

Modern America

The United States today is different from the way it was during its early history. One reason is because of great advances in technology. Globalization has also increased. We find it normal to buy things “Made in China,” travel to other countries, and communicate with people anywhere in the world. Another important difference between America today and early America is that today’s America is an “international police power” fighting a continual global “war on terror.” In this last segment of the course, we will look at how the world became “America-centric,” and America has had to fight many wars around the world.

I. From the Monroe Doctrine to WWI

A. Eighty Years of the Monroe Doctrine

1. From 1823 to 1903, Americans tried to follow the Monroe Doctrine in their relationships with other countries.
2. The Monroe Doctrine said that European countries should not try to re-colonize the Americas, and that America and Europe should not meddle in each other's affairs.

B. The Spanish American War (1898)

1. In 1895, Cuba rebelled against Spain, which had ruled over the island ever since the time of Columbus.
2. Some Americans believed that the United States should help Cuba become independent, because the Monroe Doctrine said America and Europe should stay separate.
3. Others were upset with how brutally the Spanish were treating the Cuban rebels.
4. In 1898, the United States sent a battleship called the USS Maine to protect Americans in Cuba, and it was destroyed by Spain.
5. America then declared war on Spain, and Cuba did become independent.
6. An unexpected result of the war was that the United States expelled Spain from the Philippines, Spanish colonies in Asia.
7. Since the Philipinos were not ready to form their own government, the United States decided to help them become independent as well.

C. The Panama Canal

1. Now that America was helping governments in the Caribbean and in Asia – it was considered desirable to be able to move the American navy from the Atlantic to the Pacific without having to circumnavigate South America.
2. President Theodore Roosevelt hoped to be able to build a canal across the isthmus of Panama, but it was part of Colombia, and the Colombian government did not want to make a deal with him.
3. President Roosevelt explained that he had a new way of deciding how America should treat other countries. The United States was now going to be an “international police power.”
4. Since Colombia would not act as Roosevelt wished, he supported a rebellion of the province of Panama against Colombia.
5. Then the new country of Panama allowed the US to build a canal.

II. Woodrow Wilson and America's Entry Into WWI

A. American Neutrality in a European War (1914-1917)

1. In 1914, when Europe fell into its most terrible war yet, Americans were at first relieved not to be involved. President Woodrow Wilson explained that this latest war was one "with which we have nothing to do, whose causes cannot touch us."
2. In this war, however, the two countries with whom America had the strongest ties (Britain and France) were on the same side, and Americans hoped that this side would win.
3. Americans increased their trade with their friends and reduced trade with the enemies of those friends (Germany and Austria).
4. Staying neutral became difficult when German submarines started attacking ships sailing around Britain, and 128 Americans were killed when a British ship called the Lusitania was destroyed.

B. America Enters WWI

1. Germany was worried that the United States would eventually enter the war, so it attempted to make an alliance with Mexico, promising to help Mexico reconquer territory it had lost to America in previous wars.
2. When Americans learned of this promise more of them felt like joining in the war against Germany.
3. President Woodrow Wilson also changed his mind. He explained that although American ships had been attacked, he believed America should enter the war for a new reason: "*to make the world safe for democracy.*"