Was the United States a “Good Neighbor” toward Latin America in the 1930s?

Viewpoint: Yes, the Good Neighbor Policy was a new beginning in U.S. foreign policy in Latin America.

Viewpoint: No, the Good Neighbor Policy represented an ongoing effort on the part of the U.S. government to maintain U.S. hegemony in Latin America.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933 he promised “bold, persistent experimentation” and pledged to abandon the failed policies, and failed ideas, of the past. His New Deal promised not only a new relationship between the American people and their federal government, but also new relationships between the United States and the nations of Latin America.

Relations between the United States and the other nations of the hemisphere had not been easy: though the Monroe Doctrine had put the United States on record as opposing European colonialism in the hemisphere, the United States had not always recognized the sovereignty of its neighbors. The Mexican War in the 1840s resulted in the United States seizing one-third of Mexico’s territory; American filibusterers had tried to set up independent states in Nicaragua in the 1850s; and in 1898 American outrage against Spanish colonialism in the Western Hemisphere had led to war, and the United States established a protectorate over Cuba and acquired Puerto Rico as a colony. In the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt had proposed a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine: not only would the United States not tolerate European colonization in the Western Hemisphere, but, if any nation in the region demonstrated either instability or an inability to govern itself, the United States would intervene and take over that nation’s government to prevent its falling into the hands of a European power. The United States did intervene, with military force, in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Panama. U.S. forces occupied the city of Veracruz, Mexico, in 1915, and an expeditionary force tried to capture Francisco “Pancho” Villa the following year. In fact, a German offer to aid the Mexican government against the United States prompted the U.S. government to declare war against Germany in 1917.

It had been a long and complicated relationship, and continued American military involvement, along with economic domination by American business interests, had made many in Latin America wary of U.S. intentions. Franklin D. Roosevelt pledged a change, vowing to make the United States a good neighbor, rather than an overbearing bully, to the other nations of the hemisphere.

Was it a genuine change of policy, or just a rhetorical change of style? In these two essays, Jürgen Scheunemann and Erik Benson take differing views. Scheunemann, a specialist in twentieth-century American diplomacy, and generally a harsh critic of American policy, argues that Roosevelt did indeed change the dynamics of inter-American relations. Benson, a specialist in U.S. international policy before World War II,
argues that though the Good Neighbor Policy promised much, Roosevelt actually changed little. The United States simply modified its policies: it did not reverse them.

Which interpretation is correct? The answer must depend on one’s point of view.

Viewpoint:
Yes, the Good Neighbor Policy was a new beginning in U.S. foreign policy in Latin America.

Whenever a foreign policy is subjected to analysis, its real scope and significance can only be determined when placed within its historical context. This assessment holds especially true for Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, which most scholars see as a well-meant attempt to change the pattern of a century of imperialist U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, but that nevertheless fell short of providing a genuine new beginning. In addition, many historians note that it was not a new concept conceived by the Roosevelt administration, but merely a shift in political strategy because the traditional policy—military intervention and open diplomatic or economic pressure—had proven ineffective and costly. This general view, however, appears distorted when taking (and comparing) other periods of United States-Latin American relations, and, even more importantly, integrating the different dimensions of the Good Neighbor Policy. It would be unhistorical to judge Roosevelt's policy in absolute terms without acknowledging the general thinking of his time and the often narrow political possibilities he faced. It would also be politically naive to assume that the Roosevelt administration would completely abandon a goal-oriented, realistic foreign policy that primarily served American national interests. One must also acknowledge the sheer differences in size, power, economy, and unity among the countries of Latin America and the United States. In terms of foreign policy relations, the United States would always be the more powerful, and hence the more influential, neighbor. It is only then that the Good Neighbor Policy of Roosevelt and its implementation can be appreciated as a departure from traditional U.S. foreign policy in the region. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy was in fact a new start for United States-Latin American relations and ultimately laid the cornerstone for the policies of two later presidents.

Throughout the history of United States-Latin American relations, the southern hemisphere remained “beneath the United States,” as political scientist Lars Schoultz described it in Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America (1998). During the nineteenth century, in particular, the U.S. attitude toward its neighbors was marked by a feeling of racial and cultural superiority that found expression in a unilateral, often imperialistic, style of foreign policy. This attitude reached its climax under President Theodore Roosevelt and his “Big Stick” diplomacy. Latin America was largely considered the backyard of North America, where U.S. economic and political interests ruled undisturbed in the small and mostly dependent nations. When, in his first inaugural speech, Roosevelt pledged that the United States would become a “good neighbor,” the promise was correctly perceived by the Latin American states as a new beginning. This promise was, by no means, a new grand design for a foreign policy. During FDR's two subsequent terms of office, as World War II raged across Europe and the Pacific, Latin America did not figure prominently on his foreign policy agenda. Instead, the Good Neighbor Policy resembled a set of small-scale policy initiatives that nevertheless, taken together, amounted to a new foreign policy. This approach had three elements: the policy of nonintervention, presumably the most significant departure from the actions of preceding administrations; the competing requirements of U.S. foreign policy during the 1930s; and the cultural dimensions of Roosevelt’s policy.

U.S. intervention in Latin America emerged during the nineteenth century and, historically, has been defined by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. In a sense, the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904 was just a modernized, yet aggressive, reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine. Woodrow Wilson’s foreign policy was the first major shift in this orientation, because the concept of promoting democracy abroad was introduced as a crucial American goal in Latin America. It is equally striking, however, that Wilson had to rely on intervention to achieve his goals. One of his most significant dilemmas was how to achieve liberal goals, such as democracy and human rights, without the forced application of nonliberal tools. In this regard, even Wilson remained within the framework of traditional United States-Latin American relations.

Later, President Herbert Hoover—who actually spoke of a “good neighbor policy” in 1928 during a goodwill trip to South America—cautiously began to change this policy by ordering the removal of American troops from Nicaragua and Haiti. This new approach, however, does not make him the father of the Good
Neighbor Policy. It would be underestimating the multidimensionality of Roosevelt’s new policy approach to interpret his Good Neighbor Policy as a simple continuation of Republican administration insights into the weaknesses of interventionist policies. The major difference between Roosevelt and his predecessors is that he created this pattern when he introduced the concept of nonintervention in Latin American countries, rightfully considered the essence of his administration’s new agenda for the region. It is because of this change, and those discussed below, that Roosevelt’s policy can be clearly set apart.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the United States had militarily intervened in many Latin American countries, most notably in Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Between 1898 and 1920, the U.S. Army and Navy intervened twenty times. But beginning in 1933, Calvin Coolidge’s verdict that the U.S. government had the right and obligation to protect its interests in Latin America, by force if need be, was finally put to rest. During its first term, the Roosevelt administration revoked this policy publicly and denounced it as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America on several occasions, such as at the inter-American conference in Montevideo in 1933, when the United States signed the Convention on the Right and Duties of States, and the inter-American conference in Buenos Aires in 1936, where the United States signed the protocol on nonintervention. These two documents represented more than just signatures and political pledges: to the Latin American nations they marked the turnaround of the northern colossus; for U.S. foreign policy, they signaled a new beginning.

A good example for Roosevelt’s new policy is the case of Cuba. When his administration revoked the Platt Amendment (1901) in 1934, it canceled one of its most important political and cultural (pseudolegal) justifications for intervention. Under the amendment, Cuba had been completely subjected to American influence and military power. The law had been used to justify three military interventions in Cuba (1906–1909, 1912, 1917–1922). In addition to abrogating the Platt Amendment, the Roosevelt administration took a different foreign policy approach when, in 1931, Cuban dictator Gerardo Machado y Morales suspended constitutionally guaranteed civil rights and stepped up the political repression of his people. The new U.S. ambassador to Cuba, Sumner Welles, tried to persuade Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull to intervene militarily, but despite the still valid Platt Amendment, the administration did not make a move. However, it did pressure Machado to step down in the end. By and large, this situation also represented a severe setback for the support of democracy and human rights in the region. However, the United States had departed from its familiar pattern of foreign policy in the region, even though American (mostly private) economic interests were at stake.

A second question that arises in this context is the economic relationship between the United States and Latin America. The long-term results of World War I, and the rise of Nazi Germany that began in 1933, had led to a steady decline in U.S. economic influence in Latin America throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. By the end of the 1930s, American economic and political influence in the region faced new opposition, a fact that often overshadows the beginning of the policy. An integral part of the Good Neighbor Policy was intensified economic exchange between the region and the United States. The Roosevelt administration did not actually attempt to give up or diminish U.S. economic leverage in Latin America. Instead, it tried to change its nature and shift its overall focus. Given strong German economic and military influence in some Latin and South American countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, and others, this new U.S. strategy served three purposes: to reaffirm American economic power in the region; to establish a greater level of economic partnership; and (beginning in 1939) to reduce and ultimately destroy the German war machine by pressuring Latin American countries to terminate exports to Nazi Germany. On the one hand, this might be considered classic “carrot and stick” diplomacy, but in the end it spawned a different approach to economic ties between North and South America. The single most important step was the establishment of the Import-Export Bank in 1934, which was originally founded to funnel loans to U.S. exporters. By 1940 it also served as an institution for granting loans to Latin American governments, which in fact was tantamount to direct financial U.S. government assistance. This measure obviously served American interests: the loans increased Latin America’s dependence on the United States. At the same time, however, it stabilized the region economically, supported development in some countries, and ultimately proved a tentative precursor for subsequent U.S. development aid in the aftermath of World War II.

By the same token, in a desperate effort to increase U.S. exports in the wake of the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration tried to negotiate bilateral trade agreements, most of which focused on reducing or abolishing tariffs with many Latin American countries. But the United States was unable to sign trade agreements with Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (to name only the most important ones). This suggests that these countries were not economi-
cally dependent on U.S. exports, and, more importantly, it demonstrates how times had changed. The process of these trade negotiations, and their failure in some instances, is evidence of how the Good Neighbor Policy was a new departure. The United States did use economic and diplomatic pressure to reach agreements with countries such as Cuba in 1936, and officially boycotted Mexican and Bolivian oil exports; but it ultimately limited itself to employing means it regarded as ethical in international negotiations between sovereign states. In Bolivia and Mexico, where American oil companies were nationalized in 1937 and 1938, the United States accepted the new status quo without intervening. This strategy represented another novel aspect of the Good Neighbor Policy. The United States showed the same new attitude during negotiations for a multilateral, inter-American financial institution. In the course of the talks, which, in 1940, ultimately failed, it became clear that Latin American and U.S. economic interests were diametrically opposed. While attempting to impose its interests on the other nations in the negotiations, the United States finally had to back down in the face of Latin American resistance. The balance of power had not really changed; but these countries had obviously gained self-confidence, and the U.S. willingness to peacefully accept it, was in fact new.

The promotion of trade and economic assistance against the background of the war fought in Europe suggests the third issue, namely the cultural dimensions of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. Both in speeches and deed, the Roosevelt administration attempted to establish a common cultural identity that the United States and Latin American countries could share. This common identity presumably included free trade, democracy, and a certain moral superiority over Fascist Europe. It implicitly denounced communism as an alternative, however. This idea of a "Western hemisphere," which was to gain a new and extremely important significance in the 1980s, not only drew Latin American countries closer to the United States and its political beliefs, but helped create a pan-American community.

Often neglected in this regard—but hardly to be underestimated—are the direct propaganda efforts of the U.S. during the late 1930s and 1940s against the strong influence Nazi Germany exerted in the region. In late 1940, the U.S. government opened a special office in the State Department, the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA). Headed by Nelson A. Rockefeller, its annual budget rose to $45 million by the end of the war. The office published magazines in both English and Spanish, aired radio programs, and distributed American movies and literature. All of these efforts were part of the Good Neighbor Policy. Despite the fact that some of these programs were ideologically biased (for example, some movies and literary works critical of U.S. culture were not shown), they were nevertheless the expression of a new policy. Instead of sending troops, the United States now employed more sophisticated, and ultimately more democratic, means. Rather than using force, it applied rhetoric as an instrument of its foreign policy in Latin America.

It is true that Roosevelt did not basically challenge the general U.S. approach to Latin America or the U.S. companies' interests, nor did he repudiate U.S. strategic and economic stakes in Latin America. But he nevertheless did more than just promote a strategic shift to presumably reach the same goals. He gradually changed both the U.S. attitude toward, and therefore the relationship with, the states of the Southern Hemisphere. One long-lasting and negative outcome of this policy, however, was the establishment of dictatorships throughout Latin America. This was the result not only of prior military interventions without clear political strategies for the countries involved, but also Roosevelt's resistance to using force to uphold democracy. After World War II, most American presidents did not appreciate or continue Roosevelt's policy. The global setting and American interests during the Cold War prevented a true Good Neighbor Policy from being carried out. Interventions continued with presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Richard M. Nixon. President Jimmy Carter was the first post-war president to try and redefine United States-Latin American relations according to Roosevelt precepts and to act as a good neighbor. To a certain degree, President Bill Clinton has also attempted to follow his Democratic predecessors. On the other hand, although Carter's successor, Ronald W. Reagan, largely reversed this policy and, nearly half a century after Roosevelt, even increased the pace of intervention, his actions did not in the least diminish the historic significance of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy.

—JÜRGEN SCHEUNEMANN, FOX FELLOW, YALE UNIVERSITY

Viewpoint:
No, the Good Neighbor Policy represented an ongoing effort on the part of the U.S. government to maintain U.S. hegemony in Latin America.

In the annals of U.S. diplomacy, the "Good Neighbor" stands apart as one of the most singular and popular policies. Synonymous with the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Good Neighbor Policy is renowned for fostering
a sense of friendship between the United States and Latin America unmatched in this century. Under its auspices, the United States abandoned direct military intervention in Latin American affairs and relied on diplomacy to gain support for its initiatives. Not surprisingly, this way of doing business proved popular with the governments of the region. Yet, the Good Neighbor was more than a diplomatic policy. Its themes of friendship and cooperation appeared in movies, commercials, and other media. In the United States, public interest in Latin Americans and their culture grew rapidly, producing dance crazes and film stars. In essence, the Good Neighbor was a cultural phenomena. For FDR, it was a political winner, and even his successors have invoked its name. Despite its popularity, however, the Good Neighbor Policy did not live up to its reputation.

In both the historical profession and in popular memory, the Good Neighbor Policy has appeared as a well-defined policy that represented a radical departure from past practice. In reality, it was neither well-defined nor radical. FDR's administration used the term “Good Neighbor” to refer to a loose collection of diplomatic initiatives. While there were certain precepts to the Good Neighbor Policy, these could be contorted to support U.S. interests in the region. Moreover, these precepts did not originate with FDR. They had their roots in policy changes implemented by the Republican administrations of the 1920s. FDR staked his claim to these changes largely through the turn of a phrase. While the Good Neighbor Policy encouraged a new direction in U.S. policy, it did not represent a radical departure. Rather, it was a continuation of changes already under way.

The importance of seeing the continuity in the Good Neighbor Policy is that one can better understand why the United States pursued this course of action in the 1930s and why it eventually abandoned it. Rather than representing a departure from traditional U.S. policy, the Good Neighbor Policy was part of an ongoing effort to maintain U.S. hegemony in Latin America. The United States employed different means for doing so. Instead of sending marines, it supported friendly dictators. Instead of issuing unilateral declarations, it lobbied the nations of Latin America to adopt its policies at hemispheric conferences. Admittedly, these were notable changes. However, the United States had not abandoned the idea that it was destined to lead...
the hemisphere and had not lost its sense of superiority vis-à-vis its neighbors. Thus, as circumstances changed both during and after World War II, it had little trouble forsaking the niceties of the Good Neighbor Policy. In the end, it had not changed American aims in the region; it merely cloaked them in the guise of being a friendly neighbor.

After its victory in the Spanish-American War, the United States assumed a dominant role in the Western Hemisphere, particularly in the Caribbean Basin. The U.S. presence took many forms, including armed intervention. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the army, navy, and marines were all busy “policing” America’s southern neighbors. Sometimes the threat of military force was sufficient to accomplish American aims, but on many occasions U.S. troops ended up fighting indigenous forces on foreign soil. While most of these operations were brief, a few turned into long-term occupations. In the cases of Nicaragua and Haiti, U.S. military forces governed these nations for most of the 1910s and 1920s.

American involvement in the region stemmed in part from economic and strategic interests. The U.S. government wanted stable and friendly governments there so that American business could make profits and so that the great powers of Europe would have no excuse to deploy military forces so close to the United States. Yet, more than dollars and cents were at stake. American interventionism stemmed in large part from a sense of cultural superiority. In the minds of many Americans, the United States, with its stable and just political institutions, had a moral responsibility to police the lawless, corrupt nations to the south and tutor them in the fine art of democratic government. This viewpoint pervaded U.S. society as a whole. For example, political cartoons of the period, drawing upon prevalent racial stereotypes, often depicted the nations of the Caribbean as unruly black children, with Uncle Sam as the stern white parent endeavoring to rear them.

Despite this sense of mission, U.S. involvement became increasingly unpopular after World War I. Repeated occupations of various nations seemed to be fruitless and never-ending adventures. The most frustrating experience came in Nicaragua, where U.S. forces intervened four times during the 1910s and 1920s. They failed to establish a stable government and became embroiled in a bush war that they could not win. This war and other such operations ran up costly defense bills, a particularly galling problem for the frugal Republican administrations of the 1920s. When the Great Depression hit, these expenses became all the more undesirable. In addition to domestic criticism, U.S. interventionism drew condemnation from the nations of Latin America. The United States was becoming increasingly unpopular.

The Republican-controlled administrations of the period realized that change was needed. While they defended the theoretical right of the United States to resort to armed intervention, they realized that interventionism was not a practical policy. Assistant Secretary of State J. Reuben Clark Jr. stated this opinion in a 1928 memorandum and recommended that the United States discontinue its “policing” of the hemisphere. When Herbert Hoover assumed the presidency in 1929, he and his secretary of state, Henry L. Stimson, put Clark’s proposal into practice. They arranged for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Nicaragua in 1931, and implemented plans to pull out of Haiti by the mid 1930s. More importantly, they made it clear that they had no intention of sending the troops back. In the case of Nicaragua, Stimson declared that the U.S. government would not be responsible for the welfare of U.S. citizens who chose to remain in that country—they were there at their own risk. In both word and deed, the United States was turning a corner in its diplomatic history.

Roosevelt had been an outspoken critic of U.S. interventionism during the 1920s. However, when he assumed the presidency in 1933, his overriding concern was in dealing with the Depression. Simply put, FDR was too busy to formulate a clear policy for U.S.-Latin American relations. Only a diplomatic crisis would draw his attention to the issue. In the fall of 1933, a coalition of students and noncommissioned army officers overthrew the Cuban government. The U.S. ambassador to Cuba, Sumner Welles, did not support the revolution, which he viewed as dangerously radical. He urged FDR to send troops. Belying his earlier criticism of interventionism, FDR dispatched U.S. warships to the waters off Cuba—an invasion seemed imminent. Yet, FDR’s Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, urged him not to land troops. Hull was scheduled to attend the 1933 International Conference of American States, where he planned to propose a trade agreement between the United States and Latin American nations. He worried that if the United States intervened in Cuba, the Latin Americans might reject his proposal. FDR heeded Hull’s advice and stepped back from the brink. Intervention was avoided, but just barely.

Clearly, FDR had not entered office with a well-defined policy for Latin America. However, in his 1933 inaugural address, he declared that
the basis of his foreign policy would be to act like a "good neighbor." The phrase proved catchy, and it became synonymous with his administration’s overarching policy for Latin America.

The Good Neighbor Policy was not without substance. At the 1933 conference, the United States, while defending the right to intervene under international law, voted for a resolution renouncing the use of unilateral military intervention as a policy tool. It voted for a similar resolution at the 1936 meeting, this time offering no qualifications. In effect, U.S. diplomats dropped the “big stick” of military intervention for the diplomacy and cooperation of the “Good Neighbor.” They then used inter-American conferences to lobby the governments of Latin America to support U.S. diplomatic initiatives. In day-to-day matters, they relied on these governments to provide the desired economic and political stability for American interests. In essence, the Good Neighbor Policy was defined by noninterventionism and cooperation.

Yet, the Good Neighbor Policy relied upon style as much as, if not more than, substance. While inter-American conferences provided opportunities for dealing with real issues, they also served as stages from which to proclaim U.S. friendship with Latin America. For example, in 1936, FDR traveled to the conference at Buenos Aires. His trip was a public relations coup. The sight of the U.S. president traveling in a motorcade down the streets of a South American capital, with Argentine children waving the American flag, created an atmosphere of amity unmatched to that time. FDR’s speech at the conference made no new proclamations, as he reiterated many of the old platitudes of the Good Neighbor Policy. However, it was not so much what he said as how he said it. His warmth and charisma struck a chord with the audience. Here was a man who could touch the hearts of the people. Amity was growing north of the border as well; in the United States, public interest in Latin American culture grew rapidly. Hollywood produced scores of movies that used Latin American locales, characters, and storylines. Latin dances became widely popular. Carmen Miranda and other Latin Americans became stars in the United States. This interest, coupled with the ideal of being a “good neighbor,” created a sense of friendship. Thus, the Good Neighbor was more than a policy—it was a relationship.

Despite the changes, there were some important continuities. First, U.S. officials remained determined to protect U.S. interests in the region. Second, they perceived the United States to be the natural leader of the hemisphere. As a result, their neighborliness was conditional. They expected that in return for their promise not to intervene with military force, Latin American governments would safeguard U.S. interests. If they failed to do so, or even acted against these interests, the United States would take action. For example, when the Mexican government nationalized the holdings of various American oil companies in 1938, the companies asked the U.S. government to intervene. It responded by stopping the purchase of Mexican silver, a particularly damaging blow to the Mexican economy. While the United States did not resort to armed force, it was not reluctant to employ indirect means of intervention. Such actions took many forms.

Most notably the United States maintained its influence in the region by supporting various dictators. During this decade Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic), Fulgencio Batista (Cuba), and Anastasio Somoza (Nicaragua) emerged as allies of the United States. In their respective nations they maintained order and stability through authoritarian means, serving as proxies for U.S. Marines.

World War II brought important changes in the Good Neighbor relationship. For the United States, it became a useful instrument to arm for war and influence the conflict. When hostilities erupted in Europe in 1939, the United States convinced its southern neighbors to join with it in declaring a neutral zone around the Americas. No warships from either combatant would be allowed to engage in military operations in this zone. Ostensibly, this was a neutral action. However, FDR was clearly not impartial. He loathed Nazism and was determined to aid the Allied cause. The zone was of great benefit to Britain’s Royal Navy because it limited the area it would have to patrol for German U-boats. In 1941, FDR further assisted the British by expanding the neutral zone to the mid-Atlantic. In Latin America, the Roosevelt administration targeted German economic interests and political sympathizers. Using diplomatic ties forged under the Good Neighbor Policy, it convinced various Latin American governments to shut down German companies and round up suspected Fascist sympathizers. U.S. diplomatic efforts took on a greater urgency after Pearl Harbor. At the behest of the United States, most Latin American countries broke diplomatic relations with the Axis powers, and some declared war. Brazil sent troops to Italy; Mexico dispatched a fighter squadron to the Pacific. Those who did not furnish armed forces helped in other ways. Some provided vital raw materials at fixed prices for the U.S. war industry. Mexico sent workers to the United States to fill the demand for labor in the war economy. As the Americas joined ranks to fight the Axis, the friendship fostered by the
A TIME FOR NEW RELATIONS

In an address at Chautauqua, New York, on 14 August 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt defended his Good Neighbor Policy.

Long before I returned to Washington as President of the United States, I had made up my mind that, pending what might be called a more opportune moment on other continents, the United States could best serve the cause of a peaceful humanity by setting an example. That was why on the 4th of March, 1933, I made the following declaration:

In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.

This declaration represents my purpose; but it represents more than a purpose, for it stands for a practice. To a measurable degree it has succeeded; the whole world now knows that the United States cherishes no predatory ambitions. We are strong; but less powerful nations know that they need not fear our strength. We seek no conquest, we stand for peace.

In the whole of the Western Hemisphere our good-neighbor policy has produced results that are especially heartening.

The noblest monument to peace and to neighborly economic and social friendship in all the world is not a monument in bronze or stone, but the boundary which unites the United States and Canada—3,000 miles of friendship with no barbed wire, no gun or soldier, and no passport on the whole frontier. Mutual trust made that frontier. To extend the same sort of mutual trust throughout the Americas was our aim.

The American republics to the south of us have been ready always to cooperate with the United States on a basis of equality and mutual respect, but before we inaugurated the good-neighbor policy there was among them resentment and fear because certain administrations in Washington had slighted their national pride and their sovereign rights.

In pursuance of the good-neighbor policy, and because in my younger days I had learned many lessons in the hard school of experience, I stated that the United States was opposed definitely to armed intervention.

We have negotiated a pan American convention embodying the principle of nonintervention. We have abandoned the Platt Amendment, which gave us the right to intervene in the internal affairs of the Republic of Cuba. We have withdrawn American Marines from Haiti. We have signed a new treaty which places our relations with Panama on a mutually satisfactory basis. We have undertaken a series of trade agreements with other American countries to our mutual commercial profit. At the request of two neighboring republics, I hope to give assistance in the final settlement of the last serious boundary dispute between any of the American nations.

Throughout the Americas the spirit of the good neighbor is a practical and living fact. The twenty-one American republics are not only living together in friendship and in peace—they are united in the determination so to remain.

extensive trade with Argentina, despite the British belief that the Argentines were no threat to the Allied cause. Clearly, the United States was not going to tolerate a challenge to its hemispheric leadership. Moreover, as the war progressed, U.S. policymakers increasingly neglected their neighbors. They sent little military aid to the armed forces of Latin America and ostracized them from the war effort. They did not invite Latin American representatives to many of the postwar planning conferences.

Such treatment foreshadowed what was to come. In the postwar years, Europe received billions of dollars in U.S. aid under the auspices of the Marshall Plan, but the United States told the Latin Americans that it could spare no economic aid for them. Even in the American public, the friendship idealized in Hollywood had its limits. A strong sense of cultural superiority remained among North Americans vis-à-vis their neighbors. Carmen Miranda, with her "tutti-frutti" hat, was entertaining and sexy, not serious and intellectual. Latin Americans were viewed as fun-loving and easygoing, not sober and reflective. Off the screen, they could become targets of resentment and violence. For example, during the war, there were frequent clashes between Mexican youth and U.S. military personnel in southern California. Thus, while the movies made much ado about the friendly hemisphere, there remained in American society an unfriendly attitude.

Eventually the Good Neighbor Policy fell by the wayside as a policy. There is much debate as to its time of death. Some claim that the end of the war and the passing of FDR signaled its demise. Others cite the U.S.-sponsored 1954 overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala as the death knell. Such arguments assume that there was a specific time of death because there was a clear-cut and radically different policy. However, this was not the case. The Good Neighbor Policy was largely a shift in style, and, as with most styles, it did not end suddenly, but rather slowly faded. FDR's successors continued to invoke the ideal of the Good Neighbor Policy for many years. Like FDR, they continued to talk of friendship and cooperation while making use of collective bodies such as the Organization of American States (OAS). However, as in FDR's day, U.S. officials continued to view the United States as the natural leader of the hemisphere, and they would tolerate no challenge to this self-perceived status. At times their methods would be more direct than those employed under the Good Neighbor Policy, but often their methods differed little. Overall, the Good Neighbor Policy popularized a new manner for dealing with the neighbors—it did not change American views about them.

—ERIK BENSON, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

References

Alexander DeConde, *Herbert Hoover's Latin-American Policy* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1951);


David Green, *The Containment of Latin America: A History of the Myths And Realities of the Good Neighbor Policy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971);

Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire, 1900-1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983);


