Taking Sides

Issue Nine

Was The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 Designed to Protect the Latin American Countries from European Intervention?

p. 187, ¶ 1, line 1 – “The American government in the early 1800s greatly benefitted from the fact that European nations generally considered what was going on in North America of secondary importance to what was happening in their own countries. In 1801 President Thomas Jefferson became alarmed when he learned that France had acquired the Louisiana territory from Spain.”

p. 188, ¶ 1, line 1 – “After England fought an indecisive war with the United States from 1812 to 1815, she realized that it was to her advantage to maintain peaceful relations with her former colony.

p. 188, ¶ 1, line 10 – “In 1819 Spain sold Florida to the United States after Secretary of State John Quincy Adams sent a not telling the Spanish government to keep the Indians on their side of the border or else to get out of Florida.

p. 188, ¶ 2, line 4 – “The Monroe Doctrine, as it was called by a later generation, had three parts. First it closed the Western Hemisphere to any further colonization. Second, it forbade, ‘any interposition’ by the European monarchs that would ‘extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.’ And third, the United States pledged to abstain from any involvement in the political affairs of Europe.”

Yes– The Northwest Boundary Controversy and the Non-Colonization Principle, 1823-1824

p. 189, ¶ 1, line 1 – “The famous declaration of December 2, 1823, which has come to be known as the Monroe Doctrine, had a dual origin and dual purpose. On the one hand, it was the result of the advance of Russia on the northwest coast of America, and was designed to serve as a protest against this advance and to establish a general principle against Russian expansion.”

p. 189, ¶ 1, line 9 – “On the other hand, the message was provoked by the fear of European intervention in South America to restore to Spain her revolted colonies, and was intended to give warning of the hostility of the United States to any such intervention.”
p. 189, ¶ 2, line 1 – “Russian interest in the northwest coast of America goes back to the second quarter of the eighteenth century, to the days of the renowned navigator Vitus Behring, who discovered in 1727 the Straits that now bear his name, and fourteen years late the Alaskan coast in the neighborhood of latitude 58.

p. 190, ¶ 5, line 10 – “A compromise was suggested and agreed upon by which this country would recognize the territorial claims of the Tsar north of 55 degrees.”

p. 191, ¶ 2, after quote, line 1 – “In this statement, almost five months before the appearance of the President’s message, we have the non-colonization principle full-fledged, no longer mere a subject of cabinet debate, but explicitly put forward to the minister of another power, to the minister of the power perhaps most concerned with denying it.”

p. 192, ¶ 2, line 5 – “For the question of the hours, in November of 1823, was not the dispute with Russia, but the menace offered by the Holy Alliance to the independence of the States of South America.”

p. 192, ¶ 4, line 6 – “Or it has been maintained that new European territorial establishments would endanger American security, and ought to be opposed on these grounds.”

p. 193, ¶ 2, last sentence – “Clearly, it was antagonism to commercial restriction that lay at the basis of the Secretary of State’s famous dictum...”

p. 194, ¶ 1, line 1 – “The revolt of the Spanish-American colonies followed hard upon the Napoleonic conquest of Spain. From the very beginning, the sympathies of the United States appear to have been engaged upon the side of the revolutionists.”

p. 194, ¶ 2, line 2 – “In the formative period of this country’s relations with the new states of South America, certainly down to 1822, there is little evidence of the working of economic interest. In the absence of exact statistics for much of the period, and in view of the paucity of references to trade with the Spanish colonies, it is difficult to speak with precision.”

p. 194, ¶ 2, last sentence – “But... it seems highly probable that political sympathy, not economic self-interest, lay at the root of American policy so as it revealed itself as favorable to the new states of South America.”
p. 194, ¶ 3, line 1 – “From the very beginnings of the South American struggle this sympathy asserts itself.”

p. 195, ¶ 2, line 1 – “But it was some time before the South-American question became a matter of really first-rate importance. In the years 1810 to 1815, the prime concern of the administration at Washington lay in the preservation of American neutral rights, and, from 1812 to 1814, in the prosecution of the war with Great Britain. Moreover, the course of events in the overseas dominions of Spain was for some time hardly favorable to the revolutionists.”

p. 195, ¶ 3, line 1 – “With the year 1817... a change takes place in the status of the colonial question.”

p. 196, ¶ 2, line 2 – “Henry Clay, still ardent for the colonial cause, brought up a new resolution to the House of Representatives.”

p. 196, ¶ 2, last two sentences – “The facts of the situation pointed toward the complete success of the revolutionist. In March, 1822, the President finally sent to Congress a message recommending that the independence of the new states be acknowledged, and that provision for the sending of ministers be made.”

p. 196, ¶ 3, line 2 – “Yet in another sense, the policy of the American government had been prudence itself.”

p. 197, ¶ 2, line 1 – “When these facts are considered in their entirety, the recognition of the colonies in 1822 assumes a new significance. Ti required a considerable alteration of American policy to ignore the attitude of the powers of the Old World, and base American action on American interests and sympathies, and nothing else.”

p. 198, ¶ 2, line 5 – “John Quincy Adams... came from the greatest shipping section of the Union.”

p. 198, ¶ 3, line 3 – “He was anxious to strike a blow for liberty, and the situation in the fall of 1823 offered him an excellent opportunity.”

p. 198, ¶ 4, line 1 – “Monroe’s belief in the superiority of American institutions, his conviction that the extension of European dominion would be dangerous to our peace and safety – these are propositions that are hardly capable of rigorous demonstration.”
No – The Making of the Monroe Doctrine

p. 200, ¶ 1, line 6 – “To the extent that statesmen on the continent contemplated aiding Spain, overturning American republics, or establishing new colonies in the Western Hemisphere, they were deterred by fear of Britain, not by concern about the United States.”

p. 200, ¶ 2, line 3 – “They had an invitation to join Britain in resisting the alleged European threat to Latin America.”

p. 200, ¶ 2, last sentence – “Except for the maxim that there should be no future colonization, the Monroe Doctrine expressed general agreement with British positions.”

p. 201, ¶ 3, line 9 – “The third hypothesis is that the whole process was governed by domestic politics. The positions of the policymakers were determined less by conviction than by ambition.”

p. 201, ¶ 4, last sentence – “In the case of the Monroe Doctrine... my conclusion is that the outcomes are explained in terms of domestic politics...”

p. 201, ¶ 5, line 1 – “...The men who constructed the Monroe Doctrine were all deeply interested in the approaching presidential election.”

p. 202, ¶ 2, line 1 – “In the summer of 1822, probably with Clay’s knowledge if not connivance, a document was issued that accused Adams of having truckled * to the British during the peace negotiations at Ghent and having shown a willingness to sacrifice the interests of westerners to those of New England fisherman.”

*To be servile or submissive.

p. 202, ¶ 3, line 1 – “The logic of the campaign was self-evident. If Clay could make it appear that he alone was the nationalist candidate, he might rally to himself western and northern Republicans whose concern was to prevent the election of Crawford, the triumph of the Radicals, and the preservation of southern dynasty.”

p. 202, ¶ 4, line 1 – “Adams’s strategy was partly dictated by these attacks from Clay, some of which were echoed by supporters of Crawford and Calhoun.”
p. 203, ¶ 3, line 11 – “He fought in the cabinet against any encouragement of an independence movement in Cuba. The prospect that independence might be followed by American annexation, he argued, could lead the British to take pre-emptive action and seize the island. Similarly, though publicly declaring himself sympathetic to the Greeks, Adams was emphatic in cabinet in opposing any official encouragement.”

p. 203, ¶ 4, line 1 – “The contrast between the boldness of Adams’ language and the cautiousness of his actions was due in part... to the differences between his role as candidate and his role as responsible statesman.”

p. 204, ¶ 2, line 1 – “Adams’s optimum strategy thus involved preserving relative tranquility in the nation’s international relations while at the same time persuading the doubtful that he was as patriotic and anti-British as any dyed-in-the-wool Jeffersonian and as much a nationalist ad as much a partisan of the frontiersman as was Clay.”

p. 205, ¶ 4, line 1 – “As of the autumn of 1823, Adams was therefore the central figure in the presidential campaign.”

p. 206, ¶ 2, line 1 – “In the instance of the Monroe Doctrine, the positions adopted by American policymakers seem to me to be best explained as functions of their domestic ambitions – Monroe’s, to leave the presidency without being followed by recrimination and to be succeeded by someone who would not repudiate his policies; Adams’s, Calhoun’s, and Clay’s, to become President; Jefferson, Gallitin’s and perhaps Madison’s, to see Crawford succeed.”

**Postscript**

p. 207, ¶ 1, line 1 – “The Monroe Doctrine, as it was later called, was really three paragraphs of President Monroe’s annual message of December 2, 1823 to Congress.”

**Note:** The Postscript provides an excellent summary of the debate on this issue.