

Facts and Quotes on U.S. Involvement in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico came under United States influence as a result of the Spanish-American War. In the treaty with Spain the United States gained control over the former Spanish colony. An American governor and an American-appointed executive council were appointed to rule the island. Judges in the Puerto Rican supreme court were also appointed by the United States. In spite of U.S. rule, Puerto Ricans were not American citizens and could not travel freely to the United States. This satisfied labor leaders and politicians who did not want to deal with Puerto Ricans in the United States.

In Puerto Rico the United States carried out programs to control malaria, yellow fever, and other diseases. Work was done to repair harbors, build roads, and install irrigation projects. The United States soon became the dominant power in the Caribbean—a region earlier controlled by Europe. By 1930 American investors owned 60 percent of public utilities and banking, 80 percent of the tobacco plants, 60 percent of the sugar industry, and all overseas shipping. The island conveniently provided a cheap supply of labor for American businesses.

The build-up of huge American sugar plantations took place at the expense of Puerto Rican small farmers. They had been forced to sell their land or were paid very low prices for their sugarcane. Also, they could no longer compete against cheap imported food from large and highly mechanized farms in the United States. Small plantation owners and independent farmers were destroyed and were forced to depend on seasonal, low-paying work at the plantations.

Puerto Ricans were not happy with American rule. Their government had limited freedom and major industries were foreign owned. Unemployment was over 30 percent after 30 years of American rule, and living conditions were deplorable, with little sanitation, widespread disease, and low life expectancy.

Quote by Theodore Roosevelt: "Peace has come through the last century to large sections of the earth because the civilized races have spread over the earth's dark places. It is a good thing for the world but above all, . . . for the people of those countries . . ." (Beale, p. 720)

Quote by Frederick Jackson Turner, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin: The United States Government must "channel the energies of Americans toward the expansion of trade abroad. Increased foreign trade would create jobs that might give ambitious people the same opportunity the frontier had once provided." (Davidson and Lytle, p. 442)

Quote by Josiah Strong, American Clergyman: Imperialism is justified as the natural and necessary expansion of the "superior" Anglo-Saxon people. (Madgic, p. 347)

Quote by Mariano Abril Otaño, a Puerto Rican journalist: "To think that the Yankees are going to give us all their freedoms and all their progress for our pretty face is to think blindfolded. We could indeed have an unheard-of manufacturing and business activity; but all this would be in their hands, monopolized and exploited by them." (Puerto Rico: The Flame of Resistance, p. 34)

Quote by Ramón Betances, a Puerto Rican nationalist: "I don't want a colony with Spain or the United States. I want by country to be Free, Independent and Sovereign. Why don't the Puerto Ricans revolt?" (Puerto Rico: The Flame of Resistance, p. 34)

Facts and Quotes on U.S. Involvement in China

The United States had a growing interest in China during the 1800's. Missionaries wanted to convert the Chinese to Christianity, and businessmen wanted to take part in China's trade. Other countries were also interested in China's wealth, and in the late 1800's Russia, Japan, Britain, France, and Germany had each taken control over specific regions of China, known as "spheres of influence." This was possible because China's government, under the leadership of the Manchu dynasty, was very unstable and weak. These countries were able to demand that China lease them land on which to build naval bases to protect their own interests. Each of these nations also took advantage of special privileges in their spheres of influence.

The spheres of influence restricted U.S. participation in China. Missionaries were losing some of their influence, and manufacturers and exporters feared that Chinese markets would be monopolized by Europeans. When the United States annexed the Philippine Islands after the Spanish-American War, interest grew in Asia because Americans saw the islands as stepping stones to China. In 1899, because China's military was too weak to counteract the influence of Russia, Japan, Britain, France, and Germany, the United States asked the nations involved in China to respect three principles together known as the Open Door Policy:

- No power would prevent others from trading in a sphere of influence.
- All taxes on imports or exports would be collected by the Chinese government.
- No power would ask for harbor or railroad duties in its sphere of influence that discriminated against the other powers.

The United States urged the foreign powers in China to respect certain Chinese rights and the ideal of fair competition with those wanting to trade in China. Most of the countries indicated they would go along with the proposal if the other nations involved agreed to it. Without further correspondence, the United States boldly announced that all powers had agreed to the principles of the Open Door Policy.

Many Chinese did not appreciate foreign influence in their country. The Open Door Policy had done little to rid China of continual foreign interference with ancient customs and foreign disregard for Chinese sensibilities. The Chinese were also outraged at the condition of their country and hoped to reestablish a strong government that could control both the Chinese and the foreigners living in China. This led to the formation of nationalist societies in China in the late 1800's. In 1900, one such group of nationalists known as the Boxers rebelled against the Europeans. Their hope was to expel all foreigners from China. Foreigners were killed and buildings were attacked for more than a month. This uprising was known as the Boxer Rebellion. Finally, troops from European countries and the United States arrived to put down the Boxer Rebellion. China agreed to allow foreign troops to be stationed on Chinese soil and to allow foreign ships to patrol the Chinese coastline and rivers.

After the rebellion, the United States added another principle to its Open Door Policy, one stressing that China should remain independent and not be carved up into a group of colonies as punishment for the Boxer Rebellion. With this policy in play, China remained open to trade, but foreign powers continued to violate China's national integrity and to extend spheres of influence. The United States made no attempt to support its policy with armed force. Thus, China continued to provide new markets and sources of raw materials for American industry.

Quote by Sun Yat-sen, leader of China in early 1900's: "Today we are the poorest and weakest nation in the world and occupy the lowest position in international affairs. Other men are the carving knife and serving dish; we are the fish and the meat." (Beer, p. 517)

Quote by U.S. Secretary of State John Hay in 1900: "American policy will bring about permanent peace and safety to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity . . . and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire." (Madgic, p. 373)

Facts and Quotes on U.S. Involvement in Panama

Since the Spanish-American War, the United States had had great interest in building and controlling a canal across Central America. Such a waterway would allow warships to pass between the Atlantic and Pacific without circling South America, making it easier to defend the recent acquisitions of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines. It would also benefit the growing trade with Asia. The French were the first to attempt to build a canal across Panama, but the attempt ended in disaster when malaria killed many workers and financial problems made completion impossible.

The route through Panama, then part of Colombia, was judged to be the shortest and most effective. A treaty that was highly favorable to the United States was negotiated with a Colombian official in which the United States would lease a 6-mile-wide zone in return for \$10 million and an annual payment of \$250,000 to Colombia. The Colombian senate unanimously rejected the treaty. Regarding Panama as one of Colombia's most valuable natural assets, they feared losing control of the region. President Theodore Roosevelt was infuriated at the setback.

The Panamanians, who had rebelled numerous times against Colombia, looked forward to the prosperity they felt was sure to follow the construction of the canal. They were therefore ripe for another revolt, since the rejection of the treaty meant that the United States would turn to an alternative location for the canal. The Panama revolution occurred in November 1903. The owner of the Panama Canal Company, who was also disturbed at the potential loss of his business, worked with the Panama revolutionists to raise an army. Colombian troops were gathered to crush the uprising, but American naval forces would not let them cross the isthmus. Panama won its independence easily, and an agreement was signed allowing the United States to build a canal.

The United States was not well regarded by European and Latin American powers after Roosevelt's intervention in Colombia's region of Panama. The incident marked a decline in relations with other Latin American countries who feared the power of the United States. Teddy Roosevelt defended himself against all charges of wrongdoing in Panama; however, he failed to point out that a canal route through Nicaragua was just as feasible and was available without revolution. This option, however, would have involved a time delay, and Teddy Roosevelt wanted a canal decision on his record before the presidential election of 1904.

The canal was opened in 1914 after a tremendous undertaking employing up to 400,000 men during the construction. As part of the construction, brush had to be cleared and swamps drained to wipe out breeding grounds for malaria and yellow fever. The United States benefited most from the Panama Canal, although the new sea route helped the trade of many nations.

Roosevelt remained unashamed of the part America played in overthrowing Colombian rule in Panama, sometimes referred to as the "rape" of Panama. However, in 1921, after his death, the United States signed a treaty with Colombia that expressed regret on the part of the United States. The United States provided money to Colombia as payment for Panama, thus admitting to its dubious role in acquiring the canal.

Quote by Admiral Alfred T. Mahan: "A powerful Navy is essential to protect trade routes. The United States government should build a canal across Central America. The canal will allow American ships to pass quickly between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans." (Keen and Wasserman, p.402)

Quote by Rufino Blanco-Fombona, a leading intellectual, of Venezuela: Latin American nations were physically unable to prevent United States intervention, and sought to find recourse against "Yankee imperialism" by appealing to world opinion and international law. (Burns, p. 147)

Quote by Theodore Roosevelt: His policy in Latin America was to "speak softly but carry a big stick." (Barck, p. 98)

Quote by Theodore Roosevelt: I do not see why we should dig the canal if we are not to fortify it so as to insure its being used for ourselves and against our foes..." (Beale, p. 103)

Quote by President Theodore Roosevelt: "If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing . . . in the Western Hemisphere . . . may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power." (Barck, p. 103)