

# Panama Canal timeline

## Assignment:

1. **Read the chronology of events** related to the Panama Canal.
2. Conducting any outside research you find necessary, **select** what you consider to be the 20 most important events.
3. Make an **illustrated timeline**. You can draw or print photos, create a poster, or use Prezi or similar software.
4. **No PowerPoints.**

### Scoring

Drawn, 8.5" by 11" or smaller	/20 points
Drawn, larger format	/30 points
Poster	/40 points
Prezi	/50 points

### Panama Canal Chronology

- 1502** Christopher Columbus made his fourth voyage to the "New World" and became the first white man to visit Panama's mainland.
- 1513** **Vasco Nunez de Balboa** discovered a narrow strip of land over the Panama Isthmus that separated the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Charles I of Spain initiated a movement to build a passage across the Isthmus. (<http://www.bruce.ruiz.net/PanamaHistory/balboa.htm> )
- 1534** Charles I ordered the Panama regional governor to complete the first survey for a proposed ship canal to the Pacific following the **Chagres River**. When the survey was completed, the governor decided it would be impossible for anyone to accomplish such a feat.
- 1804** German Naturalist Baron Alexander von Humboldt explored nine possible sites for an inter-oceanic canal – including Panama and Nicaragua. He favored the Nicaraguan route.
- 1821** Colombia (initially called Gran Granada) and Panama declared their independence from Spain. In November, 31 of Panama's leading landowners and merchants annexed the isthmus to Gran Colombia (which consisted of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Panama). The following year, the Panamanians officially united with Colombia.
- 1823** The **Monroe Doctrine** stated that any European nation that entered the Western Hemisphere would be interpreted as an act of war. (<http://www.law.ou.edu/hist/monrodoc.html>)
- 1826** U.S. Secretary of State Henry Clary proposed to Congress that the U.S. should work with the Central American Federal Government to build a canal across Nicaragua. The proposal went nowhere. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua\\_Canal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua_Canal)
- 1836** A U.S. Senate resolution permitted the president to negotiate with the states of Central America to draw up treaties to protect United States citizens who might try to establish connection between the two seas. President Jackson commissioned Charles Biddle to go to the Isthmus, survey the ground, and report on the different routes that had been proposed for inter-oceanic communication. Biddle went to Bogota, Columbia where he secured a franchise for a trans-Isthmian railroad. The panic of 1837 prevented the plan from being properly financed
- 1838** A French company received a concession for the construction of highways, railroads, or a canal across the Isthmus of Panama and the French government sent Napoleon Garella to study and report on the project.
- 1846** The **Bidlack Treaty** was signed by New Granada (now Colombia and Panama) and the United States and granted the U.S. a right-of-way across the Isthmus of Panama in exchange for a U.S. guarantee of neutrality for the isthmus and the sovereignty of New Granada thereafter.
- 1848** The California Gold Rush stimulated interest in a canal in either Nicaragua or Panama. At this time, there were only two choices for Americans who wished to travel from the eastern U.S. to the new California territory: walk or ride across the North American continent, beginning somewhere along the Mississippi and crossing 2,000 miles in a journey that took 4-6 months; or sail around Cape Horn and the Straights of Magellan which took 2 to 4 months and covered a distance of 13,600 miles.

- 1849** **George Law** organized a transit company that carried the first passengers by steamship to the Isthmus of Panama (2 weeks), took them by stagecoach across the country (1 week), and set sail from Panama City to San Francisco (2 weeks). The trip took 5 weeks and covered a distance of 5,200 miles. (<http://famousamericans.net/georgelaw/>)
- 1850** A group of American capitalists began work on a railroad to be built across the Isthmus. The railroad initially was to be built to help mail transit, but after the Gold Rush of 1848, it added passenger cars to get gold seekers from a boat that docked at the Chagres river transferred to the railroad and taken to the Pacific ocean. ([http://www.bruce.ruiz.net/PanamaHistory/panama\\_railroad.htm](http://www.bruce.ruiz.net/PanamaHistory/panama_railroad.htm))
- The **Clayton-Bulwer Treaty** was signed by the U.S. and Great Britain declaring that both nations were not to colonize or control any Central American republic. The treaty sought to prevent one country from building a canal across Central America that the other would not be able to use. If a canal were built, it would be protected by both nations for neutrality and security and would be open to all nations on equal terms. Those who opposed the treaty argued that it violated the Monroe Doctrine. (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britian/br1850.htm>)
- 1851** **Cornelius Vanderbilt** tried to get backing to build a canal in Nicaragua. When that effort failed, he created the Accessory Transit Company which received an exclusive charter from the Nicaraguan government to transport passengers across the country. Passengers boarded a boat in New York and once in Nicaragua, they were transported by stagecoaches to Lake Nicaragua, placed on a boat, and then put on another stage coach to meet a ship at the Pacific Ocean. His business carried about 2,000 passengers a month for two years. ([http://www.vanderbilt.edu/News/register/Mar11\\_02/story8.html](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/News/register/Mar11_02/story8.html))
- 1852** Ulysses S. Grant led the American Fourth Infantry across the Isthmus of Panama en route to garrison duty in California. The military detachment of several hundred men, together with their dependents, became victims of a raging cholera epidemic in Panama that claimed the lives of 150 men, women and children. Grant later wrote of the tragic incident, "The horrors of the road in the rainy season are beyond description."
- 1855** Panamanian Railroad completed across the Isthmus. The entire length of the road was forty-seven and three-quarter miles. It had required the construction of 170 bridges and culverts, one of the bridges being more than 600 feet in length. (<http://www.czbrats.com/Builders/Bennett/prr.htm> )
- 1856** Relations between the Panamanians and the Americans living in Panama broke into a riot on April 15th. The conflict resulted in the first landing of American troops to keep open the way of transit across the Isthmus
- 1869** President Grant ordered survey expeditions to Central America with possible sites in Mexico Nicaragua, and Panama. The route of the current Panama Canal is nearly identical to that proposed by this Panama survey.
- U.S. Transcontinental Railroad was completed, thereby limiting dependence on the Panamanian Railroad.
- 1876** The U.S. Congress appointed the Inter-oceanic Canal Commission (Walker Commission) to examine possible canal routes across Panama.
- 1878** The Geographical Society of Paris signed a treaty with Colombia to build a canal from Limon Bay to Panama City, closely following the Panama Railroad. Frenchman Ferdinand de Lesseps, the mastermind behind the Suez Canal, became president of the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique de Panama, which was formed to finance the French-built sea-level canal.
- 1880** In his special message to Congress on March 8<sup>th</sup>, President Rutherford B. Hayes announced that "the policy of this country is a canal under American control." Such a canal "would be ... virtually a part of the coast line of the United States." But this policy could not be enacted without repealing the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.
- 1880** Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique de Panama began work on the Panama Canal along the route of the 1855 Panama Railroad. It was to be a sea level canal requiring a massive 7,720-meter long tunnel through the Continental Divide at Culebra.
- 1885** American troops landed in Panama to protect the railroad and American property.
- 1889** While ignoring the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, US Congress chartered the Maritime Canal Co, headed by J.P. Morgan to build a canal in Nicaragua. In 1893, a stock panic in America caused Maritime to lose all funding, and excavation stopped.
- 1894** Lessups' company was liquidated and the New Panama Canal Company was created to continue to job.
- 1897** US Congress appointed a fact-finding Canal Commission, which recommended the Nicaraguan route.
- 1898** After the battleship *Maine* was blown up, another battleship, the *Oregon*, was ordered to proceed immediately from San Francisco around the Horn on a 12,000 mile trip to Florida. It took 67 days to make the trip which emphasized the military necessity for an Isthmian canal.

- 1898** In December in his annual message to Congress, President William McKinley called for an interoceanic canal, adding that "our national policy now more imperatively than ever calls for its control by this Government." The failure of both previous private efforts leads many Americans to believe that the canal can only be built with government funding and support.
- 1901** The U.S. Isthmian Canal Commission report to Congress favored the Nicaragua route. Civil engineer George S. Morison who wrote the minority views in the Commission's report, sent his opinion to President Theodore Roosevelt explaining the technical reasons for his preference for Panama. The letter helped persuade Roosevelt that Panama was the best route. (See photo at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua\\_Canal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua_Canal))
- French announced they were abandoning the canal project and that their assets and concessions were available for a price of \$ 40 million. They had spent over twenty years and \$260 million on their failed mission.
- The United States and Great Britain signed the **Hay-Pauncefote Treaty**. This agreement nullified the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 in return for guarantee of open passage for any nation through a proposed Central American canal.
- 1902** Iowa Senator William Hepburn introduced a bill providing for a Nicaraguan canal. Senator John Spooner of Wisconsin attached an amendment that reversed the bill, providing instead for a canal at Panama and authorizing the president to spend \$40 million to purchase the French Company. The **Spoooner Amendment** passed the Senate and then the House without the original Nicaraguan canal proposal.
- U.S. forces landed in Panama to keep the railway open.
- 1903** **Hay-Herran Treaty** would have allowed the U.S. to acquire a renewable 99 year lease on 6 mile wide strip across Panama for \$10,000,000 and an annual payment. Though it was ratified by the United States Senate on March 14, it was not passed by the Colombian Senate. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hay-Herran\\_Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hay-Herran_Treaty))
- Frustrated by Columbia's failure to ratify the treaty, a triumvirate of Panamanian businessmen, French agents of the Panama Canal Company, and United States Army officers, developed a plot to help Panama gain independence from Colombia. In October, Roosevelt ordered three US naval ships to steam toward the area and on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, they were ordered to prevent Colombia from landing troops in the Panamanian province. Two days later, Panama declared its independence from Colombia. The U.S. government recognized the new Panamanian government in the quickest recognition ever given to a foreign country by the United States.
- On November 18<sup>th</sup>, the **Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty** was ratified on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, granting the United States a canal zone in perpetuity that was 10 miles wide, 5 miles on either side of the Canal prism line. The treaty gave the US the right to act "as if sovereign" over the Canal Zone which soon became an American enclave in the middle of Panama. The Zone had its own governor, police force, courts, shops, post offices, churches and schools. Those who lived there mainly Panama Canal employees and their families were known as "Zonians." The US flag was flown and Panamanians could not enter freely. US military bases were built and tens of thousands of troops stationed there - as many as 68,000 during World War II. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hay-Bunau\\_Varilla\\_Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hay-Bunau_Varilla_Treaty))
- 1904** The Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty was ratified by the U.S. Senate on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Congress also authorized a payment of \$10 million to Panama.
- Work on the Panama Canal officially began. Chief Sanitary Officer Dr. William Crawford Gorgas and his staff arrived and set up operations to combat yellow fever and malaria – the diseases that had killed thousands of French workers during their late 19<sup>th</sup> Century efforts to build a canal. The American canal was to be built as a series of locks rather than the sea-level canal attempted by the French. (Smithsonian Institute's site, <http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Make-the-Dirt-Fly/>)
- The **Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine** was articulated in the President's annual message to Congress. The principle stated that since America under the Monroe Doctrine forbade foreign interference in the Western Hemisphere, the United States had a responsibility to insist upon proper redress for wrongs inflicted upon a foreign state by any country within the U.S. sphere of influence.
- 1906** Theodore Roosevelt became the first president to make a trip outside the continental boundaries of the United States while in office. While at first he viewed building the canal as a political, commercial, and military necessity, by 1906 during his visit to Panama, Roosevelt spoke of building the canal as a mighty battle involving national honor and patriotic duty.
- 1914** The Panama Canal opened for traffic after the U.S. had spent \$352 million on construction. It took nine hours and forty minutes for the passage of the first ship through the canal. Its tolls were set at \$1.20 per ton for freight and \$1.50 per ton for passengers. A freighter carrying a cargo of 4,500 tons paid a toll of \$5,400.
- 1918** Anti-American riots erupted in Panama. The U.S. Marines occupied the Panamanian province of Chiriqui for two years to maintain public order.
- 1925** U.S. Army troops occupied Panama City to break a rent strike and keep order.

- 1936** U.S. relinquished the rights to unilateral intervention in Panama, especially its right to use troops outside the borders of the Canal Zone.
- 1939** Panama ceased to be a U.S. protectorate.
- 1950s** Anti-American student riots erupted in Panama. When Panamanians threatened a "peaceful invasion" of the Canal Zone, the United States sent troops to back Panama's National Guard and canal police to repel the demonstrators. The Americans eventually built a fence around the zone.
- 1964** American students at Balboa High School in the Canal Zone refused to fly the Panamanian flag alongside the American flag. A three-day riot broke out when Panamanian students marched into the zone with their flag; 23 Panamanians and four U.S. Marines were killed. The incident led to a break in diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Panama and made clear the need for an agreement on the canal's future.
- 1968** Panamanian Nationalist, Arnulfo Arias was elected President of Panama and called for the immediate transfer of the Canal Zone to Panamanian jurisdiction. He was deposed 11 days later when he tried to change the National Guard's leadership. General Omar Torrijos Herrera, the National Guard chief, became president and imposed a dictatorship that lasts until 1981.
- 1971** A U.N. resolution called for a "just and equitable" new treaty on the Canal and talks began between the U.S. and Panama. Watergate interrupted the talks in 1974, as did debate over the issue during the 1976 U.S. election campaign.
- 1977** Debate raged on whether or not the U.S. should turn the Panama Canal over to the Panamanians. ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/panamacanal/newshour\\_coverage1.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/panamacanal/newshour_coverage1.html) )
- On September 7<sup>th</sup>, two treaties were signed between the Republic of Panama and the United States of America. The first abolished the Canal Zone as of October 1, 1979, reverted its jurisdiction to Panama, and provided for the gradual transfer of canal operations to Panama by December 31, 1999. The other treaty pledged both countries to guarantee the canal's neutrality in times of peace and war. (<http://countrystudies.us/panama/19.htm>)
- 1979** On October 1<sup>st</sup>, Panama gained jurisdiction over the former Canal Zone and the Panama Canal Commission began its operations. The Commission became the new agency of the U.S. Government responsible for managing, operating, maintaining, and improving the Canal through December 31, 1999. (<http://www.panacanal.com/>)
- 1982** The 30-month transition period ended. The Panama Canal Commission's transitional police force and magistrate's courts, as well as the U.S. District Court were disestablished. Also, the Panama Canal Employment System replaced the Canal Zone Merit System.
- 1983** Former intelligence chief and U.S. Central Intelligence Agency informant Manuel Noriega became head of the National Guard and greatly increased his power over Panama's political and economic life.
- 1985** The United States, Panama, and Japan signed an agreement at the United Nations to form a tripartite commission to study alternatives and/or modifications to the Panama Canal.
- 1988** The U.S. charged Noriega with drug smuggling; Noriega declared a state of emergency in the wake of a failed coup.
- 1989** Parliamentary elections held in Panama brings the opposition into victory, but Noriega declared the results invalid. He then declared a "state of war" in the face of increased threats by the U.S. government.
- On December 20<sup>th</sup>, President George Bush ordered US forces into Panama "to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty." 26,000 US soldiers occupied Panama in search of Manuel Noriega who was to be seized and tried on trafficking and racketeering charges in a US Federal court. The invasion ended two weeks later when Noriega was captured and transported to Miami. Subsequently, a new colonial government under the leadership of Guillermo Endara was hand-picked by the United States government. ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/panamacanal/newshour\\_coverage2.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/panamacanal/newshour_coverage2.html))
- 1990** Gilberto Guardia was sworn in as Panama Canal Commission Administrator, becoming the first Panamanian to occupy the Canal's highest office.
- 1991** Panama President Guillermo Endara Galimany established a presidential committee responsible for preparing various documents related to the transition process.
- 1996** The Panama Canal Commission became a government corporation with the signing of Public Law 104-106 by U.S. President Bill Clinton.
- 1996** The transit of the vessel Maersk Stafford marked the Canal's 800,000th transit.
- 1999** On December 31<sup>st</sup>, the Canal was transferred to the Republic of Panama. ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/panamacanal/canal\\_12-14.htm](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/panamacanal/canal_12-14.htm) )