



**EXPRESS.co.uk**  
Home of the Daily and Sunday Express



**Our Paper**  
Front and Back Pages, E-  
Edition and Back Issues...

**Weather**  
**12°C**  
London

Thursday 19th May 2011

Site Google

SEARCH

QuicklyFind ...

- Home | Front Page
- Reader Offers
- iPad App
- Puzzle App
- MyEXPRESS
- Have Your Say
- News / Showbiz
- Sunday Express
- Scottish
- Sport
- Pictures
- Video
- Features
- Horoscope
- Our Comment
- The Crusader
- Entertainment
- Music
- Film
- DVD
- Stage
- Books
- Technology

- TV Guide
- TV Listings **NEW**
- Money
- Motoring
- Travel
- Careers
- Fun / Competitions
- Promotions
- Cartoon
- Blogs
- Forgotten Verse
- Have a Story?
- Contact Us
- Polls
- Retirement
- Property
- Our Paper
- Print Archive

- Family History **NEW**
- Express Retirement
- Cruises
- Casino

[HOME](#) > [ENTERTAINMENT](#) > [BOOKS](#) > *Review: A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided by Amanda Foreman*

## Books

# REVIEW: A WORLD ON FIRE: AN EPIC HISTORY OF TWO NATIONS DIVIDED BY AMANDA FOREMAN



**READY FOR BATTLE: On board the CSS Alabama**

Friday November 5, 2010

By **Christopher Silvester**

Have your say(0)

**A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided**

**\* WIN A LUXURY LONG WEEKEND FOR TWO IN CAIRO!!! INCLUDES BA CLUB CLASS FLIGHTS, FIVE STAR ACCOMMODATION AND £1,000 SPENDING MONEY! \***

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

It was not just the United States that was divided by the American Civil War, but also Britain, its greatest trading partner. Soon after the war ended, the British writer William Michael Rossetti wrote an essay for the magazine *Atlantic Monthly* saying that he had never seen his contemporaries so animated "in connection with any other non-English occurrences. The words "I am a Northerner" or "I am a Southerner" were "as common on Englishmen's lips as 'I am a Liberal' or 'a Conservative'". Amanda Foreman states her purpose in writing this marvellous book is to convey a sense of how the America Civil War felt for the British, whether they were politicians or diplomats, textile workers and financiers dependent on the cotton trade, naval officers dealing with the North's blockade of Southern ports, journalists or observers of the conflict, actual volunteers who took part in the fighting on either side, or indeed those who took up the South's cause as terrorists.

**“Amanda Foreman states her purpose in writing this marvellous book is to convey a**

This is Foreman's second book – her first was a highly acclaimed and bestselling biography of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, the political hostess who dazzled late Georgian and Regency London with her combination of allure and acumen. It is a hefty and impressive work, the product of several years' research, but what is most impressive of all is Foreman's ability to keep her multi-faceted narrative and her vast array of characters under control.



MORE



Express

Win a Ne Enter no

Dating  
Auctions  
Bingo  
Lose Weight  
Franchising  
Shopping  
Book Shop  
Wine Shop

**sense of how  
the America  
Civil War felt  
for the British**

---

---

The senior British diplomat in Washington, Lord Lyons, had the hellish task of placating Lincoln's feisty Secretary of State, William Henry Seward, while trying not to antagonise the Confederate government.

The British war artist and correspondent Frank Vizetelly brought the conflict to the attention of the wider world through his vivid engravings for the Illustrated London News.

Royal Navy ships patrolling the Caribbean were obliged to maintain strict neutrality, but were decidedly unhelpful to US ships chasing blockade-runners.

Confederate representatives in Britain sought to push Her Majesty's Government towards recognising the independence of the Confederacy and funds to support the Confederate war effort were raised on the London bond market. A powerful agent of influence for the Confederacy in England was Henry Hotze, who organised pro-Confederate propaganda in the press, bent the ears of British politicians, and spread false rumours about the unreliability of Northern bonds.

British sailors on shore leave in American ports and other British visitors to America were kidnapped by "crimpers" and forced to enlist in fighting units. Later, many British prisoners of war in Federal hands were allowed to return to Britain in exchange for swearing an oath of allegiance to the United States.

British Canada, where the Confederate cause was popular, was a nest of Confederate agents and terrorists. British nationals were involved in the plot to purchase a steamer in Canada and convert it into a warship for sinking ships on Lake Erie and attacking American cities along the lake's shore. They were also involved in the terrorist plot to burn Manhattan by planting incendiary devices in hotels and other public buildings.

And then there was the fate of the CSS Alabama, one of several Confederate commercial raiders built in Britain, which ravaged the Northern merchant marine, sinking or capturing 65 ships, before it was sunk itself by the USS Kearsarge in the English Channel. The fanatical senator Charles Sumner wanted Britain to pay \$2 billion in damages or cede Canada to the US for having permitted the Alabama to operate freely. Our government eventually paid over damages of \$15.5 million in 1872 as the result of an arbitration that laid the foundations for modern international law.

There are so many fascinating aspects to this story and Foreman does justice to them all. Humble individuals are portrayed with as much care as leading figures, enriching anecdotal detail is afforded as much attention as the explanation of complex historical forces. A World on Fire is a staggering achievement.

*Allen Lane, £30*

**Verdict: 4/5**

