

## **Modern America**

The United States today is different from the way it was during its early history in countless ways. In particular, the pace of technological progress has quickened, resulting in amazing industrial advances that make our lives easier and longer. Globalization has also increased. We are now completely accustomed to buying things “Made in China,” traveling to other countries, and communicating regularly with people anywhere in the world. For America in particular the past hundred years have also resulted in a crucial shift in the country’s relationship to the world. Early America was focussed on independence, and remained apart from the wars of others. 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.”

### **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 warned European countries that because the American government was tasked with protecting the rights of Americans that Europe 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 that Europe and the Americas 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 at harbor.
5. Spain was blamed, and America declared war on Spain.
6. The American military was able to easily defeat Spain, which surprised many people in the world. Nobody realized that the United States had become such a powerful country that it could defeat a major European power.
7. As a result of the war Cuba did become independent.
8. An unexpected result of the war was that the United States expelled Spain from the Philippines, Spanish colonial islands in Asia.
9. 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 supporting the independence of two former Spanish colonies – one in the Caribbean and one 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. In 1903, the province of Panama rebelled against Colombia, and President Roosevelt decided to help it become independent.
4. The United States signed the Hay-Bunau Varilla Treaty with the newly independent country of Panama to create a canal.
5. 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.”

## **II. Woodrow Wilson and America's Entry Into WWI**

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

1. There were now two competing ideas for how America should act in the world: the Monroe Doctrine and the “international police power” idea of Theodore Roosevelt.
2. 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." It seemed that America would stay neutral.
3. 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.
4. Americans increased their trade with their friends and reduced trade with the enemies of those friends (Germany and Austria).
5. 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. This promise was delivered in a secret telegram, but the telegram was discovered by the British and passed on the United States. When Americans learned of it, more of them felt like joining in the war against Germany.
3. President Woodrow Wilson apparently also changed his mind at this point. He now explained that although American ships had been attacked, he believed America should enter the war for a wider purpose, “*to make the world safe for democracy.*” In support of this idea, America would now act as an international police power in Europe for the first time. In entered WWI in 1917.