

“Our Debt to France”

Why The Franco-American Alliance
Should Not Be Ratified

PRESIDENTS WASHINGTON, JOHN
ADAMS, MADISON AND ANDREW
JACKSON ON THE WITNESS STAND

CHARLES SUMNER ON FRANCE'S
ATTITUDE DURING THE CIVIL WAR



HORACE GREELEY AND CHARLES A. DANA OPPOSED
TO FRANCE IN 1870-71

WOULD ABRAHAM LINCOLN SPEAK OF THE ETER-
NAL DEBT WHICH WE OWE FRANCE? WOULD
DANIEL WEBSTER?

**The Whole Case Examined in
the Light of History**

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The Franco-American Treaty

Let Us Know all the Facts About our Debt
to France and Beware of Serious Mistakes

To the Senate of the United States:

The attempt to make the Franco-American alliance palatable to the public produces another instance of that distortion of history and of ordinarily well-known facts that have marked more than one of the important stages of the diplomacy attending the war and its settlements. Some grievous misstatements have crept into our State papers and as grievous misinformation has been fostered among the ill-informed.

In the light of the dark-lantern treaty-making methods of the Big Three under the dictation of the inspired French apostle of "revanche," Clemenceau, it is important to recall the language used in the official declaration of war. On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war, not on Germany, but on the "imperial German government," a government which ceased to exist before the armistice was concluded. The language is this:

"Whereas **the imperial German government** has committed repeated acts of war against the government and people of the United States," etc., "Therefore, Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled, that a state of war between the United States and the **imperial German government** which has been thrust upon the United States, is hereby formally declared . . . and he (the President) is hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States, etc., to carry on war against the **imperial German government.**"

Apparently this vital distinction between a government which has ceased to exist and the people's government which has succeeded it, has been lost sight of.

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We find another equally amazing disregard of facts, as they stare us in the face from the history of the country, in the note on the Franco-American treaty which the President sent to the Senate on July 29. I will not dwell upon the fact that in this treaty we do indeed break with the Washingtonian traditions which the President is said in English quarters to have announced as his final determination. This treaty of alliance involves us, hand and foot, in the foreign entanglements against which George Washington warned his countrymen, and witnesses the parting of the ways for the United States, after a century and a half of peaceful isolation from European embroilments.

Is This True?

The particular thought that amazes the man who has even a rudimentary acquaintance with the history of his country is contained in the following paragraph of the President's statement of July 29:

"We are bound to France by ties of friendship which we have always regarded and shall always regard as peculiarly sacred. She assisted us to win our freedom as a nation. It is seriously to be doubted whether we could have won it without her timely and gallant aid. We have recently had the privilege of assisting enemies, who were also enemies of the world, from her soil, but that does not pay our debt to her."

These are pretty sentiments, but they would have more importance if they were unqualifiedly true. Neither England nor the United States, it may be recalled, rushed to the defence of France in 1870. No prominent American then seemed conscious of the sacred debt under which we rested to France. Horace Greeley and Charles A. Dana, the foremost editors of that period, openly sided against France, the former declaring that as a result of the attitude of France during the Civil War, she had forfeited our friendship and sympathy. France, he declared, had been our ally in the past, but Germany would be our ally in future. The distinction which marked public opinion in 1870 and 1919 is the difference between the divergent views of public men educated respectively under Union and Confederate influences. And in the case of France and our alleged debt to her, we must judge the present-day Francophile

demonstrations, in and out of high places, in the light of the adage that distance lends enchantment. Could we summon either Washington or Lincoln to give testimony on our debt to France, we should (as I shall attempt to show) hear an emphatic contradiction of the words delivered to the Senate on July 29. The paragraph quoted, serenely ignores the momentous truth of history that **the conduct of France toward the young American republic was so provocative that we declared war against her in 1798**, and Washington was appointed to take command of the American forces for the impending conflict.

We seem to have forgotten that unfortunate interlude in our relations with France, just as we seem to have forgotten that we declared war on “the imperial German government,” while the terms we are asked to exact under the Clemenceau treaty interpret the French spirit of revenge for the result of 1971, and constitute a peace, at the expence of starving woman and famishing babies — a peace of studied cruelty designed to sap the vitality of a nation of 70,000,000 and to exterminate it by a graduated process of economic serfdom.

Driving a Hard Bargain with a Starving People

Let us dispassionately look at some of the conditions of the peace treaty which the German people (not “the imperial German government”) were compelled to sign, ~~and see whether my statements are true.~~ I quote:

PARIS, July 24 (Associated Press).—Germany will have to surrender to France 500 stallions, 3,000 fillies, **90,000 milch cows**, 100,000 sheep, and 10,000 goats, according to a report made yesterday before the French Peace Commission, sitting under the presidency of Rene Viviani, by M. Dubois, economic expert for the commission, in commenting on the peace treaty clauses.

Two hundred stallions, 5,000 mares, 5,000 fillies, **50,000 cows**, and **40,000 heifers** also are to go to Belgium from Germany. The deliveries are to be made monthly during a period of three months until completed.

A total of 140,000 milch cows! Forty thousand heifers! To be surrendered by a country in which little children are dying for lack of milk, and babies are brought into the world blind, because of the starved conditions of the mothers! Henry Nevison, an eminent

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journalist, recently published in the *London Daily News* a tragic description of what he saw in the hospitals of Cologne: "Although I have seen many horrible things," he writes, "I have seen nothing so pitiful as these rows of babies, feverish from want of food, exhausted by privations to the point that their little limbs were slender wands, their expressions hopeless and their faces full of pain." (*The Nation*)

A formidable number of equally impartial witnesses might be quoted to the same end. We have read of revolts against the course of deliberate cruelty by starvation recorded of the British soldiers in the occupied Rhinelands — against the inspired policy of "revanche" on a conquered foe.

There are even now milk stations for the supply of milk to French babies in many cities of this country, just as there were throughout the war. France, in truth, is over-supplied with milk. It has been selling milk to Germany at a substantial profit. The *New York Sun* of April 3, last, printed a dispatch from The Hague, as follows: "**They (the Germans) are particularly happy over the purchase of 250,000 cases of condensed milk from the military stores of France and England, which, to cover the cost, will be sold at 2:20 marks (at normal exchange about 60 cents) for a one-pound can.**" Observe: "normal exchange" — the mark is down to about 7 cents at present from approximately 25 cents, normal! Perhaps Mr. Alfred Barton was not wholly wrong when he said, at Sheffield, April 21 last, that the economic blockade with its starvation of women and children "is no more cruel than the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*."

These are but fugitive instances of the grinding terms of peace which the Senate is asked to ratify, while the attempt is made to stifle its conscience and divert its attention by a barrage of sentimental eloquence about our debt to France.

No one inquires into our history to discover the reason why this debt was regarded as discharged by the founders of the republic who still lived and spoke in 1798, only twenty two years after our declaration of independence; again by the great men of the '60s as well as in 1870, when not a hand was raised in America to save France from the consequences of her declaration of war against Prussia.

American Presidents on the Witness Stand.

If it were my purpose to summon the witnesses of the past against the President, I could easily quote from the public statements contained in the official copy of “The Messages of the Presidents,” published by authority of Congress: the denunciation of French aggressions by Washington, January 19, 1797; of President John Adams, November 22, 1797, and February 5, 1798, December 8, 12, and 14, 1798; the address of the Senate to President Adams, December 12, 1798; the address of the House to President Adams, December 13, 1798; of President Madison, June 1, 1812, and of President Jackson, December 7, 1835.

War with France in 1798 was thoroughly popular. “Everything seemed to indicate immediate war with the French republic. And there was much *casus belli*,” writes Elson, p. 365. “France had heaped one insult upon another . . . Her privateers had captured scores of American merchant vessels; she had rejected an American minister because he belonged to a party distasteful to the French. Even after all this our President was so anxious to maintain peace that he sent three envoys; and these were kept waiting three months in the antechamber, hearing the most humiliating proposals, and at last two of them were driven in disgrace from the country. Was not this enough to raise the ire of every true-hearted American?” Public sentiment he epitomizes in one sentence: **“Such an outburst had not been known since the battle of Lexington.”** Patriotic songs were written, and one of these, “Hail, Columbia,” still lives in our literature.

Benson J. Lossing Testifies.

Benson J. Lossing, the popular American historian, recorded his unmistakable dissent from the opinion expressed by President Wilson in an article, “Our French Allies”, printed on page 753 et seq. of Harper’s Magazine for December, 1870, to May, 1871. Lossing says:

“From the time that the king of France publicly recognized the nationality of the united American colonies struggling for independence, and sent troops to help them, until our government recognized

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the republic of France as it suddenly arose out of the ruins of Caesarism, our French friends have not ceased to remind Americans that they owe their being as a nation to the generosity of the French monarch and the gallantry of French warriors. So Frenchmen believe and so many Americans believe. **Like most other superstitions**, there are many grains of truth in it. To winnow those grains from the chaff is the object of this paper.”

Lossing admits that the French government did aid the Americans.

“State policy, simulating friendship for them, overruled the opposition of the weak king, . . . who could never hear Franklin, the embodiment of democracy, praised without petulance, nor of help being given to the Americans without breaking out into a fit of passion.”

He then sets forth the motives which actuated France in coming to the aid of the colonies:

“In the Seven Years War, which ended with the treaty of 1763, France had been thoroughly humbled by England. Her pride had been wounded. She had been shorn of vast possessions in America and Asia. She had been compelled, by the terms of the treaty, to cast down the fortifications of Dunkirk, and to submit forever to the presence of an English commissioner, without whose consent not a single paving stone might be moved on the quay or in the harbor of a French maritime city. This was an insult too grievous to be borne with equanimity. Its keenness was maintained by the tone of English diplomacy, which was that of a conqueror—harsh, arrogant, and often uncivil. A desire for relief from the shame became a vital principle of French policy, **and the most sleepless vigilance was maintained for the discovery of an opportunity to avenge the injury and efface the mortification.**

“The quarrel between Great Britain and her colonies, which rapidly assumed the phase of contest after the port of Boston was closed, early in the summer of 1774, attracted the notice and stimulated the hope of the French government. But it seemed hardly possible for a few colonists to hold a successful or even effective contest with powerful England—the mistress of the seas; and it was not until the proceedings of the First Continental Congress had been read in Europe, the skirmish at Lexington and the capture of Ticonderoga had occurred, and the Second Congress had met, thrown down the gauntlet of defiance at the feet of the British ministry, and been proclaimed to be ‘rebels’, that the French cabinet saw gleams of sure promise that England’s present trouble would be sufficiently serious to give France the coveted opportunity to strike her a damaging blow.”

Thus, for ten closely-printed pages, the American historian "winnows the grain from the chaff," and reveals the wholly selfish interests prompting the government of France to extend its aid to the colonies.

Mr. Wilson on the Witness Stand.

Finally, it is proper to take the testimony of President Wilson himself, as given at a period considerably ante-dating the statement of July 29, that "We are bound to France by ties of friendship which we have always regarded and shall always regard, as peculiarly sacred." In his "History of the American People" Mr. Wilson treats the subject in the following words:

"The Congress at Philadelphia explicitly commanded its commissioners to be guided by the wishes of the French court; Dr. Franklin, Mr. John Adams and Mr. John Jay, who bore its commission, were men of honor, and entertained, besides, a lively sense of the very deep obligations of the United States to France, for the money and the armed assistance in the field and upon the seas, without which, apparently, their victory would have been impossible. **It proved impracticable, nevertheless, to act with France; for she conducted herself not as the ingenuous friend of the United States, but only as the enemy of England, and as first and always, a subtle strategist for her own interest and advantage. The American commissioners would not be tricked, and came to terms separately with the English.**"

These American commissioners of 1783, specifically described as "men of honor" by Mr. Wilson, the historian, would not be "tricked." Will the Senate of 1919?

Here is evidence of such a total disregard of our debt to France that the address of July 29 conveys something akin to a rebuke to the men who occupied the White House for a period of thirty-five years immediately following the establishment of our government. **At a later period France seized the Hawaiian islands, and on June 18, 1851, Secretary of State Webster instructed the American minister in Paris to say that the further enforcement of the French demands against Hawaii "would tend seriously to disturb our friendly relations with the French government."**

France in Our Civil War

What would be the probable attitude of President Lincoln toward France, in view of the pernicious French anti-American activity during the Civil War? The British government was formally approached by the government of France with a proposal for the joint recognition of the Confederacy; Mr. Davis was more popular in France than Mr. Lincoln, and Justin McCarthy in his “History of Our Own Times,” (III, p. 253), says: “It is well to bear in mind that there were only two European states which entertained this feeling and allowed it to be everywhere understood.” One of these states was France.

While the Northern and Southern States were engaged in a death grapple, Napoleon III was defying the Monroe Doctrine by invading Mexico, and in 1862 was sending instructions to the French general Forey, as follows:

“People will ask you why we sacrifice men and money to establish a government in Mexico. In the present state of civilization the development of America can no longer be a matter of indifference to Europe . . . **It is not at all to our interest that they should come in possession of the entire Gulf of Mexico, to rule from there the destinies of the Antilles and South America, and control the products of the New World.**”

After Lee's surrender, General Slaughter of the Confederate army opened negotiations with the French Marshal Bazaine for the transfer of 25,000 Confederate soldiers to Mexico, and **many distinguished Confederate officers cast their lot with the French to establish Maximilian on the throne. General Price was commissioned to recruit an imperial army in the Confederate States. Governor Harris of Tennessee and other Americans naturalized as Mexicans and now took the lead in a colonization scheme of vast proportions. The North became thoroughly alarmed. A French army co-operating with Confederate expatriates could not be tolerated on the Mexican border. The government at Washington lodged an emphatic protest with the French government, and an army of observation of 50,000 men under General Sheridan was dispatched to the Rio Grande, ready to cross into Mexico and attack Bazaine at a moment's**

notice. The American minister in Paris was instructed by Seward to insist on a withdrawal of the French forces from Mexico, and as the French government was in no position to engage in a war in a distant country against a veteran army of a million men, it was forced to yield.

The French populace was enthusiastically on the side of Napoleon in the Mexican adventure, as attested by the proceedings in the French legislature, especially by the scenes in the Senate, February 24, 1862, and in the Corps Legislatif, June 26 of the same year, when Billault, Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke on French aims in Mexico. On March 23, 1865, Druyn de Lluys, the French premier, notified Mr. Seward, our Secretary of State, that American intervention in favor of Juarez would lead to a declaration of war on the part of France. The necessary military preparations had been made by Marshal Bazaine, who, as related by Paul Garlot in “L’Empire de Maximilian,” (Paris, 1890), had erected “fortified supports” at the United States frontier and made certain “arrangements” with Confederate leaders.

“In our dark hours and the great convulsions of our war,” said Charles Sumner, then chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate, in New York, September, 11, 1863, “France is forgetting her traditions.”

Our Late Enemies During the Revolution

Since the ratification of the treaty of alliance with France has become predominantly a question of sentiment, let us be just and fair enough to recall at this momentous juncture what the attitude of our late enemies toward us was during the Revolution and what our relations always were down to 1914 — and the writer is bold enough to assert that this debt is greater than the average man is aware of, and may well enlist the critical interest of the Senate.

Had Russia in 1778 formed an alliance with England, Russian troops would have swelled the forces arrayed against the American patriots to such proportions that the result of the struggle presumably would have been different. The influence of Prussia in that relation is a chapter of history practically closed to most students. But for immense bribes to Count Panin, Catherine the

Great's premier, paid by Frederick the Great, as testified by British authorities, Russia would have extended aid to England in her struggle with the Colonies which might have proved decisive.

It was England's interest to secure if possible the alliance of Russia, and, as in the Seven Years War, to involve France in continental complications. In 1778 there seemed every reason to expect the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. The continuance of the war gave an increased importance to an alliance with Russia, and while the Dutch appealed to Catherine on the ground that Great Britain had broken with Holland solely on account of the armed neutrality, the English government offered to hand over Minorca as the price of a convention. In 1778 Catherine was approached by the English government through Sir James Harris and invited to make a defensive and offensive alliance. But the opposition of the Premier, Nikolai Ivanovich, Count Panin, influenced by Frederick the Great, prevented any reproachment between England and Russia, and Catherine declared her inability to join England against France unless the English government bound itself to support her against the Turks.

"The Prussian party, headed by Panin at St. Petersburg," writes Arthur Hassall, M.A., in "The Balance of Power, 1715-1789," p. 338; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), "had won its last triumph, and all chance for an Anglo-Russian alliance had for the moment disappeared . . . Since 1764 Count Panin had been the head of the Prussian party at the Russian capital, and the Prussian alliance had been the keystone of Catherine's policy . . . **Frederick the Great, partly by immense bribes to Panin, had kept Catherine true to the existing political system, and had contributed to prevent Russian assistance from being given to England during the American struggle.**" (P. 361).

I need not cite the fact that Frederick himself was approached by England for the purpose of inducing him to send troops to America, and we know his reply: "**If the English crown would give me all the millions possible I would not furnish it two small files of my troops to serve against the colonies.** Neither can it expect from me a guarantee of its electorate of Hanover,"

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and he gave France his solemn assurance that she had nothing to fear from him in case of a war with England.

Let Us Know the Truth

If the truth is to play any part in the present discussion of ancient friendships, it is necessary to point out the attitude alike of France and Prussia during our struggle for survival as a united nation, and it is of vital importance to do so because it is purposed to commit us to the levy of a heavy and oppressive retribution upon one nation under a specious pretext of sentimental duty to another, a retribution so rashly conceived and remorselessly applied that we may well pause to reflect upon the possible consequences.

We know from the discussion in the Senate during the Franco-Prussian war, without quoting other authorities, that **both England and France prohibited the listing of Union bonds on their exchanges, while the Germans bought some \$600,000,000 of our securities.** ("Globe Congressional Record," 41st Congress, third session; part II, pp. 953-55.) Elson in his "History of the United States," p. 779, says: "It is a pleasure to turn to our relations with Germany and Russia during the war. Not only was the German Confederation in full sympathy with the Union cause, but thousands of German-Americans [the hyphen was not then a badge of dual alliance] gave their lives in defence of the cause."

After the close of the Civil War, the Prussian deputies, some 260 in number, on April 26, 1865, submitted an address to the American minister in Berlin, in which the following language occurs:

"Living among us you are witness of the heartfelt sympathy which this people have ever preserved for the people of the United States during the long and severe conflict. You are aware that Germany has looked with pride and joy on the thousands of her sons, who, in this struggle, have arrayed themselves on the side of law and justice. You have seen with what joy the victories of the Union have been hailed and how confident our faith in the final triumph of the great cause of the restoration of the Union in all its greatness has ever been, even in the midst of adversity."

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William H. Seward, as Secretary of State, wrote to the United States minister at Berlin in May, 1863:

"You will not hesitate to express assurance of the constant good will of the United States toward the king and the people who have dealt with us in good faith and great friendship during the severe trials through which we have been passing".

Are these things which I have cited, out of an abundance of material, relevant? We are asked to take a position of the most stupendous consequences on a problem based upon a pretended debt of gratitude, and to become parties to a compact for the fastening of economic slavery upon one nation in order to protect another which avowedly has been waiting forty-eight years to glut its revenge — revenge upon a people (no longer "the imperial German government"), who in every crisis of our history have been our friends. Shall we enter blindly into this dismal compact of revenge? **If so, let it be upon some pretext other than a profession of gratitude**, and let us understand the treaty of peace and our responsibility in connection with it. **"Those who will sign this treaty will sign the death warrant of millions of German men, women and children,"** said Count Rantzau; "already since the war we have 1,000,000 dead — victims of the blockade."

Respectfully,
R. C. DASHER.

* * * *

" 'Tis better using France than trusting France" — Shakespeare, 3d Henry VI, IV, Sc. I.

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(New York Evening Sun)

"The German Menace."

Washington, D. C., Aug. 25 — France will be a great source of profitable trade and should be protected from the German menace declared the Senate Judiciary sub-committee in reporting that the proposed Franco-American alliance would be constitutional.

(Vienna Correspondence Germania, Berlin, latter part of June)

The French Military Mission in Vienna.

"General Hallier, chief of the French military mission, tells anyone inclined to listen that the French aim in the war was to destroy the German Empire. While a people of 60,000,000 souls could not be exterminated, it could be so bound and gagged, maimed and weakened, that it would be impossible ever to recover. The victory had placed in the hands of France the means to deliver the blow, and though the object had not been fully accomplished, Germany was already powerless, and it would only be necessary to continue in the same direction in order to attain the ultimate end in view.

"No less significant and remarkable than the statement of General Hallier are the utterances of a French general staff officer, who asserts that every intelligent person in France knows that Germany did not desire the war. Germany could not have wished anything better for herself than the preservation of peace, but France was obliged to make propaganda for her own cause, and it had served the purpose of gaining the accession of the Americans."

