

Essay II “No. 2. Essay on the Revolution in So. America”¹

A portion of the Spanish Dominions more immediately interesting to the U. S. and not less critically situated than Mexico is the Island of Cuba. The consequences of the treaty of guarantee apply to this Island with even more propriety than any other Spanish Colony. Its great intrinsic & relative value render it an object of peculiar Solicitude to France and England as well as Spain. It may be occupied by an expedition from France; it may be the object of the great armament in the Scheldt.² To prevent which and the possibility of a popular insurrection it may be thought expedient by the Regency that the British should occupy it. Either contingency is equally fatal to us. But to enable my countrymen to estimate how deeply their interests are involved in the fate of Cuba it will be necessary to enter into some detail on the Physical and relative importance of this Valuable Island.

The Island of Cuba covers a space of about seven hundred miles in length and ninety miles in breadth, between the peninsulas of Florida and Yucatan; it is estimated to contain 30,215,266 acres of Cultivable lands of unparalleled fertility, about 3,333,000 acres of which are in a state of improvement. It possesses a great number of Commodious bays and harbors fit for the reception of all Kinds of shipping, among others Havana on the north side and Santiago de Cuba on the south side are impregnablely fortified and possess all the natural advantages requisite for the establishment of great naval depôts. The forests of the Island furnish an unlimited supply of as fine timber for naval construction as any in the world: no timber has been allowed to be felled without Special permission from the Marine department, as in all grants of land the timber proper for naval construction has ever been reserved to the Crown. From the peculiar situation of this Island it completely commands the navigation of the Mexican Gulph and the Bahama passages. The transit from the northern ports to any port in the Gulph of Mexico, to the Mississippi, to W. and E. Florida, to the coasts of Georgia and So Carolina, is always sure; and in common weather from

three to ten days. From the southern ports to Jamaica or any part of the Main So. of Yucatan the transit is equally easy & Certain.

Hence Cuba has with strict propriety obtained the expressive appellation of Key to the Spanish continental provinces. The Climate is generally very healthy: in Havana and in Santiago de Cuba the yellow fever prevails in the hot months but it is probably owing in a great measure to those cities being too compactly built; to their being surrounded by high walls and fortresses, and also to their very defective police. The mercury never rises above 90° and the nights are allways delightfully cool and refreshing. From the best authorities Cuba contains about 600,000 inhabitants--100,000 of which are black and 110,000 are contained in Havana and its neighbouring Villages. The natives are remarkable for the robustness and vigor of their constitutions; they are very temperate, are excellent horsemen, and seem to possess the qualities requisite to form good citizens and soldiers. Innumerable herds of cattle, horses, mules and swine are bred in the interior, and might be exported with advantage if that branch of trade were permitted & encouraged: of these the horses and mules are remarkable for their indefatigable activity. By the returns of the custom house of Havana in 1810 10,000,000 lbs of Coffee and 746,608 quintals of sugar were exported in that year, and in the same their revenues amounted to 3,200,000 dollars three fourths of which were derived from import duties. Exportation is free. In the present state of things Cuba depends on the U. S. for flour and ordinary lumber: the consumption of the former has since the year of the general embargo been reduced from 90,000 to 60,000 barrils. But if this Island should fall into the hands of a power who had an object in rendering it independent of its neighbors, by giving a proper stimulus to industry & encouraging immigration, not only flour but all the necessaries of life equal to its own consumption might be produced without great prejudice to its more precious branches of agriculture.

It follows from the forgoing that the Island of Cuba possesses resources for agriculture and commerce unequalled by any portion of the globe of the same extent, that we are acquainted with,

and which if in the hands of England or France, and turned to the terrible purposes of war, might render them masters of the American coasts from Charlestown to Darien. Havana would become a great naval station, that would give them the complete command of those seas; not a boat could leave the Mississippi and enter it without their License. It would also be the headquarters of a moveable army, allways ready to be transported to any point required, to abet rebellion or depredate on our maritime settlements. Their influence over New Spain would also then enable them to controul their policy, and wrest from us our late acquisitions of Louisiana and Florida. Even a division of our Union might then be affected and our prospects of future happiness and political grandeur blasted in the blossom. I will now endeavor to reverse the picture, and show what would be the influence of Cuba in our hands, or under our immediate controul. The Maritime Superiority of our ennemy would be parylized; Mexico would be safe; our coasts would be effectually secured from blockade or depredation, and the trade of our ennemy in those seas at our mercy: England or indeed any power could not then make war on us with any prospect of advantage: and finally our Union with all its important consequences would be secured forever.

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² The (Baltimore) *Weekly Register*, Oct. 19, 26, 1811, printed reports on Napoleon's efforts to rebuild the French navy at Antwerp since the Battle of Trafalgar, including the prediction that France would shortly put 150 ships of the line to sea; see Richard Glover, "The French Fleet, 1807-1814: Britain's Problem; and Madison's Opportunity," *Journal of Modern History*, 39 (1967), 233-52.