

James Monroe: Consul to Rio, 1863-1869

by

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To the women of my family—their examples of faith,
love, and strength have been influential beyond reckoning.

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ABSTRACT

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James Monroe, who had been both an Oberlin College professor and President *pro tempore* of the Ohio Senate, joined the United States diplomatic corps at one of the most turbulent times in his country's history. As a representative of the Union government during the Civil War, he performed duties which far exceeded in scope and complexity those tasks required of a peacetime diplomat. From his post in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Monroe helped to delay Confederate privateers until Union vessels could intercept them. He cooperated closely with naval officers of the South Atlantic Squadron to monitor and interfere with Confederate commercial shipping activity. In the war's aftermath, he arranged for the repatriation of several hundred Confederates who had emigrated in hopes of re-creating their slaveholding culture in Brazil.

Monroe's service in Brazil was exemplary. He performed his duties with discretion and distinction, doing much to lessen the tension and suspiciousness which had marred diplomatic relations between the countries. Unlike his superior, Minister James Watson Webb, Monroe genuinely liked and respected his hosts; he struggled to control the damage done by Webb's insensitive behavior.

His policy of supporting Webb's intentions, if not their results, satisfied both Brazilians and Americans.

In an era when consular appointments were used as rewards for one's political supporters with little regard as to the fitness of the appointee, Monroe was an uncommonly skilled diplomat. His honesty, dedication to duty, and understanding of the intricacies of diplomacy placed him among the most highly respected United States consular officials of his time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Contemplating a work of this scope requires only self-belief, but finishing it requires that there be people willing to come to one's aid when that self-belief flags. It is my pleasure to acknowledge, with gratitude, their various contributions to the successful completion of this thesis.

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Finally, and most importantly, thanks to my family, who have helped me through not only this project, but so many others before. I value their love, support, and understanding more than words can express.

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Chapter I

Reflections on United States-Brazilian Relations,
1850 - 1863

I

It had been a long voyage. After six weeks on rough winter seas, the steamer *North American* lay in Rio de Janeiro harbor. Although New York to Rio was a regular route for the ship, the captain had never before seen the Atlantic whipped into such a fury as it had been during January, 1863. It had been all he could do to keep the craft from breaking apart. As the passengers huddled below the deck and prayed, he and the crew had spent a few terrible nights cursing the storm which tossed the ship like a toy.¹ Now that he was safely in harbor, he could sleep soundly and perhaps dream of the enjoyment to be found with the exotic beauties of Rio.

One of his passengers, however, was passing a restless night. James Monroe of Oberlin, Ohio, was soon to be sworn in as a consular officer for the city of Rio de Janeiro. With the rising of the sun, he would take up the delicate duties of a diplomat. For a man of Monroe's staunch religious convictions, the swearing of an oath was no small thing. It required that he seriously contemplate the job he was to undertake and the vow he was to offer which bound him to this duty.

As he tossed in his bunk, he thought of the difficulties inherent in this task, especially now when the United States was engaged in a civil war. The United States' foreign policy, like its domestic affairs, seemed to be at a cross-roads. It had fallen to him to play a part in the formation of a great empire or to bear witness to the decline of a promising dream. He reflected, as he frequently had during the long and perilous journey, on the recent history of the country which he was to represent and its relations to his host country, Brazil.

The policies which he would be expected to further had been greatly influenced by the domestic attitudes and political climate of the previous decade.

During that time, the slavery issue in the United States was inextricably linked to issues of expansion and political sovereignty. At a time when apolitical calmness, sound judgment, and principle were most needed, the United States government had been peopled with short-sighted and self-interested men who put regional concerns before national good. As a consequence of this narrow inward focus, American diplomatic initiatives had been tinged with haughtiness, greed, and threats to other nations' economic and political well-being.

During the 1850s, a series of seriously ailing or incompetent men acted as Secretary of State. President Millard Fillmore appointed Daniel Webster to the post, yet Webster's health left the President to assume both duties.² This benign neglect was preferable to the sort of attention given to the post during the presidencies of Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. Secretaries of State William Marcy and Lewis Cass received their Cabinet appointments because their sympathies and supporters, though not their residences, were Southern. Southerners who allied with these Northern politicians to elect "doughface" presidents were, in turn, rewarded with lucrative diplomatic positions.³

Monroe knew that while the ministership of Brazil was nowhere near as prestigious as some appointments, it was still an extremely profitable position which carried with it the substantial benefits of trade.⁴ Candidates for the Brazilian ministry, generally, were influential Southern businessmen who were wholly unqualified to practice statecraft in the largest and richest country in South America. The rising tide of United States nationalism, coupled with deep-rooted preconceptions of Anglo-superiority, permeated the actions and the attitudes of Ministers William Trousdale (1853 - 1857) and Richard K. Meade (1858 - 1861). Their insensitive and often outrageous behavior in the name of U.S. diplomacy exacerbated tensions between the nations.⁵

There were numerous causes for the deterioration of United States-Brazilian relations. United States ministers had been inculcated with a republican

suspicion of imperial forms of government; they would often refuse to participate in formal rituals which they felt subordinated the prestige of the United States.⁶ While North Americans saw this as proper national pride, South Americans construed the behavior as disgracefully disrespectful. Linguistic, racial, and religious differences between the countries made for difficult relations. The biggest problems, however, were due to conflicting economic and political agendas.

At the close of the Mexican-American war, a group of politically and commercially influential men assessed the position of the United States, both figuratively and literally. The nation's population had grown dramatically, and the country would soon achieve its full continental growth. It seemed to many that democracy and Anglo-Saxon industry had the God-given right to expand in all directions. These proponents of Manifest Destiny sought to bring land and valuable natural resources under United States control while bestowing the blessings of "civilization" and Christianity on the "lesser" (Indian and Latino) peoples who comprised the land's indigenous population. Expansionists contended that the United States' democracy and strong economy would prove to be an irresistible lure. Any objections of the inhabitants of desirable land could be quelled by a show of force.⁷

Southerners, particularly those with commercial interests, found an exaggerated geopolitical ideology convincing. This version of Manifest Destiny held that contiguous land masses, such as North and South America, should have the benefit of common governance. Proponents argued that the similarity of geographic regions naturally encouraged peoples to work together for the economic gain of all parties. No less important to Southern geopoliticians was the expansion of slavery and the chance to gain economic parity with the North. They reasoned that if the United States developed Pacific trade routes, America would be in the ideal geographic location to play broker between Asia and Europe. More to the point, trade with Asia had the potential to shift the commercial center of the United States from the North to the South.⁸

One of those most interested in commercial expansion in South America was Lt. Matthew Fontaine Maury of the United States Navy. Maury, a native of Tennessee, served in Washington as Chief Hydrographer under fellow Southerner, Secretary of the Navy William Alexander Graham. In a series of popular articles which were published in *DeBow's Review*, the *National Intelligencer*, and the *Washington Union*, Lt. Maury wrote passionately about the need for direct steamship lines which would carry goods and information from South and Central America to the ports of Mobile, New Orleans, and Charleston.⁹ Although he felt that it was necessary to "promote sympathetic relations" with South America until the continent asked to be annexed to "a land of superior institutions," he saw nothing wrong with nudging the wheels of destiny. Lt. Maury often suggested that United States intervention in the South American affairs "would be a blessing for all peoples of the Americas." While he generously noted that South Americans were surrounded by marvels and wealth, he also commented that they lacked the "Anglo-Saxon industry" to capitalize on their good fortune.¹⁰

He proposed that the most efficient use of the abundant natural resources of the region would be to export these resources to Southern destinations. Southerners would then gladly furnish finished goods to the "backwards" natives. Maury found a showcase for these opinions each year when he served as Chairman for the Great Southern Convention, an influential gathering of Southern businessmen which focused on the region's need for industrial expansion and economic independence from Northern factories and shipping cartels. Speaking on behalf of the Convention members, he denounced many of the less friendly nations of South America for hampering the expansion of what amounted to American mercantilism.¹¹

Most particularly, however, Lt. Maury agitated for immediate intervention in the affairs of Brazil. In numerous articles written for *DeBow's Review* in the mid-1850s, Lt. Maury contended that Brazil's Byzantine policy of controlled trade

on the Amazon River adversely affected the development and free trade of all nations drained by the river. He urged his readers to consider whether Brazilians were truly capable of making the best use of the resources under their control. His veiled threats of occupation of the territory were linked to overt demands for trade agreements which would place economic control in the hands of United States commercial interests.¹²

Data gathered as a result of a Naval Department secret mission bolstered Maury's case. On February 15, 1851, Secretary of the Navy Graham had heeded Lieutenant Maury's prompting and authorized Lieutenant William Lewis Herndon and Lieutenant Lardner Gibbon to make a detailed exploration of the Amazon River. This covert operation was to explore both the major and minor branches of the Amazon, making maps and taking particular note of all goods which might interest "a commercial people."¹³ The region's silver mines were of particular interest to the government; any scientific or geographical notations were to be regarded as of "merely incidental" value.¹⁴

The report which Herndon and Gibbon produced for Congress at the end of their trek was extravagant in its praise of the Amazon Valley. The growing season was nearly continuous. Precious metals, medicinal plants, furs, and other resources awaited extraction. The natives of the region were docile, friendly, and generous. According to Lieutenant Herndon, they supported the introduction of American industry, yet did not seem inclined to compete for a share of the commercial market. Moreover, they had little use for actual money; wages in rural regions were paid in food or in cheap cotton cloth. The Amazon Valley was an entrepreneurial dream.¹⁵

The acquisitive tone of Secretary Graham's order commissioning the expedition, the secrecy of the assignment, and the frank rapaciousness of the Herndon-Gibbon report left little doubt as to the intention of the mission. The governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina bridled indignantly

at the intrusion. Such an incursion into the hearts of their countries, following close on the heels of the United States takeover of a significant portion of Mexico, could only be considered aggressive. The country most offended by the Herndon-Gibbon mission, however, was the country which controlled the Amazon: Brazil.

Brazil's interior was sparsely populated. Brazilians traditionally had exercised territorial control over the region by following a policy which resisted the introduction of any potentially divisive elements—including foreign traders or vessels—into the Amazon Valley.¹⁶ Upriver trade was conducted solely by Brazilians. Any goods from upriver nations passed through the custom house at Para, the Amazon's coastal port on the Atlantic. The Brazilian government garnered a huge profit from the export of taxable goods through Para, and any nation which objected to the Brazilian tax scheme could expect its goods to sit unshipped until such objection was withdrawn. In this way, it was easy to maintain regional hegemony without expending resources on fortifications along the winding Amazon.¹⁷

Therefore, Brazilian alarm over the U.S. naval mission, and the diplomatic initiatives which followed it, was considerable. It was clear that American commercial and territorial aggression had the potential to disrupt both the economy and political structure of Brazil. Emperor Dom Pedro II, head of the Brazilian government, acted through his Council of State and immediately appointed a special envoy, Duarte da Ponte Ribiero. Ribiero was to negotiate restrictive trade agreements with all upriver nations and to counter any offers made by the United States special envoy, J. Randolph Clay. Ribiero met with great success; the threat of Brazilian intervention in affairs of the upriver nations was more immediate than any possible retaliation by the United States.¹⁸

Ministers serving in Brazil after the Herndon-Gibbon mission were placed in a delicate position. While they wholeheartedly supported the economic desires of the United States, they were unable to discuss the matter of free trade on the

Amazon without risking an international incident. Minister Richard K. Meade reported, upon his arrival in Rio de Janeiro in 1857, that the Brazilian government was "exceedingly sensitive" about the subject of Amazonian navigation. His predecessor, Minister William Trousdale, had been both ineffective and caustic during his tenure in Rio. In an obvious reference to Trousdale's bellicose remarks, Minister Meade noted that threats, "official and otherwise," had severely prejudiced the Brazilian government against the United States.¹⁹

While economic and cultural tensions were the root of many diplomatic problems between Brazil and the United States, other reasons for unrest existed. Brazil itself was in a state of flux, as its social structure changed in response to economic influences. Sugar and cotton growers needed many slaves because both crops are labor- and land-intensive. When cotton and sugar prices dropped because of competition from the southern United States, many large plantation owners were forced to sell or emancipate their slaves. Coffee, which could be grown on a small farm with few slaves, quickly became the main cash crop. Because of the limited capital investment required, more people could grow coffee; concurrently, the number of large landholders dwindled throughout the decade. Political power once held by a handful of plantation owners began to disseminate to small landowners and the merchant class. Ex-slaves and liberal Brazilians agitated for universal Brazilian manumission. While Emperor Dom Pedro II's Council of State was still entirely composed of large landowners of old Portuguese stock, the growing popularity of Brazilian-born politicians who supported abolition threatened this stranglehold on power. Brazilian domestic affairs were turbulent, making United States-Brazilian diplomacy in the 1860s even more difficult.²⁰

This tension between abolitionist and slaveholding forces in Brazil was only heightened by external circumstances. Great Britain, one of Brazil's major trading partners, had tried to pressure Brazil into emancipating the numerous slaves held on coastal cotton and sugar plantations. The literature circulated by

Great Britain's abolitionist groups was fraught with Protestant evangelical rhetoric and cultural self-righteousness. Brazil's Catholic slaveowners already felt threatened, and were not reassured by the attempted interposition of British will on Brazilian affairs. When they read accounts of similar abolitionist activities in the United States in commercial newspapers such as the *Charleston Mercury*, it was only natural that they should associate the evangelical fervor of the Northern abolitionists with a threat to their own livelihood.²¹ Northerners were viewed with deep suspicion, especially now that the United States had taken up arms over the right to hold slaves.

Consul James Monroe wondered how he, an avowed antislavery man, would be received. He had pored through the papers, read all the travel accounts, and learned all he could about the country in which he would serve from his predecessor and friend, Richard C. Parsons. Monroe had served as a state legislator in Ohio and was considered to be a gifted public speaker, but he was concerned by his lack of diplomatic experience. Suspecting that his efforts as a member of the United States legation to Brazil might be limited by a host of longstanding social, political, and cultural forces beyond his control, would he be prepared to smooth over years of provocations and serve his country creditably? Could he lay aside his own strong opinions on slavery in the interest of diplomatic duty? Would the extravagant life of the international diplomatic scene prove too great a temptation and separate him from his simple and pious life? Far from his friends, removed from the fellowship of his church, and already regretting that he had left his family behind in Ohio, James Monroe had no choice but to believe that he would make the most of the difficult circumstances under which would serve. Exercising tact, using caution, he would do nothing to dishonor his country. Thus resolved, he drifted off to sleep.

Chapter II

Monroe Arrives In Rio

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As the sun rose, James Monroe ventured out on the deck to catch his first glimpse of his new home. His friend and predecessor at the consular post, Richard C. Parsons, had described in glowing terms the tall mountains and the surpassing beauty of the tropical flowers which characterized Rio de Janeiro. Although thick mist concealed the tops of the mountains and made it impossible to see the summer capital of Petropolis only sixteen miles away, Monroe could discern a great deal of activity in and around the harbor. Fleets of fishing boats moved out through the bright blue water toward open sea and he heard the slurred lyricism of Portuguese as the fishermen called to each other. A grey plume of smoke mixed with water vapor trailed the morning steamer as it shuttled back and forth across the harbor. After watching the scene for several minutes, Monroe concluded that although much was in motion, no one seemed to be in a hurry.¹

Parsons had not exaggerated the charm of the place. Rio was lovely beyond any of Monroe's expectations. As a man who had been born in 1821 in Plainfield, Connecticut and who had lived the majority of his life in Oberlin, Ohio, Monroe had had little prior experience with the tropical or exotic. His parents, Job and Nancy Monroe, had raised him as a Quaker. Although he later became a Congregationalist, James continued to follow many Quaker practices, including that of simple dress. The black suits which he favored hung loosely from his tall, thin frame. His elongated facial features and high forehead were considered by some to be quite handsome, but he was far from vain. His modest, bookish disposition was more suited to the classroom than the salon. What kind of figure would he cut amid the exuberant ostentation of the court of Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil?²

Monroe, who firmly believed in the unseen hand of Providence acting to guide men's lives, still must have wondered how he came to be so far from his

home and children. Both in ability and in temperament, he was an unusual choice for the post of consul to Rio, a position second in command to that of the Minister to Brazil. Diplomatic appointees to Brazil, as a rule, were not particularly talented, nor were they expected to be. Loyalty to political personage or party was far more important than skill, experience, or education. Monroe's diligent work on behalf of the Republican party before and during the 1860 election was a matter of record, but he also possessed an excellent education. He had received his A.B. degree from Oberlin in 1846, and had received a theology degree from the same institution three years later. This strong intellectual background, coupled with his experience as a politician and gifted lecturer, removed Monroe from the ranks of the stereotypical diplomatic parvenu of the age.³

Monroe was exceptional in other ways as well. U.S. legations usually treated their hosts with thinly veiled contempt, and diplomats in Brazil were no exception to the rule. They disliked the endless rituals and obsequies paid to Emperor Dom Pedro II, not the least because he was, in the parlance of the day, "a person of color." James Monroe, on the other hand, could number Frederick Douglass among his close friends. He had, as a young man, lectured extensively for William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society. Later, he had led the subscription drive to raise money for the defense of the Oberlin-Wellington rescuers of the fugitive slave John Price in 1858. When in Oberlin, he frequently dined with former classmate John Mercer Langston, one of the first African-Americans to graduate from Oberlin College. Monroe respected people for their convictions and deeds regardless of the color of their skin. It was a quality which would serve him well as a diplomat among peoples of Portuguese, Indian, and African descent.⁴

Although his modesty would not permit him to acknowledge as much, James Monroe was more qualified for the post of minister than his superior, Minister James Watson Webb. Webb, a bragging and choleric New Yorker who

had parlayed his clout as an influential newspaper editor into political preferment, had little tact and less experience in negotiation. A heavy-set, foppish man, Webb had enlivened the *New York Courier and Enquirer* with the work of his vitriolic pen between 1843 and 1859. He had been a staunch Whig and later, when political opportunity beckoned, an equally strong Republican. It is evident, however, that his support of the party platform was selective; his Unionist beliefs were firm, but he hesitated to endorse the emancipation of African-Americans. While he often scooped rival commercial journals by innovative means, he took imprudent risks which jeopardized the solvency of his newspaper. When his finances grew tight, he sought employment as a civil servant.⁵

As a long-time ally of Thurlow Weed and William Henry Seward, James Watson Webb expected to share in the spoils which had come due to the Republican party in the 1860 election. Had he not supported Seward's early bid for the presidency? After Lincoln appointed Seward Secretary of State, Webb sent several letters to Seward asking, then demanding, a ministerial post. He stated, with some exaggeration, that his loyalty and earnest exertions on behalf of Seward's candidacy had been given at the pain of fiscal loss. Webb further suggested that if Seward failed to appoint him, he might work to thwart Seward's ambitions concerning the 1864 presidential elections.⁶

In a brazen addendum to his already indelicate request, Webb listed specific positions which he felt would be either lucrative or prestigious enough for a man of his unspecified talents. Great Britain was, of course, his first choice, but Seward surely knew that Webb lacked the deftness and polish which the post required. Webb also hoped for appointment to France. Austria, Prussia, and Belgium were somewhat less desirable to Webb, but he would accept these positions if Seward insisted.⁷

The Secretary of State, his hands full with more pressing problems, offered Webb the relatively minor post of Minister to Turkey. Webb haughtily declined.

He continued to wheedle and threaten until the exasperated Seward offered him the post of Minister to Brazil, the most lucrative appointment in South America. Webb, sensing that Seward would make no more offers, accepted. He was duly appointed by President Abraham Lincoln in September, 1861, at a salary of \$6,000 per year.⁸

Although Webb was singularly unqualified as a diplomat, he did know something about shipping and commerce. Secretary Seward had been a supporter of territorial expansion after the Mexican-American war, but had grown disenchanted with "aggrandizement by means of military conquest." Instead, he favored a program of economic colonization, or the establishment of virtual sovereignty over a weaker nation's trade. Seward had labelled commerce "the chief agent [for] the enlargement of empire." This system offered great economic benefits to the United States without obligating it to justify annexation of non-Anglo-Saxon peoples to its own citizens. Although Seward focused his colonial designs on Asia, this belief influenced State Department practice everywhere during the 1860s. Seward instructed Webb to pursue the delicate issues of Amazonian navigation and free trade, matters which he felt Webb would be familiar with from his work in the commercial press. He perhaps hoped that Webb would become so absorbed in this that he would cease his tiresome complaints about conditions in Rio de Janeiro.⁹

Even from thousands of miles away, Webb managed to be an embarrassing annoyance to Seward. Upon arrival in Rio, he immediately created a diplomatic crisis. His predecessor, Minister Richard K. Meade, had made a fiery farewell speech. As he left to join the Confederate Army, he strongly condemned President Abraham Lincoln and praised the Confederacy. Minister Webb stubbornly declared that he intended to redress this injurious slander in a long speech, in English, during his investiture at court. The Brazilian diplomatic attaché tried to compromise with the obstinate Minister by arranging a private meeting between

Webb and the Emperor during which he could present his argument for the Union, but Webb refused the honor. His assumption of duty was delayed for nearly a month until he was granted special dispensation to deliver a milder version of the acerbic speech he had planned. This inauspicious start set the tone for his behavior throughout his stay in Brazil.¹⁰

Webb had always fancied himself a very powerful man, and his perceived manipulation of Secretary Seward only fueled this belief. His ambition probably had overruled accurate self-perception, however. His abrasive manner and sensitive honor made him a difficult man with whom to work. He considered his appointment to Dom Pedro II's court as little more than an opportunity to make money through his diplomatic connections while proving himself worthy of a more visible position in Europe. He constantly complained that his "talents" were wasted in the "miserable backwater" of Brazil, and never ceased to petition Seward for a transfer. He claimed that he was dreadfully overworked and required a less strenuous position.¹¹

These claims are suspect, because Webb's schemes to turn a profit for himself and his family occupied much of his time. He suggested, in a dispatch to Seward, that the Union strongly consider transporting emancipated Southern blacks to Brazil. This would doubly benefit Brazil by populating the sparsely inhabited banks of the Amazon and by solving the labor shortage which had resulted from the recent cessation of the Brazilian import slave trade. It would also rid the United States of the problems connected with supporting what Webb felt were a "helpless" and "racially inferior" people. Of course, Webb felt that his expertise in Brazilian affairs would make him the only qualified candidate to head the land speculation and transportation company. Secretary Seward rejected this proposal without putting it before President Lincoln for consideration.¹²

Minister Webb also had great aspirations for monopolizing Brazilian coastal trade. In 1862, he produced a plan to open a steam line from New York to

Rio de Janeiro. This steamer would pass through the Brazilian ports of Para, Pernambuco, and Bahia en route to the Brazilian capital. The line as proposed by Webb was ideal in all respects save one: the company he wished to form would make his son, Robert Webb, sole concessionaire of the line. When that piece of information surfaced, President Lincoln withdrew his support.¹³

Seward frequently lost patience with Webb and reminded him of the proper behavior for a diplomat. He urged Webb to conduct his private affairs more discreetly. This was sound advice, for Webb's irrational behavior toward other members of the diplomatic corps was reprehensible. His patriotic posturing, coupled with his self-interested machinations, disgusted Emperor Dom Pedro II and the Brazilian Council of State. Webb was aware that he was disliked, but attributed slights real and perceived to international or personal jealousy.¹⁴

Self-interest and ego aside, Webb admittedly had some cause to grumble about Rio de Janeiro. His health had suffered as a result of the rich food and late evenings favored by the glittering international set he mingled with in Brazil. His gout and arthritis were aggravated by the humid tropical heat. The city itself was a nest of diseases against which most United States citizens had never developed immunity. Poor sanitation only contributed to the problems of beleaguered and inconsistently trained medical personnel. He and his young wife, Laura, found it much more beneficial to live several miles from the city, near the summer capital of Petropolis. Even thus removed, they experienced chronic ill health during their stay. Seward turned a deaf ear on Webb's complaints of sickness and fatigue, and was apparently more willing to allow him to create minor international disturbances than to risk recalling him.¹⁵

It would be hard to find two more diametrically opposite men than James Watson Webb and James Monroe. Webb was suspicious, stingy, hot-tempered, and aggressive. Monroe, on the other hand, was generous in thought and deed. He calmly performed his duties without causing a sensation. Webb was a strong

supporter of Manifest Destiny and had only objected to the extension of slavery because he felt that it tended to curb industrial growth. Monroe, by contrast, keenly felt the moral injustice of slavery and had opposed categorically any territorial acquisition which could be used to expand the institution. Perhaps most tellingly, Webb had been a vocal but peripheral player on New York's political scene; Monroe, however, had been an active participant in the formation of Ohio's Republican party.¹⁶

Monroe had always felt bound to act on his convictions, yet his friends in the abolitionist movement had encouraged him to avoid an active role in politics. Politicians were compromisers by nature, they argued, and there could be no compromise or gradualism on moral issues. Thus, Monroe hesitated to join with Free Soil supporters because the party had continued to tolerate slavery while working to limit its expansion. Over a matter of years, however, Monroe concluded that containment rather than abolition was a more immediately attainable goal. Therefore, he endorsed the Free Soil ticket in 1852, although he declined to run for office as a Free Soil candidate.¹⁷

By 1855, he had become a Republican. Although the party platform still stopped short of requiring an immediate end to slavery, Monroe enthusiastically accepted the party's nomination for a seat in the Ohio legislature. His commitment to abolition remained strong, yet he was convinced that he could be a more effective champion of that cause as a Republican legislator than as a private citizen and college professor at Oberlin College. Not everyone agreed with Monroe. Oberlin College President Charles Grandison Finney admonished his congregation, James Monroe among them, that men of high moral principle could not run for office without compromising their standards. Monroe's legislative record, however, rebuts Finney's contention.¹⁸

James Monroe consistently drafted the most liberal legislation which he felt could receive majority support. One such measure softened the federal Fugi-

tive Slave Law by placing enforcement of the federal measure in the hands of more lenient county officials. Monroe defended his habeas corpus bill by pointing out the constitutional deficiencies of the Fugitive Slave Law and the nonviolent resistance implicit within his legislative rejoinder. While the act was repealed within two years of its enactment, other reforms attempted by Monroe were more successful. He introduced measures which sought to expand the common school system and provide reformatory care for juvenile delinquents apart from adult prisoners. His egalitarian instincts stopped short of women's suffrage, but he did support the protection of the property rights of married women. His innovative ideas and eloquence won him the respect and admiration of Republicans and Democrats alike.¹⁹

Salmon P. Chase, who was Ohio's governor between 1856 and 1860, was one of Monroe's admirers. Chase had counted on Monroe to rally votes in difficult situations, and the political alliance soon warmed to friendship. Monroe and Chase shared similar convictions regarding slavery and, in the months preceding the 1860 elections, Monroe considered Chase to be the candidate most likely to lead the Republican Party to the fully desirable stance of abolition. He had hoped to further Chase's candidacy as a delegate to the national nominating convention in Chicago, but a last-minute change of plans prevented Monroe from making the trip.²⁰

While many months of strategy meetings with Chase had been subverted by the nomination of Abraham Lincoln, Monroe was nonetheless pleased by his party's choice. He campaigned vigorously throughout the summer, delivering over thirty speeches on Lincoln's behalf. He won an Ohio Senate seat by a commanding majority, and could take pride in the state-wide Republican victory. Once in the state Senate, he was elected President *pro tempore* and was one of a select group of dignitaries chosen to escort President-Elect Lincoln on his journey through Ohio in the days immediately preceding Lincoln's inauguration. It was a great honor.²¹

He did not always travel in such celebrated circles. A little over a year before, in late December, 1859, he had journeyed alone to retrieve the body of John Copeland, one of three Oberlin blacks who had participated in John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Copeland had been captured and hanged for treason. After Copeland's execution at Charleston, Virginia on December 16, his body was to be shipped to a Winchester, Virginia medical school for dissection unless a friend or family member accompanied the body back to Ohio. Copeland's father appealed to Monroe and, with great reluctance, Monroe agreed to make the trip.²²

It was a courageous act. Virginia's citizens, never hospitably disposed towards abolitionists, were especially hostile in the wake of John Brown's raid. A lone white man traveling a great distance to insure that one of Brown's "nigger confederates" received a decent burial might have expected to meet with harm. Monroe, whose nonviolent sentiments had been revulsed by John Brown's bloody attack, must have seen the irony in his own imperilment.

When he arrived at Winchester, Monroe immediately contacted the school's chief administrators. He persuaded faculty members to release the corpse, but medical students claimed ownership and broke into the dissecting theatre to remove Copeland. The body was hidden by the students, and Monroe returned to Oberlin emptyhanded. At a Christmas Day memorial service for Oberlin's slain, he told the 3,000 mourners that "as a community and as individuals we had done what we could, according to our sense of duty; and this is always success."²³

If measured by how well he carried out his duties as professor, politician, husband, and father, James Monroe was a stellar success. He was one of the most visible and well-respected politicians in the entire state legislature. Back at Oberlin College, he was considered by fellow faculty members as the obvious choice to succeed President Charles Grandison Finney when the old evangelist grew too tired for the position. At home, Monroe enjoyed an especially affectionate

relationship with his wife and former classmate, Elizabeth Maxwell Monroe. Although his political career took him away from home for weeks at a time, he wrote a continuous stream of letters back to his wife and their four children, Emma Elizabeth, Mary Katherine, Charles Edwin, and William Maxwell Monroe. It is obvious that he regretted each day that he had to spend apart from his family. In his correspondence, he constantly inquired after the educational progress of his fourteen-year-old daughter, Emma, and expressed anxiety about two-year-old William's health. Most frequently, however, he sympathized with his wife's concerns about money.

Even though he was a success by his own definition, Monroe fell far short of material success. Oberlin College had been established in 1833 upon the departure of a radical branch of seminarians from the Lane Seminary in Cincinnati; while it enjoyed political notoriety and an ever-growing reputation for excellence in education, it still struggled economically. Administrators raised funds for new lecture halls and dormitories by canvassing known friends of the college during subscription drives. In these early days of Oberlin College, professors received scant compensation for their duties, and were expected to offer a wide variety of classes. Monroe himself taught philosophy, political economics, political science, history, rhetoric, and several varieties of literature. In 1849, when he had left the pastorate of the Sandusky Congregational Church to become Oberlin's Professor of Rhetoric and Belle Lettres, he had known that the moral satisfaction he derived from the job would be its most generous compensation. His family, however, was small and he was sure that Elizabeth supported his desire to teach in the exciting atmosphere of abolitionist Oberlin.²⁴

By 1861, however, his Oberlin salary remained low (\$600) and his family had grown. His lectures were well-attended and he was always selected to speak at important occasions in the community, yet his teaching career was working a fiscal hardship on those he loved. Although they were hardly in danger of starv-

ing, Monroe's family often received small gifts of money and food from other Oberlin residents to relieve the daily pinch of tight finances. These kindnesses, while greatly appreciated, deeply embarrassed Monroe. He took every opportunity to match favor for favor, but his income prohibited him from expressing the generosity he would have liked to have shown. With enrollment dropping due to the enlistment of students into the Union Army, it seemed unlikely for Monroe to expect a raise in the foreseeable future.²⁵

His political career was more of a drain than a boon to family finances. The Senate post, while prestigious, paid little more than travel expenses between Columbus and Oberlin, along with a small daily stipend for food and lodging. Monroe tried to maintain two households for a time, but found that the costs of doing so were prohibitive. Moreover, although Monroe had been reelected by loyal Oberlin backers in 1861, he felt that his effectiveness in the state legislature was on the wane. Emancipation appeared more probable as the war progressed. With that goal reached, Monroe's chief purpose in entering politics would be accomplished. The social programs he had supported were de-emphasized as the state government's economy tightened. His mounting frustration, his frequent absences from Oberlin, and the economic strain occasioned by his political endeavors led Monroe to consider a change in career.²⁶

He had hoped to receive the party's nomination to the U.S. House of Representatives, but incumbent H. G. Blake was well-liked in the district and was not yet ready to step down voluntarily. A place in the Lincoln administration, then, appeared a more likely possibility. Monroe had corresponded with Salmon P. Chase on a regular basis since Chase had left Ohio to take up the post of Secretary of the Treasury in Lincoln's Cabinet. Monroe's abolitionist sentiments were well-known to Chase from their years together in the Ohio government, and they often discussed the possibility of transforming the war to suppress rebellion into a "blessed" enterprise to emancipate slaves. Monroe's summations of inside negotia-

tions in Columbus kept Chase abreast of the political sentiments of his home state. For a man with Chase's intense political ambitions, this sort of information was of incalculable value. Chase, therefore, temporized when Monroe inquired about a State Department position.²⁷

On first glance, it appears odd that a man of James Monroe's modesty, honesty, and discretion would approach an old political ally for preferment. In February, 1862, however, he had suffered a great shock which had forced him to reexamine his life and future. While at his boardinghouse in Columbus, he received a brief telegram stating that his wife had died suddenly. Elizabeth's death stunned the entire community, yet the outpouring of genuine affection and support for Monroe and his family did little to ease his bereavement. Profoundly depressed, he took several months to answer the many sympathy letters which he received.²⁸

Monroe spent a few weeks in Oberlin while he arranged for the care of his children, but found that every scene triggered a painful memory. Instead of succumbing to his misery, he decided to return to Columbus where he could escape the constant reminders of what he had so recently lost. In a note to Salmon P. Chase, the usually reserved Monroe offers a glimpse of his sentiments at that difficult time:

It has seemed to me as if God has taken from me almost all that I had. I have lost forever, in this world, the society and loving aid of one of the most excellent wives and mothers that ever husband and children had; and she died so suddenly that I was not permitted to bid her farewell. I would give all I have or hope for in this world for but half an hour...yet I have thought it my duty to return here [to Columbus] and do the best I can for my constituents and the country.²⁹

In many ways, however, his work in Columbus must have seemed a terrible reproach. It had cost him the opportunity to share his wife's life and death. His devotion to the low-paying duty of public service had deprived his family of comforts which he had hoped to provide for them. His father, Job, constantly encour-

aged him to save money and to be generous to less fortunate members of the family; how could Monroe tell him that he had no money to save and less to give? With the increase in child-care costs, he fretted continuously about his meager salary. The unexpected nature of his wife's death must have impressed upon Monroe the uncertainty of his own future. Although he was but forty years old, he realized that he had to find more lucrative employment so that his children could be assured of a secure future.³⁰

Monroe's friend and one-time political ally, Richard C. Parsons of Cleveland, had frequently described the beautiful scenery and glittering gaiety of Rio de Janeiro. Parsons, who was employed by the State Department as the consular official at Brazil's winter capital, was delighted by the giddiness of diplomatic life; he was, however, troubled by ill health and was forced to resign the post in August, 1862. When Parsons returned to Cleveland, Monroe paid a visit to welcome him home and reacquaint him with the political situation in Ohio. During this visit, Parsons encouraged Monroe to try for his newly vacated appointment. Monroe, driven by his need for a change of scenery and more money, ignored his usual qualms concerning the appearance of impropriety and wrote Chase to see if the post could be procured.³¹

While he admitted that the request might sound presumptuous, he assured Chase that if Secretary of State William Seward could be prevailed upon, the appointment would be "a great favor...and it should be no discredit to the Country." Knowing Chase's continuing interest in state politics, Monroe also noted that he would take pains to insure that his successor as President *pro tempore* of the Ohio Senate would be both influential and a friend to Chase. He added that if he did not know that he could guarantee such a result, he "should think it wrong—under present circumstances—to resign the office of Senator." Although he desperately wanted the position in Rio de Janeiro, Monroe's conception of duty to friends and party took precedence.³²

Chase, however, was loath to lose such an important ally in the Ohio Senate. President Lincoln seemed more inclined to listen to the advice of Secretary of State Seward and Chase began to feel that his own days in the Lincoln Cabinet were numbered. He tentatively planned to step down from the head of the Treasury Department and seek a U.S. Senate seat in the next election. This would free him to make yet another bid for the White House in the 1864 elections without appearing to be disloyal to the President. Thus, when Monroe initially sought the consular appointment, Chase attempted to discourage the ever-loyal Monroe from pursuing the matter further. The Secretary of the Treasury was well aware that a man of Monroe's influence within the Ohio legislature would be a powerful asset in his bid to secure election to the Senate through legislative appointment. Acting mainly out of self-interest, he tried to persuade Monroe to remain in the Ohio Senate through the next elections. Chase pointed to Monroe's usefulness as a state legislator and appealed to his sense of civic duty at a time when the country remained in a state of crisis. Chase also reminded Monroe that his considerable abilities would be lessened if he, too, went to Rio and contracted the diseases which had felled several emissaries to Brazil. Neither Monroe's request nor Chase's reply touched on the delicate subject of finances.³³

Monroe had made up his mind and was not to be dissuaded by his friend's arguments. He countered Chase by stating that while he should indeed much prefer being in the service of his country at home, "it is not probable that I shall obtain any position here in which I could be useful and at the same time maintain my children."³⁴ As to his health, he confessed that he had been examined very recently by an Oberlin physician. The doctor had told Monroe that he would not "suffer more in Rio than among the changeable winds of our Lake Shore." While he admitted that his throat had been affected, presumably from emotional strain and too many speaking engagements in the days before amplification, he otherwise felt himself to be in exceptional health. In a blunt declaration which must

have embarrassed Monroe greatly to commit to paper, he revealed his primary motivation for soliciting Chase's help:

The position at Rio would allow me to be useful to the country, and also to do something for my four children, whose growing wants with my small salary of six hundred dollars have, for some time past, (I venture to say it to you, though I have said it to few others) been a matter of anxious interest to me.³⁵

With all dissembling swept away, Chase was forced to admit that Monroe's patience and loyalty deserved a better reward than incessant worry. This decision was made even easier due to the Secretary's decision to remain in Lincoln's Cabinet. Ohio's U.S. Senate post was certain to be given to Chase's political rival, Benjamin F. Wade; if Chase resigned from the Cabinet, he could find himself without office entirely. He was thus able to perform a service for Monroe without jeopardizing his own political future. Chase consulted with Secretary of State Seward and gained approval for Monroe's appointment. On October 1, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed Monroe's commission as Consul to Rio de Janeiro.³⁶

If Monroe's swift actions are any indication, he was eager to take up his responsibilities in Brazil. Within two weeks, he had arranged to leave his children in Oberlin with some friends. While he thought it "a great trial" to leave them behind, he felt that the long journey and strange climate would adversely affect the younger children, while the elder children would be deprived of a good education and the companionship of their schoolmates. By October 25, he had contracted to sell his house and had said farewell to his father. Perhaps most indicative of his impatience is the haste with which he resigned his Senate seat. Chase, alarmed that Monroe had moved so quickly, had to be reassured that Monroe would procure another "sympathetic" man to fill the position.³⁷

In his enthusiasm, however, it appears that Monroe may have deprived himself of the opportunity to earn an even higher salary than he would receive in

Brazil. The State Department needed two officers at the time Monroe was appointed and, while the Brazilian post was considered to be more pleasant and prestigious, a similar appointment in Nicaragua which required no expensive investments in court dress or sumptuous living was also available. The salary for the Nicaraguan appointment was smaller, but the cost of living in Nicaragua was dramatically less than that in Brazil. Monroe expressed interest in the Nicaraguan position, yet felt that it would not be best to change his plans just to obtain it. He fretted anxiously for his orders and noted that to delay his departure until spring "would be not a little embarrassing."³⁸

Monroe received the long-awaited instructions and orders a few weeks before Christmas, 1862. After the holidays and a flurry of last-minute visits to all of his friends in Northern Ohio, James Monroe travelled to New York City to embark on the long journey to Brazil. The January seas were particularly foul and Monroe was no traveller. He spent most of the six-week voyage ill or recovering from being ill. He later apologized for his poor correspondence during the voyage, but justly claimed that rough water would have made his handwriting nearly impossible to read.³⁹

Once the steamer anchored in Rio's harbor, however, Monroe began to write prolifically. One of the first letters that he sent back to the United States was a long and grateful missive to Secretary of the Treasury Chase. In it, he described Rio as a place in which he had found "fine climate and beautiful scenery and labor sufficient to occupy but not to weary the mind." He also mentioned that the change of scene had done much to lift "the depression of spirit" from which he had suffered since the death of his wife.⁴⁰

He also apparently had had second thoughts about the propriety of approaching Chase concerning the consular position, for he wished to set the record straight between the men:

[I]t was, in no sense, the payment of a debt. You owed me nothing; the obligation was the other way. It never occurred to me that voting for and sustaining you for high positions, furnished ground for a claim upon you. Much as I esteemed you...I voted for you for responsible office only because I thought the good of the Country demanded it. ...[H]ad you declined to aid me...I should not have been offended, nor have been one whit less your ardent friend and supporter thereafter.⁴¹

Monroe assumed that Chase was motivated by the same noble sentiments. He concluded that he appreciated Chase's actions and his own post because he knew that Chase believed him worthy of the position on merit.

Many worthy men applied for diplomatic appointments, but the fact remains that the best State Department jobs were divided among the loyal of the victorious party. Monroe surely knew that no one could accuse him of scandalous dealings in a matter so routine. He had neither cajoled nor threatened Chase; he had simply presented himself as a candidate and had demonstrated his suitability as such. Compared with Webb's attack on Seward for the minister's post, Monroe's bid for the consular office appears to be without blemish. Yet, Monroe was clearly uncomfortable with the proceedings. He earnestly solicited Chase's approbation as a means to mollify his uneasy conscience.⁴²

Once in Brazil, Monroe would have little opportunity for lengthy correspondence with Chase. His time would be consumed in running errands, performing notarial duties for international businesses, taking part in charitable endeavors, filing the endless rounds of paperwork required by Washington, and smoothing over the insults offered by Minister James Watson Webb. As he attended to the duties of his position, he hoped to recover from the devastating loss of his wife and, perhaps in time, become more financially secure. As the second-in-command at the post, Minister Webb would expect his full support. For the moment, however, between leaving his home in Oberlin and beginning life anew in Rio de Janeiro, he was at liberty to express his thanks and friendship with no politically entangling ties or conflicting loyalties. This complimentary gesture to Chase,

fulfilling a duty yet expressing more than mere duty required, must be considered a true indication of Monroe's concept of the ideal civil servant: disinterested, professional, capable, and above all, serving the good of the country. This was the ideal which Monroe sought to fulfill throughout his tenure as Consul to Rio.

Chapter III

The Trial By Fire

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March 1861

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III

The spring of 1863 had been a busy season for Consul James Monroe. March and April had been consumed by his search for suitable lodgings between Petropolis and Rio de Janeiro. He finally had found a small room in a boardinghouse situated midway between the consular offices across the harbor and Minister Webb's lodgings in the more expensive summer capital. According to his description of the six-mile ride to Rio, he cut an ungainly figure as he trotted along the dusty wagon road on the back of a small brown burro. With wry humor, he admitted that there were more dignified and comfortable ways to travel. The trip could be unbearably hot depending on the time of day; for this reason, he fell into the habit of arriving at the Embassy early and staying until the daily afternoon rainfall washed the heat and humidity from the air.¹

This schedule, Monroe found, also had the advantage of keeping him out of the midst of the various religious parades which clogged the narrow streets of Rio. These saint day celebrations, like so much about the city, seemed overwhelmingly bizarre to him. The procession of stuffed effigies representing the physical presences of the saints was accompanied by chanting, dancing, and drunken revelry. At times, the dizzying noise, heat, and passion of life in Rio seemed like a feverish hallucination. The perfume of the tropical flowers growing near his boardinghouse reminded him, even as he dreamed of his Northern Ohio home, that he was a stranger in Brazil.²

Minister James Watson Webb had done little to make Monroe feel more at home in Rio. He apparently believed that his personality was strong enough to command the consular staff from afar, for before Monroe's arrival, he had only visited the embassy building once each month. He did not vary this routine even

in March, 1863, and therefore did not meet his second-in-command for several weeks. Indeed, when Monroe arrived on February 28, 1863, Webb failed to acknowledge his presence for four more days. Finally, in a tersely worded note, he congratulated Monroe on his safe arrival and admonished him to "obey."³

This stern injunction from a man he had never met hardly could have comforted Monroe, who had hoped for a more cordial beginning to relations with his superior. Even taking into consideration the difficult nature of communication and travel between Webb's home in Petropolis and the embassy in Rio, this cool reception appears to have been an attempt on Webb's part to remind Monroe of his relative station in Brazil. Other embassies were filled with petty rivalries; Webb was determined that he would rule over the United States legation absolutely.

Monroe hoped that Webb's sternness and his own feelings of alienation were temporary conditions. He reasoned that the first could be overcome by proven competence and the second by meeting his fellow legation members and throwing himself into consular affairs. His pleasant personality and enthusiasm for work endeared him to his junior officers, who were more used to Minister Webb's petulant demands. The Lidgerwood brothers, Charles and Duncan, were reliable career diplomats responsible for attending to the commercial affairs of the consulate. Both of the attachés had served under Richard C. Parsons and therefore knew Monroe by reputation. Perhaps out of mutual loneliness, the bachelor brothers and Monroe struck up a lively friendship and, for a time, shared living quarters.⁴ Attaché Milford Davis and his young bride lived nearby. Davis, a hot-tempered and proud man who was constantly at odds with Minister Webb, was the consular staff's English language copyist. Davis also ran some of the consulate's errands. Completing the daily circle of Monroe's coworkers was Augusto Cordeiro, a Brazilian clerk who transcribed official documents into the court languages of Portuguese and French. Cordeiro was well-versed in the Brazil-

ian legal system and perhaps had received his appointment in the United States consulate through his connections in Dom Pedro II's court. His absolute trustworthiness won him respect from everyone except the ethnocentric Minister Webb.⁵

This tightly knit group helped Monroe through the difficult first months in Rio. They taught him more than how to fill out the endless copies of paperwork required under international commercial and maritime law; they showed him around the city, introduced him to other members of the diplomatic corps, and familiarized him with the labyrinthine maze of official protocol. While part of this code could be found in the State Department's *Consular Instructions*, most of the finer points of etiquette were a matter of custom. Without the help of the Lidgerwoods, Davis, and Cordeiro, Monroe's career as a diplomat might have ended with embarrassing abruptness.⁶

The actual duties of his job were numerous enough without worrying about trivial social niceties. He monitored the American population in Rio and frequently reported the state of U.S. trade relations with Brazil. He noted import-export ratios, taxation matters, and a host of related economic information in his monthly, quarterly, and yearly State Department reports. Triplicate filings of any contract involving American business had to be drafted and approved by Monroe before the contract could be considered valid. He refereed disputes between ship masters and crews of American vessels. He represented American shipping and business interests when they ran afoul of Brazilian law. While much of his new job dealt with matters in which he had little experience, Monroe soon learned to navigate through the tricky language of the State Department guidelines to arrive at fair settlements.⁷

For the duration of the Civil War, Monroe's office also had a paramilitary function. If Confederate privateers entered the ostensibly neutral waters of Rio harbor for repair or resupply, he was to protest the intrusion with the Brazilian government and attempt to delay the ship's departure. While Monroe used legal

means to keep such ships in the bay, information concerning their location would be relayed to United States embassies up and down the Atlantic coast. Whichever vessel in the Union Navy's South Atlantic Squadron was closest would set sail for Rio and try to intercept the Southern "pirates." The *C.S.S. Florida* and *C.S.S. Alabama* were rumored to be in the area and had been responsible for embarrassing and costly Union losses. Minister Webb, chafing to take an active role in the war, exhorted Monroe to be ever-vigilant in his daily survey of Rio's harbor.⁸

In addition to commercial and military duties, the role of diplomat in the nineteenth century carried with it social obligations. Monroe represented the United States at events ranging from gala balls to church picnics. Events involving members of the international diplomatic corps, however, were never strictly social. Emissaries jockeyed for rank in every matter, from seating position at dinner to the elegance of dress uniform. In a strong centralist monarchy such as Brazil, the informal policies of the Emperor and his favorite courtiers often meant more than any official code passed by the legislative body: Therefore, each party could be viewed as a war of prestige in which commercial favors could be won or lost depending on a felicitous turn of phrase. Both personal and national fortune rode on the consequences of one's actions.

In the previous decade, American diplomats had behaved badly in the Brazilian court, and American business opportunities had suffered as a consequence. Minister James Watson Webb hoped to remedy this situation by impressing the Brazilians with ceremonial exactitude and a vigorous defense of United States prerogatives. Although Seward urged a more temperate approach, Webb confided to Monroe that

[p]eople in Washington know nothing of the effort and perseverance necessary, in a foreign country, to take hold of an apparently abandoned cause and resuscitate and return it to favor. If they did, they would not growl at my recklessness or preach me sermons.⁹

As part of his campaign to restore American prestige abroad, he insisted on ornate and immaculate dress among his junior officers. Webb held the honorary title of brevet general due to his political connections in the United States and wore the regalia of that rank. He expected Monroe to wear the uniform of a naval lieutenant to official functions, as Richard C. Parsons had done. Monroe, however, hesitated to don military dress with its two gold epaulets and ceremonial sword. His Quaker forefathers would have blanched to see him parading in the gaudy uniform and carrying arms. He demurred for well over a month and missed several official functions. Webb was intractable and demanded that Monroe conform to his sworn duty. Left with no choice, Monroe reluctantly purchased the expensive costume. Though he would bring nothing but honor to his country's uniform, he would never feel comfortable in it.¹⁰

The charitable duties of Monroe's consular position were much more to his liking. He was commissioned to provide for indigent and ill Americans stranded in Rio. Monroe's approach to these charitable endeavors exceeded the strict letter of agency regulation, however. While the State Department commanded officers to pay for transportation for American travelers who had suffered unforeseen reverses abroad, Consul Monroe saw to it that stranded unfortunates had enough money to make the return trip with dignity. Periodically, ailing seamen were abandoned in Rio by shipmasters who wished to avoid paying the men the three months' hardship wages due them under maritime law. Monroe visited the sailors during their hospital stays and arranged for new jobs for them if they recovered. He routinely paid for medical care and, when necessary, made funeral arrangements. If the deceased man's family could be located, Monroe wrote condolence letters to the bereaved. While he had a legal duty to notify other port consulates to detain shipmasters who hoped to evade their responsibilities to crew members, Monroe's vigorous pursuit of wrongdoers appears to have been singular among fellow officers.¹¹

His most time-consuming duty, however, was catering to the whims of Minister Webb. In the four months since Monroe had arrived, Webb's coolness had continued unabated, and nothing that Monroe did met with the senior diplomat's favor. Perhaps Webb had not forgiven him for the squabble over Monroe's manner of dress. Whether aggrieved or not, Webb constantly demanded Monroe's services as errand boy throughout the spring of 1863. His mania for the most current news of the Civil War ruled the office schedule at the embassy; he commanded Monroe to leave aside all other work when steamers from any English-speaking countries docked. Monroe was to meet these vessels, pick up consular mail (thus bypassing the disorganized Brazilian postal inspection houses), and deliver it to Webb *immediately*. Webb's taste for fine living also impeded official business. Monroe commonly opened the daily mail only to find a three-page missive from Webb detailing the sort of cigar he required from the local tobacconist. The Minister also allowed Mrs. Webb to abuse Monroe's good nature in this manner. Buttons, earrings, hats, gloves, and wine were among the list of items she expected the consul to procure.¹²

By mid-June, Monroe had had enough of this poor treatment. He patiently explained to Minister Webb that he suffered from various infirmities occasioned by his recent arrival in Rio and he would require more time to execute his official duties. Webb acknowledged Monroe's ill health, but shortly demanded that the consul mail a number of letters "at once."¹³ Monroe's terse reply indicates that his patience was at an end:

Don't crowd me. I am not well and I am overworked. It is a matter of some doubt whether I shall be able to endure the climate of Brazil. *You must give me a little time to take breath.* I have all I can do and *more than I ought to do* in connection with my consular duties before the French steamer leaves. After that, I will take up these new topics and see what I can do...This will be in good time for the English steamer.¹⁴

Under normal circumstances, it is likely that Webb would have dismissed Monroe for impertinence. Yet, as it transpired, events in Brazil during the summer of

1863 were anything but normal. Webb let Monroe's sharp retort pass without incident, for he could ill afford to alienate the man he relied on most for loyal support.

As a New York newspaper editor, Webb had acquired a reputation for verbal invective and nationalism rivalled by few in his trade. He redressed perceived insults to his enormous pride by offering to cane offending parties in public places. Webb's campaign to restore American prestige abroad took a disastrous turn when these old habits reasserted themselves at a ball given by the Austrian diplomatic corps in April, 1863. It is not clear whether Minister William Christie, representing the British Empire, intended to slight Minister Webb when he made a joking reference to the Confederacy's recent military successes. It is very clear, however, that Webb perceived this comment as a national insult. He created a scene by denouncing the British minister and storming out of the hall.¹⁵

Minister Christie was recalled shortly thereafter and chose to escalate matters from a distance. He published a piece in the *London Times* in which he criticized Webb's performance as a minister and asserted that he was supported in his contentions by Webb's own countrymen.¹⁶ This article touched off a volley of increasingly bitter responses by the American minister. Not satisfied to restrict the debate to the diplomatic community or to strict truth, Webb even paid editor Tavares Bastos of Rio's *O Mercantil*, the city's largest commercial journal, to write the following insert for the June 16, 1863 afternoon edition:

Our skillful savant Christie, lately minister in this empire, is now in London busy slandering our nation, our government, and our people on a daily basis. Lord Palmerston believes all these lies and it is commonly said that Brazilian citizens may expect no protection under the *Principes Galles* when they visit that country.¹⁷

Webb instructed Monroe to circulate the article to Rio's other newspapers "with favorable comments; [p]lay if necessary." Monroe, however, had grave reservations about Webb's handling of the incident. While he sympathized with Webb's earnest

defense of national honor, he felt that the minister had allowed passion to override prudence. The consul wished to avoid being dragged into the spectacle if he could do so without giving the appearance of disloyalty. Webb had frequently solicited his support in the past weeks, stating that he was "justly entitled" to at least indirect endorsement from Monroe. Choosing the middle path, the consul paid for printing of the article, but made no comment on its content.¹⁸

This appears to have been the wisest approach. Webb's sensational antics, which included forbidding his legation from visiting or dining with British consular officers, disgusted both Brazilian and American governments. By maintaining his distance from the chaos fomented by Webb, Monroe could take whatever opportunity offered itself to smooth over relations between the countries. While Webb remained belligerent, Monroe recognized that it would be his unenunciated duty to act as conciliator following Webb's apoplectic episodes.

Monroe and the other Americans in Rio recognized the underlying foundation of Webb's complaint against the British minister. British officials were prone to look on Americans as rebellious upstarts; Americans, on the other hand, felt it necessary to emphasize that they were no longer the colonials which Great Britain had alienated only a few decades earlier. Indeed, the United States's ascending commercial and naval power had already begun to intrude into markets in which Great Britain's sailors and merchants held a traditional hegemony. The vast natural resources of Brazil and the mercantile trade in manufactured goods which could be conducted in her ports made the country a particularly lucrative prize in the struggle for commercial supremacy.¹⁹

This, however, was only one aspect of the complex situation. Great Britain's traditionally warm relations with Brazil had cooled in 1850, when the British government tried to compel Dom Pedro II to enforce the slave importation ban which had been the key element of an 1826 trade agreement between the countries. By the mid-1850s, Brazil submitted to British pressure and importation

ceased. Brazilian slavery being the harsh business that it was, natural reproduction could not keep pace with the high mortality rates, and serious labor shortages began to develop. Some Brazilians began to invest the money once spent on slave labor in small business enterprises. As this new middle-class developed, their political thought mirrored that of the northern United States. This growing minority favored democracy, free trade, and free labor. They felt that slavery kept Brazil a prisoner to backward thought, and had cheered President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.²⁰

While Dom Pedro II personally disliked the institution of slavery, his political supporters benefitted from the system and were adamantly opposed to further reform. The most powerful families in the Brazilian aristocracy had grown rich on imperial land grants and the profits reaped from slave labor. They felt a spiritual kindredship with citizens of the Confederacy who, they felt, were only defending their rights to possess property without unjust governmental interference. In a sense, then, Brazilians felt that the result of the controversy in the United States would predicate their own future as a slave power. With coffee prices near an all-time high, talk of the Civil War could be a volatile subject. Christie's remarks, therefore, were probably subtle flattery directed at the Brazilian aristocrats assembled at the gala.²¹

Monroe also knew that Christie's comments concerning the Confederacy were particularly troubling given the tense international scene. Great Britain, ostensibly neutral, needed large amounts of cotton to keep its textile mills running, and was known to have business dealings with the Confederate government. The Brazilian power elite were known to follow Great Britain's diplomatic lead and felt an affinity for the Southern cause. If Brazil's ports were opened to Confederate ships, the privateers and steamers could raid Union vessels and refuel with impunity. Brazil might sell the riches of the Amazon to replenish the Confederate war machine, backed by the might of the British Navy. It was imperative to

the speedy and successful conclusion of the war that Great Britain and Brazil at least remain neutral if they could not be persuaded to join with the Union. Webb had hoped to rekindle the tension between Brazil and Great Britain, thus gaining a dual political and commercial advantage for the United States.²²

While correctly assessing the situation, Webb had seriously erred in the implementation of his self-imposed mission. Brazilians had tired of American histrionics and Anglo-Saxon presumptiveness in general. The American minister was sharply reminded by the Brazilian Council of State that his attempts to shape Brazilian foreign policy through public opinion were not appreciated. Secretary of State Seward threatened Webb with recall if he could not moderate his childish and short-sighted behavior. American merchants reported that their businesses had been the target of boycott activity. In the words of historian L.F. Hill, "[u]nder Webb, U.S.-Brazilian relations reached an all-time low."²³

This dismal state of affairs made Monroe's job difficult in a number of ways. He struggled with his conscience over the position he should take regarding Brazilian slavery. Monroe's unwavering opposition to the institution had been, before his arrival in Rio, largely a matter of abstract principle; in Brazil, however, evidence of the extreme cruelty and injustice of the system was everywhere. He felt bound by his oath of office to voice no opinion on a condition which he found manifestly repugnant, and indeed could not even commit his thoughts on the matter to paper lest the dispatch be intercepted and read by persons wishing to add fuel to the furor raging around the United States legation. Years later, after he returned to private life in the United States, Monroe would speak passionately and frequently on the subject. For the moment, however, he could only pray that the trend toward gradual emancipation would bring a swift end to the miserable living and working conditions of the Brazilian slave. In public, he chose to keep his silence.²⁴

His relationship with Webb had warmed considerably during the Christie incident, but it was a friendship which Monroe entered with reservations. Webb

was quick to grasp the political or commercial possibilities of any situation, but he acted too hastily and forcefully to be a good diplomat. He was a loyal and sincere man, but he was also vain, self-indulgent, and temperamental. Monroe knew that Webb could do his country serious harm in his current position but loyally supposed that in another, perhaps, he would excel. In the meantime, the Rio consul's diplomatic effectiveness would be limited by the uneasy relations between the Brazilian government and Webb.

Monroe, of course, could not directly express such an opinion under the circumstances without appearing unsupportive. When Louis Napoleon of France wrote Webb a kind response to a long and ingratiating letter, however, Monroe must have seen it as a fortuitous opportunity to express the opinion indirectly. He was as reluctant as ever to pursue political preferment for himself, being of a modest disposition. With little prompting by Webb, however, he wrote to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase soliciting the minister's transfer to the French court on the strength of Webb's "personal friendship" with Louis Napoleon. His willingness to assist Webb in the search for another post was only tempered by his customary uncomfortableness in "meddling" in high government affairs; it is clear by the tone and content of the missive that Monroe hoped that Webb's transfer would resolve the tensions in Brazil to the satisfaction of all parties. Though he could not speak generously of Webb's skill as a diplomat, Monroe still avoided sabotaging his commanding officer's chance to gain the position.²⁵

It is unclear whether Secretary Chase approached Secretary Seward with Monroe's request. However, Seward had ample notice of Webb's wishes from Webb himself. Seward was unimpressed with the minister's translation of Napoleon's letter and angry about Webb's indelicate handling of the Christie incident. He refused Webb's request, stating truthfully that there was no opening to be had in France. Webb, like Monroe, would have to make the best of his stay in Brazil.²⁶

Given enough time, it was possible that the tension created by Webb would ease and the political aspects of diplomacy could be pursued once more. Until such

time, however, Monroe chose to busy himself in the commercial and legal dealings of the embassy. He had not anticipated the volume of the notarial business that he would be called upon to conduct as consul. As he admitted to a close friend in Oberlin, Professor J.H. Fairchild, this trade was an "important source of revenue" over and above his yearly salary of \$2,409.50. Because his position as notary was not officially linked to his State Department office, the rates for notarizing official documents were set by local custom and he was authorized to keep any money he collected. Monroe recorded that over the course of several busy weeks, he took in an average of \$16 a day from Americans and Brazilians alike. He noted that he had attracted "a segment of Rio's merchant class" who especially liked his service, for they could expect to pay quadruple his rates if they did business through Brazilian organizations.²⁷

In this way, Monroe began to establish some sorely needed credibility for the United States legation through his direct contacts with the Rio business community. He wrote to Fairchild that "[b]esides making some money, I believe I have a good reputation for reasonableness and consideration for others in my way of making it." While nothing could expunge Webb's offenses against the patience and dignity of the Brazilian court, Monroe could soften the ire of a portion of the population and procure more favorable standing for his country's commercial interests.²⁸

A pleasant side-effect of this unofficial initiative was its lucrative nature. Monroe often wondered at his good fortune after so many years of fiscal insecurity. At a distance, he could admit to his friends in Oberlin that he had struggled so much that he had been formerly unable to support his church in Columbus and had sometimes been embarrassed by the generosity of neighbors who knew of his difficulties. His office in Rio was "a good one financially" and he hoped to live cheaply and invest the profits of the position. As he wrote to Fairchild, his goals were simple:

If I can...get something before hands so that when I return to O[hio] I can go on with my labors without that financial embarrassment that used to trouble me, I shall feel that a valuable end has been accomplished for my children, myself, and my usefulness. In the meantime, I don't mean to be stingy and hope I shall not be.²⁹

His friends in the United States, however, feared that Monroe would be too generous with his funds. They nursed hopes that Monroe would run for a Congressional seat and knew that it was a rare man who went to Washington without at least moderate wealth. One of his political allies, Oberlin banker Samuel Plumb, wrote Monroe that he expected Monroe to "start upon a new and more adequate financial basis, with renewed health, and with a largely accumulated stock of business knowledge such as will adapt you to the new fields of public service" if no misfortune arose.³⁰ Richard C. Parsons was less discreet:

*I do hope you will keep your health and be sure and save money—for money must be had if you would live easily. Stay long enough to make it pay and only get back in time to run for Congress in the next election.*³¹

While Monroe had not yet decided whether to run for Congress, he had taken his friends' monetary advice to heart. He engaged Fairchild to invest most of his State Department salary in rental properties and land in Oberlin and left risky stock speculation to less cautious men. Although opportunities for making a fortune in the purchase and resale of wartime materiel abounded in Rio, Monroe's deep pacifist sentiments prohibited him from investing in this sort of enterprise.

Monroe was not averse, however, to taking advantage of the volatile conditions of the international monetary market. The Civil War had made the trade future uncertain, and currency exchange rates fluctuate wildly. By exchanging his Brazilian milreas for British pounds and his pounds for American dollars, Monroe and Fairchild could sometimes increase the consul's earnings by sixty per cent. The extra money he made in this manner allowed him to indulge his charitable nature without risking his financial security. Fairchild was routinely instructed to

donate money to Oberlin College, the First Congregational Church in Oberlin, Monroe's less fortunate relatives, and Oberlin's needy. Under Fairchild's honest stewardship, Monroe began to amass a comfortable sum toward an easy retirement many years and many miles away.³²

At present, however, his duties were anything but easy. No sooner had the public outcry over the Christie incident died away than the United States legation in Rio became involved in another potentially explosive international situation. As noted previously, the Brazilian government claimed neutrality in the war in the United States. It nonetheless persisted in granting Confederate vessels "belligerent" status and allowed Southern privateers to dock at Brazilian ports for "brief" refueling and repair stops under "emergency" conditions. Brazil was a large country with a poor communication system, however, and Brazilian provincial officials were empowered to deviate from official policy if they felt it would be in the nation's best interests. If provincial presidents were leniently disposed toward the Confederate cause, they could interpret the terms "brief" and "emergency" in a manner which would give Confederate ships free access to certain ports at any time.³³

This lax policy infuriated representatives of the Lincoln government, including Minister James Watson Webb. Throughout the spring of 1863, there had been rumors that the *C.S.S. Alabama* was lurking somewhere off the coast of Brazil, but the *U.S.S. Mohican* and *U.S.S. Vanderbilt* had been unable to locate and destroy this extremely successful "pirate ship." The *Alabama*, a swift and well-armed vessel, had disrupted Northern trade by destroying or capturing millions of dollars worth of goods and ships. The Union war effort had been hampered by the Southern privateer, and Union officials had been deeply embarrassed by the mocking accounts of her one-sided victories which had been featured in Southern newspapers. Therefore, American legations in all South American ports were under strict State Department instructions to assist the Navy by any means possible in their search for the elusive *Alabama*.³⁴

Shortly after the American community in Rio had gathered together for an Independence Day picnic, James Monroe received word that the *C.S.S. Alabama* had been sighted in the Brazilian port of Fernando de Noronha. This island port, which was situated within Brazilian waters and fell under the control of the provincial president of Pernambuco, had extended hospitality to the Confederate ship repeatedly in the previous several months. By refueling and resupplying locally, the *Alabama* had been able to stay in South American seas and capture half a dozen Union whalers. The vital supply of lamp oil aboard the whaling ships would be redirected to the Confederacy, and the North would lose both profits and products of the voyages. The *U.S.S. Mohican*, steaming northward towards Pernambuco to intercept the *Alabama*, docked just long enough to learn if any further news of the Southern ship had been received.³⁵

Over two weeks passed with no news of either the *Alabama* or the *Mohican*. Minister Webb, frantic to take an active part, wrote directly to Emperor Dom Pedro II to demand that Confederate vessels be prohibited from Brazilian ports. It is fortunate for U.S. interests that after this initiative, Webb became too ill to take a major role in the unfolding drama; this attempt to make direct contact with the Emperor was a breach of protocol which did not bear repeating. Responsibility for monitoring Union interests fell to Consul Monroe, and Webb was relegated to an advisory capacity.³⁶

By August 1, 1863, events had reached a critical point. The Brazilian government had recently issued a long statement of official policy which limited the stay of *both* Union and Confederate vessels to twenty-four hours in port. The document also contained veiled threats concerning the consequences of violating the neutrality of Brazilian waters. These threats, however, were more stuff than substance given the size and firepower of the tiny Brazilian Navy. The *Alabama* now lay at anchor in the port of Pernambuco and the *Mohican* was closing in as fast as its engines could take her. It was up to Monroe to test the enforcement of imperial policy before the two sides clashed.³⁷

Secretary Seward issued a despatch to Webb suggesting that every legal means be employed to seize the *Alabama* and outlining a number of possible tactics to follow. He strongly advised the minister to avoid military intervention in Brazilian waters at all costs; such an instruction galled Webb, but he conceded that Seward's plan of attack might succeed. He passed a copy of the despatch to Monroe with the provision that access to its contents was to be restricted to "countrymen only." The Brazilian support staff, including the ever-loyal Cordeiro, were not to be trusted with state secrets. Monroe quickly employed a lawyer, and together, they began to draft briefs aimed at detaining the *Alabama* "for a hearing of the violations of the rules of the [Brazilian] court" and assorted violations of maritime and international law. Their liaison officer to the Brazilian court system, Foreign Minister Marquis D'Abrantes, agreed that their case had merit and helped them to pursue it.³⁸

The Brazilian courts, modeled on the Portuguese system, moved slowly. After the early August filing date of the complaints against the *Alabama*, all interested parties were notified and given an opportunity to respond to the charges. Monroe and Webb were astounded when the newly appointed British consul filed an appeal on behalf of the *Alabama* and asserted that the United States had no right to detain or seize the ship under the circumstances. A British sloop, the *H.M.S. Onward*, was sent to wait near the *Alabama* to escort it safely to international waters.³⁹

This stunning development altered the simple legal gambit Seward had outlined. Monroe, inexperienced in courtroom matters and unwilling to make the wrong move, solicited Webb's advice. In response, Webb drafted a lengthy refutation of the "high-handed" British position which Monroe read to D'Abrantes on August 17, 1863. Monroe evidently tempered Webb's strong words, for D'Abrantes complimented Monroe on "the firm and friendly language" of the message. Webb was well-pleased with his consul:

[I]n reading...my letter, you have done all that can be accomplished in the emergency which has arisen—all that I could have done had I been present. Indeed, I think, for many reasons, it is better that I should not be where a discussion of this question would have been forced upon me. Now, if the vessels are still in Port, they [the Brazilian government] will be obliged to *act*.⁴⁰

The *Mohican* was due to arrive outside Pernambuco harbor at any time, and Webb surmised that if that steamer was in evidence, the British consul would “scarcely proceed.” In closing, he urged Monroe to look closely for procedural errors in the British filing; if such minor formulaic problems could be detected, the Americans could appeal and delay the ships for a few more precious days. Everything seemed to depend on the arrival of the *Mohican*, which was experiencing engine problems as it pushed against the strong coastal current. Its sidewheel, which was so effective in the calmer waters of a river, was nearly useless in the choppy Atlantic Ocean.⁴¹

Over a week passed before the Brazilian government officially notified Monroe that they had detained the *Alabama*. Webb had worried himself into the symptoms of a duodenal ulcer, while Monroe haunted the dockside hoping for news from Pernambuco. Finally, a representative from the northern province informed Monroe that “the most stringent orders have been given to prevent any departure of the ship until the proceedings in Court are closed.” The *Mohican* circled the area outside the harbor but, due to the twenty-four hour restrictions, was forced to lay several miles off the coast outside Brazil’s territorial waters.⁴²

In the two months of court proceedings that followed, the *Mohican* would act as a watchdog on both the British and Confederate vessels. Monroe and the legal team representing the United States won a partial victory for the Union cause by gaining Brazil’s assent to rigorous enforcement of the twenty-four hour emergency harbor regulation. The larger issue of seizure eluded them, however. Brazilian courts declared that they had no legal standing to seize the property of one belligerent nation and give it to another. Although Monroe made a persuasive

case which demonstrated that the Confederacy was not a nation but a loose amalgamation of states in rebellion against their lawful government, the Brazilian judiciary remained firm. The *Alabama* was free to leave Brazil. On a foggy October night, it slipped its moorings and sailed quietly out to open sea. By morning, it had once again vanished.⁴³

Monroe was heartsick, as was Webb. Ironically, the *U.S.S. Vanderbilt*, another member of the Atlantic Squadron, had narrowly missed encountering the *Alabama* as the Union ship steamed southward. With the Union Navy sorely embarrassed and plans for capture in disarray, Monroe sent instructions from Webb to the consuls at Bahia, Pernambuco, St. Catherine's, and Santos, to be given to the first commandant of a U.S. warship to enter their ports. The terrible waiting game of the summer and fall had been for naught. Webb vowed to take more vigorous action if given a second opportunity, and Monroe wearily agreed that legal extradition was a limited tactic.⁴⁴

Mere days later, Webb had the opportunity to make good upon his threat to act. On October 4, 1863, the *C.S.S. Florida* arrived at Bahia and her crew was given forty-eight hours to repair her boilers, load coal, and re-provision. The *U.S.S. Wachusett*, under the command of the ambitious Napoleon Collins, also lay at anchor in the harbor. The consul at Bahia, James Wilson, had promised the provincial government that "there should be no violation of [Brazil's] neutrality nor...any conflict in their waters." Webb's strident orders, however, overrode all such promises and Wilson advised Collins to seize the rebel vessel while he had the chance. Collins, who was young and eager to make a reputation for himself, agreed.⁴⁵

As Monroe later heard the story, on the morning of October 7, as soon as the forty-eight hour grace period had elapsed, the *Wachusett* opened fire on the *Florida*. Some of the Confederate ship's crew had not yet returned to the vessel, and its boiler was still partially dismantled. As it lay at anchor no more than a

few hundred yards distant and was unable to maneuver away from the Union gunboat, it was easy prey. It is unclear whether the *Florida* ever returned fire.⁴⁶

The Bahian port authorities were shocked at this bold violation of their country's neutrality. The commander of the Brazilian naval division threatened to turn his guns on the *Wachusett* if Collins continued to fire; it is hard to believe that the shelling in Bahia's harbor occasioned no civilian casualties. Collins, content that the skeleton crew aboard the *Florida* could be subdued and the ship seized, ordered his men to board the vessel. Shortly thereafter, a sailor threw a towline between the vessels and the *Wachusett* began to drag its prize out of the harbor. Brazilian ships pursued the ungainly pair, but were either unable or unwilling to overtake them. The *Florida* was towed to Hampton Roads, Virginia, where it sank shortly after its arrival.⁴⁷

Consul Wilson, who apparently feared the wrath of the people of Bahia, was aboard the *Wachusett* throughout the attack and subsequent seizure. His presence, in the mind of Emperor Dom Pedro II and his government, gave the proceedings an unmistakably official cast. This unwarranted intrusion into Brazil's territorial waters, aggravated by the grave insult to Brazilian dignity and sovereignty, was insufferable to the Brazilians. They demanded an immediate and unconditional apology from the United States government. Once again, Minister James Watson Webb had contributed to creating an international diplomatic incident.⁴⁸

Throughout Brazil, anti-American sentiment ran high for the remainder of 1863. Bahia's consulate was set on fire, while other consulates reported being pelted with stones by angry mobs. American businesses were vandalized for weeks afterward. On the night that news of the *Florida* incident reached Rio, it was rumored that crowds planned to attack Webb's residence. Although the attack never materialized, Monroe could plainly see the consequences of diplomacy gone awry. While the initial violent overtones would fade quickly, the resentment of the Brazilian public would linger until the United States made a full apology.⁴⁹

Over a year later, on December 26, 1864, the incident was finally put to rest. Secretary Seward apologized to the Brazilian government on President Lincoln's behalf, admitting that the president disavowed and regretted the episode. Further, Lincoln would suspend Commander Collins and recommend that he be court-martialed; Consul Wilson, who admitted that he had advised and incited the commander, would be dismissed from government service. Finally, a U.S. warship would enter the port of Bahia flying a Brazilian flag and fire a twenty-one gun salute to complete the public apology.⁵⁰

This elaborate expression of regret appealed to the Brazilian government's delight in ceremonial forms. Although the actual salute would not take place until the summer of 1866, Brazilian pride was mollified and negotiations concerning the long-desired Amazonian free trade agreement could progress. The apology exactly fulfilled the demands of Dom Pedro's government, but Brazilian businessmen and newspaper editors speculated that Webb, rather than Wilson, should have been dismissed. After all, Wilson only acted under standing orders from Webb and had absorbed his own ideas of diplomatic propriety from watching the behavior of his superior. Webb, however, merited only a severe scolding from Seward for his role in the affair.⁵¹

The embarrassment that the *Florida* incident occasioned for the Union government was nearly as great as the benefit it derived from the *Florida's* capture. Therefore, many of Seward's promises to the Brazilian government were not kept. The commander of the *Wachusett*, Napoleon Collins, was given a long leave of absence and then returned to active duty with the promotion for which he had hoped. James Wilson, who had been the real focus of Brazilian anger, was retained by Seward in Washington and often acted as the clerk in charge of correspondence to Brazil. Members of the U.S. legation in Brazil were strictly admonished to conceal Wilson's continuing involvement in State Department affairs from their Brazilian hosts. Thomas Adamson, Consul to the Brazilian port of

Pernambuco, accurately summed up the general attitude of the United States government when he told Monroe that it mattered little "how Brazil takes our apology." The important prize, the *Florida*, had been won.⁵²

The lenient treatment received by the other two principals, not to mention the complimentary notices scattered in newspapers throughout Union territory, angered Minister Webb. His "plan," he obstinately insisted, had been instrumental in the seizure of the *Florida* by Collins and Wilson. The harsh words from Seward and the generally negative attitude of the Lincoln government toward Webb's undiplomatic behavior stung the egotistical man. His central role deserved a reward, not censure.⁵³

James Monroe bore up well under Webb's capricious temper and kept silent when confronted by Webb's critics. This silence, however, cannot be construed as support. The consul was always quick to praise his superior when he could offer such praise sincerely and would truthfully state his opinion when Webb thought to confer with him. Yet, Monroe's careful propriety prohibited him from openly disagreeing with the minister. It is likely, then, that he hoped that the ambiguity of his silence would be interpreted by the Brazilians as neutrality, by the State Department as disapproval, and by Webb as tacit approval. Even when urged by other U.S. diplomats to offer comment on Webb's outrageous behavior, Monroe gently changed the topic.⁵⁴

Webb, who soon tired of ranting at members of his support staff, instead vented his frustration towards the captains of the United States Navy's Atlantic Squadron. His rancor was reciprocated by the naval personnel, who found the interference of "the great balloon" of "gas and brass" intolerable.⁵⁵ In early January, 1864, to prevent the total breakdown of communication between the military and civilian representatives of the Union government, Consul Monroe volunteered to handle the direct military communications for the duration of war. Webb, who planned to spend the winter enriching himself and his family by winning Brazil-

ian approval for the introduction of U.S. steamer trade on the Amazon, was happy to be relieved of the onerous duty.⁵⁶

Monroe and Webb would continue to differ in many ways. Webb felt that it was his duty to "cultivate the kindest feelings with the governments of South America" insofar as it would make the realization of his entrepreneurial goals in the region easier. He promised Monroe that they would both profit from his proposals, but Monroe quickly disentangled himself from Webb's scheme. He wanted no part of a plan which so easily could be construed as a conflict of interest. Although Webb frequently invited Monroe to dinner and pressed his junior officer to be his near-constant social companion, Monroe chose to keep their relationship amicable yet somewhat distant.⁵⁷

Webb construed Monroe's polite refusals as an indication of an overzealous attachment to work. They might more accurately be characterized as evidence of a strong devotion to duty. Monroe's conception of duty was selfless and sure; he was to develop strong economic and political ties between Brazil and the United States to promote each country's common good. Furthermore, he was to perform his official duties efficiently, fairly, and discreetly. The proper execution of Monroe's responsibilities required more time and organization than Webb could possibly imagine. Monroe, unlike many diplomats of the day, took his consular appointment very seriously.

James Monroe was sure that before 1864 drew to a close, new challenges would test his abilities in previously unimagined ways. He could, however, consider the momentous events of 1863 as a proving ground in which he first demonstrated his worth as a diplomat. In nine short months since his arrival in Brazil, he had been near the center of events which threatened to jeopardize harmonious relations between the United States, Brazil, and Great Britain. Although his superior was recalcitrant and alienated nearly everyone in the diplomatic community, Monroe managed to be well-liked and well-respected. He had made many friends and had acquitted himself well under extreme pressure.

At the end of Monroe's trial by fire, Webb could report, without exaggeration, that "Consul Monroe is always anxious to do more than his duty."⁵⁸ He had gained experience in commerce, finance, and law which would serve him well should he decide to run for a Congressional seat. Without sacrificing his honor or neglecting his duty, he had also started to accumulate the money necessary for his family's security and comfort. Through his policies of discretion, honesty, and hard work, Monroe continued to augment his reputation as a committed public servant at home and abroad. All in all, he could be satisfied with a job well done.

Chapter IV

The War Ends

IV

In Oberlin, the months of January and February, 1864, were bleak and snow-laden. Rio de Janeiro, however, with its tropical Southern Hemisphere climate, was cursed by a different sort of miserable weather. During Rio's "summer" months, it seemed to rain constantly; black mud and grey skies framed the usually picturesque mountains. A humid dampness which no amount of rain could wash from the air permeated every room. Trade dropped off and, in diplomatic circles, the elaborate parties of the "winter" season were discontinued due to the heat. The omnipresent rain hampered the travel, disrupted the communications, plagued the health, and depressed the spirits of foreigners living in the Brazilian port.¹

James Monroe, who would soon complete his first full year as Consul at Rio, must have felt that the torpid gloominess of Rio's summer climate at times mirrored his emotional state. He desperately missed his four children and, although he had been a widower for two years, still quietly mourned for his wife. The dramatic events at the embassy in the first several months of his stay had occupied him nearly completely, but with the escape of the elusive *Alabama*, his thoughts increasingly turned homeward. Minister Webb did not have to instruct Monroe to look for the mail steamer on a daily basis, for he eagerly awaited any letters with news of Oberlin and his family.²

While friends assured him that Emma, Mary, Charles, and Willie thrived under the care of Mrs. Hughes, not everything they said comforted him. Mrs. Mary Kinney, who described his old house and its new tenants in a guardedly negative way, told him that "the yard shows the want of your careful hand." Oberlin College's financial worries increased as young men withdrew from school

to join the Union Army. Monroe grew frustrated at the two-month delay of news between Brazil and Ohio, a lag exacerbated by the Confederate Navy's dogged interference with merchant vessels which often carried letters and newspapers as part of their cargo.³

If the letters from Oberlin carried uncertain news of home, the newspapers were even more troubling. Union forces finally appeared to be gaining the upper hand, but at a staggering cost. No one could predict when the war would end or how two sides engaged in such bitter conflict could be made into a nation again. The questions of citizenship and racial equality raised by an eventual Union victory loomed large. Was the opportunity for national redemption which had been purchased by so much suffering to be wasted? Perhaps no one felt this irony more keenly than the free blacks of Oberlin, who had hoped that the Emancipation Proclamation would soon be followed with measures granting equal rights to all men under law. Instead, racial issues were so sensitive for the duration of the war that it sometimes seemed that the conflict had actually delayed the eradication of inequality.

One of Monroe's many friends in Oberlin, ex-slave John Patterson, summed up his disappointment in a letter to the consul:

No talk now of Erasing the word "white" from the Constitution, no reward of merit held out to black men though there is some of our own town boys that has fallen in Federal ranks...*True*, they are applauded through the newspapers for the Brave and Soldier-like Spirit, but with that it stops. It seems that none of them is too Black to make Good and Brave Soldiers...yet all of them is too Black to have the Right of Franchise given to them or to be allowed Equal Pay as white men.⁴

Monroe often wished himself at home where he could take a more active role in the struggle for equality when he received such bitter news from those among the vanguard.

For a variety of reasons, however, Monroe chose to stay in Rio and work through his homesickness. His relatively high salary, coupled with a great desire

to provide for his family's future, provided strong motivation. Exchange rates in the triangular trade between Brazil, Great Britain, and the United States soared. Even after Monroe's financial manager, Professor James H. Fairchild, figured in a small brokerage fee, Monroe netted a whopping 194% increase on a \$250 draft sent to Oberlin via London.⁵ Such favorable rates were unlikely to last. Furthermore, Monroe's competence and honesty might be disregarded if Abraham Lincoln were not reelected in 1864. Consular positions often were promised as rewards to party faithful; as a loyal Lincoln man, Monroe could reasonably expect to be dismissed if George McClellan won the Presidency. He wisely chose, therefore, to stay in Rio until his political future was more certain.

Moreover, Monroe's sense of duty forbade him to leave his post while the general sentiment of the Brazilian government was so decidedly anti-Union. Brazilians deeply resented the American presence in their midst, and Minister James Watson Webb reluctantly announced that the custom of flying the Union flag before residences and businesses would have to be abandoned. He reasoned that it would lessen public respect for the national colors if they were "indiscriminately exhibited without affording any protection or immunity to the place in which [they were] displayed."⁶ The Brazilian government was slow to forgive Webb for his role in the seizure of the *Florida* and did little to intervene when its citizens destroyed or damaged American property. Temporarily, therefore, open displays of the patriotic nationalism which had offended Brazilian sensibilities were strongly discouraged.

If Webb's behavior routinely aggravated his host country, it also frequently embarrassed even the most loyal Union supporters in the region. The *Florida* incident had seriously undermined the credibility and effectiveness of other Union diplomats in South America. How could Monroe leave with a clear conscience when most of his fellow consular officials agreed with the sentiments of Minister to Paraguay, Charles Washburn?

If I were in the place of a certain friend of ours [Webb]...I should certainly expect to get a longer leave of absence than I had earned—in fact, a permanent leave...Our Government won't stand the scandal that will grow out of it and he will be lucky if that precious power of attorney is not the power that turns him out of office. I feel humiliated when the Union is spoken of [here] and though I refuse all insinuation of collusion, I am annoyed that I can't deny anything.⁷

Even though Webb was not to be dismissed for his diplomatic ineptitude, as Washburn had surmised, the minister would soon be eligible for a lengthy leave of absence. His departure would be little regretted by anyone who regularly dealt with the temperamental man. With Webb abroad, however, the well-liked Monroe would be officially in charge of the Brazilian post. It was impossible for Monroe, under the circumstances, to leave Rio.

James Monroe already bore the brunt of ministerial duties due to his superior's ill health. Laura Webb, who often took over correspondence with Monroe during her husband's illnesses, reported that Webb had been reduced to eating nothing but moistened bread due to a severe case of gout.⁸ Minister Webb had, for months, leaned heavily on crutches and was always liberally medicated with opiates. The combination of drugs and pain made it impossible for Webb to reason clearly and fulfill his duties expediently. He finally agreed, at Monroe's request, to grant Monroe the full privileges accorded to the ministerial position so that business at the Brazilian embassy could progress unimpeded. Webb wished to clarify, however, the limits of his power of attorney regarding the Confederate ships and his conception of his duty as a diplomat:

[I]t is a great *farce*, because having no legal rights over [rebel ships], I cannot transfer any such rights to you. If I possessed the power, I should most cheerfully and promptly order you to burn the vessels; but such is not my position...As the Representative of the United States, I am bound to obey the orders of my Government and make such representations to this Government as the President may direct. Here my authority begins and ends.⁹

While Webb himself constantly overstepped these enunciated limits, he had recently raised the ire of Secretary of State William Seward by his behavior. It is possible that, in echoing Seward's words, he wished Monroe to avoid his own mistakes. It is more likely, however, that Webb hoped that the circumscribed statement of duties would discourage Monroe from exercising any prerogatives which the minister felt belonged to him alone.

To this end, Webb further reminded Monroe that, in many ways, the office of Consul to the Port of Rio de Janeiro was much more legally powerful than his own. Monroe could authorize the sale and transfer of Confederate vessels (including changing their flag) and clear them for any other port. Webb was powerless to initiate any such proceedings. The minister also urged Monroe to remember that, according to a government circular dated October 8, 1861, the consul was legally required to remove the masters of any American vessel showing the rebel flag, appoint another captain, and send the ship to a port north of Baltimore. Monroe might wish to "attempt to carry [the policy] into force against [Confederate] ships at the proper time."¹⁰

Webb was well aware that the policy of removal and seizure could be resisted in the Brazilian courts, but noted that "such resistance would take time, which is all we want."¹¹ The delay would give the Atlantic Squadron the time to arrive and to seize the vessel if the legal gambit failed. Although the tactic would be primarily aimed at rebel warships such as the ever-slippery *Alabama*, it could also be employed effectively against commercial vessels which attempted to run the Union blockade of Confederate ports. Monroe, thus armed with detailed instructions, had only to await a chance to carry out Webb's plan.

The *C.S.S. Gracie*, a British-built ship purchased by a congeries of Confederate commercialists and underwritten by the British-based firm of Wright, Maxwell & Company, afforded Monroe the perfect test case. The small, lightweight vessel docked in Rio harbor in early May, 1864 and her master proceeded to

purchase both medicine and materiel to aid the Confederate war effort. To stop the *Gracie* from departing with her cargo, Monroe solicited the aid of the Brazilian Tribunal of Commerce through the country's Office of Foreign Affairs. The ship was then detained for a few days while the legal issues surrounding its ownership could be clarified. British citizens, who had long hoped for "nothing short of rebel success," took offense at Monroe's "impertinence." Great Britain's minister to Brazil instructed the steamer *H.M.S. Curlew* to speed toward the port to prevent a repetition of the infamous *Florida* incident. Meanwhile, the sole United States Navy vessel within range of Rio was the *U.S.S. Onward*, an old man-of-war whose construction predated the Mexican-American War. The Union ship would be no match for the state-of-the-art British vessel, which had bigger guns, a more experienced crew, and superior maneuverability.¹²

For a few days in May, 1864, however, it appeared that conflict between the two ships was imminent. The *Onward* rested outside the harbor to the northeast, directly in the shipping lane most frequently taken by vessels returning to the United States. If the Brazilian government allowed the *Gracie* to return home, the *Onward* planned to engage her just outside Brazil's territorial waters. The *Curlew*, on the other hand, intended to provide protection to the *Gracie* until it was clear that the Union ship had quit pursuit. Throughout the Civil War, Union and Confederate governments alike wondered if Great Britain would become entangled in the conflict. Was it possible that the world's foremost naval power would endanger its ostensible neutrality on a small commercial ship like the *Gracie*? No one knew.¹³

James Monroe thus had to proceed cautiously. When the Tribunal of Commerce refused to allow the consul to seize the vessel's master and take possession of the rebel ship on behalf of the Union government, Monroe appealed the decision. In a dispatch from the Office of Foreign Affairs, however, the Tribunal reiterated its previous ruling about the *Gracie* and all other rebel ships:

[All vessels are] free and at liberty to proceed where their owners may choose to send them, in spite of any appeal for a revisal of the decision to the Supreme Tribunal of Justice which might still be made, because *according to Brazilian law*, [this appeal] *would not produce the effect of suspending this sentence.*¹⁴

As Webb noted on Monroe's copy of the missive, the U.S. legation had reached "the end of [their] ropes." The minister encouraged Monroe to rely on the *Onward*, as he had issued orders to Captain Clark permitting the *Onward* to go "wherever he thinks is his duty to go in pursuit of the Pirates." Monroe was nonetheless despondent over the loss and dreaded the anticipated naval clash.¹⁵

It appears, however, that the British Minister to Brazil was as eager to avoid military conflict as Webb was to foment it. Before daybreak on May 16, the *Gracie* crept out of Rio's harbor escorted by the *H.M.S. Curlew*. As the two ships left the wide mouth of the port, they set a southern course to evade completely the *Onward*. This confounded any hope of seizure by the Union man-of-war, although Captain Clark followed the convoy as soon as he was informed of the departure; moreover, British residents in Brazil took every opportunity to boast of the "glorious escape" to their humiliated American neighbors.¹⁶

Webb, however, assured Monroe that the Americans should "rejoice in [the *Gracie's*] escape." Monroe had done his duty in trying to prevent her escape and thereby had preserved his nation's prestige. Monroe had been both vigorous and honest in his attempt to capture the vessel. Although "self-respect frequently compels nations and individuals to do that which they would avoid if possible," Webb was well aware that "it would have been an embarrassing affair to our Government in the existing critical state of our relations with Great Britain." For all his belligerence, the minister admitted that he prayed that the other rebel vessels currently at anchor in the Rio harbor escaped before the *Onward* returned from its pursuit of the *Gracie*. Monroe was to be heartily commended for gaining "all that was desirable...without causing any embarrassment to our Government."¹⁷

Monroe was far from satisfied with the *Gracie's* escape. He had thought that his general good relations with the Brazilians, when considered with his clear legal right, would sway the Tribunal of Commerce. The consul's frustration only mounted when, in mid-July 1864, Webb explicitly forbade him to attempt to seize the rebel vessels which periodically anchored in Rio harbor. Webb reasoned that while the fight against clear legal precedent in the Brazilian courts might be noble, the losses it would occasion would be both futile and demoralizing for Union supporters. Furthermore, Webb was convinced that Union forces were only a few months from victory; he urged Monroe to look beyond the war to the reconciliation which must follow. Reluctantly, Monroe agreed to enter no new pleas before the Tribunal of Commerce. He continued, however, to represent the Union government in a case already in progress. In this final appeal, an aggravated Tribunal decided against the United States yet again and charged the U.S. embassy 210,000 milreas (approximately \$1,050) for court costs. At last, even Monroe was forced to concede that further lawsuits were useless.¹⁸

Monroe did not perceive his defeats as failures and considered that he had done his best, yet he still was somewhat depressed at the end of the proceedings. Thwarted in the execution of his consular duties by the Brazilian legal system and Minister Webb, he was forced to occupy his time overseeing minor commercial transactions. It must have frustrated a man of Monroe's strong character and ability to be engaged in routine clerical duties while rebel ships lay only a few miles from port. The hectic pace of the previous months had left him little time to think of home; when his workload was curtailed by Webb, however, he fervently wished to see his family and friends in Oberlin.¹⁹

The bright point of the summer, then, involved two events which brought his dream of a sabbatical a little closer to reality. In a letter to Professor James H. Fairchild, he exultantly announced "[w]e have just had news of the sinking of the *Alabama* and of Mr. Lincoln's renomination. [Our] joy...was something worth

seeing." With both the *Florida* and the *Alabama* at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, the most serious threats to Union commerce had been neutralized. Furthermore, Abraham Lincoln's continued political success indicated that Monroe's future in the State Department was somewhat more secure.²⁰

Monroe resolved to wait patiently until after the 1864 presidential elections. Then, if Lincoln emerged triumphant, he would write Secretary of State William Seward immediately to request a leave of absence effective April, 1865. Monroe had spent the first year of his term as consul organizing the embassy's paperwork and was certain that Attaché Charles Lidgerwood would insure that all necessary duties were attended to in his absence. Moreover, with Confederate pirate activity radically diminished, Monroe no longer needed to act as a buffer between Minister Webb and the commanders of the Atlantic Squadron. American business activity in Brazil would soon be booming and the monies received as a consequence of increased notarial and legal transaction would finance his sabbatical to Oberlin.²¹

Even when business in Rio had been slack, Monroe managed to send Professor Fairchild large sums of money on a regular basis. These checks, drawn from the London firm of Wright, Maxwell & Company, varied in sum from \$200 to \$500. Fairchild then followed Monroe's careful investment instructions. He purchased meadows, a comfortable house and the acreage surrounding it, and a few thousand dollars' worth of federal bonds on Monroe's behalf. Because Monroe felt that tending to the new property would be a burden to his friend, he asked Fairchild to find responsible tenants for the house. Oberlin's poor were to be allowed to graze their animals in the fields owned by the consul. Even Job Monroe, who had been a relentless critic of his son's fiscal management, admitted that if James continued to save and invest with the same enthusiasm which he had shown for the last two years, Monroe would "have enough beforehand to return to Ohio and be a *man* there."²²

These predictions of financial security were predicated on the assumption that the Brazilian economy would continue to boom. In 1864, however, both political and economic conditions in Brazil showed signs of approaching instability as investors and politicians alike nervously watched the actions of the country's western neighbor, Paraguay. Brazilian territorial sovereignty and regional hegemony had been challenged in the past by Paraguayan dictator Carlos Antonio Lopez. Under Lopez's rule, Paraguay had gained independence and opened diplomatic and trade relations with Great Britain, France, and the United States. The rapid development of industry and educational opportunities fueled the growth of Paraguayan capitalism. By his death in 1862, Lopez had successfully transformed his country into "one of the most progressive and prosperous states in South America." His son, Francis Solano Lopez, continued his father's program of liberal reform. Paraguayan prosperity (with its relative absence of peonage and debt servitude and total absence of slavery) was much admired in the region, even more so because the wealth of the nation was shared by its mestizo and Indian populations. The Paraguayan government, therefore, became an attractive model on which other countries planned to base their own development.²³

The Brazilian government, however, was highly threatened by Paraguayan success. The two countries had a history of border disputes, but the larger issue of regional influence was also at stake. Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia depended on Brazilian largesse, for the Amazon, the central water route from their interiors to the Atlantic Ocean trade routes, was controlled by Brazil. By requiring that all freighters sailing the Amazon be manned by Brazilians and by taxing every item which passed through the ocean port of Para, Emperor Dom Pedro II could effectively dominate the region without expending the high cost of a standing army. The upriver countries were rich in natural resources but poor in industry; if they, like Paraguay, began to use those natural resources instead of exporting them, Brazil would lose its chokehold.²⁴

Even more troubling were the paradigmatic differences between the countries. Brazil, though it had broken from Portugal in 1822, retained its colonial outlook and vestiges of a colonial style of governance. Emperor Dom Pedro II was of Portuguese descent; the Brazilian aristocracy and the Brazilian Catholic Church, which supported the imperial autocracy, were similarly descended. Economic and social preference, then, was predicated upon one's heritage. Moreover, the large majority of Brazilians lived in poverty, servitude, or both. Conservative and isolationist policies severely curtailed the development of free enterprise and free trade within the country's incipient merchant class.²⁵

Much to the frustration of this small but vocal group, progressive reforms such as abolition met with stern official resistance. In matters of technology, communication, and educational opportunities for its citizens, Brazil lagged far behind its neighbors. Editorials criticizing the efficiency and fairness of the Brazilian government often cited Paraguay as a model for progress. In the eyes of Dom Pedro II, therefore, Paraguay's aggressive reforms posed a threat to both domestic and regional stability.²⁶

James Monroe, who had watched tensions mount, could not have been surprised when violence erupted. In August 1864, Dom Pedro II ordered a small army into the adjoining country of Uruguay to support pro-Brazilian forces in that nation's civil war. The Lopez government, fearing that Brazilian control of Uruguay would end Paraguay's unrestricted use of Montevideo harbor, retaliated by invading the Brazilian region of Mato Grosso. This territory, which was virtually unpopulated, held no military significance and Lopez soon withdrew. When Argentina refused to allow Paraguayan troops to cross Argentinian territory on their way to Uruguay, Lopez declared war on Argentina as well. Brazil, Argentina, and the pro-Brazilian regime in Uruguay formed a military Triple Alliance to crush Lopez; in addition, Brazil and Argentina secretly agreed to divide more than half of Paraguay between them at the close of the conflict.²⁷

Although the war's international effects were far from settled, its domestic effects in Brazil were immediate and harsh. Shortly after word of the Paraguayan attack on Mato Grosso became common knowledge, gold prices plummeted. Rio-based brokerage houses, which had overextended themselves on high-risk speculations, could not cover their own losses and failed. While Minister James Watson Webb contended that "everybody [was] more scared than hurt" in the economic crash, Monroe found the Bank of Brazil's indefinite suspension of specie payment most disturbing. He could not agree with Webb that "a shock which affects gold only 3 ½ per cent is no shock at all." By early October 1864, however, it was clear that the panic was much more severe than either Webb or Monroe had initially supposed. Gold prices had dropped 25%, from \$2.40/oz. to \$1.80/oz., and experts predicted that prices would go even lower.²⁸

Brazil's war-torn economy upset Monroe's careful plans for financing his journey home. Wright, Maxwell & Company, the brokerage house he customarily used, had gone bankrupt and could not repay him the sum which had been in their possession at the time of its failure. Moreover, economic instability and exorbitant wartime taxation discouraged business investments. Monroe anticipated little need for his notarial services, unless he would be needed as a witness to the filing of scores of lawsuits by Brazilians against defaulting American companies. The favorable exchange rates and frequent opportunities to supplement his income which had made the first portion of Monroe's consulship a veritable gold mine had disappeared, perhaps for good.²⁹

While the need to economize did not hurt Monroe, he was greatly distressed that Secretary of State William Seward likely would require him to remain in Brazil until conditions in the region stabilized. He, like the other consuls along South America's eastern coast, gloomily concurred with Pernambuco's Thomas Adamson when he indicated that "in the present circumstances, it is important that we should have the Consulates filled with men of experience."

Plans for a joyful reunion with family and friends would have to be postponed yet again.³⁰

These "men of experience," like Thomas Adamson, Richard C. Kirk of the Buenos Aires embassy, and Monroe's legation at Rio, were bound together in a confederacy of loneliness. Their frequent correspondence attests to the emphasis placed on contact with other Americans. Most, like Kirk, depended on other consuls to sustain them through the loneliness of life "on the outer edge of God's creation." If a trip home was impossible, then a visit from another consul was nearly as welcome. Monroe received many invitations to visit and extended hospitality to every consul who expressed an interest in coming to Rio. These visits, coupled with the social activities required by his position, formed the entirety of Monroe's social life.³¹

As is evident from their somewhat risqué letters, a few of the consuls with whom Monroe corresponded alleviated their loneliness and boredom by forming illicit relationships with native women. Monroe, who had been widowed for over two years, disapproved of these affairs both on moral and ethical grounds. It seemed, however, that at each social event he attended, some well-meaning matron would try to interest him in one of the daughters of the local tycoons. Even Laura Webb tried to be Monroe's matchmaker. These efforts, while painfully heavy-handed and unsuccessful, may have been sufficient to awaken in Monroe a sense of emptiness that went beyond homesickness. When he returned at last to Oberlin, his children would benefit from a mother's care; his house would require a woman's domestic skill. Gradually, as his grief over Elizabeth Monroe's death waned, he began to think again of love and marriage.

It would be difficult to find another person as equally suited to his taste and temperament. James Monroe admired intelligent and capable women. Elizabeth had been a college graduate and managed the Monroe family's affairs with great skill. She had also been a beauty, although the cares occasioned by four

children and a meager income had aged her prematurely. Among his Oberlin correspondents, only one woman exhibited the same wit and depth that his beloved Elizabeth had displayed. Julia Finney, daughter of Oberlin College President Charles Grandison Finney, apparently wrote Monroe often. He had been a close confidant of her father, and she had often been a dinner guest in the Monroe household. It is unlikely that Monroe served as her teacher while she was a student at Oberlin, but he certainly had watched her develop into an articulate and self-assured young woman. While she was nearly twenty years younger than Monroe, she possessed a great deal of sense and maturity. He came to look forward to her thoughtful letters concerning life in Oberlin and shared with her some of his observations on his work in Rio de Janeiro.³²

It is unclear when their literary friendship blossomed into romance, but by early 1865, James Monroe was definitely smitten. From his post in Pernambuco, Thomas Adamson gently teased Monroe about the relationship; he warned that he would instruct the consul in Bahia to pilfer the fair Julia's letters before they reached the lower port of Rio. Julia's feelings cannot be inferred from the surviving record, but Monroe's expressions of anxious doubt indicate that he was uncertain whether she would reciprocate his affection when he returned to Oberlin. Although her refusal of another suitor's offer of marriage may indicate the degree of her regard for Monroe, she was an independent woman for the age and it is equally likely that she was untroubled by the specter of spinsterhood. At any rate, her presence in Oberlin made Monroe's desire for a leave of absence even more acute.³³

His urgency is evident in a note written to William Dennison, a former Ohio governor who had just been appointed to Lincoln's Cabinet as Postmaster General. In a congratulatory note to his former political ally, Monroe cast aside his usual concerns about propriety in a desperate attempt to win Dennison's support:

I long, beyond measure, to see old faces and old friends once more; especially so I feel, that I cannot defer much longer a visit to my four motherless children...I know you will not think me troublesome if I beg of you to [bear] my petition before Mr. Seward.³⁴

Monroe's requests for leave, however, were in vain. The months following a Presidential election typically found the State Department staff overloaded by requests from anxious office seekers, so it is possible that his petition was simply overlooked for a few months. When his answer arrived on January 12, 1865, the felicitous phrases of rejection did little to comfort the homesick man:

The Department truly appreciates the fidelity with which the arduous duties devolving upon you in aid of the mighty effort of the Government to maintain its national existence unbroken, have been discharged...but in the existing juncture of our public affairs, and the present condition of our relations with Brazil, your presence at your post seems indispensably necessary.³⁵

The embassy continued to welcome visiting Americans and, as a way of dispelling Monroe's gloom, Minister Webb often commanded him to accompany visitors on their tour of the outlying countryside. When Consul Adamson made a brief visit to Rio, Monroe showed him some of the local tourist attractions. They were accompanied on their rail trip to the scenic peak of the Corcorado by Reverend J. C. Fletcher, an itinerant missionary. Fletcher, who later wrote the era's definitive travel guide to Brazil, noted that the day was clear and the scenery spectacular. He was very impressed with the speed and smoothness of the train ride and pronounced it equal to any yet found in the United States. Thomas Adamson, in a letter to Monroe, recalled much that the missionary had omitted from his account:

Do you remember the evening of our return from the ascent of the Corcorado? I remember how surprised I was to see you and another person whose name shall be nameless but whose initials are J.C.F. indulging in such *copious potations*.³⁶

Intoxication was indeed foreign to Monroe's usual behavior. In his later years, he would play a central role in the formation of Ohio's Anti-Saloon League. He was opposed to strong drink as a matter of religious conviction and personal preference. The continuous strain of his position, as well as the unlikelihood of a leave of absence, had doubtlessly contributed to this lapse. Although he bore Adamson's good-natured ribbing with patience, he was considerably less patient with his own "weakness." If his faith and character were dependent on external conditions, what kind of Christian was he? He was slow to forgive himself, avoiding the alcohol-laden parties thrown in the diplomatic community for months afterwards. This self-imposed isolation was hardly an antidote for homesickness. He reasoned, however, that if the political situations in both the United States and Brazil improved, surely he would be among the first to receive sabbatical leave.³⁷

Monroe therefore followed news of the Civil War in 1864 with great interest. Union troops had only to break the Confederacy's tenacious hold on Richmond to defeat the southern cause completely. As Sherman blazed across Georgia to the sea and Grant closed in on the Confederate capitol, final victory seemed within reach. Monroe prayed for a speedy conclusion to the long struggle and was optimistic that his prayers would soon be answered.

Conditions in the Paraguayan War did not merit similar optimism. While the Triple Alliance forces of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay were far richer in men and materiel, their troops lacked coordination and training. Argentina and Uruguay fielded only token forces of 5,000 men each, leaving the 130,000-man Brazilian army to bear the brunt of casualties and expenses. Paraguay, on the other hand, had a well-trained, well-armed force of 70,000 men. The strong nationalistic fervor of Paraguayan troops differed markedly from the factionalism of Brazilian forces; Brazilians identified more strongly with their province of origin than with the abstract concept of Brazilian nationhood. The overwhelming nu-

merical odds forced Paraguayan commander Francis Solano Lopez to fight a largely defensive war, but his stubborn resistance to Triple Alliance advances made the conflict a bloody business. Disease and malnutrition also took a ghastly toll on both sides. The war was very unpopular in Triple Alliance countries, and Lopez hoped that if he refused to surrender, public opinion would force the coalition members to the negotiating table. Both sides settled in for a war of attrition which would have no clear victories, only degrees of defeat.³⁸

While Webb fulminated about Brazilian involvement in the war, Monroe discreetly sidestepped discussions concerning Brazil's internal affairs. Throughout the war, in letters to Thomas Adamson, he repeatedly stated that to enter into a discussion about the conflict would involve him "in a matter of personal criticism" which he believed would "do some harm and no good." He noted that his strong sentiments on the subject made him "apt to say what on further reflection wounded my own heart and made me feel that I had done an injustice." Therefore, he avoided all "freedoms of expression, except when an evident duty." In a draft copy of a letter to Adamson, he judiciously struck through the following paragraph:

Rio de Janeiro is a peculiar place. I never lived in any other neighborhood where a man could do so well by attending strictly to his own business or could make so fearful a failure by attempting to regulate that of others.³⁹

The allusion to Webb, perhaps, was one of the "personal criticisms" which he hoped to avoid. Although his relationship with Webb continued to be cordial, he tacitly acknowledged that it would be a great boon to American-Brazilian relations if Webb could find another post.

Webb, for his part, was as anxious as Monroe for a leave of absence. Webb's eldest son, William Seward Webb, had been gravely wounded while serving on General Meade's staff. Webb hoped to visit him to insure that he was receiving proper medical care during his convalescence.⁴⁰ Minister Webb also hoped that his

next visit to Washington would gain him a high political appointment; he dreamed of joining Lincoln's Cabinet, though he was unqualified for any of its posts. Until the political situation in the Union changed, however, both Webb and Monroe were to remain in Brazil. Thus, like all Union supporters, they faced the spring of 1865 with high hopes for an end to the Civil War.

On May 9, 1865, news of the surrender of Richmond reached Rio. Unionists in the port shouted, danced, and laughed tearfully. Monroe managed to obtain fireworks and a small quantity of gunpowder for the celebration, although such supplies were difficult to come by during the Paraguayan War. Much to the consternation of die-hard rebels and the British citizens living in Rio, the booming report of the explosives continued throughout much of the night of May 12.⁴¹

On May 13, however, the wild exultation of the night before suddenly ended. A mail steamer which ran a domestic route from Pernambuco brought the tragic news of Lincoln's assassination to members of the U.S. legation. Thomas Adamson had received conflicting reports, but informed Monroe that he assumed Secretary of State Seward was dead as well. He wrote that he was enclosing the *New York World* article detailing the murder in his despatch to Monroe, but this article never arrived. Adamson had been prevented from sending the information by Pernambuco's American financiers, who feared that the sudden announcement of Lincoln's death would trigger an economic panic. As the embassy staff quietly circulated the news to the celebrating crowds, a shocked stillness replaced the noisy revelry. Even the most ardent Confederates dared not rejoice publicly at the nation's loss.⁴²

Over the course of the coming weeks, the embassy became an information center for expatriate Union sympathizers. Those who wished to know the latest news concerning Lincoln's death and his funeral gathered quietly to pore over the New York papers. The assassination had caused the community to draw closer together; the gay spring parties usually given by the diplomatic corps were sus-

pended as a token of respect towards the fallen leader, and prayer vigils were held in their place. Monroe and his fellow officers visited most of the American families in Rio to reassure them that their nation's government would remain stable throughout the crisis.

Naturally, the U.S. legation had been relieved to learn that, contrary to initial reports, Secretary of State Seward had not been killed in the late-night attack at his residence. He had been severely injured, but his doctors hastened to assure the shaken American public that he would be able to return to office in a few months. Monroe, who had never met Seward, was still deeply affected by the incident. He appended an inquiry about the wounded man's health to his quarterly report and asked Acting Secretary Hunter to inform Seward that the Brazilian embassy prayed for his speedy recovery. His eloquent tribute to Seward's skill as a statesman and diplomat was well-received in the Department. As an unintended result of this kind letter, or possibly as a result of the end of the Civil War, the State Department granted Monroe the four-month leave for which he had been waiting. Acting Secretary Hunter also notified Monroe that this leave could be extended if Monroe so desired.⁴³

Monroe first learned of his furlough on July 22, 1865, but rumors of a leave had tantalized him since early July. His departure, however, would have to be delayed. With a new president in the White House and the State Department in temporary upheaval, Minister James Watson Webb decided that the time was ripe for a visit to Washington. There he could pursue potential appointments within the Johnson administration and renew old acquaintances in the Republican party. Unless Monroe could win consent to leave while Minister Webb was abroad, he would have to remain in Brazil while his superior took a long vacation in the United States. He finally received such consent from the State Department in mid-September. In a matter of days, he had wrapped up the last of his paperwork, handed his office keys to Attaché Charles Lidgerwood, and was Oberlin-bound.

His first days in the United States were filled with excitement. He debarked in New York in late October 1865 and paid a brief visit to his father's home in Plainfield, Connecticut. His children, who had been visiting family friends, met his train in Erie, Pennsylvania. Within the week, the Monroe entourage arrived in Oberlin. His doubts concerning Julia Finney's romantic attachments proved unfounded; they were engaged on November 1 and planned to be married by year's end. His reunions with family, friends, and Oberlin colleagues continued throughout his six-month sabbatical.⁴⁴

During these long conversations, Monroe realized that much had changed during his stay in Rio. He had left Oberlin in a haze of grief, but had returned to claim a new wife. As the son-in-law of Oberlin President Charles Grandison Finney, he was now considered the leading contender to replace the aging man and had already once declined the honor. His dual roles of educator and legislator had gained him a great deal of respect in the community, but his diplomatic service had earned him a great deal of money as well. He was flattered to learn that the Lorain County delegation had proposed him as a candidate in the national Congressional election, though he won but 57 of the 153 votes cast at his party's nominating convention. The disturbing news that his political rivals had circulated rumors that "Monroe was making lots of money and didn't care to come back" somewhat dampened his spirits, however. Others wondered how a capable man like Monroe could leave his country during its hour of need. Dr. John Strong and Ralph Plumb, two prominent Lorain County Republicans, encouraged him to ignore the naysayers and allow himself to be nominated in the 1866 elections. As they often told him, his rivals feared his election because "they know if James Monroe gets there [to Congress], the people will keep him there."⁴⁵

Monroe could not consent to Strong's and Plumb's plans for 1866. They had convinced him that his chances of being elected *in absentia* were slim, yet he decided to serve in Rio until shortly before the 1868 elections. His leave of absence

expired in February, and he felt duty-bound to continue his State Department service as long as Minister Webb headed the U.S. legation in Brazil. Furthermore, he could earn approximately fifteen times the salary in Rio that he could as an Oberlin professor. His savings during the coming two years, if invested wisely, would be a substantial nest egg for Julia and his children in the event that he predeceased them.⁴⁶

Ralph Plumb was a fanatically political man, but he was also the President of the First National Bank of Oberlin. He admitted the wisdom of Monroe's reasoning and promised to begin "booming" Monroe's candidacy at every opportunity. Other local supporters gave similar promises. Monroe might be in Brazil, but his presence would be felt everywhere in the district. They encouraged him to write frequently and intimated that they might publish his correspondence in area newspapers as a matter of public interest.⁴⁷

Shortly after January 1, 1866, James Monroe, his bride, and Monroe's four children left Oberlin for Rio. His children's tutor, Miss Mary Dascomb, and the family's maid, Miss Clara Duncan, also accompanied them. The six-week passage from New York to Rio was a fairly easy journey for the travellers, but the women and children had great difficulty adjusting to Brazil's tropical climate. As a result, the Monroes kept close to their seaside home and politely refused social invitations until Minister Webb returned in June. Webb had been unsuccessful in his bid for transfer, and members of the State Department in Washington apologized to Monroe that they had not been able to convince him to resign.⁴⁸

With Webb's return, the demands on the Monroes' time increased. The couple soon became the toast of the season, and Julia Finney Monroe found herself at the center of the most fashionable set of Americans in residence at Rio. Their children, liberated from the formal rigors of the classroom, became expert in local history and culture. Monroe's satisfaction with family life was evident, for he no longer wrote of depression and homesickness. Instead, he could make plans for

his political future in the United States. He would serve honestly and competently until his resignation, but his days as a diplomat were slowly drawing to a close. With one eye on his district and the other on his duty in Rio, he would spend the rest of his consulship as a man of divided loyalties.

Chapter V

"Counting The Months"

V

James Monroe's absence had been brief by consular sabbatical standards, a mere six months. His superior, Minister James Watson Webb, had recently returned from a lengthy leave only to depart again in early 1866 with the expectation of remaining abroad for about one year.¹ Diplomats dissatisfied with their wages or bored with the pace of life in their locales sometimes used "poor health" as an excuse to leave their posts for eighteen months at a time while they sought more lucrative employment in the United States.

The relative brevity of Monroe's stay in Oberlin, however, belied the substantial changes which had occurred in his life during that period. The muted depression of the widower had been replaced with the joys and concerns of a loving husband and father. He now had the means to establish his family in comfortable surroundings and intended to insure that his new bride, Julia, never suffered the deprivation that had been his first wife's lot. In their home by the sea, the Monroes created a small oasis of American culture which became a quiet alternative for fellow countrymen who tired of ostentatious diplomatic parties.

His professional goals had also changed in the intervening months. During his visit to Oberlin in late 1865, Monroe's political advisors had convinced him that he could win Oberlin's Congressional seat in the 1868 elections. His salary as a member of the House of Representatives could not match his wages as Consul to Rio, but he had industriously invested his earnings in recent years and felt confident that his congressional ambitions would not harm his family financially. While he looked forward to returning to the warm sociability of Oberlin, Monroe eagerly awaited an opportunity to participate in the reshaping of American society in the postbellum period. He fulfilled his consular duties in an exemplary

fashion, but spent much of his spare time renewing his acquaintance with old political allies and keeping abreast of events in the United States.

The struggle between Congress and President Andrew Johnson over control of Reconstruction was of special interest to Monroe. He followed his custom of refraining from personal comment upon the proceedings in Washington, but he certainly favored the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. This amendment, which granted civil rights to former slaves, embodied much that he had advocated during his terms as an Ohio legislator. Moreover, his support for Radical Republican policies can be inferred from his past convictions. He had supported Benjamin Wade for the Ohio Senate seat and was absolutely committed to conferring citizenship and its concurrent rights on black freedmen. Indeed, he expected that he would soon be relieved from duty in Rio due to his support of the Republican agenda for Reconstruction. In a letter to his friend Professor J.H. Fairchild, Monroe stated that "there is no reason why President Johnson should spare me more than other decided Republicans...I presume, therefore, that I shall be superseded as soon as he reaches my name on the list."²

Until his recall, however, Monroe would have to contend with another legacy of the defeat of the Confederacy: expatriate Confederates. Reverend A.G. Simonton, a missionary stationed in Rio, wrote to Monroe on October 9, 1865, that "You will hear much said of emigration to Brazil. I have little faith in it—none at all in its wisdom. But if they [the Confederates] must come, I wish them success and that their influence be favorable."³ Simonton, like most Yankees living in Brazil, figured that even a Southern rebel would be a more civilized neighbor than a Brazilian.

By early 1866, the rumors of the Confederate immigration proved to be accurate. Throughout the year, a steady stream of diehard Southern men, their families, and their servants emigrated to Brazil with the hopes of recreating their lost society in a country where slaveholding was still legal. The Southern migration, which totalled between 600 and 1000 persons in 1866, had been led by

Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi plantation owners and businessmen who had been financially ruined by the invasion of the South. According to James Monroe's later recollections, they "turned all they had left into gold" and sought to "find refuge...where they could still maintain an aristocratic position and their title to the name of gentlemen by continuing in the relation of slaveholders."⁴ After all, the staple crops of Brazil were substantially similar to those grown in the southern United States and they assumed that the steamy climate could only benefit production.

Aided by "much friendly attention" from the Brazilian government, the Confederate emigres bought or leased some farming land near Rio de Janeiro.⁵ They bought or hired labor and began to break and plant ground. They also constructed temporary barracks-like quarters until they could afford to erect reproductions of the palatial, columned mansions which they had left behind. While their attempts to recreate the glory days of the antebellum South were troubled from the outset, the expatriate Confederates proudly refused assistance from State Department representatives. They even dubbed the Republican Monroe "Abe's Ape" and "Lincoln's hireling."⁶ The very existence of a ragged but vocal outpost of resistance to American authority vexed the embassy, but as long as the Brazilian government remained sympathetic to the Southerners, there was little to be done.

Monroe might have logically supposed that Emperor Dom Pedro II was more favorably disposed towards these survivors of the vanquished Confederate cause because he himself was experiencing unfamiliar defeat in the war with Paraguay. In Monroe's absence, Brazil's involvement in the Paraguayan War had become both more pronounced and more unpopular. Voluntary enlistment in the Brazilian army dropped as the casualty toll increased. Men who survived jungle and swamp battles returned home broken from disease and malnutrition. Vigorous recruiting practices gave way to conscription by force; small bands of Brazil-

ian soldiers would raid provincial villages and seize boys and men for enlistment. Sometimes, serious conflicts between the invaded villages and the soldiers would result in the death of soldiers and civilians alike.⁷ When a raid was successful, the conscripts were then marched quickly to the nearest harbor. There, they were herded onto steamships for transport to Montevideo, Uruguay, which was the central gathering point for Brazilian troops.

U.S.-owned steamers such as the *North American* often ferried this unwilling cargo southward, much to the consternation of James Monroe. He worried that this clear breach of neutrality would embroil the United States in an international conflict that it could ill afford, so close on the heels of the Civil War. Acting on State Department authority, he warned United States' ship masters involved in the transportation of men or materiel that their continued activity in wartime profiteering would be considered cause for punitive action. Many chose to risk government censure in spite of the warnings, however, because transporting or supplying goods for the industrially limited Brazilians was an extremely lucrative (and potentially short-lived) opportunity.⁸

While Monroe had been abroad, the Brazilian government had been forced to face a rapidly burgeoning debt incurred by maintaining a large standing army. Emperor Dom Pedro's regressive taxation policies had met with near-universal objection, and it was clear that the citizens of Brazil would hold him personally responsible if Brazil's terrible inflation rate was not reduced. Critics argued forcefully that the days of restrictive trade, especially in the rich Amazonian interior, had passed. Reluctantly, the emperor conceded the point and found himself in the unaccustomed position of soliciting free trade with the United States. The official announcement of this policy reversal would have to be carefully orchestrated, however, to avoid the appearance of an erosion of authority. Thus, the stage was set for the most significant breakthrough in U.S.-Brazilian relations in the nineteenth century.

Secretary of State William Seward had been interested in a program of economic imperialism by which the United States could import raw materials from underindustrialized nations and export finished goods to these markets. Good trade relations would inevitably, according to Seward, profit both countries. The advantages of democracy and the capitalist system would be evident to the nation's trading partners, and the United States could retain influence in a region without sustaining a costly military force or the annexation of lands with a non-Anglo-Saxon population. While he viewed the political and economic situation in Brazil as a fortuitous occurrence, he realized Emperor Dom Pedro's delicate position.

In a diplomatic master stroke, Seward encouraged his friend, Harvard biology professor Louis Agassiz, to mount a scientific exploratory expedition up the Amazon. The emperor, who was known to have a keen interest in biological science, would then be able to meet with Professor Agassiz without arousing suspicion among the conservatives in Brazil. Significantly, when Agassiz embarked on his expedition in August, 1865, he first visited with Dom Pedro II at Rio. This act of diplomatic deference caused him to overshoot his ultimate destination, Para, by about 2750 miles. Agassiz and the team of scientists who accompanied him were the honored guests of one of Brazil's foremost proponents of economic reform, steamship line director Pimenta Bueno. The combination scientific/goodwill mission had given the emperor and some of his most vocal opponents common ground on which to meet. Upon completion of his exploration, Agassiz was to return to Rio for a farewell ceremony which would include all those who had contributed to the success of his undertaking.⁹

Monroe had been in the United States for most of the events surrounding the Agassiz mission, but he did attend the U.S. Embassy's April 21, 1866 farewell party for Agassiz. Agassiz hinted, during his toast of the Brazilian government, that such a beautiful and diverse region should not remain hidden from the

world's view. The Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Marquis D'Abrantes, responded during his toast by announcing that it was "the wish of every Brazilian" to extend the courtesies of the region to friendly nations. The subtle significance of his words, which implied the emperor now supported opening the Amazon to free trade, was greeted by enthusiastic cheers from both Brazilian reformers and members of the U.S. legation to Brazil. On December 7, 1866, an imperial decree approving free trade took effect and Americans in the region anticipated that United States prestige would grow as the Brazilians came to enjoy more American-made goods.¹⁰

James Monroe could celebrate the emperor's decision for more than simply nationalistic reasons, however. Stimulation of trade at Para would probably increase Rio commerce as well. Since Monroe's consular salary was supplemented by income gained from performing notarial duties and other commercially related tasks, he stood to benefit personally from the opening of Amazonian trade.

Regrettably, the extra money would be small compensation for the aggravation Monroe could expect by the increased trade. Rumors of huge wartime profits attracted many shipping speculators, who sent forth underinsured ships on underfunded ventures. If the Brazilian economy took a sudden, downward turn or stormy weather damaged the ship's cargo, creditors would face great losses. Line owners, whose only recoverable asset might be the ship at sea and the cargo it contained, directed creditors to seize the vessel and sell it to cover their losses.

Meanwhile, shipmasters depended on their ship to make a living and therefore strove to prevent any disruption of their livelihood. With the advantages of great mobility and limited communication between ports working in their favor, unscrupulous shipmasters could hop from port to port in a foreign jurisdiction, thus evading seizure for months or years. When sailors disgruntled by lack of payment or mistreatment jumped ship, masters contacted the U.S. consul in the port and swore out desertion papers; if a sailor deserted the performance of his

sworn duties, he forfeited his entire pay for the voyage. It was left to the consul to decide who among the parties (the creditors, the captains, the line owners, or the sailors) deserved the benefit of swift justice.¹¹

In late 1866, just such a quandary faced Monroe and his fellow consul, Charles W. Parsons of Montevideo, Uruguay. On October 12, 1866, Captain John Codman attested to Parsons that while he had been taken ill in Montevideo harbor, a majority of his crew had deserted the steamer *Tejuca*. With this oath notarized by the U.S. official, Codman quickly set a course for Rio, away from representatives of his creditors.¹²

In doing so, however, Codman stranded between four and twenty sailors at Montevideo harbor. Within a few days, a number of these destitute men appeared before Parsons and told their side of the story. One of the firemen for the steamer, John Peter, testified that they had signed on with Codman at Rio for a six-month voyage to Montevideo and Paranagua.¹³ These contracts were signed in the presence of the ship's paymaster, Robert G. Elgie; they were not, however, notarized by Rio's consular official, James Monroe. Once the *Tejuca* reached Montevideo, angry creditors seized the ship and sold it. At that point, Paymaster Elgie paid the *Tejuca's* crew a small fraction of the wages they were owed and sent them ashore for leave. In their absence, Codman swore that the sailors had deserted. The dishonest Captain then hired a skeleton crew in Montevideo to sail back to Rio, perhaps hoping to abandon these new men in a similar fashion once he reached his destination.¹⁴

Peter and the other sailors rightly claimed that both the service contracts and the method of discharge were illegal. Codman had violated United States law by failing to have documents properly notarized by a representative of the United States government, by unlawfully discharging his crew under false pretenses, by breaching his contract with the sailors, by defrauding his creditors, by absconding with property (the *Tejuca*) to which he had no clear title, and by perjuring himself

under oath. Moreover, somewhere between Montevideo and Rio, documents proving ownership of the *Tejuca* were altered to make detection of true title more difficult. When Captain Codman presented this document to James Monroe, Monroe felt compelled to clarify the proceedings in Montevideo with Consul Parsons. Codman, fearing legal action, attempted to escape Rio but Monroe authorized detention of the vessel until he could thoroughly investigate the facts of the case.¹⁵

Monroe's task was not made easier by the general impression among consular officials that shipmasters were "as a class, bad men" and sailors "the most degraded set of villains met with in civilized life."¹⁶ Who could one believe? While awaiting a response from Parsons, Monroe turned to his friend Consul Thomas Adamson for advice on how to handle complex desertion cases. From his post in Bahia, Adamson chuckled that Monroe took such pains to be honest with scoundrels but obliged Monroe by assessing consular custom in the area. In Adamson's view, consuls had been given "as much discretion as is safe to give while consular appointments are made in so many cases for reasons other than fitness for the position."¹⁷ Adamson recommended leniency to the masters because it was in the nation's best interest; too vigorous enforcement of regulations might alienate captains and cause them to sail under the flag of a country with less burdensome restrictions. In keeping with this policy, Adamson further advised Monroe to turn a master out of his ship only as a matter of last resort and only for public offenses such as murder. For private offenses, such as dereliction of duty or incompetence, losses would be sustained by whichever agent was responsible for choosing the inept master.¹⁸

Monroe, however, was more inclined to interpret his powers broadly on behalf of the *Tejuca's* crew. U.S. sailors stranded at a foreign port of call were entitled, under the terms of *Consular Regulations # 26*, to three months' bonus pay. The Rio consul, however, pursued full payment for all crew members, U.S.

citizen and Brazilian alike.¹⁹ Correcting the injustice of Codman's actions was, of course, necessary to satisfy Monroe's code of ethics. Codman was notorious for his ill treatment of his crew and was no stranger to legal proceedings through the Rio consulate. Just two years before, Codman had caused a scene at the embassy by demanding that he be allowed to set sail aboard his former vessel, the *Cotapaxi* after that ship had been sold to the Brazilian government for restitution of outstanding port fees. If not for Monroe's firmness, he would have escaped Rio with both his ship and the proceeds from the sale.²⁰

Insuring that all men received wages they had earned was, perhaps, even more important to Monroe because of a recent personal experience in which he had assumed the nursing and burial expenses of young Hugh Quinn, a sailor caught in much the same circumstances as John Peter and the *Tejuca* crew. Quinn had been sent ashore for treatment of "liver and bowel disease" and left in Rio without money, personal effects, or clothes. He lingered for several weeks at a local hospital, then died. Monroe had frequently visited Quinn and witnessed firsthand the cruel consequences of abandonment. While he could not help Quinn, Monroe could help to establish a firm precedent which might dissuade other dishonest shipmasters from pursuing Codman's course.²¹

While Codman's case was admittedly an extreme one, it was by no means the worst example of unscrupulous behavior by a shipmaster or ship owner. Monroe became involved with another complex maritime case in August, 1866 which was the very embodiment of slipperiness and dishonesty. In the spring of 1866, Captain E.J. Hardy, master of the *Dakotah*, sailed from New York bound for Rio. The *Dakotah's* owner, Laurence Woodruff, failed to insure the barely seaworthy ship because he had little money to spare. Due to heavy storm damage, the *Dakotah* limped into the harbor at Paramaribo, Suriname. There, Hardy was told that the *Dakotah* would be unable to continue its journey unless it was extensively repaired. Hardy then contacted the U.S. Consul to Paramaribo, J. Henry

Sawyer, to see if the U.S. government could assist him. He told Sawyer that the underwriters for the vessel favored scrapping the ship and refused to pay for the costly work unless authorized to do so by Woodruff.²²

Sawyer, who was new to the U.S. diplomatic corps, did not notice that the insurance documents produced by Hardy were forgeries; he was eager to be of service to the shipmaster. When Hardy assured him that Woodruff would assume full responsibility for the repayment of any repair bills, Sawyer arranged and cosigned a large \$4,000 loan from a local bank. Captain Hardy's ship was soon repaired and the *Dakotah* resumed its journey to Rio. Months later, the shipmaster claimed that Woodruff did not respond to him when Hardy sent a duplicate voucher for the amount owed for repairs; Hardy steadfastly refused to assume liability for the loan, claiming that he had acted only as Woodruff's agent in the transaction. Sawyer faced the possibility of repaying the debt himself on his miniscule annual salary of \$1,000. On August 28, 1866, the unfortunate consul turned to James Monroe for aid in extricating himself from the difficult position in which he found himself. He requested Monroe to arrest Hardy and to sell the *Dakotah* to settle the debt, per the request of Laurence Woodruff.²³

By the time Sawyer's letter reached Monroe, the *Dakotah* had already left Rio headed for Montevideo. The ship was, however, scheduled to return to the port in mid-November, at which time Monroe promised to help Sawyer. While he waited for the *Dakotah*'s reappearance, he investigated the matter himself to insure that Hardy would not be wronged by the seizure. It seemed that every party to the transaction told a different story.

Woodruff, who was harried by creditors, had sent checks to Sawyer to repay the debt only to default on such checks upon several occasions. When pressed, he stated that he was not even the real owner of the ship; owner Warren Leland and Captain Hardy had persuaded him to finance the voyage, using the ship as security for the loan. Moreover, Hardy "had private *business* of a delicate

nature" which had taken him out of his latitude and into the path of the storm near Paramaribo.²⁴ He again urged the consuls to sell the ship, use the proceeds to pay off the loan and any collection expenses, and send him the rest of the money from the sale. Both consuls suspected, however, that Woodruff did not wish the *Dakotah* to return to the United States because it faced seizure in its home port as well.

By March 6, 1867, it was clear to Sawyer and Monroe that Hardy had no intention of returning to Rio. Meanwhile, the total expenses in the case mounted to over \$5,000. While he hoped that the order which alerted all South American consuls to arrest Hardy on sight would be effective, he encouraged Sawyer to let the State Department's home office pursue Woodruff for the monetary settlement if Hardy remained at large. It was hard to judge Sawyer harshly for "a Christian act...to aid [his] countryman in distress," yet he, like Sawyer, had learned by this experience, a lesson never to be forgotten. Charitable behavior was only virtuous in moderation. Until one was once again surrounded by the familiar scenes and faces of home, the consuls would always have to maintain a degree of healthy suspicion toward even the most plausible of tales.²⁵

Despite Sawyer's terrible experience, Monroe continued to engage in charitable endeavors, albeit cautiously. As members of the city's American Benevolent Society, he and Julia Finney Monroe helped to raise money to send their indigent fellow countrymen back to the United States where the misfortunate could be cared for by friends and family. Monroe was often invited to Brazilian charity functions and made at least one large donation to the construction of a veterans' hospital for soldiers wounded in the Paraguayan War; he proudly preserved the invitation to gala opening among his personal effects.²⁶ His work on behalf of the urban poor in Brazil made him unique among the Americans in the city. Most, like Laura Webb, assumed that Brazilians were, by nature, lazy and untrustworthy and refused to hire them for their domestic work; they preferred to employ the city's large Irish immigrant population instead.²⁷

The Monroes' charitable activity was somewhat curtailed upon Minister Webb's return to Rio in March, 1867. Webb was an inveterate host and his frequent invitations for dinner or overnight visits made for a full schedule for James and Julia Monroe. Laura Webb, who was increasingly unhappy so far from home, turned to Julia as a confidante with whom she shared her burden of depression; nursing her demanding husband was fatiguing and lonely work for Laura. It is clear that both the Monroes sympathized with Laura's plight and made a special effort to visit her often.²⁸

As an indication of the intimacy between the two couples, the Monroes were fully aware of one of the Webbs' most private hopes: the wish for a child. Laura's frequent miscarriages weakened her physically, even as lingering guilt and depression weakened her emotionally. Her husband solicited the finest medical care available in Rio and fretted anxiously over her welfare for a short while, but soon reverted to his usual self-centeredness. Although Laura's doctor explicitly recommended frequent seawater baths as a restorative, Webb found seaside living distasteful and too expensive. The plan to move to the shore was abandoned on May 10, 1867, four days after her last miscarriage.²⁹ The Monroes tried to offer comfort to Laura, but their flock of healthy children must have served only as a bitter reminder of what had been denied to her. It was difficult to assess the benefit of their solicitousness.

Laura's grief over the loss of yet another child was far deeper than anyone, even her closest friends, suspected. On May 21, 1867, while her husband was to be away all afternoon on business, she took an overdose of an emetic. When Webb, who returned unexpectedly due to inclement weather, found her, she was "in a state of collapse—no pulse, blind and deaf." He shook her, but she failed to respond. Laura had hidden the brandy, Webb's favorite resuscitation tool, but he found it and poured huge quantities down her throat. By the time her doctor arrived, the brandy had induced vomiting and Laura's suicide attempt had been

aborted.³⁰ Webb appeared oblivious to the intentionality of her act, concerning himself instead with his own heroic role in averting disaster. The Monroes responded to this near-tragedy in a different manner, with kindness and watchfulness. They took care to include Laura in every social activity and for a time sent Emma Monroe to act as a live-in companion for the ailing woman.

In the months following Laura's suicide attempt, the couples spent many evenings together. Conversation frequently turned to the political scene in the United States; although both Webb and Monroe were Republicans, Monroe was far more liberal on the subject of suffrage. Monroe considered it a universal right for adult male citizens, while Webb subscribed to a bigoted standard:

I recommended Negro suffrage to the President...all colors to be equal before the law and no man to vote unless he can read and write. *All* to vote who can. This would exclude ¼'s of poor whites, nearly all Negroes *at present*, and quite half the Irish...³¹

He suggested, perhaps in jest, that while he knew that Johnson and Seward would be willing to exclude all the former slaves, his standard would improve on their scheme by eliminating nearly all the Democrats.

Monroe shared neither Webb's views on suffrage nor his racist approach to civil rights. He watched the U.S. papers closely for news of the upcoming Ohio election, for the question of "Negro suffrage" was on the ballot in his home state. By the fall of 1867, the measure was clearly in trouble and Monroe concurred with Webb's conclusion that "it will probably go badly."³² The issue's faltering chances for success gave the consul yet one more sound reason to return to Oberlin as a Congressional candidate. For some citizens, the final resolution of the war had been reached at Appomattox; Monroe hoped to convince them that the nation could never consider the war concluded while some people were denied civil rights due to the color of their skin. Indeed, Monroe's concerns over the failure of the Ohio suffrage measure in November, 1867 seems to have spurred Monroe into action regarding the 1868 Congressional elections. He wrote several lengthy

letters to his friends and political advisors in the Oberlin area and requested them to assess his chances for success as a Republican candidate.³³

While he awaited their replies and fretted about full liberty for former slaves, Monroe was asked to assist the slaves' former masters. In a little more than one year, the Confederate emigration experiment had collapsed utterly. Monroe assessed the situation as follows:

[T]hey did not understand farming in Brazil...Many of the slaves whom they had bought...ran away, and it was not easy to recover them...The fugitives secured places of refuge among their fellow slaves [on other plantations], and the Brazilian planters themselves were thought to be unsympathetic and unhelpful in the work of rendition.³⁴

The snobbery evinced by the Confederates towards their Brazilian neighbors was reciprocated in full by Brazilian planters who wished to discourage American competition. The Confederates, with few exceptions, could not speak Portuguese. Monroe concluded that the failure of their first cash crop left the emigres with scant capital. All traces of their former animosity toward Monroe vanished, and he found that in asking for aid they became "as affable and gracious as I could desire."³⁵ They asked that Monroe help them return to the United States, where they could recoup some of their losses.

Monroe's usual solution to repatriation was to fund the desired relocation through the American Benevolent Society in Rio. This private fund, Monroe later stated, was "quite inadequate" to finance such a wholesale emigration. Moreover, the society was comprised of many former Yankees; there was little enthusiasm among the Northerners in Brazil to make life easier for ex-secessionists. Minister Webb stubbornly refused to participate in Monroe's efforts on their behalf, so the consul appealed to Secretary of State Seward for extraordinary aid.

Seward requested Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, to order all home-ward-bound American vessels to transport as many of their former enemies as

they could accommodate. The expenses for the goodwill gesture would be defrayed by the U.S. government.³⁶

Monroe, who was responsible for notifying the South Atlantic Squadron of this controversial measure, was relieved when the flagship of the fleet, the *U.S.S. Guerriere*, appeared in Rio harbor. Rear Admiral Charles Henry Davis, who was a close friend of Monroe's, was aboard the *Guerriere*; Monroe reasoned that if Davis could be persuaded to execute Welles's order, the rest of the fleet would follow suit. When Monroe gathered Davis and the *Guerriere*'s crew together for the reading of the naval dispatch, however, the friendship between the men was severely strained. Davis vehemently protested that the plan was impractical. If the *Guerriere* took the quota suggested by Welles, the main deck would have to be covered with houses for the immigrants. This would leave no room for the exercise of his men and would make the use of deck guns nearly impossible in the event of a surprise attack at sea. The possibility of sabotage also must have been foremost in Davis's mind. Monroe generously characterized these objections as "purely professional."³⁷

Contrary to Monroe's later account, it took Davis several days to change his mind about transporting the Confederates back to the United States. The admiral, who was described by Monroe as extremely disciplined, could not evade the execution of a direct order. To his credit, once Davis reversed his initial decision, arrangements for the repatriation of Confederate families proceeded quickly. He ordered his crew to construct main-deck shelters to house fifty-five additional passengers; within a week, passengers and crew were bound for New Orleans.³⁸ Throughout late 1867 and early 1868, other ships in the South Atlantic Squadron followed the admiral's precedent and grudgingly agreed to aid in the repatriation process. Monroe's service on behalf of his Confederate constituents made him a popular and trusted man in the South.

As Monroe resolved the problems occasioned by Confederate relocation, he could again turn his attention northward to Oberlin. He eagerly awaited good

news from his political advisors. He had, for some time, "counted the months" between himself and home according to the plan which had been devised during his 1865 trip to Oberlin. By November, 1867, he talked openly and often of returning home. When he received responses from his friends in Lorain County, however, their perceptions disappointed him.³⁸

Dr. John Strong and Ralph Plumb, who had so strongly encouraged his House of Representatives candidacy when he had been home, provided mixed reports. Plumb noted that the issue of "Negro suffrage" had been met with resounding opposition at the polls and that Monroe, who "was not known to falter in the hour of trial," might be adversely affected by this sentiment. Finance, not equality, was foremost on the minds of Ohioans.³⁹ Strong and Plumb agreed that Monroe could count on Lorain County votes, but disagreed about the amount of support he could expect from other counties in the district. Both men urged him to return to Ohio well before the election if he decided to run; the Democrats had "swept the state" in 1867 and Monroe would have to make quite a few campaign appearances if he were to be successful.⁴⁰ On the whole, the only positive reports came from friend James H. Fairchild, who was admittedly "not a politician."⁴¹ Reservations concerning his candidacy, however, were numerous indeed.

Still, Monroe persisted in his determination to return home. On March 9, 1868, Webb reported that a visitor to the minister's home had mentioned that Monroe "talked freely of resigning and leaving in April."⁴² It is unclear whether he was more surprised at the announcement or what he must have perceived as Monroe's indiscretion. It is likely that Webb construed Monroe's plans as a personal criticism, for he demanded that Monroe clarify his plans immediately. Moreover, Minister Webb knew that Monroe's stalwart and competent presence in Brazil facilitated Webb's constant vacationing; if Monroe left to pursue his political ambitions, Webb's workload would triple. Monroe, who had received nothing but gloomy reports from Oberlin, felt that he could not rely on his party's

nomination in 1868. When asked for an immediate decision, he was forced to abandon his plans. Reluctantly, he resigned himself to at least another year of service in Brazil.

It must have been even more frustrating for Monroe to read of the shifting opinions in his home district. No sooner than he had made the decision to remain in Brazil than he received a letter from Samuel Plumb (written nearly two months before) which begged him to return home.⁴³ Clearly disappointed with Monroe's decision, his political advisors bombarded him with political updates which nullified their original opinions. Plumb grumbled that "an effort worthy of the occasion would have secured...not only your nomination, but...a stronger ticket with you in South America than <the incumbent> at home."⁴⁴

Dr. John Strong, like Professor James H. Fairchild, preferred to emphasize future possibilities. Strong summarized the nominating convention proceedings and stated that the Republican party planned to rotate the nomination to Monroe in 1870. Even the dissenting voices at the convention had conceded that although "Monroe had had a very soft time of it" while he drew his large salary in Rio, "if he were present, he would make a fine run."⁴⁵ Fairchild noted that "<the incumbent Welker> will be returned and that will leave the door open for you two years later, if it shall seem desirable for you to look in that direction."⁴⁶

Monroe wholeheartedly desired his party's nomination in 1870. It was clear that he could not monitor political events closely enough from his post in Rio; even if it occasioned financial sacrifice, he would have to resign early and take his chances. He had amassed over \$10,000 in U.S. government bonds and could make \$600 per year interest on the sum. Further, he knew he was welcome to teach at Oberlin, or perhaps, due to his political experience, become a dean there. He had investment properties and assured himself that he would never again feel the pinch of lean times.⁴⁷

The consular position in Rio had lost its allure for Monroe. He spent less and less time in the embassy as 1868 progressed. Increasingly, he kept to a late schedule due to frequent social invitations. The intensity with which he once served was gone.

Minister James Watson Webb was also in his waning days as a diplomat. He spent several months each year on sabbatical, but when in residence, he routinely insulted the Brazilian Council of State. Finally, in a petty dispute over a small legal claim, Webb haughtily demanded his passports. The Brazilian government gratefully complied, and as such, Webb became a private citizen at his own request. It was rumored in the United States that Monroe might get the call to replace his former superior, but soon Minister Charles Blow was appointed in Webb's stead.⁴⁸

With Webb's exodus, Monroe's last compelling reason for staying in Rio vanished. He resigned from office effective October 1, 1869 to pursue Oberlin's House of Representatives seat.⁴⁹ Although he was approached in September, 1870, concerning the possibility of resuming his former position with the State Department, he would never return to Brazil.

Monroe's years in Brazil had been both profitable and successful. He had enhanced the prestige of his nation without insulting his host country. The usually vitriolic Webb dubbed Monroe "one of the purest and best men I have ever known...he has no superior in the public service in any position..."⁵⁰ He had gained valuable business experience and international polish which qualified him for national officeholding. During his service as Consul to Rio, he had absolved himself from financial want and had won a new wife to brighten his life. As one of the class of unsung heroes of the Civil War, he performed his consular duties with distinction and discretion. In sum, Consul James Monroe could pride himself on ranking among the most highly regarded men in the diplomatic service.

ENDNOTES

Chapter I

Reflections on United States-Brazilian Relations
1850-1863

1. James Monroe, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to Professor James H. Fairchild, Oberlin, Ohio, ALS, 6 March 1863, Monroe Papers, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio (hereafter referred to as OCA).

2. Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988), pp.168, 220-228.

3. Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidency of James Buchanan* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1975), p.18; L.F. Hill, *Diplomatic Relations Between The United States and Brazil* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), p.229.

4. James L. Crouthamel, *James Watson Webb: A Biography* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), p.157.

5. Hill, pp.230-236.

6. For an example of contrary behavior by American diplomats, see Crouthamel, pp.163-166 or Hill, p.237.

7. Charles Vevier, "American Continentalism: An Idea of Expansion, 1845-1910," *American Historical Review*, LXV (January 1960), pp.323-325.

8. For an example of Southern commercial thought, see "The State of the South," *DeBow's Review*, September 1852.

9. For an example of Maury's serialized work, see "The Amazon and the Atlantic Slopes of the South America," reprinted in *DeBow's Review* between February and June 1853.

10. Vevier, pp.327-328.

11. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 12 (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1931), pp.428-431.

12. For an example of Maury's ideas concerning the mercantile system, see "The Amazon and the Atlantic Slopes of the South America," reprinted in *DeBow's Review* between February and June 1853.

13. Thomas Cochran, ed. *The New American State Papers. Naval Affairs*, Vol. 9 (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1981), pp.249-251.

14. *Ibid.*

15. William Lewis Herndon and Lardner Gibbon. *Journals of Exploration in the Amazon*, Vol. I (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1855), p.96.

16. E. Bradford Burns. *A Documentary History of Brazil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p.241; Hill, p.223.

17. Hill, p.223; John Codman, *Ten Months in Brazil with Notes on the Paraguayan War* (New York: James Miller Publishing Co., 1866), p.23; for a brief summation of the income generated by the port of Para, see *DeBow's Review*, Vol. XX, January 1858, p.324.

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19. Hill, p.235.

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27. Blue, p.300; see also Salmon P. Chase, Washington, D.C., to James Monroe, Oberlin, Ohio, ALS, 1 November 1859, Chase Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter referred to as LC); Salmon P. Chase, Washington, D.C., to James Monroe, Oberlin, Ohio, ALS, 17 September 1861, Chase Papers, LC; Salmon P. Chase, Washington, D.C., to James Monroe, Oberlin, Ohio, ALS, 29 August 1862, Chase Papers, LC.

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