

The 1989 united states invasion of panama courtney politics essay



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The United States of America's invasion of Panama on the twentieth of December, 1989, was portrayed by the Bush Administration as a mark of military distinction and an effective model upon which future international invasions should be based. To the Panamanians conversely, the invasion was an unprecedentedly imperialistic exploitation of their people and their nation. The United States government portrayed, through the media and other means, the 1989 invasion of Panama as being a safeguard for American lives and for the purpose of overthrowing a criminal dictator and restoring democracy. In reality however, the illegal invasion manifestly disregarded the value of Panamanian life and was for the solely imperialistic purpose of maintaining political control of Panama and consequently economic control of the Panama Canal. Operation Just Cause as it was so ironically named was falsely presented by the media to the people of North America in a biased light and the rationalisation for the invasion was a guise concocted by the United States Government to conceal their true motives. In order to obtain their objectives, the United States marginalised the effect that the invasion had on the people of Panama and indiscriminately dealt with anyone who they believed was a risk to attaining their goal. Despite the fact that the invasion was illegal, the bona fide intention of the United States when invading Panama was to acquire political and economic control in Panama. It is therefore palpably evident that Operation Just Cause was not even remotely 'just'.

Throughout the 19th century The United States of America made no movement to accept Panama's lobby for sovereignty from Columbia.

According to a documentary entitled ' The Panama Deception', which was

directed by Barbara Trent, United States policy in regards to Panamanian independence abruptly changed when their request to construct a canal was rejected by Columbia (1992). Trent's film was awarded an Oscar and an Academy Award which validates the sources' authenticity and reliability. The Panama Deception is factual and makes a formative yet unbiased decision in regards to the injustice of the invasion of Panama. In 1903 the United States militarily supported Panama so that they were able to secede from Columbia (The Panama Deception, 1992). In return for their aid the United States was given the Canal project abandoned by the French. A treaty was negotiated with the French, and the United States placed the Canal Zone under immediate military control without the express consent of Panama (The Panama Deception, 1992).

The Canal was completed in 1913 which, according to Trent (1992), prompted an increased presence of North American troops within Panama as well as a tighter hold on Panamanian politics. In 1968, Omar Torrijos emerged as the Panamanian leader after a military coup was staged. 1978 bought about a climax in relations between Panama and North America which instigated The Carter-Torrijos treaties and established a new relationship between the two nations. The Carter-Torrijos treaties required the United States to evacuate their military bases, withdraw their troops and relinquish control of the Panama Canal to Panama by the year 2000 (The Panama Deception, 1992). Torrijos soon fell out of American favour and in 1981 died in a plane crash (Avakian, 2005). The Panama Deception included a statement by Jose De Jesus Martinez, a Panamanian author, professor and close colleague of Omar Torrijos. Martinez (1992) believes that the CIA killed

Torrijos because he was influencing the revolutionary movements in Central America. This statement gives rise to the notion that the United States was determined to gain Political Control in Panama irrespective of the cost. With the death of Torrijos, General Manuel Noriega, head of the Panamanian military, anticipated his opportunity to lead the nation. Notwithstanding the fact that he was a drug runner, Noriega, who is pictured in the bottom left hand corner of the multi-modal, was the United States' prime Panamanian contact and, according to Trent (1992), throughout the 1980s became an increasingly beneficial North American asset. Despite Noriega's compliance and assistance with numerous United States' covert operations, by 1984 Noriega was becoming increasingly in compliant with United States objectives in South America. According to Barbara Trent in her 1992 production, Noriega didn't like to be pushed around by the United States despite the fact that he earned in excess of \$US 100, 000 merely by being on the CIA's payroll. This unwillingness to comply with the United States is embodied within the multimodal through the use of a speech bubble encapsulating the word ' NO!'. The fact that it is not displayed on the television screen represents the United States not wanting to reveal to the public his rejection of their policies. Bob Avakian believed that with the beginning of 1987 looming, Noriega was losing support in both Panama and the United States, prompting Noriega to launch a surge of tyranny upon the Panamanian people (2005). Bob Avakian's article entitled " The US Invasion of Panama 1989: The Injustice of Operation Just Cause" was part of a series about United States Imperialism. Though the articles are written from a communist perspective and are at times seemingly colloquial and emotive they are extremely relevant and accurate which is proven by the extensive list of references <https://assignbuster.com/the-1989-united-states-invasion-of-panama-courtney-politics-essay/>

cited. As a result of Noriega's brutally violent offences, the Reagan administration publicly announced their desire to have Noriega removed. Behind closed doors however, they were covertly negotiating with the oppressive dictator (The Panama Deception, 1992). Gavrielle Gemma; Director of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the US Invasion of Panama told Trent (1992) that the United States demanded that Noriega amend the Panamanian Government's policy on numerous issues in order to comply with The United States' policies. Gemma goes on to say the United States also stipulated that they be allowed to maintain control of their fourteen military bases as well as the Canal Zone (1992). The demands were refused by Noriega (this is also represented by the 'NO!' speech bubble) which provoked the United States to increase military presence in Panama and undertake an effort to overthrow his regime. On account of their inability to remove Noriega from power, the United States attempted to sway the 1989 Panamanian National Elections (The Panama Deception, 1992). This event is represented in the multimodal through the speech bubble originating from Bush which includes the words " Democracy, Liberty, No Drugs..." written in an embellished font. This represents the fact that Bush publicised his alleged support of democracy but ironically went against this and swayed the Panamanian National Elections. As it became increasingly obvious that Noriega had lost the election, ballot boxes were confiscated and American-backed candidates were ferociously beaten in the streets. Trent notes that as a result, Noriega was declared Head of State and President George Bush Senior then explicitly encouraged the Panamanian Defence Force to revolt (1992). The attempted military coup failed, which an Investigative Journalist Doug Vaughn believes was due to the deliberate

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inaction of the United States (1992). The United States military increased its intimidation campaign and began conducting military manoeuvres that fell outside of North American jurisdiction. Provocations against the Panamanian people, believes National Labour Organiser Sabina Virgo who spoke to Trent about the Panamanian invasion, were instigated in order to create an international incident so that the United States could say they were invading Panama for the protection of American lives which is precisely what occurred.

Following an incident on the sixteenth of December in which an American soldier was killed, President George Bush Senior assented to the execution of Operation Just Cause. According to the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the US invasion of Panama (1991), it was this incident in conjunction with failed military threats, economic sanctions and negotiations, which prompted the United States to invade Panama. At one o'clock in the morning on the twentieth of December 1989 the United States army concurrently bombed 27 targets, many of which were located in heavily populated districts. The invasion is depicted within the multimodal through the use of the image of the American soldiers with weaponry as well as the pictures of the destroyed buildings that line the right-hand side of the compilation. The United States troops showered the cities with bullets for an extensive period of time before calling for surrender (The Panama Deception, 1992). According to an undisclosed author at the Socialist Worker Website, 2, 500 people were dead within the initial twenty-four hours of the invasion (2001). This is shown through the picture of the dead bodies lining the streets of Panama which is the third picture from the top, on the right-hand side of the multimodal

collage. This article is a biased manipulation of Barbra Trent's documentary as it extracts only the pieces of evidence that present the United States in a less than favourable light. It is however, factual and thus reliable. The callous method in which the United States conducted the 1989 invasion of Panama demonstrates a flagrant disregard for Panamanian life which is reiterated by the fact that the United States took control of the Panamanian hospitals and morgues for their own benefit (Socialist Worker, 2001). Helicopters reportedly fired indiscriminately at the Panamanian people, shooting anything that moved without mercy. International Journalist Valerie Van Isler was recorded saying in Trent's Documentary (1992) that the US focussed on their goal of procuring Noriega "...to the exclusion of what was happening to the Panamanian people, to the exclusion of the bodies in the street, to the exclusion of the number dead, to the exclusion of what happened to the women and children of that country during this midnight invasion". The notion of the Panamanian people being disregarded is represented through the images that have been effectively "pushed to the side" of the multimodal and not considered as the primary focus as perhaps they should have been. In the aftermath of the Panamanian infiltration corpses lay in the streets and were crushed by numerous military tanks. Gavrielle Gemma told Trent of eye-witness accounts of United States soldiers capturing civilians and executing them on the street. 18, 000 Panamanians were placed in detention centres, 20, 000 were homeless and 7, 000 were detained (The Panama Deception, 1992). It is clear, through the analysis of the aforementioned information that the United States' invasion occurred without due consideration of Panamanian life and that during the assault it was further disregarded and the corpses were, for the most part, treated

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with ignominy and disrespect. The multimodal presents this view through the devices mentioned above as well as the deliberate placing of the bodies under the dollar signs which symbolises the concept that money was more highly valued than Panamanian life.

Media manipulation was a key tool used by the Bush administration throughout the Panama invasion. Bob Avakian (2005) states that Noriega was “portrayed on television as a madman waving a machete”; this information reiterates the fact that the media fed off government information and credulously accepted it as fact. By inserting an arrow pointing from the White House to the Television the idea is portrayed that the administration is controlling the content of the media. This is reiterated through the image of Noriega with ‘devil horns’ because that is how he was portrayed to the North American people by the media, under the direct influence of the oligarchy. Jeff Cohen and Mark Cook of fair.org published an article in February of 1990 elucidating upon “How Television Sold the Panama Invasion”. The source is well referenced and although it, at times, appears biased, each statement is backed up by facts. In the article, Cohen and Cook refer to an opinion poll taken by CBS news just two weeks after the invasion. The poll deduced that a vast majority of eighty per cent of Panamanian people said that the consequences of the invasion were worth the outcome. The illegitimacy of this opinion poll is extreme due to the fact that it was taken in a country under stratocracy and was conducted by an agency in favour of the invading force (Cohen; Cook, 1990). Numerous other journalists travelling with the United States Military also reported an appreciative and joyous welcome from the Panamanian people. Cohen and Cook believe that whilst this type of

“ Canal Zone Journalism” dominated the media, independent journalists such as Peter Eisner investigated the invasion on their own (1990). Eisner reported that the Panamanian people cursed the United States troops under their breaths and offered a justification for the lack of opposition saying that the liberals were in hiding due to fear that they would be forcefully suppressed (Cohen; Cook, 1990). The brunt of the United States media coverage focussed on how many American soldiers had been killed, how many had been wounded and whether or not the invasion was effective. The wellbeing and security of the Panamanian victims were largely omitted from American media disseminations. The media distorted particular series of events notably in reference to the death of the American soldier just four days prior to the invasion which demonstrates that information was taken as gospel and the truth was only considered as an afterthought (Cohen; Cook, 1990). Ronald C Kramer, a professor of sociology at the University of Western Michigan stated, in his well-referenced and unbiased account of the invasion, that the United States Government went to great lengths to regulate the media throughout the Panamanian operation by limiting admittance to the war zone and supplying them with micro-managed pieces of information (1995). This aspect of media management has been communicated in the multimodal through the use of a “ DO NOT ENTER” sign that has been placed in front of the war zone. From video clips played by American media it appeared as though the Panamanian people were jubilantly thankful for the North American invasion. Upon closer investigation however, it is evident that the people shown and interviewed were, by and large, white, middle-class people who could speak English (The Panama Deception, 1992). The use of a white foot in the multimodal (not its actions) <https://assignbuster.com/the-1989-united-states-invasion-of-panama-courtney-politics-essay/>

demonstrates how the main focus of the media was on those who weren't profoundly affected by the invasion. This glaring disrespect for human life was clearly rife throughout the invasion. It is therefore evident that the United States of America manifestly disregarded the value of Panamanian life and marginalised the effect that the invasion had on the people of Panama, indiscriminately dealing with anyone who they believed was a risk to attaining their goal.

" General Noriega, the drug-related indicted dictator of Panama, we want to bring him to justice, we want to get him out and we want to restore democracy to Panama and so when you read these outrageous charges by this man discount them, they are total lies." This was the 1989 declaration presented to the North American people by the then President George Bush Senior. As alluded to by Ronald C Kramer, President Bush cited four reasons as to why the invasion of Panama was justified (1995). The photograph of American President George Bush adorned with speech and thought bubbles convey many ideas. The first is that he is a dominant figure in the invasion as he is situated at the top of the page. The second is that what he says and what he truly believes differ greatly, which is assumed through the discernment that the speech bubble is what he portrays to the public as the reasons behind the invasion whilst the thought bubble contains his true motives. The people of the United States were told that the assault upon Panama was crucial in order to protect American lives, to restore democracy, to intern Noriega and indict him on drug charges and finally to safeguard the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty (Kramer, 1995). This relation between the integrity of the Panama Canal and Noriega's drug offences is presented

through the picture of cocaine being placed over the canal symbolising that it is a threat to the Canal. Kramer then elaborates upon this; emphasizing the falsity of these excuses, he says that there was no risk to American life, unless the Panamanian Defence Force was duly provoked, that there was no democracy in Panama for a start, that the Panamanians posed no threat to the Canal and that the United States alleged trepidation with the Panamanian drug trade was a charade (1995).

Eugene Carroll, a Rear Admiral in the United States Military, agrees with Kramer. In an account made to Trent in 1992, he begs the question: "How in the world do you restore that which has never existed?" he goes on to say that "Panama has never been a democracy since we created Panama for our own purposes in 1903. All we did was to go down and restore American control and dominance in Panama." Washington fashioned Noriega's military dictatorship and thenceforth created the Endara regime as a replacement in order to maintain indirect political control which does not embody democracy in any sense of the word (The League for the Revolutionary Party, 1990). The image of the puppet with the face of Endara, situated just below the images of the White House and George Bush insinuate that the United States have accomplished their goal for political dominance in Panama and that they control the actions of Endara.

The Bush administration cited that another reason behind the invasion was to staunch the flow of drugs into the United States by removing Noriega. The League for the Revolutionary which is quite a biased source says that the excuse of putting an end to Noriega's involvement with drugs was the biggest farce of all (1990). After eliminating the emotive language the source <https://assignbuster.com/the-1989-united-states-invasion-of-panama-courtney-politics-essay/>

(1990) is quite reliable and points out that Bush himself hired and paid Noriega knowing his involvement with drugs. Not only did the United States financially support this criminal dictator but they overlooked his involvement in the drug trade and increased his salary in order to keep him in their favour. The picture of the cocaine concealed beneath the dollar signs stands for the fact that the United States was willing to turn a blind eye to Noriega's involvement with drugs if they were able to receive benefits in return; specifically economic or benefits ascertaining to the Canal.

Not only did they support Noriega but according to a US general accounting report, cocaine trafficking through Panama increased by 200 per cent in the wake of the invasion (Trent, 1992).

" I have studied everything that the President has said as to reasons why he ordered the invasion and none of those things singularly or collectively makes any legal, moral or constitutional sense." New York Democrat Charles Rangel told Trent (1992). He went on to say:

" When (Bush) said that the loss of American life was the last straw, sure there must be something we could have done. Certainly there must have been papers we could have filed. We could have gone to the World Court, we could have gone to the UN or maybe the organisations of America states but invade a country because of this is absolutely ridiculous." - Rangel (1992).

It is therefore patently clear that the Government of The United States did, in effect, concoct a guise in order to conceal their true motives behind the invasion. This concept as mentioned heretofore was represented primarily in the multimodal through the image of Bush and his ulterior motives.
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The United States did not truly want for democracy in Panama instead they covertly lobbied for political control albeit indirect. After they lost control over Noriega, criminally charged and illegally indicted him in North America, the United States installed Endara who they backed and manipulated according to United States policy (Trent, 1992). It was evident that the United States sought political control but it was their desire for economic control that instigated the most callous and uncalculated action. Former United States Attorney General Ramsey Clark says that America has to face the fact that they are a plutocracy and a nation in which wealth controls all; dictating even the democratic processes and foreign action (Trent, 1992). The Panama Canal was the objective that America yearned for, the key to successful US-Global operations as well as strategic assaults and the ability to relocate military forces belligerently around the globe (Avakian, 2005). The Wheeling Jesuit University also describes how the Panama Canal is an eminent factor in the American economy (2002). As an academic source with a direct link to an educational institution it can be concluded that their statement that the Panama Canal is vitally important to the United States economy is accurate. The ship on the Canal in the multimodal presents the Panama Canal's importance in relation to the United States' economy. Over ten per cent of all United States imports and exports travel the Canal and considering how many thousands of ships traverse the Canal each year it is evident that keeping the Canal open is candidly crucial to the United States economy. The fact that a photograph of the Panama Canal is the background for the entire multimodal reiterates the fact that it was one of the main focuses of the United States when invading Panama.

The Panama Canal Treaty of 1913 states that in the year 2000 Panamanians will assume responsibility for the security of the Canal. In order to bear this responsibility says Humberto Brown, a former Panamanian diplomat, it is vital that the nation has an army (Trent, 1992). The United States, says Humberto (1992), were aware of this fact and through the invasion eliminated, the Panamanian defence force to ensure the continuity of American presence in Panama. By placing the White House and President George Bush at the top of the image it is portrayed that the United States believes that their rightful place is a place of dominance over Panama.

Jose De Jesus Martinez agrees with Brown in a statement where he labels Americans as 'stupid' for believing that the reason for the invasion was to eradicate Noriega (Trent, 1992).

"One time, they had Noriega at gun point, they could have taken Noriega then but the Americans didn't really want Noriega. What they wanted was to destroy the Panamanian army in order to do with the treaties what they wanted which is what is happening now." - Jose De Jesus Martinez (1992)

March 1991 was the date upon which all speculation was proven to be true. President Guillermo Endara proposed a Constitutional amendment that would abolish Panama's right to maintain an armed force perpetually. A decree was then passed subsequently that year that called for the renegotiation of the Panama Canal Treaties to allow for permanent North American military presence in Panama (Trent, 1992). The law was passed on the basis that Panama was, allegedly, no longer able to defend the Canal. This event combined with the actions and deduced motivations of the United

States Government display that the invasion was conducted for the solely imperialistic purpose of maintaining political control of Panama and consequently economic control of the Panama Canal. The Panamanian Flag which is positioned beside George Bush in the multimodal has been altered so that specific sections now encompass the flag of the United States. The United States flag has been deliberately changed to colours that match the Panamanian flag to represent the fact that they believe their political dominance to be discreet. Their political dominance in general is represented by their mere presence on the Panamanian flag.

Throughout the process of attempting to attain their economic and political goals, the United States Government and Military committed many offences that violated United States law, International law and even rudimentary human rights. By injecting in excess of \$US 10 million into the support of Noriega's opposition in the 1989 Panamanian National elections the United States committed a hypocritical action that, according to Gavrielle Gemma, if it had been performed in the United States would have been in direct violation of the integrity of the democratic process and therefore considered illegal (Trent, 1992). The United States also managed to somehow overlook International law whilst turning a blind eye to Noriega's drug ties. Peter Kornbluh is a senior analyst at the National Security Archive and says that the United States paid Noriega an absurd amount of money deciding that his value to the United States outweighed his illegal activity (1992). Whilst in Panama, soon after the invasion, the United States military augmented their campaign of terrorization and incitement; conducting offensive manoeuvres that went beyond their jurisdiction (Trent, 1992). It was alleged that they

also mercilessly and unjustly executed hundreds of Panamanian citizens and imprisoned over 7, 000 people without just cause or due process (Calvo, 1992).

Granted, the North American media created an undeniable perception of support for the Panamanian assault however it was tremendously condemned within the international sphere (Trent, 1992). An attorney with the Centre for Constitutional Rights Jose Morin stated in 1992:

“ The Panama invasion violates the UN charter and the OAS charter which have specific prohibitions against invasions of a sovereign country and invasions of the territorial integrity of other countries. These provisions are very strict and very clear under international law. The US’s actions are in violation of human rights and also violate the Geneva Conventions which protects civilians from indiscriminate acts of violence as had occurred against civilian victims in Panama.”

This statement was then reiterated by Jeff Cohen of fair. org and Mark Hertsgaard (an author and journalist interviewed by Barbara Trent for her 1992 documentary). All three agree that the invasion violates international law and that it was indisputably illegal. This notion was reinforced by the fact that the effective kidnapping and trial of Noriega in the United States was not legally grounded (The Independent Commission of Inquiry on the US invasion of panama, 1991). It is fundamentally illegal, under any law, to deploy military force, in a time of piece and kill civilians at the discretion of the military. These actions violated the laws of the Sovereign Republic of Panama as well as the human rights of each and every person implicated

through the invasion (The Independent Commission of Inquiry on the US invasion of panama, 1991). In the multimodal, the representation of the foot squashing the sign that reads “ laws and human rights” represents the United States’ blatant disregard and lack of respect toward national and international laws as well as human rights. It shows that they believed that they had the right to imperialistically invade another nation, regardless of the consequences to fulfil their nation’s desires.

Given the aforementioned analysis of the Panama invasion, it is undisputable that the United States government portrayed, through the media and other means, the 1989 invasion of Panama as being a safeguard for American lives and for the purpose of overthrowing a criminal dictator and restoring democracy. In reality however, the illegal invasion manifestly disregarded the value of Panamanian life and was for the solely imperialistic purpose of maintaining political control of Panama and consequently economic control of the Panama Canal. During this invasion the United States demonstrated that they are an imperialistic nation which will stop at nothing to obtain political and economic power even if it comes at the cost of human life.