

## 12.9 Dilemma 4: What Should President Monroe Do to Support the New Latin American Nations?

James Monroe became president in 1817. After the excitement of the War of 1812, he was happy to return the nation to its policy of isolationism. Americans began to turn their attention away from Europe to events happening in their own backyard. From Mexico to the tip of South America, colonial peoples were rising up in revolt against Spain.

**Latin America's Revolutions** In Mexico, the revolt against Spanish rule was inspired by a priest named Miguel Hidalgo. On September 16, 1810, Hidalgo spoke to a crowd of poor Indians in the town of Dolores. "My children," Hidalgo cried, "when will you recover lands stolen from your ancestors three hundred years ago by the hated Spaniards? Down with bad government! Death to the Spaniards!" Hidalgo's speech, remembered today as the "Cry of Dolores," inspired a revolution that lasted ten years. In 1821, Mexico finally won its independence from Spain.

Two other leaders liberated South America. In 1810, a Venezuelan named Simón Bolívar launched a revolution in the north with the cry: "Spaniards! You will receive death at our hands! Americans! You will receive life!" José de San Martín, a revolutionary from Argentina, led the struggle for independence in the south. By the end of 1825, the last Spanish troops had been driven out of South America.

### The New Latin American Nations

Many Americans were excited by what Congressman Clay described as the "glorious spectacle of eighteen millions of people struggling to burst their chains and be free." The British also supported the revolutions, for their own reasons. Spain had not allowed other nations to trade with its colonies. Once freed from Spanish rule, the new Latin American nations were able to open their doors to foreign trade.

Other European leaders were not so pleased. Some even began to talk of helping Spain recover its lost colonies. In 1823, Britain asked the United States to join it in sending a message to these leaders, telling them to leave Latin America alone.

President James Monroe asked former presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison for advice. Should the United States do something to support the new Latin American nations? If so, what?



A Catholic priest, Miguel Hidalgo (lower center) inspired an independence movement in Mexico. In his upraised hand, Hidalgo holds the flames of revolution that spread throughout Latin America in the early 1800s.

**secretary of state:** The head of the State Department, who oversees matters relating to foreign countries. The secretary of state is an important member of the president's cabinet.

**doctrine:** a statement of official government policy, especially in foreign affairs

With the Monroe Doctrine by his side, Uncle Sam puts out his hands in warning to foreign powers to keep their "hands off" the Americas. Even though the Monroe Doctrine is over 180 years old, it still guides American presidents as they make foreign policy decisions.

## 12.10 What Happened: The U.S. Issues the Monroe Doctrine

Both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison liked the idea of joining with Britain to send a warning to the nations of Europe. Jefferson wrote to Monroe, "Our first and fundamental maxim [principle] should be, never entangle ourselves in the broils [fights] of Europe. Our second, never to suffer Europe to meddle with... America, North and South."

President Monroe's **secretary of state**, John Quincy Adams, agreed with Jefferson's principles. But he insisted that "it would be more candid [honest], as well as more dignified," for the United States to speak boldly for itself. Though never a bold man himself, Monroe agreed.

In 1823, President Monroe made a speech to Congress announcing a policy that became known as the Monroe **Doctrine**. Monroe stated that the nations of North and South America were "not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers." The United States, he said, would view efforts by Europeans to take over "any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety."

Europeans denounced Monroe's message as arrogant. "By what right,"

asked a French newspaper, did the United States presume to tell other nations what they could do in "the two Americas"?

Americans, however, cheered Monroe's message. It made them proud to see the United States stand up for the freedom-loving people of Latin America. If Europeans "attempt to control the destinies of South America," boasted a Boston newspaper, "they will find...an eagle in their way."

In the years ahead, the Monroe Doctrine joined isolationism as a basic principle of U.S. foreign policy. The doctrine asserted that the United States would not accept European interference in American affairs. It also contained another, hidden message. By its very boldness, the Monroe Doctrine told the world that the United States was no longer a weak collection of quarreling states. It had become a strong and confident nation, a nation to be respected by the world.



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