

**WHY HAS HISTORY FORGOTTEN ME?**

**By**

**William J. Wood**

**Indianapolis Literary Club**

**Presented November 2, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. President, and also you, Mr. Secretary, for affording me this opportunity not only to respond to calumnies that have been heaped upon me by a hostile press but also to expose the betrayals that have been played upon me by my superiors in public life.

Perhaps I should first inform you a little about myself. I was born in 1801 in Southern France. I was destined for the priesthood, but I did not get along at the seminary, so I left. By age 18, I had been arrested, and I had been convicted twice for insurrection and treason in France, where for the rest of my life was known as a "republican", that is, one who seeks to overthrow the corrupt monarchies of Europe. I escaped and first went to England where I also did not get along and was not accepted by the entrenched monarchists. I moved on to Port-au-Prince, where I did not get along, then to Baltimore, where I did not get along, then to New York., where I did not get along.

At length, I settled in New Orleans, where I did not get along with the socially prominent Creole families in the in the city. Nevertheless, by then I had learned to deal with hostility, so after many hardships and lengthy study, I became a successful criminal defense lawyer and a civil rights advocate, known for defending the rights of the poor and for seeking to abolish the death penalty.

After accumulating considerable wealth from the practice of law and wise real estate investments, I was finally accepted into society and became a force in Louisiana politics. I served in the United States Senate from Louisiana and was appointed by President Pierce as an ambassador.

Today, however, my name has been lost in history despite my lifetime of services to my community, to my state and to my country.

Perhaps by now, some of you have guessed my identity. Please raise your hands if you know who I am.

(PAUSE)

Would the words "Ostend Manifesto" be a helpful clue to my identity?

(PAUSE)

I am Pierre Soule, principal author of the Ostend Manifesto.

Some critics have accused me of hypocrisy in posing myself as a supporter of civil liberties while strongly supporting U. S. slavery and its expansion in the United States and into Latin America. They forget that the United States Constitution of 1787 did not abolish slavery, nor forbid its extension, nor establish a date for its abolition, with the full knowledge that slavery was practiced extensively throughout the South. That's not all. Although the original draft of the Declaration of Independence included an attack on slavery, those words were expressly removed from the final draft. I take all that to mean that slavery was impliedly approved as an established constitutional structure in our American society. So I have always considered myself as a constitutionalist.

Furthermore, cotton had become "king" in the South. All of Europe was totally dependant on the United States for the production of cotton for Europe's mills. The entire world made increasing demands for more cotton, but it was impossible to raise cotton without slave labor. Therefore, we in the South had "manifest destiny," if you please, to seek the expansion of American slavery not only to the West, but also to the south of the United States in Latin America. I became a fervent expansionist of slavery under our control to the south, particularly in Cuba, which had existed as a "thorn in our side" since the American Revolution. Everyone, North and South, was troubled by such a large holding by a foreign government, a holding so close to our shore.

Many of us also felt that our beloved country was destined to become an empire. At least two presidents before me used the word "empire" in describing our destiny, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. To Southerners "empire" included the acquisition of Cuba one way or the other.

As early as 1815, President John Quincy Adams had advocated our acquisition of Cuba from the impotent Spanish government.

To make matters worse, after the British Parliament had outlawed the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1805, it was apparent to us Southerners that the world was slowly turning against slavery. There was a belief at the time that Britain was seeking to "Africanize" Cuba by formenting a slave insurrection that would lead to a free, Africanized and infectious Cuba, just a few hundred miles

from our shores, while the tottering Spanish government seemed incapable of making a decision about the future of Cuba.

Meanwhile, Cuban ex-patriots in the United States began making raids on Cuban shipping. They were called "filibusters."

Relations between our country and Spain became increasingly difficult while many American newspapers criticized the treatment of Spanish slaves in Cuba, adding to the belief that the United States had a "moral destiny" to acquire Cuba, either by purchase or by conquest.

I want to emphasize that every step I took with respect to Cuba throughout my life was wholly in the direct interest of the United States and my beloved State of Louisiana without any thought of profit to me.

By a stroke of luck in 1846, I was appointed to fill out the unexpired term of a deceased United States Senator from Louisiana, putting my name in the national scene and coming to the notice of that presidential candidate, Franklin Pierce, who shared my belief for the expansion of cotton into Cuba by slave labor under the auspices of the United States. Please remember that Pierce was from New Hampshire.

I was re-elected to the Senate in 1853, the same year that Pierce was elected President. I had ardently supported Pierce's candidacy in Louisiana and made repeated speeches on behalf of his campaign up and down the east coast of the United States. After his successful election, in which I played a large part I trusted that he would appoint me to a seat in his cabinet, but my detractors

unjustly persuaded him that I was an opportunist, and too controversial and too disruptive to serve in the cabinet. I understand that one proposed member of the cabinet told Pierce that he would refuse to serve in the cabinet if Pierce appointed me. This was typical of the insults to which I was subjected all my life.

I then hoped to be an ambassador to one of the prominent European ministries, but Pierce listened to my enemies and awarded the ministries to Great Britain and France to others. I understand that the Czar of Russia refused to accept me as ambassador to St. Petersburg. Ultimately, I was appointed ambassador to Spain, despite the serious misgivings of the Spanish Queen's court and despite my well-known distaste for the hapless and bankrupt Spanish government.

That appointment was a great turning point in my life, one that I hoped would secure my place in history as a great patriot of our country. Instead, my mission to Spain turned out to be a humiliating defeat, despite my best efforts on behalf of our country and at the risk of my life several times. I attribute my failures in Spain largely to the indecisiveness of President Pierce and my betrayal by Pierce's Secretary of State, William Marcy.

My instructions before leaving for Spain were to make no overt offers to purchase Cuba, nor to make threats of war, but rather to investigate the attitude of the government in Madrid toward the situation knowing that we could and would take over Cuba and Puerto Rico by force if necessary.

My initial tactic was to take my time in traveling to Madrid, leaving the Queen's effete courtiers to build up their fears and to fumble about in their efforts to determine how properly to "receive" such a hostile ambassador. My republican friends in Europe had advised me that the members of Queen Isabel's tremulous court did not know how to receive such a combative, undiplomatic American. At length, on my arrival, I indeed fulfilled their worst fears. Well, perhaps my proposed initial diplomatic address was a little too caustic for the Queen, requiring me to rewrite my address to her, and causing my acceptance to be somewhat awkward, to say the least..

The Spanish court also was disturbed by my clandestine and sometimes open associations with republicans in Spain and France.

To make matters worse, the French minister to Spain, the Marquis de Turgot invited me and my family to a great ball in Madrid for all the socially prominent people. My dear wife, a beautiful Creole Louisianan accompanied me adorned with a striking blue velvet gown. During the ball, a guest's wife was heard to make a denigrating remark about Mrs. Soule's dress. Our teen-age son who also attended the ball with us, heard about the remark and challenged the French ambassador to a duel. Fortunately, both their pistols jammed, and no one was injured.

Nevertheless, I still felt dishonored, so I challenged the French ambassador to a duel, as well. Fortunately, I was uninjured, and he was only slightly injured in

the fleshy part of his knee. For some reason I was regarded as tactless and undiplomatic.

By then, my efforts regarding Cuba were not advancing. So I then turned to the Queen Mother, who seemed to fancy my roguish American demeanor and outlandish style of dress and conduct. I courted her to the point that some gossip began about us, but I merely endeavored to convince her to suggest to her daughter, the Queen, that the government should sell Cuba to the United States. Later, the press in the U.S. criticized me for violating Marcy's order to make no direct offer to the Spanish government to buy Cuba, but I did not see my indirect efforts with the Queen Mother to violate Marcy's instructions, which were to make no direct efforts. Ultimately, that effort with the Queen Mother also failed.

Back in the United States, the Kansas-Nebraska bill of 1854 not only destroyed any hope of unity in the U. S, but strengthened a renewed interest in Cuba. You will recall that the Kansas-Nebraska bill started out as a bill simply to authorize the transcontinental railroad, but that pusillanimous Senator Stephen Douglas allowed the bill to be amended in the name of "popular sovereignty", allowing both Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether to be slave or free, in the hope of relieving the stress between North and South. Instead the Act led to the birth of the Republican Party and to prominence of the previously unknown Abraham Lincoln, an uneducated man whose intransigence ultimately drove the South to secession and the War Between the States.



The American press reported rumors that Britain and France were planning anew to “Africanize” Cuba. Because the press accused me of “bad management” in Spain with regard to the Cuban matter, a national commission was appointed to settle with Spain over “past difficulties.” Naturally, I opposed the commission and then discovered that Mr. Horatio Perry, the secretary of my American Legation in Madrid had been corresponding behind my back with Secretary of State William Marcy, making no secret of Perry’s efforts to undermine me. Perry’s wife was a party to the conspiracy, too.

Amid these difficulties, in 1854 a propitious event occurred in Cuba, when a merchant vessel of the United States named the “Black Warrior”, en route from New Orleans to New York City with a cargo of mostly baled cotton, was seized by Cuban authorities. The ship had made 34 prior refueling stops in Cuba without declaring its transitory cargo of cotton, but for some “unknown” reason this time the port authorities refused to accept the cargo manifest from the captain, claiming that he had deceptively failed to list and pay the docking fee required for the baled cotton, although on no previous stops had a fee been charged for any cotton in transit to New York. The captain was arrested and held. On receiving the news, all the U.S. newspapers, North and South, played up the American outrage at this unprecedented illegal act on the part of the Cuban authorities. It was a perfect causa belli, but the timid Pierce administration failed to pursue the matter with vigor and the matter was ultimately settled. I could have terrorized the Spanish Court with the “Black Warrior” affair if given the opportunity.

Also, in 1854 republicans perpetrated a brief revolution in Madrid. I did what I could to support their revolt, while at the same time my wife and I gave shelter from the insurrectionists to the Queen Mother in our own home.

After the insurrection was quelled, it was clear that the Queen's government was shakier than ever, so I wrote a letter on July 18, 1854, to Secretary Marcy. In that letter, I said, "What a moment for taking in our own hands the question of Cuba, which it seems almost impossible we may hereafter be able to adjust in any other way than by force of arms!" Both Pierce and Marcy took that comment to heart, immediately authorizing me to offer \$230,000,000 U.S. Dollars for the purchase of the country, in the hope that Spain would use the funds for defending itself from revolution and paying off its delinquent bonds. Please note that this was a reversal of my original instructions from Pierce and Marcy.

A second uprising took place the following month in August, 1854. There were renewed charges that I was transferring United States funds to the insurrectionists, so I found it necessary to leave Madrid for my health. The American press had turned public opinion against me. One American newspaper said that we wanted an ambassador to Spain but instead sent a matador!

Wilting under the pressure, Secretary of State Marcy then instructed me to set up a meeting with Ambassadors Buchanan and Mason to seek a settlement of the Cuban question with Spain. Buchanan was ambassador to London and Mason was ambassador to Paris. We met in a port town in Belgium by the name of Ostend. At Ostend, the three of us discussed various methods that might be

used to “detach” Cuba from Spain. Buchanan wanted the United States to use Spanish bondholders to pressure Spain to sell the island to us, inasmuch as Spain was in danger of defaulting on its bonds. The meeting commenced October 3, 1854 in supposed secrecy, but all the newspapers in the United States knew of the meeting.

I arrived at the meeting humiliated by my failure in Spain, angry at my betrayal, and totally frustrated with Pierce and Marcy in the failed attempts to solve the Cuban question. I must say that I took over the meeting and was the major draftsman of what we called the Ostend Manifesto, espousing the destiny of the South to extend its cotton growing lands not only to Cuba but to other Central and South American lands as well. The manifesto was issued October 18, 1854. Its primary proposal was “an immediate and earnest effort” to buy Cuba for up to \$120 million by open and frank negotiations for the self-preservation of the United States, but if the sale was refused, we would “be justified in wresting it from Spain...” The New York Herald was the first United States newspaper to break the news of the “secret” Ostend Manifesto.

In early November 1854, Marcy disavowed the Manifesto! Marcy was fearful of the November election that very month in which the Cuban question was now thoroughly linked with Kansas and slavery. The disavowal of the Ostend Manifesto through the treachery of Perry, the betrayal of Marcy, and the failure of leadership by Pierce left me no choice but to resign my ministry to Spain. I was

simply sacrificed to save the Pierce administration from Marcy's blunder of April 3, 1854 in directing me to proceed with open negotiations to purchase Cuba.

My only friend and supporter in this whole sad affair was Lord Howden of Great Britain. I visited him after my resignation and then proceeded across the English Channel on my way to return to Madrid to close out my office. I intended to land at Calais, visit Paris and some republican friends, then visit my old homestead in south France and eventually arrive at Madrid. To my amazement, I was denied a visa on my arrival at Calais by the French government. The French monarchists were trying to destroy me. I tried to respond by challenging the French foreign minister to a duel, but he laughingly rejected my challenge. At length, Lord Howden succeeded in acquiring my direct passage through France into Spain. I was now totally isolated in Europe by my own government.

President Pierce was a coward who made me the scapegoat of his failed Cuban policy. In 1855, I returned to Louisiana and for a time considered challenging Marcy to a duel.

In my beloved Louisiana I resumed a successful law practice and soon became interested in the construction of a canal across Central America at Tehuantepec, Mexico.

By 1860, it was apparent to most Southerners that secession was inevitable, either by war or negotiated compromise. That bumpkin Lincoln had electrified the Eastern newspapers with his moralistic speech of February 27, 1860, proclaiming that the South "cannot justly insist" on slavery's extension or

enlargement. So he had to eat his words when he came to Washington as president, with nothing in his saddlebag but that Republican platform that sounded more like an ultimatum than a political platform. He had no idea what to do with the South and had no idea how to negotiate a compromise on the issue of expansion of slavery.

Many Southerners had decided that secession would be the only way to extend slavery and cotton to Cuba, Mexico, and Latin America. After secession a Southern army could easily conquer those lands. A compromise could have been worked out, but the naïve Lincoln knew only to stand fast on the Republican platform of 1860, forcing the secession of the South.

I initially opposed secession and preferred the Union to remain together, but the old sense of urgency became overwhelming in the South. It seemed there was no longer any voice counseling prudence. All hope for a peaceful secession vanished. I heard no one say it was a mistake to fire on Fort Sumter without first having a written commitment of support from the British and French. No one said that it was a mistake to assume support from the border states. No one believed that the North, led by the irresolute Lincoln, would outlast us in a prolonged war.

But I made up my mind that I would not be left behind when the inevitable came. When Louisiana finally seceded from the Union, I went to Richmond, Virginia to offer my services on behalf of the Confederacy to President Jefferson Davis, but Davis and I had experienced a prior unfortunate episode and he had been so tainted by my supposedly difficult personality that he had first denied my

offer. After intervention by some of my few remaining friends, Davis felt compelled to appoint me as a brigadier general in the Confederate Army, but without assigning a military unit to my command. At length, I was able to be attached to the service of General P.G.T. Beauregard, reportedly because Jefferson Davis disliked Beauregard as much as he disliked me, although everyone agreed that Beauregard was an outstanding tactician. Beauregard assigned me to assist in the defense of Charleston and New Orleans from attacks by Union naval vessels. I think everyone, including my enemies, agreed that my services were most helpful in the defense of those key cities.

After the war, I was exhausted and so depressed that I began to destroy my private papers. My family and friends falsely claimed that I was beginning to show signs of mental deterioration, so in 1868, I was placed under an interdiction, or limited guardianship, although by then I had succeeded in destroying almost all of my papers and personal correspondence.

These are the facts of my life to date. Surely, you agree with me that in all my major endeavors, I have been betrayed not only by my enemies, but by my supposed friends and family, as well. I only ask your help in releasing me from this interdiction so that I may continue my work in espousing the acquisition of Cuba and my philanthropic efforts in support of Confederate veterans.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY FOLLOWS**

Amos A. Ettinger, The Mission to Spain of Pierre Soulé, 1853-1855 (1932) Yale University Press, 1932

Encyclopedia of World Biography, Vol. 14, P. 351, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. IX, P. 405

Reinecke, Jr., J.A., "The Diplomatic Career of Pierre Soulé," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 15 (April 1932).

Sifakis, Stewart, Who was Who in the Civil War, New York: Facts on File 1988.

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, online, Soulé, Pierre

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia,  
The Ostend Manifesto  
The Black Warrior  
The "Young Americans" Movement  
P.G.T. Beauregard  
President Franklin Pierce  
President James Buchanan  
Cuba

www.historyofcuba.com, online, The Cuba Movement

Caribbean-U.S.Relations, online

Louisiana Historical Society, History of the American Party in Louisiana, online

Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, P. 1504

Library of Congress, online, Papers of William L. Marcy

The Indianapolis Star, "Today in History"

Dowd, Alan W., "American Empire", The American Legion Magazine, Feb.2009, p 29

Baumheckel, Ralph E., "Food, Feed and Foreign Policy" Indianapolis Literary Club, presented March 16, 2009

Franklin, John Hope and Moss, Alfred A., From Slavery to Freedom, A History of African Americans, (Alfred A. Knopf, 1947 New York, 2000)

8/25/09