



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

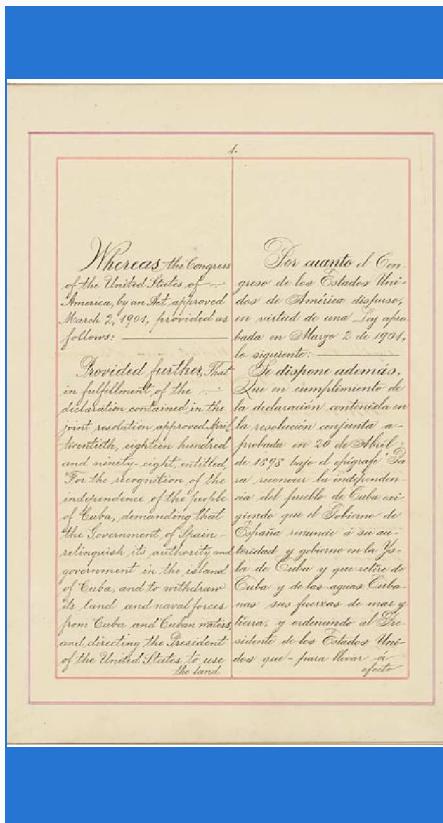
Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

The Platt Amendment

The United States' foreign policy plans dominate the current news cycle, particularly regarding U.S. interests in [Venezuela](#) and [Greenland](#). As discussions occur over the future of these two nations, [phrases](#) describing the role the United States may or may not play have included things like: "run the country," "ensure a safe, proper, and judicious transition," and "defend for strategic national security concerns." In the past, the United States has exercised control and influence over a nation beyond its borders without owning or annexing it. For that example, one must look at the details of Cuba's [Platt Amendment](#).

Historical Context

In the late 1800s, Cuba was a Spanish colony that had been fighting for independence for decades, most notably during the [Cuban War of Independence](#), which began in 1895. The conflict gained the attention of the United States, which had strong economic ties to Cuba and a growing interest in the Caribbean. U.S. newspapers reported on Spanish abuses of Cuban civilians, increasing public support for American involvement. In 1898, the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana harbor led the United States to declare war on Spain, beginning the [Spanish-American War](#). Spain was quickly defeated, and Cuba was freed from Spanish rule. However, U.S. troops remained in Cuba after the war, claiming they needed to help establish a stable government. Concerned about protecting American interests and preventing foreign influence, the United States pressured Cuba in 1901 to adopt the Platt Amendment to its new constitution.



The Platt Amendment Provisions

Approved on May 22, 1903, the Platt Amendment, named for [Senator Orville Platt](#), permitted extensive U.S. involvement in Cuban international and domestic affairs for the enforcement of Cuban independence. Stipulations included:

- Cuba was not allowed to sign treaties with other countries that might weaken its independence or allow a foreign power to gain control over the island
- The United States reserved the right to step in militarily if it believed Cuban independence or order was threatened
- Cuba could not go deeply into debt with foreign countries, to prevent economic control by outside powers
- Cuba had to accept all actions taken by the United States during its military occupation after the Spanish-American War
- Cuba agreed to improve sanitation and public health to prevent the spread of diseases to the United States
- Cuba was required to sell or lease land to the United States for naval bases, leading to the creation of the U.S. naval base at [Guantánamo Bay](#).

The Platt Amendment Today

The United States used its authority under the Platt Amendment to intervene in Cuban affairs on four separate occasions in the 20th century (1906, 1912, 1917, 1920). The Amendment was eventually repealed under President Franklin Roosevelt's [Good Neighbor Policy](#) towards Latin America in the 1930s, however Guantánamo Bay remains an operational U.S. naval base to this day. While the surrounding circumstances and the nations involved may differ, the Platt Amendment serves as a historical parallel to current debates about U.S. military presence and influence in countries such as Venezuela and Greenland, all highlighting tensions between great power strategic interests and the [autonomy/sovereignty](#) of smaller nations.

To Think and To Do: Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believed, "No foreign policy—no matter how ingenious—has any chance of success if it is born in the minds of a few and carried in the hearts of none." What did he mean by this statement? How might his quote apply to the Platt Amendment and foreign policy ideas debated today?

