

# TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of  
American Public Life  
from 1870 to 1920

By  
**R. F. PETTIGREW**  
Formerly United States Senator  
from South Dakota



Printed by THE ACADEMY PRESS  
112 Fourth Avenue, New York City

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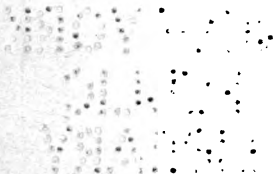
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Published January 1, 1922.



## XXV. IMPERIALISM AT WORK

The story of our criminal aggression in the Philippines makes bad reading for the liberty-loving American, but it is not the only shameful page in American imperial history—far from it. The United States has been following the course of empire for many a year. Since the days when the white man first came into contact with the American Indians, the English-speaking people of North America, after the example of their cousins across the water, have been robbing weaker nations of their property and calling it civilization.

Our first aggressive war after the Revolution, which made us a nation, was the war in 1846 with Mexico. We invaded Mexico without any provocation and stole from Mexico half her territory and annexed it to the United States. General Grant, in his Memoirs, writes:

“The occupation and annexation of Texas were, from the inception of the movement to its final culmination, to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American slave-holders. Even if the annexation of Texas could be justified, the manner in which the subsequent war was forced upon Mexico could not.” (Vol. 1, p. 33.)

At another point Grant holds that “the war was one of conquest in the interest of an institution.” (Vol. 1, p. 115.) Again he states: “It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory.” (Vol. 1, p. 32.) These are the sentiments of a man who was an officer in the American army that conquered Mexico and who later distinguished himself in the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln, in the House of Representatives, voted against and denounced the war with Mexico as a great wrong. (See his speech in the House of Representatives, January 12, 1848.) Later in the same year, in a letter to J. M. Peck, Washington, May 21, 1848

(Complete Works, N. Y. Century Company, 1894, Vol. 1, pp. 120-122), he writes:

"It is a fact that the United States army, in marching to the Rio Grande, marched into a peaceful Mexican settlement, and frightened the inhabitants away from their homes and their growing crops. It is a fact that Fort Brown, opposite Matamoras, was built by that army within a Mexican cotton field. . . . It is a fact that when the Mexicans captured Captain Thornton and his command they captured them within another Mexican cotton field."

We went into Mexico because we had taken a fancy to some of Mexico's territory. After a war that lasted two years we helped ourselves to nearly nine hundred thousand square miles of land. That was the first great military triumph of the American imperialists.

Our next performance was the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, and this was closely followed by the conquest of the Philippines. This robbery did not inure to the benefit of the laboring people of the United States, but exclusively to the advantage of the exploiting speculators and plunderers.

The Mexican War occurred more than seventy years ago. Between that time and the Spanish War exactly fifty years elapsed without a single act of aggression or a single war of conquest waged by the United States. Those were the years during which the slave oligarchy of the South was replaced by the power of an exploiting plutocracy of the North—the years that saw the rise to power of a new ruling class in the United States. The new rulers were busy with their internal affairs at first. By the time of the Spanish-American War, however, they had found their stride and they have been lengthening it ever since.

We had scarcely reduced the Philippines to subjection when the Roosevelt administration became involved in the taking of Panama, one of the most infamous episodes that ever disgraced American history.

The Republic of Colombia is situated on the north

coast of South America and embraced the whole of the Isthmus of Panama. It has a government modeled after that of the United States, and is composed of several independent states having governors and legislative bodies of their own. The Isthmus of Panama was the State of Panama, one of the states composing this Republic of Colombia.

In 1903, while Roosevelt was President, he negotiated with the French company that held the franchise for the purchase of the then uncompleted canal across the Isthmus and approached the Republic of Colombia with an offer of ten million dollars if they would cede to the United States a strip ten miles wide across the Isthmus. The cession was to grant sovereign rights and thus give the United States exclusive control over the Canal. At the same time this cession would cut the State of Panama in two. Colombia was afraid to deal with us for fear that we, having obtained a foothold at Panama, might take the whole country. She therefore declined to sell the Canal Zone.

Roosevelt thereupon sent out navy and our marines to Colon, which is the port on the Gulf side of the Isthmus of Panama, and secretly notified the government of the State of Panama that, if they would set up a republic and revolt against the Republic of Colombia, he would give them the ten millions of dollars for the canal strip, and would also see that Colombia did not send any troops to suppress their rebellion. The Governor of Panama agreed to this arrangement, and, at the proper time, started a rebellion to set up an independent government.

The Republic of Colombia sent sufficient troops to overthrow and suppress the rebellion, but Roosevelt had instructed the officers in control of the American marines not to allow Colombia to land any troops in Panama or to interfere with what went on there. Pursuant to their instructions, our officers refused to allow the Colombian troops to proceed to the scene of rebel-

lion, but, instead, turned them back and compelled them to return to Colombia.

On November 2, 1903, the Department of State at Washington telegraphed the naval authorities at the Isthmus as follows:

“(a) Keep the transit free and uninterrupted. Should there be a threat of interruption by armed force, occupy the railroad line; prevent the landing of any armed force having hostile intentions, whether the government or insurgent, at Colon, Portobelo, or any other point. Prevent landing if in your judgment it might precipitate a conflict.

“(b) In case of doubt regarding the intentions of any armed force, occupy Ancon Hill and fortify it with artillery.”

About 3:40 P. M. on November 3, 1903, Loomis, Acting Secretary of State, sent the following telegram to the person in charge of the United States consulate at Panama:

“We are informed that there has been an uprising on the Isthmus; keep this department informed of everything without delay.” The Consul of the United States answered on the same day: “The uprising has not occurred yet; it is announced that it will take place this evening. The situation is critical.”\*

Later on the same day (November 3) at about nine o'clock, Loomis sent the following telegram to the United States consulate at Panama: “Troops which landed from Cartagena must not continue to Panama.”

At 10:30 the same day, another telegram was sent to the same official: “If the cablegram to the Nashville (one of the war vessels then at Panama) has not been delivered, inform her captain immediately that he must prevent the government troops from continuing on to

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\* This correspondence will be found in House Document 8, 58th Congress, 1st Session, which contains the official correspondence connected with the Panama Revolution of 1903.

Panama or from assuming an attitude which might result in bloodshed."

On the same day, November 3, the following telegram was sent to the Secretary of the Navy by the commander of one of the war vessels stationed at Colon:

"I acknowledge receipt of your telegram of November 2 (above referred to). Before receiving it, there were landed here this morning by the Colombian government about four hundred from Cartagena. There is no revolution on the Isthmus, nor any disturbance. It is possible that the movement to proclaim independence may take place in Panama this evening."

At about 10 o'clock P. M. of the same day, the Department of State at Washington received from the Vice-Consul of the United States in Panama the following telegram: "The revolt took place this evening at six; there has been no bloodshed. The government will be organized this evening and will be composed of three consuls and a cabinet. It is believed that a similar movement will take place in Colon."

On the same day General Tovar arrived at Colon with a battalion of sharpshooters from the Colombian army, a force more than adequate to handle the uprising on the Isthmus.

On the following day, November 4, Hubbard, commander of one of our war vessels at Colon, sent the Secretary of the Navy the following dispatch: "Government troops (Colombian) now at Colon. I have prohibited the movement of troops in either direction. There has been no interruption of transit yet. I shall make every effort to preserve peace and order."

On November 6, the Secretary of State at Washington, telegraphed to the Vice-Consul in Panama in the following terms: "The people of Panama by an apparently unanimous movement have severed their political bonds with the Republic of Colombia and have assumed their independence. As soon as you are convinced that a de facto government, republican in form and without

substantial opposition on the part of its own people, has been established on the Isthmus of Panama, you will enter into relations with it as the responsible government of the territory."

Here, then, was a rebellion by one state against a sister republic—a rebellion which we helped to organize, a rebellion which was assisted by our troops and navy, which were sent in advance to help make the rebellion a success. Is there any more glaring chapter of infamous conduct in the treatment of one nation by another than this proceeding on the part of the United States? I know of nothing that parallels it in its infamy except the annexation of Texas, the acquisition of Hawaii and of the Philippines.

Let me cite one more illustration of the imperialistic methods employed by the United States in its recent dealings with Latin-America. Central America is a country about four times as large as the state of Ohio, and has a population of a little over five million people. The country is divided into five republics—Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. During Taft's administration the United States intervened during a difficulty between some of the Central American states, in which Nicaragua was involved. The United States thereupon said: "Let us have a conference," and the result was that all of the states of Central America except Nicaragua sent delegates to Costa Rica to attend the conference, the object of which was to make perpetual peace in Central America.

The president of Nicaragua refused to send a delegate because the conference had been called by the United States, and he would not recognize the right of the United States to interfere in Central American affairs. Thereupon the United States sent down troops and drove him out of office and put a puppet in his place. Afterwards a meeting was held in Washington of the Central American states, and Nicaragua participated.

At that meeting a League of Nations was formed of



the Central American republics, and it was agreed to arbitrate all their differences and thus to end war forever. There was to be an international court to decide the international problems of Central America. Carnegie hailed the proposition with delight, and furnished one hundred thousand dollars to build a marble peace building in Costa Rica.

Meanwhile, the puppet we had set up in the place of the duly elected president of Nicaragua began looting the treasury of Nicaragua, and was finally forced to borrow money. The United States Government thereupon notified their puppet that the New York bankers would let him have all the money he wanted.

In 1912 the people of Nicaragua revolted against the government set up by us, and in order to support our man in authority we landed marines in the capital of Nicaragua, and we have kept them there, and our creatures have been ruling there ever since. Nicaragua contracted further debts, until at last they could not meet their interest payments.

In 1916 Nicaragua was very hard up, and we said to her: "Your case is practically hopeless. You cannot pay interest on your debt. The United States may some time want to build a canal up the San Juan River and through Lake Nicaragua to the Pacific Ocean. Give us the San Juan River and the lake, with the privilege of building the canal when we get ready to do it, and give us that splendid bay of Fonesca, and a little island for a naval base, and we will loan you the money to pay your interest and put things on a new basis." The result was that Nicaragua, having a president of our choice, maintained by our blue jackets, said: "Very good. We will give you the right of way and we will sell you the island, and will take the funds to pay the interest on the money we owe you."

Costa Rica claimed a partial right in the San Juan River, which is the boundary between the two nations. We were therefore proposing to purchase from Nicaragua a part of the territory belonging to Costa Rica.

There was a long debate over the subject, and it was finally appealed to the United States during the administration of Grover Cleveland. Cleveland was the judge and gave a clear-cut decision that was just and equitable and satisfactory to all parties.

Another nation now came into the case—San Salvador. The Gulf of Fonesca abuts Nicaragua and it abuts San Salvador. An island in that bay commands the shores of San Salvador, and San Salvador said: "We object to giving away any naval base in Fonesca Bay, even to the United States, because it threatens our coast." So the case came before the court at Costa Rica—before the League of Nations—and was thoroughly considered and a decision rendered, which was against Nicaragua and the United States and in favor of San Salvador and Costa Rica. Yet, Nicaragua, backed by the United States, refused to recognize the decision of the court. The League of Nations, formed to secure perpetual peace, vanished into thin air.

In 1917 the president of Costa Rica was overthrown, and another president took his place. The matter was referred to President Wilson, and he refused to recognize the rebellion which had occurred over the question of an election during which it appears that Timco, the new president, represented the majority of the people. At any rate, the matter was purely a local one. But Wilson said, "I will not recognize him." Thereupon, the Costa Rica Congress met and recognized the administration of the new president; but Wilson still refused, although the new president had been recognized by every Latin-American country except Panama, Nicaragua and Cuba—all three dominated by the President of the United States.

Recently we have purchased the Danish West Indies, which lie on the ocean side of the Caribbean Sea, without asking the consent of the people living there. We have taken over Santo Domingo; we collect the customs of the country; the finest building in the republic is our customs house, built with Dominican money by

Americans and officered by Americans. Haiti, the other half of the island, without any declaration of war by the United States Congress, was seized by President Wilson and is now being administered in every detail by the United States. The excuse given for this action by the Wilson administration was that the Republic of Haiti owed money to the National City Bank of New York. On their account the United States invaded the island, placed it under martial law, suppressed the newspapers, dispersed the legislative assembly, dominated the elections and murdered several thousands of the people.\*

The Declaration of Independence holds that "All men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." I should like to call Jefferson as a witness and have him tell us what he thinks of these disgusting perversions of American foreign policy.

Again and again the United States has fastened its eyes on a desirable piece of territory and then sent its armies to fulfill its territorial ambitions. Again and again the American flag has floated over battlefields where the victors were invaders from the United States, while the men, fighting desperately in defense of their homes, their children and their liberties, were the inhabitants of small, weak, defenseless countries that could not stand before the organized might at the disposal of the great northern empire.

The essence of imperialism is the extension, by armed force, of the rule of one people over another—as we extend our rule over the southwest; over the Philippines; over Haiti and over Nicaragua. Such armed con-

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\* General Barnett placed the number killed by the American forces at 3,250.

quest is recorded among the acts of imperialists in every age. During the past two generations our American imperialists have greatly extended the list.

One annexation leads to another annexation. One act of aggression is followed by a second. The principle of expansion established by Jefferson, and which he considered to be "beyond the Constitution," is acclaimed by Roosevelt with enthusiasm. Meanwhile, Roosevelt, who boasted of the taking of Panama from Colombia, scores "the feeble diplomacy of Jefferson's administration" (*Winning of the West*, Vol. VI, p. 261) and refers to Jefferson and Madison as "peaceful men, quite unfitted to grapple with an enemy who expressed himself through deeds rather than words," and as "two timid, well-meaning statesmen." (*Ibid.* p. 271.) In 1803 the Constitution was still virile and respected. Even a President of the United States hesitated to transgress it. Exactly a century later a President could act as Roosevelt acted in Panama; could consider himself an exemplary American, and could taunt those who had tried to observe the Constitution during an earlier generation with being "peaceful," "timid," and "well-meaning."

Between Jefferson's hesitancy over the purchase of Louisiana in 1803 (a contiguous territory) and Roosevelt's eager seizure of Panama in 1903, there stretched a century that witnessed a slow, but steady shifting from the principles of Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence to the principles of Caesar, Napoleon, McKinley, Roosevelt, Wilson, the Platt Amendment and the Peace Treaty of Versailles.

Since the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 the United States has been speeding away from her old policies; abandoning her old positions and devoting herself to a venture in imperialism that drags her down to the level of the British Empire, the Japanese Empire, the Roman Empire, the great empire of Alexander, or of any other conquering people, past or present.