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## Building US Hegemony in the Caribbean

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US interest in the Caribbean dates to the era of the American Revolution. Despite various imperial restrictions designed to ensure that most colonial revenues returned to Britain, North American prosperity depended heavily on trade with the islands. This commerce continued after American independence, since monocrop agriculture kept the islands' plantation economies dependent on imports. British and French activity west of the Appalachians and the Spanish presence in Florida limited opportunities for territorial expansion of the fledgling United States and increased its interest in the Caribbean and other regions controlled by European powers. US policy makers speculated about seizing Cuba or the wealthy French colony of Saint-Domingue (after 1804, Haiti). When the slaves in the latter colony rebelled, the Americans supplied the rebels with arms in the unrealized hope that their revolt would drive France from the area. With Saint-Domingue lost, Americans sought the vast Louisiana territory.

President James Monroe's December 2, 1823, message to Con-

gress outlining the Monroe Doctrine is a foundational statement of US policy toward the Americas. Monroe issued his statement well after European powers ceased to threaten US survival, however, and thus it represented a consequence rather than a cause of US intentions. When revolutions erupted in Latin America after 1810, the United States pursued neutrality, hoping to eventually gain territory at Spain's expense. Britain also remained neutral because it had important commerce in the Americas to protect, and it persuaded France to refrain from supporting Spain. While the British navy easily could have demolished US pretensions in the Americas in the 1820s, the crown allowed its former possession to pull its chestnuts out of the fire. These combined actions contributed to the loss of most of Spain's empire. The Monroe Doctrine thus seconded, rather than determined, a policy of noninterference by extrahemispheric powers. In later years, however, the United States became strong enough to invoke the doctrine regardless of other nations' aims, and to enforce it.

The United States reached its current continental boundaries by 1898 and began to rival Britain and Germany in industrial output. It competed in the Caribbean to supplant former British, French, and Spanish agricultural and commercial interests. Finance and technology proved important partners as US-financed railroads moved sugar and fruit to ports, especially in Cuba. Certain US opinion makers, most notably Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, campaigned for the development of a larger fleet to ensure the security of national interests abroad, allow the United States to dominate the Caribbean and Central American regions, and make its navy competitive with British and German counterparts in the Pacific. Mahan's widely consulted book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1600–1783* (1892) described the eminence that had accrued to nations with strong navies. Such navalists as Mahan and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt also advocated building a canal through the Central American isthmus to radically reduce shipping time and stimulate Asian trade. As European nations increasingly turned their attention to colonial possessions in Africa and Asia, they allowed the United States to patrol the Caribbean and secure their interests for them. Washington officials coupled this informal control over the region with a commitment to a free-trade policy referred to as the Open Door.

### The Impact of the Spanish-American War

The destruction of the USS *Maine* in the Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, was the ostensible cause of the Spanish-American War. Decades later, the explosion that wrecked the ship was determined to have resulted from faulty storage of combustibles, but at the time, Americans were convinced that Spain had blown it up in retaliation for US sympathies with rebelling Cuban nationalists. Navalist advice seemed to have paid off when, after declaring war on Spain, the US Navy effectively blockaded



Havana. In the Pacific, Commodore George Dewey neutralized the Spanish army in the Philippines and seized the island of Guam and the island kingdom of Hawaii, which US sugar interests already dominated. The Caribbean theater of the Spanish-American War resolved itself in only three months with the defeat of the Spanish army. Spain signed a treaty on December 10, 1898, placing Cuba and Puerto Rico under US military control. The rapid victory strengthened the view held by many Americans that war could accelerate political transformation and instill the American way of life even in nations with radically different cultures.

Prevalent thinking about race and gender also quickened the pace of US hegemony in the Caribbean. The belief in the inherent savagery and inferiority of non-European peoples justified the wars and punitive expeditions carried out against them. In the United States lynch law, the Plains Wars against Native Americans, and discrimination against Asian immigrants illustrated the nature of a society obsessed with efforts to preserve racial hierarchy through such practices as eugenics and segregation. Social Darwinism, the application of evolutionary ideas to society, gave a scientific veneer to racial bias and helped legitimize it.

The visual culture of the popular press stimulated the American public's support for Cuban independence. Cartoonists frequently depicted Cuba as an innocent and beautiful female victim of Spanish rapacity in need of rescue by American men (figure 28.1). The image was intended not only to arouse sympathy but also to point out

Figure 28.1 Cartoon image of Cuba as the lovely mestiza in distress, awaiting rescue by the United States. Drawing by Louis Dalrymple (1898). Source: Art Resource, NY.

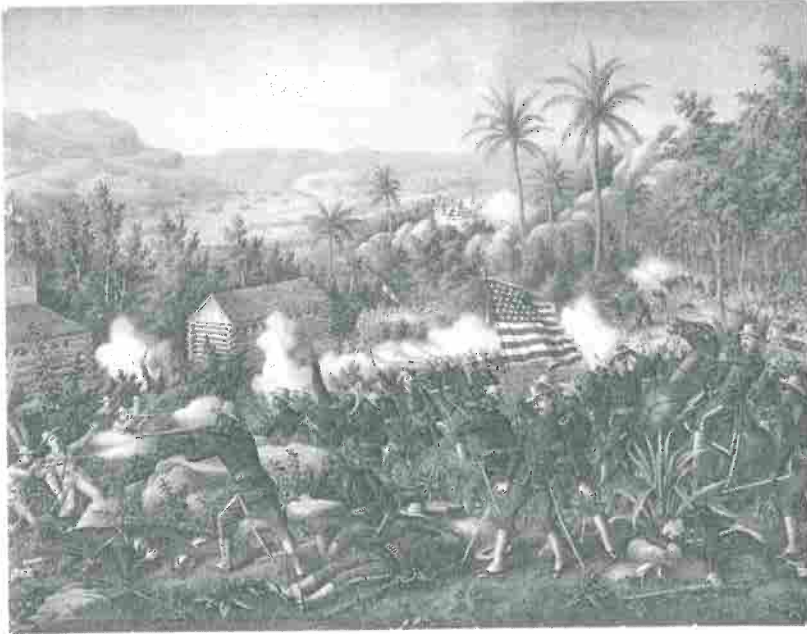


Figure 28.2 Despite Theodore Roosevelt's racial attitudes, his Rough Riders were aided by African American troops in their battle against the Spanish in Cuba. Print (ca. 1898). Source: Art Resource, NY.

the disparate power relations between the hapless and dependent sufferer and her valiant would-be saviors. The trope of the damsel in distress had a venerable lineage in US thought: the female captivity narrative dated back to 17th-century Indian wars. The foil of the distraught Cuban maiden in the popular graphic press was the stalwart American who exemplified the cult of virility as espoused by Roosevelt. Worried about the racial impact of immigration on the national character and the decline of the old Anglo-Saxon stock, Roosevelt encouraged whites to

have more children and white men to increase their vitality through physical culture and cultivation of manly military virtues. Roosevelt followed up on his convictions, suspending his cabinet service to lead a regiment, known as the Rough Riders, in the Spanish-American War. White supremacy, then, helped rationalize US ascendancy over the Caribbean, a region whose peoples often appeared in illustrations as wayward children or savages and who, as Roosevelt notoriously said, deserved spanking when they misbehaved. Armed with supremacist beliefs, and shored up by the evidence of European victories over nonwhite peoples in Africa and Asia, Americans premised their authority on ideological as well as political foundations.

At the turn of the 20th century, racism was not limited to the great powers. The legacy of slavery also influenced opinion and social practice in Latin America and the Caribbean. Societies in the Americas retained substantial ambivalence about their mixed-race heritage as well as considerable adulation of the customs, mores, and traits of the empires that had colonized them. Panama, for example, denied citizenship to persons of African descent, wishing to maintain an identity as a white nation. As Dominican society did not readily acknowledge its own African heritage, preferring to attribute dark skin to Amerindian ancestry, Haitian immigrants and their offspring encountered racial discrimination. In Haiti, the prosperous classes modeled themselves on the French bourgeoisie. Countries that rejected black immigrants extended a welcome to Europeans in the hopes of modernizing and "improving" the national phenotype. While Caribbean racism did not share the singular violence and rigidity of the North American variant, its collusion with it abetted the growing US mastery of the region.

Another practice that facilitated and increased the power and influence of Europeans and North Americans derived from the circumstances of coups d'état and revolutions. Severe social inequality in many Caribbean countries all but guaranteed that episodes of civil violence would entail attacks on private property. The business community, both foreign and native-born, attempted to shield itself through appeals to metropolitan powers for protection. A French trader in trouble, for example, might seek the assistance of the French consul, who in turn might request a visit from a French gunboat. In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, some indigenous merchants sought foreign citizenship to receive the advantages enjoyed by expatriates. The long-term result was the devaluation of local nationalities and the privileging of foreign identities that conveyed security, prosperity, and status.

The same reasoning that justified US control could also support arguments against it. Not all Americans wanted the United States to keep the territories it had annexed during the war with Spain, or seek other colonies populated by people of color. Some, like author Mark Twain, objected to imperialism on ethical and moral grounds, as it deprived subject nations of the liberties that Americans assumed for themselves. Some objected to the vociferous patriotism, called jingoism, that marked expansionist rhetoric. A strand of pacifism underlay the anti-imperialism of some critics. Others did not believe that people of radically different race and culture could or should assimilate into American life.

Bowing to these reservations in the run-up to war with Spain, Congress in April 1898 adopted the Teller Resolution, a statement disavowing any intent to make Cuba a colony of the United States. While Cuba remained technically sovereign, the United States expanded its empire between 1898 and 1934 while simultaneously maintaining the fiction that it was not a colonial power. Speaking of US rule as guardianship over subjects too politically immature for self-government held out

the promise that such stewardship would have a foreseeable end. This did not differ substantially from the self-serving oratory of other colonial powers, which US advocates of intervention overlaid with a view of the United States as an exception to the behaviors that guided other nations. They evoked divine providence to explain in mystic terms why the United States was destined for the benevolent domination of inferior peoples.

The United States maintained a protectorate over Cuba from 1898 to 1901, during which time it suppressed nationalist revolts and forced the legislature to adopt laws known in the United States as the Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution. Once finalized by treaty in 1903, the laws stipulated that Cuba could not enter into foreign relations or initiate financial agreements with other powers without express US consent. Cuba gave the United States a right to intervene in its internal affairs and to establish a naval base at Guantanamo Bay. The Platt Amendment governed Cuban-American relations until 1934 and provided the pretext for several armed interventions conducted by US forces.

Military occupation did not solve Cuba's political problems or make it more amenable to US ideas about governance. Puerto Rico, however, provided an early model of the desired relationship. Spain ceded the island as part of the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1898. US military rule ended in 1900, and the Foraker Act of April 2 of that year set in motion the evolution of Puerto Rico's current status. The law created a bicameral Puerto Rican legislature whose upper house would consist of US appointees, most of them Americans. While islanders could vote for members of the lower chamber, the US president would name their governor. Soon thereafter, US sugar interests and local capitalists boosted by free trade began creating large-scale plantations. In spite of spirited efforts by some local leaders to promote independence, US authorities did not face nationalist resistance in Puerto Rico of the same magnitude as in Cuba, and they more easily imposed a colonial structure on Puerto Rican society. Pro-independence activities nevertheless continued both within and outside the constitutional structure the Americans had devised. In 1917, when the United States entered World War I, Congress passed the Jones Act, which bestowed US citizenship on Puerto Ricans, preempting European subversion and undercutting local sentiment for independence. Still, nationalism flourished in Puerto Rico during the 1920s and 1930s under the leadership of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos. The Nationalist Party's challenge to US hegemony was ruthlessly put down and Albizu Campos was jailed in federal prison for the presumptive crime of sedition.

Political unrest in the Philippines proved more difficult to contain. After Admiral Dewey's fleet quickly dispatched the Spanish navy, the US military confronted a full-fledged nationalist uprising. The Philippines provided the methods and metaphors for American counterinsurgency campaigns for years to come. Warfare took

on racist overtones, as the dehumanization of Filipino rebels as "gooks" rationalized the taking of hundreds of thousands of lives. US forces finally crushed native resistance in 1902 and set up government administration on the Puerto Rican model.

The United States also monitored the actions of powers that had not accepted the principle of US hegemony in the Americas. Washington officials suspected that Germany had not abandoned designs on acquiring territory in the region. A diplomatic solution to the problem of German ambition presented itself when Venezuela defaulted on loans to European creditors, who persuaded the governments of Britain, France, and Italy to blockade major ports and shell Venezuelan defenses in December 1902. Venezuela's president, Cipriano Castro, evoked the Monroe Doctrine in appealing for US assistance. The Roosevelt administration did not sympathize with Castro, but saw in the crisis a chance to foil German as well as other European schemes. Secretary of State John Hay took the high road in persuading all powers to accept arbitration of the Venezuelan dispute in the international court at The Hague. In this instance, the United States avoided an active intervention and gained respect for statesmanlike behavior.

#### US Policy in the Caribbean, 1903-12

The United States proved in the war with Spain that it could defend a Central American isthmian canal. Roosevelt became vice president in 1901 and succeeded to the presidency upon the assassination of William McKinley. As president, he seized the opportunity to act on his longstanding desire to initiate a canal project. He understood that some residents of Panama, then part of Colombia, harbored separatist aspirations. Among them were individuals who had invested in the speculative New Panama Canal Company. The Roosevelt administration encouraged the Panamanians to secede. Private parties in the United States, including noted attorney William Nelson Cromwell, helped the insurrectionists obtain aid. US Navy gunboats kept Colombian troops out of Panama while it declared independence on November 4, 1903. Widespread bribery of Colombian forces had ensured the absence of serious fighting, and Washington extended formal recognition of the new republic the following week. The subsequent Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, signed on November 18, granted to the United States in perpetuity a 10-mile strip of land on which it would establish the Canal Zone. In exchange, the United States guaranteed Panama's independence.

Roosevelt justified his actions in Panama in the name of progress and modernization. Canal construction began in May 1904 with labor heavily recruited from the British West Indies. Black workers found themselves worked endlessly, paid little, exploited, and ignored by their consular representatives. By the time the Panama Canal opened in 1914, US authorities had created in the Canal Zone a replica of

racially segregated American life. Canal authorities housed, schooled, and paid employees according to race, with the greatest benefits accruing to white Americans.

Cuba began its precarious independence with the presidency of Tomás Estrada Palma, whose pro-American inclinations outweighed the nationalist credentials he had amassed as a revolutionist. His efforts to retain power when his term ended were met with opposition and political violence. In an action legitimated by the Cuban-American treaty, the United States moved troops to the island on September 29, 1906, to impose calm. For nearly three years an American proconsul, Charles Magoon, ruled a provisional government before restoring control to Cubans. The US Marines returned in 1912 to suppress black Cuban dissidents who were indignant at their growing exclusion from national political life.

Just as civil disorder provided a justification for US military forays in the Caribbean, a debt crisis in the Dominican Republic in 1904 revived US fears that European nations would intervene. Rather than witness Europeans running customs houses and collecting revenues in the region, the Roosevelt administration preferred that the United States serve as the collection agency. In line with the Monroe Doctrine's principle of noninterference, Washington sought and the Dominican government agreed to discharge the Dominican public debt by means of a customs regime. As Roosevelt framed it, the United States had succeeded to "the exercise of an international police power." Political cartoonists seized on the constable image, augmented by another Roosevelt adage: "Walk softly and carry a big stick." The president failed to achieve congressional approval of the arrangement, whose underlying principles—US preemptive action to avoid European interference in case of default or civil unrest—became known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. The customs regime continued for two years under the cover of executive fiat and proved effective at relieving bondholders and protecting foreign property. As a result, in 1907 Congress acquiesced to a treaty that perpetuated it.

Caribbean countries suffered from widespread political unrest and indebtedness during this period. Washington saw the failure to create governments that effectively addressed the region's poverty, social stratification, and economic underdevelopment as a hemispheric security threat. Success in the Spanish-American War had strengthened the notion that prompt military action could resolve specific crises. Sending in the US Navy to repel particular challenges to the Monroe Doctrine, however, provided only a short-term solution. Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, took a longer view of the issue, identifying lack of money as the cause of Caribbean weakness. Good administration and defense capabilities would end civil wars and European intrigues. The resulting peace would put these nations on the road to stable development. Taft encouraged North American banks to extend credit to perennially cash-short republics. This so-called dollar diplomacy did not require much federal initiative. Instead, it enlarged the playing field for the US



banking industry to expand overseas, helped steer countries in the region toward US rather than European sources of capital, and ensured that indebtedness to American interests would check fiscal irresponsibility. Banks considered many Caribbean governments to be risky clients and exacted high rates of interest from them, thus furthering their dependency. In cases where the United States declined to create receiverships or customs regimes, the possibility that it might do so in the event of future default kept debtor governments in line.

Figure 28.3 Cartoon image of Roosevelt's famous adage, "Walk softly and carry a big stick." Drawing (ca. 1904). Source: Library of Congress.

### Wilsonian Gunboat Diplomacy and Military Occupations

Private banks increased their powerful role in Caribbean economies after Woodrow Wilson became president in 1913. Wilson had campaigned as a reformer on domestic issues, but in foreign policy he expanded federal assistance to financial institutions operating overseas, especially the First National City Bank of New York. Wilson deplored revolutionary regime change, and he endorsed his predecessor's belief that only stable constitutional governments, capable of satisfying their creditors, merited support. Deep social fissures and economic and political structures inherited from colonial times and reaffirmed in the present, however, prevented Caribbean states from achieving the conditions that Wilson thought ideal.

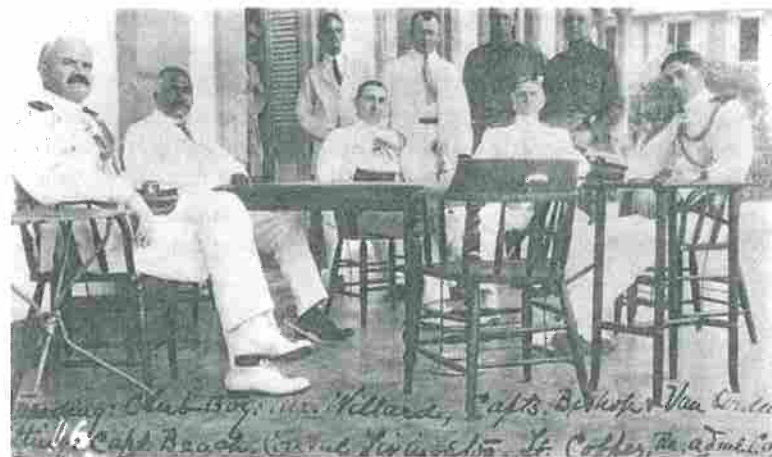
Wilson delineated his policy for Latin America and the Caribbean in a major

address delivered on October 27, 1913. With seeming sympathy, he praised the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and compared the experience of the Latin American republics to that of the United States in its infancy. All had known colonial oppression and had revolted against it. The Americas had inherited a common resentment of encroachment by European powers, which, he asserted, continued their practices of exploitation through draconian loans and political subversion. American nations could resist them through alliances with the United States, which was powerful enough to repel both financial opportunists and military aggression. Wilson's speech did not refer to the many incidents in which the United States itself had meddled in the internal affairs of other republics or condoned harsh lending practices by US banks. During the Taft years alone, the United States had helped overthrow Nicaragua's president, established a customs receivership in Honduras, supported an extortionate banking contract in Haiti, sent troops to respond to fears of a black Cuban insurrection, and obstructed business between Mexico and Japan. In spite of Wilson's criticisms of dollar diplomacy, his administration continued it. Changing world conditions, however, demanded some modifications.

Europe plunged into war in August 1914. The United States maintained neutrality until April 1917, but public sympathies lay strongly with Britain and France in their struggle against Germany and other members of the Central Powers alliance. Conflict in the Atlantic seaways and disruption of transatlantic trade meant that fighting could spill over into the Caribbean, threatening US control and providing opportunities for Europeans to establish beachheads. The American purchase of the Danish Virgin Islands in 1917 preempted their possible seizure by Germany.

Washington leaders became increasingly concerned about preventing regional insurgencies and depriving extrahemispheric powers of a foothold in troubled countries. Rather than allow the British or Germans to land marines to protect their nationals, the United States assumed this responsibility. In Haiti, where a cycle of coups and countercoups had undermined civil society and deprived the government of revenues needed for development, the US State Department tried to coax Port-au-Prince into yielding control of customs revenues to American administrators. In July 1914, US Marines armed with sticks physically removed funds from the Haitian central bank and conveyed them to the United States on a warship. Such draconian efforts failed to stem Haiti's political crisis, which climaxed with the assassination of its president in January 1915. This time the Marines returned and remained in Haiti for 20 years.

World war provided the rationale for the military occupation of Haiti and its neighbor, the Dominican Republic, in 1916. In Haiti, the Marines immediately set out to defeat the peasant armies called *cacos* and to co-opt their leaders. US leaders held that deprivation caused Caribbean unrest, and that unemployment and landlessness motivated peasant enlistment in private armies. Military officers accord-



ingly pledged jobs to guerrillas who agreed to disarm. They promised that labor on the US-owned and financed National Railroad and employment with the proposed rural constabulary would provide prosperity. Several important insurgent leaders accepted a truce on September 29, 1915. Yet the US Marine Corps could not control every remote corner of the rugged country where guerrillas raided foreign-controlled estates and challenged US patrols. Responding to the likelihood of renewed *caco* activity, the Marines launched punitive expeditions against bandits in the countryside, claiming thousands of Haitian lives. In the cities and towns, they enforced curfews, censored the press, and introduced American-style racial segregation in public places.

The Marine Corps accepted no soldiers of color during this era. The Wilson administration sent political appointees with mediocre qualifications to staff Haitian ministries and newly conceived bureaucracies at Haitian expense. Key officers and "experts" hailed from the US South or held racist opinions—a major source of friction with Haitians. They were chosen on the assumption that they knew how to handle "Negroes." The Haitian legislature, at gunpoint, elected a president who followed US orders. In February 1916, the US Senate consented to a treaty that permitted American control over Haitian finances and authorized training of a native guard, the Gendarmerie d'Haïti. Brute force kept Haiti relatively quiescent for the first three years of the occupation, but peasant resistance revived in 1919 when US authorities forced rural Haitians to build roads, paying and housing them poorly,

Figure 28.4 The US consul at Cap-Haïtien, an African American, surrounded by white officers of the US Navy. Photograph (1915). Source: Naval Historical Center.

often removing them far from their homes and making it impossible for them to tend their farms. Violence perpetrated by the Marines and forced labor so resembled slavery that both city and countryside supported the *caco* war of 1919–20.

The insurrection took place primarily in north and central Haiti, and while the most famous leader, Charlemagne Peralte, was from the privileged class, most of the fighters came from rural communities. Urban opposition took on a different character. Affluent individuals who formerly had disparaged their own Caribbean roots now experienced foreign invasion, in author Léon Laleau's words, as a "shock." Haiti was the first Latin American republic to declare independence and throw off the yoke of slavery as well as that of colonialism. Its history of internal strife had created the bond that united Haitians in defense of national sovereignty. While some members of the bourgeoisie furtively financed the rural war, others chose constitutional means of protest. They reached out for support to anti-imperialists and civil liberties groups in the United States, forming the Union Patriotique, an organization modeled on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The embrace of national unity and the rejection of racism and imperialism contributed to a new literature in which writers probed the history and culture of their own countries. Works included Jean Price-Mars's *La vocation de l'élite* (The Vocation of the Elite, 1919) and Laleau's *Le choc* (1932). These texts appeared just as the worldwide "Negro renaissance" of the 1920s began taking shape and fed the stream of what would later be termed *négritude* literature, produced in the Americas by such Francophone Caribbean authors as the Haitians Jacques Roumain, Normil Sylvain, and Carl Brouard; the Martinican Aimé Césaire; and the Guadeloupian Léon Damas.

Continuing fiscal disputes and Washington's fears that the Dominican Republic would fall prey to European wartime machinations led to the occupation of the Dominican Republic by US troops in 1916–24. During this period, the US government made infrastructural improvements that facilitated the expansion of modern cane plantations, but the majority of Dominicans remained poor, including those who had lost their land to sugar and subsequently joined the guerrilla movement. Corporations brought in Haitian immigrants to work the land. Their slavery-scale wages and harsh treatment underwrote the exports that enriched US companies. The Marines treated Dominicans with the same bigotry, brutality, and highhandedness they were practicing in Haiti. The Dominican response also resembled that of Haiti: urban professionals established a protest organization, the Unión Nacional Dominicana, while eastern peasants engaged in armed struggle. Insurgents challenged US hegemony in a war that engulfed the eastern part of the country in 1917. Haitian and Dominican insurgents fought together against the Americans on the frontier between the two countries. The Americans found themselves in a classic guerrilla war in which there were few victories and the enemy successfully recruited rural

communities to its cause. A 1922 ceasefire disarmed the Dominican rebels in exchange for pardons.

The Haitian and Dominican experiences were not unique. The US Marines returned to Cuba in 1917 and occupied it until 1922. American investors' considerable interest in the sugar fields joined Washington's attention to hemispheric security in wartime. US officials also faced increasing radicalism in the region, precipitated by World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. Huge fortunes were made in sugar from this period through the 1920s. The "Dance of the Millions," as the boom and subsequent bust were called, attracted thousands of immigrant workers, but as in the colonial era, the wealth thus generated benefited few Cubans.

In Honduras, the US Marine Corps guarded banana plantations belonging to US firms. The United States also sent Marines to Nicaragua in 1912 to support a conservative regime. They remained there until 1925 and returned in 1927. Nicaraguans did not view these interventions passively. Augusto César Sandino was one of the most determined opponents of US control, and his resistance inspired subsequent generations of Nicaraguans for whom the term Sandinista connoted nationalist authenticity and power. The figure of the rebel appears frequently during this period in the greater Caribbean and Central American region, and it includes the Mexican soldier Pancho Villa, who skirmished on the border with US military authorities during World War I. Nations under US rule understood that their struggles encompassed the region. The experience of one individual exemplified an emerging international critique of imperialism. Gregorio Urbano Gilbert, although among those who received amnesty in the Dominican Republic in 1922, continued to reject the status quo of American domination and went into exile in Cuba. Urbano Gilbert expressed solidarity with Puerto Rican advocates of independence and in 1928 traveled to Nicaragua to fight with Sandino.

### A New Model of Control

The ideological rationale of white supremacy played a major role in US interventions in the Caribbean. Another powerful set of beliefs also underwrote Washington's policies. Many American leaders subscribed to an almost religious faith in modernization and in the power of technology to generate social and political change. This thinking stemmed from the contemporaneous domestic reform impulse in the United States. The first two decades of the 20th century formed part of what US historians call the Progressive Era. Activists repelled by rampant corruption in government, urban decay, low standards of education, and unregulated business sought to institute managerial standards and professionalism in politics and corporate behavior. President Wilson achieved electoral success by endorsing this agenda. The transfer of "progressive" ideas to the Caribbean entailed eradi-

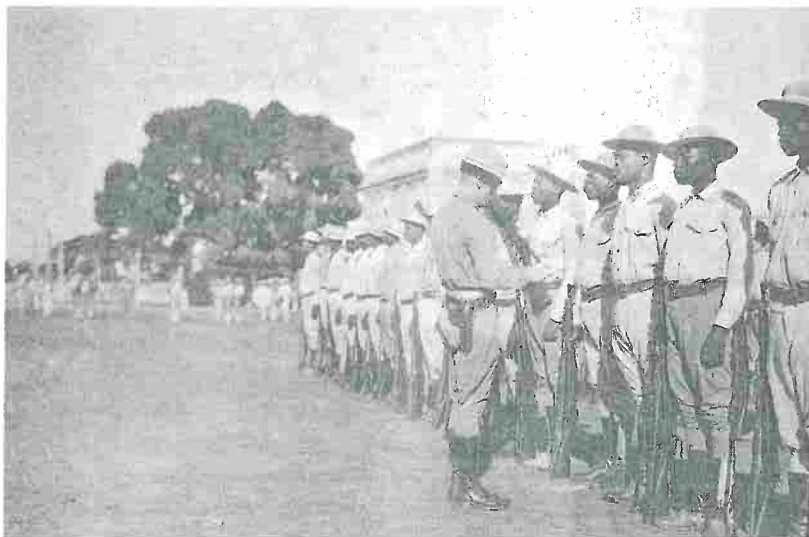


Figure 28.5 US officer inspecting Haitian constabulary. Photograph (ca. 1920). Source: Marine Corps History Division.

cating what US administrators perceived as the inefficiency, fraud, and backwardness that had retarded the area's development. They pinpointed one source of trouble in the public and private armies that in many countries had been a stepping-stone to power and a cause of instability. US planners believed that these armies should be disbanded and replaced by wholly professional police and national defense forces which, as the

US military putatively did, would remain uninvolved in politics and subservient to civil authority. Military officers from the United States accordingly began to train such units. The Gendarmerie d'Haiti, later called the Garde d'Haiti, and the Guardia Nacional of the Dominican Republic and of Nicaragua, were products of the conviction that the United States could export political culture to nations with different values and traditions.

After the Allied victory in World War I, the United States emerged as the world's premier military power. Nationalists in the Caribbean and Central America nevertheless continued to resist the "protectorates" exercised over their countries. The *cacos* and *gavilleros*, and clamor from US anti-imperialists, forced Warren G. Harding's administration to modify the political structure of these regimes. Congressional hearings on Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1921 and 1922 led to modest reforms. By the end of the 1920s, pressures intensified to replace Americans in the civil service and military of the occupied countries with indigenous people. The

onset of global economic depression in the late 1920s made the occupations increasingly expensive, even when impoverished host countries shouldered much of the administrative cost.

Definitive changes occurred after the Cuban Revolution of 1933. In 1924, Gerardo Machado had won the presidency as an anti-American advocate of reform, but had enacted few positive changes; he held onto repressive power until ousted in 1933. Rejecting Machado's US-endorsed successor, Cubans rallied around the candidacy of Ramon Grau San Martín in September 1933. The power behind the new president's throne was an army sergeant, Fulgencio Batista. Washington proved hostile to the nationalist Grau San Martín and, with the connivance of Batista, forced his resignation in 1934. The United States had performed an about-face. In spite of its heralded opposition to military involvement in politics, it had conspired with a common soldier to effect regime change.

As the Depression worsened, President Franklin D. Roosevelt elaborated a policy initially sketched by his predecessor, Herbert Hoover. The Good Neighbor Policy, officially unveiled in Roosevelt's March 4, 1933, inaugural address, foreswore punitive expeditions, interventions, and occupations in the Americas. Congress repealed the Platt Amendment in 1934, and the Marines left Haiti the same year. The United States nevertheless retained its claim to regional hegemony, including continuing control over some nations' customs revenues. Yet indigenous people would increasingly do the work of securing American interests themselves, as US expatriates yielded civil service and military posts to locals. Caribbean defense forces, trained by US officers, were the chosen instruments. In Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, strongmen emerged from the ranks of the military to assume leadership or wield power behind the scenes. In Cuba it was Batista; in the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo; and in Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza. These men soon established ruthless dictatorships. In Haiti, the powerful Major Armand Durcé began reconverting the Garde d'Haiti into the conventional army the Americans had earlier dismantled. Political repression dissolved Progressive Era hopes that armed forces would abstain from politics, as Caribbean aspirations for democracy and prosperity were postponed.

### Conclusion

American opinion leaders and policy makers between 1898 and 1934 often spoke as if the United States had received special dispensation to impose its decisions on Caribbean nations. Some pointed to divine providence, and others to special characteristics that they felt made the United States an exception to the patterns of political behavior that governed other great powers. In the final analysis, however, US dominance derived from a combination of fortuitous circumstances, none of



them mystical or resistant to factual explanation. In the 19th century, the United States had synchronized its policies with Britain, whose naval power—rather than American force—had restrained the New World ambitions of continental European powers. Widespread ideological acceptance of both white supremacy and modernization not only by the technologically advanced nations, but also by many citizens of the developing states of the Caribbean, also benefited the Americans. An association of whiteness with prestige had roots in prior colonial history, and the identification of whiteness with progress in the 20th century further accentuated it. After 1898, an industrializing United States held its own militarily in the region, largely with the approval of other powers that could now tend their colonies elsewhere and rest assured that the United States would maintain order and mind their interests in the Americas. By the mid-1930s, economic conditions favored the replacement of the US protectorates with indigenous authoritarian regimes that served as subcontractors for these same tasks.

29

## The American Sugar Kingdom, 1898–1934

CÉSAR J. AYALA

Two institutions have characterized, like no others, the history of the Caribbean since the European discovery and conquest: the plantation and slavery. While slavery in the archipelago ended at different points in the 19th century, the plantation endured and even thrived after abolition. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this trend comes from Cuban sugar production. In the early 1890s, less than a decade after the last slaves achieved freedom in Cuba, the island produced the formidable and unprecedented amount of one million tons of sugar per year.

By the time the United States occupied Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898, the Cuban sugar industry had been almost totally destroyed by insurgents seeking independence from Spain, but it quickly recovered as Cuban sugar received favorable tariff preference in the US market. In 1905, the United States also placed the Dominican Republic—the third country of the Spanish Caribbean—within its sphere of influence through a “customs receivership,” and from 1916 to 1924 its troops occupied the country. The specific political mecha-