“Monroe’s Doctrine or Monroe Doctrines? A Review of Jay Sexton’s The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America”

Jeffrey J. Malanson
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, malansoj@ipfw.edu
This research is a product of the Department of History faculty at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.

Follow this and additional works at: http://opus.ipfw.edu/history_facpubs
Part of the Diplomatic History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Opus Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History at Opus: Research & Creativity at IPFW. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Opus: Research & Creativity at IPFW. For more information, please contact admin@lib.ipfw.edu.
Inside...

A Roundtable Discussion on Jay Sexton’s *The Monroe Doctrine*

Wikileaks and the Past and Present of American Foreign Relations

Historians as Policymakers

...and much more!
Why revisit the Monroe Doctrine? Dexter Perkins’s The Monroe Doctrine, published three quarters of a century ago, was a masterful three-volume model of historical investigation that seemed to reveal everything about President James Monroe’s 1823 statement to Congress regarding Latin American independence. Penned partly by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, Monroe’s admonition to Europe to stay out of the affairs of newly independent American republics—and his promise that the United States would reciprocate—was part of a plan to secure the Americas’ independence from the Holy Alliance. (The British shared this goal and discussed a Monroe-type joint statement, but Adams convinced his president to go it alone.) More ambitious was a longer-term hegemonic project to overwhelm all Europeans as the dominant power in the Americas.

Since Perkins, other scholars have essentially extended this geopolitical analysis. For example, Gretchen Murphy may have appeared not to when she explored the cultural meanings of the doctrine in 2005. Her Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire explained how the doctrine helped create a separate national identity for the United States and the rest of the Americas by reflecting gender, race, and other markers. Yet the narrative movement was projected outward from the nation’s identity rather than inward to embrace domestic goals.

Jay Sexton attempts something different: a long-term review of the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine. Essentially he asks why it took so long for the 1823 speech to become a “doctrine.” It was not until 1853 that the word was used, and it was another half-century before the doctrine was transformed from a defensive to an offensive policy. He answers this question in terms that are largely domestic. The Holy Alliance barely threatened the Western Hemisphere, even in the 1820s. “A remarkable feature of the Monroe Doctrine in the nineteenth century is that Americans most often invoked it against one another” (12).

The argument is fascinating on its face, but the book’s first two chapters offer little but the well-known story of the U.S. desire for independence from Britain and the difficulty of holding the nation together in the face of westward expansion. The author is not altogether convincing when he argues that the debate between Secretary of War John C. Calhoun and Adams over whether or not to ally with the British in sending a message to the Holy Alliance reflected a larger debate about “American systems.” He believes Adams’s call for federal development as a defense against British encroachments suggests that it did. He is also unable to demonstrate some of his assertions about the 1823 message itself that make up the heart of these chapters: namely, that its authors “sidestepped the most contentious issues” or “avoided an explicit statement on the important issue of territorial expansion” (60, 61). The evidence shows no deliberate sidestepping or avoidance. He admits at times the lack of contemporary references to Monroe’s message, and in one instance offers the rather weak explanation that Andrew Jackson probably “saw no need to enforce the 1823 message” (82).

Sexton establishes several themes early on, although their ties to the Monroe Doctrine are indirect. One is that anticolonialism and imperial expansion—seemingly contradictory policies—were actually interdependent. The young republic was anticolonial in that it opposed the extension of European colonies in the new world, and specifically the direct or indirect extension of British power in its thirteen former colonies. This argument picks up steam in chapter 3, where “Monroe’s declaration” or “Monroe’s doctrine” truly entered the lexicon of U.S. political leaders in the run-up to the Mexican War. In the 1840s, proslavery administrations revived the 1823 message and the European threat it embodied in the midst of campaigns to expand the U.S. empire through the institution of slavery. Sexton plainly states, for instance, that the Tyler administration “exaggerated the British threat in Texas” (90). The only solution to this nonexistent threat was the annexation of that slave state. One South Carolinian saw this move not as hypocrisy but rather “a precedent & noble model” for battling the abolitionist British (91).

James Polk himself directly invoked Monroe’s warning about British aggression against the New World in an 1845 message to Congress when he advocated annexing California, and again in 1848 when he addressed the secession of the Yucatán Peninsula from Mexico. Calhoun rejected Polk’s call for intervening in Mexico and, ever the loyal South Carolinian, again brought the debate into domestic politics by making the proslavery argument and warning that failing to protect Texas and Cuba from emancipation might deliver them to Europe. Polk, a champion of slavery who “cared little about Latin America,” thus ended up using the Monroe Doctrine to great effect, but on domestic issues that had little to do with securing the independence of new Latin American republics (105). Sexton notes that Polk’s invocation of Monroe also contradicted the intent of the 1823 message to promote republicanism and economic liberalism. There are many such examples of irony in the uses of...
the Monroe Doctrine in the decades that followed its enunciation.

President Zachary Taylor and the Whigs also twisted the meaning of the doctrine for political ends. They justified the signing of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, in which Washington and London each agreed not to build a canal in Central America without the other’s consent, on the theory that they had prevented British expansionism in Latin America. Sexton rightly points out that the deal recalled the rejected 1823 British offer of a joint declaration.

As the Civil War approached, Stephen Douglas, as astute a Democrat as any, condemned Clayton-Bulwer as a Whig “negation and repudiation” of the Monroe Doctrine because it forestalled U.S. expansion, which was the only true defense of republicanism against European encroachment (127). Countering Douglas, William Henry Seward argued that the United States had largely beaten back British advances in the Great Lakes, Texas, Oregon, and California, again focusing the debate outside of what U.S. citizens at the time considered to be “Latin America.” Seward instead used Monroe to advance his vision of internal economic development, which would aid in the global competition with European commerce. The disagreement over interpretations of the Monroe Doctrine deepened the rift between the sections in the 1850s.

During the Civil War itself, critics of Abraham Lincoln and Seward, now secretary of state, focused on their inability to resist British chumminess with the South and their avoidance of confrontation with the French, who took over Mexico. Radical Republicans joined in, moved by their absolute opposition to European monarchial encroachments. Again, however, there were politics involved. An 1863 pamphlet titled The Monroe Doctrine was published with the aim of promoting the presidential bid of Republican Salmon Chase. For the first time, writes Sexton, the phrase “Monroe Doctrine” became a nationalist symbol, a permanent feature of the political and diplomatic landscape, during the Civil War” (153).

Between the Civil War and the War of 1898, U.S. citizens gradually shed much of their remaining anticolonialism and embraced “a powerful cultural internationalism,” including a hunger for colonies beyond the territory they had already acquired in the West (161). Here Sexton fails to distinguish clearly between what he calls a “liberal” internationalism and “an assertive and nationalist foreign policy” or to explain how liberals embraced the Monroe Doctrine (162). Nevertheless, the movement from a defensive to an offensive doctrine accelerated.

Ulysses S. Grant made a particularly Machiavellian use of the fear of European power when he argued that if the United States did not annex the Dominican Republic, some other great power would. Grant called his (ultimately unsuccessful) plan “an adherence to the Monroe doctrine” (165), clearly foreshadowing Teddy Roosevelt’s justification in 1904 for what became known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the doctrine. By invoking the specter of European intervention, however, interventionists such as Secretary of State Hamilton Fish could keep claiming that the doctrine was “not a policy of aggression . . . it does not contemplate forcible intervention in any legitimate contest” (168). Thus U.S. political leaders could continue to have their imperialist cake and eat it too, claiming that their offense was still really defensive.

Secretary of State James G. Blaine was subtler about his use of the Monroe Doctrine. To an extent, he liked his predecessors held up the hobbledin of military intervention from Europe. The War of the Pacific, which endangered British railroad and mining interests in South America, produced the lingering possibility of British gunboats appearing in the Pacific. But Blaine saw the Monroe Doctrine primarily as a symbol allowing him to construct an informal U.S. version of imperialism, in which commerce would stand in for colonialism as a way to ward off the still-powerful commercial clout of Europe in Latin America. Neither British investment nor the French-planned Isthmian Canal counted as threats to the republicanism of the hemisphere as Adams and Monroe envisaged it in 1823. But no matter: the doctrine now had a long history of being revived to serve not ideals but concrete U.S. interests, and Blaine’s ability to reinterpret it once again spoke to its versatility.

In one of the too few instances in which Sexton uses Latin American voices to underscore the shifts in interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, he quotes Le Courrier of Buenos Aires as saying that “the famous Monroe Doctrine will be enlarged.” That paper saw through Blaine’s scheming to redefine hemispheric diplomacy: “It is not a question of the nonintervention of Europe in the affairs of the American continent, but of the preponderance . . . of the United States” (191).

The better-known invocations of the Monroe Doctrine—Secretary of State Richard Olney’s 1895 “declaration” against the British in Venezuela and the Roosevelt Corollary—end the volume and appear as anticlimactic rather than dramatic reappearances of the doctrine as they do in most narratives of nineteenth-century U.S. foreign relations or U.S.–Latin American relations. Sexton recounts not only the international politics behind these two events but also the ever-present partisanship. For example, Olney’s “twenty-inch gun” volley was in part directed at opponents of the Grover Cleveland administration (203). Olney’s wing of the Democratic Party, normally cautious on foreign policy, faced Anglophobia from some of its own populists and an aggressive naval building zeal from Republicans.

The declaration against British advances on Venezuela thus served to shore up the Democrats’ national security credentials. That the U.S. Navy was gaining quickly on the British by then also made the statement that the United States was “practically sovereign” in the Americas more palatable to the British.

Details also illumine the context of the Roosevelt Corollary. Announcing it to the Congress in December 1904, the president chose not to call his statement a “doctrine” but rather to link it to a well-respected tradition. That caution reflected the domestic political troubles caused by his brash statements in favor of intervention. For that reason he waited until after his election to unveil his policy. As a result, the Monroe Doctrine was now fully predicated on a view of “civilized” versus “uncivilized” peoples and posited a proactive, even preventive justification for intervention against often imagined European threats. The distance traveled since 1823 had been far and tortuous.

A few caveats are in order. The book will be of less relevance to historians of Latin America or U.S.–Latin American relations than to those of the nineteenth-century United States or of U.S. foreign relations more broadly conceived.
even national identity. There are also few assessments of the Monroe Doctrine by foreigners, which is unfortunate because some of the few statements Sexton cites from British and Latin American observers uncover more directly the hypocrisy of U.S. policymakers.

All in all, Sexton makes a valiant effort to pull from the historical record instances in which key internal debates about investment or expansion invoked, if not the very words of the Monroe Doctrine, at least its arguments or its logic. At times the author seems to be stretching the argument and looking for any U.S. discussion of European expansionism as an expression of Monroeism without concrete evidence that Monroe was on the minds of the discussants. There also appears to be a frustrating unwillingness to plainly state that U.S. policymakers were hypocritical in their application of the doctrine. Instead, Sexton calls the obvious contradiction between the clearly defensive statement of 1823 and the growing interventionism of the nineteenth century a mere “uneasy relationship” (199). Overall, the book is a valuable addition to the literature on a topic whose evolution in the century after 1823 remains mysterious to many.

Monroe’s Doctrine or Monroe Doctrines? A Review of Jay Sexton’s The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America

Jeffrey Malanson

In The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America, Jay Sexton offers a vital reexamination of the creation, evolution, and many deployments of James Monroe’s 1823 declaration of American foreign policy principles. The book covers a lot of ground, beginning with American independence and concluding with some reflections on World War I, but Sexton has balanced a thought-provoking discussion of the pertinent issues surrounding the Monroe Doctrine in its various iterations with a compelling and forward moving narrative.

Historians have typically viewed the history of the Monroe Doctrine as a series of marked and sudden shifts in interpretation and utilization, but Sexton masterfully teases out the consistent factors that make the Doctrine’s history much more one of evolution rather than abrupt change. He points to “three interrelated processes central to nineteenth-century America” that the Monroe Doctrine illuminates: “the ongoing struggle to consolidate independence from Britain, the forging of a new nation, and the emergence of the American empire” (13). Sexton’s great contribution here lies in the larger analytical framework within which he evaluates these processes and the changing Doctrine through time. Four themes within this framework stand out as meriting special consideration and will be the focus of this review: the relationship between international relations and domestic politics; the specific framing of the Monroe Doctrine by policymakers throughout the nineteenth century; the connection between America’s anticolonialism and its developing empire; and the gap between perception and reality in Americans’ conceptions of foreign threats. It is through his exploration of these themes (among others) that Sexton is able to successfully and convincingly situate the Monroe Doctrine as an integral aspect of the development of the United States in the nineteenth century.

Sexton is not the first historian to point to the important connections between America’s domestic politics and its foreign policies, but he filters the history of the Monroe Doctrine through this lens in a new way. The best example of this novel approach is to be found in his treatment of the decades before the Doctrine was issued, when public pronouncements about U.S. foreign policy were as much concerned with preserving and strengthening the union as they were with America’s relationships with other countries. Sexton presents George Washington’s call in his Farewell Address to avoid foreign alliances as stemming from his desire to minimize the exposure of American weakness to a hostile world; it was a “means” of national self-preservation and “not an end in itself” (28). While Sexton could have done more to explore the long-term impact of the Farewell Address on American conceptions of foreign policy (Washington may have been primarily concerned with union, but several generations of Americans looked to it as a statement of guiding foreign policy principles), especially in instances when it conflicted with the Monroe Doctrine, his analysis is an important demonstration of how discussions of foreign policy could be used to address domestic concerns in substantive ways.

The same concerns for union at the heart of the Farewell Address also directly influenced the final shape and message of the Monroe Doctrine. The threat of European intervention in Latin America did not just mean the potential loss of territory in the Western Hemisphere, but also represented a direct threat to the American union and way of life. As a result, the United States’ warning to Europe to leave the new Spanish American republics alone was as much an act of self-defense as it was a statement of genuine concern for the fate of its southern neighbors. Efforts to use foreign policy to address concerns about the fragility of the union faded over time. James K. Polk’s transformation of the Monroe Doctrine in late 1845 “from a cautious and reactive statement of national security requirements into a proactive call for territorial expansion” helped to bring about the Mexican War and succeeded in inflaming sectional tensions rather than tamping them down (102).

The real strength of Sexton’s analysis of the uses of the Monroe Doctrine in domestic politics lies in how he applies it to the period from the Civil War to the dawn of American empire in the mid-1890s. In this period, policymakers frequently discussed the Doctrine domestically but rarely utilized it as a real tool in diplomacy. During the Civil War, the Doctrine became “a nationalist symbol, a permanent feature of the political and diplomatic landscape,” and the “domestic politicking” surrounding it “shaped how Americans came to understand their nation’s role in international affairs” (153, 156). As a result of its new symbolic status, the Doctrine could easily be held up by politicians and policymakers to justify their actions as an attempt to defend Monroe’s principles. In many cases that defense took the form of a reinterpretation of those principles to meet modern needs and priorities. Sexton’s focus on the malleable meanings and the political evolution of the Monroe Doctrine in this period—when foreign policy concerns tended not to be at the center of American lives—helps to clarify what seemed at first to be a dramatic shift in the meaning and utilization of the Doctrine during the imperial boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

That the Monroe Doctrine could so easily and repeatedly be reinterpreted by generations of Americans resulted from the way it was originally presented in 1823. Sexton makes the point several times that the core components of President James Monroe’s message, the doctrine of two spheres and the non-colonization principle, were framed in “negative terms: they stated what European powers could not do, but dodged the question of what the United States would do” (60-61). The Doctrine was a statement of American ideals and not a promise of American action. There are also few assessments of the Monroe Doctrine by foreigners, which is unfortunate because some of the few statements Sexton cites from British and Latin American observers uncover more directly the hypocrisy of U.S. policymakers.

All in all, Sexton makes a valiant effort to pull from the historical record instances in which key internal debates about investment or expansion invoked, if not the very words of the Monroe Doctrine, at least its arguments or its logic. At times the author seems to be stretching the argument and looking for any U.S. discussion of European expansionism as an expression of Monroeism without concrete evidence that Monroe was on the minds of the discussants. There also appears to be a frustrating unwillingness to plainly state that U.S. policymakers were hypocritical in their application of the doctrine. Instead, Sexton calls the obvious contradiction between the clearly defensive statement of 1823 and the growing interventionism of the nineteenth century a mere “uneasy relationship” (199). Overall, the book is a valuable addition to the literature on a topic whose evolution in the century after 1823 remains mysterious to many.
Given the wide mix of domestic and international concerns it was meant to meet, the framing was understandable; but this ambiguity made it easy for later policymakers to read what they wanted to into it.

As early as 1826, President John Quincy Adams tried to give the Doctrine more specific meaning through U.S. participation in the Congress of Panama. He saw the international meeting of the independent republics of the Americas as a chance to convince them to adopt the non-colonization principle as their own and as an opportunity to give the Doctrine a lasting legacy. If Adams had succeeded at Panama, the Doctrine would have meant defending sovereign national territory against European encroachment. The more problematic warning contained in the doctrine of two spheres would have been set aside as a foreign policy pronouncement issued to meet a specific international challenge that had since passed.1 According to Sexton, Adams attempted to provide a “proactive complement to the negatively framed message of 1823” (74). The problem, of course, was that he did not succeed. Congress delayed its decision to approve the mission to Panama for so long that the United States was unable to participate in the congress. Sexton wisely points to this failure as an important and problematic development in U.S. relations with Latin America, but he does not go far enough in discussing how thoroughly in discussing how thoroughly the Doctrine was set aside by the American people in the aftermath of the Panama debate.

By the beginning of Andrew Jackson’s presidency most Americans saw Monroe’s Doctrine as a dangerous violation of the principles expressed in Washington’s Farewell Address.

It was Polk who resurrected the Monroe Doctrine and gave it a second life as a bolder statement of American interests. He took advantage of the Doctrine’s negative framing to justify an expansionist foreign policy, and many of those that followed him in the White House and State Department made similar use of its ambiguity to meet their own needs. It was not until the onset of American empire, though, that policymakers began actively reframing the Doctrine’s negative principles into strictures for positive action. The best demonstration of this was Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which “explicitly transformed the negatively framed and non-interventionist message of 1823 into a proactive call for intervention” (229). Roosevelt followed the example set by his predecessors, but he went further than anyone else in broadening the nature and scope of American action under the Doctrine’s auspices. The United States’ newly acquired global power and empire made this proactive foreign policy unsurprising, but it bore little resemblance to Monroe’s declaration of 1823.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Given the wide mix of domestic and international concerns it was meant to meet, the framing was understandable; but this ambiguity made it easy for later policymakers to read what they wanted to into it.

As early as 1826, President John Quincy Adams tried to give the Doctrine more specific meaning through U.S. participation in the Congress of Panama. He saw the international meeting of the independent republics of the Americas as a chance to convince them to adopt the non-colonization principle as their own and as an opportunity to give the Doctrine a lasting legacy. If Adams had succeeded at Panama, the Doctrine would have meant defending sovereign national territory against European encroachment. The more problematic warning contained in the doctrine of two spheres would have been set aside as a foreign policy pronouncement issued to meet a specific international challenge that had since passed. According to Sexton, Adams attempted to provide a “proactive complement to the negatively framed message of 1823” (74). The problem, of course, was that he did not succeed. Congress delayed its decision to approve the mission to Panama for so long that the United States was unable to participate in the congress. Sexton wisely points to this failure as an important and problematic development in U.S. relations with Latin America, but he does not go far enough in discussing how thoroughly in discussing how thoroughly the Doctrine was set aside by the American people in the aftermath of the Panama debate.

By the beginning of Andrew Jackson’s presidency most Americans saw Monroe’s Doctrine as a dangerous violation of the principles expressed in Washington’s Farewell Address.

It was Polk who resurrected the Monroe Doctrine and gave it a second life as a bolder statement of American interests. He took advantage of the Doctrine’s negative framing to justify an expansionist foreign policy, and many of those that followed him in the White House and State Department made similar use of its ambiguity to meet their own needs. It was not until the onset of American empire, though, that policymakers began actively reframing the Doctrine’s negative principles into strictures for positive action. The best demonstration of this was Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which “explicitly transformed the negatively framed and non-interventionist message of 1823 into a proactive call for intervention” (229). Roosevelt followed the example set by his predecessors, but he went further than anyone else in broadening the nature and scope of American action under the Doctrine’s auspices. The United States’ newly acquired global power and empire made this proactive foreign policy unsurprising, but it bore little resemblance to Monroe’s declaration of 1823.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.

Sexton’s most important analysis deals with two seeming contradictions. The first was a foreign policy declaration aimed at preventing European colonization of the Western Hemisphere being used to justify American overseas empire. The second was a statement of principles opposed to European intervention in Latin America being used as the foundation for U.S. interventionism in the same place.
Roosevelt Corollary, which established the United States as a police power in the Western Hemisphere. In declaring such a role for his country, Roosevelt had “explicitly transformed the negatively framed and non-interventionist message of 1823 into a proactive call for intervention” and “used an anticolonial symbol to extend legitimacy to an interventionist foreign policy” (229, 239). Herein lay the “great paradox of the Monroe Doctrine: its anticolonial-
ism and idealism—its enlightened call for a new world order premised upon nonintervention, republican self-government, and an open world economy—justified and empowered an imperialist role for the United States in international affairs” (248). Such a conclusion seems too contradictory to be true, but it was the natural outgrowth of the evolution of the Monroe Doctrine and American foreign policy.

The Doctrine in all its forms was premised on the idea of a European threat to the United States or to the American System. Some of Sexton’s most persuasive evidence examines the gap between perception and reality in Americans’ conceptions of these foreign threats. This problem of perception was ingrained into America’s sense of self from the moment the country declared its independence. Sexton rightfully notes that “American statesmen viewed international affairs through an ideological lens that presupposed rivalry between republics and monarchies” (227) and set the United States perpetually at odds with the powers of Europe (11). Given how frequently the United States bounced back and forth between hostilities with Great Britain and France until the end of the War of 1812, the perception of an almost constant European threat was understandable.

The extended period of peace that followed the war did not diminish American sensitivities, though. A reading of John Quincy Adams’s diary in the month leading up to the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine makes it clear that multiple members of the cabinet (most notably Secretary of War John C. Calhoun) were entirely motivated by their nation’s naval power. Adams’s pragmatic assessment of the largely non-existent European threat won the day and led to the publication of a declaration of American principles that was carefully crafted and moderate in tone, but it did nothing to curb future overreactions. The view of the British abolitionist and colonization threat in Texas and California in the 1830s and 1840s is a prime example of this problem of threat perception at work. The fear that Britain would take action in the West or that that action would dramatically undermine the United States was overstated, but it enabled Polk to assert the Monroe Doctrine to justify a preemptive foreign policy. Sexton stresses that this was not simply a case of overreaction, but that “fixed policy objectives,” in this case the acquisition of California, “dictated [Polk’s] threat perception” (101). Polk wanted California, and any rumblings that Britain might also have its eye on the region signified a grave threat to American interests and security. “It was in this context that Polk invented ‘Monroe’s Doctrine’ in late 1845” (102).

The overstated British threat lingered throughout the nineteenth century, but starting in the 1880s American policymakers “developed a newly heightened perception of threat.” They feared that the ongoing scramble for Africa would “spill over into Latin America and the Caribbean” and also worried that the “rising nations of Latin America” could pose a threat to U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere (176). These concerns persisted in the last quarter of the century even as administrations and policies changed. Sexton does a nice job of highlighting how much U.S. policymakers struggled with negotiating relations with Latin América in this period. By the dawn of the twentieth century the British threat had been replaced by a German one that was not completely unfounded but was also significantly overstated. Teddy Roosevelt’s response to this new threat was a much more proactive foreign policy. As Sexton phrases it, “the cocktail of threat perception and international ambition laid the foundation for the Roosevelt Corollary” (226). Issued in response to this new European threat, the Corollary “was a statement of a self-confident nation concerned more with the great game of imperial rivalry than with the internal dynamics of its once fragile union of states” (239). The nation’s and Roosevelt’s proverbial “big stick” only grew bigger as the nation matured and as its ambitions and conception of foreign threats expanded.

The overstatement of foreign threats from Polk through Roosevelt was often born out of strategic utility. This idea serves as a fitting way to make sense of the place that the Doctrine holds in the history of American foreign policy. John Quincy Adams saw the international situation at the end of 1823 as the ideal time to declare American principles to the world, but he and Monroe did so without clearly stating what the United States would do if those principles were violated. This negative frame enabled subsequent generations of policymakers to uphold the Monroe Doctrine as a vital statement of American principles while simultaneously utilizing it in the ways that best fit their needs. Whether that was as a political tool, as a defense against foreign threats, or as a justification for imperialist action, over the course of the nineteenth century the Doctrine became a one-size-fits-all pronouncement of foreign policy ideals. Sexton is spot-on in his conclusion that “there were as many Monroe Doctrines as there were perspectives on nineteenth-century statecraft” (246). In the final analysis, Jay Sexton’s The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America is an extremely valuable and necessary reconsideration of the Monroe Doctrine and its impact on nineteenth-century America.

Notes:
1. The best and most easily accessible evidence of Adams’s intentions at Panama is Secretary of State Henry Clay’s mission instructions, which can be found in The Papers of Henry Clay, ed. James F. Hopkins, 10 vols. (Lexington, KY, 1959-91), 5:313-44.

Roundtable comment on Jay Sexton’s The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America

William Earl Weeks

Jay Sexton is a young historian who has already produced an impressive body of work on the still-neglected field of nineteenth-century American foreign relations. His current offering, The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America, takes a fresh look at the Monroe Doctrine as a key ideological foundation stone in the construction of an American global empire. As the title suggests, the book posits an organic connection between the American nation and the American Empire, framing them as mutually reinforcing phenomenon that evolved in parallel even as each was fiercely contested. Construction of an expansionist American Empire was both a precondition and raison d’être for the construction of an American nation, and “Monroe’s Doctrine,” as President Polk first termed it, appeared to function as a point of consensus: all Americans, whatever
their section or party, could agree that future foreign intervention and colonization in the Western Hemisphere was a no-no. Over time politicians competed to show who had the greatest fidelity to these bedrock principles, using their presumed stronger adherence to them as a club to beat down political opponents.

Sexton narrates the evolution of Monroe’s principles from a lightly regarded statement in the president’s annual message to Congress to the status of a commandment in the church of American nationalism in a series of artfully constructed chapters, the last of which deals with Teddy Roosevelt’s Corollary of 1904. The author’s strong grasp of the history of the entire century, combined with a clear and confident writing style, makes for an enjoyable and intellectually stimulating read. Each chapter stands on its own as a perceptive analysis of the period with which it deals. The contested nature of the meaning and application of the Doctrine is the unifying thread: “There were as many Monroe Doctrines as there were perspectives on nineteenth-century statecraft” (60). The division between pro-slavery and anti-slavery versions of the Monroe Doctrine was perhaps the most significant political fault line in this regard. Yet in spite of the diversity of opinions on its meaning and application, a solid majority of Americans backed its implicit claim to hemispheric dominance. “Premised upon a curious mixture of imperial ambitions and perceptions of internal vulnerability, the national security of the United States required more than just the safety of its borders—it required an entire hemispheric system conducive to its political system and economic practices” (60).

In this reader’s view, the strongest chapter is on the 1860s, appropriately entitled “Civil Wars.” Sexton places the war in the context of the “dual crises” of the decade in the United States and Mexico, as both nations sought to resolve internal conflicts without precipitating foreign intervention, unsuccessfully in the case of Mexico. He emphasizes that an independent Confederate States of America represented the ultimate threat to the Monroe Doctrine. The Confederacy schemed to ally itself with a European power even as the crisis it had spawned diverted American attention from France’s incursion into Mexico. Although the term “Monroe Doctrine” was never publicly used by the Lincoln administration, which was wary of incurring criticism for failing to apply it stringently enough, by the 1860s the Doctrine had “attained the status of national dogma” and the term and the principles it symbolized had become “entrenched in the American vocabulary, appearing for the first time without the possessive and often as a proper noun with both words capitalized” (123-24). Indeed, the conquest of the South was as much about crushing a would-be hemispheric rival as it was about preserving the Union, an underappreciated fact that places the conflict in its rightful international frame as a foreign war. Lincoln’s and Secretary of State Seward’s vigorous assertion of the Monroe Doctrine in their conduct of the war is no less significant for being implicit rather than formally stated.

Sexton emphasizes “the simultaneity and interdependence of anticolonialism and imperialism” (5), with the British Empire paradoxically serving as a model to be feared as well as emulated. Even as Americans desperately sought to separate themselves ideologically from their former colonial masters, they were creating a new form of empire heavily reliant upon British commerce, investment, and military power. Certainly one of the great strengths of the book is that, somewhat inadvertently, it elaborates the ways in which Anglo-American imperialism after 1823 was a single entity, at least when viewed from a certain perspective. Notwithstanding the high-profile controversies that marked U.S. relations with Great Britain throughout the nineteenth century, an emerging body of scholarship is sketching the outlines of a de facto imperial alliance between the two states. As Bernard Porter has observed, “most serious historians today, on both sides of the Atlantic, acknowledge America’s ‘imperialist’ past, though they might not realize how precisely similar to Britain’s many aspects of it were. In the earlier nineteenth century one can see British and American ‘colonisation’ following the same path almost exactly.” The correctness of this view traditionally has been obscured by the tendency to characterize the American conquest of a large part of the North American continent and the de facto colonization of the hemisphere as “not imperialism.” The Monroe Doctrine in this respect functions as a first principle not subject to debate that enabled the United States to develop a “hands-on” policy for the Western Hemisphere, thereby obscuring its fundamentally imperial aspect. Perhaps what is needed now is an Anglo-American imperial school dedicated to revealing the commonalities between the two expansionist states, which scholars too often see in opposition to one another. In this regard Sexton notes “imperial influence in the nineteenth century was not unidirectional” (246).

I have two quibbles with Sexton’s otherwise fine book. The first concerns his failure to incorporate the concept of union into his analysis of the relation between nation and empire. Union has long been a ubiquitous yet paradoxically near-invisible concept in American history generally and foreign relations history particularly. It is most often taken for granted and seen as synonymous with nation, even as everyone recognizes that the political union created in 1776 did not automatically result in the creation of a nation. That was a much more arduous project; Sexton suggests that it was complete by the end of the nineteenth century, while others might see it as incomplete even today. In any case, it is the concept of a durable, permanent political union that connects the pre-existing expansionist tendency to the soluble collectivity known as the nation. Sexton makes minimal mention of the distinct role of union, as evidenced by the fact that while “nationalism” appears in the index, “union” does not. Indeed, the notion of a permanent union is itself a sort of internal Monroe Doctrine, a mostly unspoken first principle aimed at preventing the security threats of intervention and colonization from occurring domestically. It is in this respect that the dual nature of the Civil War as both an internal rebellion and foreign war is revealed. It was a war to save the Union as well as a war to assert the Monroe Doctrine.

My second quibble concerns the role of British and American military power in the making of the Monroe Doctrine. Sexton, like most historians of the topic, argues “the 1823 message itself accomplished nothing. It was British statecraft, not Monroe’s message, that achieved the immediate objectives of 1823.” He minimizes American military power as a meaningful factor in the hemispheric balance of power: “It was British naval power and diplomacy, combined with the power of the states of Latin America, that prevented the recolonization of territories in the Western Hemisphere in the nineteenth century” (244). He dismisses John Quincy Adams’s later claim that the Doctrine also functioned as a warning to Great Britain not...
to intervene in the hemisphere as “akin to the hitchhiker dictating directions to the driver” (53). While Sexton is echoing the scholarly consensus on this point, I believe it is off the mark. The genius of Adams’s statesmanship (mostly attributable to his talent and long experience as a judge of geo-strategic reality) resided in his correct assessment of the relative power, geographic position, and national interests of the United States vis-à-vis Great Britain and the other European powers. Certainly Adams recognized that in absolute terms, American military power was no match for Great Britain’s. Yet he also understood far sooner and more profoundly than anyone else how dramatically British policy had shifted from supporting the restoration of monarchy during the Napoleonic Era to espousing open markets and liberal capitalism. He had seen this evolution during the course of the post–1815 U.S. rapprochement with the British and alone among the American policy elite understood that a formal alliance would not be needed to get them to pursue their own self-interest in opposing further European intervention in the hemisphere. At the same time Adams, perhaps owing to his long years abroad as a diplomat, also understood that without British support the chance of a major European military intervention in the hemisphere was nil. Napoleon’s disastrous expedition to reconquer Sainte Domingue had proven that the New World could be a graveyard for Old World armies, even ones as capable as that of Napoleonic France. The Holy Allies, who I believe it is fair to say were more sentiment than substance as a unified force, lacked the capacity effectively to project power across the Atlantic Ocean and throughout the extensive landmass of the Americas. Adams made this point most famously when he said that he no more believed that the Holy Allies would “restore the Spanish dominion upon the American continent than that Chimborazo will sink beneath the ocean” (52). That the Polignac Memorandum, in which Canning received a pledge from the other European states not to intervene in Spanish America, was made some months before Monroe issued his pronouncement merely confirms Adams’s insights. Secure in the knowledge of British interests and European impotence, Adams could argue for an independent American policy. The Monroe Doctrine did not need the support of British military power to be effective; it needed only the certainty that British power would not be deployed. This, to me, is a critical distinction. So Sexton is but half right when he concludes that “the course of action pursued by the Monroe administration advanced American interests and principles at minimal cost. The 1823 message shrewdly exposed British power, which Adams hedged would be deployed against the Holy Allies in the case of intervention, without signing up to the restrictive terms of Canning’s offer” (53). Adams did not count on British power being used to stop an invasion. Rather, he counted on the Holy Allies’ inability to mount an invasion without it.

The net result of the Monroe and Adams handiwork was a post–1823 world in which a de facto Anglo-American condominium had been established in the Western Hemisphere. The centuries-long multilateral European imperial competition for dominance in the region had effectively been reduced to two players, Great Britain and the United States, and the latter owed its existence in part to the expansionist impulse. The two states could now engage in what Sexton terms the “collaborative conquest” of Latin America, cooperating and competing as specific circumstances dictated.

Yet I believe Sexton underestimates U.S. military power in evaluating pre–Civil War Anglo-American relations. British military power was great and increasing after 1820, far surpassing the standing armies and navies of the United States. But a one-to-one comparison ignores the huge role a favorable geographic position played for the United States in balancing British power, at least as far south as Panama. By the 1820s, no candid observer could doubt the Americans’ remarkable capacity, whatever the current state of preparedness of their forces, to successively take on the mightiest powers in the world. On the high seas, the American navy had bested the French in the Quasi-War of 1798 and had duelled the Royal Navy to a draw during the War of 1812. On land, the rag-tag American revolutionary forces had bested the British (with French help). Historians tend to view the War of 1812 as a draw, but in doing so they overlook the fact that the last three important engagements of the war—on Lake Champlain, at Baltimore, and at New Orleans—were major American victories. The fact that the victory at New Orleans occurred after the treaty had already been inked and thus in some sense was moot did not lessen its significance as a crushing defeat for a British New World invasion force.

The Anglo-American New World condominium erected in the 1820s did not function in a steady state. Over the course of the century, the United States slowly and steadily gained the upper hand in the relationship as a result of its rising economic and military strength, the advantages of a favorable geography, and the fact that while the Americas were but one part of an evolving British global empire, they constituted the United States’ “backyard,” the core of its foreign policy interest. When push literally threatened to come to shove, as in Oregon, the British consistently calculated that their interests in the region were too peripheral to warrant the risk of a third Anglo-American war. This calculation also prevailed in Texas, as Sexton acknowledges: “For all their interest in an independent, anti-slavery Texas, British statesmen never were prepared to risk provoking the United States through an interventionist policy aimed at that end” (91). By the 1850s the British were backpedaling in Central America as well, in spite of outrageous U.S. provocations such as the 1854 leveling of the village of Greytown by American naval vessels.

Sexton ends his work in the early twentieth century, the century in which the Monroe Doctrine would be applied reflexively and repeatedly. It then functioned as received wisdom for policymakers and critics, its nineteenth-century origins mostly obscured or forgotten. Sexton’s sure hand makes the reader eager to see a second volume dealing with the Doctrine’s twentieth-century evolution, for he has produced what is, in my view, the most perceptive assessment of the Monroe Doctrine’s early decades yet written. A second volume seems a logical step. But my hope is that he continues to apply his considerable skills as a historian to the long-fallow field of nineteenth-century American foreign relations.

Notes:

Author’s Response
Jay Sexton

I would like to thank Jeffrey Malanson, Alan McPherson, and William Earl Weeks for their constructive comments in this exchange, and Andrew Johns for doing such a great job of bringing it to print. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to engage with these colleagues.

I chose to write about the Monroe Doctrine because it provides a fresh prism through which to view nineteenth-century U.S. statecraft. The story of the Doctrine’s evolution is not a linear one. The Doctrine was
a slippery and shape-shifting symbol whose meaning and application varied widely. Invocations of it reflected, as well as produced, domestic political conflict, not to mention diplomatic controversy. Changes in the Doctrine over time reveal not only the imperial march of the United States, but also the variety of perspectives regarding the international role of the American union that can be found in the nineteenth century. Most often invoked in domestic political contexts, the Doctrine forces us to consider together the domestic and foreign aspects of U.S. history, which we scholars are often too quick to treat separately. In the bigger picture, the Doctrine provides a means of thinking about the interrelated, geopolitical processes of nineteenth-century U.S. history: the ongoing struggle to consolidate independence from Britain, the contested and violent process of national consolidation within the union, and imperial expansion and the projection of U.S. power beyond its borders.

As the above paragraph no doubt makes clear, the very characteristics that make the Doctrine interesting are also the ones that make writing a coherent book about it difficult. I am thus very pleased that the reviewers, particularly Malanson and Weeks, are convinced by the overall argument and framework that ties the book together. Malanson’s first paragraph neatly sums it up, more succinctly than I could do here. Most pleasing of all are the comments Weeks makes concerning the British angle that is so central to the book. I am glad that this part of my argument did not fall through the cracks. I could not agree more when Weeks makes the case for thinking about Anglo-American imperialism as a joint phenomenon. This is the direction in which scholars on this side of the Atlantic, in Britain, are moving. Indeed, with “American exceptionalism” now rightly in the dustbin, SHAFR scholars might find it useful to view nineteenth-century America in relation to a global economic and imperial system conditioned by British power.

The central challenge facing nineteenth-century U.S. statesmen was how to consolidate their decentralized union, which existed in what they imagined to be a hostile geopolitical environment. In the book I use the rather old-fashioned word “statecraft” because, unlike “foreign policy,” it looks both inward and outward, as did the “statesmen” of the nineteenth century. American diplomacy, in other words, was inextricably intertwined with the internal politics of the union. The expanding conception of nineteenth-century U.S. national security derived more from perceptions of the internal fragility of the union than from calculations of the power of foreign rivals. The concept of union, in short, is central to my argument—and here I am picking up on the work of a number of scholars, including David Hendrickson, James Lewis, Peter Onuf, and Weeks himself, who cogently examines this theme in his various writings. Perhaps it is the very ubiquity of union that paradoxically explains its absence from the index.

The synergy between the internal dynamics of the union and the construction of foreign policy lies at the heart of the message of 1823, the textual basis for what became the Monroe Doctrine. McPherson has misunderstood my argument on the difference between Calhoun and Adams: I see their disagreement in 1823 as arising out of different conceptions of what most threatened the unity of the union. Calhoun feared that a European intervention in Latin America would trigger an ideological confrontation within the union, Adams, in contrast, feared that the bold foreign policy called for by Calhoun might result in a war with European powers that would necessitate the concentration of federal power to such an extent that it could trigger a 1776-style, anti-imperial rebellion from within the union. The story of the drafting of the 1823 message is complex, not least because it was wrapped up with the issue of a potential alliance with the hated British, as Weeks rightly emphasizes. Drafting the 1823 message required compromise between the various perspectives offered by cabinet members. And the final draft of the message did reveal that the Monroe team postponed a decision on two key issues: first, what the United States would do if the Holy Allies ignored Monroe and intervened in Latin America; and, second, the administration’s plans for Texas and Cuba, two territories coveted by expansionists like Adams. These issues were discussed at length in November 1823, but the cabinet did not come to a resolution on them and avoided explicit discussion of them in the final draft of the 1823 message. Monroe’s 1823 message thus can be said to have sidestepped these two issues.

One of the challenges in writing a history of the Monroe Doctrine is constructing a narrative of an ever-changing symbol that is difficult to pin down. Furthermore, as Malanson and McPherson rightly point out, there were times—particularly in the 1830s—when Americans barely mentioned the Doctrine (or, the 1823 message, as it then would have been called). Dexter Perkins, who wrote a masterful trilogy on the Doctrine in the early twentieth century, dealt with this problem, more or less, by fast-forwarding through the drought years to arrive at the next episode in which the Doctrine appeared. I chose the alternative of searching for connections in U.S. thought and policy across time, for what is most important in my view is not the narrowly defined history of the Doctrine, but the larger attitudes and policies Americans attached to it.

Thus, the book briefly examines Andrew Jackson’s domestic, foreign, and Indian policies as a means of setting the stage for James K. Polk, whose creation of “Monroe’s doctrine” in 1845 owed more to Old Hickory than it did to Monroe. McPherson offers a critical view of the section on Jackson, but he flattens the argument that is offered in the book. There are three reasons Jackson did not speak of or invoke the 1823 message: first, it was then a symbol associated with his political enemies Adams and Clay; second, the Jackson administration saw commercial benefit in British control of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands; and, third, the policies associated with the 1823 message after the Panama Congress (namely, hemispheric cooperation) had little appeal to Jackson, whose agenda was the unilateral pursuit of North American hegemony.

Weeks raises an important point concerning the significance of U.S. military power in the pre-1861 era. I am keen to read more from him in the future on this issue. Though the book does not emphasize British perceptions of U.S. military power, it certainly acknowledges that Britain’s gradual retreat from North and Central America owed much to the lessons of 1776 and 1812. There was little enthusiasm in Britain for pursuing costly policies that had little chance of containing American expansion. Fighting the Americans, a Victorian once said, would be like breaking your neighbor’s windows with gold coins. It was better for the British to outsource the job of imperial expansion in North America and reap the economic benefits of an expanding United States without incurring the overhead costs of imperial wars and administration.

Yet Britain’s gradual retreat from North America was not simply a reaction to U.S. military power but also reflected innovations in imperial thought and strategy.
One way to illustrate this point is to place Britain’s U.S. policy in a broader context. A comparable process was at work, for example, in Britain’s dealings with Argentina. The failed expeditions to colonize Río de la Plata in 1806–7 influenced Britain’s Latin American policy in much the same way the War of 1812 affected its U.S. policy. The high costs and low rewards of a policy of all-out conquest highlighted the advantages of a program of “informal imperialism” involving commercial expansion and collaboration with local elites. This, of course, is the famous “informal if possible, formal if necessary” argument put forth by Robinson and Gallagher. The comparison with Argentine policy, however, gives some grist to Weeks’ mill: if the British felt able to seize the Malvinas/Falklands from Buenos Aires, they certainly did not feel able to wrest Texas away from the Americans a decade later. Again, I would agree that the potential military power of the United States—combined with the unpopularity of a costly third American war at home in Britain—was on the minds of British policymakers. But I would suggest that the issue of military power be incorporated into a broader interpretation of the evolution of British imperial strategy in the Americas in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

McPherson suggests that The Monroe Doctrine is of more value to those interested in U.S. foreign relations in general than to experts of U.S.–Latin American relations. He wants more on the hypocrisy of U.S. statesmen. This issue, however, is explicitly discussed in several places in the book. But I agree with the bigger point that many more stories of Latin American resistance to the United States remain to be examined, as do a surprising number of counter-episodes in which mid-nineteenth-century Latin American liberals such as Sarmiento and Romero embraced what they viewed as the enlightened potential of the Monroe Doctrine. Like the tangle of Anglophobia/Anglophilia in nineteenth-century U.S. politics, images of the United States in Latin America ran the gamut from virulent Yankeephobia to a liberal embrace of North American institutions.

If hemispheric responses to U.S. power are not the central theme of the book, a sub-theme running through it concerns how Latin Americans became increasingly adept at appropriating the Monroe Doctrine and exploiting Yankee insecurities in order to achieve their own objectives. One common strategy was to seek U.S. assistance during violations of the 1823 message, as Mexican liberals sought to do during the 1860s. In other instances, such as Yucatan in the 1840s, Latin American statesmen overstated the European threat or even invited foreign intervention as a means of coaxing the United States into certain actions. Toward the end of the century, Latin Americans such as Luis María Drago re-imagined the Monroe Doctrine as a symbol of non-intervention and hemispheric cooperation to advance an internationalist and legalistic agenda. The book argues that Latin Americans played a crucial role in the formation of the Monroe Doctrine.

A final challenge in writing about the Doctrine is the imperative of avoiding the anachronism that so easily slips into studies of nineteenth-century America. One must not project the twentieth-century Monroe Doctrine back into the nineteenth century. The factious nineteenth-century union was not the singular nation of later times; nor was the United States the hegemonic global power that it would become. The “Monroe Doctrine” did not even exist until the mid-nineteenth century, and even then it could not be said to have determined U.S. policy. Nor would it have been recognized by most Latin Americans until the final decades of the nineteenth century. If we set out only to find the antecedents to twentieth-century anti-Americanism, we risk flattening the range of responses to the Doctrine that can be found in Latin America, Europe, and the wider world. In short, we must bear in mind that the Doctrine meant different things in the nineteenth-century world than in the subsequent “American century.”

The Monroe Doctrine—and I am speaking of it now as the versatile political symbol imagined in the United States—helps us locate the origins of American imperialism in the internal dynamics and political culture of the nineteenth-century union. The book seeks to explain how an anticolonial symbol became the script for imperial expansion. The history of the Doctrine illuminates the internal origins of U.S. imperialism by casting light on a domestic political system and culture that, though anti-imperial in Anglophobic and anti-monarchical respects, nonetheless incubated a powerful nationalism that produced expansionist and imperialist foreign policies. The political scramble to claim the nationalist Monroe Doctrine at home narrowed the policy options available to statesmen in Washington as the nineteenth century progressed. The story of the rise of American imperialism in this period, of course, is also geopolitical: the ongoing competition against the British, combined with the union-building project at home, led U.S. statesmen to pursue outward-looking and assertive policies. This is the synergy between anticolonialism and imperialism that William Appleman Williams so rightly pointed to long ago.

The Monroe Doctrine, in short, helps us see nineteenth-century U.S. statecraft and imperialism in new ways. It tells us a story that is different from (although not incompatible with) the story that emerges when we look at Manifest Destiny, which highlights the racial and ideological origins of U.S. imperialism, or the Open Door, which illuminates its economic roots. The Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, the Open Door . . . all that remains to be discussed is the Farewell Address, which Malanson brings up. But I will leave that one to him, as tracing it over time would no doubt tell a different story still.

Notes:
2. Pages 72, 178, and 191 examine why Latin Americans saw “hypocrisy” in the words and actions of the United States. The theme is further explored elsewhere, albeit without using the specific word “hypocrisy.”
3. Sarmiento and Romero are examined in Chapter 4. For Latin American resistance to U.S. invocations of the Monroe Doctrine, see pp. 69-73, 110-11, 170, 189-97, 209, 228, 235-7, 247.
4. My view here is shaped by the “Images of America” project at University College London, particularly the work of Nicola Miller and Natalia Bas.