

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

The banana family of nations

July 30, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Pan-Americanism was once scheduled to be the Next Big Thing in a way that's difficult to appreciate now. There's NAFTA and Mexican coolies, of course, but not quite any amero or Greater American Zollverein. Starting from James Blaine's less-than-successful conference in 1890 extending to the Montevideo Convention of 1933 with its daft boilerplate about equality of states, there was a real peak during WWI when people such as Secretary of State Robert Lansing were on board with it. You had such strange events as the "Pan-American Scientific Congress" (several of them) that though now flushed down the memory hole, were covered by, of all places, the Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry with such glowing words (<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/ie50080a003>) as "Linked to us by propinquity, a common origin and political destiny, Pan-Americanism is not a visionary dream, but is purposed with immediate and practicable results fraught with untold advantages to the entire world through the increase in culture and commerce among the participating countries of this new world group of nations." (1915)

Lansing gave a keynote (<https://archive.org/stream/panamericanism00lans#page/n1/mode/2up>) to that congress, which in no ambiguous terms stated:

Pan-Americanism is an expression of the idea of internationalism. America has become the guardian of that idea, which will in the end rule the world. Pan-Americanism is the most advanced as well as the most practical form of that idea. It has been made possible because of our geographical isolation, of our similar political institutions, and of our common conception of human rights. Since the European war began other factors have strengthened this natural bond and given impulse to the movement. Never before have our people so fully realized the significance of the words, "Peace" and "Fraternity." Never have the need and benefit of international cooperation in every form of human activity been so evident as they are to-day.

[...]

In this great movement this congress will, I believe, play an exalted part. You, gentlemen, represent powerful intellectual forces in your respective countries. Together you represent the enlightened thought of the continent. The policy of Pan-Americanism is practical. The Pan-American spirit is ideal. It finds its source and being in the minds of thinking men. It is the offspring of the best, the noblest conception of international obligation.

With all earnestness, therefore, I commend to you, gentlemen, the thought of the American Republics, twenty-one sovereign and independent nations, bound together by faith and justice, and firmly cemented by a sympathy which knows no superior and no inferior, but which recognizes only equality and fraternity.

Jacobinism was retconned as the American Way. Well, "retcon" is quite debated. The Monroe Doctrine, traditionally regarded as a non-interventionist measure, was recast by Lansing, more accurately too I'd suspect, as a concession to Latin American nationalism and as a pro-republic-building measure.

Lansing also speaks of the "American Family of Nations," encompassing a common fictive kinship of North and South America:

During this later time, when the American nations have come into a realization of their nationality and are fully conscious of the responsibilities and privileges which are theirs as sovereign and independent States, there has grown up a feeling that the Republics of this hemisphere constitute a group separate and apart from the other nations of the world, a group which is united by common ideals and common aspirations. I believe that this feeling is general throughout North and South America, and that year by year it has increased until it has become a potent influence over our political and commercial intercourse. It is the same feeling which, founded on sympathy and mutual interest, exists among the members of a family. It is the tie which draws together the twenty-one Republics and makes of them the American Family of Nations.

This feeling, vague at first, has become to-day a definite and certain force. We term it the "Pan-American spirit," from which springs the international policy of Pan-Americanism. It is that policy which is responsible for this great gathering of distinguished men, who represent the best and most advanced thought of the Americas. *It is a policy which this Government has unhesitatingly adopted and which it will do all in its power to foster and promote.*

I presume this is something of a failure case borne out of the simultaneous desire of Americans to regard themselves as simply Europeans (except better in every way) and as something unique altogether. Pan-Americanism can thus work when you need allies against the continent, though there was still the awareness that it can't all be goodwill, and you do need to harvest some bananas out of the whole thing — but this ounce of realism has since been lost.

Dogmatic Anglophiles will hate it regardless, but there is little they can do: all of this has already been decided for them far before they were born.

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