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SIMONE M. MÜLLER

WIRING THE WORLD

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CREATION OF GLOBAL TELEGRAPH NETWORKS
story of John Pender as the sole anchorman of ocean cabling, a closer look at the boards of directors reveals how a small group, the network of the Class of 1866, controlled almost all global communication via cross-directorships and multiple directorships. Throughout the nineteenth century, their monopoly was repeatedly challenged, most successfully by Siemens Brothers in the 1870s. At the end of a fierce cable war with Pender’s business consortium, Siemens Brothers managed to establish itself as a viable alternative on the cable manufacturing market. The antagonists’ battle for Atlantic cable supremacy not only shifted power relations on the market, but also revealed a deeper divide over how these cable actors envisioned global communication. Yet, these visions of the globe’s “electric union” concerned not only its economic structuration but also the system’s moral implications. Ultimately, the cable network produced both a unified market of goods and a unified market of morality; along with the transportation of stock market information, contemporaries believed the cable network would help spread of values and ideas such as universal peace or Europe’s civilizing mission.

Father rejoiced like a boy. Mother was wild with delight. Brothers, sisters, all were overjoyed. Bells were rung, guns fired, children let out of school shouted, “The Cable is laid!” “The Cable is laid!” “The Village was in a tumult of joy.”

David Dudley Field to Cyrus W. Field, Telegram, August 9, 1858.

Thus ran the congratulatory telegram David Dudley Field sent to his brother Cyrus, vividly capturing the excitement sparked by the successful laying of the 1858 Atlantic telegraph. Not only Field’s hometown cheered the cable’s advent; celebrations were held “ocean-wide” at both sides of the Atlantic commemorating “with electric enthusiasm… the nuptials of the Old World and the New.” During the summers of 1858 and 1866, banquets, speeches, sermons, and parades erupted all over America, Great Britain, Ireland, and Newfoundland. Even at places not directly linked by the cable, orators dwelled on the merits that the Atlantic telegraph seemed to promise for the world’s union, its “civilization,” and “universal” peace. The system of ocean telegraphy de facto came to represent a Eurocentric exclusiveness in the form of an economic undertaking of enormous scale, intended to foster global trade as well as to serve its agents’ financial interests. In its public perception, the arrival of the Atlantic cable set not only a small village in the middle of Massachusetts, but almost the entire Euro-American world, into a state of enthusiastic frenzy. The agents’ breakthrough with a technology that only some would be able to use was indissolubly connected to a vision, a promise almost, of a brighter future for all. The new technology’s avowal of a peaceful and civilized modernity entailed an imagined global unity that reached far beyond the telegraphs’ actual means of point-to-point
communication between the world's centers of urbanity. Ultimately, the cable network produced not only a unified market of goods but also a unified market of morality; it would not only transport stock market information but also add the spread of values and ideas.

Contemporaries discussed the imagined global impact of the telegraph, referring to ideas of an electric union, universal peace, and the telegraph's civilizing mission. The rhetoric of universal peace served as placeholder. It exemplifies how they structured their global images as well as visions of participants in, and beneficiaries of, the advantages of global communication, according to Western-centric thinking. The mid-nineteenth-century notion of an electric union and the pacifist concepts connected with it are some of the first expressions of a global imaginary in the history of modern globalization. For the cable actors, these discourses formed their economic and political realm of action—they were duly implemented into their sales rhetoric—and influenced their cultural way of thinking. A variety of explanatory ideologies nourished contemporaries' understanding of universal peace between the American Civil War and the First World War, drawing from the political-economic philosophy of Manchester Liberalism, the idea of a Societas Christiana, or l'esprit d'Internationalité. All of these ideologies were expressions of an elitist worldview that unthinkingly excluded the vast majority of the planet. Finally, telegraphy also functioned as an instrument for Euro-America's civilizing mission—a concept that is inextricably linked to the notion of the teleographic progress as well as the engineer as the "great civilizer." All of these ideas were inherently connected to the expansion of submarine telegraphy. They are verifications of an underlying philosophy of technology that expressed itself in the utopian and Eurocentric ideas of a world society of "kindred nations" in a world that was progressively "civilizing" itself according to the European model. During the Great Atlantic Cable undertaking, these ideas of universal peace and telegraphy's civilizing mission were as prevalent and important to the undertaking as the furthestance of world trade and economic prosperity.

TECHNOLOGY, UNIVERSAL PEACE, AND THE WORLD'S ELECTRIC UNION

Glory be to God in the Highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men. The Queen desires to congratulate the President upon the successful completion of this grand international work.

On August 16, 1858, Queen Victoria and the American President James Buchanan exchanged congratulatory telegrams to officially open the Great Atlantic Cable. With her wish for "peace" and "goodwill," Queen Victoria gave prominent expression to a broader public discourse on the Atlantic telegraphs and universal peace. The expression "peace and goodwill" is a quotation from the Bible that contemporaries easily understood. The phrase, taken from the Christmas story in Luke 2:14, celebrates the advent of Christ as the Prince of Peace. Its usage in the submarine cable context demonstrated that, aside from an economic reality, people in Europe and in North America connected an imagined globe with the cables' proliferation as well as the advent of a new era of a Christian civilization. Indeed, as the British member of parliament John Bright emphasized in a speech at an Atlantic cable banquet in 1864, there seemed to have been not one man in 1858 who had not felt "that a new world and a new time were opened to him."

The Great Atlantic Cable distinguished itself from other engineering undertakings of the time. One of these distinctions was the ubiquitousness of the cable's public perception all across the Western world. According to cable chronicler Henry Martyn Field, in a "history of popular enthusiasm...large space [must be given] to the Atlantic Telegraph." The response of a generally Euro-American public to the laying of the first Atlantic cables resulted in vast amounts of newspaper accounts, pamphlets, poems, songs, leaflets, and cable souvenirs, such as the jeweler Tiffany's engraved piece of cable. Similar to Queen Victoria's telegram, many of these accounts centered upon the cables' inherent moral and civilizing promises and a "drawing together of all parts of the globe in one single world." The sources mirror a still undiluted belief in progress inherently connected to the era's technological developments. As Charles Bright, son of the famous cable engineer Charles T. Bright, concluded in his 1903 cable book, "[a]nticipation and reaction to the cable became a celebration of the union of all the families of man under the dominion of one science and one art, made visible in steam locomotives and electric wires."

Many newspaper articles contained the topos of "instantaneity." The cable, "a tie nearly as subtle as that of love," had connected the two hemispheres by means of "instantaneous intercourse...as though no Atlantic rolled between them." Indeed, the "marvelous cable" turned the Atlantic into a mere "whispering gallery" and enabled "each world...almost instantaneously, to feel the heart-pulses of the other best." Now that
England and America had been brought into speaking distance, the cable would "be the first to tell England and America what each [was] thinking of the other." Many a contemporary hoped that instantaneous communication was the key to a world in peace. This idea was based on a theory of communication that saw the act of communicating as the transmission and reception of ideas. It presumed that transnational and cross-cultural contacts enabled people to better understand the complexities of another community and that communication enhanced empathy for differences. The more frequently this happened, the better.15

The concept of peace through telegraphic, and thus instantaneous, communication, however, did not originate with the Atlantic cable of 1858, nor did it vanish with its failure only a few weeks later. Rather, it represented the pinnacle of a discourse that accompanied means of modern communication from their very beginnings. Already with the advent of optical telegraphs around 1850, enthusiasts in the United States "hailed the potential of the new medium."16 Haunted by the "specter of disunion," early Republicans, such as Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin, urged that there was no other solution "to the 'inconveniences' and even 'dangers' posed by the enormous size of the United States" but to establish speedy communication throughout the entire country.17 In the electric telegraphs, which during the 1850s quickly displaced optical telegraphy, peace advocates saw their greatest strength in their inherent speed by which distance could be crossed in almost no time. Through telegraphic instantaneous, communication theoretically controlled actions even over great distances. Misunderstandings could be corrected at the moment they appeared, instead of giving problematic messages days to sink in before the explanatory letter arrived. According to Napoleon III, in the age of the telegraph, "any misunderstanding . . . might be readily rectified."18 The magazine Punch saw submarine telegraphy especially well-suited to meet expectations of the creation of peace.19 These cables established communication between but not, as most land telegraphs did, within nations or communities. They created connections between regions that had for centuries been separated by seemingly unbridgeable geographical impediments. Already in 1855, Samuel F. B. Morse predicted that one of the effects of the telegraph would be "to bind man to his fellow-man in such bonds of unity as to put an end to war."20

The idea of the globe's electric union also manifested itself in iconography. One engraving in particular, showing two winged female figures, came to represent the cables' mission of peace. It demonstrates the modularity and translation of the idea of an electric union into various contexts around the globe. The cartoon "Effect of the Submarine Telegraph: Or Peace and Good-Will Between England and France," which in contrast to its messages still needed to be transported between the Americas and Europe by ship, originated in the context of the Brett brothers' submarine cable across the English Channel of 1851. In the picture, two "mermaids" of Greek stature with angelic features follow the cable's path along the ocean ground. They deliver the olive branch, representing peace, from England to France. Just as the cable had taken its way from the British Isles to continental France, the mermaids were represented as the peaceful outreach of the English to their long-time enemy. Broken weapons, remains of sunken ship wrecks, and human skulls, representing centuries of belligerent relations between those two nations, are scattered on the ocean bed. Alongside the cartoon, Punch published the

"mermaid’s song" dwelling on the marvel of an "enchanted wire" running "from shore to shore." Through a "conduit of a magic fire" kindly spirits are wishing "To England, Peace! — to France, Good-will!" The frequent use of the mermaids within pacific concepts soon turned them into a household word. In particular the biblical reference to "peace and goodwill" developed into a widely known topos, which traveled telegraphic space. In September 1858, the American magazine Harper's Weekly printed the very same picture in their special edition on the Atlantic cable expedition. The engraver only added small details to the original picture of 1839, such as the cable ship Great Eastern and star-shaped ornaments for the mermaids, thus making them look as if they were dressed in a Star-Spangled Banner. In effect, he simply exchanged France for America. Similar to the article in Punch from 1851, Harper's Weekly expressed its hope that a telegraphic line would ameliorate existing Anglo-American tensions. In this pictorial transfer of the mermaid’s song across the Atlantic, they substituted the Anglo-American context for the Anglo-French one, without making any distinction between the countries' varying histories of transnational relations. Communication via ocean cable appeared as a panacea for international tensions and conflicts, a panacea that was—using the metaphor of an ever expanding net of wires—globally applicable and ever spreading. In the mid-nineteenth century, the image of the mermaids and their promise of universal peace traveled along the telegraph lines, accompanying the globalization of communication.

It is difficult to determine whether the discourse on universal peace was primarily manipulated by the cable agents’ promotional rhetoric, was due to sheer exaggeration, or stemmed from the sincere belief that ocean telegraphy could truly accomplish a global electric union. Nevertheless, the cable agents’ and the public’s universal peace aspirations are not to be taken as utterly naïve or to be dismissed too lightly. Their hopes were not entirely without foundation, as the timing or, rather, the sequence in which people learned of events could be more important than the actual chronology. Prior to the introduction of ocean telegraphs, these could vary considerably. On Christmas Eve 1854, for example, a peace treaty ended the War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States. However, news of that treaty did not reach Washington before February 1815. In the meantime, on January 8, 1815, U.S. troops led by Andrew Jackson defeated the British at the Battle of New Orleans. According to historian David Nickles, faster communication, such as a transatlantic cable, would have "averted that engagement, saved many lives, and, in all probability, prevented Jackson from later becoming president of the United States." In addition to ocean cables, other enterprises of civil engineering were also seen as centerpieces of a transboundary distribution of universal peace. In the decades after 1860, when many natural, century-old barriers, such as mountain ranges and oceans, were overcome to facilitate transnational railway and steamship connections, contemporaries hoped that this would develop new neighborhoods of kindred nations and relationships of mutual respect and friendship. In 1861, upon the opening of the South Eastern Railway Company’s new rapid steamship between France and England, an article in Punch concluded that it would undoubtedly improve Anglo-French relations. According to the author of "Neighbours Getting Over Their Distance to One Another," it was the kettle "in the vapour of which young James Watt prophetically saw the first steam," which would turn out "to be the most powerful pacificator the world has ever known." Emphatically, the writer suggested that the Peace Society should adopt the "kettle as their crest." As the engraving "L’Arrivée à Paris" from 1884 and the 1869 gold medal commemorating the opening of the Suez Canal demonstrate, all of these grand engineering projects seemed to be embedded into similar pacific discourses, irrespective of whether it was the Great Atlantic Cable, the Suez Canal (1869), the tunneling of St. Gotthard in the Alps (1882), or the scheme of an English Channel tunnel. All of these projects overcame geographical obstacles that had for centuries been considered to be permanent. These technological breakthroughs allowed, as Reverend Cortland van Rensselaer, an American Presbyterian, pointed out, that "man walk[ed] beyond the bounds of his domain" and reached out into the world with a peaceful hand. All these projects would be spearheaded by Eirene, the goddess of peace, and "prepare la paix du monde." Ferdinand de Lesseps, the builder of the Suez Canal, expressed the very same notion. To him, the great construction projects of the nineteenth century represented "enterprises of universal interest" that had an identical purpose: "to bring peoples closer together and thereby to bring about an era in which men, by knowing one another, will finally stop fighting." Yet to whose distance was de Lesseps, Field, or one of the many other creators of global development projects at the time referring? These
pacifist concepts need to be read through the lens of Euro-American power relations. In the case of the Atlantic cable, this certainly means the American Civil War and the emerging concept of Anglo-American special relations. According to Queen Victoria, the Atlantic cables established not only telegraphic communication but also "an additional bond of union" between the United States and Great Britain. Moreover, they were meant, as the American President Buchanan emphasized, to serve the promotion of "perpetual peace and friendship between the kindred nations." Due to a common, if not shared, history of colonialism, and through mutual language and heritage, it became increasingly common in the nineteenth century to refer to both nations as familial. Texts implicitly drew from the racial concept of Anglo-Saxonism, which developed at the time. Beginning with the early 1800s, Englishmen and Americans started to compare the Anglo-Saxons to each other. Their conclusion was that the "innate characteristics of the race," and not environment or accident, had led to their rise and success.

The experience of how close both nations came to war during the 1860s helps to explain some of the later concepts of peace. After the War of 1812, relations between Great Britain and America developed peacefully, and by the outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861, they were more dependable than they had been since American independence. Still, it is remarkable that city dwellers living along the Atlantic shoreline were debating early terrestrial telegraphic lines in the United States in the 1840s as an early warning system in case of foreign, i.e., British, attack. The Civil War put new strains on the vulnerable Anglo-American relations. Events such as the Trent Affair of 1861, when Americans took two Confederate diplomats hostage from the British mail steamer Trent, or the Alabama Claims in the war's aftermath, which were claims lodged by the United States against Great Britain for damages caused to the United States by British support for the Confederacy in the Civil War, contributed to mistrust and general estrangement. Both incidents express the North's fear and the actual possibility that Great Britain might take sides in the Civil War. Indeed, Anglo-American relations remained marred by mutual distrust, suspicion, and antipathy until the end of the nineteenth century. Wishes for "peace and goodwill" expressed both nations' hope that cables could serve to facilitate diplomacy, the emerging concept of "kindred nations," and Anglo-American special relations.

Nevertheless, universal peace and "peace and goodwill" would not concern every nation or community on earth, only the few Euro-American industrial nations. Universalism was "incorporated into the nation-states." The term was employed within a Eurocentric rhetoric of imperial and industrial power relations and only valid as such. With regard to the submarine cables laid in the Irish Sea, an English journalist even warned how fatal a message it would be for Ireland, "if [the British] interpreted the first dispatch of this new agent of intercourse [the cable] as a decree of perpetual subjection to our country"; quite the contrary. Still, considering how entirely the world was dominated by European powers in the Age of Imperialism, there is a certain logic to contemporaries' Eurocentric assumption that "la paix Européenne" would suffice to spread peace "universally." Modern means of communication and transport in the nineteenth century, ranging from the Atlantic cable to the Gotthard Tunnel, played a crucial role in contemporaries' imagination of a unifying world. They saw the abolition of distance by bringing neighbors into speaking distance with each other as the enabling structure for peace. In this train of thought, the Atlantic cable garnered special attention. Its speed brought a new sense of instantaneity and, with it, a new sequence in the chronology of events irrespective of distance. With its globe-spanning implications, it symbolized the means to make peace universal. However, the notion of a global electric union only served as placeholder for various regionally generated ideas of morals, values, and progress.

MANCHESTER LIBERALISM AND SOCIETAS CHRISTIANA

Beyond a mid-Victorian belief in progress employed within a Eurocentric system of imperialism, there were two additional sources of influence within peace rhetoric: Manchester Liberalism and its sense of a correlation between the spread of markets and peace, and the notion of a unified Christian globe. The sources reveal an often blurred divide between the British and the American actors concerning their "global" imaginary of a unifying world. Although religion, for example, had little influence on James Anderson and John Pender, it played a tremendous role for the Americans Cyrus W. Field and Samuel F. B. Morse. The congratulatory telegrams of the mayors of London and New York
in 1866 best illustrate this divide. On August 4, the Lord Mayor of London telegraphed that he hoped that their “commerce [would] flourish” and that “peace and prosperity [may] unite [them].” His wording is in accordance with the logic of Manchester Liberalism. Only hours later, he received the reply from the mayor of New York. The American in turn highlighted, “the Providence of God” that had directed the “energy and genius of men” in this work. The cable may be “instrumental in securing the happiness of all nations and the rights of all people.” This juxtaposition of commerce and the providence of God plays a tremendous role in explaining the pacifist discourse of the Great Atlantic Cable. It also influenced the setup and organization of the global media system and the cable agents’ actions within and beyond this system. Finally, it marks a fine Anglo-American distinction between an emphasis on commerce versus religion.

In mid-nineteenth-century Europe, liberalism was probably the most popular model of explaining international relations and was soon incorporated into the British peace movement. The British cable concepts of peace were heavily influenced by a concept that had originated with the English revolution in the seventeenth century. It considered peace as the basis for utilitarianism, according to William Penn, as a means for the “protection of property.” Britons of the time did not view striving for personal economic prosperity and riches through trade and expansion as contradictory to aspirations for universal peace. Rather, contemporaries believed in a positive correlation between free trade, the establishment of international markets, and peace. They followed the argumentation of commercial liberalism. Primarily influenced by Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations, commercial liberalism in the nineteenth century had developed as a new international order that based itself on the freedom of trade and the rights of citizens to freely engage in private actions across the borders of states. From the eighteenth century on, influential thinkers such as James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Jean-Baptiste Say, and Richard Cobden had made the argument that close economic contacts contributed to peace by making war irrational and useless. The development of ever-faster means of transport and communication were essential tools for integrating markets into ever-larger spheres of activity, while the peaceful impact of the mid-nineteenth-century trade revolution was expected to be on a “planetary scale.”

Both key protagonists of Manchester Liberalism, John Bright and Richard Cobden, supported the cable project. The two merchants from the Manchester area had been closely associated with each other ever since their engagement in the Anti-Corn Law League in 1839. The League challenged British protectionist policies that strictly regulated foreign imports in the agriculture sector and caused tremendously high food prices. Repeal of the Corn Laws became the symbol of their campaign for free trade. Its success in 1846 made Bright and Cobden national celebrities. To a large degree created by the Anti-Corn Law agitation, the economic-political movement of Manchester Liberalism based itself on the principles of laissez-faire, noninterventionism, and free trade and saw the spread of universal peace as a logical corollary to its theories. In the words of John Bright, a Quaker, Manchester liberals believed that free trade would “unite mankind in the bonds of peace.” The railroads, steamboats, cheap postage, and telegraphs were vital means to “keep the world from actual war.” Global integration, in their view, resulted in a particular kind of global interdependence that rendered war impossible. From the early 1850s on, Cobden and Bright also dominated the British peace movement. They were the heads of the British Peace Society’s Manchester and Salford Auxiliary and participants in the various international peace congresses taking place in the aftermath of the Europe-wide, but largely unsuccessful, revolutions of 1848, in which tens of thousands were killed. The “Manchester Peace God,” in the words of the magazine Punch, equally aimed at the commercial as well as the pacifist integration of the world. The Atlantic telegraph seemed to provide them with both.

Both Bright and Cobden were from the beginning extremely supportive of the Great Atlantic Cable project. John Bright not only backed the undertaking in the British House of Commons, but also remained supportive during the lean period of the early 1860s. The relationship between Field and Bright was especially close. During the American Civil War and the Alabama Claims crisis, they exchanged information on their respective country’s sentiments. Even after the cable enterprise was over, Bright’s relationship to the Class of 1866 remained close. The politician attended most of the commemorative cable banquets in the decades to come. Although he died before the 1866 cable was completed, Richard Cobden was similarly attached to the undertaking and had been one of the early visionaries of a telegraphic connection to America. According to Field, in the aftermath of the Great Exhibition of 1851, Cobden had already negotiated with the Prince Consort that the exhibition’s profits
should go into establishing telegraphic communication across the Atlantic. Later on, when the idea of an Atlantic cable materialized in the form of Field's cable company, he aided the project politically, supporting, for example, the notion that the British government should supply one half of the capital necessary for the undertaking.\textsuperscript{15}

The geographical composition of the cable agents and shareholders also suggests a strong influence from the Manchester school's way of thinking and its conception of a peace movement through free trade. In addition to John Pender, a large group of early Atlantic cable investors were merchants from Manchester. The "cotton metropolis" of North West England had, in the nineteenth century, become synonymous with the model of industrial capitalism, which was undisturbed by state intervention and followed the principles of Manchester Liberalism.\textsuperscript{15} Due to the commitment of Bright and Cobden, it had also become the center of the British peace movement. The last of the international peace congresses organized in the aftermath of 1848 took place with about 500 delegates in Manchester in 1853.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, the Cotton Famine (1861–1864) in North West England during and partially due to the American Civil War and interruptions in cotton trade forcefully showed the impact of war on international trade. It demonstrated that peace was indeed advantageous to commerce.\textsuperscript{15} In the public speeches or letters of many of the British cable agents, this idea is tangible. In 1886, for instance, James Anderson, general manager of the Eastern Telegraph Company's submarine system, delivered a speech before the British Chamber of Commerce. He attested to the strong influence of the Manchester School. According to Anderson, submarine cables were not laid for a time of war, but as a means for an international economy. They enhanced the development of a "growing federation of commerce in which all nations were free to join." Foreign trade became "an extended home trade" and produced an interconnectedness that made war unprofitable.\textsuperscript{15} The notion of a supremacy of economic and commercial ideals played a tremendous part in the setup of the global system. For actors like John Pender, James Anderson, and William Hay, who dominated the global development of ocean cables, social or cultural ideals were only secondary and side effects of economic and commercial ideals.

Although the followers of Manchester Liberalism had turned away from Christian pacifism, this idea reigned strong among the Americans and their interpretation of the cable project. Probably the most common idea within American sources, which also originated in a totally different economic context of the American School's focus on protectionism and self-sufficiency, was the notion of unity between mankind and peace to all nations.\textsuperscript{32} People from all over the world were asked to join in the German immigrant William Spitznagel's, "Festlitt für den Atlantischen Telegraphen" ("Hymn to the Atlantic Telegraph"), which he had composed for the official celebration of the City of New York on September 1, 1858. One of the stanzas sung "to human mind's great praise" expressed particularly well the aspiration that "Peace be on earth to every nation!" This was based on the Christian understanding that all men are of one creation, or in the poetry of Spitznagel: "One harmony is all creation—One family the human race."\textsuperscript{32} This idea of a conjunction of science and divine providence was frequently repeated in many an American clergyman's sermon. According to Reverend Cortlandt van Rensselaer, the completion of an Atlantic telegraph cable represented a victory of morals as much as technology: it had an important "educating influence on the popular mind" and magnified "the triumph of mind over matter." Simultaneously, it assisted "in bringing God to view as the great and glorious Ruler of the Universe."\textsuperscript{32} Clergymen connected this notion also to the Atlantic cable itself, which they translated into religious terms as the harbinger of Christ as the Lord of Peace. The cable agents rose to be God's instruments and were incorporated into the world's history of salvation. In the words of the Presbyterian clergyman William Adams, they were "disciples of that true 'star-eyed science' which walk[ed] hand in hand with the one true religion of [the] divine Lord."\textsuperscript{32}

The religious context is as important for framing the discourse on universal peace as it is for contextualizing the cable agents in their scientific endeavor. Although today the conjunction of science and religion usually "conjures up an immediate image of conflict and confrontation," this was not the case in the 1850s and 1860s.\textsuperscript{46} Rather, the new technology was widely embraced by American spokesmen of religion, such as Reverend van Rensselaer or William Adams, who was a close friend of both Cyrus W. Field and Samuel F. B. Morse. Archbishop John J. Hughes had an engraving made into the cornerstone of the Anglican St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, celebrating Cyrus W. Field and his scientific wonders.\textsuperscript{46} Finally, as the Direct United States Cable Company (DUSCC) stockholders' lists disclosed, a large number of British clergymen saw it as a lucrative means of investment.\textsuperscript{43} The idea of a Christian union, or a
Societas Christiana, which encompassed all people in the body of Christ, represented the underlying explanatory model for a global electric union in the American sources. In this view, technological progress was a manifestation of God's providence, and the cable protagonists served as his agents in preparing the advent of Christ. From this understanding of technology, American spokesmen of religion and American cable entrepreneurs concluded that their work and their telegraphic network were also intended to spread the Christian religion.

As Morse revealed in 1857 in a letter to his wife, the support of the Christian community was very important to him personally and presumably also to some others. Some of the cable agents, such as Cyrus W. Field, Samuel F. B. Morse, and Peter Cooper, fully embraced this idea of a Christian union and extended it to their cable work. Although many of the British cable agents, such as Daniel Gooch, had a distinct religious background, the Americans in the group emphasized it. In his autobiography, director Peter Cooper, for example, portrayed himself as a “truly religious man” who held “Christianity and progress . . . to be closely related.” In this he accorded with Field and Morse, as well as his son-in-law Abram Hewitt, who all believed that “material and scientific advances would eventually be followed by spiritual and cultural advances.”

In 1859, with the support of Abram Hewitt, Peter Cooper launched the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, an institution that provided free higher education to men and women. The institute would, time and again, play an important part as a meeting place in the social history of the American cable fellows as well as in their endeavors for the furtherance of Anglo-American relations. Samuel F. B. Morse and Cyrus W. Field employed their cable business travels around the world for missionary purposes. In 1870, they embarked on a cable trip to Europe and included a detour to Russia. They were part of an American delegation of the Evangelical Alliance that had set out in cooperation with the European Alliance “for the purpose of inducing his imperial majesty, the Czar of Russia, to stop the persecutions of the Protestant Letts and Estonians in the Baltic Provinces, and to grant religious liberty to all his subjects.” Under the slogan of “We are one body in Christi,” the Evangelical Alliance promoted universal Christian unity and showed a strong inclination toward the promotion of religious liberty. The delegates considered their petition to the czar to be not only “of the utmost importance . . . for Russia, but prospectively also for the cause of Christian missions in Turkey,” feeling that the “proclamation of religious liberty throughout that vast empire would be one of the greatest events of the century, equal in importance to the emancipation of the serfs by the present emperor.” In all likelihood, it had been their friend, clergyman William Adams, member of the Board of Foreign Missionaries, who had established the connection to the American Evangelical Alliance.

Another of Cyrus W. Field’s and Peter Cooper’s “missionary” interests lay with the London branch of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, of which Field, alongside George Peabody and Junius Morgan, was a founding member. The U.S. Sanitary Commission was a government agency that coordinated the voluntary work of women during the American Civil War, for example, taking care of the wounded or disabled. Its New York branch used Cooper Union as a meeting place. Due to Field’s influence, Richard Glass, of the British cable manufacturer Glass, Elliot & Co., donated “for the benefit of the Sanitary Fund 1,000 tons of coal to be delivered at his own expense.” Religion played an important part in the lives of Americans involved in the cable enterprise. They connected their religious ideals of liberty and a Christian union of the world with their cable work and used their cable travels as a means to diffuse their religious beliefs.

Nevertheless, the idea of the interrelationship between progress and Christianity had its loopholes. The pacifist concepts drew a thin but clear line between Christians and “pagan peoples” and ultimately between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized.” Peace and goodwill were not to be bestowed upon the entire globe, even less so upon all its inhabitants. On the contrary, the electric telegraph was heralded as a “treasure of Christendom” and, as such, restricted to the “Christian nations to whom art has been vouch-saved.” Telegraphy and, more distinctly the ocean cables, represented a means of distinction, separating “us” from “the other” and defining the latter as “pagans,” “barbarians,” or “savages.” Although the telegraphs created a global unity among the “Christian fellows,” they were only passing through the other’s territory, leaving them unconnected: they were not part of the network because only Christianity represented the “basis of Civilization.”

According to contemporaries, the acceptance of the Christian faith was fundamental to advancement; those who had not accepted it “relapsed into their primitive stupidity” and could neither grasp the
meaning of the telegraph nor benefit from it in any way. In 1872, the Eastern Telegraph Company published a series of Christmas greetings from "round the world" that had passed through its cables. Many of them entailed that same Christian sentiment of telegraphic exclusivity. From the 'four quarters of the world, . . . glad words of Christian fellowship' were "flushed at one time and with one will by the new speech of Civilization"; telegraphy. Still, although ocean telegraphy allowed men to speak "with one voice all 'round the globe," the "fraternal message" had to overcome various "impediments." These were "trackless voids of wild water, . . . desolate waste places of the earth, . . . unsubdued [sic] regions of solitude or barbarism, and [a] swarm of Pagan peoples." Before the "civilised earth" could speak "at the same time in the same words of united and brotherly feeling," it had to pass geographic obstacles such as the North Atlantic and human obstacles such as non-Christian peoples. The company saw Christianity and progress as interrelated. Not only would technological progress, such as the ocean telegraphs, spread Christianity, but Christianity was the enabling structure for technological progress in the first place.

In the early years of global communications, contemporaries connected two different and almost conflicting imaginaries of a world in electric union with it. These marked the distinction between British and American protagonists. Both sets of concepts of peace, for instance, grew out of different national settings concerning political, economic, and social ideals: In Great Britain, the economic-political ideas of Manchester Liberalism nourished concepts of a pacifist universalism. In the United States, where the economic-political system focusing on state protectionism of the American School contrasted Manchester Liberalism, a religious justification of a Christian union was much more prevalent. In both cases, pacifist concepts comprised economic and political ideas as well as cultural concepts.

CRITICS, CHANGES, AND L'ESPRIT D'INTERNATIONALITÉ

Even in the 1850s and 1860s, discourses on universal peace were not unanimously positive. A general disillusionment over the telegraph's ability to create peace as well as the obvious exaggeration of some statements spurred on critical remarks. Submarine telegraphy had not eased tensions and the danger of war during Napoleon III's coup d'état in 1852, prevented the Crimean War in 1853, or rendered the American Civil War impossible. Rather, telegraphy had then found its first military tactical application because the telegraphs offered unprecedented access to front-line events. After all, William H. Russell, official Great Atlantic Cable correspondent, had become famous with reports from the Crimean War. From the 1870s on, pacifist concepts of communication outlived themselves. Instead, contemporaries increasingly discussed the question of cables as a "powerful instrument of war." However, until the Spanish-American War in 1898, ocean telegraphy's suitability for belligerent conflicts remained a theoretical question. From the 1870s to the 1890s, concepts of internationalism served as an explanatory model for the moral implications of a global media system. Through ideas of an international law code and the International Telegraph Union, the two legal reformers Louis Renault and David Dudley Field attempted to create the structure for a global electric union. They were driven by the idea of l'esprit d'internationalité, which would teach nations to follow certain common principles in their mutual relations and result in a peaceful international system.

Early critics of a unified world via telegraphy targeted their objections at the very quality that promoters of peace highlighted: speed. According to these critics, the quality of communication was defined by its content and not by its speed. The Pall Mall Gazette, for instance, questioned how much the Atlantic telegraph "contribute[d] to that warm affection between different fractions of our race." It wondered whether the people of Great Britain and the United States would "really love each other more warmly because [they could] send a message to New York and receive an answer within five hours." Aside from the obvious "exaggerated rhetoric" that the subject "almost invariably [seemed] to provoke," critical journalists highlighted the mere instrumentality of telegraphy. It could "thrusten as well as compliment—[could] bear tidings of woe as well as messages of peace." In their argumentation, critics depersonalized the cable, which had beforehand been esteemed not only as the messenger of peace but as the maker of peace, and reduced it to a technical and mechanical application within human intercourse. It remained, after all, only "a musical instrument, on which operators may play any tune they choose." In the decades to come, the tune more often than not
consisted of brief and suggestive messages. This hindered rather than enhanced transnational understanding. In fact, "illegitimately telegraphy tended to make the management of diplomatic crises more difficult and arguably increased the likelihood of war." From the 1870s on, the mermaid's song and the notion of peace and goodwill became less frequent in cable rhetoric.

Spurred on by such disillusionment, two things happened to submarine telegraphy in cultural rhetoric. First, a shift occurred from the personified telegraph cable to the application of telegraphy and, as such, a clear emancipation of man from machinery. The technology should serve man's purposes and not follow any kind of intrinsic destiny. Human reason dominated the new technology, and as such, "truth and error, an honest and a malevolent purpose" could use it alike. In addition, the cable agents themselves backed away in their sales rhetoric from any promises to generate peace. In a speech celebrating the landing of the French Atlantic cable at Duxbury, Massachusetts, in 1869, James Anderson admonished his American audience that no one knew "whether the electric cable will become the great implement in war or an instrument in the cause of peace." Rather, he only phrased it as a possibility: the cable "may be a great promoter and sustainer of the whole world, and of civilization, of good feeling and of good fellowship." Second, a democratization of submarine telegraphy occurred, which went hand in hand with a certain "normalization" of the reception of future cable projects. In his diary of 1874, Daniel Gooch, again embarking on the Great Eastern on an Atlantic cable-laying enterprise, remarked on how decidedly the nature of cable laying had changed: "all now is a simple matter of quiet business and there is no fuss or reporters." The protagonists of the cable system promptly reacted to these changes in the public's and, more importantly, the government's or rather the military's perceptions. Their channel to secure a status of neutrality for the ocean cables and to protect their property became the International Telegraph Union (ITU) and its instruments of international law. The ITU is one of the oldest of the international organizations that emerged after 1850 as a response to the increasing mobility of goods, capital, and labor across national borders. It was established in 1865 by the leading telegraph authorities of the various European governments and was soon joined by many nations outside of Europe. The organization's main objective was the promotion of a uniform system of traffic exchange and universal tariffs. It did so through internationally binding telegraph conventions, which were the results of the regular telegraph conferences. Already in 1871, at the ITU conference in Rome, Cyrus W. Field submitted a position paper to the delegates on the protection of ocean cables in the case of war. His aide-mémoire also contained a letter by Samuel F. B. Morse who urged the delegates to consider the telegraphs "a sacred thing, to be by common consent effectually protected both on the land and beneath the waters." Both men followed a U.S. government initiative of 1869, which had then been dropped due to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. The U.S. proposal suggested that governments should refrain from any kind of supervision of the cables' messages and that each state should enact laws for the security of submarine cables within their jurisdiction. The agreements found should then also be valid in times of war.

Despite fierce opposition at the Rome conference, Field had good fortune. Still at the conference, Field telegraphed to Morse about their success: the conference had adopted the proposition "to recommend the different governments . . . to enter into a treaty to protect submarine wires in war as well as peace." It was further suggested that no international cable should be laid without the joint consent of the governments proposed to be connected. At the time, the ITU only represented the European countries and their systems, but some of the members brought extra-European colonial territory into the agreement: Britain brought India; France brought Algeria, Tunisia, and Indochina; and Russia and Turkey brought their Asian possessions. Most of the important ocean cable companies at the time were also present and ready to commit themselves to the decisions taken. Even in 1871, the agreement took on the appearance of being "globally" binding in the sense of a Euroconeric electric union, or in the words of Cyrus W. Field, the convention represented "twenty-one countries, six hundred millions of people, and twenty six different languages." For the history of ocean telegraphy and the systemic premises of global communication, this episode at the ITU conference marked an important shift: the breakthrough of internationalism. Although Morse used religious rhetoric in his letter to Field, their approach morphed in the international society to support practical applications over the Societas Christiana; an electric union was not guaranteed by the cables as harbingers of Christ, but through the instruments of international law.
The 1871 decision was not a legal agreement but only a recommenda-
tion to explore the matter. On leaving the conference in Rome, Field
traveled all over Europe to urge the American ministers in each of the
cities visited "to help on this treaty."26 Yet for more than a decade, little
came of this universally agreed upon recommendation. In 1878, Louis
Renault, professor of international law at the University of Paris and
member of the Institut de Droit International, established in 1873, con-
vinced the institute to set up a commission of academic experts to deal
with the issue.27 The commission was composed of an international
group of well-known experts on international law: Johann Caspar Blunt-
schli from Switzerland, Nicolas Saripolos from Greece, John Westlake
from Great Britain, Louis Renault from France, and David Dudley Field,
Cyrus W. Field's brother, from the United States.28 The commission
based its report on Renault's 1877 report Études sur les rapports interna-
tionaux: La Poste et le Télégraphe and recommended that governments
embrace a common strategy on cables during war.29 Renault argued that
electric telegraphy could indeed accomplish much in the development
of international relations. Nevertheless, to exploit its full potential, it had
to be seconded by international law, which was, in the words of Dudley
Field, "a power like gravitation that held the world together.30 Indeed, in
the same way that natural obstacles, such as the Atlantic, were overcome,
legal obstacles also needed to disappear. The electric union could not be
a limited sphere.31 To reinforce this idea, Renault introduced another
important idea of a world in union: l'esprit d'internationalité. This global
imaginary was one of universal codification, regulating the international
movement of goods, labor, capital, and communication, which would in
the end produce a peaceful international system.32 David Dudley Field
in 1873 became the first president of the Association for the Reform
and Codification of the Law of Nations, later renamed the International
Law Association (ILA); from 1866 on, the ILA promoted the scheme of
an international code. Through such a code, international differences
would be solved by arbitration, which would render wars unnecessary.33
Within such a system, Renault and Field argued the administrators of
these two organizations had done more for civilization and international
understanding than celebrated diplomats.34 From the 1870s on, l'esprit d'internationalité represented the dominant force in the emergence of an
international system promoted by organizations such as the ITU, ILA, and
Institute of International Law. Both David Dudley Field and Louis
Renault saw the global media system as one field of international coop-
eration that needed universal codification but that entailed a vision for
the future.

The institute's recommendation, as well as other appeals, fell on deaf
ears. In 1881, the Eastern Cable Companies as well as the Vereinigte
Deutsche and the Great Northern Telegraph Company brought a pam-
phlet before the London Board of Trade and the Foreign Office. In it, they
meticulously listed all cable breakages and damages, their causes, and
their costs. In a time of fierce price competition, the question of cable
security was preeminent for the cable companies. Yet, not until 1882,
when France invited a group of international government representatives
to consider the protection of submarine cables in times of peace and war,
did governments take action. An international group of administrators,
headed by David Dudley Field, met six times between October 1882 and
July 1887. The forty-six delegates produced the draft for the International
Telegraph Convention for the Protection of Submarine Cables of 1884.35
In 1887, twenty-four nations, among those the major powers of the time,
ratified the Convention. It achieved little, however, concerning the ques-
tion of submarine cables during war or the moral implications behind an
international law code. Already in 1882, the British delegate introduced
the proposal that all agreements should only concern cables in times of
peace, not war. France seconded the motion.36 Consequently, the treaty
only addressed the "interruption of cables in the ordinary way."37 Article
XV explicitly stated that all stipulations were made "for the time of peace
only" and would in no way "restrict the action of belligerents during time of
war."38

In his closing speech of the 1883 conference, Louis Cochery, French
Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, revealed the crucial turning point: in
the end, the issue of cables in times of war was reserved for diplomats,
not legal or telegraph experts. The conference's inability to draft a bind-
ning resolution showed the limits of international law, which in 1880
David Dudley Field had still heralded as the agent of "the Brotherhood of
men" and "Peace and Good-Will."39 Although international regulations
increasingly became a matter for administrative experts, questions of
war remained reserved for the diplomats.40 However, diplomats showed
little interest in the matter. It was James Anderson who pointed out the
obvious: the idea that "submarine cables could or should be relied upon
in time of war [was] nonsense." Any commander-in-chief who could
not "arrange his plans when the cables were cut [was] not fit to be at the head of the concern." Additionally, as the Dutch delegate had already pointed out in 1871, it was unconceivable that a state would adhere to cable neutrality as long as the messages' content was not fully controllable. In case of war, "any government would destroy a telegraph line to stop transmission of enemy communication."  

Finally, great power relations also played a role. With her supremacy on the high seas and most cable companies registered as British enterprises, Great Britain would have gained the greatest benefit from such a neutrality treaty among the European powers. Presumably, it was such control that prevented other powers from signing.  

Throughout the nineteenth century, governments showed little interest in solving the issue of cables at war. Rather, "commensurate with its vast importance," no subject appeared to have been "more censurably neglected," according to the Pull Mill Gazette. This changed with the Spanish-American War of 1898. To the principal imperial powers, the war brought attention not only to the legal rights of cable property but also to the fact that reliable submarine communications under exclusive control were "absolutely necessary." During the war, the U.S. Navy cut several cable connections in the West Indies, the cables connecting Florida with Cuba, and the connection between Asia and the Philippines. They acted upon a policy developed by General A. W. Greely, Chief Signal Officer of the U.S. Army. It stated that a cable with two terminals in enemy country could be cut any time, cables between belligerent parties were subject to harsh censorship, and cables between an enemy state and a neutral state could also be cut, if only within the three-mile shoreline. This policy also redefined the world's seas. Up until then, the international community saw the oceans as "the great international highway, belonging equally to all nations." Now, the political boundaries of a state also included such portions of the high sea that a nation could "by her commercial and naval vessels and her submarine cables, reach out and secure."  

In response to the unresolved international legal situation on cables and war, new attempts were made to solve the issue. In 1899, at the first Hague peace conference, the Danish delegate proposed to treat submarine cables as analogous to terrestrial cables and put them under national jurisdiction. The proposition failed due to British opposition. In 1900, General Greely expanded upon his earlier ideas and had a Handbook of Submarine Cables prepared with an outline of practical rules of action to at least regulate the issue for the American military.  

In 1902, the Association of International Law agreed on rules that a submarine cable uniting two neutral territories was inviolable and that cables may not be cut in neutral waters. In 1907, the Hague Conventions of land warfare slightly modified these rules. The conventions primarily drafted by Louis Renault stated that submarine cables connecting with a neutral territory shall not be seized or destroyed except in the case of absolute necessity. The same year, Renault received the Nobel Peace Prize.  

Although the Hague Convention represented a major achievement in protecting submarine cables internationally, all attempts amounted to nothing. Facing military conflict, internationalism in the form of a binding international law code to regulate the electric union failed soon after 1907. During the Italo-Turkish War of 1911 to 1912, the Italian navy cut all cable connections with Turkey through the Mediterranean within a couple of days. On August 4, 1914, almost immediately upon the commencement of war between Great Britain and Germany, Britain had the civilian cable steamer Alert cut those five Atlantic cables that connected the German Reich with the rest of the world. Germany, in turn, unsuccessfully tried to destroy a British cable station in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, telegraphic messaging increased drastically during war time, and all companies found their cables used to full capacity. Cutting cables, the belligerent parties entirely disregarded which company operated the cables. In the case of the "German" Atlantic cables, these were operated by the American-based Commercial Cable Company. The Americans had entered into a joint-venture agreement with the Deutsch-Atlantische Telegraphengesellschaft with regard to the latter's two Atlantic cables laid via the Azores in 1900 and 1902. The events of the First World War seemed to squall all ideas of an electric union and the benefits of instantaneous communication around the earth. From a universal panacea, the technology had finally developed into a powerful weapon of war. Looking retrospectively upon the First World War, James Bryce, academic, jurist, and Britain's ambassador to the United States, even concluded that "had it not been for the extraordinary development of means of communication Europe would not have burst into a world-wide conflict with almost explosive violence." Whereas in the "good old days" of stagecoach, horse, and sailboat, it would have taken months for a conflict to involve an entire continent, telegraphy brought all European nations simultaneously face to face with crisis.
From the 1850s until 1914, contemporaries used the logic of three very different concepts to explain the idea of an electric union as accomplished via an ocean telegraph network. From the 1870s on, the dominant explanatory model was that of international law and a codified world in union. Louis Renault and David Dudley Field were the key protagonists. Both believed that the codification and regulation of the international movement of goods and people as well as knowledge and information would result in the creation of an international system that was inherently peaceful. In the end, the ideas connected to the implementation of a Manchester liberal system of international trade, the Societas Christiana, and the esprit d’internationalité of a universal law code could not prevent the entire world from going to war in 1914. The implementation of a global communication system had not lived up to its initial promises of peace and goodwill.

THE ENGINEER AS THE “GREAT CIVILIZER”

Alongside the ideals of universal peace and an electric union, there was another cluster of concepts connected with the development of a global communication network—namely, the notions of civilization, being civilized, and lastly, the diffusion of civilization. Telegraph technology was fundamental to a Western understanding of civilization, and ocean telegraphy should be “an instrument . . . to diffuse religion, civilization, liberty and law throughout the world,” in the words of U.S. President Buchanan in 1858. Similarly, the American telegraph engineer George Squier, of the U.S. Signal Corps, concluded in 1899 that “[t]he mails, the telegraph and the telephone [were] civilizing the world.” The cables equally signified Euro-American superiority as well as a Euro-American mission statement to diffuse its civilization. In 1879, for example, Rose Pender, daughter-in-law of John Pender, published her travel diary from a cable business trip to the African continent together with her husband. In No Telegraph; or A Trip to Our Unconnected Colonies, she argued that only a submarine telegraph connection and instantaneous communication with London could bring civilization to these “distant and wild places.” Within this context, the Atlantic cable symbolically crowned the Euro-American mastery over nature and its forces achieved thus far.

Even more so than the cables, the telegraph engineers, electricians, and cable operators symbolized the interrelatedness of technology, civilization, and their diffusion. Musing on the functions of the engineer, William Preece, engineer-in-chief at the British Post Office and brother-in-law to Atlantic engineer Latimer Clark, concluded that the engineer represented “the great civilizer” of their time. As such, the telegraph agents became, willingly and unwillingly, an integral part of Euro-America’s ideology of a civilizing mission. They not only “conquered” nature, in the form of the world’s oceans, and gathered knowledge about the unknown, such as the deep sea, but also took possession of their surroundings as spokesmen of a “civilized” Euro-America by naming indigenous children, villages, or mountains of countries they operated in. However, issues of civilizing were discussed not only along the more obvious “West—East” divide but also within the transatlantic realm, bringing the debate over a civilization-wise distinction of Old World versus New World to the forefront.

Western Europe and North America’s industrial and technical developments in the nineteenth century were fundamental to their understanding of civilization. They distinguished their nations from all preindustrial, meaning un- or semi-civilized, ones. Although to be civilized or civilization served as a sort of self-description, the terms only came alive in their antithesis to savagery or barbarity. Those employing the terms divided the world according to degrees of progress and development. Fundamental to the concept was the idea of mastery: to be civilized meant “to be free from specific forms of tyranny; the tyranny of the elements over man, of disease over health, of instinct over reason, of ignorance over knowledge and of despotism over liberty.” As brought to life in the play Contentius staged on board the Great Eastern in 1866, the world’s oceans were perceived as some of the greatest deserts of the time, symbolized in the figure of Neptune. They separated peoples and markets and made intercontinental travel and trade an unsafe and tedious matter. The Atlantic, in particular, appeared as the greatest obstacle separating the Old World and the New World. Before the age of transatlantic telegraphy, travel and communication across the Atlantic amounted to a matter of weeks, if not months. For that reason, transatlantic commerce was slow and insecure. With the transatlantic submarine cables, a Euro-American “humanity” had accomplished mastery over the Atlantic.