

EXPANSIONISM AS DIPLOMACY: THE CAREER OF SOLON BORLAND IN CENTRAL AMERICA 1853-1854

IN studying foreign intervention in Central America in the nineteenth-century, historians have traditionally focused upon the filibusters,¹ the Anglo-American rivalry,² or the development of a transit route across the isthmus.³ Scholars and popular writers have usually concen-

¹ The definition of filibusters is to be found in Scrogg's account on William Walker: "Filibusters is a derogative word in the Nineteenth Century. It is employed to designate those adventurers who, during the decade preceding the Civil War, were engaged in fitting out and conducting, under private initiative, armed expeditions from the United States against other nations with which this country was at peace." William Oscar Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers: The Story of William Walker and His Associates*. (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1916), p. 4. Walker has drawn almost exclusive attention as a filibuster. Scrogg's is the first English work on the subject, and it has remained the standard. There are several earlier works in Spanish. See Jerónimo Pérez, *Memorias para la historia de la Revolución de Nicaragua y de la guerra nacional contra los filibusteros*, 2 vols. (Managua, Nicaragua: Imprenta del gobierno, 1865-1873); Lorenzo Montafor y Rivera Maestre, *Walker en Centro America*. (Guatemala: Tipografía la Union, 1887); Virgilio Rodríguez Beteta, *Transcendencia Nacional y Internacional de la Guerra de Centro América contra Walker y sus Filibusteros*. (Guatemala: Editorial de Ejercito, 1960.) Recent works on Walker in English include Albert Carr, *William Walker and His World*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963.) A more popular and colorful account of Walker is to be found in Frederick Rosengarten, *Freebooters Must Die! The Life and Death of William Walker, the Most Notorious Filibuster of the Nineteenth Century*. (Wayne, Pa.: Haverford House Publishers, 1976.)

² The standard work on the rivalry in Central America is Mary W. Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy, 1815-1915*. (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1916.) Other useful works are Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1826-1867*. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932.); Charles Lee Stansifer, "The Central American Career of Ephraim George Squier." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1959); Mario Rodríguez, *A Palmertonian Diplomat in Central America, Frederick Chatfield, Esq.* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1964.)

³ John H. Kemble, *The Panama Route*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1943); David Izatt Folkman, "Westward via Nicaragua: The United States and Nicaragua, 1826-1869." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, 1966); David Izatt Folkman, *The Nicaraguan Route*. (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1972.)

trated upon the exploits of a few prominent individuals, especially William Walker, E. George Squier, Frederick Chatfield, or Cornelius Vanderbilt. Almost lost among these giants, one United States diplomat has been overlooked. Solon Borland, a former United States Senator from Arkansas, served as the first United States Minister to Nicaragua and Minister Plenipotentiary to all Central America just prior to the Walker episode. Unfortunately, Borland would be a disaster as a diplomat. His personality was too tempestuous and his political views too expansionistic to be of any real service to the United States in Central America. Upon leaving his post after a stay of only nine months, Borland caused a near riot in British-held Greytown, and that disturbance provoked the United States Navy to level the port some two months after he had departed. This latter incident was one of the earliest examples of American gunboat diplomacy in Latin America.

In addition to Borland's own personal failure as a diplomat, his short term in Central America effectively highlighted the duality of the Monroe Doctrine. That doctrine sought to protect Latin America from European domination, yet it could be conveniently used as a justification for American expansion into and domination of the region. This was the duality of Borland's career in Central America.⁴ He desired to expel the British to allow for United States territorial expansion into the isthmus. For this reason, Borland's whole tenure in Central America represents a microcosm of the duality of the Monroe Doctrine.

In the middle of the nineteenth-century, Great Britain and the United States engaged in a bitter rivalry for dominance in Central America. The Monroe Doctrine notwithstanding, no one effectively challenged English hegemony in the isthmus until 1849. Her Majesty's government controlled not only Belize, but also seized the Bay Islands from Honduras in 1838. Britain preserved its protectorate over the "mosquito kingdom" along the Caribbean shore of Honduras and Nicaragua. In early 1848, English forces occupied San Juan del Norte on the southeastern coast of Nicaragua. That country protested, yet eventually it was forced to

⁴For a good discussion of this duality in the Monroe Doctrine, see Donald E. Dozer, editor, *The Monroe Doctrine: Its Modern Significance*. (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona State University Press, 1976.)

recognize the British occupation of the port. The British then re-named the small coastal city Greytown in honor of the governor of Jamaica.⁵

With the conclusion of the war with Mexico, the United States desired and needed an easy access route across the Central American isthmus in order to bind California and the Pacific coast to the rest of the country. As historian Mary Williams pointed out many years ago:

“It is to be remembered that before the Civil War, little faith was entertained that a railroad could be successfully built to the Pacific, or even operated if it could be built. Therefore, upon gaining territory on the Pacific, the interest of the United States in Central America must increase tremendously.”⁶

Although President Polk was aware of Central America’s importance to his country, he was personally too involved with the 1848 presidential election to orchestrate any major move into the isthmus. That option would remain for the Whig administration of Mexican war hero General Zachary Taylor.

Taylor’s administration made Central America and a secure transit route one of its major foreign policy objectives. This became evident when President Taylor chose Senator John Clayton of Delaware for Secretary of State. Some fifteen years earlier, Clayton sponsored a Senate resolution calling for an American-controlled transisthmian canal.⁷ Secretary Clayton immediately dispatched E. George Squier to Central America to blunt British penetration and power into the area. Squier was so successful that by the end of 1849, Honduras, Nicaragua, and to some degree El Salvador now looked to the United States for protection against English encroachment.⁸ On August 27, 1849, Nicaragua granted

⁵Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, pp. 31-32, 36, 38-39. Rodriguez, *Palmerstonian Diplomat*, pp. 52-147. Nicaragua was forced to recognize British control of Greytown on March 7, 1848, p. 285. For a further look at British penetration and dominance in Central America see Robert Naylor, “The British Role in Central America Prior to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850.” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. XL (August, 1960), pp. 361-382; Virigilio Rodriguez Beteta, *La Política Iglesia en Centro América durante el Siglo XIX*. (Guatemala: Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1963); William J. Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness: Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1965.)

⁶Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, p. 47.

⁷Senator John Clayton of Delaware had sponsored this Canal resolution on March 3, 1835. Folkman, “Westward via Nicaragua,” pp. 22-23, 39.

⁸Rodriguez, *Palmerstonian Diplomat*, pp. 301-304; Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, p. 72. Squier signed a series of treaties with Nicaragua and Honduras, dated respectively September 3, 1849, September 28, 1849. The United States promised to protect Nicaragua’s territorial integrity and Honduras ceded Tigre Islands to the United States for eighteen months. For a look at Squier’s treaties, see William Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860*, 12 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1932-1939), vol. III, pp. 360-369, 393-403.

to the American-owned Atlantic and Pacific Canal Company the right to build a canal and to operate a transisthmian transit route via the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua.⁹

Attempting to counter these new thrusts by their American rival, Frederick Chatfield had British forces seize Tigre Islands from Honduras before that country could temporarily cede them to the United States. Reaction, however, was so strong to this English move in North and Central America that her Majesty's government abandoned the islands within months.¹⁰ To cool the Central American rivalry, London sent Sir Henry Bulwer to Washington City to begin negotiations over Anglo-American differences. The British emissary's talks with the American Secretary of State eventually produced the famous Clayton-Bulwer Treaty on April 19, 1850. In this document, Britain and the United States promised not to build a transisthmian canal without each other's permission. The treaty also stated that no new colonization would be tolerated.¹¹ The United States Senate ratified the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty on May 22 by a lopsided vote of forty-two to twelve.¹²

With the ratification of the treaty, the administrations of Taylor and his successor Millard Fillmore were more interested in safeguarding their future interest in a transisthmian canal than in challenging English power in the region.¹³ In opposition to the policy of these administrations, the

⁹Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. III, pp. 360-361. This Nicaraguan route had long been considered as the most feasible way across the isthmus ever since the days of the Spanish explorers. See Max H. Williams, "San Juan—Lake Nicaragua Waterway, 1502-1921." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1971), pp. 1-91.

¹⁰Rodriguez, *Palmerstonian Diplomat*, pp. 304-312.

¹¹For the best descriptions of the negotiations which produced the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty see Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, pp. 67-98. For an official text of the treaty see David Hunter Miller, editor, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States, 1776-1863*, 8 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1948) vol. V, pp. 671-76.

¹²There is no official record on the debate over the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in the Senate. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William King of Kentucky, called the Senate into executive session on May 22, 1850. The record just reports that the executive session lasted for some time. John Rives, editor, *Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st Session*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1850), p. 1045. The Senate actually voted for the treaty that day; see Sir Henry Bulwer to Lord Viscount Palmerston, May 26, 1850. Letter reprinted in Lawrence Ott, editor, *Correspondence with the United States Respecting Central America, 1849-1856*. (London: Harrison & Sons, 1856), p. 60. The vote total taken from Perkins; nevertheless he gives no source for his information. Perkins, *Monroe Doctrine*, p. 206.

¹³Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, pp. 131-32. As a further accommodation with the British, the Whig administration of Fillmore signed the Webster-Crampton Convention of 1852. This agreement made Greytown a free port city. The British did not have to pull out of the area, while the United States tacitly gave recognition of British control without formally recognizing the British occupation. To have done that would have gone against the earlier American agreements with Nicaragua, pp. 132-33. After the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, Squier returned home where he discovered that the Fillmore administration was mostly interested in good relations with Britain. Stansifer, "Central American Career of E. G. Squier," p. 80. Squier denounces the treaty later as a capitulation to British power. Rodriguez, *Palmerstonian Diplomat*, p. 314.

Democrats for the previous ten years or more had been infected with a fever for expansion. Many leading Democrats were quick to use the Monroe Doctrine as a weapon against British interests in Central America, and then equally fast to use "Manifest Destiny" as an ideological justification for territorial expansion.¹⁴ The isthmus between the American continents looked especially promising to these expansionists because, not only was the region strategically important, but the countries in the region appeared more vulnerable to American growth.¹⁵

With the Democratic victory in the presidential election of 1852, leading Senate Democrats, especially Lewis Cass of Michigan and Stephen Douglas of Illinois, lashed out bitterly at the Whigs over the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.¹⁶ Preferring to let his Democratic colleagues lead the attack, Senator Solon Borland spoke up on the subject briefly on January 10, 1853. His few remarks point out the duality present in Democratic preachments about the Monroe Doctrine. Senator Borland boasted of his vote against the treaty and stated his reasons for doing so:

"The first was, that I recognize what is called the Monroe Doctrine, and for that reason, I thought I could not, without being inconsistent, recognize even the right of Great Britain to negotiate with us for the possession and holding of any province in Central America, or upon this continent . . . And, in the next place, I voted against it because I would never, by my voice, bend the United States to abstain from the acquisition of territory in that direction, or any other."¹⁷

As representative from a frontier state, Borland spoke as land-hungry westerner. As a southerner, Borland participated in the great national crisis of 1850. Like others from his region, he dreamed of expanding into the Caribbean to add more slave states to the American Union.¹⁸ Within the Pierce administration, there were many members of the "Young

¹⁴For a good article on expansionist fever in the Democratic Party in the 1840s and early 1850s, see Merle Curti, "Young America." *American Historical Review*, vol. XXXII (October, 1926), pp. 34-55. For another look at expansionist thought in this period, see Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Re-Interpretation*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963), pp. 27-61.

¹⁵Robert May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*. (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), p. 4. This work deals with the South's attempt to expand into the Caribbean to bring more slave states into the American Union. Borland, however, is not mentioned in this book for he pre-dates May's time period.

¹⁶Rives, *Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853); pp. 233, 236-242, 246-253, 267-273, 414-421. For a secondary source on the debate, see Perkins, *Monroe Doctrine*, pp. 216-223. Perkins claims that in this 1853 debate over the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, the words "Monroe Doctrine" came into common usage. p. 223.

¹⁷Rives, *Congressional Globe, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session*, p. 253.

¹⁸May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, pp. 9-15.

America" movement which sought to expand United States territory into North or Central America.¹⁹ Given Borland's own expansionistic views, it is little wonder he was offered a diplomatic post in the incoming Pierce administration. The former Arkansas Senator could never distinguish between protecting his country's interests and promoting its territorial expansion. As a typical southwesterner, he saw those duties as one and the same.

Born in Suffolk, Virginia on September 21, 1808, Borland began his career as a physician. Apparently he tired of that profession for he arrived in Little Rock in 1843 to edit the major newspaper for the Arkansas Democratic party. In state and local issues, editor Borland quite naturally followed the cue of the Democratic officials. On national affairs, he was an ultra-expansionist, calling upon the United States to annex Texas whether it meant war with Mexico or not. He later served in the conflict he did so much to promote. His political career began when he was appointed to a vacant Senate seat on March 30, 1848. The following November he was elected to a full term, serving in the Senate until his formal Central American appointment in April of 1853.²⁰

In his five years in the Senate, Borland sponsored much legislation and engaged frequently in debate. His acerbic and often arrogant personality, however, earned him the antagonism of men inside and outside the Senate. When Borland's appointment became known, not a few expressed surprise, if not alarm, at the decision. The Arkansas Senator had been involved in a series of several well-publicized brawls in Washington, and many questioned the wisdom of sending such a man to an important post in Central America.²¹

¹⁹ Curti, "Young America," pp. 47-48. If the "Young America" expansionists had influence in the Pierce administration, they did not reign supreme. For example, they opposed the nomination of Senator William Marcy of New York as Secretary of State. p. 47.

²⁰ Borland's early life appears sketchy. He seems to have practiced medicine in North Carolina and Tennessee before coming to Arkansas in 1843. David Yancy Thomas, "Solon Borland," *Dictionary of American Biography*, edited by Dumas Malone. 12 vols. (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1928-1936), vol. II, pp. 464-65. Other sources about Borland's career in Arkansas are: Fay Hempstead, *History of Arkansas From the Earliest Time Till 1890*. (St. Louis: N. D. Thompson & Co., 1890), p. 789; Dallas Herndon, *A Centennial History of Arkansas*, 3 vols. (Chicago, Ill.: Clarke Publishing Co., 1922) vol. i, p. 266; Margaret Ross, *The Arkansas Gazette: The Early Years, 1819-1866*. (Little Rock, Ark.: Arkansas Gazette Foundation, 1969), pp. 247-258. Although this latter work is basically the history of the oldest continuous newspaper west of the Mississippi River, it is also the best one-volume history of antebellum Arkansas politics in print.

²¹ As an example of Borland's poor relationship with his colleagues, both Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri and Borland rejoice that neither speak to one another off the Senate floor. Rives, *31st Congress, 1st Session*, p. 797. Borland's reputation outside of Congress was just as bad. At one time there had been an attempt to hang him in effigy in the streets of the nation's capital. Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, p. 300.

Borland's official title was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Central America, and he was this country's first minister to Nicaragua.²² It would take the new minister almost four months to arrive on the isthmus. He and his secretary, Frederick Been, dropped anchor in Greytown on August 27, 1853. It was the first time Borland had a chance to respond to Secretary of State William March's instructions dated June 17. These instructions had been given to Borland by Been when the two met in Mobile in late July.²³

While the Pierce administration was not as expansionistic as foreign observers had feared,²⁴ nevertheless, it did intent to challenge British hegemony in the area. This meant that the Pierce government would hold England close to the terms of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, especially the pledge in the first article that neither country would colonize or dominate the area. The United States wanted the British to abandon the Bay Islands and the mosquito coast.²⁵ Both President Pierce and his new Secretary of State desired to use the thirty-year old Monroe Doctrine against the British.²⁶ The question remained—just how far was the Pierce regime ready to go in backing its demands with action or arms?

Secretary of State Marcy's initial instructions to Borland emphasized the importance of his mission. With the acquisition of California, it was stressed that the United States must have good and strong relations in Central America. Borland was ordered to tell these countries that the United States would "help them resist encroachment for the purpose of colonization by foreign nations upon the American Continent and the adjacent islands."²⁷ In the final section of the instructions, Secretary

²² Before Borland, the United States sent its first representative in 1851. John Kerr served as Charge d'Affair in Nicaragua until Borland arrived. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 3-5, 39.

²³ Borland to Marcy, July 2, 1853; July 10, 1853; July 27, 1853, Dispatch no. 1; July 29, 1853, Dispatch no. 2; August 28, 1853, Dispatch No. 3. Dispatches found in National Archives, Records of the Department of State, Dispatches of the United States Ministers to Central America, 1824-1906. Nicaragua, vol. I, 1851-1854. (A microfilm edition found in the Tulane Library, New Orleans, La.)

²⁴ Curti, "Young America," pp. 45-48. The Prussian Minister to the United States, Baron von Gerolt, wrote his government after Pierce's election that the peace policy of the Fillmore administration was now over. The new Pierce regime was sure to assert its influence into Europe and throughout the whole New World. p. 45.

²⁵ Williams. *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, p. 151. Williams reports that Marcy and the American ambassador in London, James Buchanan, planned to limit British holdings to that of Belize. The English government maintained that the treaty of 1850 in no way affected her holdings as of 1850. This meant that the London regime would not relinquish hold over the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Coast.

²⁶ Perkins. *Monroe Doctrine*, pp. 226-228.

²⁷ Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, p. 42. All of Marcy's instructions to Borland printed on pp. 40-47.

Marcy asked Borland to resolve "any unfavorable impressions there existing against this country."²⁸ This last remark was important. Since 1849 relations between the United States and Nicaragua had been strained. Nicaragua was ignored in the Anglo-American agreements in 1850 and 1852. In addition to this snub, Nicaragua claimed that the settlements violated their own treaty with the United States written months before the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. The State Department had great hopes that Borland could re-establish American influence in not only Nicaragua, but throughout all of Central America.

Borland responded to Marcy's instructions with a dispatch almost as long as his superior's letter. He outlined his own views on the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, and ended his lengthy communication by expressing the opinion that his country's interest in Central America would never be secure until Great Britain was entirely excluded from the isthmus. He wrote that England must accept the American interpretation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty or the document should be repudiated.²⁹ After a brief stay in Greytown, Borland and his party moved inland to the national capitol of Managua.

For reasons already outlined, the Nicaraguan government was not in a cordial disposition toward the United States. Since April of 1853, the conservatives under the leadership of Fruto Chamorro had come into power, and this new regime had expressed general hostility to all foreign interests. The Chamorro government was especially hostile to the American-owned transit company.³⁰ According to the British ambassador in Guatemala, all of Central America, with the possible exception of Honduras, was thoroughly frightened of the expansion of the United States, especially after the war with Mexico.³¹ Despite these disadvantages, Borland's mission still held great possibilities. After all, he was the first official U.S. Minister to Nicaragua and that country was pleased to have such representation from the North American republic.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁹ Borland to Marcy, August 28, 1853, Dispatch no. 3, Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I. This dispatch also reprinted in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 342-348.

³⁰ Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Zelaya, *Fruto Chamorro*. (Managua, Nicaragua: Editorial Union, 1960), pp. 226-238. For another good work in this period of Nicaraguan history, see Francisco Ortega Arancibia, *Cuarenta Anos de Historia de Nicaragua, 1838-1878*. (Managua, Nicaragua: Papeles Industrial de Nicaragua, 1974, 3rd edition.)

³¹ Charles Wyke to Lord Clarendon, March 13, 1854, Dispatch no. 9. British Foreign Office, Series 15, Central America, Guatemala, vol. LXXXII. (A microfilm copy found in Tulane University Library, New Orleans, La.)

Together with secretary Been and commercial agent Fabens, Borland presented his credentials to the Chamorro government on September 14, 1853.³² At this meeting, Borland delivered a speech to the Nicaraguan leader justifying every territorial expansion of the United States from the Louisiana Purchase to the recent war with Mexico. After this speech Borland assured the Nicaraguan government that the United States planned in words and deeds to enforce the Monroe Doctrine.³³ Whatever may have been his intention, Borland's behavior at this initial audience must have baffled the Nicaraguans. On the one hand, the United States Minister pledged his country to the Monroe Doctrine. Did that mean that the North American giant was prepared finally to force Great Britain off of her eastern coast? Even more puzzling was Borland's address on American expansion. No doubt the Nicaraguans wondered whether their neighbor to the north would use the pretext of removing the British as prelude to eventually annexing them to the United States. Borland's activity in the coming months would do little to allay this fear.

Although new in his position, Borland was not totally ignorant of the difficulties he faced in Nicaragua. In his fifth dispatch to Secretary Marcy, dated September 20, 1853, the Minister wrote of the differences between the transit company and the government, the recent recall of Charge d'Affaires John Kerr without any explanation by the United States, and the "extravagant promises" of Mr. Squier; all of these events were seen as real obstacles to his mission in Nicaragua.³⁴ But the greatest difficulty was the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty which the American Minister again said should be repudiated immediately.³⁵ Borland did achieve some small measure of success in shoring up relations between the United States and Nicaragua. On September 27, 1853 he entered into negotiations with the Chamorro government for a new commercial treaty.³⁶ Since Borland and the Nicaraguan government shared a mutual antagonism toward Great Britain, the two parties worked together with some degree of harmony.

³² Borland to Marcy, September 20, 1853, Dispatch no. 5. Department of State, *Dispatches, Nicaragua*, vol. I. Speech included in the dispatch. Major excerpts from the speech reprinted in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 349-352, footnote 2.

³³ *Ibid.* The dispatch also found in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 349-353.

³⁴ Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, p. 353.

³⁵ Borland to Marcy, September 20, 1853, Dispatch no. 5. Department of State, *Dispatches, Nicaragua*, vol. I.

³⁶ Borland to Marcy, October 8, 1853, Dispatch no. 6. Department of State, *Dispatches, Nicaragua*, vol. I.

His anti-British posture having opened doors in Nicaragua, the United States Minister decided to visit Honduras to strengthen pro-American sentiment in that country. Apparently Borland hoped to achieve this aim by provoking a war with Great Britain. He proposed in early October to the State Department that authorization be given him to assure Honduras that the United States would support her with force, if necessary, in seizing the Bay Islands from Great Britain. He cared little if this could cause a war or abrogation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.³⁷ He reported that the United States could make no further concessions "to a power who is our hereditary enemy, and can never be our friend, while her memory lasts, or until she ceases to be our rival . . ." ³⁸ Although the State Department viewed these proposals with apprehension, Marcy wrote him in November that the Department was taking them into consideration.³⁹ Actually Borland had no need to go to Honduras, for E. G. Squier was there as a private citizen, working diligently to keep that country in line with the United States.⁴⁰ While Borland was waiting for instructions from Washington on his trip to Honduras, war broke out between that country and Guatemala and El Salvador. This caused Borland to reconsider his trip northward from Nicaragua,⁴¹ and his desire to visit Honduras was never fulfilled.

Although energetic in attempting to promote American interests against Great Britain, Borland was still the same frontier expansionist. British Vice-Consul to El Salvador, Henry Foote, heard the American Minister state in a public speech in Granada, Nicaragua, that it was his "greatest ambition to see the State of Nicaragua forming a bright star in the flag of the United States."⁴² Mr. Foote also heard Borland promise

³⁷ *Ibid.* Borland's exact words were: "I should feel authorized . . . to assure her that the Bay Islands are not only hers by *de jure*, but that the United States will see that they are, also, hers *de facto*; for that Great Britain must and shall give them up, either under a special agreement of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, or upon the general principles of the Monroe Doctrine, each of which having been violated in their seizure and colonization."

³⁸ Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, p. 360.

³⁹ Marcy to Borland, November 18, 1853, Dispatch no. 7. National Archives, Records of the Department of State, Diplomatic Instructions, 1801-1906. American States, vol. XV, 1833-1858. For an indication that Marcy and the State Department had worries about Borland's ideas, see Marcy to Borland, December 30, 1853, Dispatch no. 8. (A microfilm copy of these instructions retained in Tulane University Library, New Orleans, La.)

⁴⁰ Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, p. 170.

⁴¹ Borland to Marcy, November 25, 1853, Dispatch no. 10. Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I. Marcy to Borland, March 2, 1854, Dispatch no. 11. This is reprinted in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 56-57.

⁴² Charles Wyke to Lord Clarendon, November 27, 1853, no. 37. British Foreign Office, Series 15, Central America, Guatemala, vol. LXXIX.

the Nicaraguans that the United States would help them retake Greytown and the whole mosquito coast.⁴³ This Granada speech in mid-October highlighted the duality of Borland's whole career in Central America. Britain must be removed in order for the United States to expand into the isthmus. His Granada statements only confirmed British and Nicaraguan fears that the real intention of the United States was to expand territorially into Central America.

Throughout the rest of 1853 Borland continued negotiations with Nicaragua over a new commercial treaty.⁴⁴ He worried continually about British designs on Honduras and Nicaragua. Almost in a panic, he wrote the State Department in early December about the "devilish machinations" of the British. Without being specific about English activities, Borland wrote feverishly:

"I think, if I could succeed in making you fully aware of the state of affairs even now, and especially as threatened, I would not be long without special instructions to take bold and decided steps. . . . But I trust you know my principles and general views well enough to be assured that I will not involve my country unnecessarily or improperly."⁴⁵

After this dispatch reached Washington, the State Department lost all confidence in Borland's judgment. In at least half of the American Minister's dispatches to Washington, he constantly harped upon the need to repudiate the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty,⁴⁶ which antagonized the Secretary of State. Marcy bluntly wrote Borland in late December that the United States considered that treaty a "subsisting contract and feels bound to observe its stipulations. . . . The views taken of that Treaty by the United States and your course in relation to it, pointed out in your first instructions, will be observed until you receive notice of their modification."⁴⁷ Borland was ordered to follow, not make policy regarding previous American treaty arrangements.

The Secretary of State was also angry about Borland's proposal to Honduras regarding the Bay Islands. He curtly remarked to Borland:

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Borland to Marcy, November 10, 1853, Dispatch no. 9. Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I.

⁴⁵ Borland to Marcy, December 10, 1853, Dispatch no. 11. Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I.

⁴⁶ From August through December, Borland constantly complained about the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. See Borland to Marcy, Dispatches nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11. Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I.

⁴⁷ Marcy to Borland, December 30, 1853, instructions, no. 8. Reprinted in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 51-54.

“You are not authorized to pledge the faith of the United States to put that State in possession of the Bay of Islands . . . To carry out the assurance you propose to make to Honduras might require this Government to commit an act of war. Your instructions would not warrant you to take such a step, and I trust you will not think of venturing upon it.”⁴⁸

The American Secretary further scolded the U.S. Minister to Nicaragua for not being specific in his charges concerning the English maneuvers. “There are, running through all your dispatches, complaints of the conduct of Great Britain, but these complaints are not accompanied with any specification of acts, and I am left in doubt as to the foundation of them.”⁴⁹ The Secretary reminded the Minister that he had no military force under his command; and that the government in Washington would never comply with any of his requests until he made more specific charges against Great Britain.⁵⁰

Marcy’s long note to Borland in late December of 1853 was not a gentle reprimand, but a general rebuke of his mission. The Pierce administration was negotiating its differences with England over Central America in London and Washington.⁵¹ It did not want or need a minor diplomat like Borland drawing the country into a conflict. From Borland’s dispatches, that seems to have been his real intention. Perhaps he hoped that such a conflict would cede to the United States one or two republics in Central America. His incessant Anglophobia and dangerous demands for more power and authority caused the State Department to view Borland as a most unsettling element in the whole area.

Whether or not Marcy’s note was actually intended to induce Borland’s resignation, it had that effect. As soon as the sensitive Minister received the note some two months after it was written, he immediately sent a note to President Pierce asking to be relieved from his post. In the letter to the President, Borland claimed that the Secretary of State had given him an “offensive dispatch” with which “I cannot continue in a position to be subject, while so much of self-respect remains to me as becomes a man.”⁵² In the same note, Borland said he would stay in Nicaragua until the first of May.⁵³ He would continue in his duties until he was further notified by his superiors.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵¹ Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, pp. 149-167.

⁵² Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, p. 387, footnote 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Within his last few months as Minister, Borland completed negotiations with Nicaragua for a new commercial treaty. On February 14, 1854, he and the Chamorro government signed a Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, Navigation, and Protection.⁵⁴ The Pierce administration received the treaty but never sent it to the Senate for ratification. Later on the State Department sent the treaty back with Borland's successor for modification.⁵⁵

Rather than producing potentially controversial agreements with Central American states, the State Department wanted Borland to protect the interests of the American-owned Accessory Transit Company. It sent two messages in late 1853 and 1854 ordering him to intervene for the company against the Nicaraguan government.⁵⁶ Only after the Chamorro regime levied a tax on treasure transported by the company did Borland protest to the Nicaraguan government.⁵⁷ Just when a major confrontation was brewing between the Chamorro government and the United States over the transit company in the spring of 1854, a full-scale civil war erupted between the liberal and conservative factions in Nicaragua. This civil war invited William Walker to enter Nicaragua the following year.⁵⁸

Somewhat characteristically, Borland's departure from Nicaragua would not be a quiet one. It would involve a murder, a near riot, leveling of a town, and an international embarrassment for the United States. The American Minister traveled down the San Juan River toward Greytown on a transit company river steamer under the command of a Captain Smith. After the steamer collided with a small boat the captain and the small boat owner entered into a heated argument. When the two boats were finally separated, Captain Smith shot the small boat owner in the back with a rifle, killing him instantly. Borland was on board, but had no part in the affair.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Borland to Marcy, February 22, 1854, Dispatch no. 13, Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I.

⁵⁵ Marcy to John Wheeler, October 23, 1854, Dispatch No. 3. This dispatch reprinted in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, p. 63. The actual text of this treaty had disappeared from the files of the State Department. See the above volume p. 385, footnote 2.

⁵⁶ Marcy to Borland, November 18, 1853, Dispatch no. 7; Marcy to Borland, February 3, 1854, Dispatch no. 10. Department of State, Diplomatic Instructions, American States, vol. XV.

⁵⁷ Chamorro Zelaya, *Fruto Chamorro*, pp. 233-34. Borland to Marcy, March 11, 1854, Dispatch no. 15. Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. I. For the Nicaraguan reply to Borland's protest, see Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, pp. 396-97.

⁵⁸ Max H. Williams, "San Juan-Lake Nicaragua Waterway, 1502-1921.", pp. 125-130.

⁵⁹ Folkman, "Westward via Nicaragua," p. 185.

After the steamer arrived at Greytown on May 16, 1854, a local mulatto marshal, together with about twenty blacks, attempted to arrest Captain Smith for murder. Borland came to the captain's rescue, stating that the United States recognized no legitimate authority in Greytown. Therefore, the posse could not arrest an American citizen. When they tried to seize Smith, Borland grabbed the rifle of a bystander and warded off the marshal and his men with the weapon.

That night Borland visited the home of Joseph Fabens, the U.S. Commercial Agent. A body of armed men soon appeared at Faben's door inquiring for Borland, saying that they intended to arrest him. Borland confronted them and declared that they could not arrest a United States official. Just then the major arrived and apologized to Borland for the incident. He denied authorizing these men to arrest Borland. While the mayor and Borland were talking, someone threw a broken bottle which struck the U.S. Minister in the face. He was not seriously injured and his assailant disappeared into the crowd. The next morning, Borland left Greytown on an ocean steamer to report the affair to Washington. He submitted his report to Secretary Marcy on May 30, 1854.⁶⁰

Upon receiving Borland's report, Marcy instructed Fabens to demand an apology from the authorities.⁶¹ On June 10, 1854, the Navy Department ordered Commander Hollins to proceed to Greytown. He was instructed to ascertain the facts from Mr. Fabens and was also told: "Now it is very desirable that these people should be taught that the United States will not tolerate these outrages, and that they have the power and determination to check them . . . The Department reposes much in your prudence and good sense."⁶² Officials from the transit company were even more intent on revenge for their relationship with Greytown had been poor for the last two years.⁶³ A fact ignored by the U.S. officials was

⁶⁰ For a primary source for the whole affair, see United States Presidents, (Pierce) "Message from the President Concerning the Bombardment of San Juan de Nicaragua, July 13, 1854. *33rd Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document no. 85. Serial no. 702.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1854); pp. 2-23, especially pp. 2-4, 5-7. This entire episode can be found in various secondary sources, Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, pp. 75-76, with the fullest account being found in Folkman, "Westward via Nicaragua," pp. 186-188.

⁶¹ "Message from the President Concerning the Bombardment," *33rd Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document 85. Serial no. 702*, pp. 9-10.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Folkman, "Westward via Nicaragua," pp. 179-181. Folkman quotes extensively from one company official on the situation: "If the scoundrels are soundly punished, we can take possession of this town, and build it up as a business place, put in our own officers, transfer the jurisdiction. . . . It is of lasting importance that the people of the town be taught to fear us. Punishment will teach them." p. 191.

that the mayor and city council had resigned after Borland had left on May 17, 1854. Since that time, no government had emerged to replace it.⁶⁴

Failing to receive an apology from any governing officials, Commander Hollins issued an ultimatum on July 12. Unless given an apology by the next morning at 9 A.M., he would commence bombarding the town.⁶⁵ After allowing some time for women and children to flee the port, Hollins bombarded the town at three different intervals, totaling about an hour and a half. After the firing ended, marines landed and burned what had been left standing.⁶⁶ The destruction of Greytown was one of the earliest episodes of American gunboat diplomacy in Latin America.

The whole affair at Greytown proved most embarrassing to the Pierce administration. The British Foreign Minister called it "an outrage without parallel in the annals of modern times."⁶⁷ Domestic critics of the Democrats lambasted the government over the bombardment. The *New York Times* was especially harsh, calling the action an act of war.⁶⁸ The editor was particularly hard on Borland and his involvement:

"That his maltreatment and duress were entirely proper, we have never doubted. He unfurled his diplomatic banner, and pointed his loaded rifle, and drew his best Arkansas bowie knife, all for the protection of an alleged murderer . . . He should be sent back to apologize himself for so gross an outrage. The dignity of the United States should not be spent upon such kind of people."⁶⁹

For months the administration remained silent about the bombardment. The government regretted Hollins' action, but considering his instructions, it could hardly repudiate the Commander.⁷⁰ President Pierce finally mentioned the affair in his second message to Congress on December 4, 1854, almost five months after the incident. In his address, the President presented a distorted account of the whole episode. He justified his action as necessary so the townspeople would be disabused of the idea that "they might persevere, with impunity, in a career of insolence

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-92.

⁶⁵ Commander Hollins' declaration is to be found in "Message from the President Concerning the Bombardment," *33rd Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document 86, Serial no. 702*, pp. 225-226.

⁶⁶ Folkman, "Westward via Nicaragua," p. 195.

⁶⁷ Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, p. 180. For the official British press reaction, see *The Times*. (London), August 14, 1854, p. 10.

⁶⁸ *The New York Times*, August 1, 1854, p. 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Williams, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, p. 181.

and plunder.”⁷¹ While it is difficult to judge the full impact of the bombardment of Greytown, it must have made the Pierce administration wary of becoming too heavily involved in Central America. This included the future filibustering exploits of William Walker.

Borland formally departed his post on June 30, 1854.⁷² After this brief diplomatic tenure in Central America, his political career went into a precipitous decline. The affair over Greytown, and Borland’s own bombastic temperament had made him an object of ridicule in many parts of the country. When Gilbert Hathaway, a medical doctor from Indiana, traveled through Little Rock in the mid-1850s, he treated his encounter with Borland in a comical manner:

“Here resides the celebrated, if not notorious, minister of Greytown memory, whom the dignified editor of the *Tribune*, of N.Y. city, calls the Bully of the South. When I first saw him, I involuntarily looked for the mark made by the much noted bottle which is said to have come in severe contact with the most prominent part of his countenance, while, as he contends, in the faithful discharge of his ministerial duty as the representative of this Government; but, as others say . . . he was in one of his bullying gasconades. But I could see no mark, if any was ever there; time, the great physician, had quite obliterated it.”⁷³

Borland would serve for a few years as an editor in Little Rock and Memphis. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Borland enthusiastically volunteered for service in the Confederate military. His war career so ruined his health that he had to resign from active service late in 1863. In a futile attempt to regain his health, he traveled to Houston, Texas where he died on New Year’s Day, 1864.⁷⁴

⁷¹ James Richardson, editor, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1789-1897*. 10 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), vol. V, p. 284. Pierce’s entire message to Congress is found on pp. 272-292.

⁷² Borland to President Pierce, June 22, 1854. Dispatch no. 2. In this letter Borland wrote that he would consider his resignation to take effect on June 30, 1854. His last official correspondence did not come until July when he submitted his financial report. Borland to Marcy, July 17, 1854, Dispatch unnumbered. Both of these letters are to be found in Department of State, Dispatches, Nicaragua, vol. 1.

⁷³ Gilbert Hathaway, “Travels in the South-West: Life in Arkansas and Texas.” *Travels in Two Hemispheres; or Gleanings from a European Tour*, Rev. George Duffield, W. P. Isham, D. Bethune Duffield, Gilbert Hathaway. 2nd edition. (Detroit, Mich.: Doughty-Straw, Raymond & Sellneck, 1858), pp. 235-236. For a look at Hathaway’s origins, see Thomas D. Clark, *Travels in the Old South: A Bibliography*. 3 vols. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956-1959), vol. III, pp. 247-248.

⁷⁴ Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, pp. 311-12, 314-18, 320-26; Hempstead, *History of Arkansas*, p. 789. For Borland’s Civil War career, see Michael Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime*. (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1976), pp. 32, 61.

Measured only by his short term in Central America, it is easy to label Borland as insignificant. This overlooks the fact that he was the highest ranking diplomat sent to Central America before that time. Borland's short career in Central America also highlighted the intense Anglo-American rivalry in the area in the middle of the Nineteenth Century. In addition, the former Senator from Arkansas participated as a major figure in one of the first episodes of gunboat diplomacy by the United States in Latin America. For all of these reasons, Borland deserves some attention.

Even more importantly, Borland symbolized an American dream confronting an international reality. As the epitome of a rough-and-tumble expansionist, he learned that not all people desired to become part of the American Union. In other words, United States territory would not advance wherever Borland decided it should go. His whole career in Central America indicated the duality of the Monroe Doctrine—foreign exclusion for the purpose of United States penetration. Borland failed in his mission because he saw his role as a diplomat and an expansionist. To him, the roles were really one and the same. If rabid expansionism was good politics for an Arkansas Senator, it was disastrous for a diplomat in Central America.

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