



# CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

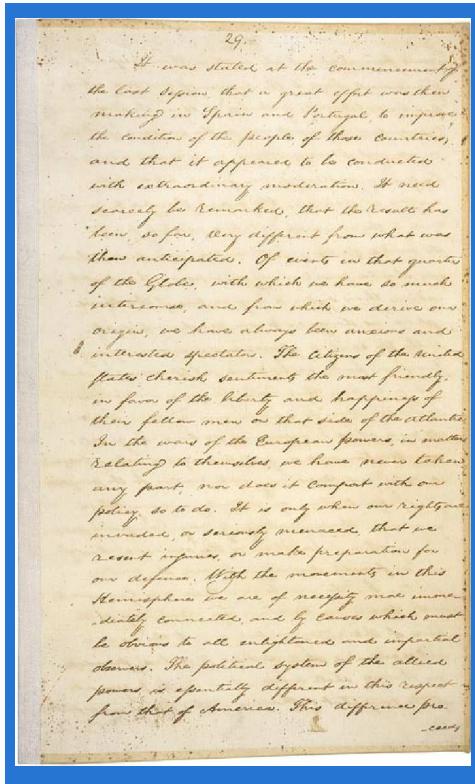
Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

## The Monroe Doctrine

The United States recently entered the country of Venezuela and arrested the president of that country, [Nicolas Maduro](#). He has been charged with various weapons and drug offenses and is currently awaiting trial in New York. As part of the justification for this action, political leaders have called back to the [Monroe Doctrine](#). To understand this justification, it is important to know what the Monroe Doctrine is.

### What Was the Monroe Doctrine?

The Monroe Doctrine was established by [President James Monroe](#) in 1823 as a foundational principle of United States foreign policy. In a [message to Congress](#), Monroe declared that the Western Hemisphere should no longer be viewed as subject to future European colonization or interference, and he warned that any such actions would be regarded as hostile to the United States. At the same time, the doctrine pledged that the U.S. would not interfere in the internal affairs of European nations or their existing colonies. At the time, the U.S. lacked the military power to enforce this principle independently, but its clear stance helped define how we as a nation thought about our regional interests going forward.



### How Did the Interpretation and Use of the Monroe Doctrine Change Over Time?

Over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Monroe Doctrine was expanded and reinterpreted by later presidents to justify U.S. involvement in the internal affairs of countries across the Americas. One big change came in the early 1900's. This was President Theodore Roosevelt's [Roosevelt Corollary](#). The Roosevelt Corollary asserted that the United States could act as a sort of 'neighborhood police' in the Western Hemisphere. This led to a number of instances of [American interventions in Latin America to defend the interests of the United States](#). During the Cold War, presidents from [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) to [John F. Kennedy](#) and [Ronald Reagan](#) also invoked Monroe Doctrine language to justify actions aimed at limiting Soviet influence and other perceived threats in the region.

### The Monroe Doctrine Today

Today, the Monroe Doctrine's legacy is controversial and widely debated. Supporters argue that it helped protect the sovereignty of newly independent nations in the Americas and established a long-standing [Western Hemisphere policy framework](#). Critics contend that, in practice, it has often been used to justify U.S. intervention or influence in the political and economic affairs of Latin American countries, sometimes undermining those nations' sovereignty. Contemporary leaders who cite the doctrine are drawing on this long legacy. As a foreign policy tool, the Monroe Doctrine remains a key part of the United States' diplomatic toolbox, and this legacy of one of our Founding Fathers and presidents continues long after his time.



**To Think and To Do:** President James Monroe said in 1823 that "the American continents... are not to be considered as places for future colonization by any European powers." This idea became known as the Monroe Doctrine. Later, President Theodore Roosevelt added the Roosevelt Corollary, saying the United States could step in to keep order in Latin American countries. What do Monroe's and Roosevelt's ideas tell you about how the U.S. saw its role in the world over time? Explain.

