

THE ATTITUDE OF KALAMAZOO  
TOWARDS  
UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY  
1880-1894 #81

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## THE ATTITUDE OF KALAMAZOO TOWARDS UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY (1880-1894)

While perusing the newspapers of Kalamazoo, Michigan, for the period 1880 to 1894, one finds that there is hardly any mention of problems concerned with United States foreign policy. There are many stories of domestic politics, of industrial development and of murders and scandals which are related with an undisguised relish that surprises a reader of the 20th century. But even though there is an appalling dearth of foreign policy material in the editorials of those years, we find scattered over many years little bits of news about some of the problems that the United States confronted in its relations with the outside world. These problems seemed relatively unimportant at the time and today when questions of major foreign policy decisions capture the headlines almost every day, they seem indeed ludicrously insignificant.

And yet, ensconced in those small items we find the important seeds that were developing into our one short outburst of imperialism, which was to flower in the Spanish-American War of 1898, and find its denouement in the many interventions in Latin America during the

beginning of the 20th century. We were beginning to feel that we were equal in strength and ability to any people in Europe and certainly superior to the ignorant masses of Asia.

In the 1880's there was an increasing clamor in the United States to put an end to unrestricted immigration of the Chinese to this country. This was particularly true of California where the Chinese were most densely settled and where the labor unions were raising the cry that the Chinese laborers were undercutting the wage structure of the white workers. But that this bias towards the Chinese was not limited to California can be shown from this editorial which appeared in the Daily Gazette of Kalamazoo.

...On the other hand China claims the right to shoulder off upon America her surplus population, her criminals, her paupers, her worthless masses, who, to the numbers of millions threaten this country with inundation.

...The following is the text of the plank (Democratic Party) II. An amendment of the Burlingame Treaty, no more Chinese immigration, except for travel, education and foreign commerce, and therein carefully guarded. This will give the Chinese all the rights and privileges that they have extended to our citizens, and about all we hope they will ever receive, for, to our mind, nothing but evil can come to our land from the introduction

of a host of leprous heathens, who proved themselves utterly wedded to their heathenish and horrid practices and who can never become desirable or useful citizens.<sup>1</sup>

The passing of the years did by no means soften the contempt and bias felt towards the Chinese. When in 1883 the famous writer and preacher Henry Ward Beecher came to Kalamazoo, preaching toleration and understanding, he was severely castigated in the following words.

...Self-preservation is the first law of nature and the masses of laboring people in this country do not propose to mildly submit to be made mere animals and denied all the happiness and comforts of life to please a horde of barbarians that came here merely to make a stake and take it back to the celestial kingdom. Men owe it not only to themselves, but to their families to do all in their power to prevent the influx of Mongolians to this country, Mr. Beecher and other nabobs to the contrary, notwithstanding.<sup>2</sup>

But this xenophobic attitude was not simply limited to people of a different race, but extended to ethnic groups which formed or were beginning to

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<sup>1</sup>Daily Gazette, Editorial, July 17, 1880.

<sup>2</sup>Daily Gazette, Editorial, February 3, 1883.

form a major part of our population. Either people were going to become completely Americanized or else they should go back to where they came from is the message of this editorial which appeared in Kalamazoo in 1889:

"The Milwaukee Common Council has changed the name of a street that runs through a section of the city, largely populated by Polanders from Bismark to Kosciusko. And now the Germans are angry, and demand that the thoroughfare be restored to its old name. It begins to look as though the ignorant hordes of foreigners who come to this country every year by the hundreds of thousands intend to monopolize and run it to suit themselves.

...We want no streets named Bismark which is synonomous with tyranny, or any street named Kosciusko. This is to be an English speaking nation, and the foreigners who do not like our language are at liberty to return from whence they came. The man who comes to this country and is not satisfied to be an American is not wanted here.<sup>3</sup>

The anti-foreign sentiment of those years also becomes apparent in the question of the building of the Panama Canal. The French builder of the Suez Canal, Ferdinand de Lesseps, made a special trip to

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<sup>3</sup>Daily Gazette, Editorial, August 17, 1889.

the United States to promote his scheme of building the proposed canal. De Lesseps didn't particularly care whether it was American or French capital that was going to pay for the project; but the whole scheme sent terror into the hearts of most people in the United States, who feared that the French would ultimately gain control of this important and strategic canal. President Hayes sent a special message to Congress in 1880, stating that any proposed canal must be built with American capital and must be under American control. The people in Kalamazoo apparently shared the President's sentiments:

The Count de Lesseps came here as representative of the foreign capitalists, with a great flourish of trumpets, and impressed simple people with the plan that he was going to carry out his idea of a Panama Canal without delay. But Mr. Hayes first checked his ardor by re-affirming the Monroe doctrine of American control over works of that nature. Captain James B. Eads followed this showing the congressional committee that De Lesseps' scheme was impracticable from engineering difficulties and the enormous expense that it would involve.

...Mr. de Lesseps said he did not like the railway plan because it had not been tried. But Captain Eads seems to have the confidence of businessmen everywhere, and it is probable that our government will patronize American

enterprise in this instance.<sup>4</sup>

In 1891 the police chief of New Orleans was assassinated when he attempted to put an end to the murders perpetrated by the Mafia Society within that city. When a jury found the 11 accused Italians innocent, a mob stormed the jail and lynched them all. The Italian government demanded punishment for the mob and compensations for the families of the lynched victims. When no punishment of the lynch mob or compensations for the victims were forthcoming, Italy recalled her ambassador and there was open talk in Italy of going to war with the United States. The people in Kalamazoo were not very frightened of going to war with Italy as can be seen from the following editorials of the Daily Gazette (Democratic) and the Daily Telegraph (Republican):

The leading diplomats of Europe say that Italy cannot afford to go to war, that she is financially bankrupt. Well, we are sorry for Italy, if that's the case. If that or any other country is hankering for a piece of Uncle Sam it will not only need money, but men to make it interesting. A war between the United States and a first-class European power would develop

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<sup>4</sup>

Daily Gazette, Editorial, March 18, 1880.

the resources of this country in a marked degree.<sup>5</sup>

According to reports from across the water, Italy's financial condition is beginning to assume a deplorable shape and King Humbert and the Marquis di Rudini would do well to employ their energies in trying to build up the shattered fortunes of their country instead of wasting their energies by barking at the heels of Uncle Sam.<sup>6</sup>

The people of Kalamazoo and the nation in general felt themselves equal to any nation in the world and the spirit of Manifest Destiny was rampant. Especially in the Pacific there seemed to be room for expansion with the Hawaiian Islands as the piece de resistance:

The senate report on the Hawaiian affair really speaks the sentiments of the American people. It is a notification to the world that this country really intends to extend a protectorate to those islands and that while we do not care to really annex them, other nations are notified to keep their hands off. The drift of public sentiment in this country is plainly for annexation and it is only a matter of time when it will be an accomplished fact.<sup>7</sup>

But while it was perfectly all right in the eyes

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<sup>5</sup> Daily Gazette, Editorial, April 29, 1891.

<sup>6</sup> Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, Editorial, May 13, 1891.

<sup>7</sup> Daily Gazette, Editorial, January 18, 1883.

of Kalamazoo that we were contemplating the annexation of Hawaii, there was great consternation about the French annexation of Indo-China and the "leprous heathens" suddenly had all of our sympathies - because part of their country was being annexed by a European nation and not by us. The Pacific had become our realm of suzerainty.

...One effect of the changes in that quarter (Tonkin) will be to magnify the field which our Pacific coast fronts, for it is an American field and not European." <sup>8</sup>

But the advocates of expansion did not confine their aspirations to such trifling matters as the Hawaiian Islands. There was Canada to the north, waiting to be joined to the United States of America. This had to occur - it was destiny:

The Canadian authorities seem to be greatly worried for fear the United States would wish to annex them without their consent and the public prints of the country seem to have no better business on hand than portraying to their readers that the vandals of Americans are liable to eat them up. If the authorities of Canada will simply mind their own business, they will have no trouble with Uncle Sam, but if the ball ever opens there will be just one piece to that pie

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<sup>8</sup> Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, Editorial, August 24, 1883

regardless of consequences. And the man with half an eye can see that the contest is sure to come. It is destiny. The North American continent is sure to be one grand nation and the most powerful in the history of the world <sup>9</sup>

Running parallel with the desire for expansion was the feeling in Kalamazoo that we should not form any close ties with the outside world. Secretary of State Blaine intended to call a Pan American Congress in 1884, a plan which had the approval of President Garfield. Garfield was assassinated in 1881, however, and his successor, President Arthur, did not look favorably on any projects advanced by Blaine. Some of the invitations to the Pan American Conference (to be held in the United States) had already been issued and accepted when Blaine resigned as Secretary of State. His successor, Frelinghuysen, with the approval of President Arthur promptly canceled the invitations. This action must have pleased many people in Kalamazoo, since already in 1882 the following opinion was expressed in the Daily Gazette:

...The real objection to the fanciful scheme (the Pan-American Congress) devised by Mr. Blaine and approved by President Garfield is that it veils a design to make the United States a predominant power in the affairs of

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<sup>9</sup>Daily Gazette, Editorial, February 27, 1894

other American countries. This is something that our people do not want. We will not tolerate foreign interference with our affairs and why should we intermeddle with those of other lands. <sup>10</sup>

It is encouraging to note, however, that not all problems relating to foreign policy were regarded in an equally ultra-nationalistic mood in Kalamazoo. The controversy over pelagic sealing in the Bering Sea was regarded from an unusually conciliatory point of view. With the acquisition of Alaska from Russia, the United States had inherited the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, where the seals met to mate every year. Vessels from all over the world congregated in the Bering Sea, killing off thousands of seals until the seals were threatened with extermination. The United States could of course prevent the ruthless extermination of seals in the immediate vicinity of Pribilof Islands and within the three-mile limit of the Alaskan coast. But beyond this line we had no jurisdiction unless we made the Bering Sea a "mare clausum". But it was strongly felt in Washington that the seal herds had to be saved somehow

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<sup>10</sup>Daily Gazette, Editorial, February 10, 1882

The result was that American coastal cutters began to seize English and Canadian schooners outside of the legal three-mile limit. A lively controversy developed with Canada and England which was not to be settled until 1893 by an international tribunal which decided against the contentions of the United States. That our position could not be maintained was already realized in Kalamazoo in 1889:

...while we insist in catching fish even within the three-mile limit in the Atlantic coast, we object to Englishmen catching seal within forty, fifty, or even a hundred miles of the Alaskan shore. We favor one principle for the Atlantic coast and another for the Pacific. The plea that the Bering Sea is an enclosed body of water is absurd, as it is 1100 miles long by over 800 miles wide, and America does not even own the shores. The Siberians have as much right to the seal in the Bering Sea as the Alaska Seal Company. Our government will have to take some other position on this question than capturing vessels in the Bering Sea for seal fishing and we will have to settle for every vessel so captured with consequent damages. Uncle Sam's position on the question is not tenable and the action of the State Department looks like a big bluff that ill accords with the dignity of a great nation. 11

Also in the case of the "Itata" incident, people in

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<sup>11</sup>Daily Telegraph, Editorial, November 10, 1889

Kalamazoo apparently took a friendly attitude towards the Chilean insurgents, even though they were defying the authority of the United States. A revolution had broken out in Chile, where the head of the state attempted to assume dictatorial power. The insurgents who called themselves Congressionalists sent the steamer "Itata" to the United States in order to pick up arms. The United States authorities feared complications with Chili, seized the "Itata" and put her under guard. The Chileans evicted the United States guards from their boat and escaped, being chased by an American cruiser.

While most papers in the United States were condemning the Chileans for flouting our authorities, the following article appeared in Kalamazoo:

The American press seems to be very much incensed because the Chilean insurgents have fooled the United States authorities and put to sea with their vessel. It will be only necessary to refer to 1776 to find that the United States was in the same predicament. The Chileans are in revolt against a monarchical government and so were the Americans. We were not recognized by the powers as belligerents and neither are the Chileans, who are fighting for a Republican form of government. Our sympathies are with the Chileans who went

to sea and landed the deputy U. S. Marshall on a sand bar. <sup>12</sup>

The only outstanding Secretary of State of this period, 1880-1894, was James G. Blaine, a highly controversial political figure, whom people either eulogized or thoroughly condemned. Today, when we have a more objective picture of Blaine, we can say that his foreign policy deserved both praise and blame. His diplomatic correspondence was highly unorthodox. His interference in all the petty struggles of the Latin American republics was completely useless and reaped much ill will on the part of Latin America. And yet, Blaine deserves praise for his work towards a Pan American union and his attempts to modify the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.

It is very hard to estimate how the people of Kalamazoo felt towards the "plumed knight".

Being an extremely partisan person himself, Blaine aroused partisan feelings everywhere. The Democrats in Kalamazoo didn't regard Blaine very highly from the beginning:

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<sup>12</sup> Daily Telegraph, Editorial, May 2, 1891

James G. Blaine, the gentleman named for Secretary of State, is the only one (of the members of Garfield's cabinet) who could possibly plead guilty to the soft impeachment of being a statesman. And so far as he is concerned this charge has never been made against him. In his own party and throughout the country he has been held simply as an able parliamentarian, a sharp and unscrupulous politician. He is genial and hail fellow with men of the world, but has not the grasp of intellect which characterized such men as Webster, Seward and others who have filled the chair of state. <sup>13</sup>

A year later when Blaine had resigned as Secretary of State the Democrats felt relieved that Blaine had been succeeded by Frelinghuysen:

The Washington dispatches now come freighted with more revelations concerning Mr. Blaine's diplomacy, which do not abate the national thanksgiving that the charge of foreign affairs of the United States has passed into other hands. Each successive installment of these disclosures helps to confirm the allegation now current in the capital that the diplomatic enterprises pursued by Mr. Blaine during President Garfield's disability were not fully learned by President Arthur till after the accession of Secretary Frelinghuysen. <sup>14</sup>

The Democrats also accused Blaine of using his own power as Secretary of State to enrich himself by

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<sup>13</sup> Daily Gazette, Editorial, March 9, 1881

<sup>14</sup> Daily Gazette, Editorial, February 3, 1882

supporting the Landreau claim. Landreau claimed that he had discovered the fertilizing qualities of guano in Peru and he demanded from the Peruvian government a third of the value of the guano, which amounted to \$500,000,000. Landreau, who was a French adventurer, claimed American citizenship and Blaine, without investigating the dubious American citizenship of Landreau, supported his claim against Peru. The House later on investigated Blaine's conduct in this affair. It came to the conclusion that even though Blaine had not tried to profit personally by supporting this claim, he had acted extremely unwisely by backing up such a dubious claim with the power of the United States government. With this judgement the Democrats of Kalamazoo heartily agreed:

The outcome of the correspondence relating to Chili and Peru will probably be investigated by Congress. It is hardly possible that the disclosures made to the public can be passed over in silence, or without an attempt to probe to the bottom of the barefaced jobbery which may be said to stand revealed in these judicial papers. According to Mr. Blaine's own showing, his position is indefensible. With a full knowledge of the bargaining between the Peruvian company and Hurlbut, before his minister started for Lima, the Secretary of State took up this Landreau claim and made

it a special subject of diplomatic action.<sup>15</sup>

To the Republicans of Kalamazoo, however, Blaine was the epitome of an able statesman:

To the careful observer of Secretary Blaine's attitude in national and international affairs it is very apparent that he has become thoroughly imbued with the spirit of that other great American commoner, Henry Clay. The great American system of protection and independence in the treatment of all affairs of state, has had no such exponent as James G. Blaine since the days of Clay and the brilliancy of his achievements stand resplendent by the side of the work of any of the premiers the country has know.<sup>16</sup>

There was one other subject which engendered intense partisanship both in the nation as a whole and in Kalamazoo in particular - the question of high or low tariffs. In all these years (1880-1894) we find almost every week an editorial in the Democratic paper blasting the high tariff system and an editorial in the Republican paper praising the tariff as the basis of prosperity. The same arguments are repeated over and over again, week after week, and it will suffice therefore to quote one editorial

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<sup>15</sup> Daily Gazette, Editorial, February 3, 1882

<sup>16</sup> Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, Editorial, August 5, 1891

from the Daily Gazette and the Daily Telegraph respectively:

Under our tariff system a large part of the money demanded of the people whether for revenue or for protection is derived from the taxation of articles used more largely by the poor than by the rich. The workers who earn but little more than a bare living outnumber the non-workers by millions. Tariff taxes that are placed on the necessaries of life are therefore largely paid out of the pockets of the working classes. Tariff taxation does not pretend to be based upon the ratio of property or means to pay among men, but favors the few wealthy drones at the expense of the multitude of wage earners. A more unequal method of raising money for public and private purposes could not well be devised. And, the worst feature of all, a protective tariff includes taxation to pay bounties and subsidies to private interests at the expense of the whole people. It's very essence is injustice. 17

The opposite opinion on the high protective tariff is expressed in this editorial:

The free traders have a custom of arguing that the use of a tariff system that affects manufacturers to any extent is to kill off our foreign commerce. It destroys our chance to buy abroad according to this view of it, and if we cannot buy, of course our chance to sell is limited by just so much. But the facts fail to bear out the free trade argument of the case. The last year of virtually free trade was 1860 and the volume of our foreign commerce was regarded as a good measure of the prosperity

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<sup>17</sup> Daily Gazette, Editorial, August 17, 1889

it could attain under that system. Since then the duties have been generally high, but they have not diminished over foreign trade. The population of the United States has increased since then over 70 per cent. Our imports instead of showing a relative decrease have more than doubled. The foreign trade has grown half as fast again as the country itself. <sup>18</sup>

The period 1880-1894 was part of a transitory period in American Foreign Policy. Gone were the days when we were a relatively insignificant voice in the international field. On the other hand the day hadn't yet arrived when the United States was to become the leader of the democratic nations in World War I.

Foreign policy to the nation as a whole and the people of Kalamazoo in particular was most of the time seen through the eyes of intense partisanship and the political struggle at home.

Only at times when issues came up that appealed strongly to the anti-foreign, nationalistic and expansionist "Weltanschauung" of this period are we able to detect a bi-partisan spirit in Kalamazoo in regards to United States foreign policy.

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<sup>18</sup> Daily Telegraph, Editorial, March 23, 1883

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