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Rivers and ports of
Brazil: speech delivered...
at the National
Rivers and Harbors
Congress held in
Washington, D.C. December
1908

Fundação Joaquim Nabuco

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Rivers and Ports of Brazil

Speech delivered

by Senhor

JOAQUIM NABUCO

Brazilian Ambassador

AT THE

National Rivers and Harbors Congress

Held in Washington, D. C., December, 1908

Editors:

The following speech to be delivered by Joaquim Nabuco, Brazilian Ambassador, at the National Rivers and Harbors Congress in Washington, D. C., must be held for release, which probably will be for afternoon papers of Thursday, December 10.

M. E. STONE,

General Manager Associated Press.

Rivers and Ports of Brazil

As to our navigable rivers, we may be excused for not having done much for their navigation. Nature Gentlemen, the master upon earth. We have here and I only come here to acknowledge your interest in the progress of your sister American Republics. Our continent is destined to be so interdependent that the interest of a powerful body like yours, representing such an accumulation of science, of mechanical and creative power, exercising such influence on the employment of capital and on the increase of wealth, would have considerable effect on the rest of the continent, were it to spread beyond the limits of your own country. The least sign in that direction is of the greatest concern to us all. Nothing would do so much for the strengthening of the relations of our two continents. I say our two continents without thinking of the Panama Canal. The current of sympathy that runs between them will not be stopped; on the contrary, shall be materially increased, by the passage you may cut across the isthmus. However wide the cutting, the sympathy would easily leap over it.

Indeed, under the present Administration, we have entered in quite a new American era, of which Mr. Root's visit to Latin America will count as the hegira.

I am supposed to speak about the navigable rivers and harbors of Brazil. When answering your so very kind invitation, I confessed my inability to do justice to the great works undertaken in other parts of the South American continent. But even with regard to what has been done in Brazil, I prefer to submit by writing to your examination a few data taken from competent authorities and to make only a few remarks on the whole.

As to our navigable rivers, we may be excused for not having done much for their navigation. Nature has taken the matter upon itself. We have here and there built, or are planning to build, a railway, or a traffic road, to avoid the falls and the rapids of some great river, as the Madeira, the Rio Branco, or the S. Francisco, but we hardly could improve our great fluvial arteries. The Amazon, for instance, is navigable by steamers, in Brazilian territory alone, for two thousand and five hundred miles; if you take together some of its tributaries, you will have, in that territory, a course open to steamers of more than ten thousand miles. I speak only of steamers. You would have to treble the number of miles, if you were thinking of any kind of boats. The present century, I hope, will see that immense canalisation all ploughed by steam and electricity. When the connection of the Amazon with the sources of the River Plate, to which we supply nearly the whole of its waters, will be established, the earth will see an inland water system of a magnitude never dreamt before. In fact, the deep fresh water line crossing Brazil east to west and north to south will be longer than her Atlantic coast.

I think we ought to be proud of those immense prospects of river and forest combined, by the side of powerful falls, destined to supply all the electricity we may need. With that vision of the future I do not like to speak of our rivers as they appear today. Take the Sao-Francisco. The men of science who have been on its banks agree that the S. Francisco is a great river of the future and that the central region it drains will show one day immense wealth. I think it is a good thing for a nation to have a part of its asset under lock, kept for a time of greater progress all round, both in agricultural sciences, in metallurgy, in electricity, and in medicine, as then the conquest of the tropics will be achieved without the destruction of nature's treasures and without irreparable damage to the country's future.

We are devoting the best of our attention to the building of great commercial ports along our coast, more than three thousand five hundred miles long. In two years more we will have terminated the building, at Rio de Janeiro, of the three kilometers of stone quay for steamers of any draught. As a shelter for the fleets of the world, should they ever decide to meet there, the bay takes care of itself. The docks of Santos have not only transformed that city, both as to its buildings and to its sanitation, but have also given to the Sao Paulo gigantic coffee trade an adequate opening. Besides those works, achieved or near completion, we have in hand the ports of Manaos, and those of Pará, Pernambuco, Bahia, Victoria and Rio Grande. It is an immense outlay, no doubt. The Santos docks were built by a private enterprise; all the rest are public works. Pernambuco, the most eastern city of Brazil, claims that, with a port open to the largest transatlantic steamers, instead of its pres-

ent natural reef only, it will become in Brazil the natural landing of the old world on the shores of the new; while Rio Grande sees in the work to make its sea entrance safe and its harbor commodious a possible rivalry of Southern Brazil with the growing Plate.

Great expectations are raised, as you see, north and south. I, for myself, have no doubt that the millions we may apply to the building of ports are the most remunerative expenditure our country could commit herself to. We have managed to build in the past more than fifty ports; we hope to improve them all. When a country within twelve years increases her exports more than thirty per cent, and doubles her imports, while her development has been continuous from decade to decade for more than a century, that country may well trust the future. Such is the case of Brazil. A yearly commerce of five hundred million dollars may not seem much by the side of your statistics, all written in astronomical figures, but, at the progressive rate stated before, half a billion dollars is already a good promise.

Gentlemen, I hope you all will excuse me for having come here only to thank you for your interest in the development of Latin America. I took your invitation as an act of Continental good will and in the same manner I have answered it.