

The Monroe Doctrine: A Close Reading

Each of the following sections of the Monroe Doctrine refers to a specific subject.

Section 1

At the proposal of the Russian Imperial Government, made through the minister of the Emperor residing here, a full power and instructions have been transmitted to the minister of the United States at St. Petersburg to arrange by amicable negotiation the respective rights and interests of the two nations on the northwest coast of this continent. A similar proposal has been made by His Imperial Majesty to the Government of Great Britain, which has likewise been acceded to. The Government of the United States has been desirous by this friendly proceeding of manifesting the great value which they have invariably attached to the friendship of the Emperor and their solicitude to cultivate the best understanding with his Government. In the discussions to which this interest has given rise and in the arrangements by which they may terminate the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers....

Section 2

It was stated at the commencement of the last session that a great effort was then making in Spain and Portugal to improve the condition of the people of those countries, and that it appeared to be conducted with extraordinary moderation. It need scarcely be remarked that the results have been so far very different from what was then anticipated. Of events in that quarter of the globe, with which we have so much intercourse and from which we derive our origin, we have always been anxious and interested spectators. The citizens of the United States cherish sentiments the most friendly in favor of the liberty and happiness of their fellow-men on that side of the Atlantic. In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy to do so.

Section 3

It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense.

Section 4

With the movements in this hemisphere we are of necessity more immediately connected, and by causes which must be obvious to all enlightened and impartial observers. The political system of the allied powers is essentially different in this respect from that of America. Governments; and to the defense of our own, which has been achieved by the loss of so much blood and treasure, and matured by the wisdom of their most enlightened citizens, and under which we have enjoyed unexampled felicity, this whole nation is devoted. We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers

to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.

Section 5

With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintain it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States. In the war between those new Governments and Spain we declared our neutrality at the time of their recognition, and to this we have adhered, and shall continue to adhere, provided no change shall occur which, in the judgment of the competent authorities of this Government, shall make a corresponding change on the part of the United States indispensable to their security.

Section 6

The late events in Spain and Portugal (events referred to in the next sentence) shew (show) that Europe is still unsettled. Of this important fact no stronger proof can be adduced than that the allied powers (the so-called "Holy Alliance" of Russia, Prussia, and Austria) should have thought it proper, on any principle satisfactory to themselves, to have interposed by force in the internal concerns of Spain. To what extent such interposition may be carried, on the same principle, is a question in which all independent powers whose governments differ from theirs are interested, even those most remote, and surely none of them more so than the United States.

Section 7

Our policy in regard to Europe, which was adopted at an early stage of the wars which have so long agitated that quarter of the globe, nevertheless remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the government de facto as the legitimate government for us; to cultivate friendly relations with it, and to preserve those relations by a frank, firm, and manly policy, meeting in all instances the just claims of every power, submitting to injuries from none. But in regard to those continents circumstances are eminently and conspicuously different.

Section 8

It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can anyone believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition in any form with indifference. If we look to the comparative strength and resources of Spain and those new Governments, and their distance from each other, it must be obvious that she can never subdue them. It is still the true policy of the United States to leave the parties to themselves, in hope that other powers will pursue the same course.

James Monroe's 2nd Inaugural Speech

Panic of 1819

Second Inaugural Address Washington, March 5, 1821

"Under the present depression of prices, affecting all the productions of the country and every branch of industry, proceeding from causes explained on a former occasion, the revenue has considerably diminished, the effect of which has been to compel Congress either to abandon these great measures of defense or to resort to loans or internal taxes to supply the deficiency. On the presumption that this depression and the deficiency in the revenue arising from it would be temporary, loans were authorized for the demands of the last and present year.

"Anxious to relieve my fellow-citizens in 1817 from every burthen which could be dispensed with, and the State of the Treasury permitting it, I recommended the repeal of the internal taxes, knowing that such relief was then peculiarly necessary in consequence of the great exertions made in the late war. I made that recommendation under a pledge that should the public exigencies require a recurrence to them at any time while I remained in this trust, I would with equal promptitude perform the duty which would then be alike incumbent on me.

"By the experiment now making it will be seen by the next session of Congress whether the revenue shall have been so augmented as to be adequate to all these necessary purposes. Should the deficiency still continue, and especially should it be probable that it would be permanent, the course to be pursued appears to me to be obvious. I am satisfied that under certain circumstances loans may be resorted to with great advantage. I am equally well satisfied as a general rule, that the demands of the current year, especially in time of peace, should be provided for by the revenue of that year."

Missouri Compromise Primary Source Documents

Andrew Jackson Papers

- John Henry Eaton to Andrew Jackson, March 11, 1820, "The President says he has recvd your letter. He said he wanted to have with me some conversation in relation to it, but it being a levee evening and much crowded no oppertunity was then had. He desired me to say to you, that he had been so taken up with the deep agitations here the (missouri bill), that he did not [have] time but that he would shortly write to you. The agitation was indeed great I assure you—dissolution of the Union had become quite a fimiliar subject. By the compromise however restricting slavery north of 36½ degrees we ended this unpleasant question. Of this the Southern people are complaining, but they ought not, for it has preserved peace dissipated angry feelings, and dispelled appearances which seemed dark and horrible and threat[en]ing to the interest and harmony of the nation. The constitution has not been surrendered by this peace offering, for it only applies while a territory when it is admitted congress have the power and right to legislate, and not when they shall become States" [\[Transcription\]](#)
- John Caldwell Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, June 1, 1820, "I perceive you have strong foreboding as to our future policy. The discussion on the Missouri question has undoubtedly contributed to weaken in some degree the attachment of our southern and western people to the Union; but the agitators of that question have, in my opinion, not only completely failed; but have destroyed to a great extent their capacity for future mischief. Should Missouri be admitted at the next session, as I think she will without difficulty, the evil effects of the discussion must gradually subside."

James Madison Papers

- James Madison to Robert Walsh, November 27, 1819. Missouri Controversy, "On the whole, the Missouri question, as a constitutional one, amounts to the question whether the condition proposed to be annexed to the admission of Missouri would or would not be void in itself, or become void the moment the territory should enter as a State within the pale of the Constitution. And as a question of expediency & humanity, it depends essentially on the probable influence of such restrictions on the quantity & duration of slavery, and on the general condition of slaves in the U. S." [\[Transcription\]](#) ²⁸
- James Madison to James Monroe, February 10, 1820, "It appears to me as it does to you, that a coupling of Missouri with Maine, in order to force the entrance of the former thro' the door voluntarily opened to the latter is, to say the least, a very doubtful policy..." [\[Transcription\]](#)
- James Madison to James Monroe, February 23, 1820, "The pinch of the difficulty in the case stated seems to be in the words "forever," coupled with the interdict relating to the Territory N. of L 36° 30'. If the necessary import of these words be that they are to operate as a condition on future States admitted into the Union, and as a restriction on them after admission, they seem to encounter indirectly the argts. which prevailed in the Senate for an unconditional admission of Missouri."

American System Source Analysis

"In defense of the American System" Henry Clay 1832

I have now to perform the more pleasing task of exhibiting an imperfect sketch of the existing state of the unparalleled prosperity of the country. On a general survey, we behold cultivation extended, the arts flourishing, the face of the country improved, our people fully and profitably employed, and the public countenance exhibiting tranquility, contentment, and happiness. And, if we descend into particulars, we have the agreeable contemplation of a people out of debt; land rising slowly in value, but in a secure and salutary degree; a ready, though not extravagant market for all the surplus productions of our industry; innumerable flocks and herds browsing and gamboling on ten thousand hills and plains, covered with rich and verdant grasses; our cities expanded, and whole villages springing up, as it were, by enchantment; our exports and imports increased and increasing; our tonnage, foreign and coastwise, swelling and fully occupied; the rivers of our interior
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This transformation of the condition of the country from gloom and distress to brightness and prosperity, has been mainly the work of American legislation, fostering American industry, instead of allowing it to be controlled by foreign legislation, cherishing foreign industry.

This passage is from Kentucky Senator Henry Clay's Senate speech, "In Defense of the American System," from February 1832. Clay's American System called for higher tariffs to protect American industry, a central bank to control the money supply, and government support for public projects, such as canals, roads, and railroads. This portion of the speech concerns Clay's tariff policies. "[Now, eight years after the tariff of 1824], we behold cultivation extended, the arts flourishing, the face of the country improved, our people fully and profitably employed . . . our cities expanded, and whole villages springing up. . . ; our exports and imports increased and increasing; our tonnage, foreign and coastwise, swelling and fully occupied. . . This transformation of the condition of the country from gloom and distress to brightness and prosperity, has been mainly the work of American legislation, fostering American industry, instead of allowing it to be controlled by foreign legislation."

... Strip this American system of all its sophistries, and what is it, but a fraudulent partnership between a portion of our politicians and capitalists, to

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States, whose products for exportation will soon reach a hundred million of dollars, will not suffer their markets abroad to be restricted or closed by our own laws. The Constitution prohibits our taxing exports; and restrictions on imports, which have the same effect, will not long be respected where our surplus products are rapidly increasing.

This article is from a May 1844 issue of *The United States Democratic Review*, a conservative 19th-century magazine that supported small government and minimal intervention by the federal government. The article is highly critical of Henry Clay's American System, particularly its support of higher tariffs.

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