

Essay VI [untitled]¹

Supposing Mexico to have achieved her independence, we may without risk of error give to her the following boundaries: for they are those of Nature. On the north and east the territories of the United States formerly the province of Louisiana; on the east and south the bays of Mexico, of Honduras, of Nicaragua, and the Isthmus of Darien; and on the west the Pacific Ocean. That Empire will then be composed of the Vice Royalty of New Spain proper; of the internal provinces; of Yucatan; of Guatamala; and of California: and will contain between seven and eight million of souls.

Those countries abound with every species of raw material; they will consume annually an immense amount of manufactures; and will consequently give birth to, and maintain an extensive and valuable commerce. Yet nature seems to have denied them the means of becoming a maritime power of any importance: it appears that they can have no well founded motive for turning their attention to maritime pursuits. Their harbors on either ocean are not good and are all in unhealthy situations and torrid climates; they have no fisheries, and a very little coasting trade, consequently few Seamen. Their abundant mines, and productive soil must for ages divert their attention from the Ocean, indeed it does not appear possible that they can ever become respectable on that element. It is therefore probable that they will at least for the present not think of fostering a national navigation. It has been a question with great Statesmen whether any nation ought in good policy to do so: if such an argument is at all founded, it applies in a peculiar manner to Mexico. It therefore follows that she will grant to foreign flags the utmost liberty on all her coasts, which will offer to the maritime commerce of the United States the most inexhaustable means of extension, by carrying her raw materials to the markets of Asia, and of Europe, and furnishing her with the necessary Supplies of our own and the manufactures of those countries. These advantages we shall of course on the Atlantic coasts of Mexico divide with the maritime powers of Europe; but in the Pacific Ocean we may be without a rival.

The cottons of our Southern States & territories and the lead of the Mississippi may be exported to China, and the proceeds returned in Manufactures to New Spain with great benefit. The Columbia river belongs to the United States by every right of property ever alledged in such cases; we discovered it, we explored it, and by our old charters, and the purchase of Louisiana, we prevent the claims of any other government: nothing but actual possession is required to make our right a perfect one. Already have our enterprizing citizens begun a settlement at the mouth of that river;² its Shores and those of the Missouri are becoming familiar to us, and it is ascertained that the communication between the headwaters of those great rivers is not only practicable but easy: that settlement will consequently soon rise to an importance that will require the attention and protecting care of the government, when the establishment of a garrison and customs house at the mouth of the Columbia will become Necessary. This by giving a home and a resting place to our enterprizing navigators would be an important step towards obtaining the maritime trade of those immense Countries; but other considerations equally important are by the events of the times offered to our Acceptance as parts of the plan.

The Russian settlements of the N.W. coast of America have been silently progressing for a series of years: under the reign of the wise Catherine they received great encouragement. Their principal factory is on the Island of Kodiak; they have another important one at Onalaski,³ and have also extended their settlements as far down as the coast as Cooks river. The court of Madrid became alarmed at their progress and founded the Missions and garrisons of Upper California as a barrier against their enterprizes. By a subsequent treaty Prince Williams Sound was fixed on as the boundary between the two nations.⁴ In the years 1804 or 1805 two ships were sent from St. Petersburg to visit these American settlements, the first of that nation that ever went there direct from Europe, and there is every reason to believe that if Russia should be able to clear herself from her European embarrassments She will aim at maritime importance in the pacific Ocean through her settlements

on the N. W. coast of America. California cannot have escaped her attention, it may already have become a condition in a treaty with the government of Cadiz;⁵ at all events on the breaking up of the Spanish Monarchy in America it seems probable that Russia will either by treaty or by force seek to possess herself of that Obscure, but fertile and valuable territory, which under a wise and active administration, would give her the means of acquiring a decided maritime preponderance on that Ocean, and of obtaining the coasting trade from California to Chili.

The coast of California will be found accurately described in an Article published in the 3d. Volume of the American Register.⁶ Lower California or the peninsula proper up to the port of San Diego in about the 32o of north latitude is nearly uninhabitable from its extreme Sterility and want of water; it produces nothing usefull but salt, except the Silver mines of some Account at the points, and the pearl fishery which is not important. The coast above to the river San Francisco in about the 40o of Lattitude, is of extraordinary fertility, tolerably well watered, and possesses several good harbors; it is also well stocked with choice breeds of Horses, horned cattle, Sheep, goats, and hogs; it is settled by from 3000 to 5000 Spanish inhabitants besides Indians, and has a force of about 500 men distributed in four posts and many missions: All the fruits and grains of Europe have been introduced there and produce abundantly: wine is made in all the Missions.

Upper California in all its relations with Mexico must be considered as a distant colony; it is separate from the nearest Mexican settlements by an immense tract of country, uninhabited except by nations of barbarous Indians, which in the common course of things cannot be joined to it, by civilization and settlement for many years to come: as yet there has been no communication between those countries but by sea and from the winds blowing constantly from the N.W. The shortest passages from the nearest Mexican port are rarely under 40 days. Therefore the only solicitude that Mexico can feel respecting California will be that it should not fall into possession of one of the great maritime powers of Europe: of the U. S. the same jealousy would not be entertained, our

interests in all our foreign relations must be nearly the same as theirs will be, and she ought to regard our establishments and maritime power on the pacific Ocean with pleasure, as a sure guarantie against the ambition of Europe. Therefore in the aforementioned Contingency it seems that the cession of California to the U. S. might be obtained without difficulty from Mexico, to which the communication would be sure, and in time easy through the Columbia & Missouri. When by the fisheries, and coasting trade of that extensive coast; the trade to Asia, and the fur trade of the N.W. Coast, an important nursery for Seamen would be formed; we should be able completely to develop the resources of the western portion of our Empire; to lay a foundation for a commerce on that ocean, which at no distant day may become equal to that we enjoy on the Atlantic; and give us a preponderance there that no European power could ever shake.

No notice has been taken of either England or France in the foregoing from a belief that their ambition and resources are so well known as to make it quite unnecessary.

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² Shaler referred to Astoria, established by John Jacob Astor in 1811; see James P. Ronda, *Astoria and Empire* (Lincoln, Neb., 1990), 37-64, 87-115.

³ Unalaska Island, Alaska.

⁴ According to Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast*, 2 vols. (New York, [1882]), 2:319, "There was never any definite settlement of boundaries between Spain and Russia. The former claimed that her possessions extended to Prince William Sound, and the latter at times extended her claims to the Columbia; but the respective claims were not zealously urged." After 1750, Spanish officials worried about Russian designs in the Pacific, and in 1768 José de Galvez planned the reorganization of the Interior Provinces of Mexico, including the establishment of mission stations in Alta California. These measures were followed by expeditions against Russian settlements in Alaska, but in 1789 Catherine II assured Madrid that she had told "expeditionaries from Kamchatka not to establish themselves at any point belonging to another power." In 1801, Russia and Spain agreed "to re-establish the commercial relations between the two countries, on the footing in which they were before the war, as far as possible." See also Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven, 1973), 41-84, 114-36, 196, 271-89, 303-21, 427-32, and "Treaty of Peace between the French Republic and the Emperor of all the Russias," *State Papers, Annual Register . . . for the Year 1801* (London, 1802), 291-92.

⁵ In a treaty signed in July 1812, Tsar Alexander I recognized the Spanish regency and made an alliance to promote trade and the prosecution of the war against France. The treaty did not contain any article pertaining to California; see Russell H. Bartley, *Imperial Russia and the Struggle for Latin American Independence, 1808-1828* (Austin, Tex., 1978), 98-101. See note 26 above.

⁶ See note 26 above.