

THE AGE OF LINCOLN and CAVOUR

*Comparative Perspectives on
Nineteenth-Century American
and Italian Nation-Building*



Enrico Dal Lago



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ITALIAN NATION-BUILDING

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INTRODUCTION



NATION-BUILDING IN THE AGE OF LINCOLN AND CAVOUR: COMPARATIVE THEMES AND DIMENSIONS

C

Current scholarship on the Civil War era in the United States and on the *Risorgimento* era, or era of national unification, in Italy has advocated a move toward wider approaches to the study of these two crucial phases of the nineteenth-century processes of nation-building in the two countries. In recent years, the publication of a growing body of historical literature has focused on the widening of perspectives and the identification of little-known or neglected links and connections between different regions of the world at the time of the American Civil War and the Italian *Risorgimento*, following the current “transnational turn” in historiography.¹ In a 2012 introduction to a special issue of *The Journal of the Civil War Era* dedicated to “New Approaches to Internationalizing the History of the Civil War Era,” Caleb McDaniel and Bethany Johnson recognized the important work done by recent transnational studies on the United States in the nineteenth century, but they also argued that “the nineteenth century in general and the American Civil War era in particular are ripe for reconsideration from global, comparative, and transnational perspectives.”² Also in 2012, in a review article that interpretatively summarized the recent scholarship on *Risorgimento* Italy, Maurizio Isabella acknowledged the importance of the transnational dimension of several recent studies, but he also wrote that “more comparative work is needed to assess what, if anything, was special about Italy’s state formation and its culture.”³ Thus, in both articles, the authors—all leading scholars in the fields of transnational history of either the

nineteenth-century United States or nineteenth-century Italy—have been keen advocates of widening the scope of studies in their fields through a more widespread adoption not just of the transnational approach, but also of the comparative approach.

Historical comparison is hardly a completely novel approach to the study of the American Civil War. The original idea of comparing the American Civil War to nineteenth-century European processes of nation-building, including Italian national unification, goes back to a 1968 essay by U.S. historian David Potter.⁴ In that essay and in other writings, Potter argued that we should see the American Civil War in close relationship to the nationalist movements that agitated Europe from the first half of the nineteenth century. In this perspective, given the substantial failure of the latter before 1860, the war waged by Abraham Lincoln for the national reunification of the United States in 1861 represented, together with the national unification of Italy under a constitutional monarchy in the same year, the first real victory of liberal nationalism in the Euro-American world since the Latin American independence movements of the 1810s and 1820s. Thus, for Potter, the type of nationalism that triumphed in the United States with the victory of the Union in 1865 was comparable, in the universal and libertarian ideals that inspired Lincoln and the Republican Party, to the type of liberal nationalism that had characterized both Latin America's nationalist movements and Europe's 1848 nationalist movements and that, as epitomized by Italian Prime Minister Camillo Cavour, was the dominant ideology in a process of formation of the Italian nation-state partly contemporaneous to the American Civil War.⁵

Despite the general admiration for David Potter, no scholar followed on his groundbreaking path for comparative historical studies for at least two decades, very likely because, during that period, the discourse of American "exceptionalism"—that is, the idea that the United States had followed an absolutely unique process of historical development, which made America fundamentally incomparable to other countries—was widespread in American academia.⁶ At the same time, it is also true that during the same years in which Potter made his comparative arguments, in the mid to late 1960s, two other scholars had begun to think about the American Civil War in a comparative perspective. The first scholar was American historical sociologist Barrington Moore, Jr., whose monumental *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966) was one of the first large-scale comparative studies, with an unparalleled breadth of vision and scope, both in terms of chronology and space, within the boundaries of Modern History.

The other scholar was Italian historian Raimondo Luraghi, who, in his equally monumental work, *A History of the American Civil War* (also released in 1966), hinted at a number of possible and highly inspiring comparative issues in regard to individuals, themes, and episodes of nineteenth-century U.S. history and Italian *Risorgimento* history. At the heart of both studies was the conviction, particularly widespread among Marxist scholars of nineteenth-century America, that the American Civil War had witnessed the defeat of an agrarian and precapitalist South by an industrialized and capitalist North, and that therefore the war was a phenomenon essentially comparable to other, similar conflicts that had characterized the emergence of modern nation-states in nineteenth-century Europe.⁷

These studies, while groundbreaking, remained without a following until the 1980s and the rise of the new scholarship on nationalism and, at the same time, the rise in popularity of the comparative historical method, both of which led to the weakening of the myth of American exceptionalism and also of the idea, still very popular, that the American Civil War was a phenomenon essentially not comparable to any other. Studies on the different historical facets and varieties of nationalism by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians such as, especially, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, have shown how modern nations, particularly the nations that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, arose as results of operations of social engineering and the “invention of traditions,” in Hobsbawm’s famous expression.⁸ Even though these scholars did not always include the United States in their treatments, it is not difficult to see how their theories led American historians who were favorable to historical comparison to adopt them, especially since they could use those theories to demolish once and for all the misguided concept of the exceptionality of creation of the American nation as an artificial process. At the same time, starting from the 1980s, American historians working in the particularly prolific field of slavery studies progressively widened their comparative horizons—until then mostly limited to the U.S. South and to other New World slave societies—and began a tradition of scholarship focusing on comparison of the U.S. slave system with other labor systems, both free and unfree, in the entire Euro-American world.⁹

All this new historiographical ferment created the conditions for a major step forward in the historiography of the American Civil War, as the suggestions coming from the new studies on nationalism and on comparative slavery progressively influenced research conducted by different scholars, ultimately leading to the current pleas

for more comparative historical studies situating the Civil War in its Euro-American and global dimension. In her groundbreaking study on nationalism in the Civil War U.S. South, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism* (1988), Drew Faust made a number of references to Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm, and the same can be said of two other crucial studies, Susan-Mary Grant's *North Over South* (2000) and Melinda Lawson's *Patriot Fires* (2002), on nationalism in the antebellum and Civil War U.S. North. Significantly, the latest scholarship on nationalism in the antebellum South and in the Confederacy, well represented by Stephanie McCurry's *Confederate Reckoning* (2010) and Paul Quigley's *Shifting Grounds* (2011), has incorporated the comparative dimension, since both works make reference to nation-building in contemporary Europe.¹⁰ The same is true also of the few recent works that have looked at transatlantic connections between the United States and Europe specifically in relation to themes such as: the 1848 European upheavals, as in Timothy Roberts's *Distant Revolutions* (2009); the significance of the start of the American Civil War, as in André Fleche's *The Revolution of 1861* (2012); and the transnational contacts of American abolitionists, as in Caleb McDaniel's *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery* (2013).¹¹

Despite this flourishing of scholarship, studies that have actually made explicit and sustained, or "rigorous," comparisons—in which, according to Peter Kolchin, the comparative analysis of two cases is the heart of the study, rather than just hinted at briefly—focusing on the nineteenth-century United States, and particularly on the American Civil War and contemporary events in Europe have been, and are still, only a few. Among them, worthy of mention are sociologist Liah Greenfeld's *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1995), which attempted to insert the entire history of the United States within the contours of a new interpretation of the rise of nations in the Western world, similarly to the more recent work by Lloyd Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America* (2011)—the latter relating to the period after 1776 on both continents.¹² Particularly important in this respect were two essays published in the early 1990s by Steven Hahn and Carl Degler, respectively, on U.S. Southern planters and on the American Civil War in comparative perspective. In those two essays, Hahn and Degler essentially considered the Civil War as a phenomenon of national consolidation comparable to similar phenomena that occurred in the same period in other parts of Europe.¹³ At the same time, though, while Hahn hinted at comparative points between the United States and Germany, most of Degler's essay dealt

with the specific comparison between Lincoln and Bismarck focusing on each man's iron will and determination to fight large-scale, costly, and technologically innovative wars for the sake of building the American and German nations. This particular comparative theme eventually gave origin to an important collection of essays focusing on the American Civil War and the German wars for national unification, entitled *On the Road to Total War* (1997).¹⁴

In addition to the aforementioned studies, the new scholarship on world history and on global history, which has grown exponentially in the last decade, has made a particularly important contribution to creating the necessary conditions for a comparative historical approach to the American Civil War in relation to the nineteenth-century nationalist movements in Europe.¹⁵ These studies not only have led scholars to definitely disregard the idea that the United States had followed a historical path completely different from that of other nations, but also have shown the importance of placing American history, especially in regard to events such as the Civil War, once considered in isolation, within the context of the socioeconomic and political changes undergone throughout the world.¹⁶ This historiographical development initially followed the pioneering work of Eric Hobsbawm in his trilogy of books on the world history of the long nineteenth century: *The Age of Revolutions* (1962), *The Age of Capital* (1975), and *The Age of Empires* (1983).¹⁷ Most recently, the publication of seminal studies such as, especially, C. A. Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004) and Jurgen Osterhammel's *The Transformation of the World* (2014), has provided an indispensable framework for the undertaking of comparative historical research focused on the nineteenth century, placing particular emphasis on the importance of transnational links and exchanges of ideas, goods, and people between different regions and countries, and thus on the interconnections between different national histories.¹⁸ If, on the one hand, this new perspective has made the work of the historian of the nineteenth century much more complex, it has, on the other hand, shown new and fascinating potentials for the study of this crucial period in world history.

In fact, in showing how "the American Civil War was . . . a global event in the same sense as the Taiping Rebellion or the 1848 revolutions, because direct connections of trade, government, and ideology spread its effects across the globe," C. A. Bayly has posed in the clearest possible way a fundamental methodological question to the scholars who intend to embark on a historical comparison between nation-building in the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The question focuses on the correct approach to a

comparative historical study of this type, and it is, put simply, whether we should treat separately the case studies under investigation—i.e., the United States and other countries—or whether we should take into account, in making this comparison, the numerous contacts that those regions had with one another throughout the nineteenth century. In this respect, it is worth pointing out that the few scholars who have written sustained comparative monographs of the types already described by Marc Bloch in the 1920s, and then updated in a seminal methodological 1980 article by Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, have generally agreed with Peter Kolchin on the fact that “rigorous” comparative history is only the approach that, through sustained comparison, gives equal importance to the different and distinct case studies with the specific objective of discovering the reasons for the similarities and differences between them.²⁰

However, it is also important to notice that as a result of its specific methodology based on the comparison of two or more case studies, usually relating to different national historiographical traditions, comparative history is, effectively, a cross-national historical approach, as George Fredrickson has remarked, and thus it has more in common than usually accounted for with the historical methodologies that have characterized the “transnational turn” in the historiography of both the United States and Europe in the past twenty-five years, and specifically with *histoire croisée* and *transfergeschichte*.²¹ While *histoire croisée*, or “entangled history,” focuses on cultural and social relations between nations in the modern period, especially neighboring ones such as France and Germany, according to its main advocates Benedicte Zimmermann and Michael Werner, *transfergeschichte*, or “transfer history,” investigates the “transfer” of ideas and cultural practices observed in intellectual, technological, and other type of exchanges, from country to country at different times.²² After a long debate that has seen advocates of transnational history and advocates of comparative history criticize each other over the pitfalls of the two methods and their supposed incompatibility, several scholars would now agree that it is indeed possible, and in certain cases even highly advisable, to integrate the comparative historical approach with transnational historical approaches such as *histoire croisée* and *transfergeschichte* in specific types of research.²³ And, in truth, despite the differences between the two types of approaches, if one analyzes in depth their methodology and the particular ways in which historians use it, one can certainly agree with Heinz-Gerhard Haupt’s and Jürgen Kocka’s conclusion that “as is the case with *histoire croisée*, transfer history does not fundamentally contradict the principles of historical comparison.”²⁴ In an

important article published in 2003, Kocka argued that, in response to the growing challenge represented by the “new” world history and global history—both, effectively, transnational historical approaches on a planetary scale—comparative historians must be able to combine transnational and comparative historical methodologies.²⁵ In particular, Kocka had noted that comparative historical studies, already transnational in themselves, can only be enriched in their analysis of similarities and differences by the treatment of specific historical junctures effectively caused by the exchange of ideas, the movement of people, and, in general, the relations between nations and regions.²⁶

This is especially true in regard to the comparative study of nation-building in the United States and Europe at the time of the American Civil War and the Italian *Risorgimento*, given the continuous exchange of people, ideas, and goods that occurred between the two parts of the Euro-American world on the opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and the continuous relations between the United States and other European nations throughout the long nineteenth century (1780–1914). Even though they have not yet studied these exchanges and relations in a systematic manner, American and European historians, including Italian-American and Italian scholars, have long recognized the importance of these investigations, leading to the publication of several studies that nowadays would be called “transnational,” given their focus on the discovery of previously little-known links between, on the one hand, some of the most important Italian and European liberal, democratic, and revolutionary activists, politicians and groups, and, on the other hand, prominent figures and contemporaneous developments in the Early American Republic and the Civil War United States.²⁷ This scholarship, together with the latest comparative and transnational research, forms an indispensable and extremely useful foundation for a study of nation-building that focuses on the United States in the Civil War era and Italy during the *Risorgimento* era, and its insights are still invaluable in many respects.²⁸

Following both the old and recent scholarship represented by these studies with a wider research focus, in linking the United States with Italy in the central decades of the nineteenth century, specifically in relation to the phenomenon of nation-building, it is important to notice that, effectively, the reunification of the American Republic after the Civil War was an event that caused the geopolitical restructuring of the entire North American continent in 1861–65. Similar, in this sense, was the geopolitical restructuring of the central part of the European continent that occurred as a result of the Italian and German national unifications in 1861–71. Interestingly, both old and

new studies looking for transnational links between the two continents have clarified that the most prominent politicians in Europe and America had a perception of these events that we could rightly call “transcontinental,” since they were aware not only of developments on both sides of the Atlantic, but also of the repercussions that those events had in the specific region of the Euro-American world where they resided.²⁹ In this respect, equally important to the geopolitical dimension is the fact that the restructuring of the North American continent under Lincoln with the American Civil War led to the creation of a continental nation-state—the post-Civil War United States—based on republican principles that had a great deal in common with the ones that characterized the formation of one of the two new large nation-states in the European continent—the Italian constitutional monarchy under Cavour; therefore, this renders the comparison between nation-building in the United States and Italy in the “age of Lincoln and Cavour” particularly significant. Tellingly, this significance is corroborated by the fact that Italian, European, and American nineteenth-century politicians and activists on both sides of the Atlantic correctly recognized the completion of the process of formation of the American nation with the victory of Lincoln’s anti-slavery Union in the Civil War as an episode of paramount importance in the advance of the principles of nineteenth-century European liberal nationalism as they were expressed particularly through the recent creation of the constitutional Italian Kingdom in the *Risorgimento*.³⁰

It is also important to acknowledge that the process of nation-building that took place in the age of Lincoln and Cavour in the United States and Italy was characterized by the existence of competing national projects, or different ideas about the future shape of the American and Italian nations. While in the United States different attitudes toward the place of slavery in the American nation—ranging from radical Abolitionism to the ideology of Lincoln’s Republican Party—and long-standing differences on the more or less centralized nature of the U.S. federal institutions ultimately led to the American Civil War, in Italy different ideas on the forms of the future Italian national government—ranging from democratic republicanism to the ideology of Cavour’s Moderate Liberals—and long-standing differences in regional political traditions ultimately caused the post-unification crisis culminating in a long and costly civil war in southern Italy, the so-called Great Brigandage, contemporaneous to the American Civil War.³¹ In this respect, the existence of competing national projects in the process of nation-building was by no means a unique feature of the history of the nineteenth-century United States and

Italy, but rather it was a familiar story in the contemporaneous processes of nation-building of several other countries, whether nation-building was ultimately successful or not, and also whether there were similar or different characteristics determining the origins of competing nationalisms. Among those countries, particularly worthy of a brief comparative investigation is Ireland.

Nineteenth-century Ireland is a particularly eloquent case in point with regard to competing nationalisms and projects of nation-building, as a result of its long-term historical and social fractures and divisions dating to the Tudors and subsequent waves of English conquest and establishment of an English Protestant elite ruling over a largely Catholic population and holding the political power and the majority of the land. As a result of these historical circumstances, the first notable expressions of Irish nationalism in modern times occurred as a result of, first, Protestant attempts at gaining parliamentary independence from Britain, with Henry Grattan's 1782 achievement of legislative autonomy, and then of Protestant Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen's 1798 revolutionary attempt to create an Irish Republic—both movements heavily influenced by contemporaneous developments in revolutionary America and France.³² After the 1801 Act of Union, which abolished the Irish Parliament, two competing types of Irish nationalism, inheritors of the eighteenth-century movements and often related to the different concepts of "moral force" versus "physical force," confronted each other by ultimately contemplating different projects of nation-building. The former type was essentially constitutional and sought through peaceful agitation and pressure on the British Parliament to achieve ultimately Home Rule for Ireland, while the latter type was revolutionary, often secret in its tactics, and sought ultimately to achieve Irish independence from Britain through violent means.³³

It is important to notice that these ideological traditions in the national projects overlapped and cut across social and religious differences. Thus, with Daniel O'Connell's 1843 movement for Repeal of the 1801 Act of Union, a distinctive Catholic type of Irish constitutional nationalism came to the fore for the first time, since, in D. George Boyce's words, "O'Connell could rest content in the knowledge that the Catholics were the majority, and were therefore the Irish nation."³⁴ Conversely, the Young Ireland movement of 1842–48 was both revolutionary and declaredly nonsectarian, since, even though stemming from O'Connell's Repeal movement, the Young Irelanders ultimately rejected it and instead, "espoused a form of inclusive nationalism which could transcend religious differences" and which

aimed at Irish political independence.³⁵ This was also the goal of the Fenians of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), founded in 1858, whose aim was the creation of an independent Irish republic and whose leaders claimed to be nonsectarian.³⁶ Interestingly, while O'Connell's Repeal movement had a great resonance among American abolitionists, who, following radical agitator William Lloyd Garrison, from the 1840s rejected the union with the slaveholders sanctioned by the U.S. Constitution, the Fenian project of creating an Irish republic separate from Britain had certainly something in common with the secessionist impulse in the Confederate South during the American Civil War, and also, to a certain extent, with the post-unification attempts to restore the Bourbon Kingdom in southern Italy at the expense of the unity of the Italian nation.³⁷ More generally, this brief overview of the different varieties of nationalism and national projects in nineteenth-century Ireland, and of the importance of the different religious and social constituencies related to them, is a revealing example of how nation-building in another part of the Euro-American world was a matter of contention between competing ideologies in comparable ways to the situation in the United States and Italy in the age of Lincoln and Cavour.³⁸

Together with the existence of competing nationalisms, an important feature of nineteenth-century nation-building in the United States and Italy was the violence associated with the process of incorporation of the southern regions within the two nation-states. In fact, even though vastly different in terms of scale and degree, the American Civil War and the Great Brigandage were comparable examples of large military operations, which, through violent processes, led to the eventual defeat of resistance to the formation of the American and Italian nation-states in the Confederate South and southern Italy. Even though these processes were not wars of colonial conquest brought upon indigenous populations of faraway lands, both the American Civil War and the Great Brigandage shared some similarities with contemporary colonial wars in terms of interpretations of the ideological battles and characterization of the "enemies" and, at times, also the brutality of policies directed toward the latter—both features that characterized in much higher degree the processes of conquest and treatment of the indigenous populations of Africa and Asia by different European powers.³⁹ In this perspective, it is worth examining briefly the case of the French process of colonization of nineteenth-century Algeria as a particularly illuminating example of violent extension of a European nation-state through warfare, suppression of regional indigenous resistance, defeat, and final incorporation, in a non-Euro-American context.

In 1830, France invaded Algeria, which was then ruled by a non-indigenous Turkish Ottoman elite, based in the coastal cities and in ongoing conflict with the indigenous farmers living in the hills and mountains of the interior countryside—both groups of strict Muslim faith—with the excuse of defeating the Mediterranean piracy fomented by Algerian corsairs, but with a view to establishing a crucial colonial foothold in North Africa.⁴⁰ In only two years, the French defeated the Ottomans and conquered the two main coastal cities of Algiers and Oran by 1832. Yet it was at this point that Muslim indigenous leader Abd al-Kadir rose to the fore, prefiguring an Algerian national movement as he “rallied the people round a religious cause, appealed to their patriotic sentiments and led a resistance movement against the French between 1832 and 1847.”⁴¹ By calling the people to participate to a holy war against the French and, above all, by implementing guerrilla tactics—following a widespread pattern of regional resistance to outside invaders that we can observe also in the American Civil War and in the Great Brigandage—Abd al-Kadir succeeded in defeating the French in 1835 and was able to keep Algeria free until 1837.⁴²

Yet, the subsequent French response was brutal, especially from 1841, when General Bugeaud began a scorched-earth policy with which he brought upon Abd al-Kadir and his large number of rebels the full might of the French army, hitting the civilians particularly hard and leading to thousands of dead in the process. Much outrage was expressed by some quarters within the public opinion.⁴³ In 1843, Abd al-Kadir was forced to flee to Morocco, where he continued to lead the guerrilla attacks against the French until he surrendered in 1847; the last embers of Algerian resistance were eventually crushed in 1857.⁴⁴ Thus, with a long and costly war of conquest, the French succeeded in defeating incipient Algerian nationalism and in incorporating Algeria within the French nation-state, initially considering it as an integral part of France, even with a right to representation in the French Parliament for the European settlers. This changed when Napoleon III abrogated that right, although Algerians were permitted to participate in the French army and the colonial administration. Yet, in practical terms, Algeria continued to be ruled by a small elite of nonindigenous French people, and Napoleon III’s vision—which focused on the creation of an autonomous “Arab Kingdom” that would fuse French and Algerians together—caused resentment among the indigenous Algerian people, who welcomed his fall after his defeat in the Franco-German War of 1870–71.⁴⁵

The briefly outlined examples of Ireland and Algeria presented here show that it would be possible to construct several comparative

studies between the processes of nation-building that occurred in different regions of the world during the nineteenth century, particularly if one focused on either the existence of competing ideas of nationalism and individuals and groups associated to them, or on the violence associated with the process of incorporation of regions into the nation-state through large-scale warfare. In this respect, the specific comparison between the United States and Italy in the age of Lincoln and Cavour in this book appears as only one of a number of possible comparisons of this type, and yet one that, even though little practiced, would yield particularly significant insights, as recent historiographical developments have hinted at. Thus, partly as a response to the recent calls for more comparative studies on the United States in the Civil War era and on Italy in the *Risorgimento* era, given their importance in the development of modern American and European nationalism, this book argues the case for a comparative study of the age of Lincoln and Cavour with the intention of seeking to better understand the process of nation-building specifically in nineteenth-century America and Italy.

Remarkably, the process of nation-building in the United States and Italy occurred in parallel during broadly similar time frameworks, beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century and culminating in the 1860s with two conflicts, though on different scales: the American Civil War and Italian national unification and its immediate aftermath. Despite the enormous complexity and multiplicity of factors involved in the two processes of nation-building, there is no doubt that, in striking parallel terms, the two key historical figures who were particularly instrumental in defining and leaving their blueprints on the two nations that managed to survive the two parallel ordeals of civil war and national unification were Abraham Lincoln and Camillo Cavour. For this reason, it is appropriate to speak of an age of Lincoln and Cavour, taking inspiration both from Orville Vernon Burton's suggestions in his seminal synthetic work *The Age of Lincoln* (2009) on the United States and Lincoln in the Civil War era, and also from Rosario Romeo's intuitions in his monumental biographical study *Cavour e il suo tempo* [Cavour and his Times, 1969–84] on the Piedmontese statesman in the context of *Risorgimento* Italy.⁴⁶

Significantly, older studies—particularly those by Howard Marraro and Giorgio Spini—had already established the existence of a plethora of actual connections between the U.S. Civil War and *Risorgimento* Italy by looking, through a transnational approach, at the many links between different activists and political groups in the two countries, thereby laying the foundation for future comparative historical

work on the age of Lincoln and Cavour.⁴⁷ Effectively, these studies showed how, during the period from 1848 to 1860, Italian activists who belonged to different political currents—as happened with activists and revolutionaries who belonged to other oppressed European nationalities—not only established themselves in the United States, but also participated in the American political debate. In turn, also as a result of this phenomenon of political migration, the American public opinion showed a great deal of interest in the Italian *Risorgimento* and in the different political programs for Italian national unification—as shown in studies such as Paola Gemme's *Domesticating Foreign Struggles* (2005) and Daniele Fiorentino's *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d'Italia* (2013)—which American politicians of different parties interpreted with reference to their own situation.⁴⁸ It is certainly true that, in general, the admiration for Mazzini's republican ideology and Garibaldi's military exploits was widespread in the United States. Yet, it is also true that American abolitionists were closer ideologically to the Italian Democrats while the U.S. Republican Party was closer to Italy's Moderate Liberals, including in terms of direct support.⁴⁹

The fact that the U.S. Republican Party was closer to Italy's Moderate Liberals, in particular, invites us to reflect upon the parallels between the ideological positions of these two political movements, and especially of their two leaders—Lincoln and Cavour—during the Civil War and *Risorgimento* eras. In his 1965 pioneering essay, Glauco Licata attempted for the first time a comparative historical analysis, with some transnational elements, of the crucial roles of Lincoln and Cavour in the American Civil War and the Italian *Risorgimento*.⁵⁰ A year later, in his history of the American Civil War, Raimondo Luraghi clarified further the grounds for a comparative study between the two men and their times, calling Lincoln “the Cavour of the . . . American *Risorgimento*” and arguing that, “as for Cavour the process of Italian national unification was to lead to . . . a liberal and parliamentary Italian nation, similarly for Lincoln the ‘great republic’ was to be essentially founded upon a further development of its democratic elements.”⁵¹ A few years later, in a seminal 1969 essay on Lincoln and the Italian *Risorgimento*, Enzo Tagliacozzo wrote that Lincoln, “from the start was a moderate, and for certain aspects a conservative, and this may qualify him as closer to Cavour than Mazzini, also as a result of his staunch faith in political and civil liberties and in the institutions of parliamentary representation.”⁵² Despite the importance of these suggestions, though, no historian has actually embarked on a comparative study of Lincoln and Cavour and their times. And yet, now, also as a result of the flourishing of new scholarship in relation to the

200th anniversaries of Lincoln's and Cavour's births—in 2009 and 2010—and the 150th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War and of Italian national unification in 2011, it is possible to understand at a deeper level and with much more detail the real significance of a comparative historical study of the two men, as already hinted at by Licata and Luraghi, within the contexts of their times. Therefore, it is also possible to analyze in comparative perspective and in more nuanced ways the similarities and differences between the processes of nation-building that the United States and Italy experienced during the age of Lincoln and Cavour.⁵³

This comparison is particularly significant at a time when the historiographies of both the U.S. Civil War era and the Italian *Risorgimento* are in the midst of a renewal through a period of intense scholarly debate on the significance of the different themes and facets of the processes of nation-building in the two countries in the course of the nineteenth century. In particular, in the United States, also as a result of the influence of comparative and transnational historical methods and approaches, the “New History of the Civil War Era” has looked at themes and issues that reflect the current interests of many scholars for a correct historical understanding of the varieties of nineteenth-century American nationalism. Thus, on one hand, U.S. Civil War historians have investigated the particular type of Republican and antislavery nationalism that characterized the North in the “age of Lincoln” and the Union government.⁵⁴ On the other hand, they have focused on understanding the different layers and the conflicting ideas and projects that constituted or else opposed Confederate nationalism in the South.⁵⁵ In doing this, U.S. Civil War historians have complicated a great deal the familiar narrative of the reasons for the success of nationalism in the Union and failure of nationalism in the Confederacy, adding texture to it, especially with their sustained investigative focus on the attempts at creating competing national cultures through the implementation of images, symbols, and the use of rhetoric and politics, following important nuances derived from cultural studies.⁵⁶

This is a particularly important point in a comparative perspective that looks at the developments of the most recent historiographies of the U.S. Civil War era and of *Risorgimento* Italy in parallel fashion. In fact, comparably to American historians, Italian historians have looked at the nineteenth-century process of nation-building with fresh eyes in recent years and have questioned previous assumptions, stimulating a debate on the character of nineteenth-century Italian nationalism that bears some resemblance to historiographical developments in

the United States. Thus, in similar fashion to the new history of the U.S. Civil War era, the new history of the *Risorgimento*, spearheaded by Alberto Banti's studies, has also emphasized the importance of symbols, images, and rhetoric—together with literature, music, and art—in the creation of a shared national culture.⁵⁷ Unlike what has happened in U.S. historiography, though, this approach has led to a historiographical emphasis on the study of the creation of this shared national culture as a promoter of strong feelings and emotions among large numbers of patriots at the expense of the importance of the study of politics. This neglect, in turn, has led to an ongoing debate and has caused much criticism by historians of the *Risorgimento* who have maintained their focus on political history, though with nuances coming from cultural studies—as several historians of the U.S. Civil War era have also done.⁵⁸ Equally important is the fact that, in both American and Italian historiographies, the reevaluation of the political process of nineteenth-century nation-building through an emphasis on cultural aspects has led historians to acknowledge and study with renewed interest the presence of conflicting nationalist ideas and conflicting projects for the future of the nation⁵⁹—an aspect that would easily lend itself to comparative studies of the United States and Italy in the age of Lincoln and Cavour with other nineteenth-century nations in formation.

Thus, the recognition of an age of Lincoln and Cavour as a ground for comparative analysis of the two historical figures as well as the multiple regional, national, and international contexts—American, Italian, and, primarily, Euro-American—in which they operated has been, effectively, the starting point for the writing of this study of the parallel processes of nation-building in the United States and Italy in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a study with which I have sought to offer a widened perspective on the American Civil War and the Italian *Risorgimento* maintaining a firm focus on the comparative dimension, but at the same time looking for important, and sometimes neglected, transnational links. In suggesting themes for a comparative analysis of the age of Lincoln and Cavour, I have devoted the longer central section of the book to the actual comparative study of Lincoln and Cavour. In the first section I have focused on the American abolitionists, Lincoln's radical competitors in the project of creation of an antislavery American republic, in comparison with the Italian Democrats, Cavour's equally radical competitors in the project of creation of an Italian free and unified nation. I have devoted the last section of the book to the actual wars for national unification in the United States and Italy—(i.e., the American Civil War and Italy's