

Imperialism in Latin America

Background

During the industrial revolution steam engines replaced wind and horse power. As transportation became cheaper, trade increased. Soon, the U.S. was importing food, metals and clothing. Americans began to invest overseas, as well, building railroads and factories and operating plantations. The new overseas links led to involvement in overseas problems. In 1898, the U.S. went to war with Spain, which governed Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the early 1900s, the U.S. supported a revolution in Panama, then built a canal there, and sent troops to the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

America is a Good Influence By "Rosy Theodore"

The U.S. is right to send troops to enforce law and order in Latin America. We are the most powerful country in the western hemisphere. We must accept the responsibility that comes with power.

Since 1492, European countries have governed different parts of the western hemisphere. The Europeans oppressed the people and did not help them develop any democratic traditions. We must help Latin American nations become democracies and grow economically.

We must also protect our ability to trade. The more we trade, the more we rely on these foreign nations for products. This means we must keep the Europeans out of our hemisphere. However, British investments are currently worth five times those of Americans, and the Germans are right behind us.

Finally, we must protect the lives and property of the thousands of Americans who live in these countries.

Each time the U.S. sent troops to Latin America, it did so to achieve all of those goals. For example, Spain governed Cuba with an iron fist. In fact, they crushed a Cuban rebellion in 1868 without mercy. When the Cubans rebelled again, the Spanish Governor forced 500,000 of them

into camps, where 200,000 died. Since defeating Spain, we granted independence to Cuba and the country has experienced self-rule, democracy and economic growth.

Panama's situation was similar to Cuba's. It was ruled by a cruel government in Colombia. Not only did we help win independence for Panama but we built a canal that will help wipe out poverty by making it easier for nations to trade.

The other interventions were also justified and beneficial. In 1905, the Dominican Republic was racked by revolutions. German and British bankers asked their governments to send troops to get their money back. To prevent this, the U.S. took over the country's customs house to make sure all creditors were paid. After the debts were paid and a democratic government installed, the American soldiers left. We intervened in Nicaragua for the same reasons. And, we did so only after President Adolfo Diaz asked us to send troops to help him restore order.

Not only are they experiencing democracy for the first time, but the people in these countries have luxuries they did not have before, such as electric lighting, electric tramways, railroads, and 250,000 telephones. The U.S. has protected its national interests, but it has also had a positive influence in these countries.

America is a Bad Influence By "Mark Clemens"

American involvement in Latin America is motivated by greed. Big American companies have made investments in the region. When the people of these nations demand laws to require our businesses to pay higher wages or taxes, the U.S. government sends troops to prevent it.

Consider the Spanish-American war. America's goal was *not* to help the Cuban people. It was to remove Spain and then take over the profitable sugar plantations, railroads and mines. Since our victory, more than half of the sugar plantations in Cuba are now owned by Americans. If the motives of the U.S. government were so pure, why did we keep one of Cuba's best ports, Guantanamo Bay, and the entire island of Puerto Rico after the war?

In 1903, the U.S. used force to buy a strip of land in Central America and build a canal through it. The U.S. government had offered to buy land in the Colombian state of Panama, but the Colombian government turned down the offer.

Colombia had every right to accept or reject such an offer. However, instead of negotiating, the U.S. encouraged a revolt in the land where the canal would be built. It did not matter whether the Panamanians were free or oppressed. We just wanted a strip of land for our canal.

The interventions in Central America and the Caribbean had similar motives. The United Fruit Company owns 90% of the banana plantations in Central America. U.S. investments in the region increased by 10 times from 1898-1914. American companies pay their workers barely enough money to live on.

But, whenever the people of a nation demanded regulation of those companies, the U.S. troops arrived. The U.S. government wasn't concerned about democracy. It was protecting the profits of big American companies.

It is true that these countries have experienced economic growth. But they have paid a price. By specializing in single industry exports, they made themselves vulnerable to international events they can't control. What will happen when the price for bananas, coffee or sugar goes down? There is no domestic economy, no diversity of products or services in any of these countries. The entire nation will be reduced to poverty.

If big American companies want to invest overseas they should accept the risks and obey the laws of those countries, just as we would expect foreign companies with investments here to obey our laws.