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Peter P. Hill, *Napoleon's Troublesome Americans: Franco-American Relations, 1804-1815*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005. xiii + 289 pp. Notes and bibliography. \$29.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-57488-879-X.

Review by Michael V. Leggiere, Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

Peter P. Hill, professor emeritus of history at George Washington University, is well-suited to write a history of the diplomatic relations between the United States and France during the First French Empire. His previous monographs on Franco-American relations during the 1797-1801 period and French perceptions of the early American republic between 1783 and 1793 have established Hill as an authority on relations between the United States and France at a time when the former just emerged from revolution while the latter succumbed to one.[1]

Regarding the diplomacy of the period, revolution is perhaps the most accurate word that can be used to describe the intricate issues that Hill endeavors to analyze and explain in his works. During this period the normal rules of conduct that governed international affairs experienced radical changes as a result of the power politics of revolutionary and Napoleonic France. All of Europe felt the repercussions of French aggrandizement and the accompanying disregard of the theory of compensation that had dictated relations between the Great Powers. By 1807 France had shattered the balance of power and established hegemony over Europe. The new Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, stood atop an emerging united states of Europe, which he steadily created through his revolutionary approach to foreign affairs. It was with this new Caesar and his unorthodox diplomacy, "his unforgiving malevolence, his deceits, and his game-playing with America's vital interests" that the young United States of America had to contend (p. ix).

In *Napoleon's Troublesome Americans*, Hill seeks to answer two questions that arose as a result of the unorthodox manner in which Napoleon conducted international affairs. First, Hill plans to explain why Americans believed Napoleon treated them badly. Second, he promises that his "study will advance the narrative of the era by examining why the French emperor believed Americans deserved such treatment" (p. ix). On both accounts the author achieves success by employing a judicious blend of historiographic synthesis and original archival research. Both historians of France and the United States will be impressed by the numerous archival holdings that Hill consulted on either side of the Atlantic. His fair and equal treatment of both "sides" will appease the most ardent partisan. Yet, while Hill has been diligent in the French archives, the discerning eye will note that overwhelming lack of secondary French-language sources in his bibliography.

Beyond the sound archival scholarship, excellent prose, and interesting biographical sketches of the leading players, a distinction must be drawn regarding the impact Hill's book will have on American and French historians. To be sure, this work is a United States history book, yet for readers of H-France, the following discussion may prove useful. For the student of American history, Hill's queries indeed pose substantial historical questions. After France assisted the United States in its war of independence, relations between the two states floundered. With such notable events as the Quasi-War and the XYZ Affair in recent memory, Hill reminds the reader that just before Congress declared war on Great Britain in June, 1812, the Senate had come within two votes of declaring war on France. Hill's analysis of the diplomatic history that led to this near declaration of war is superb and will become the standard authority for United States historians.

On the other hand, French historians will be less moved by Hill's findings regarding the emperor's conduct toward the United States. Napoleon's heavy-handed treatment of Austria and Prussia, the Spanish and Neapolitan Bourbons, Pope Pius VII, his intentions for the Braganzas of Portugal, and his exploitation of Germany and Italy placed American gripes very low on the list of complaints being addressed in Paris. French historians will easily recognize Napoleon's treatment of the United States as conforming to the pattern he established with other medium or secondary states. According to Bonaparte's grand strategy, medium states were to be cultivated and shown favor—not through benevolence, but through the blatant display of raw power—so that they would become vassals whose resources would be harnessed and employed against the recalcitrant Great Powers. If an amicable relationship (such as that established with Bavaria) could not be achieved, then the state would be forcibly co-opted into the Napoleonic fold, as Holland was.

As the empire gradually became more despotic, Napoleon's treatment of vassals likewise became more demanding and imperialistic. Consequently, Bonaparte saw the United States as another vassal state whose resources could and should be used against the most obstinate of all his enemies: Great Britain. Just as his vassals aided him in defeating enemy coalitions in 1806 and 1809, and just as his vassals provided over half of the manpower he used to invade Russia in 1812, Bonaparte expected the United States to aid him in his war with Great Britain. Likewise the United States felt the chilling effect of Napoleon's growing despotism as well as the irrationalism of his diplomacy, which became increasingly desperate and unrealistic.

Napoleon quickly recognized that the ultimate threat to his empire lay not to the east, but to the west. Although Austria, Russia, and Prussia possessed the numbers to renew their struggles against France every few years, they could not field their peasant armies without British gold. After reducing Prussia to a second-rate state, humbling Austria, and securing an uneasy alliance with Russia, Napoleon turned his attention away from the three eastern empires to the island of shopkeepers whose financial destruction offered him the only promise of a durable peace.

To destroy the British economy and prevent London from filling the coffers of his adversaries, Bonaparte implemented a continental blockade through the Berlin and Milan Decrees. Thus Bonaparte designed the "Continental System" to close Europe to British goods, cripple the British economy, and ultimately effect a change in official British policy toward France by creating a situation where the British electorate would vote according to their shrinking wallets. For their part, the British resorted to their time-tested strategy for defeating France: a naval blockade. Through the infamous Orders-in-Council, the British blockaded Europe in the hopes of exhausting France's ability to wage war. "Whereas Trafalgar may have set off Napoleon's determination to close the continent to British exports," explains Hill, "Britain's strictures against neutral commerce would give him a pretext to make it happen" (p. xiii).

The United States found itself in the middle of this confusing war of economics as it idealistically attempted to conduct commerce under the banner of "free ships, free goods." For the United States, the Continental System meant that French authorities would seize any vessel suspected of carrying British cargo to a European destination. Conversely, British Orders-in-Council "threatened to confiscate any neutral ship together with its cargo caught in transit between French (or French-controlled) ports from which British merchantmen were excluded" (p. 27). Both sides violated American maritime rights as control of neutral commerce became fundamental to their respective grand strategies.

The issue at stake was the right of neutrals to trade at belligerent ports. Although not sacred international law, "the principle held that neutral-flag vessels may carry non-contraband cargoes in safety to any belligerent port as long as that port is not effectively blockaded" (p. xi). According to Hill,

for almost six years the British and French seized similar numbers of American ships (p. ix). Both the Jefferson and Madison administrations responded with weak measures that bordered on the ridiculous and ranged from non-intercourse to ineffective embargoes. "In the end," explains Hill, "although France nearly matched Britain in its pillaging of American commerce, the British Navy's continued impressment of American seamen and the perception of British intrigue on the northwest frontier led a Republican majority in Congress to decide that Britain was their principal enemy and that war was their only honorable recourse. An unrepentant Napoleon was the principal beneficiary of that decision" (p. xi).

Hill informs us that several reasons account for Napoleon's resentment of the American government and its citizens. Seeing an affinity between the United States and Great Britain based on common language and culture, Napoleon accused the United States of active hostility toward France in its struggle with Great Britain. The emperor also viewed American violations of his Continental System with growing rage. The French historian can appreciate that Napoleon committed 1,000,000 men to the Peninsular War and the invasion of Russia in part to establish and in part to restore the Continental System—surely the annoyance caused by American shipmasters would not be dismissed. Moreover, the reluctance of the United States to protect its flag from British aggression lowered Bonaparte's respect for America. According to Hill, London's Orders-in-Council of November 1807 restricted American shipping to such an extent that Napoleon expected President Jefferson to declare war on Great Britain (p. 18). Yet as French minister Louis Turreau reported from Washington, Americans harbored a "distaste for war that bordered on cowardice" (p. 6).

Additionally, commercial self-interest and territorial expansion appeared to be the sole driving factors in American foreign policy. The author maintains that "many French officials believed Americans were not to be trusted where their material interests were concerned" (p. 57). Finally, beginning in 1808 American merchants became the chief suppliers of grain to Sir Arthur Wellesley's Anglo-Portuguese army in its struggle with French forces for control of the Iberian Peninsula. In 1811 alone, American suppliers shipped more than 380,000 barrels of flour to Spain's Atlantic ports (p. 201). As Hill concludes: "At every turn Napoleon found Americans troublesome or worse" (p. x).

Hill begins his investigation with the interesting sideshow of the Florida Question. In 1805 John Armstrong, the newly appointed American minister to Paris, pressed the imperial government to admit that the province of West Florida was included in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Unfortunately for the Jefferson administration, American claims to West Florida lacked documentation (p. 1). Regardless, the United States insisted that "West Florida had accompanied Spain's retrocession of Louisiana to France in 1800 and thence by purchase to the United States in 1803" (p. 2). Napoleon, however, considered West Florida to be a Spanish possession and had no intentions of provoking what he hoped to be an active ally in his struggle against Great Britain. With Paris refusing to acknowledge that West Florida had been part of the Louisiana Purchase, the United States and Spain drifted toward war in 1805. Initially, the French intimated a desire for money in order to arbitrate between Washington and Madrid. However, after Bonaparte decided to incorporate Spain into his empire, he decided that possession of Florida could be useful in the future.

More detrimental to the American cause was the transformation of Europe that Bonaparte effected between 1805 and 1808. It was during this period that Napoleon subdued Austria, Prussia, and Russia, solidified his control over Central Europe, and focused his efforts on defeating Great Britain. Consequently, the Florida Question became intertwined with Bonaparte's grand strategy to defeat the British. In early 1808, the French emperor sought a defensive alliance with Washington. In return he would force Spain to cede both West and East Florida to the United States. It soon became clear to the Jefferson administration that the French would return seized American ships and cargoes if the United States agreed to ally with France against Great Britain (p. 19). Interpreting this offer as an attempt by Paris to dictate Washington's response to London's Orders-in-Council, Jefferson declined.

Failing to co-opt the United States as he had with so many other medium states, Napoleon contented himself with punishing the Americans. With American ships being seized by both the French and British, Paris informed Washington that France would stop seizing neutral property only when London stopped (p. 21). According to Hill, only an American declaration of war against Great Britain would satisfy Napoleon, who was baffled by Washington's rejection of his alliance offer that included the cession of Florida (p. 38). As further punishment, Napoleon allowed his Bayonne Decree of 17 April 1808, to take a toll of ten million dollars in American property losses (p. 45). Hill finds that by the summer of 1808 both Paris and Washington "felt aggrieved over the operation of the Continental System from which Napoleon showed no signs of retreating" (p. 48). One year later Bonaparte made clear that the British first had to repeal their Orders-in-Council before he minimized the effects of the Continental System on American shipmasters (p. 71). From then on "French diplomacy can be pictured as skillfully deflecting American anger long enough for Congress to decide that Britain, after all, was the enemy it preferred to fight" (p. 89).

Hill concludes that by mid-1811 Paris steadfastly refused to make any concessions to the rights of neutrals for fear that London would reciprocate in a similar manner and thus remove the pretext for an Anglo-American war. American demands for compensation and even the release of imprisoned American sailors received little sympathy from an imperial regime that refused to accept legal responsibility for losses incurred by American shipmasters who went so far as to violate their own government's non-intercourse decrees. In a classic example of Napoleon's unorthodox diplomacy, power politics, and contemptuous treatment of a medium-size state, France continued "its maritime depredations until British policy became so abusive as to drive Americans to war" (p. 120). Bonaparte's controversial Cadore Letter of 1810 and the questions it raised over Napoleon's alleged revocation of the Berlin and Milan Decrees exemplifies the difficulty medium-size states encountered when dealing with the French emperor. As Hill concedes, even the American war with Great Britain failed to completely win over the French emperor, who looked on helplessly as American ships continued to feed the British army in Spain (p. 200). Ironically, French privateers continued to burn or seize American merchantmen while the United States was at war with Napoleon's indefatigable foe.

While the French historian will be impressed by Hill's concise explanation of why the Continental System proved so disastrous to France, minor errors regarding international affairs on the continent can be found in the work. For example, Hill comments that Napoleon counted on Spain to be an "undistracted ally in his renewed warfare with Britain and Austria in late 1804" (p. 4). Moreover, the author claims that in 1809 Napoleon had to face Habsburg Austria's anger over his ill treatment of the Spanish Bourbons (p. 51). Hill also contends that Allied armies were crossing the Rhine on 14 November 1813, but these operations did not take place for another six weeks (p. 222).

In no way do these very trivial issues undermine the quality and contribution of Hill's work. *Napoleon's Troublesome Americans* serves as a model for scholarship. If the middle section of the book drags at times, the reader will appreciate the strong introduction and conclusion in which Hill clearly states the purpose of the work as well as his findings. Hill should be commended for his fair treatment of the subject and for his labors to reconstruct the history of Franco-American relations from Napoleon's perception.

NOTES

[1] Peter P. Hill, *William Vans Murray: Federalist Diplomat: the Shaping of Peace with France, 1797-1801* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1971); Hill, *French Perceptions of the Early American Republic, 1783-1793* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988).

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