

The Invasion of Panama in 1989

The Panama Canal is a strategic waterway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. In 1977, the United States, which had controlled the canal zone since the canal was built, agreed to return control to Panama by 1999.

In the 1980s, Panama was led by the head of the military, Manuel Noriega. He had permitted elections, but allegations of his wrongdoing—voter fraud, intimidation, murder, drug dealing—were widely believed. In 1988, the United States indicted Noriega for drug trafficking and racketeering. That same year, Panama's president tried to dismiss Noriega. But the Noriega-backed legislature dismissed the president instead. The Reagan administration refused to recognize Noriega's choice for president and imposed economic sanctions on Panama. Noriega held new presidential elections in May 1989, but when a Noriega opponent won, Noriega voided the election. He placed a new president in office in September. In October, military leaders tried to overthrow the regime, but Noriega put down the coup. In December, the legislature named Noriega chief executive officer of the government. It also declared that Panama was in a state of war with the United States. The following day, a U.S. soldier in civilian clothes was killed by Panamanian soldiers. Four days later, President George Bush ordered the invasion of Panama. The U.S. Marines quickly took the country. Noriega was taken to the United States, tried, and convicted. The winner of the May 1989 election was inaugurated as the new president of Panama.

The Invasion of Haiti in 1994

Haiti is a poor Caribbean nation on the island of Hispaniola. Half of the island belongs to Haiti; the other half is another country—the Dominican Republic. For most of its history, Haiti has been ruled by brutal military dictators. In 1990, the nation's first free elections were held. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest, won election as president. In 1991, after seven months in office, the military overthrew Aristide. While the United States, United Nations, and the Organization of American States negotiated with the military government to get Aristide returned to power, thousands of refugees fled the island in small boats. Negotiations made little progress and boat people kept arriving in America. In 1993, the military government finally agreed to let Aristide return, but failed to keep its promise. In 1994, the United Nations authorized the use of force to remove the dictatorship. President Bill Clinton announced that the U.S. military would invade if Haiti's military leaders did not leave the country. With the U.S. fleet approaching Haiti, Clinton sent a delegation led by former President Jimmy Carter to Haiti's capital. After round-the-clock negotiations, Haiti's military leader agreed to leave and to order his military not to resist American troops. Aristide returned to power. U.S. troops occupied the island for six years. Democracy in Haiti remains unstable.