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El Embajador Olvidado: A Reexamination of Dr. Tomás Herrán, 1902-1904

Abstract

El Embajador Olvidado: A Reexamination of Dr. Tomás Herrán, 1902-1904 is an article featuring aspects of Colombian, US, and Panamanian diplomatic relations in the earliest years of the 20th century, particularly surrounding the events of trans-isthmian canal concessions and the correlated issue of Panama's status within the Colombian state. Historiographically speaking, Tomás Herrán is usually overshadowed by his more famous or flamboyant counterparts from the time, although in his own right he was a well-qualified, capable diplomat that was highly regarded by the majority of his peers, and rather pitied by many for the circumstances he was charged to contend with. Though his diligent work ultimately failed, his life and work is due, in the author's opinion, a reevaluation due to his centrality to a pivot point in US-Latin American relations and 20th century world history in general, and for the relative lack of coverage on Herrán in the historical record.

Beginning with the first European incursion into Panama in the early 16th century, many entities had coveted a trans-isthmian waterway. In the late 19th century in particular, Colombian national and local Panamanian aspirations began to focus on a potential transoceanic canal and the promise it held for national prominence and commercial growth. Joined with Colombia (formerly New Granada and Gran Colombia) as Panama was, any canal through the isthmus had to be first approved by the central government in Bogotá. Like Panama and Colombia, European powers and the United States also desired a trans-oceanic waterway, as it would drastically cut shipping time, and would yield tremendous geopolitical power and potential income to the nation which controlled it. In August 1903 the US and Colombia came close to sealing a canal treaty, much to the liking of the empowered elite in Panama, yet the government in Bogotá rejected it. Only three months later Panama seceded from Colombia with US assistance.¹

Many flamboyant personalities were involved with Panama's independence, such as Philippe Bunau-Varilla or Theodore Roosevelt, for example. Much of the historical literature dealing with the subject tends to seemingly operate with a presupposition that Panama would ultimately become independent and that the United States would inevitably obtain the canal terms it preferred.² Thus, when one considers the individuals and parties involved in the events surrounding Panamanian secession both a prominent position and person are often overlooked,

1 Ovidio Diaz Espino, *How Wall Street Created a Nation* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2001), 97-118.

2 See Appendix A for a more detailed analysis of the secondary sources in English.

that being Colombia and Tomás Herrán, respectively. Herrán was a highly experienced, capable individual, who was educated in the United States at Georgetown University in Washington, DC and was fluent in four languages, English being his second.³ He was connected to the US both commercially and by direct employment and had intimate familiarity with US culture and politics. Furthermore, he was uniquely politically positioned to represent Panamanian interests, making him quite arguably the best-suited diplomat for the job particularly compared to other political appointments that had previously filled that post.⁴ Through trying circumstances he nearly solidified a pact through which the desires of the Panama, Colombia, and the US would all have been assuaged. Therefore this article will attempt a reevaluation of Colombia's primary canal negotiator during this period, diplomat Dr. Tomás Herrán, and try to address an apparent gap in the historiography of this period, particularly regarding this individual. The focus will mainly be on his capacity as Colombia's representative to the United States during this time, and will place his work both within the context of diplomatic negotiations, of Colombia's particular situations, and of his own life.

Panama is the narrowest point⁵ of the isthmus dividing the two great oceans, and from the start of European colonization in Panama a canal was coveted by settlers, entrepreneurs, and world powers alike, first only as a faster route for trade with Asia and later as a tool of hegemony.⁶ As Cuba had sugar and Potosi had silver, Panama had geography, and had enjoyed prosperity as a crossroads of the Spanish Empire.⁷ As the Spanish Empire dwindled, the mercantilist system of Spain relaxed allowing products normally transported across Panama to sail other routes and under other nations' flags. With Spain's military garrison and transshipment declining, Panama's wealth flagged and its population sought new means of economic growth.⁸ In November 1821 Panama proclaimed its separation from Spain, after roughly three centuries under Spanish control. Panama annexed itself to what became Colombia, yet relations with Bogotá remained turbulent, featuring dozens of insurgencies and rebellions, often quashed, ironically, with direct assistance from the United States.⁹ As the United States invaded Mexico in 1846, it began to negotiate with another Latin American nation, Colombia, with the interest of securing a shorter, trans-isthmian route to its new possessions in the West. The US and Colombia etched a deal guaranteeing the US right of travel across Panama in exchange for a pledge of Colombian sovereignty on the isthmus. This tremendously aided the US when gold was found in California, as the Panama route cut the previous travel time through the Strait of Magellan by about two weeks. The potential for economic growth pleased the merchant and political elite of Panama, yet conflict with the US and Colombia loomed.¹⁰

The story of US-Colombia relations and the Panamanian revolution of 1903 prove fascinating, rich, and complicated. Thus, professional historians, political scientists, legal analysts, and

3 David McCullough, *Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 331-332.

4 Miles DuVal, *Cadiz to Cathay* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 191.

5 Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), i-ii. At the narrowest point the isthmus is roughly 55 miles wide. See maps in Appendix B.

6 Ibid. 1-4.

7 Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 18-20. The change came with economic reforms made by Spanish Bourbon monarchs, reforms which were key complaints leading to independence movements in the Spanish Americas.

8 Peter Szok, *La Ultima Gaviota: Liberalism and Nostalgia in Twentieth-Century Panama* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 16-21.

9 Conniff, 50-51.

10 Richard Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt's Caribbean: The Panama Canal, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Latin American Context* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 134-135.

those that were involved in the affairs have all extensively documented the events surrounding the creation of independent Panama and its canal. As previously mentioned, in contrast with his importance to and intimacy with the Panama and canal issues, Dr. Tomás Herrán, receives a rather lack of coverage in most books. Furthermore, many historical works treat Panama's independence as an inevitability, though this may seem a reasonable conclusion due to previous Panamanian insurrections, cultural and historical differences with the rest of Colombia, and political odds with central rule.¹¹ Such works usually include only cursory mention of the precedents of Colombia-US negotiations prior to Panamanian independence, and lack a context within which to understand the fractures that occurred in policy and international relations in 1903. A majority of the Panamanian political and economic elite seemed to at least tolerate, if not support, the Hay-Herrán Treaty, and had the Colombian congress ratified it Panama would have remained within Colombia for the time being.¹² Also, Panama had more or less enjoyed their status during their time within the Colombian federal system, which was destroyed by Conservative centralization prior to the War of a Thousand Days.¹³ The constitution, formerly at odds with Panamanian interests, was reformed only seven years after Panama's independence, amending the financial and political centralization of previous years that had been key motivations for Panamanian separatism. These contingencies center around the turning point of Herrán's work in 1903, and by brushing its coverage aside miss the cruciality of his work in Washington.

Tomás Herrán was born in the presidential palace of Colombia on September 21, 1843. His father, Pedro Alcantara Herrán,¹⁴ and maternal grandfather, Tomás Mosquera de Cipriano, both served as president of Colombia and had been personal friends of Simón Bolívar. Pedro, Tomás' father, was sent to the US as Colombian envoy in 1847, and Tomás followed. The president of Colombia at the time of the crucial Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty was Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera, who was acutely aware of Panamanian merchant mentality.¹⁵ He believed detachment from Europe and closer association with the US,¹⁶ would decrease chances of imperialist interference from powers abroad. Also, Tomás Herrán's father, Pedro Alcantara Herrán, was the critical Colombia actor in the negotiation of the trans-isthmian railroad in Panama in the mid 1800s.¹⁷ In 1859 Tomás enrolled in Georgetown University, and by 1868 had obtained a Master's from said institution (by the 1880s Herrán had earned a Ph.D. in law).¹⁸ After briefly serving Colombia in Peru and Chile, Tomás Herrán returned to Colombia and in 1871 married Laura Echeverri Villa, daughter of a wealthy and well-connected family.¹⁹ In the next thirty years Herrán served abroad only once, as consul for Colombia in Hamburg, Germany. Herrán's work during his time in Colombia was dedicated to education and economic development in Medellín, Colombia and the Department of Antioquia. Medellín was his adopted city, and through his correspondences it is easy to see that his friends and contacts there were not only extensive, but also deep. Two times Herrán even worked for the US State

11 Again, see Appendix A for greater detail.

12 David Bushnell, *Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 149-155.

13 Stephen Randall, *Colombia and the United States: Hegemony and Interdependence* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 78-80. Symbolizing US primacy in the region, the peace treaty for this war was signed on a US navy ship. In this war Panama attempted to secede, and US forces aided Colombia in suppressing the rebellion, again.

14 *Wall Street*, 40-42.

15 Randall, 26-30. A key tenet of Panamanian nationalism was the idea that the isthmus was destined to be a major destination for trade and transshipment due to its geographic traits. See Peter Szok's *La Ultima Gaviota*.

16 Collin, 133-135.

17 *Ibid*, 136.

18 Thomas Dodd, ed., *La Crisis de Panama, 1900-1904: Cartas de Tomás Herrán*, (Bogota: Banco de la Republica, 1985), 19-22.

19 *Ibid*, 23.

Department as consul representing the US in Colombia. Herrán served as university administrator and professor, and was more or less apolitical and relatively uninvolved in internal Colombia governmental turmoil. Throughout his entire life Herrán maintained his friendships in the US, and when he was sent to Washington in 1900, he rekindled those relationships and a renewed interest for the US in general.²⁰

Prior to taking over negotiations, Tomás Herrán acted as the stabilizing personality within the Colombian embassy in Washington, DC. He reopened the embassy (it had been closed since 1887) and assisted the somewhat combustible personalities of Ambassadors Carlos Martínez Silva and José Vicente Concha.²¹ When both men returned to Colombia under strained circumstances, Herrán took the position of Minister Plenipotentiary in November 1902. Compared to Concha, for example, who had never before been out of Colombia, Herrán was practically a Washington insider. Considering Herrán's role models (his father and grandfather), he was well suited to understanding the particular needs of Panama while balancing those of the rest of his homeland, following in the path.²² The bulk of primary sources examined in this paper were written by or to Tomás Herrán between November 1902, when he assumed control of negotiations, until February 1904, when Herrán left Washington for New York where he would die an early death, never having returned to his homeland.

Dr. Herrán was appointed negotiator following Concha's sullen departure. Immediately prior to his exit, Concha spoke out against the United States' intrigues, saying that they only wanted to toy with their prey (presumably Colombia) before they devoured it, while pretending to be gentlemen.²³ Furthermore, Concha called Cromwell "a rat," but his frustration with the negotiations is rather understandable. Accordingly, Herrán noted that the process, which had once seemed easy, had become obviously problematic. In the same correspondence he used conciliatory words regarding Concha, though the former ambassador had effectively dampened negotiations and any goodwill.²⁴ Herrán had to send his own son Rafael along with Concha to New York, as Concha could not speak English; Rafael served as his interpreter and assistant (illustrating further, possibly, why Herrán was better for the job).²⁵

Herrán was well suited for the position he inherited, and was the favored diplomat of many in Bogotá (as would later be intimidated).²⁶ Secretary Hay and William Nelson Cromwell were both pleased to deal with Herrán, particularly in light of his forerunners.²⁷ They had previously worked alongside Herrán in convincing the US Congress to select the Panamanian route over

20 Ibid, 24-27.

21 DuVal, 170-190. Neither man anticipated the force with which the US would push their conditions for a treaty, and both men returned to Colombia embittered toward the US with bleak outlooks on the canal and Panamanian issues. Both men were very open with their feelings of anger toward the apparent US bullying.

22 Ibid., 36-39.

23 German Cavellier, *Política Internacional de Colombia: II, 1860-1903*. (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1997), 339-350.

24 Tomás Herrán, November 12, 1902, to Ella Nichols, *La Crisis*. The primary sources used most in this article are held in Washington, DC at Georgetown University, and by far the largest published collection of these documents related to Herrán are published in the Thomas Dodd-edited *La Crisis de Panamá, 1900-1904: Cartas de Tomás Herrán*. The primary sources appear in chronological order in that publication.

25 Tomás Herrán, December 3, 1902, to José Vicente Concha, *La Crisis*.

26 Charles Burdett Hart, February 1, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

27 William Nelson Cromwell, December 17, 1902, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*. Secretary of State John Hay had served Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley, ironically all assassinated while in office. William Nelson Cromwell was the attorney for the New Canal Company and friend of TR and the Republicans who had a vested monetary and political interest in the buyout of the Canal Company, sans Colombia.

Nicaragua.²⁸ However, in early January 1903 Herrán began to convey his distrust of Cromwell and the Canal Company (Compaigne Nouvelle) to Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Felipe Paul, pointing out that as they had assisted intimately in convincing the US Congress to choose Panama, they were now at odds with one another.²⁹ Only a few weeks prior, Herrán had written Bogotá expressing his concerns about separatist sentiments in Panama and the possibility of remedying them with a suitable treaty. In the same letter he stated that he had never experienced an equal torture to his dealings with the Colombian legation in Washington.³⁰ Trying to satisfy three people with conflicting interests is difficult, and one can only imagine the strain placed upon Herrán as he tried to placate two nations, a demanding company, and the discontented department of Panama. Furthermore, during his time in charge of negotiations he had no staff and worked alone, making the amount of work he completed an admirable feat in itself.³¹

In the first weeks of his position as head negotiator, William Nelson Cromwell, “The Fox,” fell ill and discussions quieted for a several days.³² Cromwell, a New York lawyer and representative of the Canal Company, was a clever, influential political mover in the upper rungs of Washington government and New York financial circles.³³ Neither he nor the other negotiator extraordinaire, Philippe Bunau-Varilla,³⁴ held an actual government position, and their intimate association with both the Canal Company and negotiations caused them to have extreme conflict of interest. If Colombia and the US had waited to sign a treaty for just over a year, the Canal Company’s concession would have expired.³⁵ By pushing a treaty through to completion, a buyout of the Canal Company was assured, which lined the pockets of both Cromwell and Bunau-Varilla and many other shareholders in the US who were, coincidentally, Roosevelt supporters or Republican donors.³⁶

Herrán continued to be displeased with the direction of the negotiations through the end of 1902, and proceeded with much caution, as he did not completely trust his counterparts.³⁷ At least Herrán did engage in diplomatic discourse, unlike the failures of his predecessors. Herrán confided in friend Frank Rudd that while he was working with the US on behalf of Colombia, Colombia was attacking him from behind, and Herrán expressed feelings of inadequacy to undertake the job at hand.³⁸ For one, President Marroquin continued to push Herrán for an amount of money the US was unwilling to pay – a \$10,000,000 indemnity and \$600,000 annuity.³⁹ On December 12 Secretary Hay officially offered a higher annuity of \$100,000 (over the \$10,000 originally offered), yet this still left a \$500,000 gap between the

28 *Wall Street*, 40.

29 Tomás Herrán, January 8, 1903, to Felipe Paul, *La Crisis*.

30 Tomás Herrán, December 12, 1902, to Felipe Paul, *La Crisis*.

31 Herrán wrote hundreds of hand-written, private correspondences in 1 year period on top of diplomatic work load and he had no staff – not even a secretary or valet.

32 Tomás Herrán, November 27, 1902, to Ella Nichols, and Tomás Herrán, December 9, 1902, to Lilian Andrews, *La Crisis*.

33 LaFeber, 15-16.

34 Bunau-Varilla was a Frenchman and held huge shares of Canal Company. He would later negotiate the famous (or infamous) treaty bearing his name, instead of a Panamanian negotiator. That treaty would exist in Panama as “the treaty no Panamanian signed.”

35 *Wall Street*, 44.

36 *Ibid.*, 15-18, 46-47.

37 Tomás Herrán, December 9, 1902, to Lilian Andrews, *La Crisis*.

38 Tomás Herrán, December 15, 1902, to Frank Rudd, *La Crisis*.

39 President Marroquin, December 11, 1902, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

two amounts.⁴⁰ Colombia estimated a \$500,000 revenue from travel across and taxes within the isthmus,⁴¹ and that estimate appears to be reasonable. Philippe Bunau-Varilla, the scheming Frenchman and Canal Company operator, intervened by contacting President Marroquin in late December 1902 (through Herrán) to propose an agreement on the smaller annuity of \$250,000.⁴²

The issue was not as simple as finding an agreeable sum of money, though. The Canal Company's grant had to be purchased by the US for the US to proceed in construction. The company's concession ran until late 1904, thus it did not matter to Bunau-Varilla or Cromwell, both company cronies, how much Colombia received as long as they obtained their buyout.⁴³ Colombia was in massive debt due to their recent civil war, and it seems that Marroquin was delaying until more favorable conditions could be found. Thus, these were the swirling intrigues that Herrán contended with. Arguably, Herrán was the hinge on which the appeasement of four contentious and collaborative entities rested – the Company, two countries, and the department of Panama. Also, with all of the personalities in play, Herrán seemed to be the only one willing and able to transcend personal gain or grudge in hopes of finding a logical conclusion to the complicated matters at hand.⁴⁴

Neither the money issue nor Canal Company interference were truly as important to Colombia as the issue of sovereignty in the canal zone.⁴⁵ A friend of Herrán wrote to him from Medellín, saying that the proposed treaty was popular with Conservatives, but the Liberals were not as supportive.⁴⁶ Also, Herrán had to contend with annexationist sentiment in the US. He wrote Bogotá regarding Senator Cullom of Illinois, who proposed the idea that Panama was international imminent domain, and should be taken by the US.⁴⁷ Likewise, President Theodore Roosevelt was guilty of using rhetoric similar to that of Senator Cullom in proposing to give to the world exactly what he and the US knew it needed – a trans-oceanic canal under US control.⁴⁸ With these pressures, Herrán was confined by work on Christmas, and on that day wrote a letter to a confidante, in which he prophetically stated:

*“I have been entrusted with the solution of a problem that cannot be solved in a manner satisfactory to Colombia, and I am sure to be bitterly attacked in any event, whether I accept or reject the best conditions I have obtained up to this point, and I am afraid nothing better can be done”*⁴⁹.

40 Tomás Herrán, December 12, 1902, to Felipe Paul, *La Crisis*.

41 Tomás Herrán, December 29, 1902, to Mr. Andrews, *La Crisis*. The extra \$100,000 was meant for rent.

42 Philippe Bunau-Varilla, December 20, 1902, to President Marroquin c/o Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

43 *Wall Street*, 15-18.

44 McCollough, 331,332.

45 Randall, 83-93.

46 Germán Villa, December 15, 1902, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*. Colombia had just recently ended a civil war, which pitted the two parties. One explanation for Liberal dissent against the treaty was because it was more centralist, and consolidated power in Bogotá and Washington without asking Panama, and because it would solidify Conservative popularity if the treaty were successful.

47 Tomás Herrán, December 19, 1902, to Felipe Paul, *La Crisis*. Also, Tomás Herrán, December 23, 1902, to Rafael Parga, *La Crisis*.

48 President Roosevelt, November 4, 1903, to Kermit Roosevelt in *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches* (New York: The Library of America, 1984). In this letter, written a day after Panama's secession, Roosevelt further stated, "...I am attending to the Panama business. For half a century we have policed the Isthmus in the interest of the little wildcat republic of Colombia. Colombia has behaved infamously..." Roosevelt also wrote, "Any interference I undertake now will be in the interest of the United States and of the people of the Panama Isthmus themselves."

49 Tomás Herrán, December 25, 1902, to Lilian Andrews, *La Crisis*.

Indeed, Herrán would become the scapegoat. However, he underestimated himself and the quality of solution he helping to mold. Again, Herrán expressed his grave perceptions of the situation:

*"I fear much that we will not be able to arrive at an agreement. (...) The lack of final and explicit instructions and orders that I have repeatedly asked of the Government enlarges a lot of the embarrassments of my grievous situation"*⁵⁰.

Herrán's health was poor, and he attributed his physical decline to strenuous work. In less than two months as the lead (and sole) negotiator, Tomás Herrán had become almost as despondent as Concha, minus the vitriol. The first weeks of 1903 would prove critical to the future of Colombia and Panama, and though Herrán despaired, he would toil through the tension to create a proposal worthy of consideration for all involved.

Apart from the negotiations in which Dr. Herrán participated, he was busy organizing a potential defense of the Isthmus of Panama should the US turn (more) aggressive and attempt to seize the isthmus. Among his personal letters are many notes on weapons acquisition.⁵¹ Herrán wrote many memos detailing arms purchases or contracts for the potential defense of Panama. Ironically, many of these deals were with US companies. Herrán also had extensive dealings with Henry Marmaduke, a naval mercenary who commanded a Colombian gunboat that had been fitted out in Seattle to fight the rebellion in Panama during the War of a Thousand Days.⁵² It is ironic that the US, which had paternalistically protected Panama from imperialist incursions and internal rebellions and had helped maintain Colombian sovereignty on the isthmus, became the force Colombia was now preparing to defend itself against,⁵³ and ironic too that Herrán, who had previously admired the US was arranging the defense, symbolizing his change of heart and mind toward the US.

On December 24, 1902 Herrán wrote Bogotá asking for specific instructions on how to proceed. He had been receiving veiled threats from Secretary Hay that the US would select the Nicaragua route if he did not sign within the next month. Herrán expected to collect a formal ultimatum from Hay within the following two weeks.⁵⁴ A polite ultimatum did arrive from Secretary Hay only six days later with the annuity sum still standing at \$100,000.⁵⁵ Herrán was under standing orders from Bogotá to demand much more, but if the US did not budge he was to sign the treaty regardless.⁵⁶ To Hay's initial request Herrán responded that he needed more time to hear from Bogotá and candidly spoke of his qualms about the great discrepancies in desired annuities.⁵⁷ Herrán was well aware of the \$250,000 annuity previously suggested to Marroquin, and his holdout was at least in part an effort to gain the larger annuity. Hay later officially extended the \$250,000 annuity proposal to Herrán.⁵⁸ Herrán, in this same correspondence to Hay, proposed the idea of signing for \$10,000,000 and submitting

50 Tomás Herrán, December 30, 1902, to Arturo Brigard, *La Crisis*.

51 Tomás Herrán, February 22, 1903, to Mutis Duran, *La Crisis*. Also, between September 12-17, 1902 this topic was in Herrán's correspondences with Duran.

52 Tomás Herrán, November 13, 1902, to Mr. Davies, *La Crisis*. It was on this subject that the Governor of Panama, Mutis Duran, wrote Tomás Herrán to discuss Capitan Marmaduke's contract on January 12, 1903.

53 Collin, 180-185.

54 Tomás Herrán, December 24, 1902, to Colombian Department of Exterior, *La Crisis*.

55 John Hay, December 30, 1902, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

56 President Marroquin and Felipe Paul, December 11, 1902, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

57 Tomás Herrán, December 31, 1902, to John Hay, *La Crisis*.

58 Tomás Herrán, December 26, 1902, to Vicente Hurtado, *La Crisis*.

the annuity for review by an arbitrator with minimum \$100,000 and maximum \$600,000. Hay acknowledged receipt of Herrán's request for more time, and added that if they signed under the US' terms a possible increase in annuity could be made in the future.⁵⁹ This again was likely a ploy by Herrán to gain a bit more time for instructions from Colombia, but to also prompt Hay and Roosevelt to extend pecuniary concessions, but Herrán was also working diligently to convince his government of the situation's gravity.

Hay sent a final proposition to Bogotá featuring the previous terms.⁶⁰ Colombia decided under these circumstances to demand a share of the Canal Company's buyout amounting to \$10,000,000, threatening that if the Company did not relent, Colombia would not sign. This certainly drew the ire of Cromwell and Bunau-Varilla, both Company associates. Both, having the ears of Roosevelt and Hay, convinced the US to intercede in an issue that was none of its concern. The Company (Cromwell and Bunau-Varilla included) would certainly lose profits, but Colombia's reasoning was not at all irrational.⁶¹ The Company had neither touched the equipment nor the concession since the early 1890s, some ten years prior. The concession was due to run out, and if the US was pressuring for a signing before its expiration and with unsuitable financial terms, then Colombia wanted a share of the Company's \$40,000,000 jackpot.⁶² By refusing to allow Colombia such a gain, the US barged into business that was not its own and obviously did so to protect big business and influential friends of the administration.⁶³ Under coercion from the US and its Company friends, terms were actually included in the Hay-Herrán Treaty that would have barred Colombia from seeking settlement with the Company.⁶⁴ Bogotá sent Herrán instructions more or less reiterating their message of December 11, 1902.⁶⁵ Nicaragua had already agreed to \$7,000,000 upfront and a pittance of \$35,000 in annuity for a canal, and the possibility of that option loomed over Herrán and Colombia's head as well.⁶⁶ The Marroquin administration seemed willing to risk the canal and Panama for more money, and the Roosevelt administration was willing to risk either the favored Panama route or legitimacy to support its corporate pals and hegemonic goals.

On January 22, 1903 Secretary Hay presented Dr. Herrán with the final offer. Hay, due to Herrán's polite persistence offered Colombia a \$250,000 annuity after a nine-year period.⁶⁷ That night, under duress and without options, Herrán signed the treating bearing his and Secretary Hay's names – the Hay-Herrán Treaty of 1903.⁶⁸ The next day it went to the US Senate.⁶⁹ The delay in time of communication between Washington and Bogotá, though, would prove fateful. On the night of the signing Herrán sent word to Bogotá that he had signed the treaty and informed them of the increase in annuity he had achieved.⁷⁰ Three days later Herrán received a demand from Bogotá to not sign the treaty and await further instruction.⁷¹ Marroquin was playing a game of delay, but Herrán, with mixed messages from

59 John Hay, January 3, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

60 John Hay, January 3, 1903, to Colombian Department of Exterior, *La Crisis*.

61 Conniff, 65-66. Some estimates project that Colombia would have lost \$50 million in the deal. When Panama seceded, however, they lost all.

62 Miles DuVal, *Cadiz to Cathay* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 201-202.

63 LaFeber, 18. *Wall Street*, 15-18.

64 Hay-Herrán Treaty, January 22, 1903.

65 President Marroquin and Felipe Paul, January 10, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

66 Tomás Herrán, January 18, 1903, to Felipe Paul, *La Crisis*.

67 John Hay, January 22, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

68 *Wall Street*, 23.

69 *Cadiz to Cathay*, 205.

70 Tomás Herrán, January 22, 1903, to Colombian Department of Exterior, *La Crisis*.

71 President Marroquin, January 24, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

Bogotá, took it upon himself to sign, thinking that the terms offered were the best available for Colombia and Panama, and to delay any further games would jeopardize all.⁷² He had worried repeatedly about the future of Panama within Colombia if a deal could not be reached, and likely sensed that Marroquin was using him and his personal credibility with US negotiators as a stall tactic. For the engineering of the treaty and its signing Herrán received a letter from the then Governor of Panama Mutis Duran, congratulating him on the opening of a new epoch in the history of their nation (Colombia).⁷³ Panama seemed satisfied, the US would soon ratify the treaty, and the Company would receive its enormous buyout – what remained was selling the treaty to Colombia. The pecuniary gains made by Herrán for Colombia were truly vast. To his friend Germán Villa, Herrán composed the following explanation of the extra assets accrued by his efforts:

Increase in the initial pay:	\$3,000,000
Increase of \$150,000 in the annuity	\$3,000,000
Annuity of \$250,000 during the Five years before the original date	\$1,250,000
Total of the extra concessions obtained	<u>\$7,250,000</u> ⁷⁴

Adjusting for inflation, that amount of money would be a net gain of roughly \$155,000,000 in 2005 dollars.⁷⁵ Those figures do not account for the \$10,000 sum that was originally offered by the US, which would make the increase in concessions more impressive. Herrán was also confident that Colombia's sovereignty over the isthmus was guaranteed and sufficiently recognized.⁷⁶ On this point, Panama's governor even chimed in, saying that though terms were good, Panama could have enjoyed more acknowledgment of Colombian sovereignty in the isthmus – hardly as secessionist tone.⁷⁷ Herrán thought his part of the treaty and canal process was completed. He received many warm congratulations from politicians and private individuals in the US for his dedicated work on the treaty, as he did from many in Colombia as well. However, he knew that troubles awaited his treaty in Bogotá, and that although many liked the treaty, President Marroquin did not and secretly rallied support against it.⁷⁸ As he expressed to a friend, Herrán knew though that if had not signed the treaty, all hope could have been lost of the canal being built on Colombian soil (either Nicaragua or non-Colombian Panama).⁷⁹ In this way Herrán did more for his people than anyone else at this period, as he would imply following the treaty's rejection in Bogotá and Panamanian secession.⁸⁰ All Herrán thought he had remaining to personally do was to translate the treaty into Spanish⁸¹ and to physically recover from the rigors – poor health and lack of sleep – amassed over the past

72 Tomás Herrán, January 29, 1903, to Felipe Paul, *La Crisis*. The treaty allowed the US control over 10 miles of land surrounding the canal, extending from ocean to ocean, and of tributary waters flowing into the canal. Additionally the US could militarily protect the canal. Marroquin's administration would find the acknowledgement of Colombian sovereignty too vague, among other complaints.

73 Mutis Duran, January 26, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

74 Tomás Herrán, January 30, 1903, to Germán Villa, *La Crisis*.

75 According to <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/> and its Inflation Calculator. For use of an large section of a sovereign nation's land, for 100 years with renewal option, with fortification, that amount of money today would seem rather small.

76 Tomás Herrán, January 22, 1903, to Julio Uribe, *La Crisis*.

77 Mutis Duran, January 26, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

78 Tomás Herrán, February 1, 1903, to Ella Nichols, *La Crisis*.

79 Tomás Herrán, February 3, 1903, to Julio Uribe, *La Crisis*. Also, Carlos Villa, February 6, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

80 Tomás Herrán, November 13, 1903, to Arturo Brigard, *La Crisis*.

81 Tomás Herrán, February 1, 1903, to Ella Nichols, *La Crisis*.

months of negotiations.⁸²

One should recall what all parties potentially gained with the Hay-Herrán Treaty. Colombia would have maintained Panama and would have achieved financial benefit (though arguably not equal to previous revenue and with imperfect recognition of sovereignty). Panama would have received their trans-oceanic canal and the associated economic boom, the Canal Company and their shareholders would have made an enormous profit. The United States, the biggest winners of all, would have achieved canal rights and primacy in the canal zone, a relatively cheap deal especially considering the 100 year length of the treaty (with renewal options held solely by the US) and would satisfy the ambition of their big business friends in the shipping, railroad, canal and military businesses.⁸³ The US was the power in play, and instead of erring on the side of mutual benefit the Roosevelt administration chose to use monetary and military threats to achieve desired ends – the US and Colombia both, however, could take lessons in international affairs. Compared with the looming independence of Panama and loss of all economic benefit of a Colombian canal, Herrán had engineered a plan that would have kept Panama in the union and put at least some funds into Colombia's bank account. Without Herrán's remarkable efforts – staving off US and corporate aggression, easing Colombian price demands, and giving Panama reason to stay with Colombia – the opportunity to pacify all parties would not have been possible.⁸⁴ Bogotá (geographically) and Marroquin (politically), however, were so removed from Panama, the US, and financial and political consequences that all debate seemed abstract. Colombia certainly had many reasonable grievances with the treaty and US coercion, but the Hay-Herrán Treaty, for the nation, was the best alternative possible at that time, better than the consequences to follow which featured overt US manipulation and Panamanian nationalist victory.⁸⁵

In late February a friend of Herrán's, Julio Uribe, wrote him from Medellín, Herrán's adopted city. Uribe wrote critiqued the relationship between the US and Latin America, saying its status was "Always the wolf and the sheep," referring to US aggression and the Monroe Doctrine. After lamenting US policy in Latin America, Uribe moved on to what was, at the time, a seemingly unrelated topic – the Hay-Herrán canal agreement. He innocently asked for Herrán's opinion about whether the treaty would be passed in Bogotá and whether Panama would be pacified⁸⁶ – the answer to both would develop into a resounding "no," and before the end of that year the US would play the role of wolf once again.⁸⁷ Herrán also received a playful letter joking about him being lynched if the treaty failed.⁸⁸ Herrán's reputation, however, would eventually be lynched.⁸⁹

Herrán wrote home telling of the Hay-Herrán Treaty's ratification by the US Senate on March 17, 1903. In the same letter he expressed his apprehensions about the treaty making it through ratification in Bogotá. If the treaty was not passed, he felt sure the US would quickly move to Nicaragua. Even more troublesome to Herrán was that if the treaty did not pass the US would still be fixated on the Panama route, and assist the department toward independence from

82 Tomás Herrán, February 22, 1903, to Ella Nichols, *La Crisis*. He suffered from different colds and fevers, and combined with strenuous work and lack of sleep bode poorly for a then 59 year old man.

83 Hay-Herrán Treaty, January 22, 1903.

84 Collin, 220-221.

85 *Ibid.*, 225-230.

86 Julio Uribe, February 25, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

87 Conniff, 67-70.

88 J.T. Ford, March 25, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

89 Collin, 228.

Colombia. Herrán acknowledged that the treaty was by no means perfect, but that it was the best solution to a very complicated question.⁹⁰ Word arrived to Herrán from Colombia, exclaiming how crazed the situation surrounding ratification had become in Bogotá. Emissaries and business lobbies from around the world had arrived to attempt to sway the treaty's approval or rejection.

One of the treaty's greatest enemies was, ironically, former Colombian ambassador to the US, Jose Vicente Concha.⁹¹ The Colombian Congress was selected Marroquin to do his bidding. The US envoy in Colombia wrote Washington about the negativity of the Colombian Congress' decision and of waning public support in Bogotá. Circumstances soured for the Hay-Herrán Treaty in Bogotá. Amendments were suggested, which even if passed would likely have been rejected by the US. Worries circulated about the treaty's length and renewable options held by the US, the sovereignty of the isthmus, and other clauses of the treaty. The situation looked bleak.⁹² Herrán remained rather optimistic, though. He was concerned, certainly, but thought and hoped that others would realize the fragility of the situation and the quality of answer he had helped construct.⁹³ As affirmation, Herrán received a notice from the Municipal Council of Panama that on June 4, 1903 it had passed a petition that unanimously recommended Colombia's approval of the Hay-Herrán Treaty.⁹⁴ Despite the push by Panama for the acceptance of the treaty, Herrán's correspondences turned more negative as time drew on, yet only in the confidence of close friends.⁹⁵

Herrán attempted to work behind the scenes, from Washington nonetheless, to encourage support for the treaty. He attempted to rein in detractors (e.g., former Ambassador Concha)⁹⁶ and to reinforce those already backing the treaty, such as the department of Panama,⁹⁷ which had arguably more than any party at stake. President Marroquin, however, showed Herrán his hand with a letter sent on June 30, 1903. In it he vaguely expressed his intention to dismiss the treaty (or, his requesting of Congress to do so) and asked Herrán to bait Washington into waiting for Congress to do so without acting upon the Nicaraguan route or using force.⁹⁸ Herrán was again thrust into a lose-lose situation. US President Roosevelt, on July 14, 1903, expressed his growing anger with Colombia, calling them "contemptible little creatures."⁹⁹ These views were expressed to Herrán, though more subtly, through Cromwell in a letter received three days prior.¹⁰⁰ Herrán became more aware of the desperate situation in Bogotá, and that, amazingly, he himself was being blamed for the less than ideal circumstances – press constraints disallowed criticism of the actual culprit, President Marroquin.¹⁰¹ Furthermore,

90 Tomás Herrán, April 3, 1903, to Germán Villa, *La Crisis*.

91 Julio Uribe, April 16, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, Uribe, *La Crisis*. Uribe agreed with Herrán's opinion that without this treaty, Colombia could lose all and suffer great humiliation, which it would.

92 Julio Uribe, May 20, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

93 Tomás Herrán, May 21, 1903, to Germán Villa, *La Crisis*. Also, Tomás Herrán, May 22, 1903, to Julio Uribe, *La Crisis*. Herrán spoke more candidly about the reality of Panamanian secession if the treaty were rejected.

94 Resolution from the Municipal Council of Panama, June 4, 1903.

95 Tomás Herrán, June 20, 1903, to Rafael Parga, *La Crisis*.

96 Tomás Herrán, June 12, 1903, to Jose Vicente Concha, and, Tomás Herrán, July 2, 1903, to Jose Vicente Concha, *La Crisis*.

97 Tomás Herrán, July 6, 1903, to Demetrio Brid, *La Crisis*. Demetrio Brid was the President of the Municipal Council of the District of Panama.

98 President Marroquin, June 30, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

99 President Roosevelt, July 14, 1903, to John Hay, *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*.

100 William Cromwell, July 11, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

101 Arturo Brigard, July 14, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

analyses of the Colombian Congress' posture became increasingly bleak.¹⁰² On August 17, 1903, Herrán received news that the Colombian Congress had officially and unanimously rejected the treaty.¹⁰³

Though an amendment process or renegotiations were considered by a few in Colombia (and fewer in the US), for all intents and purposes the Hay-Herrán Treaty was dead at that point. Four days later Herrán wrote to Medellín:

"I fear that the bases which have been announced in order to take up again the business and negotiate a new treaty will not be acceptable here, and that calamity will overcome us – which I have predicted so often."¹⁰⁴

On August 29, 1903, the United States government ceased communication with the government of Colombia regarding a trans-isthmian canal.¹⁰⁵ Tomás Herrán again wrote home to Medellín about the negative events that had transpired:

"... We cannot pass over the great danger that is threatening us on the Isthmus. For a long time I have foreseen this danger and repeatedly have announced it in official and personal correspondence. ... The danger is growing and is coming closer but even yet we do not open our eyes. I repeat that if the canal treaty is not approved in Colombia without introducing into it substantial modifications we shall lose the Isthmus, and the treaty will be signed with the Republic of Panama. ... To be sure the treaty restricts somewhat our sovereignty over the narrow belt through which the canal must pass without including any people living there, but I believe it will be to our benefit to make this concession in international chess in order to assure forever our sovereignty over the entire Isthmus, with the effective guarantee of a powerful ally. ... Moreover the pecuniary advantages are not to be scorned. We are suffering from the same obsession which attacked Spain at the time she was about to lose the last remnant of her colonial empire."¹⁰⁶

Herrán became bitter, saying, *"they have treated me very unjustly in Colombia,"¹⁰⁷* and *"I am disillusioned, sick and tired."¹⁰⁸* On October 26, 1903, only days before Panama's death knell of secession, Herrán again confirmed his depression and physical debilitation due to exhaustion and disappointment.¹⁰⁹

On November 3, 1903, Panama formally seceded from Colombia under the protection of US military forces. As the treaty was failing, Cromwell, Bunau-Varilla, and Hay had covertly collaborated with Panamanian nationalists to cement a plan for secession, and in the following weeks had developed a treaty even sweeter for US interests.¹¹⁰ Herrán was aware of these

102 John Bidlake, July 22, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

103 Luis Rico, August 17, 1903, to Tomás Herrán, *La Crisis*.

104 Tomás Herrán, August 21, 1903, to Germán Villa, *La Crisis*.

105 *Cádiz to Cathay*, 245.

106 Tomás Herrán, September 2, 1903, to Germán Villa, *La Crisis*.

107 Tomás Herrán, October 2, 1903, to Enrique Cortes, *La Crisis*.

108 Tomás Herrán, October 3, 1903, to Germán Villa, *La Crisis*.

109 Tomás Herrán, October 26, 1903, to Arturo Brigard, *La Crisis*.

110 *Wall Street*, 49-149. Bunau-Varilla, a Frenchman, negotiated the most important treaty in the history of Panama behind Panama's back, and the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty would set the stage for the semi-colonial subjugation of Panama to the US to Roosevelt's and the Company's great benefit.

dubious undertakings and faithfully warned his government in Bogotá, but it was too late.¹¹¹ This would be the end of Panama's union with Colombia, and confirmed that the construction of the canal would occur outside of Colombian territory. Herrán railed against the development, and accurately blamed both US aggression and Colombian introversion and lack of foresight: "*The conduct of the United States has been treacherous and infamous, but the dispute was sought by our imbecilic government.*"¹¹²

Revenue, but maybe more importantly national pride, was lost for Colombia in the event.¹¹³ Herrán advised against any rash military action by Colombia against Panama, arguing wisely that if the US were provoked further, more territory would likely be taken from Colombia.¹¹⁴ Herrán, embarrassed, disillusioned with the US (his second country), mocked at home and defeated on all sides, closed the embassy and left for his home in Colombia. However he would never again set foot on Colombian soil. On February 10, 1904 at the age of 60, and after closing the Colombian embassy in Washington, DC, Dr. Tomás Herrán died in a hotel room New York City, driven to physical and emotional destruction by rigorous work and its subsequent failure.¹¹⁵

Dr. Tomás Herrán, educator, businessman, and diplomat served Colombia admirably, considering conflicting interests of US and Colombia, corporate manipulations, and Panamanian dissidence. History does not normally reserve many paragraphs for the so-called 'losers' and Herrán found himself on the losing end. Nevertheless his work was at the heart of a turning point in US-Latin American relations, and more specifically US-Colombian, Colombian-Panamanian, and Panamanian-US relations. Being at this center of potentiality alone requires a renewed consideration of Dr. Herrán, as he is commonly overshadowed by more famed figures. This paper, therefore, has taken a rather forgotten relic from Colombian, US, Panamanian, and trans-isthmian canal history and reexamined the body of his work during that critical period of time in the experiences of three particular nations and world history.

Appendix A

In English language sources, Miles DuVal gives best coverage Herrán in his book *Cadiz to Cathay*. Let us first examine, though, the works lacking due treatment of Herrán. Michael Conniff's book *Panama and the United States* is an excellent overview of US-Panamanian relations, but mentions Herrán only once, though the book's focus does lie elsewhere.¹¹⁶ Another excellent work, by David Bushnell, *Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*, mentions Herrán only once as well. The point Bushnell makes about Panama is that it had little in common with Colombia, though Colombia itself had a fragmented identity and had little in common from one department or major city to the other. Bushnell does note that the Hay-Herran Treaty was favored by most in Colombia, as opposed to no canal and the loss of Panama.¹¹⁷ The uproar over the loss of Panama helped unify Colombia, according to Bushnell. That benefit is apparent only in retrospect, and at the time of loss Colombia fiercely resisted

111 Tomás Herrán, September 4, 1903, to Department of Exterior, *La Crisis*. Herrán never actually received full diplomat title and rank, a blatant snub by his government that bothered him.

112 Tomás Herrán, November 20, 1903, to German Villa, *La Crisis*.

113 Conniff, 63-67.

114 Tomás Herrán, December 14, 1903, to Vicente Hurtado, *La Crisis*.

115 *Wall Street*, 159. Herrán was buried in New York City.

116 Conniff, 198.

117 Bushnell, 152-155.

Panamanian secession. Though an interesting read by, Walter LaFeber's *The Panama Canal* concentrates on US work and mentions little on Colombian negotiation during its section on canal diplomacy. Likewise, LaFeber does not specifically mention Tomás Herrán nor his work (save one mention of the failed Hay-Herrán Treaty).¹¹⁸ A slightly more critical view of Herrán is available in Eduardo Lemaitre's *Panama y Su Separacion de Colombia: Una Historia que Parece Novela*. Lemaitre argues that Herrán was a bureaucrat, only following orders, and gives a more exulted look toward Concha and Martinez Silva.¹¹⁹

Richard Collin's *Theodore Roosevelt's Caribbean Policy: The Panama Canal, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Latin American Context* makes a good contribution to the study of US-Colombian negotiations. Duly, Collin briefly examines Herrán and his background, followed by frequent mention of his diplomatic involvements on behalf of Colombia.¹²⁰ The overall concept Collin leaves the reader with regarding Herrán is that he was a noble, well-intentioned, well-suited man, but that the momentum of events lay beyond his control. Another author reaching a similar conclusion is Ovidio Espino Diaz. In his work *How Wall Street Created a Nation: J.P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt, and the Panama Canal* Espino Diaz also gives sympathetic coverage of Herrán, but arrives at a conclusion similar to that of Collin. Focusing more on Wall Street and financial pressure, he argues that Herrán was handicapped in dealing with men like Cromwell, Roosevelt, and Bunau-Varilla, without similar monetary resources or military clout.¹²¹

Peter Szok's *La Ultima Gaviota* is a book on early 20th century Panamanian nationalism. It reviews Panamanian culture, intelligentsia, and historiography on Panamanian secession, but does not cover the Colombian canal negotiations. Panama may have been the most unique of the Colombian departments, but it was not alone in its secessionist tendencies.¹²²

The lengthiest coverage of Colombian negotiations is in Miles DuVal's 1968 book *Cadiz to Cathay* which allots forty-five pages on Colombian canal diplomacy from 1900-1904. This book, published in 1968, was the first to really dig into the wealth of primary sources left by Herrán. In the chapter "Herrán Succeeds"¹²³ DuVal refers directly to Herrán's papers over forty times. Despite the chapter's name and the amount of footnotes referring to Herrán's paper trail, DuVal does not focus on Dr. Herrán as much as one may expect. DuVal conceptualized Herrán as a noble broker interested in fulfilling the wishes of all involved, especially his homeland, and posits that he was the most suited to negotiate, over former ambassadors Martinez Silva and Concha who are also subjects of the book.¹²⁴ However, his conclusion is similar to others. DuVal conjectures that Herrán tried to stem a tide that was moving too quickly to halt, yet places much blame for the results on Bogotá's rejection and little on the US or Panamanian elites. Works on this topic conclude almost unanimously that Herrán was relegated to a reactive role, and that matters were largely out of his control. Hopefully this article shows that, though subtly, Herrán was proactive and was conciliatory with all parties in an even-handed attempt to craft a desirable and viable future for all parties

118 LaFeber, 284.

119 Eduardo Lemaitre, *Panama y Su Separacion de Colombia: Una Historia que Parece Novela* (Bogota: Banco Biblioteca Popular, 1971).

120 Collin, 210-211.

121 *Wall Street*, 41.

122 Szok, 20-22.

123 DuVal, 191-215.

124 *Ibid.*, 170-190.

concerned.

The papers of Tomás Herrán are held at Dr. Herrán's alma mater, Georgetown University in Washington, DC where Herrán's widow, Laura Echeverri de Herrán, deposited them after his death. The rich primary sources of Herrán's papers were relatively untouched for over half a century until Miles DuVal exploited them for his book *Cadiz to Cathay*.¹²⁵ The Herrán papers are organized in three files, each of which contain hundreds of correspondences and personal notes. Two works in particular have utilized these sources, and they have been employed in research for this paper, also. Previously mentioned *Cadiz to Cathay*, by Miles DuVal, includes some excerpts from the Herrán papers. *La Crisis de Panama*, edited by Thomas Dodd and published by Banco de la Republica de Colombia, includes hundreds of pages of Herrán's work during his time as diplomat in Washington, from 1900-1904.

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¹²⁵ DuVal uses Herrán's sources to a maximum, and often in context where Herrán is not directly mentioned. See DuVal's *Cadiz to Cathay*.

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