

# James Monroe: The Monroe Doctrine from *America's Story*

## The Monroe Doctrine

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In October 1823, President Monroe was concerned about Spain reclaiming sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere. He asked former presidents Jefferson and Madison for advice. They told Monroe to join forces with Britain. However, Monroe's secretary of state, John Quincy Adams (who would later succeed Monroe as president), had another idea. Adams thought the United States should go it alone.

Monroe followed Adams's advice and laid out an independent course for the United States, declaring four major points in his December 2, 1823, address to Congress. He made four basic statements:

1. The United States would not get involved in European affairs.
2. The United States would not interfere with existing European colonies in the Western Hemisphere.
3. No other nation could form a new colony in the Western Hemisphere.
4. If a European nation tried to control or interfere with a nation in the Western Hemisphere, the United States would view it as a hostile act against this nation. In his Monroe Doctrine, he said that the peoples of the West "are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."

Do you think Monroe presented his foreign policy as the "Monroe Doctrine"?

Monroe's declaration of policy toward Europe did not become known as the Monroe Doctrine until about 30 years after it was proclaimed. In 1823, the US was not powerful enough to enforce Monroe's proclamation. Outside the United States, the "doctrine" went mostly unnoticed.

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# Excerpts and Questions from the Monroe Doctrine

President James Monroe's seventh annual message to Congress, December 2, 1823

## 1. No other nation could form a new colony in the Western Hemisphere.

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In the discussions to which this interest has given rise and in the arrangements by which they may terminate the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers...

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What warning does Monroe give to European countries?

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## 2. If a European nation tried to control or interfere with a nation in the Western Hemisphere, the United States would view it a hostile act.

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The citizens of the United States cherish sentiments the most friendly in favor of the liberty and happiness of their fellow-men on that side of the Atlantic. In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy to do so. It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense...

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Under what circumstances must the United States defend itself from Europe?

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### 3. The United States would not get involved in European affairs.

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It is impossible that the allied powers [Europe] should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can any one believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord...It is still the true policy of the United States to leave the parties to themselves, in the hope that other powers will pursue the same course...

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According to Monroe, will the United States interfere with South American countries once they gain independence?

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### 4. The United States would not interfere with existing European colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

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With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere.

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How would you describe the foreign policy of the United States as stated in the Monroe Doctrine?

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