

# Five Things Students Should Know about the Monroe Doctrine

1. **Monroe to Europe: Keep your hands off our hemisphere.** Thanks to the resolution of the War of 1812 and the acquisition of Florida from Spain, the United States was now dealing with Europe from a position of strength. Great Britain wanted the United States to join it in issuing an Anglo-American statement opposing further French and Spanish colonization in South America. However, President James Monroe decided instead that the United States should issue its own statement. In one fell swoop, he issued a warning to France and Spain while also asserting U.S. independence from Britain.
2. **Why isn't it called the "Monroe-Adams Doctrine"?** Most historians agree that Monroe was an advocate for the major principles of the doctrine—noncolonization, neutrality, and support for South American independence movements. However, his secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, was intimately involved in bringing the doctrine to fruition. Adams's ideas and his diplomatic efforts created conditions enabling the successful pronouncement of the Monroe Doctrine. In fact, the doctrine's original name, the American System, reflects its shared authorship as well as its debt to longstanding practices in American foreign policy, which involved the work of many individuals.
3. **It offered a continuation of three decades of U.S. foreign policy.** The doctrine provides an elegant summation of the previous thirty years of American foreign policy. Beginning with George Washington's presidency in 1789, the nation's foreign policy stressed neutrality unless American interests were directly affected, and the Monroe Doctrine represented both a continuation and a reaffirmation of this approach.
4. **It defined a uniquely "American System" of government.** Like the United States, the sovereign nations of South America had once been colonies belonging to a European power and had fought to achieve their independence. As Monroe and Adams surveyed the post-1815 landscape, they realized that North and South America shared more than geographic proximity; the two continents also shared a common history that abhorred European intrusions.
5. **Its impact would extend for nearly 150 years.** Offering a bold new vision of American strength and influence, the doctrine proved to have a long-lasting influence. In 1904 President Teddy Roosevelt issued a corollary to the doctrine that asserted new American rights relative to other countries in the region. Even as late as 1962, the Monroe Doctrine retained its original intent: thwarting a European invasion of the Western Hemisphere. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, President John F. Kennedy invoked the doctrine to impose a naval blockade on Cuba to challenge the presence of Soviet missiles.

