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## Exploration of the United States' Cultural Legacy in Panama through Analysis of American Foreign Policy and Public Opinion

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Exploration of the United States' Cultural Legacy  
in Panama through Analysis of American Foreign Policy and  
Public Opinion

by

Katherine Boss

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Submitted to the Honors College of  
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## Abstract

The study of a culture is nearly too difficult to accomplish academically, therefore the consilience of data, personal experience, and public opinion offers the most comprehensive approach. The Panama Canal has just celebrated its centennial and remains to this day one of the most important geopolitical and global economic hubs in the world. Nearly every country that participates in maritime trade utilizes the canal. Panama has ambitious plans for the canal's future, as it nears completion of a multibillion dollar expansion project; however predicting how Panama handles this growth and new responsibility as a major world power is directly related to the country's past as a pseudo-colony of the US. This study examines the American foreign policy and public involvement during the past 150 years to determine the scope of American influence in Panama. Understanding the culture of present-day Panama gives insight into how we can expect Panama to approach future international relations. This analysis found significant American influence in Panama, however there was also a meaningful amount of other international influencers. From scholarly research and museum observations, it was determined that Panama is one of few nations embracing globalization and using it to their benefit. This small Central American nation has proved that peaceful negotiation and resource management are essential to foreign relations in the twenty-first century. Panama has grown its reputation and global agenda without military strength or a large GDP, and is an example of the way globalization will change all of the countries of the world.

**Key Words:** Panama, Panama Canal, culture, foreign policy, public opinion, cultural change, mass media

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Panama lies poised in the most strategically important location in the world in terms of geopolitics and the global economy. This small country inhabits the isthmus that connects the North and South American continents and for one hundred years has provided the world with the shortest route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This uniquely narrow strip of land was recognized for its potential to provide a marine shipping route between the seas almost immediately after European explorers first arrived in the New World (McCullough 28). The dream to build a shipping canal through the fifty-one miles of jungle that separated the Atlantic from the Pacific had an unfathomably profound effect on the world. This project, through the decades of its development, saw the end of one great empire and the embarkation of another's great 20<sup>th</sup>-century imperial pursuits. The canal project caused borders to be redrawn as one country lost its greatest natural resource and a new republic won its independence. Because of the canal, technology advanced at an unprecedented rate as human engineering raced to make dreams a reality. From Caribbean peasants to American presidents, the world watched for over forty years as the tropical jungles were cleared into a glorified ditch and finally finished into a series of colossal locks and canals capable of maneuvering the largest ships in the world from one ocean to another in mere hours.

Since the first ship passed through in 1914 the power struggle involved with running the canal has reverberated throughout the political world (McCullough 616). Issues and controversies involving the canal persisted throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In April of 2016 the Panama Canal is expected to complete its massive expansion project, ushering in yet another era of increased globalization and

keeping time with the supersized growth of cargo and cruise ships. In these modern times the canal is anything but old news; it is just as much a global commodity as it was one hundred years ago. The world has indeed watched the canal, from its initial planning through the present as it nears completion of its expansion.

Analysis of the Panama Canal, its construction, and release by the US has been previously studied in depth, but never before in combination with public opinion of the American people and with the overall goal to determine the effect on the welfare of the Panamanian people. There is a wealth of information regarding the canal from a variety of sources such as economic investigations, government publications, political commentaries, medical documents, environmental reports, and of course mass media resources. By examining the range of these sources and synthesizing them into a single study it is possible to gain further insight into the lasting cultural effects of these respective nations, and taking a retrospective approach incorporates the context and circumstances surrounding the canal allowing a greater appreciation and understanding of events.

Modern scholars and diplomats seeking peaceful examples of foreign affairs have commonly looked upon the US's handling of the Panama Canal as one of the most successful models of relinquishing colonial rule. However determining the success of a process that was implemented in a very different social era and that lasted for decades is a complicated task. This study seeks to improve the understanding of US and Panamanian relations going into the expansion of the canal purposefully outlining the successes and mistakes made during the more than 120 years of direct partnership between these two countries. This study aims to answer a number of questions such as how the US viewed

Panama throughout the process of construction and release, did the US treat Panama as more of a resource or as a society? Did the US take into account the plight of the native citizens? Was the American involvement in Panama a form of “responsible colonialism?” Was the way the canal was built, managed, defended, and relinquished to Panama done in a way that was beneficial, or at the very least responsible? If not, what was the cost to Panamanians? What kinds of lasting effects has American involvement left on Panama and what attitude does Panama have towards the US because of this?

Finally, this study is increasingly relevant in understanding the social strata of world powers going into the future. The US seeks to maintain its position as a major global player but Panama is aggressively pursuing a new place as an investment, economic, technologic, and fashion hub of the Americas. Some have argued that the Panama Canal is no longer relevant to the US and it should be dismissed as an area of foreign interest altogether. Regardless of personal opinion and ignorant of what the future holds, it is important to project where the canal extension may lead Panama in the coming decades and how this will affect the United States.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

### PROCEDURE

This study intends to reveal the intricacies and overlooked aspects of the cultural influences left by America during the construction of the Panama Canal and the following one hundred years through the current expansion project. When examining a culture, especially in a historical context, the stories, events, and people are all intricately interwoven. History tends to focus on the grand events and the leading figures, but a truly comprehensive examination focuses on the individuals, no matter how seemingly insignificant. In contrast, cultural study focuses on the lifestyle, traditions, literature, language, political climate, and lives of those people. Social historians attempt to include all of these aspects in their work; they seek to reveal the interconnected nature of politics, people, and culture because they are all so heavily tied to each other (Perkin 56). As Sir Maurice Powicke said, “Political and social history are in my view two aspects of the same process. Social loses half its interest and political movements lost most of their meaning if they are considered separately” (qtd. in Perkin 56). Therefore in an attempt to study a culture consideration of both the political and the personal is paramount.

Because of the multifaceted nature of this study there is no preferred methodology. Obviously primary sources derived directly from the individuals involved are the most desired evidence of public opinion. However finding sufficient numbers of primary sources regarding the canal and those involved in developing this project proved impossible with the available resources. Therefore after careful consideration, this study has chosen to utilize two separate types of sources that when analyzed together will give greater perspective to the complicated nature of this topic. Phase one analyzes

newspapers and other similar mass media print materials to examine the attitude of Americans during US control of the Panama Canal. Newspapers often reflect the national attitude in their distribution of information and likewise different newspapers will reflect the majority of different opinions where they exist. Considerable information on how the American civilians responded to this project can be found in archives of news coverage regarding the Panama Canal throughout history. Additionally this study will examine scholarly articles from a number of disciplines in order sufficiently grasp the dynamic objective of American foreign policy regarding Panama throughout this time period.

By choosing to examine sources from such a variety of fields, the study will contrast the political intent with common American opinion to draw conclusions about how American culture viewed Panamanian culture and vice versa. Especially in the early twentieth century before and during the canal's construction, opinions on international involvement and ambitious foreign projects were far different from what they are today. These aspects offer important context and background information on the culture and society during a certain time period. With careful analysis the data collected in this study will reveal much more than a profound history lesson; these materials are evidence of political agendas, social beliefs, and national attitudes of two nations with closely intertwined histories. From this shared history much can be inferred about how each country plans to pursue their respective future endeavors, be they converging or diverging schemes. Furthermore and more importantly, a thorough understanding of Panama's background and cultural foundation can help policymakers and diplomats prepare for this small country's growing prominence well into the twenty-first century.

While the study will cover more than one hundred years' worth of history and material, the data will be sorted and separately analyzed based on publication date and subject into three general time periods. These categories were created in accordance with a major event of the canal's history that had a major impact on Panamanian lives. The first time period will encompass material produced prior to 1920; this would include material regarding the earliest ideas of digging a canal, the French attempt of a canal in Panama, the 1903 treaty between the US and Panama, the decade of construction, the first passage through the canal in 1914, and then half a decade's worth of reflection on the early functioning of the canal. The second time frame consists of publications and analyses of events occurring between 1920 and 2005. This exceptionally long period of time was relatively quiet and uneventful until President Jimmy Carter signed the Panama Canal Treaty in 1977 which began the decades-long process of preparing Panama to take complete control of the canal (Carter). This time period concludes with the surrender of the canal from the US to Panama in 1999 and the following five years of Panama's initial control. The last period will be reviewed in the context of the current widening project of the canal and will include sources published after 2005 until present. The expansion project began formally in 2007 and is set to be complete in 2016 and is the largest modification to the canal since its initial construction (Hricko). By studying such a long time period and contrasting sources with public opinion pieces the researcher will reveal the relations between these two regions and the ways each culture was affected by this grand project.

## DATA SOURCES

To achieve such a broad goal this study utilizes over a dozen sources on the foreign policy of the US, analysis of foreign politics, presidential speeches, economic studies, and historical background. It also uses over one hundred newspaper articles published on the subject of the Panama Canal. It is a common misperception that foreign policy is the set of predetermined guidelines meant to make business with other nations regulated, safe, and cordial. However the definition of foreign policy is “a policy pursued by a nation in its dealings with other nations, designed to achieve national objectives” (Dictionary.com Unabridged). Thus with the purpose of foreign policy not being simply to deal with another country but in fact to obtain some sort of goal, it becomes apparent that the public is more relevant to the decisions made by policymakers than is immediately obvious. More simply, one of the reasons there are objectives for dealing with foreign nations comes from the benefits such business will create for the citizens of that nation. Using sources relating to both the foreign policy and public opinion involved with the Panama Canal accomplishes what other studies have not: giving the most comprehensive view of American identity from presidents to the common people.

The media and scholarly sources, after being arranged chronologically will be analyzed for content. In this manner the major events of the canal and opinions present in the media at that time will be discussed in tandem and the researcher will draw larger conclusions about what these patterns reveal about the society and culture from which they came. Additionally the scholarly and media data will be supplemented by information on modern Panamanian society the researcher gathered from a research trip to Panama. This information in the form of observations and data obtained from

museums serves to give a more accurate representation of Panamanian culture that can be gained solely from data and scholarly sources.



### Chapter Three: History of the Panamanian Isthmus before the canal

To truly understand the scope of the canal one must first know a basic history of how the canal came to be. It is often touted as one of the greatest human achievements and one of the marvels of the modern world. However recognizing the tumultuous history of the canal is imperative to understanding the methods the US used in this region to achieve its goals. In studying the history of a society it is impossible to “understand the past unless we attempt to realize the precise problems of each age and the success or failures which attended human efforts to grapple with them” (qtd. in Perkin 66). The idea of a shipping canal through Panama indeed presented enormous problems and required ingenuity and monumental effort to overcome them. It took the literal moving of mountains to achieve a functional canal, and these events not only changed the geography of Panama but also changed the very people who lived there.

After Balboa reached the Pacific in 1513 Panama became a crossroads of European trade in the New World (McCullough 111). With such short land passage between the Atlantic and Pacific the isthmus became the chosen route to transfer freshly acquired gold to empty ships returning to Spain (McCullough 111, 112). While donkey cart routes sufficiently traversed the isthmus, the goal was to find a water route to the Pacific, and if one could not be found then one could be created (McCullough 112). While the continent separating the Atlantic and Pacific did hold some intrigue primarily to the Spanish, for most of the other nations sponsoring exploration of the New World it was an unfortunate speed bump in the way of easy passage to Asia. Therefore almost as soon as Europeans discovered the Americas the idea of digging a water canal through was born (McCullough 26). A German explorer and naturalist penned an analysis of

possible canal routes in Central America in 1811 (McCullough 28). In his opinion, without even having actually been to either Panama or Nicaragua, was that Nicaragua presented the easiest route for a canal. The earliest formal plans for a canal came from the Spanish crown at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Competition between imperialist countries spurred other nations to take serious interest in a canal and many nations began their own initial surveys of Central America (McCullough 56).

The earliest mention in US mass media of a canal through any part of Central America cited Panama as the most ideal location. Already in the minds of Americans was the idea that a canal's "speedy construction [was] necessary to preserve our commercial and naval supremacy, and our empire on the Pacific" (qtd. in "A Canal Across the Isthmus"). In the race to be the first to acquire legal rights for a canal somewhere in Central America, France soon began exploring options and negotiating with officials in Columbia (McCullough 83). In a country lauded for its advanced engineering and mathematics, a French aristocrat named Ferdinand de Lesseps had more than just a faint interest in building a canal somewhere in Central America. Monsieur de Lesseps had experience. He had singlehandedly spearheaded the entire Suez canal construction from acquiring rights from Mohammad Said, the viceroy of Egypt, throughout the entire fifteen years of construction. In his years working on the Suez Canal he served as the overseer, public relations coordinator, financial manager, political advisor, and technical advisor. No one dared question de Lesseps's qualifications to lead such a project, though in reality he had none whatsoever (McCullough 235). He said many times during his work at the Suez Canal that courage itself would lead him to success, and that no matter what obstacle may be encountered the ingenuity and hard work of man could overcome it

(McCullough 238). He came to be known as “The Great Engineer” and the *entrepreneur extraordinaire* to the French and a figure of national pride (McCullough 49, 53).

With the recent success of de Lesseps’ Suez Canal it seemed apparent that if anyone could accomplish a transisthmian canal it was this man, and the French public was more than willing to place their collective faith, and individual fortunes, in his capable hands. Hasty investors began pouring money into any Panama-related company, expecting the same kind of return on investment that those who had invested in the Suez enterprise had reaped (McCullough 184). However all of this optimism was not supported by any indication that this could be a successful venture (McCullough 237). An international congress was held in Paris in 1879 to discuss excavation plans, geography, possible routes, and budget (McCullough 59).

An American delegation was invited, mostly to show that this was an international meeting of great importance and that France was the benevolent diplomat inviting all interested parties to participate in their grand scheme (McCullough 65). The American invitees reported back to the eagerly waiting public that de Lesseps was “the most extraordinary man of the age” (“The Panama Canal”); however the congress comprised of very few engineers. Instead, it was more of a celebration attended by committees of politicians, potential investors, and friends of de Lesseps (McCullough 83). The research and surveys presented by the Americans were practically ignored in favor of Ferdinand de Lesseps’ bold and unscientific plans for a sea level canal (McCullough 80). Had the French considered the American plans that called for a lock scheme canal, history could very well be very different for this region. However, after

being offensively disregarded at the congress, all official American interests in aiding the French attempt evaporated (McCullough 22, 59).

American news sources passed along the sporadic updates on the progress of the French canal. Americans were clearly more interested in their own canal project and repeatedly emphasized that a canal in Panama was a costly and deadly endeavor (“The Panama Canal—Another Proposition”). The plan of a canal in Panama was regarded by Americans not only as a doomed idea but also a threat to American superiority in naval strength and global economics. Newspapers claimed that a canal built by “European capitalists” was the cornerstone for expanding competing empires (*Daily Los Angeles Herald* 21 Dec. 1880). Another article implied that a non-American canal was a malicious act and that the French canal was “an enterprise which the President has twice taken occasion to declare in messages to Congress is hostile to the interests of the United States” (“The Panama Canal Promoters”). Competition for power and resources was of such concern at this time that in the mass media sources collected from the nineteenth century for this study, one-third of publications mentioned competition with foreign nations or the American empire in their reports on the Panama Canal. Even in brief updates on the French endeavor and the negotiation of rights to an American canal project, the idea of maintaining power or expanding influence was frequently mentioned and was obviously never far from Americans’ minds.

It was on January 1, 1881 that the French excavation began with a labor force of about forty thousand men and without a definite plan (McCullough 147). So many unexpected obstacles had been overcome during the construction of the Suez and the same was expected in Panama, so the overwhelming belief was that as problems arose

solutions would be developed. National pride drove thousands of young engineers to Panama immediately after graduation from the academies of math, science, and infrastructure (McCullough 187). Many of them openly feared that they were traveling to their death, but such was fervor for a Central American canal. These young men felt that giving their lives to such a cause was more than justified and took pride in their service towards the greater good (McCullough 194). When work in Panama slowed to a crawl taking years longer than anticipated and the entire budget the French company had raised for the project had been spent this did nothing to curb enthusiasm for this undertaking (McCullough 147). The Suez canal had been difficult and had at times seemed like it would fail, but this was now expected and work continued on the Panama Canal.

Everyone in France had heard the stories of those who had invested even a small sum in the Suez construction company and had reaped an incredible return on investment (McCullough 190). Therefore when de Lesseps turned to the public to offer bonds to further fund his project, the French citizenry did not disappoint. Bond sales provided financing for canal excavation for years with the primary investors being lower-class workers and peasants (McCullough 190). These desperate citizens purchased bonds often spending more than a year's wages, but with the promise of a hefty return they were more than confident in handing over their life savings (McCullough 192).

With French funding continually ebbing, de Lesseps turned to American investors. An American newspaper stated that "de Lesseps hopes to disarm popular hostility in this country by establishing the fact that the bulk of the stock will be under control of American owners" ("The Panama Canal—It Seems"). Despite de Lesseps' attempts, the American people had little faith in a Panamanian canal and all but a few

Californian investors preferred to wait for an American canal endeavor (McCullough 188).

De Lesseps' contagious optimism in this project, even when every sign indicated utter failure, drug out the painful end and prolonged the loss of lives and money. That the canal construction was doomed was obvious at least three to four years before the money actually ran out (McCullough 237). It was not until February 4, 1889 that shareholders agreed on the liquidation of the *Compagnie Universelle de Canal Interocéanique* and even then work was not halted until May 15 of that same year (McCullough 203, 204). Word that the French canal venture had failed caused an international scandal and left the millions who had invested every last franc in the venture reeling in despair. The shock and national disbelief of the French people in the following months was so absolute that it caused riots and panic in Paris (McCullough 237). The French nation had been conditioned to believe that science and ingenuity of man would simply "find a way" as de Lesseps put it, to overcome any obstacle, and whether that had been purposeful duplicity or was purely accidental naivety remains somewhat of a mystery (qtd. in McCullough 239).

It was decided that in order to salvage the investments made by stockholders the only option was to continue excavation but under a newly formed company, the *Compagnie Nouvelle du Canal de Panama*, until the venture could be sold (McCullough 262). Construction continued slowly, however the New Panama Canal Company began immediate consultations with engineers to tackle the problems of mudslides and the flooding of the Chagres River. By this time it was obvious that the desired sea-level canal was impossible; the Chagres River could not be diverted around the canal and there was

no possible way to excavate through the mountainous region of Culebra (McCullough 167). Work on the canal operated with only enough manpower, less than four thousand workers, to meet the requirements established in the accords made with Colombia (McCullough 237). This pitiful effort was not focused on completing the canal. Instead work was focused on promoting an enticing offer for an ambitious buyer, namely the United States, to purchase the company and the rights to the canal (McCullough 240).

In the meantime investigations in bankruptcy of the Compagnie Universelle de Canal Interocéanique continued, and records kept by the various companies, sub-companies, contractors, and other offices were unsubstantial in offering information on the causes of the failure (McCullough 210). Inquiries and interviews were required for the company to declare bankruptcy but in actuality led to very little of consequence for those who might have been at fault (McCullough 213). American media reported that “scandal after scandal” arose as information on the affairs of the French failure surfaced (“Scandal after Scandal”). The sheer amount of money and number of people involved in the investigations was staggering. There were rumors of men being tried for treason and that the entire scandal situation was an elaborate plot to overthrow the republic of France, all of this the Americans watched unfold intently (“Panama Frauds not all Unearthed Yet”). Despite the investigations, practically all of the chief officials of the project escaped prosecution in various ways, from suspicious deaths rumored to be suicides, to permanently leaving the country on alleged doctor’s orders, to the court not having the heart to send an aging Monsieur de Lesseps to prison (McCullough 213, 236). Not that placing guilt on any single party would have rectified what had been done, nor would placing blame on any one man have been just for what was obviously a cumulative

failure of many people to see the incompetence of this project. The failed enterprise essentially left two countries in ruin, and it was difficult to tell whether the French economy or the malarial, muddy ditch in Panama was a greater tragedy. The total spent trying to dig a canal at Panama exceeded the costs of completing the Suez; estimates put the total between \$287 million and \$400 million spent over more than a decade of work (McCullough 235). The death toll is a less easily identified number due to incomplete records, but all told the French had lost up to five thousand of their own countrymen to work in Panama and estimates of up to twenty-two thousand workers had perished toiling on the canal (McCullough 235).



## Chapter Four: The American canal endeavor

Aside from some privately employed Americans hired by the French canal companies, the US had very little interest in the French effort until its failure (McCullough 127). When the news broke the American public began to pay attention and a number of facts became clear after the French failure. First, that the idea of a sea level canal was impossible. Even though the French had finally admitted that a lock canal was necessary they had not accomplished even designing a set of locks or the system of water level changes (McCullough 167). The French had the best trained engineers of the era working to sort out the details of overcoming terrain barriers and rerouting a river that flooded constantly and it was simply impossible to literally move mountains as they had attempted (McCullough 167). The second and more important revelation was that this project was too gargantuan for a private company to execute successfully. The only organization that would have the resources, organizational work hierarchy, and depth of men, money, and means to succeed would have to be a very powerful and very rich government. The Interoceanic Canal Company had relied on millions of dollars from private bonds sold to citizens, and that sort funding simply had not been sufficient (McCullough 240, 241).

Throughout the liquidation of the New Canal Company and the subsequent investigations, the US government had been watching the Panama venture from a distance with detached interest. When rights to a canal at Panama were awarded to the French, US interests in Panama had dissolved and instead had signed a treaty that granted the US rights to construct a canal in Nicaragua (McCullough 261). After witnessing the long and painful death of the French endeavor in Panama the American people were more

convinced than ever that the sure path to success required a canal built in Nicaragua (McCullough 261). Throughout the term of French excavation the US government continued surveys and congressional hearings on constructing a canal of their own. The plan of a canal at Nicaragua was exhaustively reported to the American public (“The Isthmian Canal”). Civil engineers, geographers, politicians and newspapers touted the stability of Nicaragua as the most important aspect to be considered if America were to make such a large commitment to a Central American country (McCullough 262; *Daily Los Angeles Herald* 21 Dec. 1880). During the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century major news and literary sources such as *Harper’s Weekly*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Munsey’s* had focused almost entirely on the development of a Nicaragua route (McCullough 263). In fact there were very few articles that even described the progress in Panama at the time. The only prominent news source that reliably reported on the Panama venture was the *New York Evening Post* (McCullough 270). The American public had for decades heard of plans for their own canal at Nicaragua; therefore it is easily understandable that “the American route” at Nicaragua was firmly rooted in the hearts and minds of most Americans (qtd. McCullough 261). Even politicians, privy to exclusive reports and private information were more than suspicious of the Panama route. By the year 1902 not a single reputable politician of any clout had publically stated anything in favor of a canal at Panama (McCullough 270).

Having just watched a private company essentially bankrupt the entire population of France, the US was understandably hesitant to make an attempt at Panama. In fact it was not even part of the political agenda to consider acquiring rights to the canal after the liquidation of the New Canal Company, even though the company, equipment, and work

completed were all for sale. But in the era where manifest destiny was a mad fever that infected the American public all it took was one precocious president to change everything. Theodore Roosevelt took office after the assassination of President William McKinley and immediately gained fame for his rambunctious personality and vigor (McCullough 253). Roosevelt had long been a promoter of an American shipping canal somewhere in Central America, and once he gained office ordered the congressional committees designated to canal legislature to move forward more quickly (McCullough 250). Of all the changes occurring at the beginning of the twentieth century Roosevelt stated that “No single great material work which remains to be undertaken on this continent is of such consequence to the American people” as a shipping canal through Central America (qtd. McCullough 249). Of course to Roosevelt the canal was much more than an economic and transportation game changer; the canal was “neither a commercial venture nor a universal utility...the canal was to be the first step to American supremacy at sea” (McCullough 250). Despite this aggressive international approach Roosevelt insisted that his moves were not imperialistic. Instead he claimed that America was moving towards some “larger, more noble objective,” that great people were destined to create great things and to leave great legacies (McCullough 254). Under pressure from Roosevelt to determine how to move forward more quickly with a canal project on November 1, 1901 the congressional Isthmian Canal Commission officially recommended the Nicaragua route (McCullough 325).

At this point the French were desperate to sell the company a nearly any cost. Initially they appraised the work done on the canal, the over one thousand buildings, and all of the equipment left in Panama at over \$140 million dollars (McCullough 287).

Roosevelt was eager for work to begin on a canal for the US and ordered the congressional committee in charge of canal plans to reevaluate their insistence on a canal at Nicaragua (McCullough 275). The Isthmian Canal Commission issued new surveys and collected information on the work already achieved in Panama (McCullough 277, “The Isthmian Canal”). Among congressmen and citizens alike the nearly unanimous consensus was that Panama proposed too many obstacles that had already caused one failure and that Nicaragua was a much safer, more stable option for an American canal.

Pushing forward on June 28, 1902 President Roosevelt signed the Spooner Act into law which declared Nicaragua as the location for a canal to be built by the United States. The law included a small exclusion principle explaining that if the French company was to sell their property and work for \$40 million then the Panama route would be taken (McCullough 328). The New Canal Company firmly believed that the Americans would eventually purchase their company as opposed to starting from scratch in Nicaragua. The company was so desperate to strike a bargain the price was quickly lowered to \$109 million (McCullough 287). Shortly after, Congress deemed Panama an acceptable route for a canal after extensive review of the offer made by the French company (“Panama Better Canal Route”). However the Spooner Act that had already been passed prohibited the US government from paying the \$109 million asking price. This legislature essentially forced the French company’s hand; if they wanted to earn even a fraction of the money lost back then they would have to give in to this American ploy. As such the French sold for the lower price and never gained back even a fraction of the over \$400 million they had lost in their Panama Canal venture.

Negotiations between Colombia and the United States over a canal had begun long before the Spooner Act was passed, but meetings were ludicrously long and intensely contentious (McCullough 329). In 1902, after years of communication and formal correspondence by both governments, the recurring Colombian civil war erupted again posing a threat to the US-owned Panama Railroad (McCullough 371). Roosevelt immediately sent American troops in to quell the fighting and secure the railroad without consent from either the Colombian diplomats in Washington or officials in Bogota (McCullough 374). The uprisings were quelled but the political damage had been done, and negotiations after that were fruitless (McCullough 330, 379). Conversation however continued and the press released a report stating that Colombia was delaying the treaty in an act to demand more money from the United State (McCullough 338). This was in fact a mistaken report though the government never refuted the claim. It was true the US and Colombia had reached an agreement on all terms of a treaty except for the amount to be paid to Colombia for canal rights. The Colombian officials repeatedly raised the price and the United States had not been able to compromise when this news broke out. Regardless of the truth, the idea that Colombia was trying to extort money from the US quickly and effectively turned public opinion against the Colombian government (McCullough 393). On August 14, 1903 the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Shelby Cullom announced at a press conference that the United States was seeking to “make another treaty, not with Colombia, but with Panama” (McCullough 339). Undermining the informal agreements between the two nations, Roosevelt had subversively contacted rebel groups within the Panamanian isthmus. He promised support of the US navy to any rebellion against the Colombian government attempting to gain Panamanian

independence (McCullough 330). Roosevelt maintained US naval presence in the Panamanian region to ensure the security of the railroad while also thwarting Colombian attempts to subdue Panamanian rebels (McCullough 295). Colombia was essentially cut off from Panama by both land and sea. The US formally recognized the Republic of Panama as a separate nation from Colombia on November 13, 1903; France and fifteen other countries formally recognized Panama a day later (McCullough 384).

The official purchase of the previous excavations and equipment by the US was completed with the signing of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty on November 18, 1903 by the US Secretary of State and a French engineer Phillippe Bunau-Varilla, acting as a representative of the New Canal Company and ambassador to Panama (McCullough 394). The treaty composed of a number of separate articles detailing the assignment of land and water for a canal zone in which the US was to have full sovereignty to construct a transisthmian canal, that the Republic of Panama refuses all rights to govern that canal zone, and finally that the canal once open will remain a neutral entity (Bunau-Varilla 505, 506). Along with the agreements involved in constructing a canal and recognizing Panama as a republic, the treaties included agreements for the United States to “construct modern systems of sewers and waterworks for the cities of Panama and Colon” which pleased many Americans troubled by the human rights issues of the canal (“The Panama Canal Treaty”).

Teddy Roosevelt’s tactics, regardless of whether they benefitted or damaged Panama, were detrimental to Colombia. The country was already crippled by civil war and then lost its most valuable natural resource: the geographically treasured Isthmus of Panama (McCullough 385). Colombia also lost the \$10 million the US would have paid

for a canal agreement and the decades' worth of annual payments for the railroad and canal usage (McCullough 385). Panamanians, though they had won independence in a major victory for most of the population, were hardly gracious to the US. Among Panamanians the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty was referred to as the "treaty no Panamanian had signed" (qtd. in Zaretsky 542).

At the time, and for at least a decade after, the American people earnestly believed that the independence of Panama mere days before the signing of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty was a timely coincidence. One publication went so far as to say "there is absolutely no ground for the accusation that the American authorities instigated the *coup* which gave independence to the Isthmus...they were entirely free from participation in it" (Marshall 62). The truth was largely ignored and quickly forgotten as excitement grew for the new American canal at Panama.

Teddy Roosevelt's oft quoted "speak softly but carry a big stick" is a metaphor for his foreign policy as well as humorous personal advice (Hendrix II 2). He was a man of his word for when Colombia failed to accept the terms of a treaty allowing the US rights to construct a canal at Panama Roosevelt had had enough of negotiating. His soft speaking had only resulted in the Colombians attempting to extort more money out of the US (Hendrix II 3). Advisors to Roosevelt were polarized as to how to continue. Some had advised abandoning the Panama enterprise and return to the Nicaragua plan (Hendrix II 3). Others recommended an invasion and outright seizure of the isthmus (Hendrix II 4). Furious with the Colombians, it was time for the "big stick" and Teddy Roosevelt's pride and joy: the United States Navy. Many already considered Roosevelt a bit of a warmonger for his previous demonstrations of maritime prowess in the Caribbean, but

the President surprised many when he chose a more tactful and strategic method. The United States Navy and Marine Corps had long held rebellion in Central America at bay (Hendrix II 4). As Roosevelt saw it, if there were no US interests in the area then there was no need to keep rebel activities from erupting. He simply shifted his troops out of Colombia allowing revolution to ignite once again (Hendrix II 4). At the same time he kept the navy close to Panama to prevent Colombian troops from landing there (Hendrix II 5). This effectively allowed the Panamanians to incite another rebellion for independence, and Roosevelt only simply needed to promise the rebels that their nation would be recognized as an independent republic if they let him build a canal (Hendrix II 6).

Roosevelt's militant and political strategy, though underhanded, were effective at lessening casualties and financial loss (Hendrix II 7). Panamanians who had long identified themselves as culturally different from Colombians were now formally recognized as their own republic and had the protection of the US to ensure their survival (McCullough 391). The United States now had the rights to construct a canal without the stipulation of having to answer to another country's government (McCullough 393). It seems that nearly everyone got what they had wanted and Teddy Roosevelt's showy, unyielding foreign policy had actually succeeded (Hendrix II 7). There are only two presidents who have held office without resulting in significant conflict or war, and Theodore Roosevelt is one of them (Hendrix II 6). Despite the aggressive modern reputation that he has, Roosevelt had an uncanny sense of just how much pressure to use to meet his goals while also using just enough coercive force to show that he meant



business. His delicacy in handling the Panamanian independence led to a partnership between two countries that lasted for the rest of the twentieth century.

Once the treaties were signed it took years for the Americans to transform the French structures into a functional excavation project once more (McCullough 307). The project had lain in ruin for nearly fifteen years before full scale work was resumed (McCullough 305). Improved sanitation and sewage systems were installed, buildings were repaired, and worker housing was renovated all before work on the canal could begin (McCullough 405, 407). Editorials and newspapers published frequent updates on the work being accomplished. The *New York Tribune* contributed photo essays bringing the exotic Central American people and landscape to Americans (“Scenes in the Zone of Panama Soil”). Once the infrastructure was back in place to support workers, foreign laborers were brought in to complete the majority of the canal work (Museo Afro-Antilleano). Initially workers were brought from European nations, however these laborers were often rebellious and halted work with frequent strikes (Museo Afro-Antilleano). It was then determined that the majority of the workforce would be brought in from the West Indies. A total of nearly 45,000 foreign laborers were brought to Panama to work on the canal between 1904 and 1914 (Museo Afro-Antilleano). Of that number over 31,000 were from the West Indie island nations, and the majority coming from Barbados, Martinique, Trinidad, and Guadalupe (Museo Afro-Antilleano). Newspapers reported that an additional 2,000 workers were brought in from Japan (“Jap Laborers for Panama”). Despite the great diversity of the workforce there was a definite hierarchy based on race (Museo Afro-Antilleano). Skilled labor, engineering positions, and other high level jobs were typically reserved for white males (Museo Afro-Antilleano).

Even when black and white workers shared the same position white men were paid nearly twice as much as their black counterparts (Museo Afro-Antilleano).

The first women immigrants to be brought to Panama for work were laundresses from Martinique (Museo Afro-Antilleano). Soon many of the workers' families began following them to Panama and took up residence in the Canal Zone. Family housing was established and schools were built ("Twenty-nine Free Public Schools"). The school system remained segregated (Museo Afro-Antilleano). West Indian children typically only completed school through eighth or ninth grade and attended classes to prepare them for positions as manual laborers or domestic employees (Museo Afro-Antilleano).

Table 1: Demographics of laborers on the Panama Canal between 1904 and 1914					
European (including Cuba)		West Indian		Central American	
Spain	14	Fortuna Island	361	Costa Rica	244
Cuba	500	Barbados	19,900	Colombia	1,493
Italy	1,941	Guadalupe	2,053	Panama	357
Greece	1,101	Martinique	5,542	Unclassified	69
France	19	Jamaica	47		
Armenia	14	Trinidad	1,427		
		Curacao	23		
		St. Kitts	942		
		St. Lucia	55		
		St. Vincent	296		
		Grenada	332		
Total:	11,873	Total:	31,071	Total:	2,163
Total of all workers brought to Panama:					45,107

(Museo Afro-Antilleano)

The Canal Zone began building recreational facilities to improve the quality of life for all workers (McCullough 398). YMCA facilities, baseball fields, an ice cream parlor, billiards rooms, a library, and competitive sports leagues were established and along with this. The Canal Zone had transformed into a habitable place to live and raise a family and thus the number of workers that left Panama yearly sharply declined (Museo del Canal Interoceánico). The humanitarian effort of improving the lives of workers and Panamanians was of particular interest to many Americans (McCullough 406). The *New York Daily Tribune* called it the “march of civilization across the Isthmus of Panama” alongside a collection of photographs and stories detailing the construction of twenty-nine new schools (“Twenty-nine Free Public Schools”). Americans were fascinated with the lives of the workers and native Panamanians. Detailed stories of the goings on at Panama were brought to the American home front as media coverage of the canal increased heavily. Photographs frequently featured smiling West Indian children and women carrying baskets of unfamiliar fruits. To the Americans at home these exotic photos were evidence of the responsible work being done by the US and the positive effect that “civilization” had brought to more “primitive people.”

The well-being of the workers on the canal was a controversial topic with the American public. Tales of the poor living conditions and lethal diseases caused an uproar from US citizens (McCullough 465). To combat this the US began the most expensive health campaign in history, costing an estimated \$20 million (McCullough 466). Though unproven at the time, it was believed that mosquitoes caused the majority of diseases in workers. Therefore the health committees set about eliminating as many mosquitoes as possible. Inspections of all edifices in the American territory were performed regularly

and mosquito larva was destroyed if it was found (McCullough 409). Maintenance crews eliminated any standing water and installed metal screens (McCullough 410). Housing and recreation areas were improved with running water eliminating the need to collect rain water (McCullough 408). Bulk shipments of quinine to combat malaria were provided to laborers (McCullough 409). Ditches and drainage systems were dug away from habituated areas to distance living quarters from standing water. Marshes and grasslands were treated with oil to kill off any growing mosquito larva (McCullough 410). Finally any person who became sick was immediately reported to medical officials and would be quarantined to prevent further contamination (McCullough 466, 467). The French effort had lost over 22,000 men to yellow fever but with this aggressive new public health campaign by December of 1906 yellow fever had been eliminated from the Canal Zone (McCullough 468).

With full domestic support on the home front due to these changes and a healthy, content workforce the rate of excavation on the canal increased to the fastest pace it had seen. In fact the digging then occurred so rapidly that it exceeded the rate experts had estimated was possible (McCullough 426). The project was divided into three geographic regions with a director of each tackling only the problems occurring in his region (McCullough 442). Holes were dug to place dynamite to blast through the Culebra highlands, four dams were constructed to create artificial lakes, and entrances at the Pacific and Atlantic were dug. Work progressed steadily and exposés detailing the “romance of Panama” were frequent in American mass media (“Romance of Panama”).

Finally on August 24, 1909 construction on the locks began (McCullough 590). The locks themselves took four years to complete due to their complexity, incredible size

of the concrete walls and steel gates, and sheer strength needed to withstand the force the water would put on the locks when flooded. Each lock was flat on the bottom with concrete walls standing more than six stories tall on both sides and running a length of more than five city blocks (McCullough 590). At the time of construction this was ample enough space to accommodate a ship even larger than the *Titanic* (McCullough 591). American audiences were astounded by schematics of the locks and photographs of the spectacular Culebra Cut (“The Farmers’ Opportunity”; “Romance of Panama”). Any qualms about the feasibility of a canal in Panama had been put to rest. The fear of a failure akin to the French endeavor was gone. It was now obvious to the Americans that the impossible was actually being accomplished. The spirited enthusiasm for this project that Theodore Roosevelt had had from the beginning of his presidency had finally spread to the American people.

The first trial of the Gatun locks occurred on September 26, 1914 and was successful (McCullough 606). A few days later the temporary dike keeping Gatun Lake from flooding the excavation sites was demolished and the Culebra Cut filled with water (McCullough 607). Shortly after that on January 7 an old French crane boat became the first to pass through both sets of lock and traverse the Panama Canal (McCullough 607). From that point the end came quickly and quietly. The first toll-paying vessel passed through on August 15, 1915 but was overshadowed by the outbreak of war in Europe (McCullough 609). After nine years and one month of American efforts, the idea that had first formed more than a hundred years ago had finally come to fruition, yet hardly anyone paid it any mind (“What the Panama Canal is Like”).

Stories detailing the opening of the canal appeared alongside other commonplace global news. Articles on the canal were more concerned about the commerce tolls were expected to bring in than its spectacular completion. The consciousness of the American people had shifted considerably. After the opening, mention of the Panama Canal in mass media was often permeated with doubts about the canal's future and whether it had been worth it. There were frequent landslides that temporarily closed the canal and required dredging out more earth. This occurred so frequently that one source stated that "the Panama Canal is doomed; that the real trouble with the canal lies not in earth slides but that the Culebra Cut is one gigantic bog and that the more dredging done the more there will be to do" ("Nailing a Rumor"). Doubts about the lasting effect of the canal began as early as 1912, before the canal was even complete. Discussions centered on the fact that the locks of the canal accommodated "ships as they are built today" and may become obsolete as ships are built even bigger ("How Long Will the Panama Canal Last?"). Additionally, fears that the Caribbean ocean was a vulnerable weakness of the US with the Panama Canal the coveted prize spread amongst other stories from the war ("Undefended Caribbean Chief Weakness of US"). There was even an accusation that the canal was practically built for the benefit of England because it would not significantly benefit US commerce ("Panama Canal Built for England"). The American people had grown suspicious and pessimistic. With the war they had forgotten the enthusiasm and deeply-rooted patriotism that had been prominent during the canal's construction. Concerned about security and plagued by recurring closures, reports that the canal was to be closed and dismantled were not uncommon ("Panama Canal to be Destroyed"). As one reporter explained it, the Panama Canal ushered in a new era but the war in Europe

accelerated it (“Panama Canal and the Future”). The oceans of the world were now open and much more easily navigated, but all the ships were acquisitioned for war use. Thus the Panama Canal, the greatest engineering feat in the world, was left mostly ignored for the first five years of its operation.

## Chapter Five: Canal opening to 1977 Carter treaty

The canal was a marvel when it opened and revolutionized the way people and goods moved throughout the world. Passing through the canal saved thousands of miles of and weeks of travel time. After completion the US government named a governor to the Panama Canal, who would maintain sovereignty over the Canal Zone without interference from the Panamanian government (McCullough 608). An additional \$11 million was spent in fortifications of the army bases in the Canal Zone which remained open for defense of the canal, while many of the supplemental buildings and housing for workers were dismantled (McCullough 607). Back in Washington, Congress argued whether the treaties signed had stipulated whether US vessels were to pay tolls to pass through the canal (McCullough 610).

“The Suez had long since established the precedent of neutrality. The concept was in keeping with the old American policy of freedom of the seas” (McCullough 256). In terms of international relations the United States wished to portray itself as a generous benefactor that had built this canal for the good of all nations without selfish ambitions (McCullough 247). However, domestically many argued for the waiver of tolls for American vessels and this stance was taken by much of the press (McCullough 608). Finally after lengthy, bitter arguments it was determined that since the canal was to operate “on terms of entire equality” that signified that the US would have to pay all tolls as any other nation would (qtd. in Bunau-Varilla 506; McCullough 608). The toll at that time was 90 cents per ton of cargo (McCullough 608). During the years of the First World War traffic through the canal was minimal; about five ships would pass through daily and less than two thousand per year (McCullough 611). The United States did not



even use the canal for the transfer of military ships or troops until the year 1919 (McCullough 611). That same year it was predicted for the first time that a new canal would eventually be necessary to accommodate the increasing traffic (“Baker Predicts New Panama Canal”). It took nearly a decade for the canal to be adopted into normal maritime routes, and by which time an average of five thousand ships were passing through the canal annually (McCullough 611). Once use of the canal became commonplace its advantages became vital to many nations’ naval and commercial ventures. Decades later, during the Second World War the canal was of strategic importance to the US which used the canal to transfer ships from the Atlantic to its decimated Pacific fleet (McCullough 610).

Once the war ended, the American people returned to their regularly patriotic ways. With the canal operating with more traffic than ever and with no more landslide closures it was finally lauded as a success. In a surge of pride a petition to rename the Panama Canal the “Roosevelt Canal” was put forth (“New Name Proposed for Big Waterway”). The pride in the canal however did not discount the resentment many US citizens felt about American ships having to pay tolls through the canal. The argument over tolls for Americans was polarizing and was featured in news headlines for years.

For the most part operation of the canal and Panama itself remained fairly quiet through the ensuing decades. In fact finding mass media sources or any newspaper articles mentioning the Panama Canal in the United States reveals little information was relayed back to the American public. The people of the US, who were so rapt during its construction and the political maneuvering leading up to the canal, had now seemingly lost interest. In the decades following the opening the American people had witnessed

two world wars and afterwards were more focused domestically. With the fatigue of war weighing heavily it is easy to see why each president since Theodore Roosevelt, when determining his strategy for dealing with Panama, choose to leave the Canal Zone to continue governing itself as had been established upon completion.

Independent of the war, society and life had evolved in Panama around the canal. The United States had developed the Canal Zone into a comfortable home for the nearly 40,000 Americans that lived there (Zaretsky 542). This area was essentially US territory and was inaccessible to Panamanians (Zaretsky 542). The Canal Zone was flush with commissaries, movie theaters, golf courses, and many other lavish excess not found in Panamanian cities (Zaretsky 542). In fact many of the inhabitants of the Canal Zone boasted that they had never “even as set foot on Panamanian soil” (qtd. in Zaretsky 542). Witnessing the affluent, off-limits lives of their neighbors in the Canal Zone made Panamanians understandably resentful. Anti-American violence because of these differences was not uncommon (Zaretsky 542).

The issue of when the canal was to be transferred to Panamanian control became a disputed topic during the 1960's bringing the tensions between the US and Panama to a head. The general understanding had been that after fifty years of American management of the canal, operation would be fully relinquished to the Panamanians (Bunau-Varilla 507). This controversy coincided with the end of the Vietnam War, a major source of American embarrassment. Many Americans felt Vietnam was a sign of weakness and incompetence of both the government and military of the US (Ladner 16).

While in office President Lyndon B. Johnson had a series of discussions with former presidents Truman and Eisenhower about the Panama situation. Shortly after, he

announced that the US would begin discussing the creation of a new treaty with Panama (Ladner 19). This, for the most part, was simply an announcement. Discussions with Panama regarding a treaty were infrequent and led to nothing for years (Ladner 16). Following Vietnam the political and public sentiment was strongly nationalist; the president publically stated that he did not want to sign a treaty that would relinquish control of the canal to the Panamanians (Ladner 16). That keeping the canal under American control was imperialism was a polarizing point creating a rift between an increasingly divided nation. The *New York Times* claimed in an article published in 1975 that the Canal Zone was “the most conspicuous relic of colonialism to be found anywhere on earth” (qtd. in Zaretsky 543). This proclamation was seen by many as embarrassing, that the US could be considered imperialistic and still have a colony in the latter part of the twentieth century was humiliating and uncomfortable. During the presidential primaries of the 1976 election California governor Ronald Reagan claimed that “We built it, we paid for it, it’s ours and we should tell Torrijos and Co. that we are going to keep it!” (qtd. in Carter). This sentiment, of course, was shared by many Americans and was problematic when Jimmy Carter won the election and took office.

President Carter’s policy was drastically different. Carter criticized Reagan’s stance on Panama saying that the governor oversimplified the international relations involved with the Canal Zone and that Reagan played to Americans’ pride in their country (Carter). Carter said, “I must repeat a very important point: We do not own the Panama Canal Zone. We have never had sovereignty over it. We have only had the right to use it” (Robberson “Panamanians”). He knew of the tensions the American-controlled Canal Zone caused between not only Panama and the US but the rest of Central America

as well. The Canal Zone, considered American land inaccessible to Panamanians, was an offensive remainder of American colonialism that had stood for over fifty years. Carter then was faced with the task of repairing relations between Panama and the United States along with reassuring his constituents that he was not retreating from nor giving in to a small Central American country (Ladner 17). He claimed that he needed to “correct an injustice. [That] our failure to take action after years of promises under five previous Presidents was poisoning our relations with Panama” (Carter). Repairing relations between Panama and the United States were imperative for proper defense of the canal (Carter). His administration sought to develop a strategy that was adapted to the new world order, one that was “multipolar” and recognized that worldwide interdependence and close economic ties are the way the world would function in the future (Zaretsky 539). On an even grander scale than just relations between the US and Panama, the rest of the world was watching to see how the US was handling a much smaller, lesser developed nation that they had always had such close ties with (Carter). Carter reiterated the need to seek diplomatic solutions that both nations could agree on, rather than resorting to the military coercion that had been the norm for the greater part of the twentieth century (Zaretsky 543). Additionally Carter’s stance was focused on human rights and the plight of the people who had been affected by the United States, acknowledging that the modern decolonized world was very different and should be handled differently (Zaretsky 543). Demonstrating that the US as a superpower was morally guided in its foreign policy was an issue that Carter took to heart (Zaretsky 540). In a debate over the proposed treaties he explained that a powerful nation that can “deal fairly and honorably with a proud but smaller sovereign nation” is distinctive of a mature

and responsible country (Zaretsky 540). As such Carter and Panamanian officials began drawing up the terms of a new treaty that would lead to the release of the canal from American rule.

However Carter's feelings of goodwill were not shared by the American people. After the failure at Vietnam the American people sought a source of pride in their country and most chose to look towards the Panama Canal. Public opinion was cemented in their nationalistic stance and were insistent upon keeping the canal under American rule. Thousands of Americans wrote to their congressmen urging them to abstain from ratifying the Carter's Panama Canal treaties (Zaretsky 535). American civilians were vicious in their criticism of Carter's plans. In a letter to her senator written in 1978 one woman wrote "Why should we Americans give up our sons, husbands, and brothers, to fight for land that does not even belong to us, and then sit quietly by, and let you, whom we choose to represent us, give away something as important as the Panama Canal?" (Zaretsky 535). This letter represents two important aspects of American thinking in the post-Vietnam era. A change in the American psyche had occurred as a result of seemingly endless war and foreign conflict, and Americans had grown weary and suspicious of government leaders. The second important point of this letter was that Americans undisputedly thought the Panama Canal actually belonged to the United States.

Conservative states and groups began organized movements to "incite public rage, disgust, and indignation about the treaties" and implemented strategies to ensure the treaties would not be ratified (Zaretsky 536). Carter's administration countered these movements by hosting rallies, giving speeches, and mailing informative pamphlets to

constituents (Zaretsky 536). Carter believed that his foreign policy was both the morally responsible and strategically best action for the US (Zaretsky 544). He even acknowledged that the canal was becoming a “declining asset” for the US. By the 1970’s the canal was functional but with antiquated technology and the limited size of the locks prohibited modern aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines from passing through (Zaretsky 544). Therefore it was best that the US release the canal before it became a costly burden and simply continue to use the canal as they always had. Arguments over the treaties intensified as promoters of the Carter treaties berated the opposing side with accusations of pure imperialism (Falk 68). A poll conducted in the latter part of 1977 revealed that regardless of class or social status that the more information Americans had on the Panamanian side of the canal story the more they were in favor of the new treaties (Fitzgerald). This human rights argument drew many groups to formally support Carter’s treaties such as the Roman Catholic Church, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Council of the Americas. The arguments eventually became grounded on two opposing opinions. Those in favor of the treaties stressed that returning the canal to the people of Panama was a necessity after the “widely condemned war” and such a move would “reinsert moral considerations into the realm of policymaking” (Zaretsky 537). The opposition countered that releasing the canal continued an established pattern of American “retreat and weakness” (Zaretsky 537). Essentially the two sides of the argument focused on whether a person believed that the Panamanians deserved to regain their territory or whether their concern for American ambitions was greater. The common belief both sides held was that the war in Vietnam had deeply wounded the country and left the world questioning the strength and leadership of the superpower. Supporters of

both arguments believed that their strategy was best for repairing the damage and returning the US to its former glory.

On March 13, 1977 Carter met with Panamanian officials in Washington D.C. to finalize the terms of two treaties (Carter). The first treaty stated that the canal would be jointly run by the US and Panama for the duration of the century, after which control of the canal would be fully assumed by Panama. The second treaty continued the guarantee that the canal was to maintain neutral and gave the United States the right to defend that neutrality if needed (Carter). The treaties were signed on September 7, 1977 at a ceremony attended by international delegates. Before the ceremony General Torrijos of Panama broke down in tears of overwhelming emotion, having just succeeded in reunifying the Canal Zone with the rest of Panama (Carter).

Attempting to placate the public, Carter's secretaries promised that "above all...the United States can do everything under the 1977 treaties that it ever wanted to do under the 1903 arrangements" (Falk 68). In a seemingly desperate attempt to gain constituent approval Carter went so far as to claim that if Teddy Roosevelt were alive that he would wholeheartedly support the new Panama treaties (Falk 68). In the end his foreign affairs doomed his political career; at the next election Carter didn't have the backing necessary to secure a second term (Ladner 18). Regarded as an only marginally successful president, Jimmy Carter was the first man to recognize the switch foreign policy needed to make from military actions to the diplomatic management of vital resources (Zaretsky 538). His morally responsible and managerial methods of foreign policy, though unpopular, were the foundation of the foreign policy that the United States has operated on for the past few decades. Regardless of the consequences to his political

future Carter said that passing the treaties “was one of my proudest moments” (Carter). It later transpired that if the Senate had not approved the treaties the national guard of Panama had been instructed to blow up the canal (Carter). Carter, of course, never know this at the time but it seems that his proclivity towards internationalism likely saved both nations from suffering, loss of the canal, and perhaps even war.



## Chapter Six: Canal treaty to present

The Carter treaties of 1977 included an article outlining the process by which the canal would transfer from American management to full Panamanian control (Fitzgerald). A US coalition called the Panama Canal Commission over the remainder of the twentieth century slowly educated and incorporated Panamanians into running the canal (Fitzgerald). The timeline for slowly releasing control was outlined in the Carter treaties as follows:

October 1, 1979	The Panama Canal Treaties take effect.
April 1, 1982	Panama accepts formal responsibility for the canal.
January 1, 1984	Panamanian employees should outnumber American employees by 20%.
October 1, 1984	The US-run School of the Americas, a training facility for military officers, closes. Nonessential military establishments in the Canal Zone cease operation.
January 1, 1990	The Panama Canal Commission chief manager position transfers from an American to a Panamanian.
December 31, 1989	The Republic of Panama assumes full, unaided responsibility of the Panama Canal. All Americans leave Panama.

(“Fighting in Panama; Canal Treaty; Step by Step”)

In addition to the treaties signed between the US and Panama were a number of additional financial provisions (Fitzgerald). Among these was a \$10 million fixed annuity to be paid to Panama in the years of the transition along with a number of loans taken out

by Panama. These financial agreements were both a show of friendship and a bailout measure to alleviate the ongoing financial crisis in Panama (Fitzgerald). Americans at this point had either lost interest or were resentful that the canal was being released to Panama. Once the decision had been made there was neither celebration nor protest of the treaties. For many their main concern was that the money to be paid to Panama would not come from taxpayers, but would be paid for out of the canal's profits (Fitzgerald). In retrospect it is clear that many Americans only cared about Panama in terms of how it would affect their own country.

In the remaining years of American tenure of the canal there was little mention of the canal in the media. It seems that after the public accepted that the treaties had been signed, the Americans who had so adamantly opposed them accepted defeat and forgot the matter. The Panamanians however were not as complacent as Americans were. Just three years after the signing of the treaties the Panamanian government sought a chair on the United Nations Security Council (Nossiter). A New York Times article claimed that this move was made in order to better defend the newly acquired canal (Nossiter). Panamanian officials stated that this was due to concerns over President Regan's previous opposition to the Carter Treaties and the fear that he would repeal the treaties (Nossiter). The tone of the Times article was one of incredulity and dismissed the move as a useless ploy at a seat intended for Costa Rica. The author's major concern was not about Panama fighting to keep the canal using the U.N. for support, but that the Council seat would go to Cuba, a Soviet puppet (Nossiter). Thus in the year 1980 when this article was published the American public was unconcerned with the possibility of Regan reacquiring the canal and more concerned that neighboring Cuba was up to Soviet-backed

nefarious acts. A follow-up article stated a month later informed that Panama was unsatisfied with the funding of the Panama Canal Commission, which relied on Congress for financial decisions (Riding). President Aristides Royo stated that he believed that a position in the U.N. Council would pressure the US to alter the current treaties to better handle the financial aspect of transferring the canal to Panamanian control (Riding). The article also dedicates a section to listing the issues and disagreements that have occurred between the US commission and the Panamanians during the process. However it ends with a quote by President Royo about the peaceful state of the two nations, “The hostility that might have existed between Americans and Panamanians has gone. They are working together, there is no hate, there have been no racial incidents, there’s a spirit of comprehension, work and cooperation” (qtd. in Riding). It seems that the general American public followed the leadership of the Americans working on the Panama Canal Commission in accepting that the canal was no longer an American asset. This article is a definite turning point demonstrating that Americans had finally stopped searching for ways to win back the canal and were finally recognizing the Panamanians’ competence as they gained increased control of the canal.

The canal did not appear frequently in US media after the treaties were ratified. Occasional updates on the transfer process graced newspaper pages but were infrequent and relatively uninformative. The media reflects that the American people had grown bored with the canal transfer and were uninterested in arguments over tolls. Of the few articles published in the last two decades of American control there were few updates given. These articles included stories about a strike in three port cities that did not affect canal traffic, the concern that government corruption was attempting to raise canal tolls to

finance an economic crisis, and the mention of an American-Panamanian-Japanese coalition conducting a study to determine the future fate of the canal (Rohter). All media reports were brief and were of little consequence.

After the signing of the treaties, political tensions and malicious feelings towards the US from many Central America nations dissipated. However that did not mean that political stability was maintained. Merely a few years after the treaties were signed into effect on August 12, 1983 a new leader took control of Panama, General Manuel Noriega (Gilboa). He served as the de facto leader of the Panamanian National Guard and president of the country during which time he developed a sustained relationship with the United States' intelligence (Gilboa). As the head of the drug investigation units in Panama, Noriega accepted significant bribes from cartels in return promising protection from inquiries and raids by the police (Gilboa).

Noriega's activities were exposed by an American journalist, though this did little to his political career in Panama (Millett). Privately President Reagan initially suggested that Noriega step down as president of Panama, and when that was unsuccessful further pressured the dictator with drug-related charges in US courts (Millett). Noriega ignored the threats and continued his dominance of the country and in the meantime overthrew an attempted coup (Gilboa). As Noriega and US leaders continued to disagree Noriega began shifting his support towards the Soviet bloc in the midst of the Cold War in return received military aid (Gilboa). As the situation became increasingly dangerous American policymakers began preparing for invasion (Gilboa). The US continued to look on as Noriega declared the recent presidential election null and maintained the presidency despite public protest (Millett). He then foiled another coup from the Panamanian

Defense Forces (Gilboa). President Reagan began receiving harassment for his lack of action against Noriega (Millett). The press berated him and criticized his spineless lack of action against a tyrant (Gilboa). Only after a US marine was killed in Panama City in December of 1989 and five other Americans were assaulted did President Bush order an invasion for December 20 (Gilboa).

President Bush outlined four reasons to justify the invasion of Panama. The objectives were to protect the lives of Americans living and working abroad in Panama, to defend human rights in Panama, to take action against drug-trafficking in Central America, and to uphold the Torrijos-Carter Treaties that established the neutrality of the canal (Buanu-Varilla). The justifications Bush gave were met with bipartisan approval and also received 80% public approval (Gilboa). A vague addition to the reasons Bush gave was the goal of deposing Noriega on charges including drug-trafficking, money laundering, human rights violations, and political murder (Millett).

American media covered the progress of the American invasion, but neglected to mention how the canal played a role in the invasion. Like Bush's reasons for invading Panama, the canal was more of an afterthought and additional justification. Deposing Noriega, it could be argued, was actually defending the neutrality of the canal, but it was also the most official justification of invading a foreign country the US could provide if anyone were to question the move. Instead of being merely an invasion to capture a corrupt dictator, the military was sent in to uphold the neutrality treaty.

Strategically the invasion of Panama was aimed at disabling the Panamanian Defense Forces and capturing Noriega, though it did result in civilian casualties and destruction of private property (Gilboa). A number of fires spread and the majority of the

*El Chorrillos* district of downtown Panama City was destroyed (Gilboa). Mere hours after the invasion began Guillermo Endara, the winner of the presidential election that Noriega had previously blighted, was sworn into office though remained in hiding (Robberson “Panamanians”). Noriega remained at large for a number of days before taking refuge in an embassy in Panama City (Gilboa). US forces maintained psychological pressure on Noriega and political pressure on the embassy until finally the dictator surrendered on January 3, 1990 (Millett). The toll of the American invasion remains uncertain with Panamanian civilian deaths estimated between two hundred and one thousand (Robberson “Descendants”). In the aftermath Endara abolished the Panamanian armed forces the following February and implemented the Panamanian Public Forces to serve as a police and domestic security force (Millett). Four years later in 1994, an amendment was passed that permanently abolished the Panamanian army (Gilboa).

In the years after the Noriega regime and invasion of Panama, Americans were uncertain and hesitant of the impending end of their tenure of the canal. The necessity of the invasion had left many were skeptical of if Panama was capable of defending the canal and managing it without corruption. Discussion between Panama in the US continued about the possibility and necessity of having some number of American troops remain in Panama after the year 2000 (LaFranchi “The Canal”). American media reported that some Panamanians were interested in the increased security US soldiers provided, however it was still a disputed topic (LaFranchi “The Canal”). Panamanian President Balladares openly stated that he wished at least a small contingency of American forces remain to aid in antinarcotics operations (LaFranchi “The Canal”). Polls

of Panamanian civilians revealed that approximately two-thirds were in favor of some troops remaining, many stating the economic impact the Americans have and also security as main factors (LaFranchi “The Canal”). Americans were less concerned with maintaining a military presence in Panama. US officials had informally expressed interest in maintaining Howard Airforce Base in Panama City but had also stated that they refused to pay rent to Panama for use of such lands that were previously part of the Canal Zone (LaFranchi “The Canal”). Additionally many congressmen expressed disapproval of keeping a foreign military base operational when so many bases back in the US were closing (LaFranchi “The Canal”). Without any very compelling reasons to maintain troop in Panama the US seemed content to completely leave their handiwork in the hands of the Panamanians. If the US felt any bitterness towards Panama for handing over the canal, officials could have used security as an excuse to keep American presence and vigilance over the canal.

During the process of the US relinquishing control of the canal to Panama there were numerous reports by the US media sources of violations of the Panama Canal Treaty by Panama (Newsom). Alleged violations ignited even more concerns that the media published in a frenzy criticizing the Panamanian efforts of running the canal. In 1997 with less than three years before the canal was to be fully in Panamanian control one American newspaper wrote of concerns such as the “possible decline in work-force quality, potential labor unrest, toll increases making the canal uneconomic for shippers, and diversion of revenues from maintenance” to other questionable acts (Newsom). This statement was followed by the remark that the US had never used the canal for profit and that all proceeds had always financed maintenance and improvements, and that in

Panama it could never be certain that the canal would remain free from corrupt management (Newsom). This kind of superiority shows the suspicion and lack of confidence many had in the way Panama would run the canal. Such a statement also seems to infer that the US never gained any intrinsic profits from the canal, which is simply untrue. Had the canal not benefitted the US in any tangible, measureable way Teddy Roosevelt would not have bothered to build it and the US would not have dedicated over fifty years to preserving it.

With media asserting that the “government [of Panama] has a heavy responsibility to insulate the canal from internal politics, corruption, or ecological deterioration,” it shows how little faith many had in the small country operating one of the most vital gateways to worldwide trade (Newsom). Even with all the careful planning that went into transitioning power in small increments and increasing the number of Panamanian workers slowly over two decades, many Americans still felt that the canal was not in capable hands. In contrast, Panamanian sentiment towards Americans was at an all-time high (Newsom). Around the same time as American suspicions were reverberating through the country, a reporter for a Panamanian newspaper countered that “Right now the pro-Yankee sentiment here is strong, the atmosphere is perhaps better than ever” (LaFranchi “The Canal”).

As time passed and the final turnover of the canal to the Panamanians neared, American media began publishing that Panamanians were concerned about the effect of accepting the canal. The tone had changed from just Americans and US policymakers having issue with the way Panama would fare in the future; news spread citing the fear civilian Panamanians had for the future. A newspaper article in 1999 introduced



Panamanian residents who explained their concerns for security, the economic loss caused by the loss of thousands of American servicemen in the area, and government corruption. The article explained that “the doubts raised by average Panamanians about their nation’s future beyond December 31 are no different from those expressed by military strategists, international shippers and member of the U.S. Congress” (Robberson “Panamanians”). The same article later claims that Panamanians “from uneducated shoe shiners to the nation’s leading politicians have grown impatient with the U.S. presence and believe the withdrawal is long overdue” (Robberson “Panamanians”). A statement such as this undermines what the Panamanians had done thus far to support the canal politically and in terms of security. It also infers that “uneducated” Panamanians were a significant part of the population and were participating in international policy decisions. At best this article demonstrates the delicate situation that existed between the United States and Panama towards the close of the twentieth century, and at worst it shows the ignorant prejudices that many Americans had about Panamanians. Additionally while many Panamanians very well may have had concerns about the final transition of the canal their attitude towards Americans was more respectful and grateful. With the guidance of former president Guillermo Endara the Panamanians came to see the American presence as a positive event in their history. They were able to put aside their own prejudices against America and instead focused on the future. Panamanians acknowledged that it was time for their country to take control of its own destiny and stand as a whole, sovereign nation for the first time in history (Robberson “Panamanians”).

Regardless of how the public felt about the situation and the security of the canal into future, the international policy had been set in the Carter treaties in 1977 and there was no way to stop the process. On December 31, 1991 while the world waited for the turn of the century, a much smaller celebration took place in Panama (Robberson “Descendants”). After nearly a century of waiting the Canal Zone was relinquished giving full control and sovereignty to Panama. The government was back in the hands of the people and the nation was no longer militant. Panama has ensured that the canal was, and to this day remains, managed completely separate from the government, therefore prohibiting any abuse of the resource or any sort of unrest from disrupting canal business. This has been, by far, the most successful achievement of the Panamanian tenure of the canal.

The canal has undergone changes and modifications through the years as part of necessary maintenance, but it has maintained the vast majority of its original structure and design. To this day the canal operates as a one-way passageway only. During a twenty-four hour time period, twelve hours are allotted to north-bound traffic and then the direction is switched and south-bound traffic is permitted the remaining twelve hours. The current canal constricts traffic and size of the vessels that can fit through the canal obviously limit the quantity of cargo that can pass through (Hricko). Ships needing to pass through the canal are often forced to wait for days before they are given clearance to enter the canal (Lynch). The canal has been working at capacity for the past ninety years and the number of vessels wishing to use the canal increases every year (Hricko). Plans for expanding the canal or building a third set of locks were proposed after only a decade of

the canal being open for passage, but now after one hundred years the idea of a larger canal is becoming a reality (McCullough 613).

While plans for expanding the canal have been discussed for decades, the plan currently in progress was formally introduced on April 24, 2006 (Kraul and White). The proposal was then sent to a national vote in which 79% of Panamanians voted in approval of the multibillion dollar plan (“A ‘yes’ for canal plan”). With such strong support a third set of locks and new shipping lanes for the Panama Canal quickly began construction in 2007. The new project received such strong support in part because the expansion was to be entirely funded by the canal authority, the jobs it would create, and the fact that the new locks would not displace any landowners (Kraul and White). The construction was originally scheduled to be completed in 2014 and open for the centennial celebration of the canal. However setbacks involving funding, strikes, and disputes with contractors caused delays and now the project is not scheduled to be complete until the summer of 2016.

While Panamanians are unabashed in their enthusiasm for the new canal lane, Americans remain largely uninterested. Most major US newspapers reported on the expansion plans only once the national vote passed. Coverage of the progress being made is only sporadic. It is not surprising that Americans are not interested in the canal as they once were; this is no longer an American asset and understandable does not hold interest in the same way Teddy Roosevelt’s canal project did. What Americans are interested in is how the new expansion will affect their country. Of the fifty articles collected from 2005 mentioning the Panama Canal twenty-seven of them are focused on how the canal will affect American ports and commerce. Most articles are reports on the renovations of US

ports and updates on strengthening the infrastructure that will be needed when commerce from the canal reaches America. Hidden among the overwhelming America-focused articles are occasional updates detailing worker strikes, financial constraints, and the progress of the expansion. No American contractors, financiers, or politicians are involved with the canal's current expansion. The canal is no longer an American asset and as such Americans are largely uninterested unless it directly is affecting their lives.

The canal is now the national pride of Panama and the overwhelming support of the expansion is proof of that. In a country that at times struggled politically and financially the canal has been their greatest resource. Many see the expansion project as a democratic move to improve the lives of underprivileged Panamanians. The expansion was slated to directly create seven thousand new jobs and countless more once traffic through the canal increases. Panamanians are keeping the canal from going obsolete by staking their future on the current expansion and new locks. The storied history of this region is proof enough that nothing is certain when it comes to Panama or the canal. The defining success of the canal to this point has often come by taking the unconventional route. Nothing ever came easily for the Panamanians, not independence from Colombia, not the completion of the canal, or sovereignty over the Canal Zone. The current excavations and construction of the new locks certainly has not been easy. In the modern era of environmental impact reports, national referendums, and courting of Chinese investors the new expansion has been wrought with obstacles. But 79% of Panamanians are willing to bet on the canal, which is as good of an indicator of the future as anything.

## Chapter Seven: Analysis and Interpretation

With the coming expansion of the canal rewriting trade routes yet again and Panama trying to reestablish the world order this small country has come full circle. Many times people, both Panamanian and not, have asked whether the Panama Canal worth it all? Will it last? Has Panama actually benefitted from the canal? These are of course hypothetical questions with answers too complicated to identify, and talking with any Panamanian they will probably tell you that it is all irrelevant. What can be measured and studied is the state of Panama now as manager of the canal for the past fifteen years and how the canal is charting its own path into the future.

The fledgling nation of Panama, not so unlike the familiar history of the United States of America, has quickly asserted itself as a keystone of international affairs and global trade. With a history of barely over one hundred years as an organized republic, Panama's location at a critical geographic location connecting the continents of North and South America and now because of the canal the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans has put this small Central American nation at the forefront of globalization. The Panama Canal is in fact so pivotal a character in global history that the country of Panama would not even exist without the canal. The isthmus region of Panama, formerly a territory of Colombia, had been recognized for its potential for an oceanic canal since the first explorers set foot there and witness the miniscule fifty-one mile distance that separated the two oceans. It stood for over a century as an idea before it became a funded project and then eventually a failed project. It was not until a precocious French engineer, claiming no financial ties to the success of the canal and only acting "to save the noble conception of French genius through its adoption by America," Philippe Bunau-Varilla

acting as an unsanctioned ambassador approached Panamanian officials with a proposal: allow the US sole rights and means to construct a trans-isthmian canal and the US will aid and legitimize Panama's liberty from Colombia (qtd. in McCullough 288). Thus one of the most important and powerful international cooperations of the twentieth century was created, and in 1903 the República de Panamá was established as an autonomous nation.

The Panamanians already had a regional culture separate from Colombians before the US or French ever undertook a canal project. The Panamanians had an identity unto themselves that included six different indigenous tribes and had long seen themselves as exceedingly different from their southern neighbors. They do not celebrate their independence from Colombia because they never considered themselves Colombian. The United States recognized the tensions existent between Panamanians and Colombians and capitalized on their differences. The interconnectedness of these two countries over the next 111 years is intricate. With a few exceptions, Panama grew and established itself as an uncommonly stable union situated in heart of the notoriously corrupt and volatile Latin American nations. The impact that the US had on Panama is complex and spans politics, language, demographics, music, food, daily life, and national attitude. The decade of construction had lasting impacts on the culture of Panama. It was not until the final hours of the twentieth century was Panama finally united as a whole country for the first time. For centuries Panamanians had lived under the rule of foreign nations, but in fifteen short years this country has established itself as the heart of Central America. Panama is unique in that it has taken the influence from other nations and fused it with their own culture to shape a uniquely distinct style of politics, lifestyle, and trade. In the

case of Panama it seems that rather than people shaping events it was events shaping people.

With the affirmation that a society, or culture, cannot simply be analyzed without the context of politics and economics it should come as no surprise that the features of American influence in Panamanian society are varied and occur throughout the many areas of daily life. That said the continued prevalence and use of the English language in Panama is not surprising considering the large numbers of Americans that lived there during the US's tenure of the canal until the year 2000. In fact the Panamanian government is promoting bilingualism within Panama by sending thousands of citizens to live in the US to learn and perfect their English. The fluency of many Panamanians in English is an enticing factor for many seeking to travel or do business in Panama. More surprising is the use of the United States dollar as the official currency of Panama. Though Panama mints the balboa, small change coins that look and feel incredibly similar to US coins, the national currency remains the US dollar and is further evidence that these different levels of society, politics, and commerce are inseparable. Additionally the US dollar in Panama indicates a complex mixing of cultures that not even cessation of American involvement in the Panama Canal could end. That Panama never saw the need to do away with American currency reveals that there was never a strong argument to change currencies. From this it can be assumed that if Panamanians felt any significant acrimony towards the US then they would have phased out the green notes emblazoned with US presidents' portraits in favor of a more pro-Panamanian bills.

Of course there are compelling reasons to retain US coinage as the national currency, the most obvious being that the US dollar has long been and continues to be

one of the strongest monetary systems in the world. For Panama to conduct global business with the US dollar offers economic legitimacy to a Central American nation that it might not otherwise have. It also facilitates global commerce by using the currency of a much larger nation that participates heavily in worldwide commerce. Other foreign nations are typically familiar with conducting business in the US dollar and therefore bringing business to Panama is simplified. The most obvious reason, however, may just be that it was easier to continue to use the dollar. Ever since the US-backed separation of the Panamanian republic from Colombia in 1903 the dollar has been the money of choice; and since it is functioning so well for the Panamanians there is simply no reason to change it (Black).

Another one of the most vivid examples of how the US changed Panama is that currently 14% of the Panamanian population is black, obvious descendants from the West Indian laborers (Museo Afro-Antilleano; “Central America and Caribbean: Panama”). The laborers brought in from all over the world to work on the canal forever changed the demographics of this country and increased Panama’s diversity immensely. Unlike its neighbors with mostly Spanish and indigenous roots, Panamanians have ancestors with histories in such far-away places as Asia, Europe, and of course the Caribbean. However Panama also inherited the racism and segregation the United States implemented during the American tenure of the canal (Museo Afro-Antilleano). The culture of segregation however did not last. Today Panama is a diverse country and welcomes new citizens from around the globe with the kind of social acceptance seen in many European nations.

That is not to say that Panama has at all lost any of its original culture. The six original indigenous groups of the Panamanian isthmus, the Kuna, Bribri, Ngobe-Bugle,



Naso, Embera, and Wounaan, still exist as subsistence farmers and fisher-gatherer societies. Of course these groups live differently today and are no longer isolated from urbanized society, but they are using modernization of the world to their advantage. The chiefs encourage visitors to take photographs to help spread knowledge of their tribe, knowing that public and government support of their tribes is essential for the continuity of their lifestyle. Hunting has been outlawed in Panama forcing members of these indigenous groups to make weekly trips into the city to purchase meat which then has to be transported back to the villages by dugout canoe. Embracing further modernization of the world, the Wounaan that live in a village in the Gamboa rainforest near the Panama Canal have just sent their first member to college in Mexico City. Overall the indigenous people are maintaining the integrity of their lifestyle while adapting to modern norms and adhering to government laws. These tribes represent the mentality of all Panamanians: adapt and embrace the changing world around them.

Panama as a country is striving to become the hub of the Americas, a centralized metropolis ideally located for cooperation with both the northern and southern continents. This goal is not just limited to political or financial goals. The citizens themselves are eagerly accepting foreign, mostly American, habits and placing on them an elite status. For example spending nights partying is a common Latin American pastime, but a spending an extravagant night partying on the rooftop bar of the Hard Rock Casino is the ultimate sign of status. Even for locals of Panama City, splurging to spend a night in the Hard Rock is a common way to flaunt your status at being on the wealthy end of the gaping income distribution (“Central America and Caribbean: Panama”). However the Hard Rock is hardly the only gleaming tower of American origin being adopted by locals

into their lives. The newly constructed Trump tower juts ostentatiously at the southernmost tip of Panama City facing the Pacific Ocean and standing as the tallest building in in the city. It has a whimsical shape reminiscent of something one would see on the skyline of Dubai, but instead it is a symbol of Yankeeedom nestled amongst the shorter and more industrial towers of the financial district. However it is not simply an adoption of American cultural phenomena into the Panamanian lifestyle, but arguably a method of survival for a society that is at a major crossroads of international commerce.

The evolution of the world during the twentieth century can be directly seen in the relations between the United States and Panama. The US, as the quintessential imperialistic superpower, now “acknowledges that partnerships, not unilateralism, will reign in the twenty-first century” (LaFranchi “America”). Jimmy Carter was the first to adopt human rights concerns into his foreign policy and today many other foreign nations do the same (Cassara). Panama in return has been friendly, not spiteful, towards the US and the two countries have been in negotiations over free trade agreements for years. The example these nations set in the twentieth century has led to a stable relationship in the twenty-first century that continues to demonstrate the power of peaceful cooperation.

While Panama may seem to be a postcolonial success story it can hardly be attributed to the goodwill of the Americans. In the instances where Panamanians benefitted from the American canal project it was less because the US felt a responsibility for the Panamanians and more because it was the means to achieving a specific American objective. There were concerns for human rights throughout the American tenure, mostly coming from the general population and not policy makers, but those concerns were overshadowed by the desire to succeed. Additionally, in the rare instances where news of

conflict between Americans and Panamanians occurred in US media, it always portrayed the Americans as the victims. Never were there stories of Americans inciting altercations, as was frequently the case, reported in the US. Instances of Americans refusing to pay vendors for goods, or for a high school in the Canal Zone refusing to raise the Panamanian flag circulated (Robberson “Panamanians”). Though these instances caused protests, violent clashes, and ultimately deaths of both American and Panamanians the only reports on such instances were cited as simply anti-American violence on the part of the Panamanians.

To forget the influence that other nations have had on Panama would be a disservice to a country that prides itself in its tolerance and diversity. Indeed there is not much evidence of the French era in Panama save for some of the architecture that is being restored. In Casco Viejo, the area where the French initially laid their camp, the architecture is exceedingly French. Though the old city was mostly destroyed during the American invasion in 1989, the remaining original buildings are being restored to their original design complete with wrought iron balconies, high ceilings, and pastel facades. Panama City has, as many large American metropolitan areas, a thriving Chinese community comprised of both new immigrants and descendants of laborers brought to work on the canal. The China Town entrance is marked with a decorative gate as is custom in many other large cities. Food in Panama City reflects the diversity of the city’s inhabitants. It is not uncommon to find unique blending of cultures such as a pizza topped with plantains and coconut or a punk Soviet art themed restaurant serving pasta. The music of Panama is also uniquely related to its geographic location. There is much more Caribbean reggae music in Panama City, which lies on the Pacific Ocean, than would be

expected. But it is said that reggaeton music actually originated in Panama and was created by former canal workers.

It is obvious from these observations and from history that Panama is not so much a melting pot of cultures as it is a sponge, readily and eagerly absorbing foreign influences and blending them with the already existent customs and ways of life. In contrast with the US, which has long been suspicious and unwelcoming towards many foreigners and immigrants, Panama welcomes them, gives them equal benefits as natural-born citizens, and makes finding work in the country less complicated than many other countries.

The goal of this study was to increase the knowledge of social history of the Panama Canal because by better understanding history, we can better understand our present reality and become better equipped to forge a more promising future for all. The overall sentiment in Panama seems to be overwhelmingly in favor of optimism for the future and while recognizing that the past does hold painful memories. Unlike many other foreign nations that had played the role of colony to the United States, Panamanians do not seem to hold any sort of grudge. There are powerful examples of this throughout Panama. The residents are very welcoming and accepting of American visitors and expatriates, whereas in some places American visitors are looked down upon. They are eager to speak English instead of insisting upon utilizing only Spanish. They continue to adopt new American influences, such as American-style sports bars with massive televisions to watch soccer and an influx and small beer breweries. Panamanians are very proud people and much of what they have pride in has direct ties to the American canal project. The majority of Panamanians seem to share this sentiment, being grateful for a

stable government within the incredibly corrupt Central and South American region, for safe potable water and advanced sewage, high quality sanitation and health care facilities, English-language schools, and of course the thousands of lucrative jobs the canal provides.

The Panama Canal changed the world and in return the world changed Panama. This country witnessed globalization before it became a popular concern. Today with nations obsessed with maintaining their cultural identity, concerns of too much international influence, and an excess of foreign immigrants Panama serves as a shining example of embracing and encouraging diversity and change. Panama, in essence, is a petri dish to the world. This small nation represents a great variety of people that have managed to live together in a small country in harmony. From indigenous fishing cultures still living without modern conveniences to billionaires investing in Panama City to become the new fashion hub of the world, Panama has forged an atmosphere that is accepting of all lifestyles and ambitions. The success of Panama has come from its ability to accept and manage such polarizing differences while making the best of a tumultuous political and economic history. The optimistic Panamanians have taken their greatest resources and in just fifteen years have made their country into a pivotal commercial player and legitimate investment capital. At the heart of it all lies the canal, one hundred years old and still changing the world.

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