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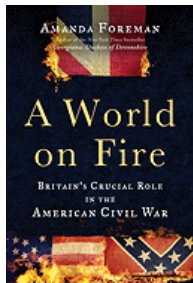
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★ **A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War**

Amanda Foreman. Random, \$35 (1,008p) ISBN 978-0-375-50494-5



In a dramatic change of pace, Foreman, author of the bestselling *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, fulfills her goal of capturing "the many relationships that together formed the British-American experience during the Civil War," from diplomatic maneuvers on both sides of the Atlantic to the sagas of British volunteers in the Union and Confederate armies. Weaving eyewitness accounts into an overview of the war's progress is tricky, particularly since Foreman includes vivid personality sketches of a very large cast of characters. But her massive text slowly comes into focus as we get to know such British participants as Illustrated London News correspondent Frank Vizetelly, whose wartime drawings are the book's visual highlight, and feisty Americans abroad, like Confederate propagandist Henry Hotze, whose masterful manipulation of the English press helped win the South sympathizers in a country where detestation of slavery was nearly universal. The North, meanwhile, struggled to repair relations after the 1861 seizure of two Confederate agents from a British ship. Whether Britain's role in the Civil War was "crucial" remains debatable, but Foreman amply offers a new perspective on the war in an elegantly written work of old-fashioned narrative history. 32 pages of b&w photos; photos throughout; maps. (June)

Reviewed on: 04/11/2011

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