

Imperialism in Latin America

The bold proclamation of 1823 in the Monroe Doctrine that declared the Western Hemisphere forever free from European expansion bemused the imperial powers who knew the United States was simply too weak to enforce its claim. For many years, the Monroe Doctrine was practically a dead letter. By 1900, the situation had changed. A bold, expanding America was spreading its wings, daring the old world order to challenge its newfound might. When Theodore Roosevelt became President, he decided to reassert Monroe's old declaration.

Puerto Rico

At the close of the Spanish-American War, the Treaty of Paris was signed. In this treaty the United States gained several lands from Spain, including Puerto Rico. Many Puerto Ricans wanted either independence or statehood. Neither one was ever granted to the people. In 1917 the United States did officially grant U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans. Still today, Puerto Ricans are still desire either their land's independence or to be made a state of the United States. All Puerto Ricans today are subject to the draft in cases of war, yet they cannot vote for U.S. president.

The Platt Amendment

Cuba became the foundation for a new Latin American policy. Fearful that the new nation would be prey to the imperial vultures of Europe, United States diplomats sharpened American talons on the island.

In the Platt Amendment of 1901, Cuba was forbidden from entering any treaty that might endanger their independence. In addition, to prevent European gunboats from landing on Cuban shores, Cuba was prohibited from incurring a large debt. If any of these conditions were violated, Cuba agreed to permit American troops to land to restore order. Lastly, the United States was granted a lease on a naval base at Guantanamo Bay. Independent in name only, Cuba became a legal Protectorate of the United States, a nation that is partially controlled by a stronger nation.

Roosevelt Corollary

Convinced that all of Latin America was vulnerable to European attack, President Roosevelt dusted off the Monroe Doctrine and added his own corollary. While the Monroe Doctrine blocked further expansion of Europe in the Western Hemisphere, the Roosevelt Corollary went one step further. Should any Latin American nation engage in "Chronic Wrongdoing," a phrase that included large debts or civil unrest, the United States military would intervene. Europe was to remain across the Atlantic, while America would police the Western Hemisphere.



A Big Stick

The effects of the new policy were enormous. Teddy Roosevelt had a motto: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." To Roosevelt, the big stick was the new American navy. By remaining firm in resolve and possessing the naval might to back its interests, the United States could simultaneously defend its territory and avoid war. Latin Americans did not look upon the corollary favorably. They resented U.S. involvement as Yankee Imperialism, and animosity against their large neighbor to the North grew dramatically. By the end of the 20th century, the United States would send troops of invasion to Latin America over 35 times, establishing an undisputed sphere of influence throughout the hemisphere.

Panama

For many years, the region of Panama had been under control of Colombia. The United States attempted several times to make deals with Columbia that would enable them to build a canal in the nation, yet these negotiations failed.

In 1903 the United States helped organize a Panamanian rebellion against Colombia. Panama quickly gained its independence and agreed to a treaty with the United States for the canal. This treaty established the annual rent of \$250,000 for Canal Zone from the American government.

Panama Canal

The canal was built from 1904 – 1914 and is still considered one of world's greatest engineering feats. The canal cost \$380 million to build. Over 40,000 workers toiled for ten years to complete this project, with about 5,600 dying in the process. The death toll was so high because of the



many problems they encountered while building. Yellow fever and malaria brought the end to many of the workers. One of the major difficulties with building the Panama Canal was the fact that the land was so diverse. The canal had to span mountains, lakes, and rivers that were all at varying levels of elevation. This posed a problem that had to be remedied with a series of locks.

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