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Two hundred years ago this past December, US President James Monroe delivered his Annual Address to Congress. By 1823, the United States had been watching revolutions unfold in Latin America for nearly a decade and anxiously observing the European creation of the Holy Alliance, which aimed at the containment of republicanism. In the midst of the routine comments, Monroe included a few paragraphs on foreign relations, largely written by his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams. “Our policy in regard to Europe,” he writes, is “not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers.” At the same time, however, the United States would view any attempt to colonize or re-colonize the Americas as “dangerous to our peace and safety.” The address, in short, asserted the United States’ intention to remain aloof from European affairs and its desire that Europe would stay out of the Americas in turn.¹

If the address was met without fanfare in its own time—after all, the United States was a weak power with no ability to put force behind Monroe’s words—within a few decades it had been elevated to the status of Doctrine-with-a-capital-D. For the generations that followed, it proved to be a rather flexible doctrine, changing its meaning to reflect the political needs of those who invoked it. The confusion continues today: half of the students in my foreign relations course this fall came into class understanding the Monroe Doctrine to be about isolationism, while the other half saw it as a call for interventionism. That mixed legacy is precisely why the Monroe Doctrine matters today. As the essays in this forum reveal, studying the Monroe Doctrine can not only tell us a great deal about the US in the 1820s, but about ongoing debates about US foreign relations in general (even up to our present moment), about US relations with Latin America in particular, and about Latin American efforts over two centuries to turn the United States into a good neighbor.²

It is appropriate that the essays in this forum do not present a unified vision of the Monroe Doctrine. The Doctrine, after all, was nothing if not multi-faceted. The contributors seem to be concerned with two sets of big questions: how/why did the Monroe Doctrine matter within US policy, and how/when was the Monroe Doctrine used by a variety of political actors to advance particular political goals. To the first set of questions,

¹ Monroe Doctrine

<https://www.oas.org/sap/peacefund/VirtualLibrary/MonroeDoctrine/Treaty/MonroeDoctrine.pdf>

² For work that engages with the Monroe Doctrine and US-Latin American relations in the nineteenth century, see Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York: Norton, 2016); Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2016), 67-68. On the Monroe Doctrine and the Greek Revolution, see *Karine Walther, Sacred Interests: The United States and the Islamic World, 1821-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 44-46.

we have a range of answers here: in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine was a “nothingburger” (Jay Sexton), or it was “the culmination of a series of crucial debates among US policymakers” (Nicholas Guyatt).³ In the two centuries that followed 1823, however, the Doctrine certainly did matter, if in different ways to different people. The answers to the second set of questions, accordingly, provide a fascinating range of topics for these scholars to consider. One of the greatest contributions of the forum is its inclusion of the Latin Americanist scholarship and Spanish-language archives that too often are not included in the US historiography. Collectively, they help us to reassess the meaning of this document with its various “shape-shifting afterlives,” as Konstantin Dierks phrases it in his introductory essay.⁴

Two of the essays focus on the 1823 moment of the Monroe Doctrine’s creation. Nicholas Guyatt makes the case for us to consider this the “Adams Doctrine,” centering the role of John Quincy Adams in the Monroe Doctrine’s creation and arguing that the Doctrine has a lot to tell us about American priorities in the so-called Era of Good Feelings. Far from being just an unimportant series of comments in the middle of an address that was primarily concerned about other things, the Doctrine was instead the crystallization of a range of questions about how the US republic ought to be in the world in the aftermath of the War of 1812. For over a decade before Monroe delivered his address, American lawmakers had been debating questions about expansion, relations with other American republics, and the balance of power between the US and Europe. In Guyatt’s analysis, we see how Adams attempted to reconcile concerns about territorial acquisitions in Florida and the public enthusiasm for “sister republics” in Latin America. He reminds us that the Doctrine emerged largely out of Adams’s anxiety about American power. Guyatt provides a helpful overview of early republican debates over continentalism, the recognition of Latin American republics, American commercial relations with Europe and Latin America, the Greek Revolution, and British Foreign Secretary George Canning’s proposal of a joint US-British response to the Holy Alliance. The Monroe Doctrine (or the Adams Doctrine, as it were) was designed to encourage two forms of American imperialism in the years to come: one territorial, with its eyes on North America, and the other commercial, with attention to Anglo-American rivalry.

If Guyatt notes that a major goal of the Monroe Doctrine was “to secure North America for the extension of the republic,” Caitlin Fitz expands on this important point in her contribution.⁵ Fitz’s essay on the Indigenous history of the Monroe Doctrine is a revelation. She reminds us of “a foundational geopolitical fact that scholars of the Monroe Doctrine have seldom if ever made explicit: in 1823, most of the Western Hemisphere was under Indigenous command.”⁶ Her essay draws attention to a further contribution of the Monroe Doctrine to American empire: its commitment to settler colonialism, not only advancing US territorial ambitions but also “affirming Latin Americans’ rights to dispossess Native people” within the borders of their new republican borders.⁷ Examining the Doctrine “holistically” within the 1823 annual address as a whole allows Fitz to draw out this key function of the text and to further complicate our understanding of its “imperial anticolonialism.”⁸ The imperialism of the document, she points out, was not, as has traditionally been understood, a subtext. It was, rather, the text. Indigenous lands and Indigenous relations were at the heart of Monroe’s 1823 address, and Fitz reminds us that the settler colonial expansion of the early republic served to make the United States more respectable and powerful in its relations with

³ Jay Sexton, “The Monroe Doctrine in an Age of Global History,” *Diplomatic History*, 47: 5 (November 2023; hereafter *DH*): 845-870, 845; Nicholas Guyatt, “The Adams Doctrine and an ‘Empire of States,’” *DH*: 823-844, 824

⁴ Konstantin Dierks, “The Shape-Shifting Afterlives of the Monroe Doctrine,” *DH*: 731-737, 731

⁵ Guyatt, “The Adams Doctrine and an ‘Empire of States,’” 829

⁶ Caitlin Fitz, “The Monroe Doctrine and the Indigenous Americas,” *DH*: 802-822, 802

⁷ Fitz, “The Monroe Doctrine and the Indigenous Americas,” 805

⁸ The term comes from William Appleman Williams. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1962).

Europe. The reason was simple: the US ability to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands enhanced American claims to be a “civilized” power, and the Monroe Doctrine and American recognition of the Latin American republics cleared the way for those countries to make similar claims of a civilized status. The important distinction of the Monroe Doctrine is not hemispheric (American vs European), but developmental (civilized vs uncivilized). Read this way, the Monroe Doctrine stands out as a continuation of past US policy—back to US revolutionary leader Henry Knox and the Marshall Court and even to the pre-revolutionary period—rather than the statement of anything particularly new. Its imperial anticolonialism would continue to echo through future generations.

Alongside these fresh perspectives on the text’s meaning in the early republican United States, the forum includes three powerful contributions that reveal its symbolism and utility in Latin American relations with the United States. Collectively, the essays help us to think about the changing meaning of the Monroe Doctrine to these various non-US constituencies as the conditions of US imperialism and hemispheric relations changed.

Marixa Lasso’s stand-out contribution to the forum examines the nineteenth-century debates over the Panama Canal Treaty from the perspective of Colombia as a way to trace the changing meaning of the Monroe Doctrine from its 1823 creation to the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary. The key moments in this story, she reveals, occurred in the 1870s and 1880s. In the first, Colombia rejected a proposed US-Colombian Panama Canal treaty after US supporters invoked the Monroe Doctrine in explaining US rights over the future canal. Then in the 1880s, the United States opposed the proposed construction of the canal by a French company. The debates revealed two things: that Colombians valued the Monroe Doctrine’s purported distinction between monarchial Europe and the republican Americas, and that the United States ultimately did not understand Latin American powers like Colombia to be equally sovereign and free to determine how their land would be used. These late-nineteenth century debates set the stage for the eventual US support of Panamanian independence and the creation of the Roosevelt Corollary in the early twentieth century. That new formulation of the Monroe Doctrine, she writes, “allowed US policymakers to justify taking the territory away from Colombia, and then continue to control both the Panama Canal and the canal zone, rather than allowing either Colombia or the Republic of Panama to do so.”⁹ The essay carries the themes of sovereignty and US ideas about racial capacities for self-government that Guyatt and Fitz discuss in the 1820s into the final decades of the century. In the US and Colombia, the proposed canal became the occasion for a debate on how much power the United States and Latin American nations really did (or should) have in the region.

Paolo Riguzzi’s insightful essay explores key moments in Mexico’s reception of the Monroe Doctrine (or Doctrines, as he encourages us to think about it) between the 1860s and 1920. In those decades, the US historiography has long understood, the Monroe Doctrine shifted from its original 1823 creation into an identifiable policy that was increasingly invoked for imperialist intervention in Latin America.¹⁰ Riguzzi traces the shifts in Mexican understandings of the Monroe Doctrine in those same decades. If it was possible in the 1860s to see the Monroe Doctrine as a defense of continental republicanism, by 1920 such an interpretation was no longer possible. By then, in the aftermath of the first world war, the Monroe Doctrine was clearly an instrument of US imperial power. To explain this changing understanding, Riguzzi points to four moments: the attempted French intervention in Mexico during the 1860s, when Mexican political leaders “fully

⁹ Marixa Lasso, “Before the Roosevelt Corollary: Colombia and the Nineteenth-Century Panama Canal Treaty Debates,” *DH*: 764-780, 766

¹⁰ On the changing meaning of the Monroe Doctrine with the Roosevelt Corollary, see Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Macmillan, 2012), especially chapter 6; John M. Thompson, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of US Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford, 2019), ch. 4

appropriated the Monroe Doctrine as part of a survival strategy.”¹¹ In 1895, the Olney Corollary forced a new interpretation of the Doctrine. The Mexican government was concerned by US intervention in a British-Venezuelan dispute over borders, and used the occasion of President Porfirio Díaz’s 1896 report to Congress to issue a statement that framed the Monroe Doctrine as a Pan-American policy. Far from justifying US hegemony over the continent, it could support the Americas in a shared project of rejecting European colonizing. The Roosevelt Corollary’s aggressive formulation again demanded a new interpretation; Riguzzi quotes a Mexican newspaper describing President Theodore Roosevelt’s position as “overlordship.” The diplomatic negotiation of the moment was delicate, but set the stage for Mexico’s “rejection” of the League of Nations’ “embrace” of the Monroe Doctrine in 1920.¹²

Juan Pablo Scarfi’s article similarly traces shifting Latin American perspectives on the Doctrine, though his focus is on Pan-Americanist legal discussions between the 1890s and the 1930s. In these decades, he argues, Pan-Americanist diplomats and jurists worked to reinterpret the Doctrine from a statement of US imperialist unilateralism into a “Pan-American multilateral legal principle of non-intervention.”¹³ US scholars who are used to thinking about the changing meaning of the Monroe Doctrine in this era primarily in terms of the Roosevelt Corollary will learn much from Scarfi’s discussion of the Drago Doctrine (1902) and the work of Brazilian diplomat Joaquim Nabuco and Chilean jurist Alejandro Alvarez at the Pan-American Conferences of the early twentieth century. A crisis point in this hemispheric intellectual history emerged when the League of Nations recognized the Monroe Doctrine as a “regional understanding” in Article 21 of its Covenant. Such a statement risked canonizing US dominance in the region, prompting Latin American diplomats to work harder to promote multilateralism in the 1920s. In Rio, Havana, and Montevideo, politicians from across the continent debated important issues involving intervention, but as Scarfi argues, these discussions “were inevitably rooted in contrasting versions over the meaning and scope of the Monroe Doctrine in the Americas.”¹⁴ The Doctrine’s meaning was far from settled at its centenary or in the decades that followed.

The multiple meanings of the Monroe Doctrines are at the heart of Jay Sexton’s closing essay. His contribution returns to some of the themes he explored in his book *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*.¹⁵ Here, he is particularly interested in thinking about the ways that the Doctrine was—and continues to be—used to make contradictory and competing political claims within the US. In Sexton’s reading, the Doctrine served as a powerful tool in domestic US politics (as well as for non-US observers) through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Imperialists and anti-imperialists alike found support for their positions in Monroe’s words, and both invoked it as evidence that their position reflected a longstanding American tradition that must be continued. For Sexton, the Monroe Doctrine served as a “political football” throughout its history, and he expects it to continue to do so in the coming years. After all, Sexton argues, “there is a distinctly nineteenth-century feel to the emerging geopolitical questions of our era.”¹⁶ In a period of declining US power, we can expect the Monroe Doctrine’s anticolonial imperialism to have renewed political relevance.

A powerful theme in both Sexton and Dierks’s essays is the crucial role that historians have had in shaping these political understandings of the Monroe Doctrine over time. This is unsurprising, of course: explaining

¹¹ Paolo Riguzzi, “Mexico and the Monroe Doctrines, 1863–1920: From Appropriation to Rejection,” *DH*: 781-801, 784

¹² Riguzzi, “Mexico and the Monroe Doctrines, 1863–1920,” 797

¹³ Juan Pablo Scarfi, “The Monroe Doctrine in the Americas: Towards a Hemispheric Intellectual History,” *DH*: 738-763, 740-1

¹⁴ Scarfi, “The Monroe Doctrine in the Americas,” 756

¹⁵ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Macmillan, 2012)

¹⁶ Sexton, “The Monroe Doctrine in an Age of Global History,” 869-870

the past is our job, after all. But the historiography of the Monroe Doctrine reveals the political import and potential real-world implications of historical analysis. The Doctrine's early historians were interested in locating a "true" Monroe Doctrine—and in defining that truth in nationalist terms that described the rise of the United States into a global superpower. More recently, as Sexton points out, historians cluster around an idea of the Doctrine as "an unredeemable manifestation of US imperialism, racism, and exploitative capitalism."¹⁷ In both cases, they have used these definitions as a lens through which to praise or critique future iterations of American global power. Fitz reminds us of the power of historical narratives, too, when she points out that by focusing on US relations with Latin American and European states as the subject of diplomatic history at the expense of US relations with Indigenous powers, historians replicate the civilized/savage distinction that nineteenth-century diplomacy embraced.

For Dierks, the essays collected here reveal the importance of the work of contemporary historians to "correct[] the record" and incorporate more voices and perspectives than before. "The Monroe Doctrine is alive," he writes, and it needs historians to explain, contextualize, and situate it in its historic moment(s) and space(s).¹⁸ As the essays in the forum make it clear, the third century of the Monroe Doctrine is off to a powerful start.

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¹⁷ Early historians of the Monroe Doctrine include George F. Tucker, *The Monroe Doctrine: A Concise History of Its Origins and Growth* (Boston: Published by George E. Reed, 1885); Worthington Chauncey Ford, "John Quincy Adams and the Monroe Doctrine I," *American Historical Review* 7, no. 4 (1902): 676-696; Ford, "John Quincy Adams and the Monroe Doctrine, II," *American Historical Review* 8, no. 1 (1902): 28-52; Dexter Perkins, *A History of The Monroe Doctrine*, Rev. Ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955). For the latter school, Sexton points to Walter Hixon's *The Myth of American Diplomacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) as emblematic. Sexton, "The Monroe Doctrine in an Age of Global History," 846

¹⁸ Dierks, 737