

Chapter 11

The Rise of American Power

★ Objectives

- ★ To analyze reasons for increased U.S. involvement in Asia and Latin America from 1890 to 1920.
- ★ To evaluate arguments for and against intervention in the affairs of Latin American nations.
- ★ To identify the causes of World War I.
- ★ To describe and explain the change in U.S. foreign policy from neutrality to involvement.
- ★ To understand the impact of wartime on the civil liberties of Americans.
- ★ To appraise U.S. contributions to peace and arms control after World War I.
- ★ To evaluate whether or not the United States made the right choices during and after the war.

From Old Diplomacy to New

The period from 1865 to 1900 saw the United States become increasingly involved in global affairs.

The end of the Civil War in 1865 and the growth of industrialization led to increasing American power and a change in U.S. diplomacy.

Communications Technology

A revolution in communications technology began to bring the world closer together between 1865 and 1900. The development of the telegraph and the Morse Code prior to the Civil War led to speedier communication over long distances. In the post-Civil War period, Cyrus Fields, after four failures, successfully completed a transatlantic cable in 1866. It allowed messages to

travel through cables at the bottom of the ocean floor between Europe and the United States. At the same time, improved steamships made passage between Europe and the United States faster. As a result of these improvements in communication, Europe no longer seemed so distant from the United States.

American Attitudes Toward Internationalism

There was much disagreement about whether the United States should expand its power and take on a greater role in international affairs by adopting *imperialism* (expansionist policies). It was obvious that the United States, like the nations of Europe, was rapidly industrializing. It was also obvious that U.S. trade was growing. But did this mean that the United States had to enter the race for overseas colonies?

Arguments for Expansion Many U.S. businesses favored expanding U.S. power for economic reasons. Until about 1890, the settlement of the West had provided businesses with new markets for farm machinery and other products. It also opened up rich sources of copper, silver, and other needed materials. But after the physical frontier had been settled, some business leaders looked for new economic frontiers—new markets, new investment opportunities—in the vast, nonindustrialized world beyond U.S. borders. Many Americans also believed that the manifest destiny that had justified expansion from ocean to ocean now justified increasing the U.S. role in world affairs.

Some people also proposed cultural reasons for expansion. Protestant missionaries believed it was their moral duty to spread the message of Christianity to all parts of the world. Josiah Strong, an influential minister and author, argued that less developed regions of the world would benefit from being governed by the “advanced” civilizations of the West. He believed that the benefits of Christianity and U.S. civilization were practically one and the same. This belief was based on Social Darwinism. The idea of superior individuals and companies was replaced by the idea of superior nations such as the United States. Thus, Social Darwinism supported cultural superiority.

Arguments Against Expansion Some Americans opposed expansion for both moral and practical reasons. They thought the United States should follow President Washington’s advice and focus on trade without political involvement. In their view, democracy would suffer if the United States took over foreign places and thereby denied native peoples their political rights and independence. In addition, opponents believed that manifest destiny had ended with American expansion to the Pacific. In their view, manifest destiny did not justify military expansion to Asia and Latin America.

Some feared that foreign involvement would lead to foreign wars. Even some businesspeople questioned the need for territorial gains, arguing that wars would harm rather than help overseas trade.



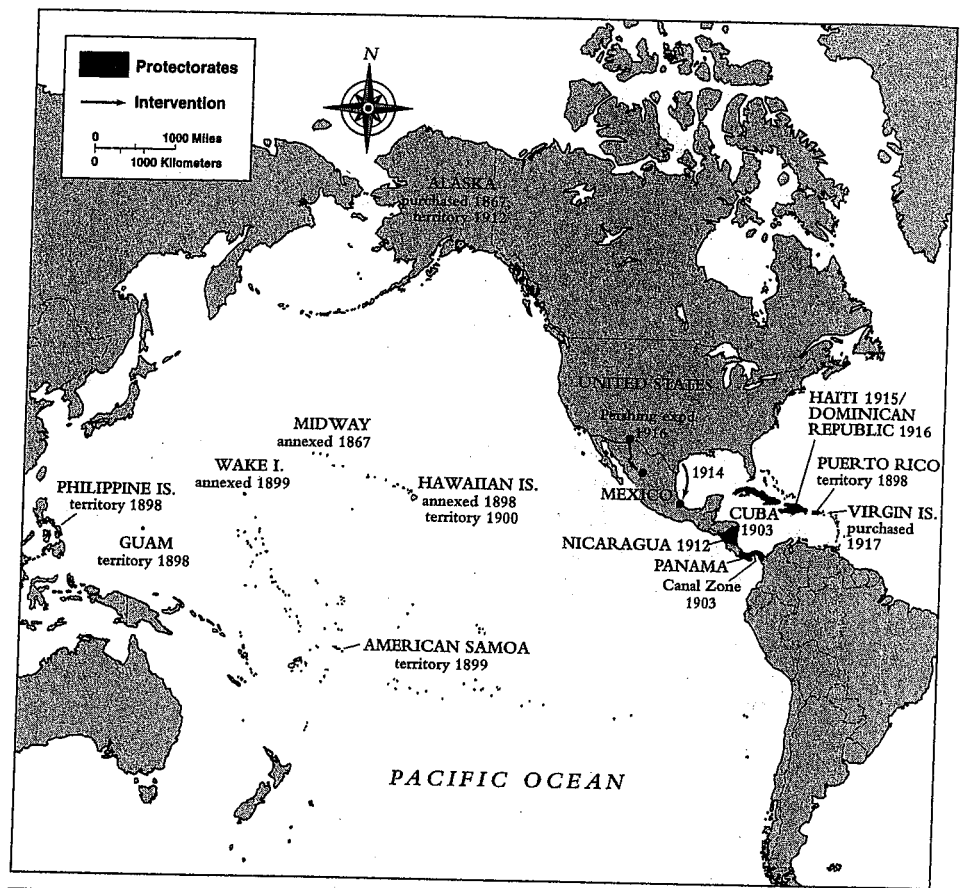
The United States (Theodore Roosevelt) as the world's policeman, in a 1905 cartoon

Growth of Naval Power

Some Americans wanted to acquire overseas territories for strategic reasons. Alfred Thayer Mahan, a U.S. naval captain, published a book in the 1890s pointing out the importance of sea power to a nation like Great Britain. He argued that U.S. security also depended on having a strong navy. Because ships of the industrial age were powered by coal-burning steam engines (not wind), the U.S. Navy needed to establish bases in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans where ships could pick up coal at strategically located islands. Furthermore, Mahan argued, increased U.S. trade with Asia and Latin America would depend on a larger navy to protect that trade against European rivals.

"Opening" of Japan

For many years, Japan was even less interested than China in trading with Europeans and Americans. It became more open to trade after 1853, the year that Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan with an American fleet. Perry wanted to open trade with Japan and gain assurances that Japan would assist shipwrecked U.S. sailors. He brought gifts demonstrating the benefits of industrial technology and, in a show of force, fired off



U.S. Territories and Protectorates in 1917

the fleet's guns. Japanese officials were sufficiently impressed to sign a trade treaty with the United States in 1854. Soon afterward, new leadership in Japan adopted a policy of learning Western technologies and making Japan into a modern industrial nation.

United States and China

In 1895, Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese army and navy crushed the much weaker forces of the Chinese. It was clear that China could not defend itself against the imperialist ambitions of stronger rivals. It was also clear that Japan had become a major power in East Asia because of its successful efforts to industrialize.

After Japan defeated China, its armies occupied Korea and the Chinese island of Taiwan. Japan also won overall economic control of Manchuria

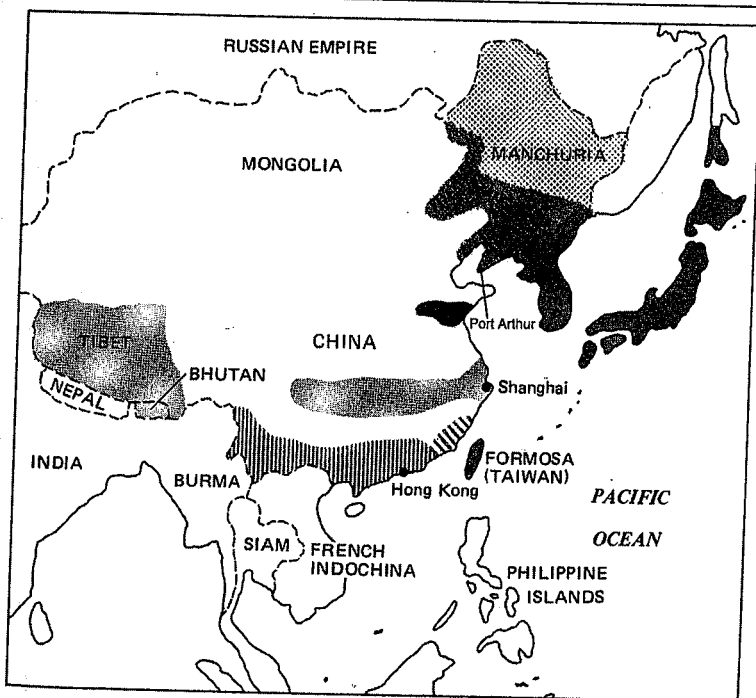
in northern China in 1905. Manchuria became known as Japan's *sphere of influence*, which meant that Japan enjoyed special privileges in the region and more or less controlled its trade and industrial growth. Russia disputed Japan's control of Manchuria until 1904, when Russia's defeat in a war with Japan forced it to give up its claim.

Competition for Spheres of Influence

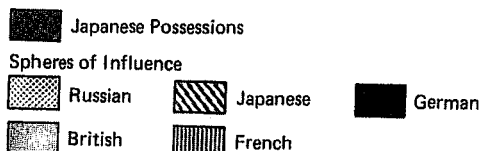
Following Japan's example, France, Germany, Russia, and Great Britain forced the Chinese government to grant other spheres of influence. It appeared as if all of China might be divided into such spheres. The U.S. government feared that America's long-standing trade with China might be cut off completely.

"Open Door" Notes

John Hay was the secretary of state for two presidents, William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. To oppose the spheres of influence in China and



Spheres of Influence in China, 1905



keep the door open for U.S. businesses, Hay composed two diplomatic notes, one in 1899, the other in 1900. The first note called on the European powers and Japan to agree to an *Open Door policy* in China. Such a policy would mean that all nations would have “equal trading rights” in China and that none would have to pay higher port fees or taxes than any other. The second note suggested that all powers in East Asia respect the territorial integrity of China. In other words, no nation would compel China to give up the control of any of its own territory.

The various replies to Hay’s notes were intentionally vague and evasive. But the U.S. government stood firmly committed to an Open Door policy in China. It would remain committed to that policy through the 1930s and early 1940s, when Japanese troops occupied much of China. U.S. involvement in World War II was partly a response to Japan’s violation of the Open Door.

Boxer Rebellion

The people of China resented the imperialist policies of the Western powers. Many joined a nationalist organization named the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists—also known as the Boxers. The aim of the Boxers was to drive the “foreign devils” out of China. In 1900, the Boxers took action. They killed Chinese who supported Westerners and some European and Americans, especially Christian missionaries. They also attacked Western embassies in the Chinese capital of Peking (now Beijing). The United States, Japan, and the European powers put together an international army to rescue those trapped in the embassies. This force crushed the Boxer Rebellion.

The foreign powers forced China to pay them an *indemnity* (a sum of money to cover damages and deaths). But the United States stood by its commitment to respect the territorial integrity of China and insisted that the other powers do likewise. The U.S. Congress voted to return the U.S. portion of the indemnity to China. This gesture of friendship greatly impressed China’s government. It used most of the returned money to pay for scholarships for Chinese students to attend U.S. colleges and universities.

Other Pacific Overtures

Acquisition of Hawaii

The acquisition of the Hawaiian islands in the Pacific is a good example of U.S. imperialism—and also of one president’s opposition to imperialism. In the late 1800s, a group of American sugar growers in Hawaii made several attempts to overthrow the native Hawaiian ruler. Finally, in 1893, with the help of U.S. Marines, the sugar growers succeeded in overthrowing Hawaii’s Queen Liliuokalani. But President Grover Cleveland opposed an imperialist policy and rejected the sugar growers’ plan for turning over

Hawaii to the United States. Hawaii remained independent for a few more years. But the next president, William McKinley, was strongly influenced by imperialists in the Republican party and pushed to make Hawaii a U.S. territory.

In 1900 a treaty providing for the annexation of Hawaii was approved by the Senate. (Hawaii entered the Union as the 50th state in 1959.)

Naval Bases in Samoa

Far to the southwest of Hawaii lie a group of Pacific islands called Samoa. A few Americans thought Samoa would make a good U.S. naval base. But Germany and Great Britain also expressed interest in taking over the islands. At one point in the 1880s, it appeared that Germany and the United States might go to war over these small islands, which few people knew existed. However, the threat of war passed.

In the late 1890s, Germany and the United States agreed to divide Samoa, each taking control of different islands.

Spanish-American War

In 1895, a revolt against Spanish rule broke out in Cuba. Three years later, the United States came to the support of the Cuban people by declaring war against Spain. More than any other event, this war represented a turning point in U.S. foreign policy. The swift and decisive U.S. victory in that war demonstrated that the United States was truly a major military power as well as a leading economic power. How did this brief but important war come about?

Causes of War

The American people's sympathy for the Cuban rebels played a large role in bringing about the U.S. war with Spain. Americans' sympathies were fanned almost daily by sensational headlines in the newspapers.

"Yellow Journalism" The newspapers of the 1890s attracted readers by playing up scandalous and sensational news. News stories that used big headlines, dramatic pictures, and emotional writing were known as *yellow journalism*. Especially influential were the New York City newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. Both publishers squeezed all the sensation they could out of the violent conflict in Cuba. Their reporters wrote of the terrible suffering of the Cuban people and the brutal acts of Valeriano Weyler, a Spanish general nicknamed "Butcher" Weyler. Reports of Spanish atrocities were often greatly exaggerated.

De Lôme Letter Early in 1898, Hearst's *New York Journal* caused a sensation by printing a stolen letter that seemed to insult U.S. President William McKin-

ley. The author of the letter was the Spanish minister to the United States, Dupuy de Lôme. Many Americans were outraged by the minister's description of the president as "weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd."

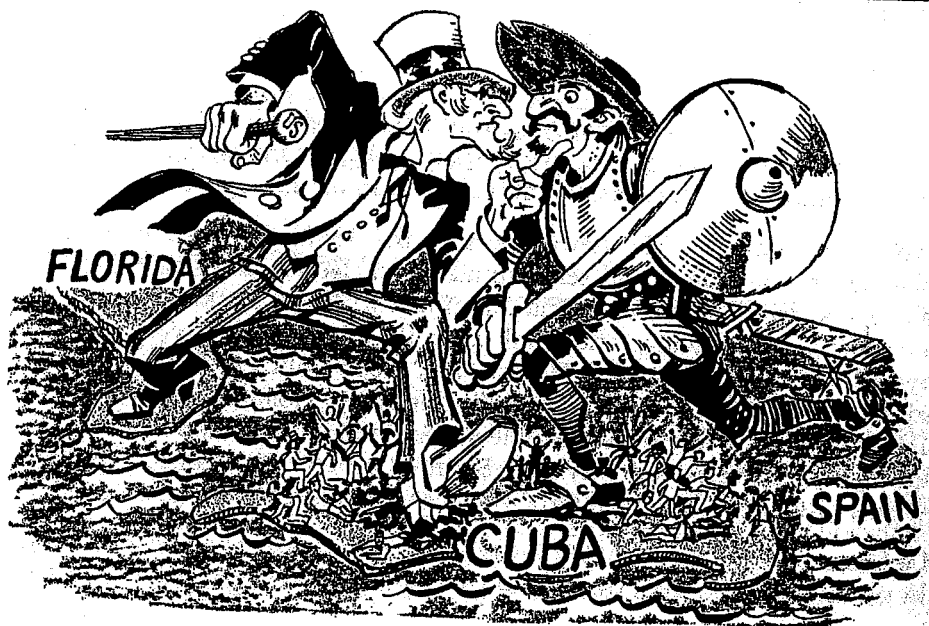
Sinking of the *Maine* Only a few days later came even more shocking news. The U.S.S. *Maine*, an American battleship anchored in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, had mysteriously exploded and sunk, killing about 250 of its crew. It was not known then—or even today—what caused the explosion. But the newspapers made it seem as if Spain had deliberately blown up the U.S. ship. After this incident, editorials in the yellow press urged that the U.S. government go to war to help liberate Cuba from Spanish rule.

Additional Reasons Besides the public emotions stirred up by sensational news stories, there were other reasons for war. A strategic reason was that military and naval planners thought Cuba might provide an ideal naval base for U.S. ships. They also argued that an island only 90 miles from Florida should not belong to a European power. An economic reason was that Americans had invested \$50 million in Cuba's sugar and tobacco plantations. One way to protect that investment was to drive out an unfriendly Spanish government and substitute a friendlier Cuban one.

Decision for War

Not everyone favored the idea of a war with Spain. Some business leaders feared that such a war might lead to the destruction of American-owned

Cartoon showing Cuba as a pawn in the U.S.–Spanish power play



properties. There was also a good diplomatic reason for avoiding war. After the sinking of the *Maine*, Spain agreed to virtually all of the U.S. demands concerning Cuba. Spain pledged, for example, that it would eventually grant Cuba its independence.

Even so, President McKinley decided that most Americans expected him to take the country to war. In April 1898, he asked Congress for a declaration of war against Spain. Congress readily complied.

In April 1898, President William McKinley wrote a lengthy message to Congress explaining why he believed the United States should declare war against Spain. The excerpt below from the president's message briefly summarizes the grounds for intervention in Cuba.

A "Splendid Little War"

The Spanish-American War lasted only about four months, and Americans won every major battle. From the U.S. point of view, it seemed a "splendid little war," as one American called it. It was fought on two fronts—the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean and the Philippine Islands in the Pacific.

In Cuba, a troop of U.S. volunteers known as the Rough Riders won instant fame and glory by following their leader, Theodore Roosevelt, in a bold and successful charge up San Juan Hill. African Americans in the reg-



MCKINLEY'S WAR MESSAGE TO CONGRESS, 1898

First, in the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there, and which the parties to the conflict are either unable or unwilling to stop or mitigate. It is no answer to say this is all in another country, belonging to another nation, and is therefore none of our business. It is specially our duty, for it is right at our door.

Second, we owe it to our citizens in Cuba to afford them that protection and indemnity for life and property which no government there can or will afford, and to that end to terminate the conditions that deprive them of legal protection.

Third, the right to intervene may be justified by the very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people, and by the wanton destruction of property and devastation of the island.

Fourth, and which is of the utmost importance, the present condition of affairs in Cuba is a constant menace to our peace, and entails upon this government an enormous expense.

ular U.S. Army participated in the charge and spearheaded another attack in the Battle of El Caney. The battles of San Juan Hill and El Caney led to the Spanish surrender of the Cuban port of Santiago. At the same time, the neighboring island of Puerto Rico—a Spanish colony since 1508—fell to the invading Americans.

In the Pacific, the U.S. Navy distinguished itself in a devastating attack against the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, near the Philippine capital of Manila. Commander George Dewey's overwhelming victory in this naval battle made him an American hero (he was promoted to admiral by Congress in 1899). But the attack, so far from Cuba, took most Americans by surprise. Many, including President McKinley, had to search to find the Philippines on a map. Only by reading the newspapers did Americans learn that the Philippines had been a Spanish possession since the 1500s. The Filipinos—like the Cubans—had been fighting for their independence from Spain when U.S. troops arrived. The Filipinos celebrated the U.S. victory at Manila Bay, fully expecting independence to be the result. Instead, they were bitterly disappointed by the terms of the U.S.–Spanish treaty of peace.

Results of the War

The terms of the treaty, signed in December, 1898, were as follows:

- ★ Spain gave two islands to the United States: Puerto Rico in the Caribbean and Guam in the Pacific. (See map, page 296.)
- ★ Spain granted Cuba its independence.
- ★ Spain “sold” the Philippines to the United States for the bargain price of only \$20 million.

United States Empire

For economic reasons, the people of Puerto Rico thought it would be to their advantage to be included in the U.S. empire. By the terms of a U.S. law (the Foraker Act, 1900), Puerto Ricans were allowed to elect representatives to their own legislature, but their governor was appointed by the U.S. president.

Although Spain had already granted Cuban independence, the U.S. position was unclear. President McKinley and Congress finally decided that Cuba should be permitted its independence, but with certain conditions attached. In 1901, these conditions were included in an amendment to a military bill. The *Platt Amendment*, as it was called, provided that:

- ★ Cuba would sell or lease a piece of land to the United States for use as a naval and coaling station.
- ★ Cuba would not allow any foreign power other than the United States to acquire Cuban territory.
- ★ Cuba would allow the United States to intervene in the country whenever it was necessary to protect American citizens living in Cuba.

Cubans strongly protested these terms. But, by a treaty of 1903, they finally accepted the Platt Amendment when the United States insisted upon it as the condition for removing its troops.

Debate Over Acquisition of the Philippines

American public opinion was sharply divided between those who wanted to govern the Philippines as a U.S. territory and those who wanted the islands to be independent.

Anti-Imperialist Argument Those arguing against U.S. control of the Philippines were known as *anti-imperialists*. Their leader was William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic candidate for president in 1900. Anti-imperialists warned that the United States would be abandoning its own commitment to democracy and the ideals of the Declaration of independence if it ruled territory on the other side of the Pacific. Furthermore, they were afraid that the possession of islands near Asia would inevitably involve the United States in Asian politics and wars.

Imperialist Argument Those favoring an imperialist policy, including Theodore Roosevelt, thought the United States had a duty to involve itself actively in world affairs. They argued that the acquisition of Pacific islands like Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines was necessary for building the reputation of the United States as one of the world's great powers. Also, the argument went, the Philippines were bound to fall under the influence of one Western power or another. If that was so, they were better off under U.S. rule than under a nondemocratic power like Germany or Russia.

Suppressing the Filipino Revolution The Philippine people could not accept the idea of being traded from one colonial power to another. In 1899, the rebel troops that had fought against Spain turned their weapons against U.S. forces. To put down the uprising, President McKinley sent 70,000 additional troops to the Philippines. After nearly three years of fighting, U.S. forces finally prevailed as the last rebel band surrendered in 1902.

Disposition of Territories

As a result of the Spanish-American War, the following territorial changes had taken place:

- ★ Cuba became a U.S. *protectorate* (a nation whose foreign policy is partly controlled by a foreign power).
- ★ The Philippines remained a colony of the United States until July 4, 1946, when it was granted independence.

Constitutional Issues The major issue concerning colonies was the question of whether the Constitution followed the flag. Did citizens of colonial territories have the rights of American citizens? Were they entitled to the same protections as American citizens? In a series of cases known as the *Insular*

Cases, the Supreme Court in 1901 ruled that the Constitution did not fully cover colonial possessions. The extent to which the Constitution applied to colonies would be determined by Congress.

Latin American Affairs

Even as early as the 1820s, the United States was the strongest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Because of the relative strength of U.S. military forces, presidents tended to view countries to the south as needing U.S. protection from internal disorder as well as European control. But this point of view was often bitterly resented by Latin Americans, especially when U.S. troops were sent into their countries to "protect" them.

Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine

Recall that the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 had warned Great Britain, France, Spain, and other European nations not to interfere in the internal politics of Latin American nations. (Review Chapter 4.) Implied in this warning was the idea that the United States would protect the countries of Latin America from outside interference. Also implied was the assumed right of the United States to send troops into any threatened country to the south.

The Platt Amendment that made Cuba a U.S. protectorate was an example of this policy. In the first 20 years of the 20th century, the policy of *intervention* would be applied again and again by the three presidents of the Progressive Era—Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, and Woodrow Wilson.

Roosevelt used the Monroe Doctrine to justify his interventionist policy in Latin America. He even added to the famous doctrine by issuing a *corollary* (logical extension) to it. The problem that led him to do this was the failure of several Latin American nations to pay their debts to Great Britain, Germany, and other European nations. (The debts resulted from the use of borrowed funds to purchase European imports.)

Roosevelt recognized that Europeans might become impatient and use force to collect these debts. He was afraid that Europeans who wanted to colonize Latin America might use the debt problem as an excuse for taking political control of indebted countries. To avoid this possibility, he said that the United States might intervene in a Latin American country if its debts were far overdue. The *Roosevelt Corollary* to the Monroe Doctrine read:

Chronic wrongdoing . . . may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention. . . . In the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing . . . , to the exercise of an international police power.