

**History 282 US Diplomatic
Discussion Transcript for September 29, 2020
Progressive Diplomacy**

Main Reading: Chapter 9, Herring

Herring's discussion of US diplomacy during the progressive age—at the turn of the twentieth century—produced a number of thoughtful reactions from students who are trying to sort out the best way to analyze the intentions and strategies of policymakers and the American public during an age of contradictions.

The following selections come from student comments & questions.

PANAMA CANAL

STUDENT COMMENT: "Theodore Roosevelt was one who thought much differently than his predecessors about intervention in European politics. To Roosevelt, the principles of aversion grounded in the Monroe Doctrine were limiting his "freedom of action" and he perceived America's role to be a "civilizing power" who must carry out its "moral obligations" in the name of world peace (Herring 347). One of his biggest "American triumphs" that bridged the North and South Americas together physically was through the Panama Canal. Initially, the British and Americans had proposed in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in 1850 a canal that went through Nicaragua, but it never materialized. In the meantime, the French had started pursuing a canal through Panama, then a province of Colombia, in 1880. However, yellow fever and other epidemic challenges depleted French resources within 9 years and they went bankrupt. America took this chance to take over the construction of a canal joining the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, gaining official authority to manage its own in 1901. While initially sticking to Nicaragua, congress voted in favor of Panama despite past French failures in the region in June 1903. When Secretary of State John Hay negotiated a treaty with Colombia, it held out to get better financial terms, which set in motion an American desire to monopolize on benefits disguised as an act of their "ingenuity" and "resourcefulness" (Herring 369) due to its solution of engineering and other challenges that bankrupt the French. Panama seeking this as a chance to gain independence instigated a rebellion against the Colombian government, with the US sending warships as support to the Panama City as acceptance of independence, which Herring describes was done in "unseemly haste" (368). However, this to me reflects exactly the ideals Roosevelt stood for, with American imperialist desires veiled as responsibilities of a world power promoting economic development in other countries and leading the drive for innovation in the world. This was eventually the basis for the Roosevelt Corollary, which essentially replaced the Monroe Doctrine by reversing its core principle on non-intervention by allowing the US the right to intervene. Roosevelt and Root claimed that the US must police the surrounding areas in the hemisphere given the construction of the canal, whenever there is a lack of internal political stability within nation-states in the region.

DOLLAR DIPLOMACY

STUDENT COMMENT: "The second quote which stood out is from the Dollar Diplomacy in Latin America reading by Lauren Kennedy, in which she asserts "Dollar Diplomacy may be perceived as the US abandonment of imperialism at the forefront of the Progressive age. In reality, it was not the US' relinquishment of imperialism but solely a shift from territorial to economic imperialism under the guise of humanitarian principles." This is an excellent interpretation of dollar diplomacy, as Taft and Knox developed the policy that was in itself still a form of imperialism, but with minimized military use and threat that was so often associated with imperialist colonization. Rather, the US exerted economic power over the countries it was "helping." Herring notes that through dollar diplomacy, "They sought to eliminate European political and economic influence and through U.S. advisers promote political stability, fiscal responsibility, and economic development" (373). By aiding "lesser" countries in economic and political development, it is seen as humanitarian cause. Yet, ridding countries of European influence was in turn in US interest as it furthered US influence and power in region. Imposing the gold standard gave US near total economic power over the countries they were implementing the policy over. The US ultimately attempted to implement dollar diplomacy over areas which were strategically of best for national interest. Dollar diplomacy was not a humanitarian and progressive policy, but rather an economic form of imperialism."

STUDENT COMMENT: "I know many western countries that have colonized other countries and they used this exact form of economic "control" while leaving aside the visible form of domination. I take for example the case of France with a lot of African countries that have been proclaimed independent for a long time, but which are still economically dependent on the country that colonized them decades ago. Coming back to reading, I find it fascinating how Herring describes this "new diplomacy" in a very implicit way at the beginning without evoking imperialism and later highlights the "hypocrisy" of the United States of maintaining its influence in the region. Herring starts by "embellishing" Roosevelt's intentions by describing them as a "conviction that power must be used for altruistic purpose" (Herring, 344), he calls the intervention in the Dominican Republic "the Dominican experiment" (Herring, 371) and even says that it is done to "promote stability and modernization" (Herring, 371). Behind ironic style of writing, he explains about the true intentions behind this diplomacy: having an influence without creating instability and having to intervene. At the end of the chapter, he also explains that this new way of leading diplomacy certainly had good results but did not necessarily prevent the main goals which were little instability, and no military intervention. Some Americans, even if they saw the "Dollar Diplomacy" as an exploitive nature, they were still happy with the outcomes of it."

SECRECY AND THE BULLY PULPIT

STUDENT COMMENT: "Many topics discussed in this chapter reminded me of what I included in my very first reflection after reading Mead's article. First, Herring described how the public was largely uninterested in foreign policy when they did not feel the nation was threatened by foreign powers. According to Herring, TR even viewed his role as "managing and manipulating a presumably ignorant or indifferent public," and how he would use the "bully pulpit," as a way to inform the public on matters that aligned with

his interests. But, he also discussed how TR conducted most of his diplomacy in secret. Herring wrote that he, “reveled in intimate exchanges at the top level and in the stealth and secrecy that were part of the process,” and later wrote that he, “frequently operated in secrecy to keep the public and Congress from knowing what he was doing.” Members of his administration also were said to have conducted diplomacy in secret. For example, the Taft-Katsura agreement, in which the U.S. gave Japan, “a free hand” in Korea was crafted in secret and was not made public until two decades later. I cannot help but think that the two may be interconnected in the sense that TR took advantage of the public’s apathy in order to be secretive policy-wise and I wonder if the public had been more interested and involved, if he would have acted differently or would have been remembered differently (even though he is already a controversial historical figure).”

ELIHU ROOT

STUDENT COMMENT: “Elihu Root was the necessary complement to Teddy Roosevelt’s presidency, that allowed for U.S. success in the promotion of peace and the continual expansion of the military. As Roosevelt transitioned into fostering peace within the international system to allow for stability, Root patient disposition combined with his background in law enabled him to further Roosevelt’s aims. After Roosevelt became frustrated with the Senate’s actions surrounding the arbitration treaties, “...Root tried to pick up the pieces, conciliating the Senate and then negotiating twenty-four bilateral arbitration treaties with all the major powers except Russia and Germany” (Herring 358). These treaties were subsequently approved, and this accomplishment was only thanks to the temperament of the lawyer. Root is also the writer of the “Roosevelt Corollary”, which expanded the understanding of the Monroe Doctrine to include the right and duty to intervene in other states, either due to atrocities or the protection of U.S. national interest (Herring 371). This principle has only grown in significance throughout the U.S. development into a world power and was the product of Root.”

REALISM AT THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY

STUDENT COMMENT: “One intriguing thing in this chapter was Herring's description of the belief of the people in this era. "Optimistic about humankind and confident of progress, [U.S. peace advocates] hoped that the growth of capitalism and democracy would make war less likely." This description of Herring reminded me of liberalism. On the other hand, America's move to gain the canal also reminded me of realism and the World of Anarchy. Impotent Colombia failed to protect its national interests and lost its territory in the world of anarchy. Indeed, the treaty was greatly advantageous to the United States and somewhat beneficial to Panama. I do not think that there were such established IR paradigms at the time, but it was interesting to see that the two contradicting behaviors coexisted in U.S. diplomacy during the 1900s.”