

# The Roosevelt Corollary and Latin America

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An illustration of President Theodore Roosevelt carrying his "big stick" in the Caribbean. From Wikimedia Commons

For many years, the Monroe Doctrine was practically a dead letter. The bold proclamation of 1823 declared the Western Hemisphere forever free from European growth into its territory. It puzzled the empire-building powers in Europe at the time. They knew the United States was simply too weak to enforce its claim.

However, 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 President James Monroe's old declaration.

## **New Latin American policy**

Cuba was the foundation for the United States' new policy toward Latin America. Fearful that the new nation would fall prey to the empire-building vultures of Europe, United States diplomats sharpened American talons on the island. During the Spanish-American War, the U.S. had helped Cuba win its war of independence against Spain. The Treaty of Paris ended the war in 1898 and temporarily gave the United States control over Cuba.

The Platt Amendment of 1901 laid out the conditions under which Cuba would gain its full independence. Cuba was forbidden from entering any treaty that might endanger its independence. In addition, to prevent European gunboats from landing on Cuban shores, Cuba was prohibited from having a large debt.

If any condition was 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. Although the Platt Amendment was supposed to outline how Cuba would become fully independent, it also guaranteed that the U.S. would maintain a great deal of control over the island. Ironically, the United States was engaging in the same type of imperialist actions it sought to prevent.

Convinced that all of Latin America was subject to European attack, Roosevelt dusted off the Monroe Doctrine and made an addition. While the Monroe Doctrine blocked further growth of Europe in the Western Hemisphere, the Roosevelt Corollary went one more step. Should any Latin American nation engage in continued "wrongdoing," the United States military would get involved. "Wrongdoing" was a term that included large debts or civil unrest.

Europe was to remain across the Atlantic, while the United States would police the Western Hemisphere. The first opportunity to enforce this new policy came in 1905, when the Dominican Republic was in jeopardy of invasion by European debt collectors. The United States invaded the island nation, seized its customs houses, and ruled the Dominican Republic as a protectorate until the situation was stabilized.

### **"Carry a big stick"**

The effects of the new policy were enormous. Roosevelt had a motto: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." And 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 defend its territory and avoid war at the same time.

Latin Americans did not look upon the corollary favorably. They resented U.S. involvement, which they saw as empire-building. Anger against their large neighbor to the North grew dramatically.

By the end of the 20th century, the United States would send troops to Latin America over 35 times. The actions established an undisputed sphere of influence throughout the hemisphere.

## Quiz

1 Read the second paragraph of the article.

*However, 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 President James Monroe's old declaration.*

What does this paragraph accomplish?

- (A) It discusses President Monroe's original intentions in signing the Monroe Doctrine.
- (B) It gives background information that explains why 1900 saw the return of the Monroe Doctrine.
- (C) It shows that President Roosevelt intended to follow in President Monroe's footsteps.
- (D) It explains how the United States had changed considerably since the 19th century.

2 What is the MOST likely reason for including the section "New Latin American policy"?

- (A) to show how the United States' role in Cuba paved the way for the Roosevelt Corollary
- (B) to contrast the content of the Monroe Doctrine with that of the Roosevelt Corollary
- (C) to discuss Roosevelt's reasoning for signing the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary
- (D) to explain why Cubans were opposed to the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary

3 All four sentences below help make the claim that Roosevelt's reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine was due in part to the United States' newly strengthened military.

Which of the following is the STRONGEST piece of evidence to support the claim?

- (A) A bold, expanding America was spreading its wings, daring the old world order to challenge its newfound might.
- (B) Should any Latin American nation engage in continued "wrongdoing," the United States military would get involved.
- (C) By remaining firm in resolve and possessing the naval might to back its interests, the United States could defend its territory and avoid war at the same time.
- (D) By the end of the 20th century, the United States would send troops to Latin America more than 35 times.

4 Select the paragraph from the section "Carry a big stick" that explains the long-term effects of Roosevelt's policies.