

**The *Banco Nacional* and the Dominican Customs Receivership:
Dollar Diplomacy in the Dominican Republic, 1911-1914**

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Abbreviations and Notes

NACP National Archives Building at College Park, College Park, Maryland
BIA Bureau of Insular Affairs

Many of my primary sources are found in the National Archives, so I have named the individual record groups once in their initial appearance, and abbreviated thereafter. Here is a list of those records groups for reference:

Record Group 59 General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002
Record Group 84 Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788 – ca. 1991
Record Group 139 Records of the Dominican Customs Receivership
Record Group 350 Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1868-1945

In **Record Group 350**, the series, “Classified Files Relating to the Dominican Customs Receivership, 1905-35” has several subseries, organized from 1-277, with the prefix SD for Santo Domingo. They are fully referenced in their first appearance, and abbreviated thereafter.

SD100 National City Bank of New York
SD107 Santiago Michelena, private banker in Dominican Republic
SD219 William E. Pulliam, General Receiver 1907-1913, 1921-1938
SD273 *Banco Nacional de Santo Domingo*

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, the United States used the name “Santo Domingo” rather than the Dominican Republic, as it had been the name for the Spanish colony. The United States government dropped this nomenclature after the period this paper considers (hence the SD prefix for the files relating to the receivership). However, because the Dominicans themselves used the name the Dominican Republic and because it will be easier to differentiate between the country and its capital, Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic nomenclature will be used in this paper.

Although in many documents, the *Banco Nacional de Santo Domingo* is referred to as the National Bank of Santo Domingo, this paper uses the Spanish translation in order to differentiate from the National City Bank of New York.

The full name of the hearings held by Senator-Elect James D. Phelan into the actions of James M. Sullivan during his tenure in the Dominican Republic is: In the Matter of the Investigation of Charges Against American Minister to Santo Domingo (James M. Sullivan). It has been shortened in the footnotes to Phelan Hearings, and its citation is in the bibliography.

People and Places

Bureau of Insular Affairs

Clarence R. Edwards, Chief (1902-1912)

Frank J. McIntyre, Chief (1912-1929)

Departments of War and State

Philander A. Knox, Secretary of State (1909-1912)

William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State (1913-1915)

William T.S. Doyle, Chief of Latin American Affairs Bureau (1905-1913)

American Legation¹ in the Dominican Republic

William W. Russell, American Minister (1910-13, 1915-1925)

James M. Sullivan, American Minister (1913-1915)

Charles B. Curtis, charge d'affaires (1912-14)

Dominican Customs Receivership

George R. Colton, General Receiver (1905-1907)

William E. Pulliam, General Receiver (1907-1913, 1921-1938)

Walter W. Vick, General Receiver (1913-14)

John T. Vance, Deputy Receiver (1913-1915)

Dominican Government

Ulises Heureaux, President (1882-1899)

Horacio Vasquez, President (1899, 1902-03, 1924-1930)

Juan Isidro Jimenes, President (1899-1902, 1914-1916)

Carlos F. Morales, President (1903-1905)

Ramon Cáceres, President (1906-1911)

Eladio Victoria, President (1911-1912)

Adolfo Alejandro Nouel, President (1912-1913)

Jose Bordas Valdes, President (1913-1914)

Francisco J. Peynado, Dominican Minister to the United States

Mario A. Saviñón, Secretary of Finance and Commerce

Banco Nacional de Santo Domingo

Samuel M. Jarvis, Founder

William C. Beer, Lawyer for bank

Frank J.R. Mitchell, Bank President

¹ American Legation refers to the offices of United States representatives for the Dominican Republic. A step down from an embassy. The charge d'affaires is the second command, in charge when the Minister (similar to an ambassador) is unavailable.

Introduction

At the turn of the century, the United States embarked upon a new era of foreign policy in which the government played a larger and more direct role in the affairs of nations it considered to be under its protection. Most Americans are relatively familiar with the Spanish-American War of 1898, which left the United States with new interests in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, but they are likely less acquainted with the long-term military occupations in Nicaragua (1912-1933), Haiti (1915-1934), and the Dominican Republic (1916-1924). These interventions were an outgrowth of loans backed by the U.S. government to weaker countries, more commonly known as dollar diplomacy.

In the Dominican Republic, the military occupation that began under President Woodrow Wilson and ended during Warren G. Harding's administration was not the first time the United States had intervened in the island nation. Under President Theodore Roosevelt, the United States had taken control of the country's customs revenue to forestall the forcible collection of debts by European nations. The Dominican Customs Receivership began first as a *modus vivendi*² between Roosevelt and the Dominican Republic's president, Carlos F. Morales on April 1, 1905, and was then formally ratified by the legislatures of both countries on July 8, 1907. It was dissolved on March 31, 1941 by the Trujillo-Hull treaty. The receivership bookended dollar diplomacy: it was the first instrument implemented, which President William Howard Taft subsequently sought to replicate in countries like Liberia, Nicaragua, and Haiti; and it marked dollar diplomacy's last gasp, dissolved only during the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

² Term used to describe informal and temporary agreements

The substance of U.S.-Dominican studies have primarily concentrated on military operations, particularly the eight-year occupation and the later response to the Dominican Civil War in 1965. Insofar as they consider the receivership, scholars have largely relegated it to a background role in the movement towards occupation in 1916. It is common for these general studies to open with one or two chapters discussing the general background of the nineteenth century and the early brush with American imperialism before moving to the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo (1930-1960).³ In the more specialized studies of the military occupation, the receivership and its employees are passive actors and the revenues used as leverage to gain Dominican cooperation with American demands for reform.⁴ The only exception to this rule of neglect is the establishment of the receivership which has received extensive attention, particularly Roosevelt's issues with the Senate during the ratification. However, once the receivership is in operation, there is no further consideration as to how it functioned during periods of Dominican instability.

Historians generally agree as to why Roosevelt established the receivership: to prevent European gunships from showing up on their doorstep to collect on debts owed. The Dominican Republic had defaulted on bonds purchased by European bondholders through Dutch company, Westendorp. When the Dominican Republic defaulted on both bond issues underwritten by the company, Westendorp sold their interests to the Santo Domingo Improvement Company, a New York syndicate, which operated in the country from 1892 through 1904. The Americans who

³ G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The United States and the Dominican Republic: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998); See also: Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1983); Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998)

⁴ Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916-1924* (Austin, University of Texas, 1984); Ellen D. Tillman, *Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

formed the syndicate included Smith M. Weed, John Wanamaker, and Charles W. Wells, all of whom had connections to the American government—Wanamaker, for instance, had served as Postmaster General in Benjamin Harrison’s cabinet.⁵

Though the SDIC functioned before the traditional period in which dollar diplomacy operated, many historians considered it a precursor due to the connections between the SDIC and the U.S. government. The SDIC was extremely unpopular with Dominicans, but how much influence did the company actually wield in the country? Richard H. Collin argued that by the end of the 1890s, the Dominican government owed the SDIC so much money, “the SDIC required further restrictions on Dominican expenditures and became effectively a government within a government.”⁶ Emily S. Rosenberg, in her seminal study of dollar diplomacy, *Financial Missionaries to the World*, wrote that the SDIC “never exerted effective control over Dominican revenue” though she did not explain what control they did have. She cited Cyrus Veese’s Bancroft-winning 1996 dissertation, “Remapping the Caribbean: Private Investment and United States Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1890-1908”, a precursor to his 2002 book, *A World Safe for Capitalism: Dollar Diplomacy and America’s Rise to Global Power*.

Despite the global title, Veese’s work was an in depth study of the SDIC and its relationship with the American government. He suggested that historians had ignored the role the SDIC played in “creating the economic and political conditions” plaguing the Dominican Republic as well as the “powerful influence the company exerted in Washington in pursuit of its special interests.”⁷ He is, perhaps, overstating the degree to which historians have neglected the

⁵ Atkins and Wilson, 33.

⁶ Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Caribbean: The Panama Canal, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Latin American Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 370.

⁷ Cyrus Veese, *A World Safe for Capitalism: Dollar Diplomacy and America’s Rise to Global Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 155.

role of the SDIC in Dominican instability, but his second point is well-founded. Veesser drew a more solid connection between the SDIC's appeals to the Department of State after Heureaux's assassination and Roosevelt's decision to become more involved in Dominican problems than other historians did, who depicted the SDIC as another one of the Dominican Republic's creditors. In his conclusion, Veesser suggested that "because the Improvement Company had so much influence in Washington, it forced Theodore Roosevelt to rethink the effects of private influence."⁸ Outside of Veesser's work regarding the SDIC and the origins of the receivership, there is a large gap in the study of how dollar diplomacy operated in the Dominican Republic, particularly in the years leading up to the occupation in 1916.

The only prominent role the receivership played in contemporary and subsequent secondary studies at all was during the tenure of American Minister James Mark Sullivan, the U.S. diplomatic representative to the Dominican Republic from July 1913 to 1915, and that was limited to the actions of the General Receiver, Walter W. Vick.⁹ Vick resigned in 1914 and drew up a series of complaints against Sullivan, alleging corruption and graft. He named the president of the *Banco Nacional de Santo Domingo*, Frank J.R. Mitchell, and the bank itself as party to Sullivan's corruption. When Wilson's administration did not act on his complaints to his satisfaction, Vick took his story public in a series of sensationalistic *New York World* articles in December 1914, putting the receivership and U.S.-Dominican relations on the front pages of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* for a period of several months in early 1915.

⁸ Veesser, 156.

⁹ The United States established diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic and Haiti in 1884. The Minister to Haiti operated as the charge d'affaires in the Dominican Republic. In 1904, the Dominican Republic was upgraded to an official separate Legation with its own Minister in Residence. Both countries were upgraded to embassy status in 1943.

Just as quickly as it began, the scandal died out. The sinking of the *Lusitania* that April distracted Americans' attention, and then Sullivan resigned in July 1915. Mentions of the scandal exist today in studies of Wilson, his Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, and Latin-American relations. It can be easy to concentrate on the scandal itself because the accusations are lurid and fascinating—tales of contract for hire, rank incompetence, public intoxication, and sex scandals.¹⁰ However, in the more than three thousand pages of the investigation held by Senator-Elect James D. Phelan (D-CA) in the first few months of 1915, the more important story that emerges concerns the relationship between the *Banco Nacional* and the customs receivership, in which Sullivan plays only a minor role.

Although Rosenberg's *Financial Missionaries* did not discuss the receivership at any length after its establishment, her model of a triangular relationship between the U.S. government, U.S. financial institutions, and the Dominican Republic provides a useful framework for examining the receivership from 1913-1914, specifically its involvement with the *Banco Nacional*. The bank aggressively pursued Dominican business during its early years, including a loan to the Dominican Republic in 1913 and the fiscal accounts of the receivership and Dominican government. The *Banco Nacional* depended on the type of relationship with the U.S. government Rosenberg described, but they vastly overestimated their own influence and power.

This paper analyzes that connection in detail, beginning with a brief background of U.S.-Dominican relations from the 1860s through 1904, the establishment of the receivership in 1905, the opening of the *Banco Nacional de Santo Domingo* in 1911, and Woodrow Wilson's State

¹⁰ For example, *Banco Nacional* president Frank J.R. Mitchell assisted in the creation of an affidavit accusing General Receiver Vick of public intoxication and sexual escapes in a Santo Domingo City hotel. The affidavit was later repudiated by the men who had written it.

Department after he was elected in 1912. Once the bank opened in 1911, it pursued connections with the American government as well as a Dominican loan before taking control of the fiscal accounts of the receivership and the Dominican government.

“Americans in Santo Domingo”: Institutional Background

Until the closing decade of the nineteenth century, the United States had relatively little interest in the Dominican Republic, save for an annexation effort under Grant’s administration. During Benjamin Harrison’s term (1889-1893), Secretary of State James G. Blaine pursued trade agreements with Caribbean and Latin American nations, and signed a reciprocity treaty with the Dominican Republic that went into effect early in 1891. This agreement allowed the United States to export duty-free “agricultural and manufactured goods in return for free entry of [Dominican] sugar, hides, molasses, and coffee.”¹¹ The loss of American duties substantially lowered the Dominican customs revenues, the main source of income for their government

The incoming U.S. Democratic administration after the election of 1892 ended this era of reciprocal agreements. Not only did the party take back the White House from Republicans, but they also won control of Congress. With the Panic of 1893 and the rising alliance of populists and farmers, the Cleveland administration had “an in-ward looking revision of the tariff in 1894” that shifted their priorities.

The Santo Domingo Improvement Company had also begun operations in the country in 1892. The SDIC bought the debt from Westendorp, which included a mortgage on the Dominican customs revenue. They continued selling bonds to primarily European creditors and becoming more linked with the Dominican President. By the time Heureaux was assassinated in 1899, the SDIC controlled the customs revenues and two subsidiaries: a railroad company and a

¹¹ Veesser, 33.

bank. While they never exerted control during Heureaux's lifetime, his death allowed them to force the Dominican government to honor the contracts he had signed. . The trade agreements, the Santo Domingo Improvement Company (SDIC), and attempts to lease Samaná Bay in the northeastern part of the country represented the peak of American interest in the country prior to the establishment of the receivership in 1905.

While the Dominican Republic was struggling with its internal issues, other Latin American countries were experiencing similar financial woes: too much debt to European creditors willing to resort to force in order to collect. In 1903, French, German, and British gunboats blockaded Venezuela's ports with gunboats in response to lack of payment. The situation was brought to The Hague for arbitration, who ruled in favor of the European powers. With this situation as well as the instability in the Dominican Republic on his mind, Roosevelt issued what became known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine: to protect the weaker states in the hemisphere from European powers, the United States would find it necessary to arbitrate disputes on their behalf. With France and Italy threatening to use similar enforcement techniques in the Dominican Republic, Dominican President Carlos F. Morales seeking American assistance, and on the advice of William F. Powell, American Minister to Haiti and charge d'affaires in the Dominican Republic, Roosevelt began negotiating the receivership.¹²

In 1904, Thomas C. Dawson was appointed Minister Resident and Consul General to the Dominican Republic after the United States created an American Legation separate from Haiti. With the cooperation of Jacob H. Hollander, who had worked on earlier Puerto Rican gold standard exchange reforms, they negotiated a receivership agreement which would put

¹² Atkins and Wilson, 42-43.

Americans in charge of collecting customs and renegotiating Dominican debt. The legislatures in each country balked at signing the official treaty—the Dominicans resented the intrusion into their sovereignty and Americans did not want to be involved in the debt negotiations. According to David Healy, U.S. critics of the agreement argued “the treaty, if ratified, would put Washington squarely in the middle of a disreputable scramble of international creditors, American bondholders included.”¹³ Roosevelt and Morales bypassed their legislatures and put part of the agreement into effect under a *modus vivendi* agreement, which allowed Roosevelt to appoint a General Receiver to collect customs revenues and split the proceeds between serving debt and the Dominican government.

The *modus vivendi* lasted for two years during which General George F. Colton, a veteran military man who had worked in customs in the Philippines, operated the receivership. The portion designated for loan servicing was deposited in the National City Bank of New York, with the understanding that if the treaty was ultimately defeated, that revenue would return to the Dominican Republic. The Dominicans hired Hollander to privately renegotiate their debts, an agreement that was not without controversy. His salary was paid out of the receivership revenues, but he also received \$100,000 from the Dominican treasury, an arrangement that triggered a congressional hearing several years later.¹⁴ Hollander was critical of the claims he was dealing with, and many creditors, including the SDIC, argued that he had undervalued their outstanding bonds. A loan for twenty million dollars was issued from Kuhn, Loeb & Co., with payments to be made to the Morton Trust Company.¹⁵ The loan provided that seventeen million

¹³ Healy, 123.

¹⁴ Rosenberg, 44.

¹⁵ The Morton Trust Company had been founded as Morton, Bliss & Co. in 1869 by Levi P. Morton, Benjamin Harrison’s Vice-President. He was also governor of New York.

dollars be paid to satisfy outstanding claims, with the last three million dollars to be used as investment in the country and to establish a public works fund.¹⁶

In February 1907, the United States Congress finally ratified the Dominican-American Convention, a treaty which formalized the *modus vivendi* agreement. While the initial agreement had made a percentage split (forty-five percent to the Dominican Republic, fifty percent for loan servicing, and five for expenses of the receivership), the convention set out more specific terms for the monthly disbursement of customs revenue. The receivership would retain their five percent, \$100,000 to Morton Trust for payment of the loan, and the remainder would be turned over to the Dominican Republic.¹⁷ The Dominican Customs Receivership remained under the control of the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the War Department, which oversaw Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Though the Bureau (BIA) was in the War Department, its primary responsibilities were civil, such as the receivership in the Dominican Republic, and later in Haiti.

In April, General Colton was replaced by William E. Pulliam, a customs official who had worked in public service since 1893. He had collected customs in Oregon, worked for the Treasury Department in New Mexico, and had also been in the customs service in the Philippines. He served as General Receiver in the Dominican Republic from his appointment on May 5, 1907 until Wilson replaced him in June 1913.¹⁸ The first few years of the receivership under Colton and Pulliam were difficult. Many Dominicans went out of their way to bypass customs duties and the border with Haiti was difficult to control. A frontier guard was organized, but it was initially ineffective. Not until Dominican President Carlos F. Morales' administration

¹⁶ Rosenberg, 47.

¹⁷ "The Convention of 1907 with the Dominican Republic" in *The Diplomacy of World Power: The United States, 1889-1920*, edited by Arthur S. Link and William M. Leary, Jr. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 79.

¹⁸ William E. Pulliam to Clarence R. Edwards, 6/10/1907; SD219; Classified Files Relating to the Dominican Customs Receivership, 1905-1935; Record Group 350: Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1868-1945; NACP.

fell to Ramon Cáceres in early 1906 did the country begin to stabilize and the receivership experience and success.

The banking industry in the Dominican Republic was particularly weak. Under Heureaux's administration, the French had operated the *Banque Nacional de Saint-Domingue* before the SDIC gained controlling interest. That national bank failed in the early part of the century, and for nearly a decade, there were only private merchants acting as bankers. The Dominican government and the receivership both used the services of private banker, Santiago Michelena, as their fiscal agent.

On August 19, 1911, using the letterhead of H.C. Niese & Co., New York lawyer William V. Martin wrote to Brigadier General Clarence R. Edwards, Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs (BIA), that a new bank was being organized by H.C. Niese and S.M. Jarvis, the president of the national bank in Cuba. "The success of this enterprise," Martin wrote, "is, I believe, assured...[I] hope you may be able to assist in some way the development of this plan." A month later, on September 28, 1911, Martin wrote again, this time on National City Bank letterhead, that he had learned that Jarvis had been completely discredited in banking circles, and that Edwards "should not work with success with these men...they are not worthy." He requested that his letters encouraging the enterprise be destroyed.¹⁹

Despite Martin's efforts, Jarvis and Niese's new bank—the *Banco Nacional*—opened as a public bank in Santo Domingo City in January 1912, organized under the Dominican Banking Law of 1909. Its board of directors were Americans, including Samuel M. Jarvis, who had also served as the president of the National Bank of Cuba. Jarvis and his nephew, the bank's president, Frank J.R. Mitchell, referred to Taft's Secretary of State, Philander A. Knox, and his

¹⁹ William V. Martin to Edwards; 8/19/1911, 9/28/1911; SD273; Classified Files Relating to the Dominican Customs Receivership, 1905-1935; Record Group 350: Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1868-1945; NACP.

call for Americans to “make capital investments and extend loans in the Caribbean region, notably in the Dominican Republic” as the impetus for the bank.²⁰ Though it is unknown how long the bank operated in the Dominican Republic in total, the bank struggled in its early years. Jarvis and Mitchell had expected American support for their endeavor, but found it less than forthcoming until the fall of 1913 when General Receiver Vick and Minister Sullivan arrived in the Dominican Republic.

Mitchell and Jarvis were joined by Henry C. Niese, a banker who had worked with Jarvis in Cuba and opened a banking firm, H.C. Niese & Co., in New York.²¹ The stock offering Martin enclosed with his initial letter in August described the Dominican Republic as the “best UNOCCUPIED FIELD FOR BANKING IN THE WORLD.”²² In those late months of 1911, the Dominican Republic likely appeared a good source for investment. Under President Ramon Cáceres, the country had been steadily paying off its debts and was politically stable for the first time in nearly a decade. However, in November 1911, Cáceres was assassinated and the country plunged into a civil war that lasted almost a year and destabilized the country.

The bank, having opened its doors in October 1911, was officially incorporated in January 1912 under the 1909 banking law. Pulliam wrote BIA Chief Edwards that not only had the *Banco Nacional* opened, but that the Royal Bank of Canada had also opened a branch. This “must furnish a striking exhibit of confidence” in the country, Pulliam wrote.²³ American Minister Russell also sent a letter notifying the Secretary of State Knox that the banks were open for business. Mitchell sent a letter to the American Legation on February 2, 1912, emphasizing

²⁰ Atkins and Wilson, 39.

²¹ “H.C. Niese & Company, 25 Broad Street, New York City”, *Banker’s Magazine, Volume 82* (New York: Warren, Gorham, Lamont, Inc.: 1911), 443-445.

²² Martin to Edwards, 8/19/1911; SD273; Capitalization per actual document.

²³ Pulliam to Edwards, 2/9/1912; SD273.

that the *Banco Nacional* was a public bank, in contrast to previous banks organized by private bankers and merchants. A public bank was subject to the Dominican Banking Law of 1909, restricting its interest rates to no more than nine percent per year and setting minimum reserves of capital.²⁴ “Furthermore,” Mitchell wrote, “some of the most important merchants and capitalists of Santo Domingo are shareholders and Directors of the Bank.”²⁵ Despite these reassurances, Pulliam wrote Edwards again in April, stating that the bank was struggling amid the political turmoil and that Dominicans had little experience with this type of institution.²⁶

Almost from the beginning, the bank sought American assistance with its affairs. Martin’s original letter in August had expressed the hope that the BIA would be able to assist the bank in some way. According to Melvin S. Knight, writing in 1928, the bank’s primary goal in its organization had been to gain control of the receivership’s bank accounts.²⁷ When the receivership began operation under the *modus vivendi* in 1905, customs revenues that were not turned over to the Dominican government were placed in an account with the National City Bank of New York, awaiting either the final rejection of the treaty or the reorganization of the debt. Once the treaty was ratified and the loan had been issued in 1907, the funds in the account were transferred to Morton Trust Company as payments on the loan. Meanwhile, General Receiver William E. Pulliam officially selected Puerto Rican private banker and merchant, Santiago Michelena, as the fiscal agent for the receivership. Michelena already held the accounts for the Dominican government.

²⁴ *The Bankers Magazine*, Volume 80 (Bradford Rhodes, 1910) 491.

²⁵ Frank J.R. Mitchell to American Legation, 2/2/1912; Vol. 57; United States Diplomatic Records for Dominican Republic, 1904-1935; Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788-ca.1991; NACP.

²⁶ Pulliam to Edwards, 4/9/1912, SD273

²⁷ Knight, 50.

In May 1912, the *Banco Nacional* renewed its quest for U.S. government assistance. Samuel M. Jarvis, chairman of the bank, wrote to the acting chief of the BIA, Frank J. McIntyre that he hoped to meet with McIntyre and the Dominican minister to the United States, Francisco J. Peynado. He also wrote a letter of introduction on the same date for Henry C. Niese, who “desires to confer with you in reference to collection of customs receipts in Santo Domingo.”²⁸ A few days later, the *Banco Nacional*’s lawyer, William C. Beer, wrote to McIntyre:

We are not asking any favors, but being on the ground and representing as we do the interests of much important commerce with the United States, and being in a very strong position with the existing Government, I think the Bank can do our American interests a great deal of service...²⁹

Beer also requested that McIntyre write to Pulliam in Santo Domingo City in order to recommend the bank to the Dominican government. In a memorandum dated two days later, McIntyre summarized this interaction with the bank’s representatives: Niese had wanted Pulliam to have the bank replace Michelena, the private banker who held the accounts for both the receivership and the government. McIntyre declined to pass the request on to Pulliam.³⁰ Neither the letters nor the memo were specific as to whether the bank’s representatives had asked only for assistance with the Dominican government’s accounts or if they asked for the receivership accounts as, but it seems unlikely the topic of the receivership accounts did not arise. As spring faded into summer in 1912, the political turmoil about which Pulliam had written to BIA chief Edwards only intensified.

While the Dominicans were fighting a civil war in 1912, the United States was also preparing its own transition of power. In 1912, Taft ran for reelection against his predecessor,

²⁸ Jarvis to McIntyre, 5/31/1912; SD273.

²⁹ Beer to McIntyre, 6/3/1912; SD273.

³⁰ BIA Memo, 6/5/1912; SD273.

Roosevelt, and New Jersey governor Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's path to the nomination was not assured. He had made enemies during his run for governor in New Jersey by turning on the democratic machine that had elected him. James Chace wrote that Democratic "bosses were deeply suspicious of a man who had turned on them when he ran, for Wilson's betrayal left a shadow of suspicion on him that his rhetorical attitude could never quite remove."³¹ He was finally selected after forty-six ballots and help from William Jennings Bryan, whom Wilson repaid with an appointment to Secretary of State.³²

The State Department during Bryan's tenure has been heavily criticized for its use of political patronage and lack of consideration for professional experience. J. Robert Moskin described the reaction of a serving Republican congressman at the time, John J. Rogers, who "told the House...that in 1913 the United States' forty-one ambassadors and ministers included only twenty-three with previous experience."³³ Arthur S. Link suggested Bryan's sweeping changes at the State Department stemmed from Bryan's concern that "officers in the American diplomatic corps were either incompetent Republicans or else members of a snobbish professional elite fast developing into an aristocracy."³⁴ Alan J. McPherson argued "Woodrow Wilson...eviscerated almost his entire diplomatic corps in Latin America, replacing them with party hacks."³⁵

In addition to criticism of Bryan's appointments while in office, there is also a great deal to be said about his relationship with Wilson himself. Link wrote that Wilson "had little respect

³¹ James Chace, *1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft, and Debts—The Election that Changed the Country* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 125.

³² Lin, *Wilson: Road to the White, Vol. 1* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pg. 413.

³³ J. Robert Moskin, *American Statecraft: The Story of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013), 282.

³⁴ Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom, Vol 2*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 103

³⁵ Alan McPherson, "Lid Sitters and Prestige Seekers: The U.S. Navy versus the State Department and the End of U.S. Occupations" in *Journal of Military History* 78 (2014), 79.

for Bryan's judgment."³⁶ One of Wilson's closest advisors during his term in the White House, E.M. House, wrote in his journal in December 1914 that Wilson "spoke with extreme regret of Mr. Bryan's unsuitability for office of Secretary of State, but did not know what could be done...that it would be a good thing for the administration if he would pleasantly take himself out of the Cabinet."³⁷ When Bryan did tender his resignation in June 1915, Wilson told House that "he [Bryan] had remarked with a quiver in his voice and of his lips 'Colonel House has been Secretary of State, not I, and I have never had your full confidence.'"³⁸

How soon Wilson regretted his selection of Bryan is a matter of historiographical debate, but according to Lester D. Langley, while Wilson was heavily involved in interventions in Mexico, in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, he gave Bryan a free hand in policy making.³⁹ He did, however, suggest that the replacement of career customs official, William E. Pulliam, who had served as General Receiver for six years. Wilson replaced Pulliam with Walter Whiting Vick. Vick, born in North Carolina in 1878, had worked on both Wilson's gubernatorial campaign and his presidential campaign. He had no customs experience, but had been active in Bergen County politics in New Jersey and was credited with flipping it from Republican to Democratic control⁴⁰ On May 2, 1913, House wrote of his recommendation that Vick be given the position, which Wilson passed on to Bryan on May 22. Wilson made the appointment official on June 14, 1913, and Vick arrived in the Dominican Republic that August.

The appointment of Vick as the General Receiver also coincided with the replacement of William Worthington Russell as American Minister. He had been appointed on November 3,

³⁶ Link, *The New Freedom*, 8.

³⁷ Link, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol 31 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 384-85.

³⁸ Link, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol 32 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 449.

³⁹ Langley, 115.

⁴⁰ Biographical Sketch; Vick, Walter W.; Personal Name Information File, RG350, NACP.

1910, and stayed in the position until his resignation on March 2, 1913. Recommendations for his replacement, James M. Sullivan, poured in throughout May and June 1913 from low-level lawyers in Connecticut and New York City, as well as high ranking government officials such as New York Senator James O’Gorman and New Jersey Congressman James A. Hamill.⁴¹ Sullivan arrived in the country amid continued political turmoil and was immediately tasked with establishing peace.

“An American Concern”: The *Banco Nacional* Pursues Dominican Revenues

During Ramon Cáceres’ term in office from 1906 to 1911, the Dominican Republic experienced relative political stability. Unlike any of the short-term administrations he succeeded, Cáceres was able to control the political factions of *horacistas* (supporters of former President Horacio Vásquez) and *jimenistas* (supporters of former President Juan Isidro Jimenes). Not only was Cáceres able to keep the peace, but he also invested in infrastructure: railroads, highways, lighthouses, schools, and hospitals, due to the success of the receivership. “Within five years customs revenues tripled,” Frank Moya Pons wrote, “as did the revenues of the Dominican state.”⁴² In his quest to modernize and stabilize the nation, Cáceres made enemies when he reorganized the military and placed it under the leadership of Alfredo Victoria, bypassing several other generals. One of them, Luis Tejada, assassinated Cáceres on November 30, 1911, plunging the country into a year-long civil war.

Under Dominican law, Alfredo Victoria was too young to become President, and most sources suggest he strong-armed the Dominican Congress into selecting his uncle, Eladio Victoria as a puppet.⁴³ Vásquez and his supporters rose in protest of Eladio Victoria’s

⁴¹ Sullivan, James. M; Applications and Recommendations for Appointment to the Consular and Diplomatic Services, 1901-1924; Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002; NACP.

⁴² Moya Pons, 296.

⁴³ Atkins and Wilson 45, Moya Pons, 306.

government. The cash reserves of the Dominican government were drained as a result of the conflict. Taft sent a pacification mission to the island in the fall of 1912 that included 750 Marines. At the suggestion of the United States, Victoria resigned in favor of Santo Domingo City Archbishop Adolfo Alejandro Nouel on November 30, 1912.⁴⁴

The civil war had left the finances of the country in ruins. After the BIA declined to assist the *Banco Nacional* in gaining a foothold in the country, the bank made loans of its own to the government. The Dominican government was also taking loans from Michelena as well, intending the loans as advances on the government's share of the customs revenues. On June 11, 1912, William W. Russell, the U.S. Minister, wrote to the State Department that the *Banco Nacional* was making a loan for \$250,000 using the alcohol tax as security.⁴⁵ In that same letter, Russell informed State that public salaries for officials had been in arrears for two months. The *Banco Nacional* offered another loan in September 1912, using the tax on stamps and stamped paper as security. Russell told the State Department that "unless we force reforms on this country it will shortly be in a condition of complete ruin."⁴⁶

On October 26, 1912, Russell suggested a loan to the Dominican Republic. The government needed at least \$800,000 for back salaries and other damages left by the war, but Russell was hesitant to turn over money to the government unless they were able to "remedy the results of the former misuse, to stop its present wild excess of expenditure over revenue, and...makes provision against renewed bad administration, improper loans, and a return of the present conditions which necessitates this new loan."⁴⁷ He wanted to appoint an American to

⁴⁴ Moya Pons, Langley, Healy.

⁴⁵ Russell to Knox, 6/11/1912, Vol. 54, Diplomatic Posts for DR, RG84, NACP.

⁴⁶ Russell to Knox, 9/7/1912, Vol. 54, Diplomatic Posts

⁴⁷ Russell to Knox, 10/26/1912; Vol. 54; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

audit the disbursement of this loan who might then stay on as an advisor to the Dominican government.

On December 10, 1912, Russell informed the State Department that the Dominican Congress was negotiating a bill for an additional loan, and that the Royal Bank of Canada had made an initial bid.⁴⁸ The Dominican Congress was initially considering a one million dollar loan, with an interest rate not to exceed six per cent per year with payments of \$20,000 a month to be taken from the Dominican revenues (on top of the \$100,000 payments the receivership made to the Guaranty Trust Company⁴⁹).⁵⁰ When the bill was passed by the Congress on December 16, the terms were \$1.5 million dollars at no more than seven per cent annually, with payments of \$30,000 a month.⁵¹ The first bid came from the Royal Bank of Canada, but Russell wrote that the bank had added a clause requiring the Dominican government to use the bank as their official depository for government revenues, which Russell thought would give the United States “trouble in the future as this bank may not be disposed to work jointly with us.”⁵² Neither Knox nor anyone else from the State Department responded to this opinion, but there is no evidence to suggest the Royal Bank was ever in serious contention for the loan.

The *Banco Nacional* also made a bid for the loan, which BIA chief McIntyre advised the State Department to accept on January 2 if no other favorable bid existed.⁵³ With the Royal Bank no longer in consideration, the *Banco Nacional* was the only bank standing.⁵⁴ On January 7,

⁴⁸ Russell to Knox, 12/10/1912; Vol 54; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

⁴⁹ Morton Trust Company, the initial depository and fiscal agent for the loan had been absorbed by the Guaranty Trust Company in 1909.

⁵⁰ Unsigned memo, 12/9/1912; Vol. 54; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

⁵¹ Russell to Knox, 12/18/1912; Vol. 54; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ McIntyre to Knox/State, 1/2/1913, SD273

⁵⁴ The Royal Bank, Michelena, and the *Banco Nacional* were the only banks in the country at that point, and it does not appear Michelena ever submitted a bid.

Secretary of State Knox cabled a bid from the National City Bank of New York to the Dominican Republic, adding a note to Russell stating that,

If Mr. Michelena lays before the Government this contract, you will take pains to out to the Government of the Dominican Republic that the State Department has telegraphed said contract to you only as a matter of convenience to the bankers and not as showing it should be preferred to any other proposlas[sic] more favorable in its terms.⁵⁵

Michelena had been designated by the National City Bank to act as their representative in loan negotiations and sign papers, but with no other involvement. The National City Bank of New York was the only mainland bank to submit a bid for this loan; a bank officer, R.L. Farnham, testified during the Phelan hearings that they had been invited to bid by a circular of the Dominican government.⁵⁶ He was not pressed on the matter by either Senator-Elect Phelan or his co-counsel, Charles H. Strong, so without further correspondence or paperwork, there is no proof that the United States government suggested National City Bank submit a bid.

However, one could speculate that with the *Banco Nacional* the only bank left in contention, there was a desire to open the field. That being said, the official record of correspondence shows that other than Russell's opinion regarding the Royal Bank of Canada, no American official showed a preference for which bank received the loan. While some correspondence between Russell's American Legation and members of the Dominican government existed in the diplomatic posts, it is unlikely it is the full record of communication, so it is impossible to know for sure. Rosenberg, the only historian to discuss the 1913 loan at all, wrote that Bryan dismissed an employee "who had tilted the loan to National City Bank" but there is no evidence this ever happened, and Rosenberg did not cite any record. Melvin S. Knight

⁵⁵ Knox to Russell, 1/7/1913, Vol 64; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

⁵⁶ Phelan Hearing, vol. 1

made a similar claim in his 1928 *Americans in Santo Domingo*, but he only suggested the employee was in the pay of the National City Bank.⁵⁷ The employee in question—chief of Latin American affairs in the State Department, William T.S. Doyle—was let go at this point, but there is nothing in the archives to suggest he had anything to do with the loan, though he was mentioned during the protest the *Banco Nacional* carried out after they lost the loan.

During the testimony at the Phelan Hearings, Russell, the former U.S. Minister, and Mitchell, the *Banco Nacional* president, argued about a conversation Mitchell claimed the former Minister had had with a member of the Dominican Congress. Mitchell testified that the congressman had told him that Washington had selected the National City Bank because it was better for them. During Russell's testimony, he denied this exchange ever happened. Then, in one of the more confusing spectacles of the hearings held by Phelan in Washington D.C. in February 1915, Russell and Mitchell alternated taking the stand, continuing to argue about this conversation. Russell would testify that he had never said any such thing, then Mitchell would return to stand by his story, then Russell return to deny it *again*. No conclusion was reached since Mitchell refused to name the congressman so that he could be asked to testify during hearings in Santo Domingo.⁵⁸

On January 22, the Dominican Congress selected the National City Bank's bid for the loan.⁵⁹ Three days later, on January 25, Samuel Jarvis of the *Banco Nacional* wrote McIntyre advising that the National City Bank's bid "would be in excess of 7% per annum" which was higher than the interest rate the Dominican Congress had authorized, making contract illegal; the bid from his bank, *Banco Nacional*, was better.⁶⁰ On January 30, Russell telegraphed the State

⁵⁷ Knight, 52.

⁵⁸ Phelan Hearing, V3 #, V4 #

⁵⁹ Russell to Knox, 1/22/1913, Vol 64; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84

⁶⁰ Jarvis to McIntyre, 1/25/1913, SD273.

Department that Jarvis had filed an official protest with the Dominican Congress. Jarvis also sent a telegram to Knox in favor of his bid, describing himself “as Chairman of the National Bank of Santo Domingo of Santo Domingo, a financial institution established by myself and associates as the direct result of your announced policy of encouragement and commerce of and for the United States.”⁶¹ Clearly, Jarvis wanted to remind those in the State Department that the *Banco Nacional* was an American institution organized under the auspices of Taft and Knox’s dollar diplomacy.

The State Department and McIntyre took the complaint seriously. Knox delayed the United States’ approval of the loan until McIntyre completed his investigation.⁶² McIntyre acquired more information from Jarvis, including how the *Banco Nacional* had calculated the interest rate on the National City Bank bid. Once in possession of Jarvis’s calculations as well copies of the bids both banks had submitted to the Dominican Congress, McIntyre determined that Jarvis and the bank had no grounds for their protest. The company *Banco Nacional* had engaged to calculate the interest had used incorrect information, so the rate would not be illegal. Furthermore, McIntyre wrote, there was a difference in how the loan would be disbursed. The loan itself was for \$1.5 million dollars; the National City Bank’s bid allowed for \$500,000 to be delivered upon signing the contract, and the balance within three days. The *Banco Nacional*, by contrast, stated in its bid that “the Government may not draw the loan from the sums exceeding \$300,000 monthly, except by previous agreement with the bank.”⁶³

While it is clear that McIntyre found this important because he would later refer to again when testifying in the hearings held by Senator James D. Phelan, it is difficult to say *why*

⁶¹ Foreign Relations, 461.

⁶² Knox to Russell, 2/7/1913, Vol. 64; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84

⁶³ McIntyre to Knox, 2/5/1913, SD273

McIntyre found it important enough to single out in the initial investigation and again two years later.⁶⁴ It's possible, based on the testimony of William E. Pulliam at the same hearing, that rumors of the *Banco Nacional*'s insolvency may have already been swirling. Pulliam had written the year before that the bank was struggling to gain business. There's no correspondence on file that indicating McIntyre knew about those rumors, and without the records of the Dominican Congress, it is not possible to know it was a material feature in *their* decision. It is, however, worth considering.

Jarvis continued to correspond with McIntyre and the State Department, offering to change terms, and even went as far to accuse the National City Bank of somehow getting hands on the *Banco Nacional* bid in advance. After the Dominican government approved the contract with the National City Bank on March 1, 1913, Jarvis and *Banco Nacional* president Frank J.R. Mitchell made their protest public, publishing articles in the Dominican paper *Listin Diario*, insinuating that William T.S. Doyle, had been terminated for sending a telegram to Jarvis to stop the newspaper attacks—not quite what Rosenberg or Knight referred to in their coverage of the loan. The charge d'affaires at the American Legation, Charles B. Curtis, sent another *Listin Diario* translation from May 13, 1913. The article purported to be a translation of the *New York Sun*, April 24, 1913 article about the National City Bank. It included a note that “the National City Bank has been frequently censured. It is said that this Bank has been favored by officials of the Government.” Curtis seemed to doubt the translation, and noted that *Banco Nacional* president, Mitchell, was one of the few residents of Santo Domingo City that received the *Sun*.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Testimony of Frank J. McIntyre, Phelan Hearing, Vol. 4, pg. 1683.

⁶⁵ Charles B. Curtis to William Jennings Bryan, 5/22/1913, Vol. 64; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84. I was unable to find a copy of the *Sun* article, but the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* also covered the story on the same date: April 24, 1913, and the cited quote appeared in neither version.

The *Banco Nacional* was not content with questioning the reputation of State Department employees and their rival bank; they also attacked the terms of the loan. The State Department, in return for allowing the Dominican Republic to increase their overall debt, insisted that Charles B. Curtis, the charge d'affaires, and John H. Edwards, the Deputy General Receiver, oversee the disbursement of the loan. They were to investigate anyone claiming for back salary or war damage, and then issue payments to those they found legitimate. Curtis wrote first on March 25, 1913, enclosing an article from the *Listin Diario* which protested American supervision of the loan. On April 1, 1913, Mitchell and the bank had published two pamphlets attacking the loan, claiming that American control and supervision "was placed in the contract at the solicitation of the National City Bank of New York and would not have been exacted by the National Bank of Santo Domingo." Curtis had been contacted by the Dominican Secretary of Finance, who said it was a humiliating attack and wanted the Americans to publicize that it had been a requirement of *their* government, not of National City Bank, as Jarvis had claimed.⁶⁶ The letters from Curtis continued through June 1913, relating rumors attributed to Mitchell.

The attacks appeared to stop in the summer of 1913, coinciding with the diplomatic appointments under Wilson's administration. William E. Pulliam was informed abruptly on June 14, 1913 that his services were no longer required. He was instructed to close his accounts and turn them over to his deputy receiver, John H. Edwards, as soon as possible.⁶⁷ There had been accusations made by the Victoria government the previous fall that Pulliam was too friendly with Michelena, the banker who held the receivership accounts, but Pulliam had been assured by his superiors that the accusations were unsubstantiated. Pulliam requested that he be allowed to turn over his accounts to his replacement, Walter W. Vick, personally, as Pulliam had done with his

⁶⁶ Curtis to State, 4/1/1913; Vol. 64; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

⁶⁷ McIntyre to Pulliam, 6/14/1913, SD219

own predecessor, George R. Colton in 1907; this request was denied without explanation. As he prepared to leave the island, Pulliam made it clear that he considered his recall to be orchestrated by the Jarvis interests at the *Banco Nacional*, who had never cared for Pulliam's refusal to hand over the receivership accounts.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Russell had left his post as Minister and James M. Sullivan had been appointed in his stead on July 19, 1913. There were rumors in Santo Domingo City that the officials with *Banco Nacional* had had advance notice of who the minister would be. Pulliam claimed at the time that Mitchell told him the last name of the new Minister would end in an N. Mitchell later agreed that this was true, but that he known the men up for the position were named Sullivan and Robinson.⁶⁹ In any case, Bryan had made the case for Sullivan on the basis that he was "not biased in favor of either one of the banking groups that seem to be rivals in Santo Domingo."⁷⁰ Two years later, after Senator Phelan's investigation, Bryan admitted that "we were deceived as to the interests which supported Mr. Sullivan's candidacy."⁷¹

The *Banco Nacional's* lawyer, William C. Beer, who had corresponded with McIntyre the year before as to assistance for the bank, was, in fact, friendly with Sullivan. Beer himself did not write a letter of recommendation for Sullivan (perhaps aware it would doom the man's chances), but according to several men who testified in front of Phelan, Beer was vigorously supporting Sullivan behind the scenes. Sullivan also testified during the hearing that while he had not spoken to Beer about the appointment before it was made, Beer had mentioned "the injustice" done to his clients before Sullivan left for his post.⁷²

⁶⁸ SD219.

⁶⁹ Testimony of Mitchel, Phelan Hearing, Vol. 3, pg. 945.

⁷⁰ Bryan to Wilson, 6/8/1913; Correspondence of Secretary of State Bryan with President Wilson, 1913-1915 (National Archives Microfilm Publication, T-841, Roll 1); RG 59; NACP.

⁷¹ Link, Vol. 32, 219.

⁷² Testimony of James M. Sullivan, Phelan Hearing, Vol. 5.

The *Banco Nacional* was not waiting for Sullivan's arrival. On September 6, 1913, the charge d'affaires in Santo Domingo City cabled the State Department that the bank had been designated the depository for the Dominican government, due to *Banco Nacional* having pledged to make "larger advances...than Michelena was disposed to make."⁷³ For the moment, the receivership's accounts stayed with Michelena. Two days later, Mitchell, *Banco Nacional* president, wrote to Vick that the bank had not sought this position; the Dominican government had come to them.⁷⁴ The Dominican government, it should be said, was no longer under the control of Archbishop Nouel. He had resigned in April 1913, and José Bordas Valdez, a senator in the Dominican Congress, came to power.

While it may be technically true that the *Banco Nacional* had not specifically asked for the government's account, they had continued to loan the government large amounts of money in expectation of being paid back out of the receivership revenues that were given to the Dominican government. Vick wrote to McIntyre on September 9 that Mitchell and Michelena were making these advances. Vick assured McIntyre that "he [Mitchell] is fully aware of the responsibility he will be obliged to assume should his advances reach an amount increasing the indebtedness of the Government."⁷⁵ Under the terms of the 1907 treaty, the Dominican Republic could not increase its overall debt without the approval of the United States Government, so if Mitchell and the bank loaned the Dominican administration more money than the receivership could pay, it was Mitchell's problem.

Vick had arrived that August, a month before Sullivan, and asked Michelena to make some changes in how the receivership did business with him: to produce a security bond to

⁷³ Curtis to State, 9/6/1913; SD273.

⁷⁴ Mitchell to Vick, 9/6/1913; SD273.

⁷⁵ Vick to McIntyre, 9/9/1913; SD273.

protect the receivership's assets and to pay a daily interest on the balance the receivership held with Michelena's bank. By October 13, Vick wrote to McIntyre that Michelena had declined to pay the daily interest, and furthermore, Vick found that until his arrival, much of the communication between the receivership and Michelena had been based on verbal understanding, rather than written arrangements.⁷⁶ Vick was dissatisfied and wanted to make a change. The *Banco Nacional* had proposed better terms at two percent annually on the daily balances, which Vick wanted to accept.⁷⁷

Amid these issues with Michelena, Vick was also pressured by the Dominican government and Sullivan to make the change. Sullivan suggested to Vick that "all funds for specific purposes and all balance be placed [with the *Banco Nacional*] to the end that there may be more flexibility in the channels of currency." Similar requests came from the Dominican Secretary of State for Finance and Commerce.⁷⁸ McIntyre responded with a caution to Vick that "haste not necessary" and McIntyre understood that Dominican Minister to the United States, Francisco J. Peynado was also not in favor of changing the depository.⁷⁹

In response, Vick wrote that he did not have much choice. Having declined to pay interest on the daily balances which Vick required, Michelena had, in effect, resigned his responsibility as depositor in Vick's mind. Vick dismissed Peynado's concern, citing Peynado's friendship with Michelena. Based on his experience with Michelena and the opinions of Sullivan and the Dominican government, Vick entered into a temporary contract with the *Banco Nacional* in October 1913.⁸⁰ Pleased with this, Sullivan wrote to Vick that he "desire[d] to acknowledge

⁷⁶ Memo of Vick, 12/5/1913; SD273

⁷⁷ Vick to McIntyre, 10/13/1913; SD273.

⁷⁸ Sullivan to Vick 10/10/1913, Saviñón to Vick 10/13/1913, 10/22/1913; SD273.

⁷⁹ Vick to McIntyre, 10/17/1913; SD273. The direct cablegram is not in the files, but Vick quotes from it in his letter. Peynado's displeasure only came through McIntyre's letters.

⁸⁰ Vick to McIntyre, 10/28/1913; SD273.

that I have urged this change upon you constantly since I have been acquainted with the existing conditions.”⁸¹

On December 5, 1913, Vick wrote a memo regarding the change in the depository in which he stated that upon his arrival in the Dominican Republic, the receivership and depository issues were quite disorganized, and he was satisfied that he had been “frank and impartial” in dealing with the issue. He argued that Pulliam’s neglect to get a bond from Michelena—whose business was nearly “usurious”—had opened the receivership to “justified criticisms of favoritism.”⁸² Mitchell had written Vick in early November that Pulliam had refused to see the benefit of moving the receivership account to the bank, citing the fact the institution was organized by Americans.⁸³

By late December, after the receivership had switched from Michelena to the *Banco Nacional*, the tone of the relationship between the receivership and the bank deteriorated. On December 24, Vick informed McIntyre that they had not heard from the bank about the bond issue, and on December 29, Deputy Receiver John T. Vance cabled Vick and the Secretary of War that he “did not think [the] recent change in depository will prove satisfactory; our experiences thus far, aggravated by certain rumors affecting stability of [the bank] forces me to this conclusion...advise that contract be not ratified.”⁸⁴ When pressed for more information, Vance clarified his claims to the Secretary of War. The bank had practically no other depositors save for the receivership and the Jarvis estate, “and is nothing more than the agent of

⁸¹ Sullivan to Vick, 10/31/1913; SD273.

⁸² Memo of Vick, 12/5/1913; SD273.

⁸³ Mitchell to Vick, 11/6/1913; SD273.

⁸⁴ John T. Vance to Vick and Lindsey Garrison, Sec. of War, 12/29/1913; SD273.

receivership and Dominican government...I believe...[the bank] has no credit at all...”⁸⁵ He went further in a letter to McIntyre:

The idea of the representatives of *Banco Nacional* seems to have been that its contract with the Government bestowed upon it not only the right, but the duty, to advance sums to the Government as they were requested in any and all amounts, and the President of the United States would be charged with the corresponding duty of ratifying a loan...⁸⁶

Mitchell told Vick that the rumors to which Deputy Receiver Vance referred were due to the enemies the bank had made, and that the man who had been in charge while Mitchell was in New York was incompetent. Mitchell intended to bring in a more experienced person who *was* competent in banking, and the bank assured all that Jarvis’s illness and subsequent death in January 1914 would not affect the bank.⁸⁷ On January 20, Vick seemed to accept at least some of Vance’s conclusions, writing McIntyre that “it is quite evident...that during the organization and fight of the Bank for a foothold in Santo Domingo, it has catered to the political elements.”⁸⁸

By that point, the Bureau of Insular Affairs had distanced themselves from Vick’s decision to change the bank. On January 12, 1913, McIntyre issued a memo to the War Department that the General Receiver had “full discretion” as to the bank which held the receivership accounts. The BIA was relatively satisfied with Michelena’s handling of affairs since the *modus vivendi* and Convention of 1907 establishing the receivership, and that Michelena had not been at any point “required to...furnish bond or security, or to pay interests on deposits.” Furthermore, McIntyre wrote that he did not consider the interest rate to be worth the hassle of changing banks. Still, the BIA did not want to interfere with Vick’s handling of the matter, and remarked that the *Banco Nacional* had since offered 1500 Cuban Telephone

⁸⁵ Vance to Garrison, 1/2/1914; SD273.

⁸⁶ Vance to McIntyre; 1/7/1914; SD273.

⁸⁷ Memo, 1/14/1914; SD273.

⁸⁸ Vick to McIntyre, 1/20/1914; SD273.

Company bonds of 20 pounds each as a temporary bond, but that the contract would not be ratified without them being replaced by an actual bond.⁸⁹ The *Banco Nacional* had managed to acquire the customs receivership accounts, but it was on a probationary period.

“Numerous Failures to Meets Its Obligations”: Banco Nacional Refuses to Pay Drafts

Contrary to Mitchell’s assurances, matters between the *Banco Nacional* and the receivership only worsened. As mentioned earlier, revenues collected by the custom receivership were split: Five percent was reserved for the operation of the receivership and the employee salaries, \$100,000 to be paid to the Guaranty Trust Company for serving the 1907 loan, \$30,000 to the National City Bank of New York for the 1912 loan, and the remainder to the Dominican Government. In order to make the loan service payments, the receivership purchased bank drafts, which are checks drawn on the banks’ own funds. Bank drafts were supposed to be guaranteed money, in the way that money orders are today. Either Vick or his deputy, Vance, would purchase the drafts each month from the *Banco Nacional* in Santo Domingo City and then send them to New York. Representatives from either Guaranty or National City would present them at *Banco Nacional*’s New York firm, Rojas, Niese & Company for payment.⁹⁰

On January 8, Vance had purchased a draft from *Banco Nacional* for \$100,000 and sent it to New York for payment to the Guaranty Trust Company, the fiscal agents for the original twenty million-dollar loan. On January 27, Guaranty Trust presented the draft to Rojas, Niese & Company who refused to honor it. Their refusal to pay the draft purchased from their Dominican affiliate meant the receivership had failed to make a loan payment to Guaranty Trust on the

⁸⁹ BIA Memo, 1/12/1914; SD273.

⁹⁰ H.C. Niese’s company, H.C. Niese & Co., founded in 1911 merged with Rojas at some point.

original loan. Thus, the bank had placed the receivership in a precarious position and damaged its credibility.

The *Banco Nacional* and Mitchell specifically, cited a few reasons for their New York's office unwillingness to honor the draft. At the time, Mitchell claimed to have no knowledge of the issue before sailing from New York on January 30, and therefore, was unable to resolve it. The Guaranty Trust representatives expressed skepticism in a letter to McIntyre: the draft had been refused by Niese & Company on January 27, three full days before Mitchell's departure from New York City.⁹¹ Once Mitchell arrived in Santo Domingo, he suggested that the bank had advanced large amounts of money to the Dominican government, so the draft had been delayed.⁹² During the hearings, Mitchell then claimed that the draft had taken less time to arrive in New York before the *Banco Nacional* could make a provision with the New York firm to make the payment.⁹³ Neither Senator-Elect Phelan nor his co-counsel pressed him on this matter.

By January 26, the bank, through the State Department, had asked for a delay in payment, which made Mitchell's claim not to be aware of anything until his arrival in the Dominican Republic in early February even more suspect. Sullivan's letter approved the request to delay payment of the draft—with a partial payment in a few days, and then the balance soon after. On January 30, he wrote Vick again, passing the delay of payment along as an instruction from Secretary Bryan. Vick asked that Sullivan to send the delay request through Vick's own superiors: the War Department and the Bureau of Insular Affairs because he did not want to be

⁹¹ Guaranty Trust Company to Vick, 2/26/1914; SD273.

⁹² Vick to McIntyre, 2/25/1914; SD23.

⁹³ Testimony of Mitchell, Phelan Hearing, Vol 3, page 945.

held responsible for making such an arrangement.⁹⁴ Sullivan wrote back that he was not asking for any favors.

Vick thought the *bank* was asking for special concessions to which it was not entitled. He told McIntyre that if the delayed payment of the draft was honored, they would be showing the same nepotism for which the receivership had been criticized under Pulliam's tenure.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Vick was not satisfied with Mitchell's excuses, and for the first time in the correspondence, he drew a connection between Sullivan and the bank:

Because of the general attitude here of the Legation towards the *Banco Nacional* I would much appreciate if the Bureau would take occasion to inform the State Department of the existing facts in connection with the unsatisfactory way this institution has been acting for the past sixty days.⁹⁶

In other words, Vick was suggesting that Sullivan was showing favoritism towards the *Banco Nacional*, and that the State Department in Washington needed to rein him in.

The bank made partial payment to Guaranty by February 26, and full payment by March 6, 1914, but by that time had already lost the trust of the receivership. On February 20, Vick wrote to McIntyre that he wanted to give the receivership account to the Royal Bank of Canada. He felt they had no other option—*Banco Nacional* had had four months to prove themselves and they had been a complete disaster. On March 5, Vick repeated this request. McIntyre sent a memo to the Secretary of War on the matter, again distancing the bureau itself from the issue. "This contract was not approved by the Bureau," he wrote. "It was entered into contrary to the advice of the Bureau." Furthermore, the bank had not replaced the Cuban Telephone bonds with a proper security bond, in violation of their contract, and had been an overall disappointment.

⁹⁴ Vick to Sullivan, 1/31/1914; SD273.

⁹⁵ Vick to McIntyre, 2/1/1914, SD273.

⁹⁶ Vick to McIntyre, 2/13/1914; SD273.

Because Sullivan had intervened between the bank and the receivership during the draft debacle in January and February, McIntyre thought the Department of State should approve of the request to change banks again. The Secretary of War passed the question on to Bryan, but there is no reply on record as to whether the State Department protested changing the depository.

Meanwhile, the Dominican political instability had continued unabated. After Bordas became president in April 1913, he took control of the railroad from the *horacista* political faction that held it for several years. This group rose up in protest, leading to new violent conflicts in the summer of 1913. Sullivan went to the center of the rebellion, Puerto Plata, and engineered a cease fire by promising free elections. Those elections, held in December 1913, were generally agreed to be a disaster. Bordas kept his office by arresting members of the other faction and rigging the polls. Instability continued and the drain on the government funds only increased.

The receivership, instead of advancing monthly sums, was now giving sums daily, but the Dominicans required more and more: from two thousand early in 1914 to nearly ten thousand by April 1914. Sullivan reported to the State Department on April 15, 1914, that the receivership “will not give more than the amount of Dominican Government’s share of the custom receipts for this month.”⁹⁷ The *Banco Nacional* continued to advance money to the government, expecting to be paid back by sums from the receivership but when the government had exhausted their share of customs duties, the receivership did not continue sending the money.

On May 25, the Guaranty Trust Company notified Vick that another draft, this one for \$25,000, had been refused by Rojas, Niese & Company, with the notation that the *Banco Nacional* had not contacted them to pay the draft. Vick cabled McIntyre with the news, who

⁹⁷ Sullivan to State, 4/14/1914, Vol. 70; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

passed it on to Bryan. McIntyre, at this point, believed that the *Banco Nacional* had “created an intolerable condition with reference to the business of the Receivership.”⁹⁸ Two days later, McIntyre wrote to the State Department again with more details. The \$25,000 draft had been purchased to pay interest on the 1907 loan, and a second draft for \$35,000 to pay the principal on that loan had also been refused.⁹⁹ He asked for the “authority to go ahead” and make the necessary changes. He referenced the fact that the Bureau of Insular Affairs was in the War Department, so that the State Department would not be bothered with situations like these. While McIntyre’s words were carefully selected, his tone did appear to be annoyed.¹⁰⁰ The BIA was not accustomed to State Department interference, and according to the previous General Receiver, William E. Pulliam, no American Minister had ever involved himself in the business of the receivership before.¹⁰¹

He advised Vick to stop depositing with the bank and to select a new depository for the receivership account. They had already received bids from banks for the business. As stated earlier, Vick wanted to select Royal Bank of Canada because he considered it neutral. McIntyre wrote in June 1913, based on the bids he had seen, that they should go with the lowest bid—Michelena. McIntyre had allowed the Vick the final decision when the account had been taken from Michelena in the fall of 1913, but he was more forceful now. If Vick selected the Canadian bank, it would be “with the understanding that the Bureau will approve making deposits under contract with that Bank only on submission of some reasons why the lowest bidder should not receive the award.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ McIntyre to Bryan, 6/10/1914, Exhibit 84, Phelan Hearing, Vol. 2, pg. 739d

⁹⁹ McIntyre to State, 6/12/1914, Exhibit 83, Phelan Hearing, Vol 2., pg. 739a

¹⁰⁰ McIntyre to State, 6/12/1914, Exhibit 82, Phelan Hearing, Vol 2., pg. 739d

¹⁰¹ Testimony of William E. Pulliam, January 14, 1915, Phelan Hearing, Vol. 1.,

¹⁰² McIntyre to Vick, 6/13/1914, Exhibit 81, Phelan Hearing, Vol. 2, pgs. 738a-c

Vick wrote to Sullivan for help to resolve this issue, but when no answers were forthcoming, he took matters into his own hands. On July 8, he wrote the charge d'affaires at the Legation (Sullivan had left for Washington on business) that he would be unable to complete the required June payment to the Guaranty Trust Company. He enclosed a copy of the complaint to Mitchell and to the Dominican government as well as the bank's reply. Vick wrote that he had nearly sixty thousand dollars on deposit with the bank, but that *Banco Nacional* was refusing to honor drafts Vick had purchased from them in good faith. The bank offered a truly surprising defense for not honoring the May draft (or a later June draft): the money on deposit with the bank did not belong to the receivership, it belonged to the Dominican Government. In fact, Mitchell's reply suggested that the bank had the right to deny drafts written by the receivership if "such withdrawals would constitute withdrawals from funds belonging to the Dominican Government."¹⁰³ The response to the letter also offered a breakdown of the receivership's accounts to bolster their argument.

In essence, the bank was claiming the right to audit the books of the receivership. Anything left over the obligations of the receivership (the five percent and the loan payments) belonged to the Dominican government, even though Vick had not yet officially cut a check or sent the money to the government and the money was still technically in the possession of the receivership. The bank was taking it upon themselves to repay themselves for the money they themselves had advanced to the Dominican government with funds in the accounts of the receivership. It was the same defense John G. Gray sent to the BIA and State Department in June 1914 and that Mitchell testified to in February 1915.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Vick to John C. White, 7/8/1914, Vol. 71; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

¹⁰⁴ Testimony of Frank J.R. Mitchell, Phelan, Vol 3., pg. 1169.

The answer from the American government was swift. McIntyre wrote on June 13 that the BIA did not “admit [the bank’s] right to question in New York this payment of a draft which you sell to the General Receiver in Santo Domingo and, in that you seem to think that you exercise such right, I shall advise the General Receiver to avoid hereafter purchasing drafts from your bank in Santo Domingo.”¹⁰⁵ Not only did American officials reject the bank’s position, but the Minister of Finance and Commerce in the Dominican government, Mario A. Saviñón, did as well. Vick had forwarded him a copy of a letter from the Guaranty Trust Company, who advised they had been told by representatives from the *Banco Nacional* that *they* had been told by the Dominican government that the Vick’s drafts were “more than he is authorized to remit” and that the money should go to the Dominican Republic. Saviñón informed Vick that the government held no such position, had never told the bank as such, and furthermore,

That after giving the lie to such a false affirmation the Government protests against those who in the present instance have taken its name in order to resolve or justify certain operations in which the Government has neither taken part nor made any arrangement whatever.¹⁰⁶

When Mitchell claimed during the Phelan Hearings that Vick had been sending more money to New York than he was supposed to, he was asked by Senator Phelan and his co-counsel, Charles H. Strong, why the bank had continued honoring drafts until June 1914, Mitchell gave the same reason the bank had given Vick in July 1914 in response to Vick’s official notification. “However,” the bank wrote, “in order not to interfere with the notions of the Receivership, the Bank permitted such withdrawals so long as the Receivership appeared to be acting in good faith with the Bank.”¹⁰⁷ If the bank’s contentions that Vick was not giving the

¹⁰⁵ McIntyre to H. Jarvis, 6/13/1914, Exhibit 87, Phelan Hearing, Vol 2., pg. 739i.

¹⁰⁶ Mario A. Saviñón, 7/25/1914, Exhibit 86, Phelan Hearing, Vol 2. pg. 739g.

¹⁰⁷ Enclosed in Vick to John C. White, 7/8/1914, Vol. 71.

Dominican government their fair share were true, Mitchell and the bank admitted they were willing to overlook it if the receivership continued to deposit with his bank. Once the receivership asked the banks to bid for the receivership's contract, the *Banco Nacional* started to refuse checks drawn on the receivership's account, including several checks in Santo Domingo aside from the drafts to New York.

The situation between the receivership and the bank was resolved by mid-July 1914 and the account returned to Michelena, but Vick had already had enough of Santo Domingo. On June 9, 1914, he told McIntyre that he sent his resignation to Woodrow Wilson. He cited his wife's poor health and some health issues of his own, but he also wrote, "In trying to do my duty in a patriotic manner, I have made myself the target of the Banco Nacional crowd and in order that the cry of bias or prejudice may be effectively squelched I prefer to resign."¹⁰⁸ His resignation was effective August 15, and Vick returned to New Jersey, leaving Deputy John T. Vance in charge of the receivership until a successor could be appointed.

Conclusion

The receivership did not do business again with the *Banco Nacional*, and remained with Michelena until he sold his interests to the National City Bank of New York in 1917. The *Banco Nacional* remained in operation at least through that point and possibly in the 1920s, though it is impossible to say for sure without investigating the records in the Dominican Republic. As mentioned earlier, Vick took complaints about Sullivan's actions in office to his superiors and later *The New York World*, resulting in investigations held by Senator-Elect James D. Phelan.

In addition to complaints of corruption, patronage, and graft, Vick argued that Sullivan's appointment had been engineered by William C. Beer, the *Banco Nacional*'s lawyer and that

¹⁰⁸ Vick to McIntyre, 6/9/1914, Vol. 70; Diplomatic Posts, RG 84.

Sullivan had interfered with the receivership's business with the *Banco Nacional*. Phelan concluded that Sullivan's appointment had, in fact, been engineered by men who wanted more favorable treatment in the Dominican Republic, and that Sullivan had advocated for the bank on the conclusion that "that the *Banco Nacional* was an American institution, and apparently, that Mr. Michelena was an alien, and therefore that the one was entitled to his zealous support, the other to opposition, if not insults and threats..."¹⁰⁹ Ironically, Michelena, as a Puerto Rican citizen, held American citizenship under the Jones Act of 1898, and was as American as Mitchell or Jarvis.

The fact that the *Banco Nacional* was an American institution owned by Americans was a theme repeated throughout the correspondence and records considered. William C. Beer, the bank's lawyer and Sullivan's sponsor for his position, told the BIA in 1912 that the bank could do "American interests a great deal of service." Jarvis cited Knox's call for private interests to invest in countries in Latin America during the loan negotiations in 1913. Mitchell repeatedly stressed the American nature of the institution and argued that during Russell's tenure as Minister, the bank "did not get what it was entitled to."¹¹⁰ He claimed Russell had treated him unfairly when Russell (allegedly) steered the loan towards the National City Bank of New York. Based on this fact, the *Banco Nacional* officials seemed to feel entitled to the business of the receivership and the Dominican Government.

Vick and his deputy receiver, Vance, independently wrote of the bank's expectations that the American government would look out for them. In January 1914, Vance suggested that the bank had made large loans to the Dominican Republic with the expectation that the United States

¹⁰⁹ James D. Phelan, *Santo Domingo Investigation: Copy of the Report, Findings and Opinion* (Washington: Press of Gibson Bros, 1916), 13.

¹¹⁰ Testimony of Mitchell, Phelan Vol. 3, 1063.

would guarantee the money. Vick concurred, writing to McIntyre about the bank's "apparent belief the American Government is responsible for them in some mysterious way."¹¹¹ The bank continued to advance money to the Dominican Republic, despite being warned that they were responsible for anything more than the government could afford to pay. The bank locked up their capital in these loans, endangering their ability to carry out business for the receivership. Twice, they delayed payments on the loan that underpinned the receivership's existence and considered themselves the arbitrators of the funds that had been placed with them, claiming they had that right as the fiscal agents of the Dominican government.

Perhaps the best evidence that the bank and Mitchell considered themselves as holding extra power occurred during the Phelan hearings when Mitchell was questioned about the change in banks that occurred in June 1914. Charles H. Strong, Phelan's co-counsel, asked Mitchell if he knew that the War Department was reviewing the matter. Mitchell replied, "The War Department has nothing to do with" the change or the receivership itself. It was, in fact, a matter for the State Department. When he was corrected by Phelan and Vick, who both said that the executive order of President Roosevelt placed the receivership with the War Department, Mitchell wanted to see the executive order, questing the provision that gave the War Department the authority. He claimed,

Under the Convention the Dominican receivership is strictly a State Department matter, but for convenience, inasmuch as the State Department has no accounting bureau of Insular Affairs, the Dominican Customs Receivership, was you may say, loaned to the War Department or to that Bureau.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Vick to McIntyre, 2/14/1914; Vick; Personal Name Information File; RG350.

¹¹² Testimony of Mitchell, Phelan Vol 3, 1095-96.

When Phelan and Strong read the provision in the Convention that put the receivership under the BIA into the record, Mitchell continued to insist that there was a line subjecting it to the State Department. The line he referred to allowed the BIA to take instructions from the State Department, but it did not seem to quite match Mitchell's claim that the receivership was actually subject to the State rather than the War Department.

The triangular relationships between the receivership, the State Department, and the bank illustrated how the power of dollar diplomacy was distributed. The *Banco Nacional* opened in the Dominican Republic as a Dominican bank controlled by Americans. These Americans aggressively pursued their own interests at the expense of the credibility of the Dominican government and the customs receivership. When they were denied the loan in 1913, they attacked the terms of the loan in such a way that the Dominican government looked weak for having negotiated away control of their own loan. They pursued the fiscal accounts of the Dominican government, advancing them large amounts even after other banking interests stopped doing so. The *Banco Nacional* was warned that they were responsible for any issues that might arise from making these loans, but when they found their capital locked up, bank officials still thought they should receive some consideration despite having caused the receivership to nearly default on its loan obligations. When the receivership exercised its right to have its account in a bank they could trust, the *Banco Nacional* again put the credibility of the receivership in jeopardy by refusing to honor payments on the loan obligations, and even claimed to have the right to the money in the receivership accounts due to the advances made to the Dominican Government.

At every turn, the bank was a disappointment to the receivership, and still they appealed to their ally, James Sullivan, and the Department of State to give them extra concessions because

they had advanced the money the Dominican Republic needed to stay in operation. Over a year later, during the Phelan hearings, Mitchell took the stand to claim unfair treatment by Russell and Pulliam. They had not given the bank its due, the business to which it was entitled as an American concern in a country in which the United States exerted so much control, even though once the bank had the accounts they had sought so eagerly, they had failed miserably.

The Dominican Customs Receivership operated for thirty-six years, from 1905 to 1941. It survived a Dominican civil war, several violent rebellions, countless presidential administrations, a military occupation by the United States, and the usurpation of power by Rafael Trujillo in 1930, who served as the country's dictator for the next thirty years. The General Receiver and his employees were at the forefront of that political instability and had to have a close working relationship with the government, more so at times than the American Minister.¹¹³ It was the first instrument of dollar diplomacy and also the last tool to be dismantled.

Yet historians have not made it a focus of their studies beyond its initial establishment in 1905-1907. When the receivership, the loan, or the bank are discussed, it is to provide nothing more than context for incompetence and corruption of James M. Sullivan. Even the Sullivan scandal has been largely forgotten, relegated to a handful of pages in biographies of Wilson and Bryan or passing mentions in other studies. The receivership, the bank, and the men who controlled them have been marginalized into obscurity.

¹¹³ Clarence H. Baxter assumed the role of General Receiver in 1916. William E. Pulliam was reappointed under Warren G. Harding in 1921, and remained there until he retired in 1939. Along with Colton and Vick, the receivership had surprisingly little turn over in primary roles of General Receiver and Deputy General Receiver.

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