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Panama Canal and the Roosevelt Corollary

Part 1 – The Panama Canal

The Panama Canal was begun by the French builders of the Suez Canal in 1881, though the project quickly faltered primarily due to technological limitations and the impact of tropical diseases, most notably malaria. By 1904, the United States, viewing the canal as crucial for economic well being, was ready to take up construction but balked at the price that Columbia, which controlled the canal site, demanded for construction to continue. Rather than acquiesce to Columbia's demands, the United States staged an independence movement in the Columbian state of Panama. Furthermore, the United States stationed naval gunboats off the coast to discourage Columbian interference. The independent nation of Panama quickly agreed to allow the United States to build the canal. By 1904, technological innovations eased construction difficulties for the Americans. The introduction of quinine limited the deaths caused by malaria and improvements in lock technology allowed engineers to overcome the elevation changes that bedeviled the French. When the Panama Canal was completed in 1914, it was regarded as a wonder of the modern world. Twice as long as the Suez Canal in Egypt, the Panama Canal was, at 51 miles, the largest artificial body of water in the world. The canal required over 30 years of intermittent construction and approximately 80,000 laborers, of which an estimated 30,000 died mostly from malaria. Construction of the canal cost the United States approximately \$352 million dollars. By utilizing the canal, a ship sailing from San Francisco to New York could save nearly 8,000 miles.

From http://www.tahg.org/module_display.php?mod_id=93&review=yes



Above: President Theodore Roosevelt at the controls of a steam shovel at the canal site.



Above: The construction of the Panama Canal.

Photo Credits: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0f/Roosevelt_and_the_Canal.JPG
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/Panama_Canal_under_construction,_1907.jpg

1. How does the United States get the land for the Panama Canal? Describe.
2. What were some of the problems Americans had in building the canal? How did they overcome them?

3. Describe at least five characteristics of the completed canal.

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Part 2 – Excerpt from the Roosevelt Corollary (1904)

It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any projects as regards the other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. 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, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and 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 or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.* If every country washed by the Caribbean Sea would show the progress in stable and just civilization which with the aid of the Platt Amendment Cuba has shown since our troops left the island, and which so many of the republics in both Americas are constantly and brilliantly showing, all question of interference by this Nation with their affairs would be at an end. Our interests and those of our southern neighbors are in reality identical. They have great natural riches, and if within their borders the reign of law and justice obtains, prosperity is sure to come to them. While they thus obey the primary laws of civilized society they may rest assured that they would be treated by us in a spirit of cordial and helpful sympathy. *We would interfere with them only in the last resort, and then only if it became evident that their inability or unwillingness to do justice at home and abroad had violated the rights of the United States or had invited foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations.* It is a mere truism to say that every nation, whether in America or anywhere else, which desires to maintain its freedom, its independence, must ultimately realize that the right of such independence cannot be separated from the responsibility of making good use of it.

Source: <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=56>

4. Does the United States intend to take additional colonies in Latin America? Cite the excerpt as your evidence.

5. What is the United States' goal in the Western Hemisphere? What is the United States willing to do to achieve that goal?

6. Why does the United States feel this goal is just?

7. When will the United States get involved in the affairs of its neighbors?

Part 3 – Summarization

Using what you've learned from this lesson, write a paragraph using the following prompt:

Theodore Roosevelt's actions in Latin America were controversial. Why? How did Americans feel about Roosevelt's actions? How did Latin American countries feel about his actions?