

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Confederate Diaspora

By **Claire M. Wolnisty**, Austin College

In the wake of the US Civil War, approximately ten thousand Confederates expats left the geographic space of the Confederate States of America for other countries rather than face the consequences of peace.¹ Some expats sought to avoid the immediate repercussions of losing a war, such as imprisonment and possible hanging for treason. Other emigrants invested in long-term futures away from what they perceived to be the impending ideologies and realities of US Reconstruction in the South. Prominent Confederate leaders, such as Confederate Secretary of War John Cabell Breckinridge, Lieutenant General Jubal Anderson Early, and Brigadier-General Joseph Orville Shelby, drove some of these emigration efforts when they vowed that they would never capitulate to the social, racial, and political orders of a newly reunited United States. Confederate veterans who later served in various national military forces, such as Captain John Randolph Tucker, also contributed to the thousands of Confederates who left the South. Civilians who sought out opportunities abroad in an effort to rebuild their postwar lives, such as members of the Scarborough Barnsley Family and the Price Family, constituted additional members of this postbellum Confederate diaspora. These emigrants journeyed across much of the globe pursuing military, economic, and political opportunities and promises in places as disparate as Mexico, Canada, Egypt, Brazil, and Britain.

Slavery often proved an important consideration for Confederate expats who traveled south. Emigration recruiters and publicists touted Brazil in particular as a place where Confederates could perpetuate slavery as that country had yet to officially abolish slavery. As the *Charleston Mercury* reported at the beginning of the US Civil War, “No people in the world, for example, have been freer from foreign aggressions and hostility than the slaveholding people of Brazil and Spain.”² Similarly, Louisiana sugar planter Andrew McCollam claimed, “And I can truly say if 100 families from Louisiana could be located here and the institution of slavery insured I should think I found a new land of promise.”³ Select members of the Brazilian government, including its head, Dom Pedro II, also initially expressed support for the relocation efforts of Confederates.⁴ Encouraged by such evaluations of Brazilian economics and labor as well as Brazilian government stances, Confederates, such as brothers George and Lucian Scarborough Barnsley and their father, Godfrey, originally from Georgia, settled in locations such as Lagoa Juparaná in

¹ Exact numbers for the Confederate diaspora are difficult to pinpoint, especially since Confederates who left the former Confederate States of America did not always leave records of their travels and often returned to the United States within a few years. Confederates also moved within the United States, particularly to places such as Texas and California, sometimes before they left for other countries.

² *Charleston Mercury*, September 12, 1861.

³ Andrew McCollam Diary, Andrew McCollam Papers, no. 449, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁴ Quintino de Sousa Bocaiúva, letter to editor, *New York Herald*, July 21, 1867.

east-central Brazil and the southern Brazilian State of Paraná. These primarily upper-class Confederate expats, or Confederados, traveled existent nineteenth-century migration patterns across the Western Hemisphere through the ports of Galveston, Texas and New Orleans, Louisiana and connected with family members along the way. Often still defining themselves as loyal southerners after the war, they focused on familial survival when they invested in agricultural and professional pursuits in Brazil such as growing sugar and practicing branches of medicine. These southern expats did frequently experience profound disappointment in their lives in Brazil, citing language and cultural difficulties as well as economic difficulties, which prompted a significant return migration to the United States. Despite this widespread failure, Confederate emigration to Brazil comprised the largest contingent of the Confederate diaspora and some of these emigrants created a number of the few lasting Confederate diaspora settlements after the war.⁵ Today, both annual Confederate heritage festivals and protests over the use of the Confederate flag in Brazil contest the legacies of these expat communities.⁶

Cuba, with its history of southern, pro-slavery attempts to spread to the island through antebellum filibuster expeditions, became another site for the Confederate diaspora. Some of the highest profile Confederate officials, such as Confederate States Secretary of State Judah Philip Benjamin and Secretary of War John C. Breckinridge, escaped United States military forces by fleeing to Cuba. Benjamin would remain as a lawyer in London and Paris while other expats who initially fled to Cuba would go on to Canada, Europe, Latin America, or return to the United States after President Andrew Johnson issued an amnesty proclamation for them in 1868.⁷

International power struggles shaped the decisions of Confederates expats who emigrated to Mexico after the US Civil War. Napoleon III of France hoped to realize his imperial plans for Latin America through Emperor Maximilian in Mexico, and, in 1865, Maximilian collaborated with emigration boosters such as oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury to bring white southerners from the former Confederate States of America to Mexico. As Maury wrote to General Robert E. Lee that same year, Mexico was “the only bright spot that I can see with the future of our people.”⁸ While such colonization plan collaborations less overtly highlighted the possibility of continued slavery than initial recruitment efforts for Brazil, they certainly promoted white supremacy through “apprenticeship” schemes. Men such as “unreconstructed” General Joseph Shelby and his military men as well as newspaper firebrand John Newman Edwards temporarily settled near Córdoba and the settlement, Carlota, was named after Maximilian’s wife. They promoted visions of imperial expansion with modern technologies such as steam and railroads in their new chosen homes. Confederate expats primarily ran plantations of coffee and corn until the Republican forces of Benito Juárez executed Maximilian, the main supporter of Confederate settlement efforts, in 1867 and Confederate settlements generally fell into ruin without Maximilian’s support.⁹

⁵ Claire M. Wolnisty, *A Different Manifest Destiny: U.S. Southern Identity and Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century South America* (University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

⁶ See “Civil War Descendants in Brazil Fly Confederate Flags,” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2020, for example.

⁷ William Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Lincoln: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

⁸ Matthew F. Maury to Robert E. Lee, August 8, 1865, MS 1 22673, Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

⁹ Todd W. Wahlstrom, *The Southern Exodus to Mexico: Migration across the Borderlands after the American Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

Other Central and South American countries, such as Honduras, Peru, and Venezuela, offered economic and military opportunities for former Confederates. While these countries never drew emigrants on the same scale as Brazil and Mexico, approximately two hundred expats, primarily from Georgia and Kentucky, such as Major Washington Goldsmith, did secure land grants in Honduras, often resorting to relocation in British Honduras when their original plans went awry. Other former Confederates served as military advisors in Peru and in 1867 multiple colonist groups of around fifty people each, such as one led by Captain Frederick A. Johnson of Missouri, explored Venezuela for a land grant that never materialized due to internal disagreements.¹⁰

Egypt, in contrast to other Confederate diaspora locales, drew both Confederate and United States veterans into its military service. Under the leadership of Khedive Ismail Pasha, the viceroy of Egypt, the autonomous state sought to strengthen its position vis a vis the Ottoman Empire by modernizing its army with the aid of United States military advisors. Men such as Thaddeus Phelps Mott of New York, Henry Hopkins Sibley of Louisiana, and William Wing Loring of North Carolina recruited mercenaries and arms for use in Egypt and General Charles Pomeroy Stone took leadership of the operation. Motivated by the promises of continued military service and economic stability after the US Civil War, these men engaged in various military operations for Egypt, such as exploration expeditions and building forts. Some soldiers, such as self-declared “unreconstructed” Henry Clay Derrick, continued to harbor animosity towards their former enemies even as they served in the same military while other soldiers, such as Raleigh Edward Colston, fostered reconciliation with his former opponents on the grounds of shared ideals of honor and duty. The 1870s and 1880s saw these men embrace a variety of roles after their military service in Egypt, ranging from farmers back in the United States to circuit lecturers who spread ideas of Orientalism.¹¹

Similar motivations scattered Confederate expats across multiple continents in the decades after the US Civil War. Despite the wide range of locations to which they moved after the war, most members of the Confederate diaspora, “unreconstructed” or otherwise, prioritized the promise of more stable economic livelihoods, rooted in white supremacy if not overt endorsements of slavery. They also narrated their emigration in terms of upholding definitions of honor, such as providing for their family and continued military service with the promise of promotion.

By 1877, the majority of former Confederates who continued to reside outside of the geographic South resigned to a life without a homogenous Confederate community. As Julia Louisa Hentz Keyes concluded in her 1874 memoir about her life in Brazil, “I have given up the idea of a purely Confederate settlement.”¹² Despite this loss, remaining Confederate expats framed their life abroad in terms of success. George Scarborough Barnsley, for example, considered himself lucky in his chosen home even after many of his family members returned to the United States. He explained his continued residence in Brazil after

¹⁰ Alfred Hanna and Kathryn Hanna, *Confederate Exiles in Venezuela*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The Confederate, 1960).

¹¹ Tarik Tansu Yiğit, “Reconstructing the American under the Most Unimaginable Conditions: Civil War Veterans in the ‘Arabian Nights,’” *The Journal of Civil War Era* (December 2021); 507-38.

¹² Julia Hentz Keyes, “Our Life in Brazil,” 96, MS 01672, Julia Hentz Keyes Reminiscence, 1874, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

a visit with his family, “I was glad to get back to Brazil where I could do as I pleased, and in perfect freedom to think as it suited me.”¹³

¹³ George Scarborough Barnsley, “Original of Reply to a Circular Asking for Information of the Ex-Confederate Emigrants, 1915,” Folder 25, MS 01521, George Scarbrough Barnsley Papers, 1837-1918, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.