

**"The means of doing us a great deal of injury":  
The involvement of North Germany's port cities and merchants  
in the American Civil War, 1861-65**

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Current scholarship analyses the American Civil War as a global shock that affected people and places throughout the transatlantic world.<sup>1</sup> But curiously, the role of Central Europe and its major Atlantic ports and merchants has mostly been neglected by this historiographic trend so far. This is rather astonishing, since Hamburg, Bremen, and their hinterlands played a crucial role for the global impacts of North America's bloodiest conflict.

This article argues that people of Northern Germany were not merely passive recipients of the Civil War. Supported by extending networks of transatlantic trade and migration, individuals from the port cities of Hamburg, Bremen and their surroundings actively influenced the conflict in North America. As we shall see, North German overseas merchants shipped large amounts of weapons from Bremen and Hamburg to both the Union and the Confederate armies and had a large share in the covert trade with Southern cotton. Using their multilateral business connections with branches in Germany, the United States, and Mexico, the merchants acted as influential elements that transformed the war in North America into a global conflict.

The active role of North German merchants not only provokes a realignment of traditionalist accounts of Central European partisanship during the American Civil War, it also underscores the region's entanglement with American slavery over the course of the mid-nineteenth Century.<sup>2</sup>

Cities and their hinterlands have always had the potential to become transnational spaces of linkages and connections. Port cities in particular are settings where people and commodities are constantly exchanged beyond national borders and are thereby embedded in networks of trade, migration and communication.<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth century, Hamburg, Bremen and their immediate surroundings (parts of the Kingdom of Hanover and the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg) were the continental hubs of emigration to America and gateways for American slave labor products,

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<sup>1</sup> For recent publications see Enrico Dal Lago: *The Age of Lincoln and Cavour. Comparative Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century American and Italian Nation-Building*, Basingstoke, 2015; Don H. Doyle: *The Cause of All Nations. An International History of the Civil War*, New York, 2015; Douglas Egerton: *Rethinking Atlantic Historiography in a Postcolonial Era. The Civil War in a Global Perspective*, in: *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2011, 79-95; Andrew Fleche: *The Revolution of 1861. The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict*, Chapel Hill, 2012; Patrick J. Kelly: *The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Transnational Turn in Civil War History*, in: *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2014, 431-443; Brian Schoen: *The Fragile Fabrics of Union. Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War*, Baltimore, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The amount of studies for the field of slavery is still modest. A few pertinent works dealing especially with Central Europe's connectedness with the Atlantic world are Jochen Meissner, Ulrich Mücke and Klaus Weber: *Schwarzes Amerika. Eine Geschichte der Sklaverei*, München, 2008; Sam Mustafa: *Merchants and Migrations. Germans and Americans in Connection, 1776-1835*, Hants, 2001; Magnus Ressel: *Hamburg und die Niederelbe im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *WerkstattGeschichte*, Vol. 23, No. 66-67, 2015, 75-96. Klaus Weber: *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680 - 1830 : Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cádiz und Bordeaux*, München 2004; *Ibid.*: *Deutschland, der atlantische Sklavenhandel und die Plantagenwirtschaft der Neuen Welt*, *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2009, 37-67; *Ibid.*: *Mitteleuropa und der transatlantische Sklavenhandel: eine lange Geschichte*, in: *WerkstattGeschichte*, Vol. 23, No. 66-67, 2015, 7-30.

<sup>3</sup> For the global role of cities and the meaning of urbanization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century see Jürgen Osterhammel: *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, München, 2009, 356 ff. and 402 ff. For recent approaches in the historiography of port cities see the introductory remarks by Lars Amenda & Malte Fuhrmann: *Hafenstädte in globaler Perspektive*. In: *Comparativ*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2007, 7-11.

namely cotton, coffee, tobacco and sugar.

Before the Civil War, cotton harvested by slaves on American plantations was brought from Hamburg and Bremen to inland spinning centers like the Kingdom of Saxony. During the war, the small kingdom and several other German states suffered severely from the cotton famine the conflict had caused.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after the conflict had ended, Saxony's commercial chamber summarized that "the cotton famine [caused by the Civil War] has reminded us of the intimate connection between politics and economy."<sup>5</sup> Several German papers and authors agreed on that assessment in one way or another.<sup>6</sup> For Central European contemporaries, the most palpable ramifications of the American Civil War were its economic impact.<sup>7</sup>

What contemporaries acknowledged immediately, historians would later treat rather dismissively. Studies about the war's consequences in Central Europe are often relying on diplomatic sources and neglect the powerful synergy of conviction and commerce. Such studies suggest that contention and partisanship in German-speaking Europe during the American Civil War proceeded solely on a political scale.<sup>8</sup> Actors and factions considered democratic or liberal were supposed to be in favor of the Union, whereas supposed conservative individuals and organs were said to be attracted to the Confederacy's war aims. In the end, popular support for the Union and its world-famous *Wiederhersteller* (restorer) Abraham Lincoln seemed to have won the hearts of the majority of the German-speaking population.<sup>9</sup> However, this notion needs to be readjusted. It overlooks the economic conditions that influence individual actions and habits affected by long distance-trade and its remarkable power to change and destabilize spatial and social relations.<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War's impact in Northern Germany reveals a strong discrepancy in established historiographical tendencies. Older studies neglect the fact that relations between the various German states and the United States ante 1871 were based first and foremost on commercial pillars.<sup>11</sup> Entanglements between Europe and the United States were primarily woven by cotton fabrics, harvested by the hands of slaves. Formal expressions of political loyalty, represented by treaties or inter-state alliances, lacked the power or simply did not exist in the manner they would later in the nineteenth century.

Two major prerequisites need to be considered if a solid historiographical readjustment of

<sup>4</sup> Enno Eimers: *Preußen und die USA 1850 bis 1867. Transatlantische Wechselwirkungen*, Berlin 2004, 458 ff.; W.O. Henderson: The Cotton Famine on the Continent, 1861-5, in: *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1932, 195–207; Hubert Kiesewetter: *Die Industrialisierung Sachsens*, München 2007, 537-542.

<sup>5</sup> *Deutsche Industrie-Zeitung*, January 4th, 1866 (all translations: PG).

<sup>6</sup> As early as August 1861, Germany's most influential publisher Johann Georg von Cotta observed that "this unfortunate war of brothers [acts] tremendously and disadvantageously on Europe's commerce and industry." See Cotta to Herman Raster, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1861; Copierbuch V, Cotta-Archives, Marbach. Similar accounts can be found in Constantin Frantz: *Die Ereignisse in Amerika in ihrer Rückwirkung auf Deutschland*, Berlin, 1861, 5; Friedrich Kühne: *Bericht über die Lage und den Handel der Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, New York, 1865, 3; John Lothrop Motley to William H. Seward, August 25th 1862, in: Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, Vol. I, Washington, 1862.

<sup>7</sup> Egerton: *Rethinking*, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Doris Bernhard: *Die Haltung der liberalen Presse in Österreich zum amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg*, Wien, 1963; Jordan Donaldson & Edwin J. Pratt: *Europe and the American Civil War*, London, 1931; Wilhelm Kaufmann: *Die Deutschen im amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg*, München & Berlin, 1911; Michael Loeffler: *Preußens und Sachsens Beziehungen zu den USA während des Sezessionskrieges, 1860-1865*, 1999; Alfred Loidolt: *Die Beziehungen Österreichs zu den Vereinigten Staaten zur Zeit des amerikanischen Bürgerkrieges 1861-1865*, Wien, 1949; Raphael Lutz: *Die Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten während des Sezessionskrieges*, Heidelberg, 1911; Ingeborg Lymphius: *Die diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika während des amerikanischen Bürgerkrieges*, Wien, 1966; Baldur E. Pfeiffer: *Deutschland und der Amerikanische Bürgerkrieg 1861-1865*, Mainz, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Max Lange: *Abraham Lincoln der Wiederhersteller der Nordamerikanischen Union...*, Leipzig, 1866; A stimulating overview on German images of Abraham Lincoln is delivered by Horst Dippel: *Die Lincoln-Rezeption in Deutschland*, in: *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, Vol. 56. No. 3, 2011, 331–345.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz: *Handel*, in: Ulinka Rublack [ed.]: *Die Neue Geschichte*, Frankfurt, 2013, 161 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Mustafa: *Merchants*, 2, 255-260.

Central Europe's position during the Civil War is to be realized. First, global commodity chains always initiate multilateral spaces of interaction, and are, hence, not linear.<sup>12</sup> Trade between Central Europe and the United States affected a multitude of different opinions, people and purses. Only connecting the dots along political beliefs fails to satisfy the broadness of the different interests Europeans had in the Civil War. Second, we have to keep in mind specific *zeitgeist*-phenomena. Similar to today, ethics and economics in the Civil War Era often went separate ways. In the 1860s, this split was strengthened by *realpolitik*.<sup>13</sup> Materialistic and economic interests were neither deeply touched by the ideological ideals that had the power to affect the mode and circumstances under which goods were produced. Nor were such ideals able to influence decisions about whom to do with business with. Accordingly, the liberalist commercial policy and "merchant culture" around North German shippers and importers were sparsely principled and peaked in pragmatic support of free trade that led to simultaneous backing for both the Union and the Confederacy.<sup>14</sup> Originally celebrated as the guarantor of universal peace and human liberty, the Civil War tested the sincerity of the dogma of free trade's humanitarian component.<sup>15</sup> As such, merchants in Northern Germany, downright supporters of free trade who often praised themselves for their liberal cosmopolitanism, had a deep interest in the perpetuation of North American slavery.

Northern German overseas merchants maintained long-established socioeconomic ties with Southern commercial centers like New Orleans, Charleston, and Galveston. Between 1850 and 1860, German immigration to the future Confederate States increased by eighty percent.<sup>16</sup> Trade with the South promised a bright future. Most of those immigrants originated from the northwestern parts of Central Europe, namely Bremen, Hamburg, Oldenburg, and Hanover.<sup>17</sup> A prime intention for plenty of the newcomers was to cultivate or continue commercial relations with Germany's overseas ports where Southern cotton, tobacco and sugar were sold for further processing.<sup>18</sup> Thanks to Northern Germany's expanding railway- and steamboat-system (which was also considered a model for the seaports and their back countries in the American South), plantation products were swiftly distributed to industrial centers and consumers all over the continent.<sup>19</sup>

North German merchants depended tremendously on the constant circulation of Southern staples. As an exemption from the European rule, Bremen did not import Southern cotton and

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel & Niels Petersson: *Geschichte der Globalisierung. Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen*, München 2006, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Möller: *Vom revolutionären Idealismus zur Realpolitik. Generationswechsel nach 1848?*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift, Beihefte*, Vol. 36, 2003, 71-91; Rudolf Vierhaus: *Liberalismus*, in: Otto Brunner & Werner Conze (eds.): *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Band 3, 1982, 764-785; August Ludwig von Rochau: *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands, Zweiter Theil*, Heidelberg, 1869, esp. IV ff.; Heinrich August Winkler: *Geschichte des Westens. Von den Anfängen in der Antike bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, München 2009, 687-690.

<sup>14</sup> Mustafa: Merchants, 2 (citation); Andreas Schulz: *Liberalismus in Hamburg und Bremen zwischen Restauration und Reichsgründung (1830-1870)* in: *Historische Zeitschrift, Beihefte*, Vol. 19, 1995, 145, 157.

<sup>15</sup> Heinz Gollwitzer: *Geschichte des weltpolitischen Denkens*. Vol. I, 1972, 443 f.

<sup>16</sup> Andrea Mehrländer: *The Germans of Charleston, Richmond and New Orleans during the Civil War Period, 1850-1870*, Berlin & New York, 2011, 295.

<sup>17</sup> In Charleston, 73 percent of the German population came from Hanover, Oldenburg and Holstein. See Mehrländer: *The Germans*, 295.

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Mehrländer: "...überall hiest man Fahnen": *Bremer Einwanderer während des amerikanischen Bürgerkriegs in den Konföderierten Staaten*, in: *Die MAUS - Gesellschaft für Familienforschung e. V. Bremen (Hg.): Über Bremen in die Welt*, 2002, p. 134 ff. and Bernd Kappelhoff: *Der Handel in den Küstenregionen des Königreichs Hannover*, in: Karl Kaufold & Mark Denzel (eds.): *Der Handel im Kurfürstentum/Königreich Hannover (1780-1850)*, 2000, 191.

<sup>19</sup> Letters from Lieutenant M. F. Maury on a Line of Steamers from the Chesapeake to Europe, in: *De Bow's Review*, Vol. 22, Issue 5, May 1857, 514; Ludwig Beutin: *Von 3 Ballen zum Weltmarkt. Kleine Bremer Baumwollchronik 1788 bis 1872*, 1963, p. 81-82 and Robert Lee: *Regionale Strukturen: Seehandel und die Beziehungen zwischen Hafen und Hinterland in Bremen, 1815-1914*, in: *Bremisches Jahrbuch*, Vol. 86, 2007, 154-155; Klaas Rönnbäck: *Consumers and Slavery. Diversified Markets for Plantation Produce and the Survival of Slavery in the Nineteenth Century*, in: *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2010, 69-88.

tobacco via New York or Liverpool, the great intermediaries in the North American cotton trade. The city's merchants received their goods directly from Southern ports built on the backs of forced labor. In 1860, cotton was the commodity that generated by far the most revenue for the small republic.<sup>20</sup> Bremen's aggregate value of all imports from Southern ports was almost twice as much as its Northern imports.<sup>21</sup>

Permanent free trade with low or no tariffs between Charleston or New Orleans and Germany's overseas harbors was a long-conceived intention of American planters and German importers: "The subject of direct trade with Bremen occupies a great deal of public attention in this city," an observer in Savannah wrote in early 1860.<sup>22</sup> That year, slave owners sent shoe and blanket samples intended to be used by their slaves to Bremen, to examine whether Central European products could keep up with New England-made slave garments.<sup>23</sup> Bremen and its surroundings were not only home to over two hundred tobacco and cigar plants, but also to over three hundred shoemakers.<sup>24</sup> They were now motivated to demonstrate their skill so slaves in Georgia and elsewhere could scamper through cotton and tobacco fields to increase their owner's fortune. Testing the production capacity of Bremen's shoemakers was one of many trials the South used to check if the region could prevail independently of Northern industries.<sup>25</sup> "If a favorable answer should be received," the Savannah observer assured, "the South will no longer be under the necessity of patronizing her enemies at the North, and a brisk trade with Germany will follow."<sup>26</sup>

Once Georgia and several other slave states had seceded from the Union, the way seemed paved for further German-Confederate cooperation. Various correspondents in Bremen assured the readers of *The Index*, the Confederacy's newspaper in Europe, of the city's sincere willingness to establish permanent trade with the new nation of slaveholders.<sup>27</sup> Bremen's Mayor received applications for consular posts from former Bremen and other German citizens now living in the Confederacy, coquetting with their experiences in transatlantic trade and personal acquaintances with high-ranking Confederate officials.<sup>28</sup> One way or another, North German merchants supported the slaveholding South and favored unrestricted trade with it. A multitude of peoples in Hamburg, Bremen and their hinterlands depended on the South's plantation economy.<sup>29</sup>

All European nations maintained official neutrality towards the two belligerents across the Atlantic. Business with both Union and Confederacy was a legitimate act according to international law. Trading with both conflicting parties, the conflict across the Atlantic became boon and bane for Northern German shippers, merchants and other businessmen. As the war raged on, no European nation besides Great Britain had more vessels running between North American and European coasts than the free republics of Bremen and Hamburg.<sup>30</sup> These numbers ballooned when North American vessels began changing their native flags and established branches abroad, afraid of otherwise getting captured or destroyed by the enemy.<sup>31</sup> Flags of neutral nations proved

<sup>20</sup> *Bremer Behörde für die Handelsstatistik: Tabellarische Uebersicht des Bremischen Handels im Jahre 1860, 1861*, 20-29.

<sup>21</sup> *Bremer Handelsblatt* June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1861.

<sup>22</sup> *The New York Herald*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1860.

<sup>23</sup> *Bremer Handelsblatt*, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1860.

<sup>24</sup> Numbers compiled from *Adreß-Buch der freien Hansestadt Bremen*, 1859 & 1861.

<sup>25</sup> The global motifs of antebellum secessionists have recently been worked out by Schoen: *Fragile Fabric*, 198-264.

<sup>26</sup> *The New York Herald*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1860.

<sup>27</sup> *The Index*, May 1st, 1862; November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1862.

<sup>28</sup> Gustav Mohr to Arnold Duckwitz, March 29th and 30th, 1861, 2-B.13-.b.15, Staatsarchiv Bremen.

<sup>29</sup> Meissner et al.: *Schwarzes Amerika*, 77-98 and Weber: *Deutschland*, 37-66.

<sup>30</sup> Rudolph Schleiden to Abraham Lincoln, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1862, *Hanseatische Gesandtschaft in Washington*, 132 - 5/9 A1, Staatsarchiv Hamburg; Richard Hildreth to Frederick W. Seward, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862; James Putnam to William Seward, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1864, in *Despatches from United States Consuls in Le Havre and Trieste*, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives (NA), Washington.

<sup>31</sup> Rodney Carlisle: *Flagging-Out during the American Civil War*, in: *The Northern Mariner / Le marin du nord*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2012, 53-65.



to be an attractive means to camouflage both the cargo and the ship. Thousands of North American shippers switched their colors, mostly to the British Union Jack, but also to Northern Germany's littoral states. These commercial transplantations could cause a temporal boost for local shipyards. Former US ship-owners preferred to establish their headquarters in rather modest harbors like Geestemünde in Hannover, where local carpenters and other professionals specialized in repairing ships could earn considerable profit from the increasing numbers of vessels.<sup>32</sup>

Flagging-out and the protection of neutral colors also encouraged a large number of vessels to enter the blockade running business. Recent studies implicate that the blockade of the Union Navy was less effective than assumed by older works and trade between Europe and the South extended the Confederacy's ability to fight a four-year war.<sup>33</sup> German traders and shippers had a considerable share in this prolongation. For traders specialized in trading and speculation with Southern staples, the Union's blockade of Southern harbors had the potential to be lucrative business. Profiting in this manner was not considered "unlawful or dishonorable", but was rather seen to be "bold and daring," as one blockade trader recollected.<sup>34</sup> Until bales packed with cotton and barrels filled with tobacco reached their final destination in Continental spinning mills or cigar plants, every resale promised profit. This was especially profitable, given that, as discussed above, North German merchants traditionally used to purchase cotton and tobacco for the German markets directly from the slaveholding producers in the South, enabling the merchants not to share the profit with wholesalers or forwarders.<sup>35</sup> Needless to say, the individuals involved in this system wanted to continue that profitable mode of transaction. Bremen's cotton brokers for example, soon announced that they would "take the Civil War in America into consideration for future calculations."<sup>36</sup>

Central Europe soon was in desperate need of cotton. That brokers and merchants responded to that need reveals itself after an examination of Bremen's commercial statistics. Although Europe's wartime imports of Southern cotton in general nearly reached a standstill, Bremen became the exemption. After Great Britain, the city's second largest supplier for cotton between 1862 and 1865 was Texas.<sup>37</sup> This was achieved by covert shipping via Matamoros, Mexico, adjacent to the Confederate border.

Much has been written about the Confederacy's Mexican gateway in Matamoros.<sup>38</sup> However, the important position of German-speaking merchants in this transnational trade has yet to be explored. A vivid hustle and bustle developed over the war years along the Texan-Mexican border, attracting thousands of European merchants.<sup>39</sup> Texas's cotton exporters benefited from relatively low numbers of Union troops and transported their stocks to Matamoros, the nearest neutral port

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<sup>32</sup> *Weser-Zeitung* December 31st, 1863 (supplement), December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1865 (supplement).

<sup>33</sup> M. Brem Bonner & Peter McCord: Reassessment of the Union Blockade's Effectiveness in the Civil War, in: *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 88, 2011, 375-398; Jay Sexton: *Debtor Diplomacy. Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873*, Oxford, 2005, 187 f.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Marika Sherwood: *After Abolition. Britain and the Slave Trade since 1807*, London, 2007, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Lars Maischak: *German Merchants in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic*, Washington, 2013, 31.

<sup>36</sup> *Weser-Zeitung*, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1861. For general speculation in cotton during that period see Sven Beckert: *King Cotton. Eine Geschichte des globalen Kapitalismus*, München, 2014, 239 f.

<sup>37</sup> Data compiled from *Bremer Behörde für die Handelsstatistik: Tabellarische Uebersicht des Bremischen Handels*, Bremen, 1861-1866 (6 Vols.).

<sup>38</sup> James W. Daddysman: *The Matamoros Trade. Confederate Commerce, Diplomacy and Intrigue*, Newark & London, 1983; Robert W. Delaney: *Matamoros, Port for Texas during the Civil War*, in: *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 1955, 473-487; William Diamond: *Imports of the Confederate Government from Europe and Mexico*, in: *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1940, 470-503; L. Tuffly Ellis: *Maritime Commerce on the Far Western Gulf, 1861 – 1865*, in: *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 2, 1973, 167–226; Philip Leigh: *Trading with the Enemy. The covert Economy during the American Civil War*, Yardley, 2014; Ronny C. Tyler: *Cotton on the Border, 1861-1865*, in: *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 4, 1970, 456–477.

<sup>39</sup> Delaney: *Matamoros*, 473.

with connection to the open sea.<sup>40</sup> German merchant companies from Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover and Oldenburg had been settling along Mexico's Gulf Coast since the 1840s. The German need for Mexican spices and silver was a major motivation to establish this economic relationship.<sup>41</sup> In the early 1850s, there were already over 60 German trading houses established in 15 Mexican cities, and after the United States, Great Britain, and France, German ships represented the fourth most sighted foreign vessels in Mexico's harbors.<sup>42</sup>

In Matamoros, one of the most successful wartime profiteers and most likely the chief agent for Confederate cotton exports to Central Europe was *Droege & Oetling's* merchant house. Originating from Bremen, the company operated branches in Mexico, Havana, Manchester and Hamburg.<sup>43</sup> Through arrangements with Confederate military officers, *Droege & Oetling* exported the bulk of Texan cotton to Europe where it was sold on behalf of the Confederate government. The transnationally-operating owners were soon known for making Millions by selling Southern cotton to Europe.<sup>44</sup> The company also became a switch point for Confederate mail and probably arms.<sup>45</sup> Bremen ships, which must have had a great share in this business, quickly earned the reputation of being keen operators in the Confederate trade with Europe. Union authorities even prohibited some Bremen vessels from sailing to reopened Southern ports like New Orleans if they not intended to take a direct route.<sup>46</sup> According to Henry Boernstein, Abraham Lincoln's consul in Bremen, the sympathies of the city's business elite for the South prevailed until the very end of the war.<sup>47</sup>

Besides Hamburg and Bremen, a third German maritime nation discovered the profitability of the Civil War, the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. Although a minor player in the nineteenth-century global economy, Oldenburg's textile industry, its merchants and shippers could not avoid being absorbed by transatlantic involvements.<sup>48</sup> Oldenburg had for years established firm connections to American markets, especially in Texas, where the Duchy's consul in Galveston had been long engaged in the cotton business. In the turmoil of the Civil War, Oldenburg's consulate became the economic representative of almost every German state in Texas.<sup>49</sup> In one of his reports to the Oldenburg government, forwarded via Matamoros by *Droege & Oetling*, the consul mentioned the "very vivid and significant import and export" on the Texas-Mexican border.<sup>50</sup> Next to Hamburg and Bremen, Oldenburg ships were an important third power for German cotton imports during the

<sup>40</sup> Daddysman: *The Matamoros Trade*, 107-137, 151-155.

<sup>41</sup> Georg Wilhelm Hopf: *Grundlinien der Handelsgeographie*, Nürnberg, 1863, 316; Georg von Viebahn: *Statistik des zollvereinten und nördlichen Deutschlands, Erster Theil*, Berlin, 1858, 237-239.

<sup>42</sup> Felix Becker: *Die Hansestädte und Mexiko. Handelspolitik, Verträge und Handel*, 1821 - 1867, Wiesbaden, 1984, 67-68; Hendrik Dane: *Die wirtschaftlichen Beziehungen Deutschlands zu Mexiko im 19. Jahrhundert*, Köln & Wien, 1971, 41-42 & 52-53; Ernst von Halle: *Amerika. Seine Bedeutung für die Weltwirtschaft und seine wirtschaftlichen Beziehungen zu Deutschland insbesondere zu Hamburg*, Hamburg, 1905, 414-415.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Möring: *125 Jahre G.A. Droege & Sohn*, Hamburg, 1972, 17-28.

<sup>44</sup> James L. Fremantle: *Three Months in the Southern States: April-June 1863*, Edinburgh & London, 1863, 10-11; *Der Kamerad. Oesterreichische Militär-Zeitung*, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1866.

<sup>45</sup> J.A. Quintero to J. P. Benjamin, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, 1863, in: *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (ORN)*, II, 3, 901-902; H.P. Bee to A. Supervielle, Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1863 in: *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion (ORA)*, I, 26 (Pt. II), 309; S. Hart to George Williamson, Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1863 in: *ORA*, I, 53, 946.

<sup>46</sup> James Anderson to William Seward, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1862, in: *Despatches from United States Consuls in Hamburg*, RG 59, NA.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich Boernstein: *Fünfundsiebzig Jahre in der Alten und Neuen Welt, Zweiter Band*, Leipzig, 1881, 348 f.; Johannes Rösing to Heinrich Smidt, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1862, *Senatsakten* 13. b. 1, a. 2., Staatsarchiv Bremen.

<sup>48</sup> Rebekka Habermas: *Auf der Suche nach dem Bürgertum im Niedersachsen des 19. Jahrhunderts. Erkundungen von Bremen bis nach Togo*, in: *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, Vol. 82, 2010, 20-24.

<sup>49</sup> Julius Frederich to Ludwig von Rössing, Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1866, 31-15-11 Nr. 82 B, Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Oldenburg.

<sup>50</sup> Julius Frederich to Ludwig von Rössing, Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863, 31-15-11 Nr. 82 B, Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Oldenburg.

Civil War's blockade. The amount of insurance collected for the loss of ships or merchandise concluded by Oldenburg shippers (likely due to the risk of being seized by Union or Confederate vessels) grew constantly from 1.4 million Thalers in 1861 to 2.3 million Thalers in 1865.<sup>51</sup> Whereas within the last five years before the Civil War, 47 ships left Oldenburg for the Gulf of Mexico, this number rose to 72 while the war raged.<sup>52</sup> Another look at the statistics of Bremen, Oldenburg's geographical neighbor and immediate trading partner, reveals that Bremen received more than 460,000 pounds of cotton via Oldenburg during the war. As the amount before the outbreak of war between 1856 and 1860 only totaled 8,500 pounds, it is clear that the war shifted the balance of economic powers.<sup>53</sup>

If cotton and other Confederate goods came the way of Mexico to Northern Germany, continental consignees had to receive them. In the case of *Droege & Oetling*, it is most likely that their Hamburg branch, managed by Gustav Adolph Droege, was the primary recipient of Confederate commodities. Hamburg's cotton imports from East Mexico skyrocketed from literally zero bales antebellum to over

1,400 bales in the 12 months between 1862 and 1863 alone.<sup>54</sup> The trade seemed to be profitable. In early 1863, Hamburg's chamber of commerce justified the erection of a consulate in Matamoros as "appropriate and desirable," owed to the intensified trade between the two regions.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, most names of German merchants engaged in the blockade running business got lost over time or were kept disguised. Discretion with regard to business is said to have been a Hanseatic virtue ever since.<sup>56</sup> Maybe this is the reason why one of the few known blockade runners operating from Germany, Charles W. Adams, was not a German but an American by birth. He owned a trading firm in Galveston, but moved to Hamburg shortly after the war broke out. Like most overseas migrants with commercial interests, he did not cut his transatlantic ties and continued business with Galveston, where agents now shipped cotton through Matamoros.<sup>57</sup> Through the efforts of the Union consuls in Hamburg and neighboring Altona, Northern officials became aware of Adams's commercial activities. They ensured that Adams was arrested and his cargo was seized by Union troops as he appeared at the Mexican border to supervise it in 1864.<sup>58</sup> After his release and a ten-year lawsuit with German and American authorities, Adams's claim for compensation was rejected by the Congress's Committee on War-Claims. The committee argued that Adams was "an outspoken, bitter rebel" and "a blockade-runner."<sup>59</sup> What further made Adams a suspect in the eyes of Union authorities, was his acquaintance with Ambrose Dudley Mann, one of the Confederacy's chief emissaries to Europe. During the war, Mann acted as one of the South's major intermediaries for Confederate operations in Central and Northern Europe.<sup>60</sup> He and Charles

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<sup>51</sup> Numbers compiled from *Statistische Nachrichten über den Freistaat Oldenburg*, 10. Heft, Oldenburg, 1868, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Data compiled from *Statistische Nachrichten über den Freistaat Oldenburg*, 5. Heft, Oldenburg, 1862, p. 94-95 and *Ibid.*: 10. Heft, 82-83.

<sup>53</sup> Numbers compiled from *Tabellarische Uebersicht des Bremischen Handels*, 1857-1866.

<sup>54</sup> *Tabellarische Uebersichten des Hamburgischen Handels*, 1859-1866.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes of the *Commerzdeputation Hamburg*, Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> 1863, S/599 1863, Archiv der Handelskammer Hamburg.

<sup>56</sup> Maischak: German Merchants, footnote 22, 31 f.; Hermann Wätjen: *Blockade, Kaperfahrten und neutrale Handelsschiffahrt im amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg*, in: *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, Vol. 60, 1936, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Report of the Committee on War-Claims, Report No. 784 of the House of Representatives, 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1874, 15.

<sup>58</sup> James H. Anderson to William H. Seward, Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1862; William Marsh to William H. Seward, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1864, May 14<sup>th</sup>, and November 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> (exact day illegible) 1864, Despatches from United States Consuls in Hamburg & Altona, RG 59, NA.

<sup>59</sup> *Hanseatische Gesandtschaft Washington: Reklamationsforderungen (claims) von Hamburgern 1862-66*, 132 5/9, C5, Staatsarchiv Hamburg; Report of the Committee on War-Claims, Report No. 784 of the House of Representatives, 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1874, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Heinrich Boernstein to William H. Seward, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1861; William W. Murphy to William H. Seward, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Despatches from United States Consuls in Bremen & Frankfort-on-the-Maine, RG 59, NA.

Adams were said to be engaged in arms purchases in Hamburg.<sup>61</sup> This brings us to the most belligerent case of North German involvement in the American Civil War.

Affairs in Hamburg and Bremen unveil that economic relations between the United States and Europe appeared to be guarantors of war rather than pacifying phenomena, despite the fact that a recent article argues that "the transatlantic economic relations were one of the many peace factors" during the conflict.<sup>62</sup> As we have already seen, cotton exports to Europe brought money into the Confederate economy. However, the wartime arms trade that occurred between Northern Germany and the United States immediately impacted Northern and Southern warfare.

A vast network of Union and Confederate agents eager to purchase arms for their governments spread across Europe as soon as the war began. Confederate purchasers knew that German arsenals kept huge amounts of war material and were willing to sell.<sup>63</sup> In Hamburg's harbor alone, dozens of blockade runners were outfitted and loaded with war material for the South.<sup>64</sup> This is, however a little known fact, as most studies focus on Britain or France when discussing the role of European ports during the Civil War's blockade.<sup>65</sup> The Hanse Towns were the first choice for exporting large amounts of weapons from the Continent. As free harbors, they provided the logistics that were required for quick and smooth transfers of arms, which was "free from duties and without any further scrutiny," as local authorities proudly claimed.<sup>66</sup> Hamburg alone kept over a dozen of small arms factories whose owners realized considerable profit by processing rifles and cannons that arrived from Saxony, Austria, and Prussia, where American agents mostly received the arms from.<sup>67</sup> Other Hanseatic individuals entered the arms sale to America at earlier stages, acting as carriers or agents who, aware of the vast American demand for weapons, went directly to the armories of the German states and bought tens of thousands rifles.<sup>68</sup> In Hamburg, at least 18 gun factories, merchants and broker firms were involved in the transatlantic arms trade for the Civil War. Four of these companies sold their stock to both the Union and the Confederacy or at least provided that the shipments reached both sides by fitting out blockade-runners anchored in Hamburg's harbor.<sup>69</sup>

James Anderson, the Union's consul in Hamburg, undertook secret observations in the city's harbor by sailing on a small boat between the steamers and noting their cargo. According to his observations, we can actually identify more Hamburg firms that supplied the Confederacy than companies who shipped to the North.<sup>70</sup> When Anderson complained to Hamburg's state department that the city "had been the means of doing us a great deal of injury" because it provided blockade runners with German weapons, Hamburg's Minister of State only replied that his administration was powerless, since all these vessels sailed under the British flag and officially headed for ports like Nassau or Havana, which acted as popular stopovers for Confederate shipments. Indirect trade covered by neutral flags was distinctive of Euro-Confederate

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<sup>61</sup> Testimony of Emil Liefmann, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1864, attachment to James H. Anderson to Frederick W. Seward, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864, Despatches of United States Consuls in Hamburg, RG 59, NA.

<sup>62</sup> Niels Eichhorn: North Atlantic Trade in the Mid-Nineteenth Century. A Case for Peace during the American Civil War, in: Civil War History, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2015, 172.

<sup>63</sup> Caleb Huse: The Supplies for the Confederate Army. How they were obtained in Europe and how paid for, Boston, 1904, 26 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Numbers compiled from: Despatches from United States Consuls in Hamburg and Altona, 1861-1865, RG 59, NA; James H. Anderson Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>65</sup> One prominent example for this one-dimensional focus is the classical work of Stephen Wise: Lifeline of the Confederacy. Blockade-Running during the Civil War, Columbia, 1991.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes of the *Commerzdeputation Hamburg*, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1864, S/599 1864, Archiv der Handelskammer Hamburg.

<sup>67</sup> Data compiled from the official directory of Hamburg: *Hamburgisches Adreßbuch für 1862*.

<sup>68</sup> *Weser-Zeitung*, September 9<sup>th</sup> and November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1861.

<sup>69</sup> Data compiled from the despatches of United States Consuls in Hamburg and Altona, RG 59, NA and the private letterbook of James H. Anderson, Anderson papers, Box 7 Folder 2, Ohio State Historical Society.

<sup>70</sup> Data compiled from Despatches of James H. Anderson to William H. Seward 1861-1862, RG 59, NA and Letterbook of James H. Anderson, Box 7, Folder 2, Mss 84, Ohio Historical Society.



collaborations and responsible for their success. Tons of weapons were shipped with the help of Bremen and Hamburg merchantmen, proud of being inhabitants of free liberal republics, to support a slaveholding empire.

In sum, German war material worth 1.4 million Dollars was registered by the New York customs office alone, making the German states the second largest European supplier of arms after Great Britain.<sup>71</sup> This is not to mention the exact value of German arms that entered the South, which could be estimated to be at least over 100.000 rifles, dozens of canons, and various tons of sabers, clothing and other contraband of war.<sup>72</sup> To Union observers, the involvement of Hamburg merchants in shipping war material for the Confederacy became even more obvious, when in late 1864, members of Hamburg's parliament, which consisted mostly of merchants engaged in transatlantic trade, spoke out against the duty of declaration for the destinations of their vessels, which would have revealed the clandestine trade of many parliament's members.<sup>73</sup>

The war material needed to be transported quickly. Steam-powered ships were therefore the first choice to satisfy the short-term demands of the North American armies. A good deal of these transports was executed by Hamburg's and Bremen's major steamship companies, the Hamburg-America-Line (Hapag) and the North German Lloyd. Since New York had been their prime port of call in the United States, Hapag and the Lloyd shipped German weapons exclusively to the North. Both companies were joint stock corporations with many shareholders and represented the interests of multiple North German citizens. The transport of arms to North America became a fluke for the two German steamship lines and their shareholders. Since increasing numbers of emigrants avoided the passage via Hamburg and Bremen to enter a war-torn country, Hapag and the North German Lloyd feared a loss in revenues. The enormous request for weapons from America, however, compensated the losses from the reduced emigration business and even allowed these companies to profit from the war.<sup>74</sup> Once again, the Civil War provided more benefits than losses for Continental contemporaries.

## Conclusion

As it turned out, thousands of German-speaking Europeans were, by migration and commerce, deeply entangled with Civil War America and also its institutionalized slavery. These links resulted in the multilateral repercussions triggered by the Civil War in transnational melting pots like the port cities of Hamburg, Bremen, and their hinterlands. There, contemporaries were everything but passive recipients of the war's global shockwaves. North Germans actively influenced the economic and military proceedings of North America's bloodiest conflict, whether by buying Southern cotton via Mexico or shipping large amounts of arms to both belligerents. In most cases, German diaspora trade companies were interposed in these transnational undertakings. Amplified by the neutral status kept by all European nations as the war lasted, trade with both North and South was legitimate. It contributed significantly to the wars duration by increasing the Confederate army's ability to fight their material superior opponent.

It has further been proven, that economic impacts were the most palpable ramifications of the

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<sup>71</sup> Executive Documents of the House of Representatives, No. 324, 42<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (1872).

<sup>72</sup> James H. Anderson to William H. Seward, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1862, Despatches from United States Consuls in Hamburg, RG 59 (NA); J.W.H. Hartley: Marcellus Hartley. A Brief Memoir, New York, 1903, 130-149; Caleb Huse to Josiah Gorgas, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1862, ORN, II, 2, 177 ff.; Huse: Supplies, 26 f. Also highly valuable for general American demands for German weapons, but limited to Prussia and without detailed information to whom the arms were sold to, are the annual reports of the Prussian chambers of commerce, see: *Jahresberichte der Handelskammern und kaufmännischen Korporationen des preußischen Staats für 1861 ff.*, Berlin.

<sup>73</sup> William Marsh to William Seward, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864, Despatches from United States Consuls in Altona, RG 59, NA and *Hamburger Nachrichten*, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1864.

<sup>74</sup> *Hamburg-Amerikanische-Pakettfahrt-Actiengesellschaft (Hapag)*: Minutes of the board-meetings, 621-1/095, 163, Annual meetings, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1863 and March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1864, 621-1/095, 178 Bd. 2, Staatsarchiv Hamburg; Norddeutscher Lloyd: Reports of the general meetings, 2-R. 11. mm. 4, Staatsarchiv Bremen.

American Civil War in Europe. Therefore, generalizing categorizations of Central European partisanship for either Union or Confederacy along superficial political lines do not satisfy the demands of the historical reality. Transnational analyses of the Civil War would be well-advised to consider the economic dimensions of the conflict. In the case of North German shippers, merchants, brokers, and arms dealers, support for the North or the South was primarily non-ideological. Instead, loyalty was determined by pragmatic consideration, and often lasted as long as considerable profit was worth a certain risk.

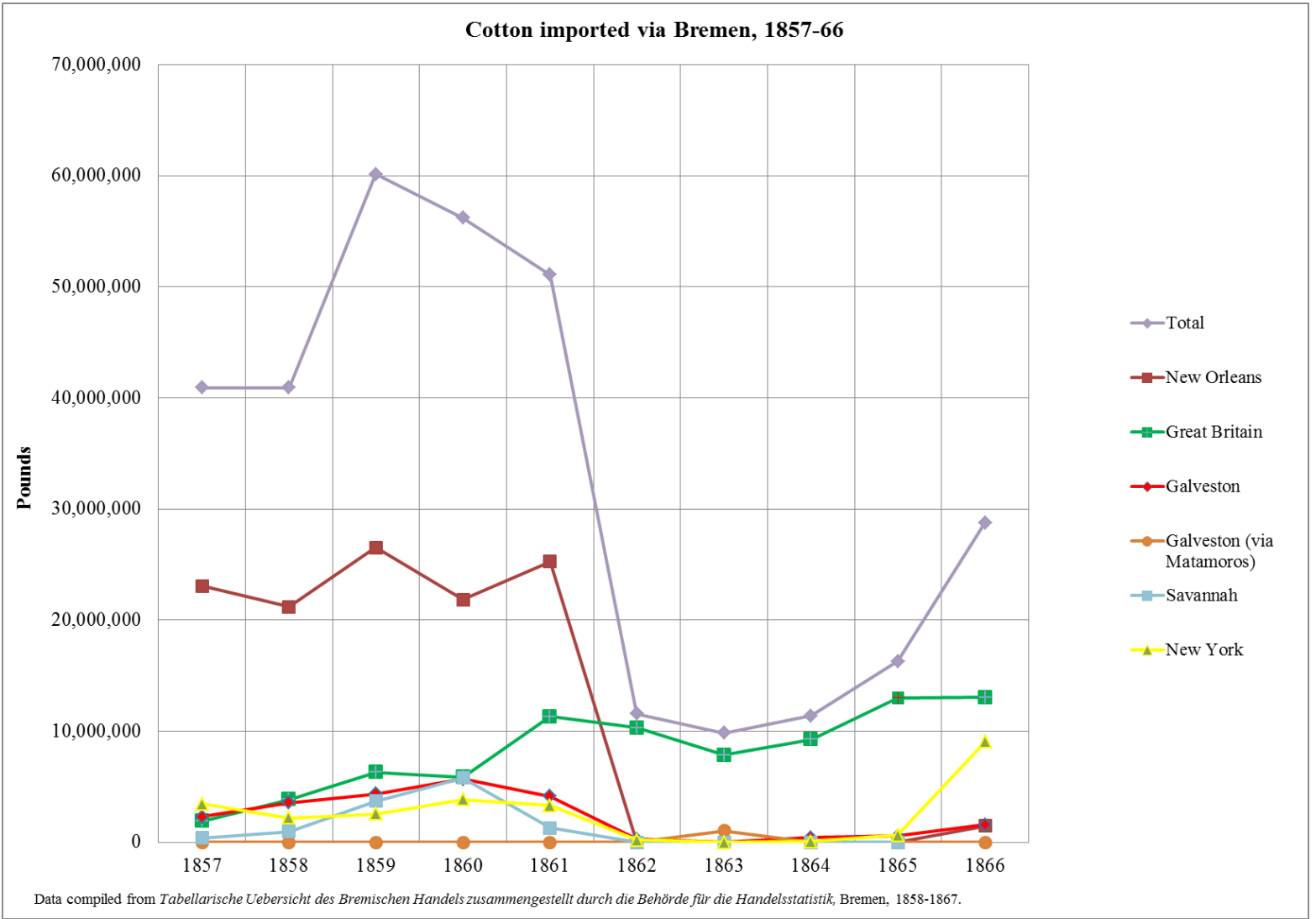
As the examples of Hamburg and Bremen illustrate, transatlantic connections in the mid-nineteenth century often promises more fertile insight if performed by examining small groups of actors and their individual actions. Although this essay focused primarily on businessmen, it should be noted that the war in America was felt, seen and read by Central Europeans of multiple professions and both sexes.<sup>75</sup> Since economic linkages were the driving forces behind the entanglement of Central Europe and America during most of the Nineteenth Century, the Civil War raged in transnational spheres of experience— rather than as a mere political issue debated in German privy chambers or parliaments, where the conflict often remained just a side note.<sup>76</sup>

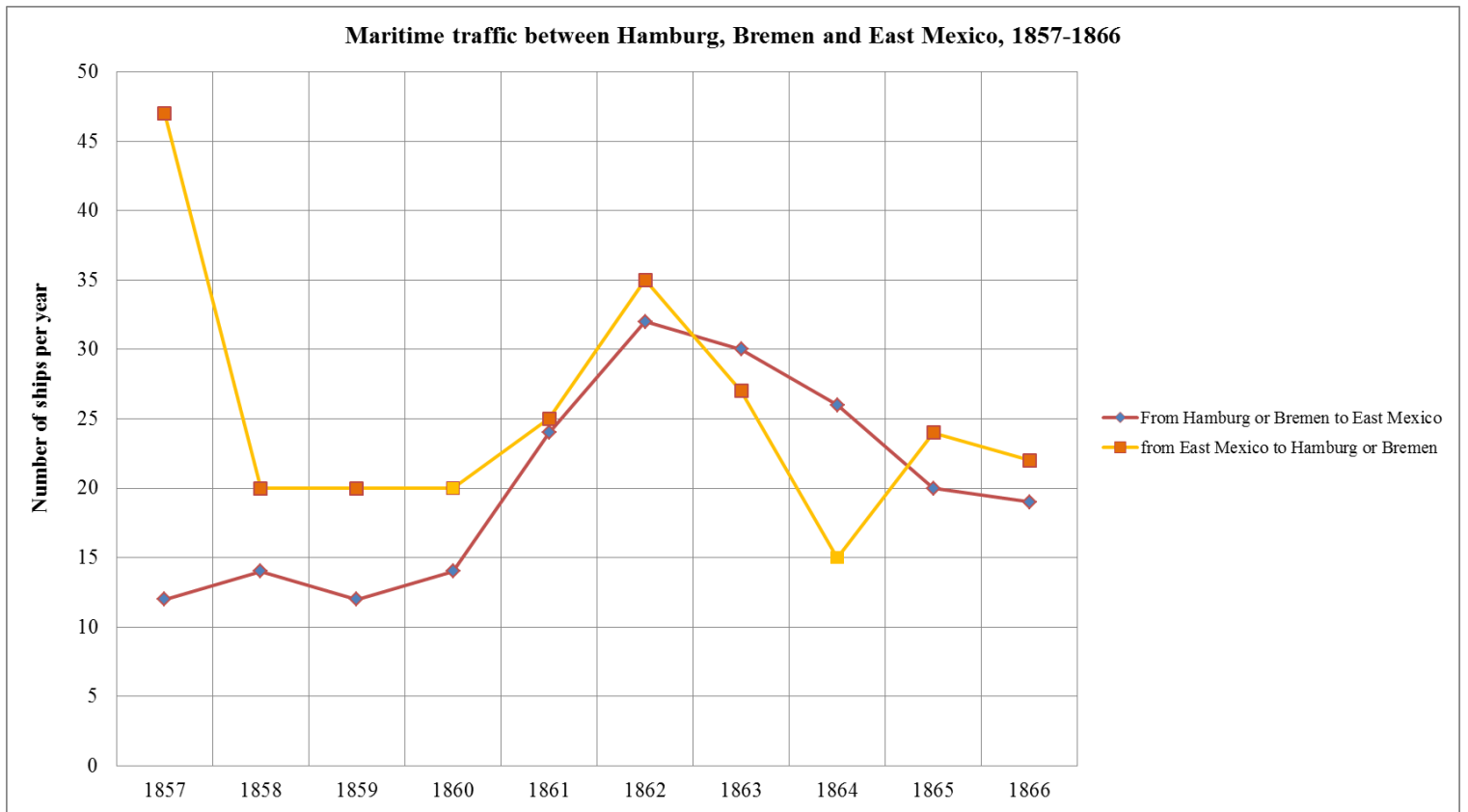
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<sup>75</sup> Women and children formed the majority of workers in Germany's textile industries. In the Kingdoms of Prussia, Wurttemberg and Saxony, the amount of women and children working in spinning mills, textile plants and looms ranged between roughly 40- 50 percent (women) and 5-28 percent (children), numbers compiled after: *Statistik des Zollvereintem und nördlichen Deutschlands, Band 3*, 1868, 873.

<sup>76</sup> Rudolf Ullner: *Die Idee des Föderalismus im Jahrzehnt der deutschen Einigungskriege*, Lübeck, 1965, 18-25 and 93 ff.

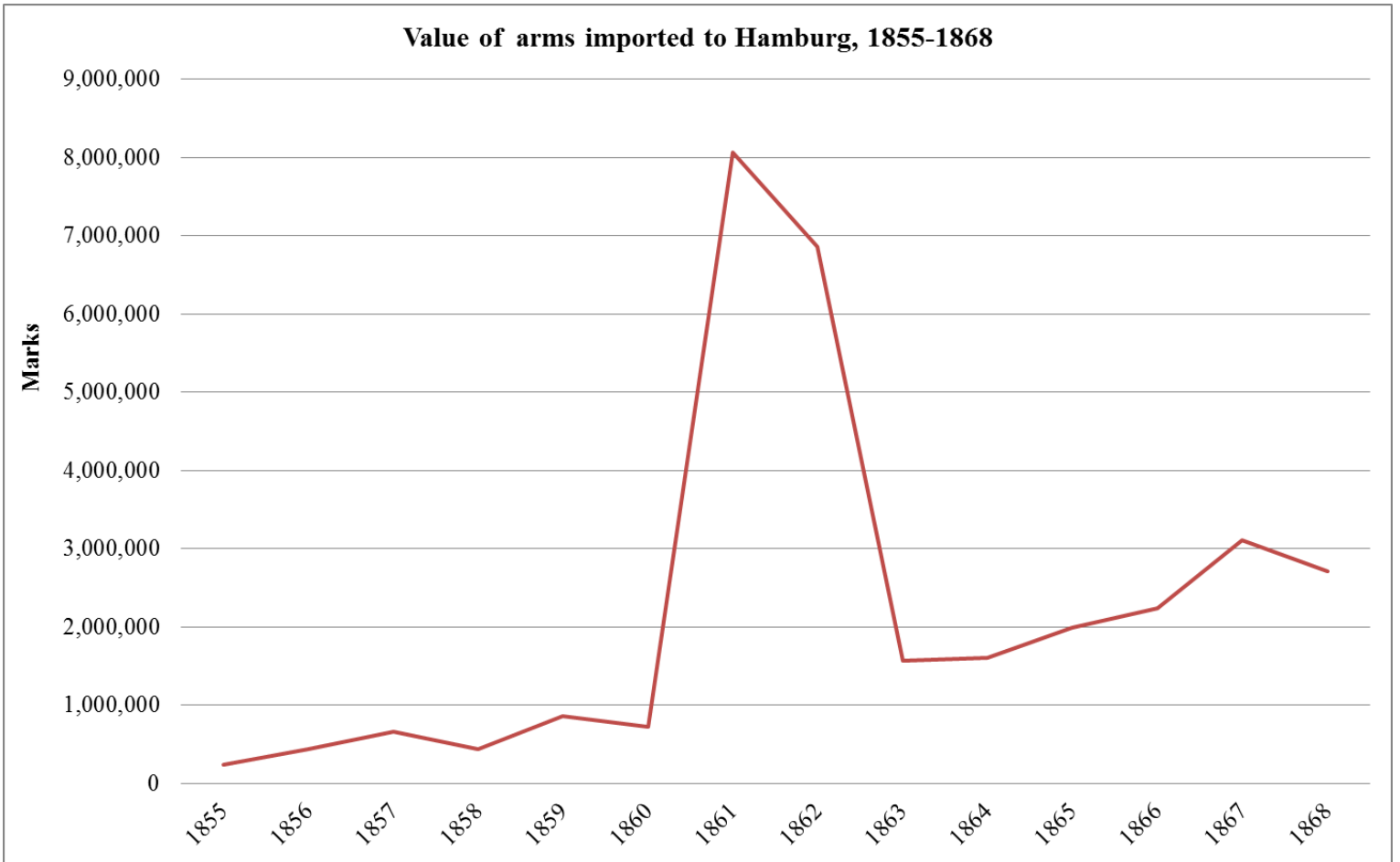
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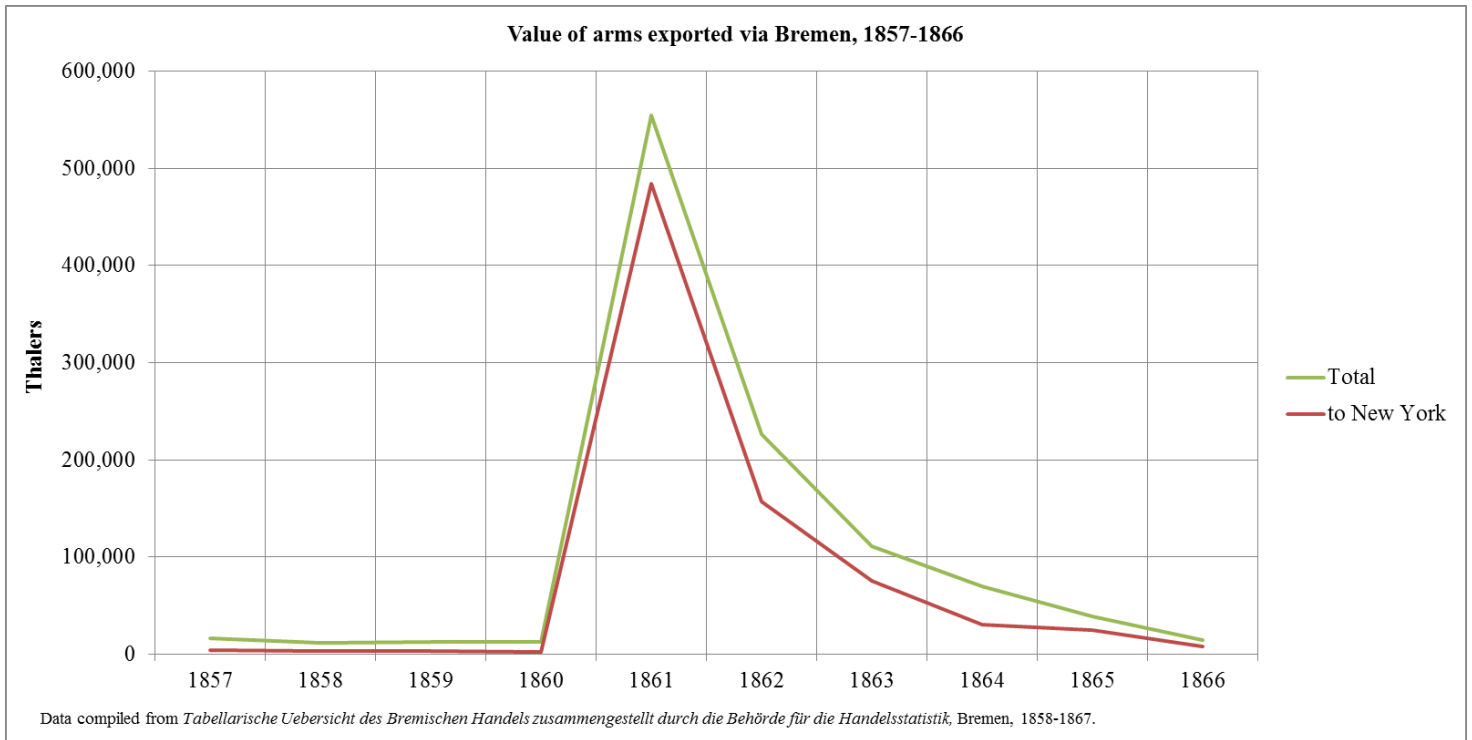




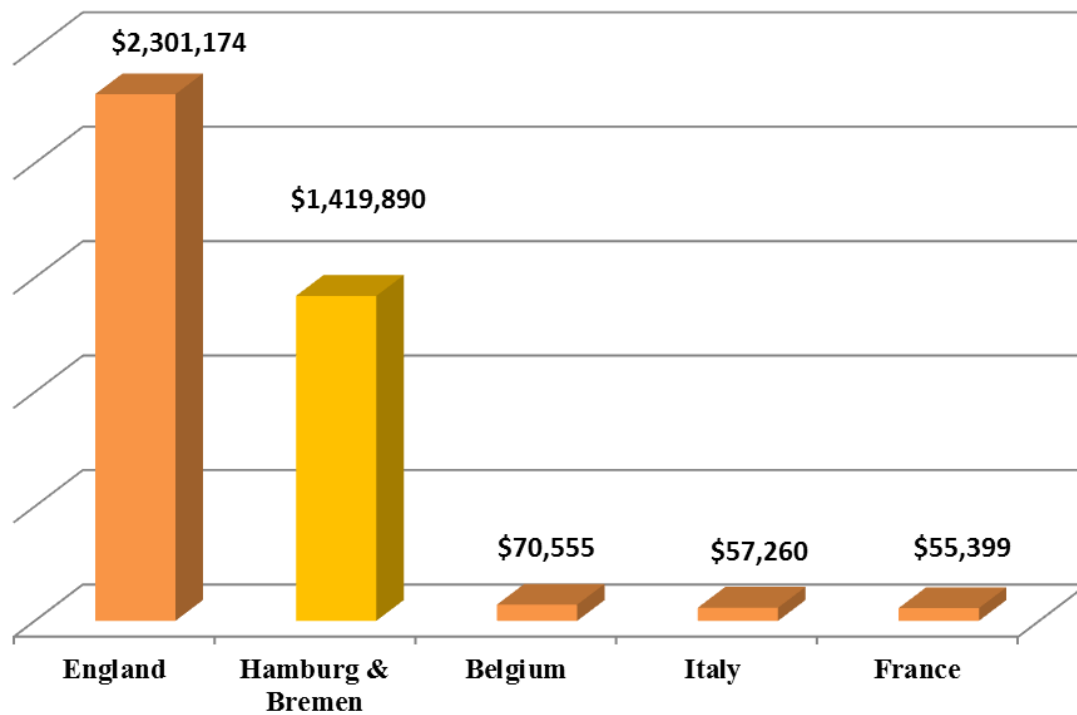


Name	Branch	supposed to provide supplies for
Buck, L.	merchant	Confederacy
Gleichmann, T.G.	merchant, banker	Union
Hagenest & Arnold	merchants, arms	Both
Hapag	shipping	Union
(Andrew) Israel & Co.	fancies	Confederacy
Labatt, Eduard	merchant	Union
Lady, E.	merchant	Confederacy
Lohm (?), E.E.H.	turner	Confederacy
Lohmann, F.W.	arms manufacture	Confederacy
Moll, Peter	arms manufacture, draperies, woolen goods	Confederacy
Moller, John R.	merchant	Confederacy
Ohlendorff & Co.	guano and agricultural products	Both
Piper, H.M. Eduard	merchant	Confederacy
(Eduard) Ringel & Co.	merchants	Both
Romberg & Watty	merchants	Union
Schulte & Scheemann	arms manufacture	Union
Sohns, Heinrich Edward	shipping & comission business	Both
Trittau, F. W.	chemicals, parfumes, spirits	Union
(Conrad) Warnecke & Co.	colonial goods	Confederacy





**Value of European fire-arms imported into the Union, 1860-1865  
as entered in the US custom-house returns**



Source: Executive Documents of the House of Representatives, No. 324, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess. (1872)