

# Empire and Expansion

1890–1909

WE ASSERT THAT NO NATION CAN LONG ENDURE HALF  
REPUBLIC AND HALF EMPIRE, AND WE WARN THE  
AMERICAN PEOPLE THAT IMPERIALISM ABROAD WILL  
LEAD QUICKLY AND INEVITABLY TO DESPOTISM AT HOME.

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL PLATFORM, 1900

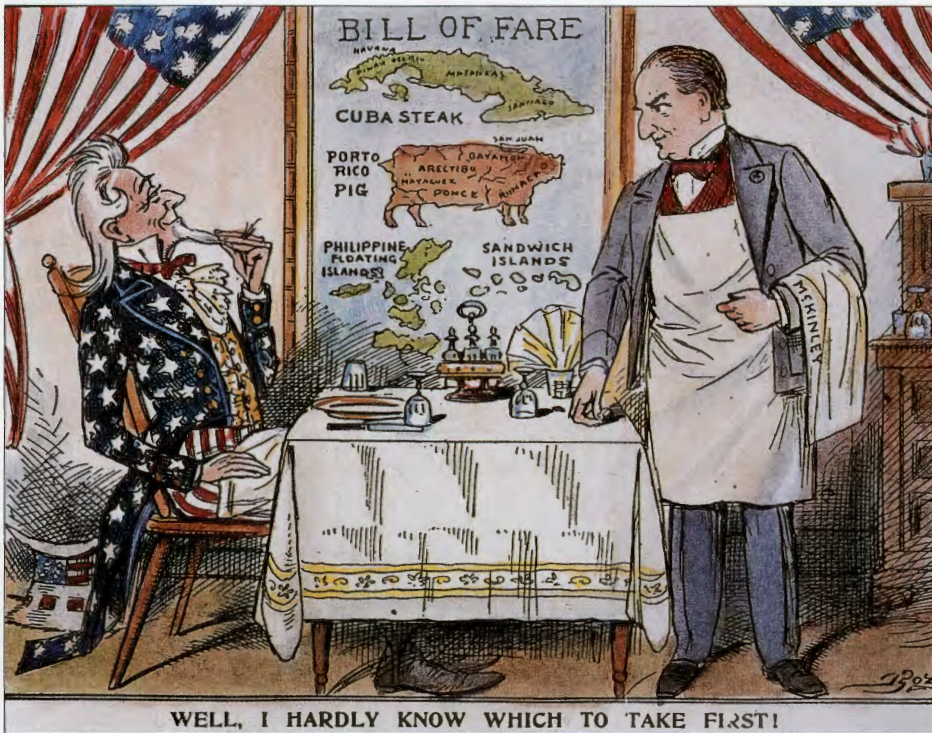
In the years immediately following the Civil War, Americans remained astonishingly indifferent to the outside world. Enmeshed in struggles over Reconstruction and absorbed in efforts to heal the wounds of civil war, build an industrial economy, make their cities habitable, and settle the sprawling West, most citizens took little interest in international affairs. But the sunset decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a momentous shift in U.S. foreign policy. America's new diplomacy reflected the far-reaching changes that were reshaping agriculture, industry, and the social structure. American statesmen also responded to the intensifying scramble of several other nations for international advantage in the dawning "age of empire." By the beginning of the twentieth century, America had acquired its own empire, an astonishing departure from its venerable anticolonial traditions. The world now had to reckon with a new great power, potentially powerful but with diplomatic ambitions and principles that remained to be defined.

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## America Turns Outward

Many developments fed the nation's ambition for overseas expansion. Both farmers and factory owners began to look for markets beyond American shores as agricultural and industrial production boomed. Many Americans believed that the United States had to expand or explode. Their country was bursting with a new sense of power generated by the robust growth in population, wealth, and productive capacity—and it was trembling from the hammer blows of labor violence and agrarian unrest. Overseas markets might provide a safety valve to relieve those pressures.

Other forces also whetted the popular appetite for overseas involvement. The lurid "yellow press" of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst described foreign exploits as manly adventures, the kind of dashing derring-do that was the stuff of young boys' dreams.



WELL, I HARDLY KNOW WHICH TO TAKE FIRST!

### The Imperial Menu

A pleased Uncle Sam gets ready to place his order with headwaiter William McKinley. Swallowing some of these possessions eventually produced political indigestion.

Pious missionaries, inspired by books like the Reverend Josiah Strong's *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*, looked overseas for new souls to harvest. Strong trumpeted the superiority of Anglo-Saxon civilization and summoned Americans to spread their religion and their values to the "backward" peoples. He cast his seed on fertile ground. At the same time, aggressive Americans like Theodore Roosevelt and Congressman (later Senator) Henry Cabot Lodge were interpreting Darwinism to mean that the earth belonged to the strong and the fit—that is, to Uncle Sam. This view was strengthened as latecomers to the colonial scramble scooped up leavings from the banquet table of earlier diners. Africa, previously unexplored and mysterious, was partitioned by the Europeans in the 1880s in a pell-mell rush of colonial conquest. In the 1890s Japan, Germany, and Russia all extorted concessions from the anemic Chinese Empire. If America was to survive in the competition of modern nation-states, perhaps it, too, would have to become an imperial power.

The development of a new steel navy also focused attention overseas. Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan's book of 1890, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, argued that control of the sea was the key to world dominance. Mahan helped stimulate the naval

race among the great powers that gained momentum around the turn of the century. Red-blooded Americans joined in the demands for a mightier navy and for an American-built isthmian canal between the Atlantic and the Pacific.

*In 1896 the Washington Post editorialized,*

"A new consciousness seems to have come upon us—the consciousness of strength—and with it a new appetite, the yearning to show our strength. . . . Ambition, interest, land hunger, pride, the mere joy of fighting, whatever it may be, we are animated by a new sensation. We are face to face with a strange destiny. The taste of Empire is in the mouth of the people even as the taste of blood is in the jungle. It means an Imperial policy, the Republic, renaissant, taking her place with the armed nations."

America's new international interest manifested itself in several ways. Two-time secretary of state James G. Blaine pushed his "Big Sister" policy, aimed at rallying the Latin American nations behind Uncle Sam's leadership and opening Latin American markets to Yankee traders. Blaine's efforts bore some fruit in 1889, when he presided over the first Pan-American Conference, held in Washington, D.C., the modest beginnings of an increasingly important series of inter-American assemblages.

A number of diplomatic crises or near-wars also marked the path of American diplomacy in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The American and German navies nearly came to blows in 1889 over the faraway Samoan Islands in the South Pacific, which were formally divided between the two nations in 1899. (German Samoa eventually became an independent republic; American Samoa remains an American possession.) The lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891 brought America and Italy to the brink of war, until the United States agreed to pay compensation. In the ugliest affair, American demands on Chile after the deaths of two American sailors in the port of Valparaiso in 1892 made hostilities between the two countries seem inevitable. The threat of attack by Chile's modern navy spread alarm on the Pacific Coast, until the Chileans finally agreed to pay an indemnity. A simmering argument between the United States and Canada over seal hunting near the Pribilof Islands off the coast of Alaska was resolved by arbitration in 1893. The willingness of Americans to risk war over such distant and minor disputes demonstrated the aggressive new national mood.

America's new belligerence combined with old-time anti-British feeling to generate a serious crisis between

the United States and Britain in 1895–1896. The jungle boundary between British Guiana and Venezuela had long been in dispute, but the discovery of gold in the contested area brought the conflict between Britain and Venezuela to a head.

President Cleveland and his pugnacious secretary of state, Richard Olney, waded into the affair with a combative note to Britain invoking the Monroe Doctrine. Not content to stop there, Olney haughtily informed the world's number one naval power that the United States was now calling the tune in the Western Hemisphere.

Unimpressed British officials shrugged off Olney's salvo as just another twist of the lion's tail and replied that the affair was none of Uncle Sam's business. President Cleveland—"mad clear through," as he put

**They Can't Fight** Britain and America waged a war of words during the Venezuelan boundary dispute, but cooler heads prevailed, ushering in a new era of diplomatic cooperation between the two former foes, now bound together by ties of language, culture, and mutual economic interest. As the fabled German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck reportedly remarked, "the supreme geopolitical fact of the modern era is that the Americans speak English."

*The undiplomatic note to Britain by Secretary of State Richard Olney (1835–1917) read,*

"To-day the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition. . . . Its infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable as against any or all other powers."



it—sent a bristling special message to Congress. He urged an appropriation for a commission of experts, who would run the line where it ought to go. If the British would not accept this rightful boundary, he implied, the United States would fight for it.

The entire country, irrespective of political party, was swept off its feet in an outburst of hysteria. War seemed inevitable. Fortunately, sober second thoughts prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic. A rising challenge from Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany, as well as a looming war with the Dutch-descended Boers in South Africa, left Britain in no mood for war with America. London backed off and consented to arbitration.

The chastened British, their eyes fully opened to the European peril, were now determined to cultivate Yankee friendship. The British inaugurated an era of "patting the eagle's head," which replaced a century or so of America's "twisting the lion's tail." Sometimes called the Great Rapprochement—or reconciliation—between the United States and Britain, the new Anglo-American cordiality became a cornerstone of both nations' foreign policies as the twentieth century opened.



### Spurning the Hawaiian Pear

Enchanted Hawaii had early attracted the attention of Americans. In the morning years of the nineteenth century, the breeze-brushed islands were a way station and provisioning point for Yankee shippers, sailors, and whalers. In 1820 the first New England missionaries arrived, preaching the twin blessings of Protestant Christianity and protective calico. They came to do good—and did well, as Hawaii became an increasingly important center for sugar production.

Americans gradually came to regard the Hawaiian Islands as a virtual extension of their own coastline. The State Department, beginning in the 1840s, sternly warned other powers to keep their grasping hands off. America's grip was further tightened in 1887 by a treaty with the native government guaranteeing priceless naval-base rights at spacious Pearl Harbor.

But trouble was brewing in the insular paradise. Old World pathogens had scythed the indigenous Hawaiian population down to one-sixth of its size at the time of the first contact with Europeans, leading the American sugar lords to import large numbers of Asian laborers to work the canefields and sugar mills. By century's end, Chinese and Japanese immigrants outnumbered both

whites and native Hawaiians, amid mounting worries that Tokyo might be tempted to intervene on behalf of its often-abused nationals. Then sugar markets went sour in 1890 when the McKinley Tariff raised barriers against the Hawaiian product. White American planters thereupon renewed their efforts to secure the annexation of Hawaii to the United States. They were blocked by the strong-willed Queen Liliuokalani, who insisted that native Hawaiians should control the islands. Desperate whites, though only a tiny minority, organized a successful revolt early in 1893, openly assisted by American troops, who landed under the unauthorized orders of the expansionist American minister in Honolulu. "The Hawaiian pear is now fully ripe," he wrote exultantly to his superiors in Washington, "and this is the golden hour for the United States to pluck it."

**Queen Liliuokalani (1838–1917)** She was the last reigning queen of Hawaii, whose defense of native Hawaiian self-rule led to a revolt by white settlers and to her dethronement. She wrote many songs, the most famous of which was "Aloha Oe," or Farewell to Thee, played countless times by Hawaiian bands for departing tourists.





**United States Expansion, 1857–1917** With the annexation of the Philippines, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico in 1898, the United States became an imperial power.

A treaty of annexation was rushed to Washington, but before it could be railroaded through the Senate, Republican president Harrison's term expired and Democratic president Cleveland came in. Suspecting that his powerful nation had gravely wronged the deposed Queen Liliuokalani and her people, "Old Grover" abruptly withdrew the treaty. A subsequent investigation determined that a majority of the Hawaiian natives opposed annexation. Although Queen Liliuokalani could not be reinstated, the sugarcoated move for annexation had to be temporarily abandoned. The Hawaiian pear continued to ripen until the fateful year of 1898.

### Cubans Rise in Revolt

Cuba's masses, frightfully misgoverned, again rose against their Spanish oppressors in 1895. The roots of their revolt were partly economic. Sugar production—the backbone of the island's prosperity—was crippled when the American tariff of 1894 restored high duties on the toothsome product. The desperate insurgents now sought to drive out their Spanish overlords by adopting a scorched-earth policy. The *insurrectos* torched cane-fields and sugar mills and dynamited passenger trains. Their destructive tactics also menaced American interests on the island.

American sympathies went out to the Cuban underdogs. Sentiment aside, American business had an investment stake of about \$50 million in Cuba and an annual trade stake of about \$100 million, all of it put at risk by revolutionary upheaval. Moreover, as the calculating Senator Lodge put it, Cuba lay "right athwart the line" that led to the much anticipated Panama Canal. Whoever controlled Cuba, said Lodge, "controls the Gulf [of Mexico]." Much was riding on the outcome of events in troubled Cuba.

Fuel was added to the Cuban conflagration in 1896 with the arrival of the Spanish general "Butcher" Weyler. He undertook to crush the rebellion by herding many civilians into barbed-wire reconcentration camps, where they could not give assistance to the armed *insurrectos*. Lacking proper sanitation, these enclosures turned into deadly pestholes; the victims died like dogs.

Atrocities in Cuba were red meat for the sensational new "yellow journalism" of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. Engaged in a titanic duel for circulation, each attempted to outdo the other with screeching headlines and hair-raising "scoops." Where atrocity stories did not exist, they were invented. Hearst sent the gifted artist Frederic Remington to Cuba to draw sketches, allegedly with the pointed admonition: "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war." Among other outrages, Remington depicted Spanish customs officials brutally disrobing and searching an American woman. Most readers of Hearst's *Journal*, their indignation soaring, had no way of

knowing that such tasks were performed by female attendants. Hearst also sensationally publicized a private letter from the Spanish minister in Washington, Dupuy de Lôme. The indiscreet epistle, stolen from the mails, described President McKinley in decidedly unflattering terms. The resulting uproar forced Dupuy de Lôme's resignation and further infuriated the American public.

Then early in 1898, Washington sent the battleship *Maine* to Cuba, ostensibly for a "friendly visit" but actually to protect and evacuate Americans if a dangerous flare-up should occur and to demonstrate Washington's concern for the island's stability. Tragedy struck on February 15, 1898, when the *Maine* mysteriously blew up in Havana harbor, with a loss of 260 sailors.

Two investigations of the iron coffin ensued, one by U.S. naval officers and the other by Spanish officials. The Spaniards concluded that the explosion had been internal and presumably accidental; the Americans

*Many Spaniards felt that accusations about their blowing up the Maine reflected on Spanish honor. One Madrid newspaper spoke up:*

"The American jingoos . . . imagine us capable of the most foul villainies and cowardly actions. Scoundrels by nature, the American jingoos believe that all men are made like themselves. What do they know about noble and generous feelings? . . . We should not in any way heed the jingoos: they are not even worth our contempt, or the saliva with which we might honor them in spitting at their faces."



**The Explosion of the *Maine*, February 15, 1898** Encouraged and amplified by the "yellow press," the outcry over the tragedy of the *Maine* helped drive the country into an impulsive war against Spain.

argued that the blast had been caused by a submarine mine. Not until 1976 did U.S. Navy admiral H. G. Rickover confirm the original Spanish finding with overwhelming evidence that the initial explosion had resulted from spontaneous combustion in one of the coal bunkers adjacent to a powder magazine.

But Americans in 1898, now mad for war, blindly embraced the less likely explanation. Lashed to fury by the yellow press, they leapt to the inaccurate conclusion that the Spanish government had been guilty of intolerable treachery. The battle cry of the hour became,

*Remember the Maine!  
To hell with Spain!*

Nothing would do but to hurl the “dirty” Spanish flag from the hemisphere.

The national war fever burned ever higher, even though American diplomats had already gained Madrid’s agreement to Washington’s two basic demands: an end to the reconcentration camps and an armistice with Cuban rebels. The cautious McKinley found himself in a jam. He

did not want hostilities, but neither did he want Spain to remain in possession of Cuba. Nor, for that matter, did he want a fully independent Cuba, over which the United States could exercise no control. More impetuous souls denounced the circumspect president as “Wobbly Willie” McKinley. Fight-hungry Theodore Roosevelt reportedly snarled that the “white-livered” occupant of the White House did not have “the backbone of a chocolate éclair.” The president, whose shaken nerves required sleeping pills, was even being hanged in effigy.

McKinley, recognizing the inevitable, eventually yielded and gave the people what they wanted. But public pressure did not fully explain McKinley’s course. He had little faith in Spain’s oft-broken promises. He worried about Democratic reprisals in the upcoming presidential election of 1900 if he continued to appear indecisive in a time of crisis. He also acknowledged America’s commercial and strategic interests in Cuba.

On April 11, 1898, McKinley sent his war message to Congress, urging armed intervention to free the oppressed Cubans. The legislators responded uproari-



**“Cuba Libre,”** by Captain Fritz W. Guerin of St. Louis, 1898 This elaborately staged tableau depicts Confederate and Union officers reconciled three decades after the Civil War as they join hands to liberate innocent Cuba from her chains of bondage to Spain.

ously with what was essentially a declaration of war. In a burst of self-righteousness, they likewise adopted the hand-tying Teller Amendment. This proviso proclaimed to the world that when the United States had overthrown Spanish misrule, it would give the Cubans their freedom—a declaration that caused imperialistic Europeans to smile skeptically.



### Dewey's May Day Victory at Manila

The American people plunged into the war lightheartedly, like schoolchildren off to a picnic. Bands blared incessantly "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" and "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here," leading some foreigners to believe that those were national anthems.

The war got off to a giddy start for American forces. Even before the declaration of war, on February 25, 1898, while Navy Secretary John D. Long was away from the office, his hot-blooded assistant secretary Theodore Roosevelt took matters into his own hands.

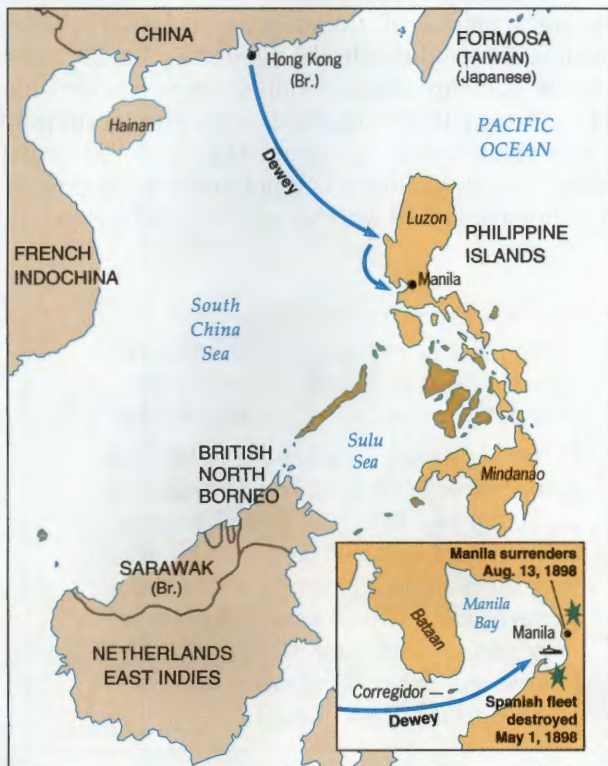
Roosevelt cabled Commodore George Dewey, commanding the American Asiatic Squadron at Hong Kong, to descend upon Spain's Philippines in the event of war. "The very devil seemed to possess him," Long later wrote of Roosevelt's actions. But President McKinley subsequently confirmed Roosevelt's instructions, even though an attack in the distant Far East seemed like a strange way to free nearby Cuba.

Dewey carried out his orders magnificently on May 1, 1898. Sailing boldly with his six warships at night into the fortified harbor of Manila, he trained his guns the next morning on the moldy ten-ship Spanish fleet. The entire collection of antiquated and overmatched vessels was quickly destroyed, with a loss of nearly four hundred Spaniards killed and wounded, and without the loss of a single American life.

Taciturn George Dewey became a national hero overnight. An amateur poet blossomed forth with this:

*Oh, dewey was the morning  
Upon the first of May,  
And Dewey was the Admiral,  
Down in Manila Bay.  
And dewey were the Spaniards' eyes,  
Them orbs of black and blue;  
And dew we feel discouraged?  
I dew not think we dew!*

### Dewey's Route in the Philippines, 1898



Yet Dewey was in a perilous position. He had destroyed the enemy fleet, but he could not storm the forts of Manila with his sailors. His nerves frayed, he was forced to wait in the sweltering bay while troop reinforcements were slowly assembled in America. The appearance of German warships in Manila harbor deepened the tension.

Long-awaited American troops, finally arriving in force, captured Manila on August 13, 1898, in collaboration with Filipino insurgents commanded by their well-educated, part-Chinese leader, Emilio Aguinaldo. Dewey, to his later regret, had brought this shrewd and magnetic revolutionary from exile in Asia so that he might weaken Spanish resistance.

These thrilling events in the Philippines had meanwhile focused attention on Hawaii. An impression spread that America needed the archipelago as a coaling and provisioning way station, in order to send supplies and reinforcements to Dewey. McKinley also worried that Japan might grab the Hawaiian Islands while America was distracted elsewhere. A joint resolution of annexation was rushed through Congress and approved by McKinley on July 7, 1898. It granted Hawaiian residents U.S. citizenship; Hawaii received full territorial status in 1900.





**Emilio Aguinaldo (c. 1869–1964) and Followers, 1900** Aguinaldo had a colorfully checkered career. Exiled from the Philippines by the Spanish in 1897, he was brought back in 1898 to assist the American invasion. A year later he led the Filipino insurrection against the new American rulers. Captured in 1901, he declared his loyalty to the United States. During World War II, he collaborated with the Japanese when they occupied the Philippines. After a lifetime of political intrigue and armed struggle, Aguinaldo died peacefully in Manila in 1964 in his ninety-fifth year.



### The Confused Invasion of Cuba

Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Spanish government ordered a fleet of decrepit warships to Cuba. Panic seized the eastern seaboard of the United States. American vacationers abandoned their seashore cottages, while nervous investors moved their securities to inland depositories. The Spanish “armada” eventually wheezed into bottle-shaped Santiago harbor, Cuba, where it was easily blockaded by the much more powerful American fleet.

Sound strategy seemed to dictate that an American army be sent in from the rear to drive out the Spanish ships. Leading the invading force was the grossly overweight General William R. Shafter, a would-be warrior so blubbery and gout-stricken that he had to be carried about on a door. His troops were woefully unequipped for war in the tropics; they had been amply provided with heavy woolen underwear and uniforms designed for subzero operations against the Indians.

The “Rough Riders,” a part of the invading army, now charged onto the stage of history. This colorful regiment of volunteers, short on discipline but long on dash, consisted largely of western cowboys and other hardy characters, with a sprinkling of ex-polo players and ex-convicts. Commanded by Colonel Leonard Wood, the group was organized principally by the glory-chasing Theodore Roosevelt, who had resigned from the Navy Department to serve as lieutenant

colonel. He was so nearsighted that as a safeguard he took along a dozen pairs of spectacles, cached in handy spots on his person or nearby.

About the middle of June, a bewildered American army of seventeen thousand men finally embarked at congested Tampa, Florida, amid scenes of indescribable confusion. Shafter’s landing near Santiago, thanks to the diversionary tactics of Cuban *insurrectos*, met little opposition. Brisk fighting broke out on July 1 at El Caney and Kettle Hill, up which Colonel Roosevelt and his horseless Rough Riders charged, with strong support from two crack black regiments. They suffered heavy casualties, but the colorful colonel, having the time of his life, shot a Spaniard with his revolver and rejoiced to

*With a mixture of modesty and immodesty, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) wrote privately in 1903 of his “Rough Riders,”*

*“In my regiment nine-tenths of the men were better horsemen than I was, and probably two-thirds of them better shots than I was, while on the average they were certainly hardier and more enduring. Yet after I had had them a very short while they all knew, and I knew too, that nobody else could command them as I could.”*



### Colonel Theodore Roosevelt with Some of the "Rough Riders"

Roosevelt later described his first encounter with the Spanish enemy: "Soon we came to the brink of a deep valley. There was a good deal of cracking of rifles way off in front of us, but as they used smokeless powder we had no idea as to exactly where they were, or who they were shooting at. Then it dawned on us that we were the target. The bullets began to come overhead, making a sound like the ripping of a silk dress, with sometimes a kind of pop. . . . We advanced, firing at them, and drove them off."

see his victim double up like a jackrabbit. He later wrote a book on his exploits, which the famed satirist Finley Peter Dunne's character "Mr. Dooley" remarked ought to have been entitled *Alone in Cuba* [sic].

The American army, fast closing in on Santiago, spelled doom for the badly outgunned Spanish fleet. On July 3 the Spaniards dutifully steamed out of the harbor and into the teeth of the waiting American warships. "Don't cheer, men," Captain Philip of the *Texas* admonished his seamen. "The poor devils are dying." Shortly thereafter Santiago surrendered.

Hasty preparations were now made for a descent upon Puerto Rico before the war should end. There the American army met even less resistance than in Cuba. By this time Spain had satisfied its honor. On August 12, 1898, it signed an armistice.

If the Spaniards had held out a few months longer in Cuba, the American army might have melted away. The inroads of malaria, typhoid fever, dysentery, and yellow fever became so severe that hundreds were incapacitated—"an army of convalescents." Others suffered from malodorous canned meat known as "embalmed beef." All told, nearly four hundred men lost their lives to bullets; over five thousand succumbed to bacteria and other causes.

### The Cuban Campaign, 1898



## America's Course (Curse?) of Empire

Late in 1898 Spanish and American negotiators met in Paris. War-racked Cuba, as expected, was freed from its Spanish overlords. The Americans had little difficulty in securing the remote Pacific island of Guam, which they had captured early in the conflict from the astonished Spaniards, who, lacking a cable, had not known that a war was on. Spain also ceded Puerto Rico to the United States as payment for war costs. Ironically, the last remnant of Spain's vast New World empire thus became the first territory ever annexed to the United States without the express promise of eventual statehood. In the decades to come, American investment in the island and Puerto Rican immigration to the United States would make this acquisition one of the weightier consequences of this somewhat carefree war (see "Makers of America: The Puerto Ricans," pp. 638–639).

Knottiest of all was the problem of the Philippines, a veritable apple of discord. These lush islands not only embraced an area larger than the British Isles but also contained an ethnically diverse population of some 7 million souls. McKinley was confronted with a devil's dilemma. He did not feel that America could honorably give the islands back to Spanish misrule, especially after it had fought a war to free Cuba. And America would be turning its back upon its responsibilities in a cowardly fashion, he believed, if it simply pulled up anchor and sailed away.

McKinley viewed virtually all the choices open to him as trouble-fraught. The Filipinos, if left to govern themselves, might fall into anarchy. One of the major powers, possibly aggressive Germany or Japan, might then try to seize them. The result could be a major war into which the United States would be sucked. Seemingly the least of the evils consistent with national honor and safety was to acquire all the Philippines and then perhaps give the Filipinos their freedom later.

President McKinley, ever sensitive to public opinion, kept a carefully attuned ear to the ground. The rumble that he heard seemed to call for the entire group of islands. Zealous Protestant missionaries were eager for new converts from Spanish Catholicism,\* and the invalid Mrs. McKinley, to whom her husband was devoted, expressed deep concern about the welfare of the

*President William McKinley (1843–1901) later described his decision to annex the Philippines:*

"When next I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps, I confess I did not know what to do with them. . . . I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance. . . . And one night late it came to me this way. . . . That there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men, for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed and went to sleep, and slept soundly."

Filipinos. Wall Street had generally opposed the war, but awakened by the booming of Dewey's guns, it was clamoring for profits in the Philippines.

A tormented McKinley later claimed that he went down on his knees seeking divine guidance and heard an inner voice telling him to take all the Philippines and Christianize and civilize them. Accordingly, he decided for outright annexation of the islands. Manila remained a sticking point with the Spaniards because it had been captured the day *after* the armistice was signed, and the city could not therefore properly be claimed among the spoils of war. But the Americans broke the deadlock by agreeing to pay Spain \$20 million for the Philippine Islands—the last great Spanish haul from the New World.

The signing of the pact of Paris touched off one of the most impassioned foreign-policy debates in American history. The issue of what to do with the Philippines confronted Americans with fundamental questions about their national identity. Except for glacial Alaska, coral-reefed Hawaii, and a handful of Pacific atolls acquired mostly for whaling stations, the Republic had hitherto absorbed only contiguous territory on the continent. All previous accessions had been thinly peopled and eligible for ultimate statehood. But in the Philippines, the nation had on its hands a distant tropical

\*The Philippines had been substantially Christianized by Catholics before the founding of Jamestown in 1607.

area, thickly populated by Asians of a different culture, tongue, and government institutions.

Opponents of annexation argued that such a step would dishonor and ultimately destroy America's venerable commitments to self-determination and anti-colonialism. "Goddamn the United States for its vile conduct in the Philippine Isles!" burst out the usually mild-mannered Professor William James. The Harvard philosopher could not believe that the United States could "puke up its ancient soul in five minutes without a wink of squeamishness." Speaker of the House Thomas "Czar" Reed resigned in protest against America's new imperial adventure. Proponents countered that Philippine annexation would simply continue a glorious history of expansion that had pushed American civilization to the Pacific and now beyond. If Americans were "morally bound to abandon the Philippines," thundered Theodore Roosevelt, "we were also morally bound to abandon Arizona

to the Apaches." The Anti-Imperialist League sprang into being to fight the McKinley administration's expansionist moves. The organization counted among its members some of the most prominent people in the United States, including the presidents of Stanford and Harvard Universities and the novelist Mark Twain. The anti-imperialist blanket even stretched over such strange bedfellows as the labor leader Samuel Gompers and the steel titan Andrew Carnegie.

Anti-imperialists raised many objections. The Filipinos thirsted for freedom; to annex them would violate the "consent of the governed" philosophy in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Despotism abroad might well beget despotism at home. Imperialism was costly and unlikely ever to turn a profit. Finally, annexation would propel the United States into the political and military cauldron of East Asia.

Yet the expansionists or imperialists could sing a seductive song. They appealed to patriotism, invoked

**Uncle Sam and People from His Colonies, c. 1900** The acquisition of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii, and other Pacific islands brought millions of people of color under the American flag. Whether they would eventually become citizens or remain colonial subjects was hotly debated in the United States. Many anti-imperialists opposed colonial expansion precisely because they regarded the exotic new peoples as "unassimilable."



# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Puerto Ricans

At dawn on July 26, 1898, the U.S. warship *Gloucester* steamed into Puerto Rico's Guánica harbor, fired at the Spanish blockhouse, and landed some thirty-three hundred troops. Within days the Americans had taken possession of the militarily strategic Caribbean island a thousand miles southeast of Florida. In so doing they set in motion changes on the island that ultimately brought a new wave of immigrants to U.S. shores.

Puerto Rico had been a Spanish possession since Christopher Columbus claimed it for Castile in 1493. The Spaniards enslaved many of the island's forty thousand Taino Indians and set them to work on farms and in mines. Many Tainos died of exhaustion and disease, and in 1511 the Indians rebelled. The Spaniards crushed the uprising, killed thousands of Indians, and began importing African slaves—thus establishing the basis for Puerto Rico's multiracial society.

The first Puerto Rican immigrants to the United States arrived as political exiles in the nineteenth century. From their haven in America, they agitated for the island's independence from Spain. In 1897 Spain finally granted the island local autonomy; ironically, however, the Spanish-American War the following year placed it in American hands. Puerto Rican political émigrés in the United States returned home, but they were soon replaced by poor islanders looking for work.

Changing conditions in Puerto Rico after the U.S. takeover had driven these new immigrants north. Although slow to grant Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, the Americans quickly improved health and sanitation on the island, triggering a population surge in the early twentieth century. At the same time, growing monopoly control of Puerto Rico's sugar cane plantations undermined the island's subsistence economy, and a series of hurricanes devastated the coffee plantations that had employed large numbers of people. With almost no industry to provide wage labor, Puerto Rico's unemployment rate soared.

Thus when Congress finally granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship in 1917, thereby eliminating immigration hurdles, many islanders hurried north to find jobs. Over the ensuing decades, Puerto Ricans went to work in Arizona cotton fields, New Jersey soup factories, and Utah mines. The majority, however, clustered in New York City and found work in the city's cigar factories, shipyards, and garment industry. Migration slowed somewhat after the 1920s as the Great Depression shrank the job market on the mainland and as World War II made travel hazardous.

**The First Puerto Ricans** The Spanish *conquistadores* treated the native Taino people in Puerto Rico with extreme cruelty, and the Indians were virtually extinct by the mid-1500s.





**Preparing for Carnival (Carnival)** This mask-maker displays an elaborate *máscara de cartón* (papier-mâché mask) made for the annual Puerto Rican festival. Masked figures at *Carnaval* have been part of Puerto Rican culture for more than two centuries.

When World War II ended in 1945, the sudden advent of cheap air travel sparked an immigration explosion (and set the stage for Leonard Bernstein's great musical production, *West Side Story*, which adapted the story of Romeo and Juliet to the clash of white and Puerto Rican gangs in New York City). As late as the 1930s, the tab for a boat trip to the mainland exceeded the average Puerto Rican's yearly earnings. But with an airplane surplus after World War II, the six-hour flight from Puerto Rico to New York cost under fifty dollars. The Puerto Rican population on the mainland quadrupled between 1940 and 1950 and tripled again by 1960. In 1970, 1.5 million Puerto Ricans lived in the United States, one-third of the island's total population.

U.S. citizenship and affordable air travel made it easy for Puerto Ricans to return home. Thus to a far greater degree than most immigrant groups, Puerto Ricans kept one foot in the United States and the other on their native island. By some estimates 2 million people a year journeyed to and from the island during the postwar period. Puerto Rico's gubernatorial candidates sometimes campaigned in New York for the thou-



**Carnaval in New York** Puerto Rican Americans making music in New York City.

sands of voters who were expected to return to the island in time for the election.

This transience worked to keep Puerto Ricans' educational attainment and English proficiency far below the national average. At the same time, the immigrants encountered a deep-seated racism in America unlike anything on their multiracial island. Throughout the postwar years, Puerto Ricans remained one of the poorest groups in the United States, with a median family income below that of African Americans and Mexican Americans.

Still, Puerto Ricans have fared better economically in the United States than on the island, where, in 1970, 60 percent of all inhabitants lived below the poverty line. In recent years Puerto Ricans have attained more schooling, and many have attended college. Invigorated by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Puerto Ricans also became more politically active, electing growing numbers of congressmen and state and city officials.

America's "civilizing mission," and played up possible trade profits. Manila, they claimed, might become another Hong Kong. Rudyard Kipling, the British poet laureate of imperialism, urged America down the slippery path with a quotable poem that he had circulated before publication to Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge (Roosevelt found it "good sense" but "poor poetry"):

*Take up the White Man's burden—  
Ye dare not stoop to less—  
Nor call too loud on Freedom  
To cloak your weariness.*

In short, the wealthy Americans must help to uplift (and exploit) the underprivileged, underfed, and underclad of the world.

Over heated protests, the Senate approved the treaty with Spain with just one vote to spare on February 6, 1899. America was now officially an empire.



### Perplexities in Puerto Rico and Cuba

From the outset, the status of Puerto Rico was anomalous—neither a state nor a territory, and with little prospect of eventual independence. The Foraker Act of 1900 accorded the Puerto Ricans a limited degree of popular government (and outlawed cockfighting, a favorite island pastime). Congress granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917 but withheld full self-rule. Although the American regime worked wondrous improvements in education, sanitation, and transportation, many of the inhabitants still aspired to independence. Great numbers of Puerto Ricans ultimately moved to New York City, where they added to the complexity of the melting pot.

The annexation of Puerto Rico (and the Philippines) posed a thorny legal problem: Did the Constitution follow the flag? Did American laws, including tariff laws and the Bill of Rights, apply with full force to the newly acquired possessions? "Who are we?" a group of Puerto Rican petitioners asked Congress in 1900. "Are we citizens or are we subjects?" Beginning in 1901 with the *Insular Cases*, a badly divided Supreme Court decreed, in effect, that the flag did outrun the Constitution, and that the outdistanced document did not necessarily extend with full force to the new windfall. Puerto Ricans (and Filipinos) might be subject to American rule, but they did not enjoy all American rights.

Cuba, scorched and chaotic, presented another headache. An American military government, set up under the administrative genius of General Leonard Wood of Rough Rider fame, wrought miracles in government, finance, education, agriculture, and public health. Under his leadership and that of Colonel William C. Gorgas, a frontal attack was launched on yellow fever. Spectacular experiments were performed by Dr. Walter Reed and others upon American soldiers, who volunteered as human guinea pigs, and the stegomyia mosquito was proved to be the lethal carrier. Cleaning up breeding places for mosquitoes wiped out yellow fever in Havana, while dampening the fear of recurrent epidemics in cities of the South and Atlantic seaboard.

The United States, honoring its self-denying Teller Amendment of 1898, withdrew from Cuba in 1902. Old World imperialists could scarcely believe their eyes. But the Washington government could not turn this rich and strategic island completely loose on the international sea; a grasping power like Germany might secure dangerous lodgment near America's soft underbelly. The Cubans were therefore forced to write into their own constitution of 1901 the so-called Platt Amendment.

The Cubans loathed the amendment, which served McKinley's ultimate purpose of bringing Cuba under American control. ("Plattism" survives as a colloquial term of derision even in modern-day Cuba.) The newly "liberated" Cubans were forced to agree not to conclude treaties that might compromise their independence (as Uncle Sam saw it) and not to take on debt beyond their resources (as Uncle Sam measured them). They further agreed that the United States might intervene with troops to restore order when it saw fit. Finally, the Cubans promised to sell or lease needed coaling or naval stations, ultimately two and then only one (Guantanamo), to their powerful "benefactor." The United States finally abrogated the amendment in 1934, although Uncle Sam still occupies a twenty-eight-thousand-acre Cuban beachhead at Guantanamo under an agreement that can be revoked only by the consent of both parties (see p. 802).



### New Horizons in Two Hemispheres

In essence, the Spanish-American War was a kind of colossal coming-out party. Dewey's thundering guns merely advertised the fact that the nation was already a



**The New Jingoism** An enthusiastic Uncle Sam cheers the U.S. Navy in the “splendid little war” of 1898. Many Americans, however, were less than enthused about America’s new imperial adventure.

world power. The war itself was short (113 days), low in casualties, and theatrically successful—despite the bungling. Secretary of State John Hay called it a “splen-

*Three years after the Spanish-American War ended, a foreign diplomat in Washington remarked,*

*“I have seen two Americas, the America before the Spanish American War and the America since.”*

did little war.” American prestige rose sharply, and the Europeans grudgingly accorded the Republic more respect. Britain, France, Russia, and other great powers pointedly upgraded their legations in Washington, D.C., which had previously been regarded as a diplomatic backwater.

An exhilarating new martial spirit thrilled America, buoyed along by the newly popular military marching-band music of John Philip Sousa. Most Americans did not start the war with consciously imperialistic motives, but after falling through the cellar door of imperialism in a drunken fit of idealism, they wound up with imperialistic and colonial fruits in their grasp. Captain Mahan’s big-navyism seemed vindicated, energizing popular support for more and better battleships. A masterly organizer, Secretary of War Elihu Root established a general staff for the army and founded the War College in Washington.

One of the happiest results of the conflict was the further closing of the “bloody chasm” between North and South. Thousands of patriotic southerners had flocked to the Stars and Stripes, and the gray-bearded General Joseph (“Fighting Joe”) Wheeler—a Confederate cavalry hero of about a thousand Civil War skirmishes and battles—was given a command in Cuba. He allegedly cried, in the heat of battle, “To hell with the Yankees! Dammit, I mean the Spaniards.”

Even so, the newly imperial nation was not yet prepared to pay the full bill for its new status. By taking on the Philippine Islands, the United States became a full-fledged Far Eastern power. But the distant islands eventually became a “heel of Achilles”—a kind of indefensible hostage given to Japan, as events proved in World War II. Here and elsewhere, the Americans had shortsightedly assumed burdensome commitments that they proved unwilling to defend with appropriate naval and military outlays.

### **“Little Brown Brothers” in the Philippines**

The liberty-loving Filipinos assumed that they, like the Cubans, would be granted their freedom after the Spanish-American War. They were tragically deceived. Washington excluded them from the peace negotiations with Spain and made clear its intention to stay in the Philippines indefinitely. Bitterness toward the occupying American troops erupted into open insur-



rection on February 4, 1899, under Emilio Aguinaldo. Having plunged into war with Spain to free Cuba, the United States was now forced to deploy some 126,000 troops ten thousand miles away to rivet shackles onto a people who asked for nothing but freedom—in the American tradition.

The poorly equipped Filipino rebels soon melted into the jungle to wage vicious guerrilla warfare. Both sides perpetrated sordid atrocities. Uncle Sam's soldiers adopted the “water cure”—forcing water down victims' throats until they yielded information or died. American-built reconcentration camps rivaled those of “Butcher” Weyer in Cuba. Having begun the Spanish war with noble ideals, America now dirtied its hands. One New York newspaper published a reply to Rudyard Kipling's famous poem:

*We've taken up the white man's burden  
Of ebony and brown;  
Now will you kindly tell us, Rudyard,  
How we may put it down?*

#### **Captured Filipino Insurrectionists, c. 1899**

For three years after its annexation of the Philippine Islands in 1898, the United States fought a savage war to suppress a Filipino rebellion against American rule. Some 600,000 Filipinos perished. There was bitter irony in this clash, as the Americans had claimed to be “liberating” the Filipinos from their oppressive Spanish masters; now the Yankee liberators appeared to be no less oppressive than the Spaniards they had ousted.



The Americans broke the back of the Filipino insurrection in 1901, when they cleverly infiltrated a guerrilla camp and captured Aguinaldo. But sporadic fighting dragged on for many dreary months, eventually claiming the lives of 4,234 Americans and as many as 600,000 Filipinos.

Future president William H. Taft, an able and amiable Ohioan who weighed some 350 pounds, became civil governor of the Philippines in 1901. Forming a strong attachment to the Filipinos, he called them his “little brown brothers” and danced light-footedly with the Filipino women. But McKinley's “benevolent assimilation” of the Philippines proceeded with painful slowness. Washington poured millions of dollars into the islands to improve roads, sanitation, and public health. Important economic ties, including trade in sugar, developed between the two peoples. American teachers set up an unusually good school system and helped make English a second language. But all this vast expenditure, which profited America little, was ill-received. The Filipinos hated compulsory Americanization and pined for liberty. They finally got their freedom on the Fourth of July, 1946. In the meantime, thousands of Filipinos emigrated to the United States (see “Makers of America: The Filipinos,” pp. 644–645).

### **Hinging the Open Door in China**

Ominous events had meanwhile been brewing in far-away and enfeebled China. After its defeat by Japan in 1894–1895, the imperialistic European powers, notably Russia and Germany, moved in. Like vultures descending upon a wounded animal, they began to tear away valuable leaseholds and economic spheres of influence from the Manchu government.

A growing group of Americans viewed the vivisection of China with alarm. Churches worried about their missionary strongholds. Merchants feared that Europeans would monopolize Chinese markets. An alarmed American public, openly prodded by the press and slyly nudged by certain free-trade Britons, demanded that Washington do something. Secretary of State John Hay, a quiet but witty poet-novelist-diplomat with a flair for capturing the popular imagination, finally decided upon a dramatic move.

In the summer of 1899, Hay dispatched to all the great powers a communication soon known as the Open Door note. He urged them to announce that in their leaseholds



**American Missionary Grace Roberts Teaching in China, 1903** A long history of American missionary involvement in China nurtured a sentimental affection for that country among Americans that persisted well into the twentieth century.

or spheres of influence they would respect certain Chinese rights and the ideal of fair competition. Tellingly, Hay had not bothered to consult the Chinese themselves.

The phrase *Open Door* quickly caught the American public's fancy. But Hay's proposal caused much squirm-

*The commercial interests of Britain and America were imperiled by the power grabs in China, and a close concert between the two powers would have helped both. Yet as Secretary of State John Hay (1838–1905) wrote privately in June 1900,*

"Every Senator I see says, 'For God's sake, don't let it appear we have any understanding with England.' How can I make bricks without straw? That we should be compelled to refuse the assistance of the greatest power in the world [Britain], in carrying out our own policy, because all Irishmen are Democrats and some [American] Germans are fools—is enough to drive a man mad."

ing in the leading capitals of the world, though all the great powers save Russia, with covetous designs on Manchuria, eventually agreed to it.

Open Door or not, patriotic Chinese did not care to be used as a doormat by the Western powers. In 1900 a superpatriotic group, known as the "Boxers" for their training in the martial arts, broke loose with the cry, "Kill Foreign Devils." They murdered more than two hundred foreigners and thousands of Chinese Christians and besieged the foreign diplomatic community in the capital, Beijing (Peking).

A multinational rescue force of some eighteen thousand soldiers arrived in the nick of time and quelled the rebellion. They included several thousand American troops dispatched from the Philippines to protect U.S. rights under the 1844 Treaty of Wanghia (see p. 403) and to keep the Open Door propped open.

The victorious allied invaders acted angrily and vindictively. They assessed prostrate China an excessive indemnity of \$333 million, of which America's share was to be \$24.5 million. When Washington discovered that this sum was much more than enough to pay damages and expenses, it remitted about \$18 million, to be used for the education of a selected group of Chinese students in the United States—a not-so-subtle initiative to further the westernization of Asia.

# MAKERS OF AMERICA

## The Filipinos

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States, its imperial muscles just flexed in the war with Spain, found itself in possession of the Philippines. Uncertain of how to manage this empire, which seethed resentfully against its new masters, the United States promised to build democracy in the Philippines and to ready the islanders for home rule. Almost immediately after annexation, the American governor of the archipelago sent a corps of Filipino students to the United States, hoping to forge future leaders steeped in American ways who would someday govern an independent Philippines. Yet this small

student group found little favor in their adopted country, although in their native land many went on to become respected citizens and leaders.

Most Filipino immigrants to the United States in these years, however, came not to study but to toil. With Chinese immigration banned, Hawaii and the Pacific Coast states turned to the Philippines for cheap agricultural labor. Beginning in 1906 the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association aggressively recruited Filipino workers. Enlistments grew slowly at first, but by the 1920s thousands of young Filipino men had reached the Hawaiian Islands and been assigned to sugar plantations or pineapple fields.

Typically a young Filipino wishing to emigrate first made his way to Manila, where he signed a contract with the growers that promised three years' labor in return for transportation to Hawaii, wages, free housing and fuel, and return passage at the end of the contract. Not all of the emigrants returned; there remain in Hawaii today some former field workers still theoretically eligible for free transport back to their native land.

Those Filipinos venturing as far as the American mainland found work less arduous but also less certain than did their countrymen on Hawaiian plantations. Many mainlanders worked seasonally—in winter as domestic servants, busboys, or bellhops; in summer journeying to the fields to harvest lettuce, strawberries, sugar beets, and potatoes. Eventually Filipinos, along with Mexican immigrants, shared the dubious honor of making up California's agricultural work force.

A mobile society, Filipino Americans also were overwhelmingly male; there was only one Filipino woman for every fourteen Filipino men in California in 1930. Thus the issue of intermarriage became acutely sensitive. California and many other states prohibited the marriage of Asians and Caucasians in

Filipino Laborers at Work on a Hawaiian Pineapple Plantation, 1930s



demeaning laws that remained on the books until 1948. And if a Filipino so much as approached a Caucasian woman, he could expect reprisals—sometimes violent. For example, white vigilante groups roamed the Yakima Valley in Washington and the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys in California, intimidating and even attacking Filipinos whom they accused of improperly accosting white women. In 1930 one Filipino was murdered and others wounded after they invited some Caucasian women to a dance. Undeterred, the Filipinos challenged the restrictive state laws and the hooligans who found in them an excuse for mayhem. But Filipinos, who did not become eligible for American citizenship until 1946, long lacked political leverage.

After World War II, Filipino immigration accelerated. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of Filipinos in the United States nearly doubled, with women and men stepping aboard the new transpacific airliners in roughly equal numbers. Many of these recent arrivals sprang from sturdy middle-class stock and sought in America a better life for their children than the Philippines seemed able to offer. Today the war-torn and perpetually depressed archipelago sends more immigrants to American shores than does any other Asian nation.



**Filipino Workers Arriving in Honolulu, 1940s**  
Tags around their necks indicated the plantations to which they had been assigned.



**A Filipino Day Parade,  
New York City**



**Columbia's Easter Bonnet** Many Americans felt a surge of pride as the United States became an imperial power at the dawn of the twentieth century, but then and later, America's world role proved hotly controversial, at home as well as abroad.

Secretary Hay let fly another paper broadside in 1900, announcing that henceforth the Open Door would embrace the territorial integrity of China, in addition to its commercial integrity. Those principles helped spare China from possible partition in those troubled years and were formally incorporated into the Nine-Power Treaty of 1922, only to be callously violated by Japan's takeover of Manchuria a decade later (see pp. 750 and 767).



### Imperialism or Bryanism in 1900?

President McKinley's renomination by the Republicans in 1900 was a foregone conclusion. He had won a war and acquired rich, though burdensome, real estate; he had safeguarded the gold standard; and he had brought the promised prosperity of the full dinner pail. An irresistible vice-presidential boom developed for Theodore

("Teddy") Roosevelt (TR), the cowboy-hero of the Cuban campaign. Capitalizing on his war-born popularity, he had been elected governor of New York, where the local political bosses had found him headstrong and difficult to manage. They therefore devised a scheme to kick the colorful colonel upstairs into the vice presidency.

This plot to railroad Roosevelt worked beautifully. Gesticulating wildly, he sported a western-style cowboy hat that made him stand out like a white crow at the Republican convention. To cries of "We want Teddy!" he was handily nominated. A wary Mark Hanna reportedly moaned that there would now be only one heartbeat between "that damned cowboy" and the presidency of the United States.

William Jennings Bryan was the odds-on choice of the Democrats, meeting at Kansas City. Their platform proclaimed that the paramount issue was Republican overseas imperialism.

*The contest over American imperialism took place on the Senate floor as well as around the globe. In 1900 Senator Albert J. Beveridge (1862–1927), Republican from Indiana, returned from an investigative trip to the Philippines to defend its annexation*

*"The Philippines are ours forever. . . . And just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not abandon our opportunity in the Orient. We will renounce our part in the mission of our race: trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world."*

*Two years later Senator George F. Hoar (1826–1904), Republican from Massachusetts, broke with his party to denounce American annexation of the Philippines and other territories:*

*"You cannot maintain despotism in Asia and a republic in America. If you try to deprive even a savage or a barbarian of his just rights you can never do it without becoming a savage or a barbarian yourself."*

McKinley, the soul of dignity, once again campaigned safely from his front porch. Bryan again took to the stump in a cyclonic campaign. Lincoln, he charged, had abolished slavery for 3.5 million Africans; McKinley had reestablished it for 7 million Filipinos. Roosevelt out-Bryaned Bryan, touring the country with revolver-shooting cowboys. Flashing his monumental teeth and pounding his fist into his palm, Roosevelt denounced all dastards who would haul down Old Glory.

McKinley handily triumphed by a much wider margin than in 1896: 7,218,491 to 6,356,734 popular votes, and 292 to 155 electoral votes. But victory for the Republicans was not a mandate for or against imperialism. If there was any mandate at all it was for the two *Ps*: prosperity and protectionism. Meanwhile, the New York bosses gleefully looked forward to watching the nettlesome Roosevelt “take the veil” as vice president.



### TR: Brandisher of the Big Stick

Kindly William McKinley had scarcely served another six months when, in September 1901, he was murdered by a deranged anarchist in Buffalo, New York. Roosevelt rode a buckboard out of his campsite in the Adirondacks to take the oath of office, becoming, at age forty-two, the youngest president thus far in American history.

Born into a wealthy and distinguished New York family, Roosevelt, a red-blooded blue blood, had fiercely built up his spindly, asthmatic body by a stern and self-imposed routine of exercise. Educated partly in Europe, he graduated from Harvard with Phi Beta Kappa honors and published, at the age of twenty-four, the first of some thirty volumes of muscular prose. He worked as a ranch owner and cowboy in the Dakotas before pursuing his political career full-time. Barrel-chested, bespectacled, and five feet ten inches tall, with mulelike molars, squinty eyes, droopy mustache, and piercing voice, he was ever the delight of cartoonists.

The Rough Rider's high-voltage energy was electrifying. Believing that it was better to wear out than to rust out, he would shake the hands of some six thousand people at one stretch or ride horseback many miles in a day as an example for portly cavalry officers. Incurably boyish and bellicose, Roosevelt ceaselessly preached the virile virtues and denounced pacifistic “flubdubs” and “mollycoddles.” An ardent champion of military and naval preparedness, he adopted as his pet



**Theodore Roosevelt** Roosevelt gives a speech with both voice and body language in North Carolina in 1902.

proverb, “Speak softly and carry a big stick, [and] you will go far.”

His outsized ego caused it to be said of him that he wanted to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral. He loved people and mingled with those of all ranks, from Catholic cardinals to professional prizefighters, one of whom blinded a Rooseveltian eye in a White House bout. “TR” commanded an idolatrous personal following. After visiting him, a journalist wrote, “You go home and wring the personality out of your clothes.”

Above all, TR believed that the president should lead, boldly. He had no real respect for the delicate checks and balances among the three branches of the government. The president, he felt, may take any action in the general interest that is not specifically forbidden by the laws of the Constitution.

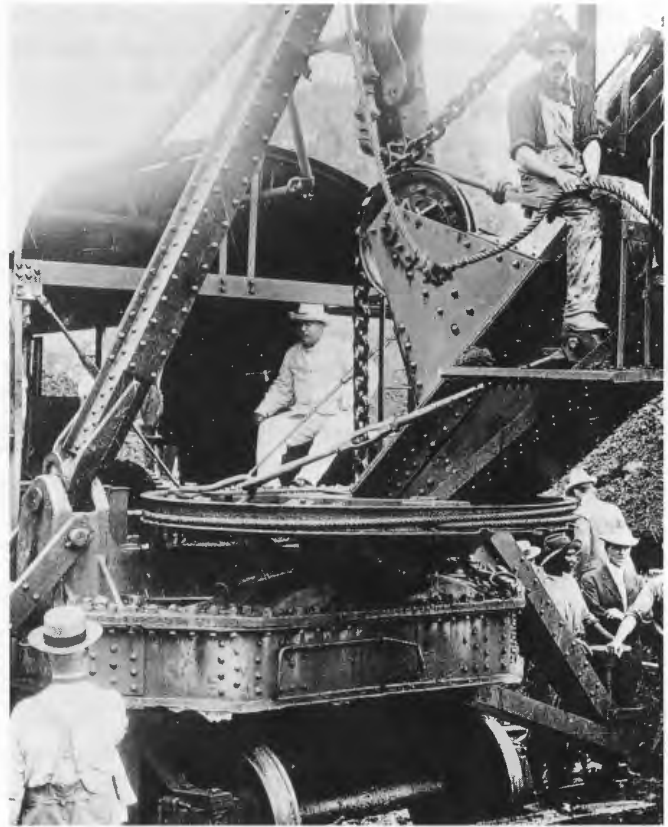
## Building the Panama Canal

Roosevelt soon applied his bullish energy to foreign affairs. The Spanish-American War had reinvigorated interest in the long-talked-about canal across the Central American isthmus, through which only printer's ink had ever flowed. Americans had learned a sobering lesson when the battleship *Oregon*, stationed on the Pacific Coast at the outbreak of war in 1898, took weeks to steam all the way around South America to join the U.S. fleet in Cuban waters. An isthmian canal would plainly augment the strength of the navy by increasing its mobility. Such a waterway would also make easier the defense of such recent acquisitions as Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines, while facilitating the operations of the U.S. merchant marine.

Initial obstacles in the path of the canal builders were legal rather than geographical. By the terms of the ancient Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, concluded with Britain in 1850, the United States could not secure exclusive control over an isthmian route. But by 1901 America's British cousins were willing to yield ground. Confronted with an unfriendly Europe and bogged down in the South African Boer War, they consented to the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty in 1901. It not only gave the United States a free hand to build the canal but conceded the right to fortify it as well.

But where exactly should the canal be dug? Many American experts favored a route across Nicaragua, but agents of the old French Canal Company were eager to salvage something from their costly failure at S-shaped Panama. Represented by a young, energetic, and unscrupulous engineer, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, the New Panama Canal Company suddenly dropped the price of its holdings from \$109 million to the fire-sale price of \$40 million.

Congress in June 1902 finally decided on the Panama route. The scene now shifted to Colombia, of which Panama was a restive part. The Colombian senate rejected an American offer of \$10 million and annual payment of \$250,000 for a six-mile-wide zone across Panama. Roosevelt railed against "those dagoes" who were frustrating his ambitions. Meanwhile, impatient Panamanians, who had rebelled numerous times, were ripe for another revolt. They had counted on a wave of prosperity to follow construction of the canal, and they feared that the United States would now turn to the Nicaraguan route. Scheming Bunau-Varilla



**Roosevelt in Panama** When he visited the Panama Canal construction site in 1906 to see "the dirt fly," Roosevelt was the first president to leave the United States for foreign soil.

was no less disturbed by the prospect of losing the company's \$40 million. Working hand in glove with the revolutionists, he helped incite a rebellion on November 3, 1903. U.S. naval forces prevented Colombian troops from crossing the isthmus to quell the uprising.

Roosevelt moved rapidly to make steamy Panama a virtual outpost of the United States. Just three days after the insurrection, he hastily extended the right hand of recognition. Fifteen days later, Bunau-Varilla, who was now the Panamanian minister despite his French citizenship, signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty in Washington. The price of the canal strip was left the same, but the zone was widened from six to ten miles. The French company gladly pocketed its \$40 million from the U.S. Treasury.

Roosevelt, it seems clear, did not actively plot to tear Panama from the side of Colombia. But the conspirators



**Theodore Roosevelt and  
His Big Stick in the  
Caribbean, 1904**

Roosevelt's policies seemed to be turning the Caribbean into a Yankee pond.

knew of his angrily expressed views, and they counted on his using the big stick to hold Colombia at bay. The Rough Rider became so indiscreetly involved in the Panama affair as to create the impression that he had been a secret party to the intrigue, and the so-called rape of Panama marked an ugly downward lurch in U.S. relations with Latin America.

Canal construction began in 1904, in the face of daunting difficulties ranging from labor troubles to

landslides and lethal tropical diseases. Colonel William C. Gorgas, the quiet and determined exterminator of yellow fever in Havana, ultimately made the Canal Zone "as safe as a health resort." At a cost of some \$400 million, an autocratic West Point engineer, Colonel George Washington Goethals, ultimately brought the project to completion in 1914, just as World War I was breaking out.

*Theodore Roosevelt wrote to a correspondent in February 1904,*

"I have been hoping and praying for three months that the Santo Domingans would behave so that I would not have to act in any way. I want to do nothing but what a policeman has to do. . . . As for annexing the island, I have about the same desire to annex it as a gorged boa-constrictor might have to swallow a porcupine wrong-end-to."

### TR's Perversion of Monroe's Doctrine

Latin American debt defaults prompted further Rooseveltian involvement in affairs south of the border. Nations such as Venezuela and the Dominican Republic were chronically in arrears in their payments to European creditors. Germany actually bombarded a town in delinquent Venezuela in 1903.

Roosevelt feared that if the Germans or British got their foot in the door as bill collectors, they might remain in Latin America, in flagrant violation of the Monroe Doctrine. He therefore declared a brazen policy of "preventive intervention," better known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. He announced



that in the event of future financial malfeasance by the Latin American nations, the United States itself would intervene, take over the customshouses, pay off the debts, and keep the troublesome Europeans on the other side of the Atlantic. In short, no outsiders could push around the Latin nations except Uncle Sam, Policeman of the Caribbean. This new brandishing of the big stick in the Caribbean became effective in 1905, when the United States took over the management of tariff collections in the Dominican Republic, an arrangement formalized in a treaty with the Dominicans two years later.

TR's rewriting of the Monroe Doctrine probably did more than any other single step to promote the "Bad Neighbor" policy begun in these years. As time wore on, the new corollary was used to justify wholesale interventions and repeated landings of the marines, all of which helped turn the Caribbean into a "Yankee lake." To Latin Americans it seemed as though the revised Monroe Doctrine, far from providing a shield, was a cloak behind which the United States sought to strangle them.

The shadow of the big stick likewise fell again on Cuba in 1906. Revolutionary disorders brought an appeal from the Cuban president, and "necessity being the mother of intervention," U.S. Marines landed. These police forces were withdrawn temporarily in 1909, but in Latin American eyes the episode was but another example of the creeping power of the Colossus of the North.



### Roosevelt on the World Stage

Booted and spurred, Roosevelt charged into international affairs far beyond Latin America. The outbreak of war between Russia and Japan in 1904 gave him a chance to perform as a global statesman. The Russian bear, having lumbered across Asia, was seeking to bathe its frostbitten paws in the ice-free ports of China's Manchuria, particularly Port Arthur. In Japanese eyes, Manchuria and Korea in tsarist hands were pistols pointed at Japan's strategic heart. The Japanese responded in 1904 with a devastating surprise pounce on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. They proceeded to administer a humiliating series of beatings to the inept Russians—the first serious military setback to a major European power by a non-European force since the Turkish invasions of the sixteenth century. But as the war dragged on, Japan began to run short of men and yen—a weakness it did not want to betray to the enemy.

Tokyo officials therefore approached Roosevelt in the deepest secrecy and asked him to help sponsor peace negotiations.

Roosevelt was happy to oblige, as he wanted to avoid a complete Russian collapse so that the tsar's empire could remain a counterweight to Japan's growing power. At Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1905, TR guided the warring parties to a settlement that satisfied neither side and left the Japanese, who felt they had won the war, especially resentful. Japan was forced to drop its demands for a cash indemnity and Russian evacuation of Sakhalin Island, though it received some compensation in the form of effective control over Korea, which it formally annexed in 1910.

For achieving this agreement, as well as for helping arrange an international conference at Algeciras, Spain, in 1906 to mediate North African disputes, TR received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906. But the price of his diplomatic glory was high for U.S. foreign relations. Two historic friendships withered on the windswept plains of Manchuria. U.S. relations with Russia, once friendly, soured as the Russians implausibly accused Roosevelt of robbing them of military victory. Revelations about savage massacres of Russian Jews further poisoned American feeling against Russia. Japan, once America's protégé, felt cheated out of its due compensation. Both newly powerful, Japan and America now became rivals in Asia, as fear and jealousy between them grew. "A subjick race is on'y funny whin it's raaly subjek," said Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley. "About three years ago I stopped laughin' at Japanese jokes."



### Japanese Laborers in California

America's Pacific Coast soon felt the effects of the Russo-Japanese War. A new restlessness swept over the rice paddies of Japan, occasioned by the recent conflict's dislocations and tax burdens. A new wave of Japanese immigrants began pouring into the spacious valleys of California. Although Japanese residents never amounted to more than 3 percent of the state's population, white Californians ranted about a new "yellow peril" and feared being drowned in an Asian sea.

A showdown on the influx came in 1906, when San Francisco's school board, coping with the aftermath of a frightful earthquake and fire, ordered the segregation of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students in a special school to free more space for whites. Instantly the inci-



Japanese Workers Building a Road in California, c. 1910

dent boiled into an international crisis. The people of Japan, highly sensitive on questions of race, regarded this discrimination as an insult to them and their beloved children. On both sides of the Pacific, irresponsible war talk sizzled in the yellow press—the real “yellow peril.” Roosevelt, who as a Rough Rider had relished shooting, was less happy over the prospect that California might stir up a war that all the other states would have to wage. He therefore invited the entire San Francisco Board of Education, headed by a bassoon-playing mayor under indictment for graft, to come to the White House.

TR finally broke the deadlock, but not until he had brandished his big stick and bared his big teeth. The Californians were induced to repeal the offensive school order and to accept what came to be known as the “Gentlemen’s Agreement.” By this secret understanding, worked out during 1907–1908, Tokyo agreed to stop the flow of laborers to the American mainland by withholding passports.

Worried that his intercession might be interpreted in Tokyo as prompted by fear, Roosevelt hit upon a dra-

matic scheme to impress the Japanese with the heft of his big stick. He daringly decided to send the entire battleship fleet on a highly visible voyage around the world. Late in 1907 sixteen sparkling-white, smoke-belching battleships started from Virginia waters. Their commander pointedly declared that he was ready for “a feast, a frolic, or a fight.” The Great White Fleet—saluted by cannonading champagne corks—received tumultuous welcomes in Latin America, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia (though it ended up having to borrow coal from the British to complete the voyage).

As events turned out, an overwhelming reception in Japan was the high point of the trip. Tens of thousands of kimonoed schoolchildren, trained to wave tiny American flags, movingly sang “The Star-Spangled Banner.” In the warm diplomatic atmosphere created by the visit of the fleet, the U.S. signed the Root-Takahira agreement with Japan in 1908. It pledged both powers to respect each other’s territorial possessions in the Pacific and to uphold the Open Door in China. For the moment, at least, the two rising rival powers had found a means to maintain the peace.

## Chronology

- 1820** New England missionaries arrive in Hawaii
- 1889** Samoa crisis with Germany  
Pan-American Conference
- 1890** Mahan publishes *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*
- 1891** New Orleans crisis with Italy
- 1892** Valparaiso crisis with Chile
- 1893** Pribilof Islands dispute with Canada  
White planter revolt in Hawaii  
Cleveland refuses Hawaii annexation
- 1895** Cubans revolt against Spain
- 1895–1896** Venezuelan boundary crisis with Britain
- 1898** *Maine* explosion in Havana harbor  
Spanish-American War  
Teller Amendment  
Dewey's victory at Manila Bay  
Hawaii annexed
- 1899** Senate ratifies treaty acquiring Philippines  
Aguinaldo launches rebellion against United States in Philippines  
First American Open Door note
- 1900** Hawaii receives full territorial status  
Foraker Act for Puerto Rico  
Boxer Rebellion and U.S. military expedition to China  
Second Open Door note  
McKinley defeats Bryan for presidency
- 1901** Supreme Court *Insular Cases*  
Platt Amendment  
McKinley assassinated; Roosevelt becomes president  
Filipino rebellion suppressed  
Hay-Pauncefote Treaty with Britain gives United States exclusive right to build Panama Canal
- 1902** U.S. troops leave Cuba  
Colombian senate rejects U.S. proposal for canal across Panama
- 1903** Panamanian revolution against Colombia  
Hay–Bunau–Varilla Treaty gives United States control of Canal Zone in newly independent Panama
- 1904** Roosevelt Corollary to Monroe Doctrine
- 1904–1914** Construction of Panama Canal
- 1905** United States takes over Dominican Republic customs service  
Roosevelt mediates Russo-Japanese peace treaty
- 1906** San Francisco Japanese education crisis  
Roosevelt arranges Algeciras Conference
- 1906–1909** U.S. Marines occupy Cuba
- 1907** Great White Fleet makes world voyage
- 1907–1908** “Gentlemen’s Agreement” with Japan
- 1908** Root-Takahira agreement
- 1917** Puerto Ricans granted U.S. citizenship

## VARYING VIEWPOINTS

### Why Did America Become a World Power?

American imperialism has long been an embarrassing topic for students of American history, who remember the Republic's own revolutionary origins and anticolonial tradition. Perhaps for that reason, many historians have tried to explain the dramatic overseas expansionism of the 1890s as some kind of aberration—a sudden, singular, and short-lived departure from time-honored American principles and practices. Various explanations have been offered to account for this spasmodic lapse. Scholars such as Julius Pratt pointed to the irresponsible behavior of the yellow press. Richard Hofstadter ascribed America's imperial fling to the “psychic crisis of the 1890s,” a crisis brought on, he argued, by the strains of the decade's economic depression and the Populist upheaval. Howard K. Beale emphasized the contagious scramble for imperial possessions by the European powers, as well as Japan, in these years.

In Beale's argument, the United States—and Theodore Roosevelt in particular—succumbed to a kind of international peer pressure: if other countries were expanding their international roles and even establishing colonies around the globe, could the United States safely refrain from doing the same? In Beale's view, Theodore Roosevelt was no simple-minded imperial swashbuckler, but a coolly calculating diplomatic realist who perceived that if the United States did not hold its own against other powers, it would soon risk being pushed around, even in its own hemisphere, despite the Monroe Doctrine.

Perhaps the most controversial interpretation of American imperialism has come from a so-called New Left school of writers, inspired by William Appleman Williams (and before him by V. I. Lenin's 1916 book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of*

*Capitalism*). Historians such as Williams and Walter LaFeber argue that the explanation for political and military expansion abroad is to be found in economic expansion at home. Increasing industrial output, so the argument goes, required ever more raw materials and, especially, overseas markets. To meet those needs, the nation adopted a strategy of “informal empire,” shunning formal territorial possessions (with the conspicuous exceptions of Puerto Rico and the Philippines), but seeking economic dominance over foreign markets, materials, and investment outlets. That “revisionist” interpretation, in turn, has been sharply criticized by scholars who point out that foreign trade accounted for only a tiny share of American output and that the diplomacy of this period was far too complex to be reduced to “economic need.”

Most recently, historians have highlighted the importance of race and gender in the march toward empire. Roosevelt and other imperialists perceived their world in gendered terms. American society, many feared, was losing touch with the manly virtues. It had grown soft and “feminine” since the closing of the frontier. Imperialists also saw the nations of the world in a strict racial hierarchy, with “primitive” blacks and Indians at the bottom and “civilized” Anglo-Saxons at the top. In this world-view the conquest of “inferior” peoples seemed natural—a tropical tonic to restore the nation's masculine virility. Scholars who emphasize these explanations of imperialism are less likely to see the expansionism of the 1890s as an aberration in American history. Instead, they argue, these overseas adventures were part of a long tradition of race-fueled militarism, from the nation's earliest Indian wars to Cold War engagements in Korea and Vietnam.