

The United States Looking Outward

(1)

About the Author

*Alfred Thayer Mahan was a U.S. Navy officer and author of “The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783.” This article was first published in “The Atlantic Monthly” in 1890, about 14 years before the Panama Canal was completed. In it, Mahan presents his view on the importance of **globalization**.*

(2)

For the past 25 years, the predominant idea has been to preserve the home market for the home industries. The employer and the workman regard with hostility anything that favors a foreign producer in the home market. Although the abundant resources of our country have maintained exports at a high rate, this is due more to the bounty of nature than to the demand of other nations. Within our borders the home market is secured, but outside our borders there are markets of the world that can be entered and controlled only by a vigorous contest. To affirm the importance of distant markets and of our own powers of production, we must recognize the shipping trade as the link that joins products and markets.

What’s going on?

(3)

It is evident that the Panama Canal, by modifying the direction of trade routes, will produce a great increase of commercial and shipping activity throughout the Caribbean Sea. This now deserted nook of the ocean will become a great thoroughfare of shipping and attract the interest and ambition of maritime nations. Every position in that sea will have enhanced commercial and military value, and the canal itself will become a strategic center of vital importance.

(4)

Our self-imposed **isolation** in the matter of markets has coincided with a remoteness from the life of the rest of the world. When the canal is built this **isolation** will pass away, and with it the indifference of foreign nations. From wherever they come and wherever they go, all ships that use the canal will pass through the Caribbean. Large commercial and political interests will center around this focus of trade.

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

(5)

Along with the signs of change in commercial activity, there is a restlessness in the world which is deeply significant. Unsettled political conditions exist in Haiti, Central America, and many of the Pacific islands, especially Hawaii. It is wise for us to be prepared for great military or commercial changes in those regions.

(6)

Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it. An increasing volume of public sentiment demands it. The position of the United States, between the two Old Worlds and the two great oceans, makes the same claim, which will soon be strengthened by the creation of the new canal joining the Atlantic and Pacific.

Adapted from Mahan, A. T. (1898). *The interest of America in sea power present and future*. London, UK: Sampson Low, Marston.

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

What is the overall message of the passage?

What questions do you have?