

## SHOULD CUBA BE ANNEXED?

*Historic Review, by William Barnes Sr., of the Relations of Spain, Cuba and the United States from the Ostend Manifesto to the Present Day—Some Analogies With Other Forceful Annexations.*

To the Editor of The World:

For generations the American people have had an instinct that it was the "manifest destiny" of the Island of Cuba to be annexed to the United States.

At the suggestion of President Franklin Pierce in 1854 (William L. Marcy being then his very able Secretary of State), the American Ministers to Great Britain, France and Spain were directed to meet and confer on the subject of the purchase of Cuba and its annexation to the United States. A meeting was held at Ostend, Belgium, Oct. 9, 1854, which was adjourned to Aix-la-Chapelle, Germany, Oct. 15, 1854. Nearly all Europe being then busily engaged in the Crimean war, it was deemed expedient to confer on this subject.

The conferrees were James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, Minister to Great Britain; John Y. Mason of Virginia, Minister to France, and Pierre Soule of Louisiana, Minister to Spain.

The conference substantially recommended the payment of \$120,000,000 (an enormous sum at that date) to Spain as the price for the sale of the Island of Cuba to the United States.

The celebrated so-called "Ostend Manifesto" is an elaborate diplomatic document of several pages, written with unusual ability and perspicacity, supposed to have been mainly the work of Minister Soule.

Some of the reasons for the proposed annexation were stated as follows:

### *The Ostend Manifesto.*

It must be clear to every reflecting mind that from the peculiarity of its geographical position and the considerations attendant on it, Cuba is as necessary to the North American Republic as any of its present members, and it belongs naturally to that great family of States of which the Union is the providential nursery.

From its locality it commands the mouth of the Mississippi and the immense and annually increasing trade which must seek this avenue to the ocean.

Of the numerous navigable streams measuring an aggregate course of 30,000 miles, which disembogue themselves through this river into the Gulf of Mexico, the increase of the population within the last ten years amounts to more than that of the entire Union at the time Louisiana was annexed to it. (1803).

The natural and main outlet to the products of this entire population, the highway of their direct intercourse with the Atlantic and Pacific States, can never be secure, but must be endangered whilst Cuba is a dependency of a distant power in whose possession it has proved to be a source of constant annoyance and embarrassment, to their interests.

Indeed the Union can never enjoy repose or possess reliable security as long as Cuba is not embraced within its boundaries.

Its immediate acquisition by our Government is of paramount importance, and we cannot doubt but that it is a consummation devoutly wished for by its inhabitants.

After we shall have offered Spain a price for Cuba far beyond its present value, and this shall have been refused, it will then be time to consider the question:—does Cuba in the possession of Spain seriously endanger our internal peace and the existence of our cherished Union?

Shall this question be answered in the affirmative, then by every law, human and divine, we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain if we possess the power, and this upon the very same principle that would justify an individual in tearing down the burning house of his neighbor if there were no other means of preventing the flames from destroying his own home, etc.

Signed by the said Ministers and by William L. Marcy, Secretary of State.

(Relations of the United States and Spain, Admiral E. E. Chadwick, pp. 263-267.)

When James Buchanan was elected President he reiterated these recommendations for the purchase of Cuba in three annual messages, without any practical result.

Our Ministers at Ostend seem to have been ready to pay Spain for Cuba in 1854 \$120,000,000.

In 1849 President Polk offered Spain \$100,000,000 for Cuba. Spain indignantly rejected the offer and said that sooner than see the island transferred to any power she would prefer seeing it sunk in the ocean.

### *The Treaty of 1898.*

It is an inexplicable enigma that when the Protocol and Treaty of Peace were signed in 1898 we did not retain possession of Cuba, especially when Spain herself favored its annexation instead of independence and the French Ambassador, Cambon, Spain's confidential adviser, recommended annexation.

The so-called Platt provisions of the Cuban Treaty ratified July 1, 1904, really place Cuba under the dominion or suzerainty of the United States and deprive her of sovereign power by denying her the right to incur any foreign debts, except under certain limitations, and forbidding her to allow any foreign power to obtain control of any part of the island and consenting to intervention by the United States in certain contingencies.

The Island of Crete has been a source of trouble for years to both Turkey and Greece and the four intervening powers.

Under the anomalous treaty with Cuba she will always be a menace to our peace.

The so-called unwise Teller resolution, ignoring any intention to exercise control or sovereignty over the island, cannot bind forever all future Congresses, not being a treaty ratified by the Senate, and it may be said that it has already been violated or repudiated by the Platt provisions of the Cuban Treaty.

Since the building of the Panama Canal the necessity for the annexation of Cuba has incalculably increased and is greatly more imperative than in 1854. It is unnecessary to enumerate these reasons in detail. They are as plain as the sun at noon-day.

### *The Panama Canal in Case of War.*

Suppose, in case of a foreign war, a Santa Anna, a Cipriano Castro or a Zelaya should be President of Cuba, would not the island be constrained by any one of these leaders to side with our enemies and to inflict incalculable damage on the United States in modes impossible to enumerate?

Would not the Panama Canal, the Mississippi River and our whole Atlantic seaboard be exposed to bombardment and war requisitions from warships sailing from Havana, Santiago and every harbor in the Island of Cuba?

I am not a military or naval expert, but can it be good policy or wisdom not to own an island almost within cannon-shot of our shores and which the Ostend Manifesto as early as 1854 declared was geographically a part of our Union?

Read history. Was not Germany always uneasy as long as England possessed the fortified island of Heligoland, almost within sight of her shore?

Has not the possession of Gibraltar by Great Britain been a very sore thorn in the side of Spain for more than a century?

Great Britain owns the valuable island of Cyprus, the City of Alexandria and the control of Egypt and Malta and other possessions to protect the Suez Canal and her route to India. I need not catalogue her fortresses all over the world.

Japan in her war with China seized and retained the large island of Formosa for strategic reasons, offensive and defensive. She is now forcibly annexing Corea, perhaps Manchuria.

Germany seized Southern Denmark in the Schleswig-Holstein war; Russia seized Finland for her protection seaward, the Crimea for possession of the Black Sea, and divers other annexations.

#### **Annexation Opportunities Missed.**

I need not repeat cases. We were once in a condition to acquire the valuable harbor of Samana and the whole or a portion of Hayti and St. Domingo, also the Danish Islands. We did not avail ourselves of these strategic and golden opportunities.

All of the Samoan Islands were once offered to us. White paper was offered to the State Department on which to write our terms. We only hesitatingly accepted the harbor of Pago-Pago. The next day Germany treated for the harbor of Apia and obtained it. Then the unwise and awkward tripartite agreement was subsequently made with Great Britain and Germany, dividing the Samoan Islands.

We nearly lost the Sandwich or Hawaiian Islands by our delay and hesitation; President Cleveland even withdrew from the Senate the treaty of an-

nexation sent in by President Harrison, and the islands were, I think, annexed by joint resolution, as Texas had been annexed.

The recent excursion of our war vessels around the world has demonstrated the absolute necessity for the possession of islands and coaling stations all over the world. Our need of a powerful American marine has also been clearly demonstrated. War ships without a merchant marine to protect or collectors to carry coal seem to be inconceivable weakness and folly.

At the Treaty of Paris we could probably have secured the valuable Caroline Islands, about one thousand in number. We, however, only accidentally took the solitary Island of Guam; and Germany, soon after the Treaty of Paris, wisely snapped up the thousand Caroline Islands from Spain.

#### **A Quasi-Suzerainty Already.**

We have been compelled already to assume a quasi-suzerainty and control over Cuba, financially and otherwise, to preserve life and property and to prevent its transfer to some foreign power. Will not this contingency happen over and over again?

Are the freedmen and citizens of Cuba entitled to any more "liberty" ("Cuba libre") than the American citizens of New York, Virginia or California and other States? Cubans should feel honored and delighted to have such a boon as American citizenship offered to them and to be annexed under a territorial government and as soon as practicable become a regular State of our Union with all its rights, privileges and franchises.

Since our Panama Canal plan and modern improvements in navigation, wireless telegraphy and for other reasons the absolute necessity of annexing the Island of Cuba has been incalculably increased since the Ostend Manifesto of 1854, the sooner the island is annexed the better. Now is the time and now is the hour to avoid future wars and dangerous and unseen complications.

If we could have annexed Cuba in 1854, as recommended in the Ostend Manifesto, at the price of over \$100,000,000 it would have saved us from the Spanish War and its enormous expenses.

Cuba has now actually a semi-veto power on our foreign policy whenever her interests or national relations or prejudices call for its exercise.

Our relations with Spain concerning the purchase or the annexation of Florida were difficult of adjustment nearly a hundred years ago.

#### **The Acquirement of Florida.**

John S. C. Abbott says in his "Lives of the Presidents," page 443:

What condition did Florida occupy in 1811? She was in the possession of Spain. What did the United States think about having adjacent territory outside of their jurisdiction? Spain was inimical to the United States and in view of the great principles of self-preservation the Congress of the United States passed a resolution declaring that if Spain attempted to transfer Florida into the hands of any other power, the United States would take possession of it. There was the territory lying upon our border, outside of the jurisdiction of the United States, and we declared by an act of Congress that no foreign power should possess it. We went still further and appropriated one hundred thousand dollars and authorized the President to enter and take possession of it with the means placed in his hands. Afterward we negotiated with Spain (1819) and gave six millions of dollars for the country.

The private interests of the Tobacco Trust or of the Sugar Trust or any other private interests should not be allowed to control or influence the question of annexation.

The best interests and welfare of the whole American people and the people of Cuba should alone be consulted and allowed to control our national policy in the premises.

If the government of Cuba and its people by a plebiscite or other popular vote should refuse to give their consent to annexation to the United States it would clearly demonstrate that we have a real enemy at our front door, capable of doing us infinite damage in the unfortunate contingency of a foreign war.

Either by treaty or joint resolution, as in the case of Texas, the subject should now be carefully considered and decided.

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