3. James Monroe Warns the European Powers (1823)

Secretary Adams's cogent arguments helped turn President Monroe toward a go-it-alone policy. The president's annual message to Congress, surprisingly, contained several emphatic warnings. The Russians, who had caused some alarm by their push toward California, had privately shown a willingness to retreat to the southern bounds of present-day Alaska. But Monroe warned them and the other powers that there was now a closed season on colonizing in the Americas. On the other hand, the heroic struggle of the Greeks for independence from the Turks was creating some agitation in America for intervention, but Monroe made his "you stay out" warning seem fairer by volunteering a "we'll stay out" pledge. Did he aim his main warning at noncolonization on the northwest coast or at the institution of monarchical systems in Spanish America? To what extent did he use America's clout regarding the acquisition of Cuba or intervention in Greece? Did he actually threaten the European powers?

In the discussions to which this interest [Russia's on the northwest coast] has given rise, the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American colonies, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for the future colonization by any European powers.

The political system of the Allied Powers [Holy Alliance] is essentially different ... from that of America. This difference proceeds from the fact that which exists in their respective [monarchical] governments; and to the defense of our own ... this whole nation is devoted. We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.

With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power, we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the governments of Spanish America who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.

Our policy in regard to Europe, which was adopted at an early stage of the wars which have so long agitated that quarter of the globe, nevertheless remains the same, which is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the government de facto as the legitimate government for us; to cultivate friendly relations with it, and to preserve those relations by a frank, firm, and manly policy, meeting in all instances the just claims of every power, submitting to injuries from none.

But in regard to those [American] continents, circumstances are eminently and conspicuously different. It is impossible that the Allied Powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness. Nor can anyone believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition in any form with indifference.