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# The First World War and the Decline of US Empire in the Caribbean

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# The First World War and the Decline of US Empire in the Caribbean

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“The campaign in Santo Domingo during 1918 was a part of the Great War.”  
(Lieutenant Colonel George Thorpe, US Marine Corps<sup>2</sup>)

Histories of US involvement in the First World War and those of US empire in the Americas are like estranged twins, intimately connected but strangely absent from each other's lives. Understandably, the first group is focused almost exclusively on the European theatre<sup>3</sup>. But most historians of inter-American relations have equally given little attention to the war<sup>4</sup>. Those who have focused on it have generally asked how the Allies obtained Latin American participation and how hemispheric diplomacy and commerce affected the war effort.<sup>5</sup> Those more interested in

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La communication a été faite en Français avec le titre suivant : *La Première Guerre Mondiale et le déclin de l'Empire américain dans les Caraïbes*.

2. Colonel George C. Thorpe, memo to Major General Commandant, Headquarters USMC in Washington, Norfolk, Virginia, 14 May 1919, folder Santo Domingo, Contacts, Reports of, box 2, Miscellaneous Collection of Records Relating to the Marine Occupation of Santo Domingo. Dominican Republic, 1916-1924, Records of the United States Marine Corps Record Group 127 (hereafter RG 127) ; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA I).

3. For instance, Farwell 1999 devotes only a few pages to Mexico, and no space to any other country in Latin America.

4. Grandin 2006, 30-1.

5. For examples, see Bailey 1942, esp. ch. 10 ; Durán 1985 ; Jore 1988 ; Albert 1988 ; Siepe 1992 ; Weinmann 1994. This scholarship to some extent reflects the literature during and immediately after the war, celebrating Latin American republics which joined the war and disparaging those which did not : Groupement des Universités 1916 ; Contreras 1917 ; Kirkpatrick 1918 ; Gaillard 1918 ; Suárez 1918 ; Barrett 1919. Another group of historians has focused exclusively on the Latin American-European relationship, largely excluding the United States ; see for example, Couyoumdjian 1986, and Rolland 1992.

US empire have been fixated largely on the opposite question – how the war affected the Americas, specifically the rising power of US trade and finance in the hemisphere. Their narrative is generally that of an imperial jaguar, already well perched before the war, taking advantage of European distraction and weakness to pounce on European partners in the Americas. The narrative is also largely focused on South America<sup>6</sup>.

While that narrative is true enough, it neglects a more nuanced story of how the First World War promoted but also restrained US empire in the Americas. At the heart of this nuance is the paradox that affected the Americas as much as it did Europe : the United States entered a war alongside colonial powers in order to promote self-determination. Just as the start of war in Europe offered Washington an opportunity to expand its power in the hemisphere, it also foresaw the beginning of the end of that empire by offering, at least implicitly, the ideological foundation for democracy and independence in President Woodrow Wilson's call for national self-determination. To understand this dynamic fully, historians must take three approaches that they rarely have : first, begin the narrative not, as they usually do, in 1917, when the United States entered the war, but in 1914, when Germany began to threaten the hemisphere ; second, focus on political and military rather than economic matters ; and third, take into account the voices of those living under the US empire – not the largely independent presidents of South American countries, but repressed, censored and desperate representatives of peoples directly under the US heel in the smaller countries of the Caribbean and Central America. It is these denizens of often military-occupied republics who most took to heart Wilson's entreaties on self-government and confronted them with the hypocrisy of US empire. This article makes those shifts in conceptual and methodological emphasis, made possible by research in three languages and five countries.

## 1. THE WAR AS A BOON FOR US EMPIRE

In many ways the war in Europe boosted the fortunes of US empire. Economically, the United States rapidly supplanted European countries as a major exporter, banker and investor south of its border. Diplomatically, the war put unprecedented pressure on Latin American republics. And militarily, the United States occupied or acquired more territory as a result of the war, or else solidified its strategic position in Central America and the Caribbean.

First, the war in Europe improved the financial outlook of the United States in the Americas. Even before hostilities broke out, the USA was moving toward an empire that increasingly emphasised dollars over bullets. True, Wilson and his Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, were opposed to the controlled-loan 'dollar diplomacy' of Wilson's predecessor William Howard Taft<sup>7</sup>. But their opposition was to the military control that it implied, not the extension of US commercial power.

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6. For examples, see Tulchin 1971 ; Black 1988 ; Rosenberg 1987 ; Langley 2002 ; Cuenca 2006.

7. Adler 1940, 200-1.

As historian Joseph Tulchin has noted, priorities shifted from eliminating political instability and fiscal irresponsibility to helping US businesses dominate foreign investment, hitherto a European domain in Latin America<sup>8</sup>.

During the First World War, the revolving door between US business and diplomacy turned ever more swiftly. The State Department was filled with men from a business background and with investments abroad, and they increasingly rejoined the business world after public service<sup>9</sup>. The relationship was so intimate that firms at times directly influenced military policy. Entrepreneur Roger Farnham, who had economic interests in Haiti, played a not unsubstantial role in scaring Wilson administration officials into believing tales of German, French and even unlikely German-French intrigue in the republic, and those tales led to intervention in 1915<sup>10</sup>.

More commonly, the State Department encouraged the growth of US business in Latin America not only indirectly by organising conferences, but directly by loaning out translators, allowing the private use of official cables and providing official representation on behalf of corporations. The federal government also set up financial, shipping and communications infrastructure or enacted legislation to encourage private growth in Latin America. The War Trade Board embargoed some foodstuffs to Cuba, which benefited US firms, and also blacklisted enemy firms, which allowed US interests to supplant them. Transferring German firms to US hands, wrote the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, was 'a good method for the development of American commerce in that region [Latin America.]'. As a result, trade between Latin America and the United States nearly tripled during the war, and US foreign direct investment south of the Río Grande grew from \$754.1 million in 1915 to \$2819.2 million in 1924<sup>11</sup>.

A major financial goal of US occupations, also adopted before the war, was to replace Europeans as the Caribbean area's major creditors. In 1910, the State Department had reorganised the National Bank of Haiti and Wall Street had largely replaced French bankers<sup>12</sup>. In Nicaragua, Secretary Bryan feared that Europeans, who were demanding payments by a government saddled with a \$15 million debt, would move to take over its customs, if not its government. Bryan sold Wilson on the idea of replacing European loans at 5 to 6 per cent for US loans at 4.5 per cent, thus saving Nicaragua some money and still providing Wall Street with a profit<sup>13</sup>. And in 1913, the Federal Reserve Act allowed US banks to establish affiliates in Latin America<sup>14</sup>.

The First World War encouraged empire in the Americas not only commercially but diplomatically. As a diplomatic indication of US power over its empire by the start of the war, Washington was able to marshal

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8. Tulchin 1971, 3.

9. Rosenberg 1987, 39.

10. Schmidt 1995, 52.

11. Coleman 1951, 36 ; Rosenberg 1987, 42-4, 50, 51 (quotation), 73. See also Kaufman 1971.

12. Callcott 1942, 277.

13. Adler 1940, 208.

14. Whitaker 1954, 114.

most directly the sympathies of nations directly under its tutelage. On 3 February 1917 Wilson severed diplomatic relations with Germany, while on 6 April Congress declared war and Wilson asked that Latin American governments at least break relations with Germany. Such a request ran contrary to the Monroe Doctrine, which viewed with disfavour any hemispheric involvement in European affairs<sup>15</sup>. Still, only six out of 20 Latin American republics remained neutral during the war. Of the 14 that either declared war on or broke relations with Germany, two were US protectorates (Cuba and Panama), three were under military occupation (Haiti, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic) and three more were subject to either occasional marine landings or diplomatic pressure (Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras)<sup>16</sup>.

To be sure, to argue for US pressure is not to deny that Latin American executives also considered their national interest when they responded favourably to Washington. The Haitian government held off on declaring war until a German submarine attack on the steamers *Karnak* and *Montreal*, which destroyed a great deal of cargo and killed eight Haitian citizens in early 1917.

Yet republics in the Caribbean and Central America admitted the weight of US influence in their decisions. Cuban President Mario García Menocal did so somewhat inadvertently in his war message, explaining that neutrality would 'be contrary to public sentiment, to the spirit of pacts and obligations, rather more moral than legal which bind us to the United States, and would eventually, because of her [Cuba's] geographical situation, be a source of inevitable conflict [with the United States].'

In his own war message, Haiti's Sudre Dartiguenave spoke of 'our powerful and natural ally, the United States, admirable in her lofty ideals'. 'Our indisputable duty in this tremendous hour of history is of a common ally,' echoed the president of Panama, 'whose interests and existence as well are linked indissolubly with the United States'<sup>17</sup>.

But the least studied yet most complex impact of the war on US empire is the third, the military one. It remains under-examined because of the long saga of US military interventions before 1914. Tulchin, for instance, sees interventions in Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua as products of the pre-war, shop-worn pattern of intervention. While this is true, these interventions were nevertheless substantial, and some of them direct results of the war<sup>18</sup>.

The Caribbean became far more strategically important as soon as the war began in Europe, and even more so when the United States joined it. The opening of the Panama Canal in August 1914 coincided with the outbreak of hostilities, and so shipping lanes became doubly vital to US security. In fiscal years 1917-19, over 5600 ships transited through the waterway. Mexican petroleum and Chilean nitrates, both vital to the Allies, passed through the Caribbean<sup>19</sup>.

Ships steamed past some of the smallest and more vulnerable republics in Latin America, such as Cuba and Haiti, and so increased the US fear of

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15. Rosenberg 1987, 4.

16. For details, see Barrett 1919.

17. All cited in *ibid*, 15, 20, 23 ; see also Martin 1942, 517.

18. Tulchin 1971, 5.

19. Yerxa 1987, 182.

a military take-over by Europeans. Reacting to this competitive environment, the Wilson administration purchased the tiny Danish West Indies in 1916, renaming them the Virgin Islands, days before the war declaration of 1917, out of fear that the Germans might seize them and establish a U-boat base<sup>20</sup>. It is even probable that Wilson signed into law the Jones Act, which among other things made Puerto Ricans US citizens, on 2 March 1917 partly because it facilitated the conscription of Puerto Ricans into the military when the Selective Service Act was passed two months later. Twenty thousand Puerto Ricans eventually served in the First World War<sup>21</sup>.

Most consequentially, Wilson sent occupation forces to Haiti (1915-34) and the Dominican Republic (1916-24). To be sure, US military intervention was not new on the island of Hispaniola that both republics shared. From 1867 to 1913, US Marines landed in Haiti 24 times<sup>22</sup>. Yet in 1915, when political violence threatened foreigners in Port-au-Prince, the Navy occupied Haiti indefinitely, primarily because of the war. The chief concern in landing was to pre-empt the Germans and French from doing the same<sup>23</sup>. It turned out later that major policy-makers such as Secretary of State Robert Lansing proved alarmist about impending European occupations, and the intervention of Haiti turned into an occupation because the State Department thought it could change the revolutionary political culture of the Haitians<sup>24</sup>. Yet the fact remains that it was fear of European intervention that prompted the initial Marine landing. Lansing, for instance, had every intention of securing a naval base at Haiti's Môle Saint-Nicolas, and Navy officials also wanted to protect Samaná Bay in the neighbouring Dominican Republic. When the Marines took Port-au-Prince in July 1915, the French had landed days before in Cap-Haïtien to protect French property, and the US Navy immediately warned Paris and London to move no further<sup>25</sup>. The French backed off, saying 'that anything likely to cause difficulties with the United States should be avoided'<sup>26</sup>.

Fear of Germany – and particularly of German spies in occupied countries – also coloured the occupations of these two countries. The exaggeration of the German threat is clear: while there may have been German citizens under US occupation who were less than loyal to Washington, there was no evidence of any effort by Germany to co-ordinate those citizens<sup>27</sup>. Berlin certainly did organise political activity elsewhere in Latin America, but not in countries that the Marines occupied<sup>28</sup>.

Yet the larger point, again, is that the Marines feared German subversion and so entrenched themselves more deeply as an imperial force. Major General Littleton Waller wrote to the Secretary of the Navy citing

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20. *Ibid.*

21. Cabranes 1979, 404.

22. Langley 1985, 69; Ferguson 2004, 56.

23. Pierce and Hough 1964, 161; Plummer 1992, 91.

24. Editorial, 'Mr. Lansing's Haitian Letter', *New York Times*, 9 May 1922, 15; Douglas 1927, 253.

25. *Ibid.*; McCrocklin 1956, 19, 21; Lieutenant R.B. Coffey, 'Notes on the Intervention in Haiti, with Some of its Political and Strategic Aspects', Port-au-Prince, 1 February 1916, folder Reports, Miscellaneous, 1915-16, box 3, Papers of William Banks Caperton, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress (hereafter MD-LOC).

26. British Ambassador in Paris F. Bertie telegram to Foreign Office, 7 August 1915, file 108600, reference 2370, Foreign Office 371, Public Record Office, Kew (hereafter PRO).

27. Edelstein 2008, 45.

28. Schuler 2010.

‘strong evidence’ – though he offered none – of German financing of Haitian anti-occupation activists in order ‘to upset the Government and drive the Americans out<sup>29</sup>.’ Haitian officials who approved of the occupation also believed such hype<sup>30</sup>. In July 1918 the Haitian Council of State gave itself the right to expel and control the movements of foreigners and to take their property. Two days later the president decreed the sequestration of leading German commercial houses. He also imposed restrictions on German movements and interned 21 German citizens<sup>31</sup>. In early 1920, long after the war was over, the Marines deported 50 Germans from Haiti<sup>32</sup>. The fear was so widespread that, generations later, US diplomats and historians remembered the German peril as real<sup>33</sup>.

The Dominican occupation was even more stiffened by paranoia, since there was never even an implied threat of German occupation there. As the State Department’s Dana Munro later explained, the occupation began in 1916 partly because ‘the principal troublemakers were known to be pro-German<sup>34</sup>.’ Occupation authorities suspected Germans behind every Dominican insurgency, and jailed at least a few German citizens<sup>35</sup>. Yet the accuracy of their knowledge was again doubtful. Occupiers spoke of ‘German interest’ lurking behind insurrections and persecuted Germans without offering solid evidence of their crimes. Some expressed frustration that they could find no ‘proof’ of German subversion<sup>36</sup>. Yet again fear, not a real threat, was paramount. Lieutenant Colonel

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29. Major General L.W.T. Waller, USMC, memorandum to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, Washington, [24 ?] September 1920, folder Haiti opns. + training. 1915-1920, box 2, General Correspondence, 1907-1936, RG 127, NARA I.

30. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, memo to Secretary of State, 14 March 1917, 838.00/1439, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (hereafter RG 59), National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA II).

31. Martin 1942, 519 ; ‘Interned Germans’, 11 February 1919, folder Internment Camp, box 2, General Correspondence of Headquarters, Gendarmerie d’Haiti 1916-1919, RG 127, NARA I.

32. John H. Russell, daily diary report, 19 January 1920, 838.00/1618, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II.

33. Josephus Daniels, ‘The Problem of Haiti’, *Saturday Evening Post*, 12 July 1930, 32, 34, 36 ; Beaulac 1951, 102 ; Rear Admiral Kent C. Melhorn, oral history by Commander Etta-Belle Kitchen and Commander Charles Melhorn, Julian, California, 14 February 1970, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC ; Heintz, Jr. and Heintz 1978, 431 ; Corvington 1984, 53.

34. Munro 1980, 270.

35. ‘Quarterly Report of Military Government in Santo Domingo from July 1, 1918, to September 30, 1918’, 18 October 1918, 839.00/2104, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II.

36. Lieutenant Colonel George C. Thorpe, Chief of Staff, letter to Brigadier General J.H. Pendleton, San Pedro de Macoris, 19 September 1918, folder 21, box 2, Papers of Joseph H. Pendleton, Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections, Gray Research Center, Quantico, Virginia (hereafter GRC) ; Henry C. Davis, Battalion Commander, memo to James J. McLean, GND, San Pedro de Macoris, 12 June 1918, legajo 28, 1918, fondo Secretaría de Estado de Interior y Policía, Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic ; ‘Annual Report of Military Government in Santo Domingo from date of Proclamation, November 29, 1916, to June 30, 1917’, 21 July 1917, 839.00/2043, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II ; ‘Quarterly Report of Military Government in Santo Domingo from July 1, 1917, to September 30, 1917’, 27 October 1917, 839.00/2062, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II.



George Thorpe, for instance, wrote in August 1918 : 'I am more than ever impressed with the seriousness of the German situation here. They think they own the earth and propose to run things to suit themselves<sup>37</sup>.' Thorpe partly revealed his logic by stating that 'whoever is running this revolution is a wise man : he certainly is getting a lot out of the niggers', and that therefore 'it shows the handwork (*sic*) of the German as certain as can be'. Thorpe offered no evidence of such leadership<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, he concluded in mid-1919 that Dominican 'insurgents were incited, supplied, and often led by Germans' and he 'imprisoned several Germans therefore<sup>39</sup>.'

Thorpe's zeal for rooting out German influence, real or imagined, might also have been motivated by his desire to be sent to Europe. As he explained in August 1918, 'If I do a good job of clearing these two provinces of insurgents and kill a lot, mayn't I go to some more active field of endeavor, too[?] It ought to demonstrate that I'd be a good German-killer<sup>40</sup>.' In other words, the outbreak of war in Europe might have made things considerably worse for anti-occupation guerrillas – and more propitious for US empire – since they became stepping-stones to a greater mission for individual occupiers.

Even the Nicaraguan occupation, begun in 1912 for reasons unrelated to the war in Europe, strengthened its hold after hostilities broke out across the Atlantic. In August 1914 Secretary Bryan and General Emiliano Chamorro signed an agreement that became law when the US Senate ratified it in February 1916. It gave the United States exclusive rights to two naval bases and to build any future inter-oceanic canal in Nicaragua. In return, Washington disbursed \$3 million to the cash-strapped Central American nation. The goals of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty were overwhelmingly strategic. The British had up to then had an equal right to build a canal, and Germany and Japan had expressed interest<sup>41</sup>. The goal of keeping them out was more salient than that of building a new US canal in Nicaragua. The US collector-general of customs in Nicaragua argued that the treaty made Nicaragua 'an important link in the chain, which we are attempting to forge, of preparedness and national defense, and the protection of our investment in the Panama Canal<sup>42</sup>.' After all, Bryan-Chamorro was signed the same month that the Panama Canal saw the passage of its first ships. Bryan had even wanted the agreement to include a US right to armed intervention in Nicaragua, though the Senate opposed it<sup>43</sup>. 'The Nicaraguan policy of the United States angered many Central Americans,' wrote historian Emily Rosenberg, 'yet World

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37. Thorpe, Chief of Staff, letter to Brigadier General J.H. Pendleton, San Pedro de Macorís, 9 August 1918, folder 21, box 2, Papers of Joseph H. Pendleton, GRC.

38. Thorpe, letter to Pendleton, San Pedro de Macorís, 18 August 1918, folder 21, box 2, Papers of Joseph H. Pendleton, GRC.

39. Thorpe, memo, 14 May 1919, folder Santo Domingo, Contacts, Reports of, box 2, Miscellaneous Collection of Records Relating to the Marine Occupation of Santo Domingo. Dominican Republic, 1916-1924, RG 127, NARA I.

40. Thorpe, letter to Pendleton, San Pedro de Macorís, 21 August 1918, folder 21, box 2, Papers of Joseph H. Pendleton, GRC.

41. Gobat 2005, 69.

42. Ham 1916, 185-91.

43. Nalty 1968 ; E-001, C-008, 000446, Colección ACS (Augusto César Sandino), Centro de Historia Militar, Managua, Nicaragua.



War I re-emphasized to the Wilson administration the necessity of dominating the Caribbean region<sup>44</sup>.

By 1919, that dominance was clear. Only the United States had a canal in the area and guarded closely its right to build – or prevent – another. Shipping lanes were as safe as could be, ensuring not only military preeminence but also the ability to outmuscle European competitors commercially. And diplomatically, Latin Americans had needed little prodding to join an effort that reflected their values and interests, even if it did bolster US prestige. The war ended with a minor but fitting episode that spoke of the triumph of US empire : during negotiations over the League of Nations, Wilson acquiesced to the Senate's demand that the Monroe Doctrine be included in the League's Covenant. Latin Americans were livid, but it passed anyway<sup>45</sup>.

## 2. THE WAR AS A RESTRAINT AGAINST US EMPIRE

Paradoxically, the war also restrained US empire in the Americas, and this in two ways. First, by focusing US energies and ambitions largely away from Latin America, war in Europe dampened the Americans' ability to back their social engineering during occupations with the needed military backbone. Second, the very language Wilson used to shape the post-war order in Europe inspired activists in the Americas to hasten the end of what they considered a US effort to suppress their own ability to self-govern.

The war had a moderate impact on the quantity of US troops in the Caribbean. Perhaps hundreds of troops were sent from Hispaniola to France right before the United States entered the First World War, for instance<sup>46</sup>. The consequence for security was minor, yet the head of the Dominican occupation complained in mid-1917 that it gave the impression to insurrectionists 'that we were withdrawing before an unbeaten bandit'<sup>47</sup>. More important, the war harmed the quality of US imperial control by drawing away the most talented Navy officers. Many who were left behind felt inferior, deprived of true combat experience<sup>48</sup>. One complained that Marines in the Dominican Republic received a smaller 'allowance' than those in Europe<sup>49</sup>. Among the discontented was Smedley Butler, an officer whose thirst for combat remained forever unquenched, who bitterly complained of having to stay in Haiti in 1917 to lead its Gendarmerie. He requested a transfer to Europe, and got his wish to go to France, but then never saw combat there, to his chagrin<sup>50</sup>. Butler was

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44. Rosenberg 1987, 155.

45. Tulchin 1971, 64.

46. McCrocklin 1956, 37.

47. H.S. Knapp, memorandum to Secretary of the Navy, 14 July 1917, 839.00/2039, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II.

48. Fuller and Cosmas 1974, 29.

49. Colonel C. Gamborg-Andresen, USMC, memorandum to the Brigade Commander, Santo Domingo, 27 February 1919, folder D-40 Dominican Rep. Misc. USMC Reports, box 8 ; Operations and Training Division, Intelligence Section, 1915-1934, RG 127, NARA I.

50. Schoultz 1998, 233.

not the only one itching to go. The French *chargé d'affaires* in Port-au-Prince reported in 1919 that 20 US recruits, unhappy that they had been sent to Haiti, were awaiting court martial after having mutinied<sup>51</sup>.

Anti-German paranoia, for all its impetus to empire in Latin America, also proved a drawback, because occupiers proved largely unable to appreciate the widespread opposition to their take-over. In the Dominican occupation, Lieutenant Colonel Thorpe concluded that 'unless people are lying to me to curry favor there is almost universal approval of our methods and plan. Our opposition is from Germans and pro-Germans<sup>52</sup>.' The descriptor 'pro-German', often used in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, became a convenient way of neglecting the real grievances of those under occupation, who criticised the Marines for taking over their institutions, dispensing justice unfairly, saddling their governments with new debts and introducing US-style racism, forced labour and torture, among other things<sup>53</sup>. When the war ended but 'pro-Germans' continued to resist, US officials were left without a true appreciation of indigenous attitudes grounded in specific Latin American conditions.

One cannot speak of US empire in Latin America without addressing Mexico. Mexico saw interventions, but not because of the war. On the contrary, the war prevented further interventions, and even shortened one. To be sure, before 1917 Mexico, having already been embroiled in revolution for years when the Great War broke out, suffered through Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson's connivance in the overthrow of President Francisco Madero in 1913, the occupation of Veracruz in 1914 and the 'punitive expedition' to chase down Pancho Villa in 1916-17. Yet none of these moves were consequences of the war. The only directly war-related issue was the German proposal of a military alliance with President Venustiano Carranza in early 1917, uncovered in the Zimmermann telegram<sup>54</sup>. But because Wilson could not afford the troops for a Mexican invasion and preferred to pacify Carranza, he let the matter drop if the latter was indeed strict in his neutrality. Mexico found the proposed alliance untenable in any case. The need for troops for the European theatre even moved Wilson to pull out John Pershing's punitive mission without waiting for a *quid pro quo* from Carranza<sup>55</sup>.

Wilson's Mexican policy, as it related to the war in Europe, was primarily one of caution. In October 1915, after the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German U-boat, the United States joined half a dozen Latin American countries in informally recognising Carranza. In an early, cynical version of self-determination, Wilson threw up his hands: 'If the Mexicans want to raise hell, let them raise hell. We have nothing to do with it. It is their government, it is their hell<sup>56</sup>.' One month before

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51. French *Chargé d'Affaires* René Delage letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Port-au-Prince, 9 July 1919, dossier 3, Haiti, Amérique 1918-1940, Correspondance Politique et Commerciale 1914-1940, Archives Diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, France (hereafter MAE).

52. Thorpe, letter to Pendleton, San Pedro de Macorís, 11 September 1918, folder 21, box 2, Papers of J.H. Pendleton, GRC.

53. Munro 1980, 311.

54. Langley 2002, xvi; Tuchman 1958.

55. Rosenberg 1987, 7-10, 118.

56. Schoultz 1998, 248.

the US war declaration, the *de jure* recognition of Carranza was complete<sup>57</sup>, but after 1917, when he shepherded the approval of a constitution that awarded all subsoil rights to the Mexican people and not to foreign investors, some in the United States panicked. The Oil Producers Association and National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico put pressure on the State Department, and Senator Albert Fall of New Mexico held hearings in August 1919. Suggestions from these proponents of US investment included breaking relations with Carranza so as to encourage arms to flow and a rebellion to spark, or even sending another US intervention force into Mexico. Wilson and Lansing refused<sup>58</sup>.

The second way that the war restrained US empire in the Americas was by spreading the idea of self-determination, a concept that seemed to many to be contradicted by US actions. To those under occupation, self-determination was an obvious goal. Even Latin Americans who did not suffer intervention or occupation were embittered, and many said so when they met US counterparts. The war also created a powerful anti-imperialist minority in the United States, much of it an extension of isolationism<sup>59</sup>. Of greatest consequence was that the end of the war did not immediately end any occupation, which laid bare other, non-strategic reasons for the US presence, such as commercial profit and social engineering.

The message of self-government affected most deeply those to whom US imperial control denied self-government. Latin Americans saw the end of the war as an opportunity to exploit the paradox embedded in Wilson's global foreign policy ideology : the US president fought a 'war to end all wars' and helped imperial allies with a promise to spread 'self-determination.' As Erez Manela has shown, it soon became clear to nationalists and anti-colonialists outside Europe that they were not to be the beneficiaries of Wilson's self-determination<sup>60</sup>.

Latin Americans, like others around the world, did not accede so easily to the US implication that freedom was not for them. Though occupied, Haiti was nominally independent, and so sent diplomats and delegates abroad. Usually these were puppets of the pro-occupation presidents, but there was one exception. Dantès Bellegarde, an experienced statesman and educator, was sent to various European capitals by Port-au-Prince. Often against the wishes of his own government, he argued for the rights of other small nations or those of Haitians exploited for their labour in Cuba<sup>61</sup>. On 1 July 1924, Bellegarde, then president of the Haitian League Society, a private association, made his most impassioned speech to the International Federation of League Societies in Lyon. For this pacifist organisation Bellegarde embraced the language of 'international law' to denounce US occupation. US diplomats, attending only as observers at the General Assembly in Geneva, barely succeeded

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57. *Ibid.*, 251.

58. Machado, Jr. and Judge 1970 ; Trow 1971 ; Langley 2003, 107 ; Rosenberg 1987, 116-17.

59. Schoultz 1998, 253.

60. Manela 2007.

61. Cook 1940.

in having a simultaneous resolution in favour of US withdrawal watered down enough to be innocuous<sup>62</sup>.

Dominicans were even more emboldened by the rhetoric at Versailles – and more desperate. In 1916, the US occupation had pushed their president, Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, into exile. It simultaneously installed a military government that operated like a dictatorship – with no Dominican president or legislature, and a US Marine as military governor ruling by decree – thus making it impossible for Dominicans to represent their nation abroad, in contrast to Haiti. Henríquez y Carvajal – known as ‘Don Pancho’ – lay low for a few years, but when the war drew to a close he saw an opportunity in Wilson’s hypocrisy. ‘Like all patriots,’ explained the French *chargé d’affaires* in Santo Domingo, [Henríquez y Carvajal] sees the US occupation of his country is incompatible with the principle of the rights of small nations proclaimed by President Wilson<sup>63</sup>.

Don Pancho gambled that he could show up at Versailles and appeal directly to Wilson to reconcile his words and actions and end the occupation. The military government sent its own representative to Versailles, but Don Pancho refused to be ‘soothed’ by such an envoy, the British vice-consul wrote<sup>64</sup>. The former president and his circle raised thousands of dollars to pay the cost of his trip to Paris in February 1919. Days before he departed, a sympathetic Cuban newspaper declared that ‘the time has come not only for the small nations of Europe but for those of America ; not only for Belgium and Poland but for Santo Domingo<sup>65</sup> !’

Events soon deflated such enthusiasm<sup>66</sup>. Don Pancho reached Paris, but never got to meet Wilson and was physically shut out of peace talks. ‘I am almost completely isolated,’ he wrote to his son-in-law in despair in April. ‘The Conference delegates are unavailable.’ He did have a meeting with State Department officials, who, to his dismay, informed him that Paris was not the place to discuss Santo Domingo or any other non-European issue<sup>67</sup>.

The immediate post-war years were rife with such disappointment. At Versailles, there were also Haitians trying to lobby Wilson, using his own rhetoric. In contrast to Don Pancho, Haiti’s representative in Paris,

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62. ‘La République de Haïti demande à être libérée des troupes américaines’, *Le Nouvelliste*, 24 July 1924.

63. French *Chargé d’Affaires* Barré-Ponsignon Perroud letter to S. Pichon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Santo Domingo, 2 March 1919, dossier 2, République Dominicaine, Amérique 1918-1940, Correspondance Politique et Commerciale 1914-1940, MAE.

64. British Vice-Consul in Santo Domingo Godfrey A. Fisher, memo to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Arthur Balfour, 9 April 1919, file 69933, reference 3803, Foreign Office 371, PRO.

65. ‘La Soberanía Dominicana’, *Diario de Cuba* (Santiago, Cuba), 18 February 1919, enclosed with American Vice Consul in Cuba letter to Secretary of State, Antilla, Cuba, 24 June 1919, 839.00/2140, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II.

66. Calder 1984, 185-6.

67. Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal letter to Max Henríquez Ureña, Paris, 8 April 1919, in Ureña 1994, 650-2 ; J.C. Grew, Secretary General of American Commission to Negotiate Peace, letter to Frank Polk, Acting Secretary of State, 25 April 1919, 839.00/2134, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II ; Henríquez y Carvajal, ‘Al pueblo dominicano’, Santiago de Cuba, 20 November 1919, in Incháustegui and Malagón 1997, 584-6.

Terulien Guilbaud, was an official delegate, and his instructions were to abolish US-imposed martial law and provost courts in Haiti and to end US financial control. Foreign Minister Constantin Benoît pointed out to Guilbaud the contradiction between Wilson's 'principle of respects for the rights of smaller nations' and Haiti's failure at 'obtaining justice', and suggested the possibility of publicly embarrassing Lansing and his president. Lansing signalled his openness to downgrading the Marine brigade in Port-au-Prince to the status of a 'legation guard', but US officials in Haiti and Washington killed the idea<sup>68</sup>.

Yet after the war, an increasing number of US citizens, moved by pacifism and the senselessness of the First World War, helped Latin Americans out of their imperial straits. Journalist Carleton Beals, for instance, was a conscientious objector during the war who went on to be an influential leftist chronicler of US sins in Latin America<sup>69</sup>. Another writer-activist, James Weldon Johnson, sarcastically titled his series of scathing 1920 articles in *The Nation* 'Self-Determining Haiti'<sup>70</sup>. After the war, Jane Addams helped found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and personally lobbied Wilson to end the Haitian and Dominican occupations. A WILPF co-founder, Emily Balch, was fired from Wellesley College for her opposition to the First World War, and in 1927 led the writing of a critical report on Haiti<sup>71</sup>. Finally, politicians joined the fray. A 70-year-old Representative, William Mason (R-IL), wrote a Dominican activist that he wanted 'to live long enough to see my country free from cononies (*sic*) and all kinds of slavery. This will mean self-determination for the Philippines, Porto Rica (*sic*) and Sandomingo (*sic*)<sup>72</sup>.' Mason died the following year, his wish unfulfilled. In 1920, even presidential candidate Warren Harding declared : 'We are at war, not alone technically with Germany, but actually with the little, helpless republics of our own hemisphere'<sup>73</sup>.

For Latin Americans the rallying cry of 'self-determination' inspired even more in peacetime. Dominican poet Fabio Fiallo continued to denounce Wilson, 'whose cynicism ran parallel with his iniquity when in Versailles he was proclaimed the Defender of the Rights of Weak Nations, while here in the Caribbean the waters were covered with cruisers crowded with marines and soldiers'<sup>74</sup>. Echoing Zola, Dominican historian and novelist Gustavo Adolfo Mejía in 1920 published a tract titled *I accuse Rome*, in which there was no mystery about who the duplicitous 'Rome' truly was : 'I accuse Rome of treason to civilisation ... I accuse Rome of having dishonored the international treaties and doctrines of its

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68. Streeter 2010, 102, 104.

69. Delpar 1992, 30.

70. For example, Johnson 1920.

71. Balch 1972 ; Rosenberg 2003, 129, 130.

72. Rep. William E. Mason letter to Tulio Cestero, Washington, 27 April 1920, legajo Papeles 1919-1920, Tomo 1, Archivo de Tulio Cestero, Fondo Antiguo, Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (hereafter UASD).

73. Moorfield Storey letter to Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, 7 July 1922, folder Corres. Haiti-Santo Domingo May-Sept. 1922, 1922 – undated – Dec. 30, 1927, box 4, Subject File, Papers of Moorfield Storey, MD-LOC.

74. Fiallo 1940, 19.

most brilliant sons<sup>75</sup>.’ Speaking of the Dominican occupation, Cuban historian Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring told a crowd that it was Wilson’s ‘ideas ... that have moved and convinced me to raise my voice in defense precisely of trampled rights and in a demand for justice for a people of America, brother and neighbor to ours.’ He added, to loud applause :

How will President Wilson, after having proclaimed ... the rights of small nationalities, allow that not in Europe but in his own continent there exists a small nation to which his own government has denied the liberty and sovereignty that he ... brought to small European nations ?

Roig specified that Caribbean nations should be self-interested in their defence of the Dominican Republic, since the rights of all small nations close to the United States were similar<sup>76</sup>.

Henríquez y Carvajal used the remainder of his time in Paris to lobby fellow Latin Americans, and there got the idea of a commission to rally support in South America, an idea that came to fruition in 1920<sup>77</sup>. He also returned to form the Dominican National Commission in New York City, which for the rest of the occupation was instrumental in raising funds and not a little hell<sup>78</sup>. In the years that followed the war, Dominican and Haitian activists compared themselves to Poland and other down-trodden nations and repeatedly pointed out Wilson’s hypocrisy<sup>79</sup>.

The issue of self-determination eventually made its way into negotiations between Dominicans and US diplomats in the 1920s. At one meeting with Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, the American Federation of Labor’s President, Samuel Gompers, argued in favour of Dominicans, telling Daniels that the issue of Dominican improvement through US tutelage was irrelevant. ‘They have the right to self-determination,’ Gompers insisted<sup>80</sup>.

Early on, it dawned on US occupiers that contradictions abounded between their stated policies in Europe and their actions in Latin America. In March 1919, after meeting with the Haitian minister in Paris, the American mission cautioned Washington that it could not ‘continue the occupation in the present form, without subjecting the United States to much criticism, particularly, as the rights of smaller nations are being kept to the fore and in the light of the President’s utterances<sup>81</sup>.’ Yet it took a new generation of policy-makers in Washington finally to respond to entreaties in favour of Latin American self-determination. At the conclusion of the war in Europe, several long-serving and senior State Department officials resigned, and a new leadership emerged. In Latin American affairs, Leo Rowe and Sumner Welles rose to the top and began to initiate military withdrawals<sup>82</sup>. In 1922, Welles negotiated the end of the

75. Mejía 1920, 5-6.

76. Leuchsenring 1919, 7, 8, 58.

77. Henríquez y Carvajal to Henríquez Ureña, Paris, 1 June 1919, in Ureña 1994, 656.

78. Idem 1977, 247.

79. Kernisan [1919] ; Asociación de Jóvenes Dominicanos 1921.

80. Tulio Cestero letter to Henríquez y Carvajal, Washington, 8 April 1920, in Tulio Cestero handwritten notes of meeting with Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, Washington, 8 April 1920, legajo Papeles 1919-1920, Tomo 1, Archivo de Tulio Cestero, UASD.

81. American Mission in Paris, memo to Secretary of State, 14 March 1919, 838.00/1563, Central Decimal Files Relating to Internal Affairs of Haiti, 1910-1929, RG 59, NARA II.

82. Smith 1963, 59.



Dominican intervention. Simultaneously, the United States re-organised the Haitian occupation, and oversaw elections in Nicaragua as a prelude to withdrawing its troops. The last two occupations lasted several more years, but an impetus toward ending them had resulted from the war in Europe.

As the eminent historian Lester Langley stated :

‘World War I confirmed US power in Central America and the Caribbean and increased its influence in South America and Canada. No European power, certainly not Germany or even Great Britain, now challenged the United States in the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico<sup>83</sup>.’

Langley, of course, was right that Washington no longer feared challenges from Europeans. But Latin Americans were another matter altogether. True, they were now more closely dependent on the United States, and many in Latin America would embrace the commercial and diplomatic opportunities of that dependence. Yet those who sought independence, often unconditionally, saw that the war served as an occasion to doubt forever the promises emerging from the Colossus of the North, knowing that behind many of those kind words were often the actions of just another imperial power.

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83. Langley 2003, 108.



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