

The Path of Empire

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1890–1899

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.

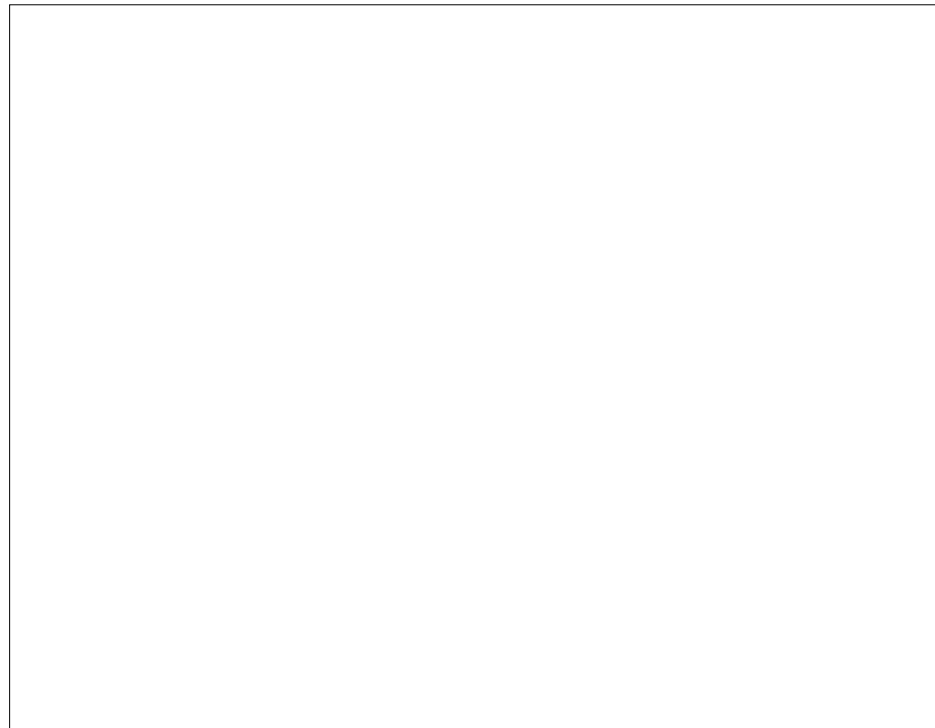
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL PLATFORM, 1900

In the years immediately following the Civil War, Americans remained astonishingly indifferent to the outside world. Enmeshed in struggles over Reconstruction policies and absorbed in efforts to heal the wounds of 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 century's end America itself would become an imperial power, an astonishing departure from its venerable anticolonial traditions.

Imperialist Stirrings

Many developments fed the nation's ambition for overseas expansion. Both farmers and factory owners began to look 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. 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 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. Read by the English, Germans, and Japanese, as well as by his fellow Americans, 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.

America's new international interest manifested itself in several ways. As secretary of state, first in the Garfield administration and later in the Harrison administration, James G. Blaine pushed his "Big Sister" policy. It aimed to rally the Latin American nations behind Uncle Sam's leadership and to open Latin American markets to Yankee traders. Blaine's efforts bore modest fruit in 1889, when he presided over the first Pan-American Conference, held in Washington, D.C. Although the frock-coated delegates did little more than sketch a vague plan for economic cooperation through reciprocal tariff reduction, they succeeded in blazing the way for a long and 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

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, renascent, taking her place with the armed nations.”

navies nearly came to blows in 1889 over the far-away Samoan Islands in the South Pacific. The lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891 brought America and Italy to the brink of war; the crisis was defused when 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 American power finally forced the Chileans 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.

Monroe’s Doctrine and the Venezuelan Squall

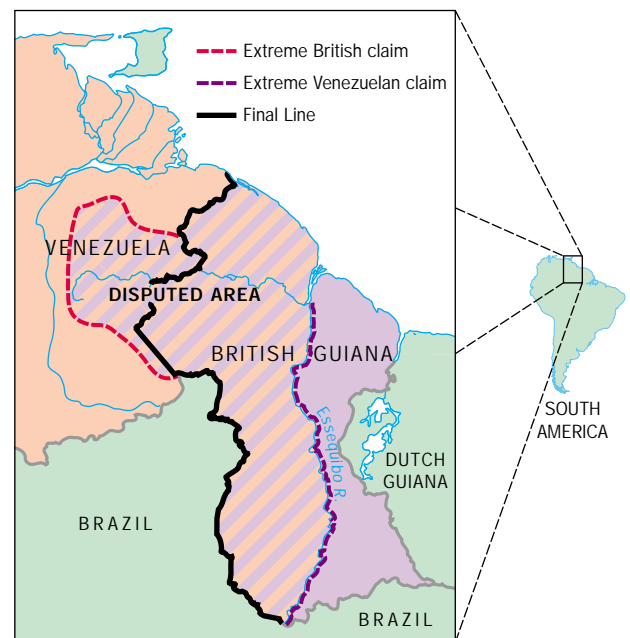
America’s anti-British feeling, which periodically came to a head, flared ominously in 1895–1896 over Venezuela. For more than a half-century, the jungle boundary between British Guiana and Venezuela had been in dispute. The Venezuelans, whose claims on the whole were extravagant, had repeatedly urged arbitration. But the prospect of a peaceful settlement faded when gold was discovered in the contested area.

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.”

President Cleveland, a champion of righteousness and no lover of Britain, at length decided upon a strong protest. His no less pugnacious secretary of state, Richard Olney, was authorized to present to London a smashing note, which Cleveland later dubbed a “twenty-inch gun” blast. Olney declared in effect that the British, by attempting to dominate Venezuela in this quarrel and acquire more territory, were flouting the Monroe Doctrine. London should therefore submit the dispute to arbitration. Not content to stop there, Olney haughtily informed the world’s number one naval power that the United

The Venezuela–British Guiana Boundary Dispute



States was now calling the tune in the Western Hemisphere.

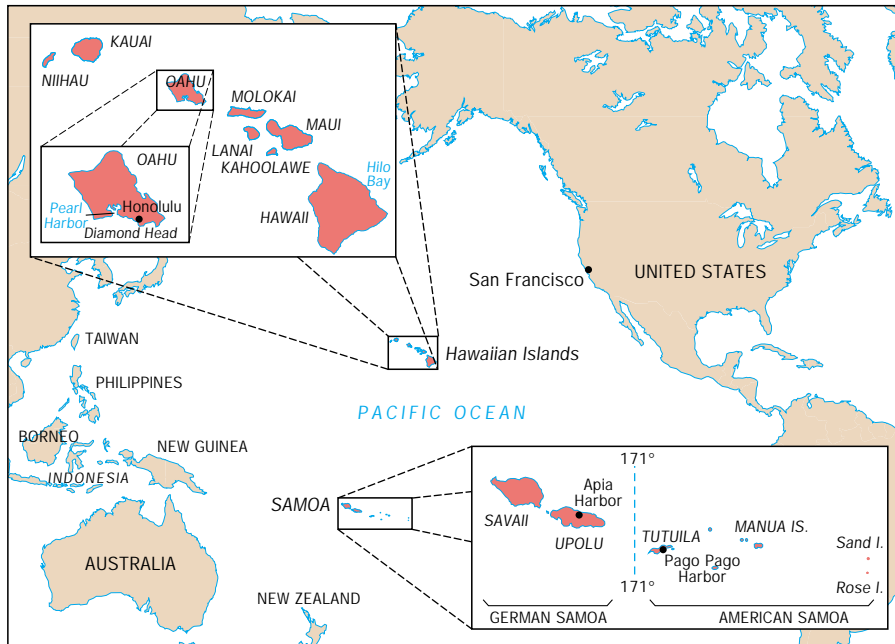
British officials, unimpressed, took four months to prepare their reply. Preoccupied elsewhere, they were inclined to shrug off Olney's lengthy salvo as just another twist of the lion's tail designed to elicit cheers from Irish-American voters. When London's answer finally came, it flatly denied the relevance of the Monroe Doctrine, while no less emphatically spurning arbitration. In short, said John Bull, the affair was none of Uncle Sam's business.

President Cleveland—"mad clear through," as he put 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. Then, he implied, if the British would not accept this rightful boundary, 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, even though Britain had thirty-two warships of the battleship class to only five flying Old Glory.

Fortunately, sober second thoughts prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic. The British, though vastly annoyed by their upstart cousins, had no real urge to fight. Canada was vulnerable to yet-to-be-raised American armies, and Britain's rich merchant marine was vulnerable to American commerce raiders. The European atmosphere was menacing, for Britain's traditional policy of "splendid isolation" was bringing insecure isolation. Russia and France were unfriendly, and Germany, under the saber-rattling Kaiser Wilhelm II, was about to challenge British naval supremacy.

The German kaiser, blunderingly and unwittingly, increased chances of a peaceful solution to the Venezuelan crisis. An unauthorized British raiding party of six hundred armed men was captured by the Dutch-descended Boers in South Africa, and Wilhelm forthwith cabled his congratulations to the victors. Overnight, British anger against America was largely deflected to Germany, and London consented to arbitrate the Venezuelan dispute. The final decision, ironically, awarded the British the bulk of what they had claimed from the beginning.



The Pacific
The enlargements show the Hawaiian Islands and the Samoas, both areas of American imperialistic activity in the late nineteenth century.

America had skated close to the thin ice of a terrible war, but the results on the whole were favorable. The prestige of the Monroe Doctrine was immensely enhanced. Europe was irked by Cleveland's claim to domination in this hemisphere, but he had made his claim stick. Many Latin American republics were pleased by the determination of the United States to protect them, and when Cleveland died in 1908, some of them lowered their flags to half-mast.

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 came the first New England missionaries, who preached the twin blessings of Protestant Christianity and protective calico. They came to do good—and did well; their children did even better. In some respects Honolulu took on the earmarks of a typical New England town.

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 1875 by a commercial reciprocity agreement and in 1887 by a treaty with the native government guaranteeing priceless naval-base rights at spacious Pearl Harbor.

But trouble, both economic and political, was brewing in the insular paradise. Sugar cultivation, which had become immensely profitable, went somewhat sour in 1890 when the McKinley Tariff raised barriers against the Hawaiian product. White planters, mostly Americans, quickly concluded that the best way to overcome the tariff was to annex Hawaii to the United States. But that ambition was blocked by the strong-willed Queen Liliuokalani, who insisted that native Hawaiians should control the islands. Desperate whites, though only a tiny

revealed the damning fact that a majority of the Hawaiian natives did not favor annexation at all. But the white revolutionists were firmly in the saddle, and Cleveland could not unhorse them without using armed force—a step American public opinion would not have tolerated. Although Queen Liliuokalani could not be reinstated, the sugarcoated move for annexation had to be abandoned temporarily—until 1898.

The question of annexing Hawaii touched off the first full-fledged imperialistic debate in American experience. Cleveland was savagely criticized for trying to stem the new Manifest Destiny, and a popular jingle ran,

... *Liliuokalani,*
Give us your little brown hannie.

But Cleveland's motives, in a day of international land-grabbing, were honorable both to himself and to his country. The Hawaiian pear continued to ripen for five more years.

Cubans Rise in Revolt

Cuba's masses, frightfully misgoverned, again rose against their Spanish oppressor in 1895. The roots of their revolt were partly economic, with partial origins in the United States. Sugar production—the backbone of the island's prosperity—was crippled when the American tariff of 1894 restored high duties on the toothsome product.

Driven to desperation, the insurgents now adopted a scorched-earth policy. They reasoned that if they did enough damage, Spain might be willing to move out. Or the United States might move in and help the Cubans win their independence. In pursuance of this destructive strategy, the *insurrectos* torched canefields and sugar mills; they even dynamited passenger trains.

American sympathies, ever on the side of patriots fighting for freedom, went out to the Cuban underdogs. Aside from pure sentiment, the United States had an investment stake of about \$50 million in Cuba and an annual trade stake of about \$100 million. Moreover, Spanish misrule in Cuba menaced the shipping routes of the West Indies and the Gulf of Mexico, and less directly the future isthmian canal.

Fuel was added to the Cuban conflagration in 1896 with the coming of the Spanish general

minority, organized a successful revolt early in 1893. It was 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."

Hawaii, like Texas of earlier years, seemed ready for annexation—at least in the eyes of the ruling American whites. An appropriate treaty 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. "Old Grover," who set great store by "national honesty," suspected that his powerful nation had gravely wronged the deposed Queen Liliuokalani.

Cleveland abruptly withdrew the treaty from the Senate early in 1893 and then sent a special investigator to Hawaii. The subsequent probe

(“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 pest-holes; the victims died like dogs.

An outraged American public demanded action. Congress in 1896 overwhelmingly passed a resolution that called upon President Cleveland to recognize the belligerency of the revolted Cubans. But as the government of the insurgents consisted of hardly more than a few fugitive leaders, Cleveland—an antijingoist and anti-imperialist—refused to budge. He defiantly vowed that if Congress declared war, the commander in chief would not issue the necessary order to mobilize the army.

The Mystery of the Maine Explosion

Atrocities in Cuba were made to order for the sensational new “yellow journalism.” William R. Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, then engaged in a titanic duel for circulation, attempted to outdo each other with screeching headlines and hair-raising “scoops.” Lesser competitors zestfully followed suit.

Where atrocity stories did not exist, they were invented. Hearst sent the gifted artist Frederic Remington to Cuba to draw sketches, and when the latter reported that conditions were not bad enough to warrant hostilities, Hearst is alleged to have replied, “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. "Butcher" Weyler was removed in 1897, yet conditions steadily worsened. There was some talk in Spain of granting the restive island a type of self-government, but such a surrender was so bitterly opposed by many Spaniards in Cuba that they engaged in furious riots. 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 again occur.

This already explosive situation suddenly grew acute on February 9, 1898, when Hearst sensation-ally headlined a private letter written by the Spanish minister in Washington, Dupuy de Lôme. The indiscreet epistle, which had been stolen from the mails, described President McKinley as an ear-to-the-ground politician who lacked good faith. The resulting uproar was so violent that Dupuy de Lôme was forced to resign.

A tragic climax came a few days later, on February 15, 1898, when the *Maine* mysteriously blew up in Havana harbor, with a loss of 260 officers and men. Two investigations of the iron coffin were undertaken, one by U.S. naval officers, and the other by Spanish officials, whom the Americans would not trust near the wreck. The Spanish commission stated

that the explosion had been internal and presumably accidental; the American commission reported that the blast had been caused by a submarine mine. Washington, not unmindful of popular indignation, spurned Spanish proposals of arbitration.

Various theories have been advanced as to how the *Maine* was blown up. The least convincing explanation of all is that the Spanish officials in Cuba were guilty, for they were under the American gun and Spain was far away. Not until 1976 did Admiral H. G. Rickover, under U.S. Navy auspices, give what appears to be the final answer. He presented overwhelming evidence that the initial explosion had resulted from spontaneous combustion in one of the coal bunkers adjacent to a powder magazine. Ironically, this is essentially what the Spanish commission had deduced in 1898.

But Americans in 1898, now war-mad, blindly accepted the least likely explanation. Lashed to fury by the yellow press, they leapt to the 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.

McKinley Unleashes the Dogs of War

The national war fever burned 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 did not want hostilities. The hesitant chief executive was condemned by jingoes as "Wobbly Willie" McKinley, while 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. Many critics did not realize that backbone was needed to stay out of war, not to plunge into it.

McKinley's private desires clashed sharply with opinions now popular with the public. He did not want hostilities, for he had seen enough bloodshed as a major in the Civil War. Mark Hanna and Wall

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

"The American jingoes . . . imagine us capable of the most foul villainies and cowardly actions. Scoundrels by nature, the American jingoes 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 jingoes: they are not even worth our contempt, or the saliva with which we might honor them in spitting at their faces."

Street did not want war, for business might be unsettled. But the public, prodded by the yellow press and the appeals of Cuban exiles in the United States, clamored for a fight. The president, recognizing the inevitable, finally yielded and gave the people what they wanted.

But public pressures did not fully explain McKinley's course. He had no faith in Spain's promises regarding Cuba; Madrid had spoken them and broken them before. He was certain that a showdown would have to come sooner or later. He believed in the democratic principle that the people should rule, and he hesitated to deny Americans what they demanded—even if it was not good for them. He also perceived that if he stood out against war, the Democrats would make political capital out of his stubbornness. Bryan might sweep into the presidency two years later under a banner inscribed "Free Cuba and Free Silver." Gold-standard McKinley was a staunch party man, and to him it seemed better to break up the remnants of Spain's once-

glorious empire than to break up the Grand Old Party—especially since war seemed inevitable.

On April 11, 1898, McKinley sent his war message to Congress, urging armed intervention to free the oppressed Cubans. The legislators responded uproariously 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 light-heartedly, 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,” thus leading foreigners to believe that those were national anthems.

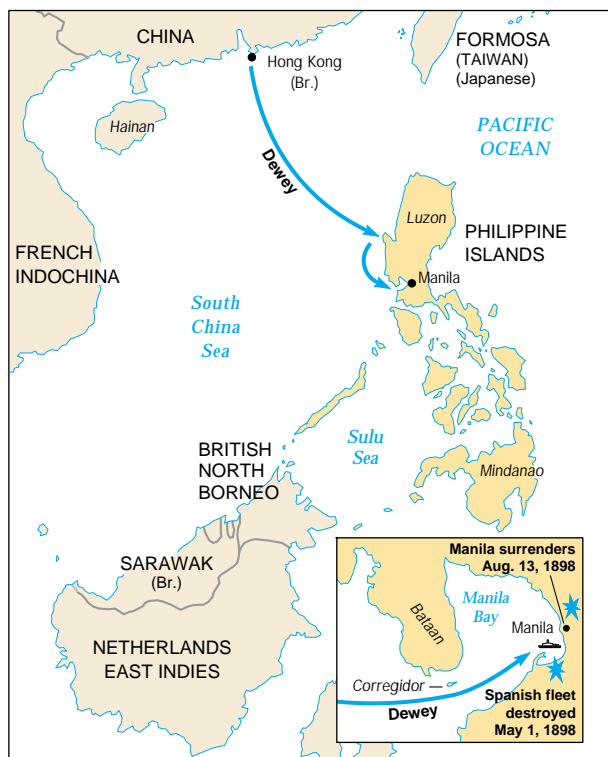
But such jubilation seemed premature to European observers. The regular army, which was commanded by corpulent Civil War oldsters, was unprepared for a war under tropical skies. It numbered only 2,100 officers and 28,000 men, as compared with some 200,000 Spanish troops in Cuba. The American navy, at least to transatlantic experts, seemed slightly less powerful than Spain’s. European powers, moreover, were generally friendly to their Old World associate. The only conspicuous exception was the ally-seeking British, who now were ardently wooing their American cousins.

Yet in one important respect, Spain’s apparent superiority was illusory. Its navy, though formidable on paper, was in wretched condition. It labored under the added handicap of having to operate thousands of miles from its home base. But the new American steel navy, now fifteen years old and ranking about fifth among the fleets of the world, was in fairly good trim, though the war was to lay bare serious defects.

The readiness of the navy owed much to two men: the easygoing navy secretary John D. Long and his bellicose assistant secretary Theodore Roosevelt. The secretary hardly dared leave his desk for fear that his overzealous underling would stir up a hornet’s nest. On February 25, 1898, while Long was away for a weekend, Roosevelt had cabled Commodore George Dewey, commanding the American Asiatic Squadron at Hong Kong, to descend upon Spain’s Philippines in the event of war. McKinley subsequently confirmed these 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 ten-ship Spanish fleet, one of whose craft was only a moored hulk without functioning engines. 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 life in Dewey’s fleet. An American consul who was there wrote that all the American sailors needed was cough drops for throats made raw by cheers of victory.

Dewey’s Route in the Philippines, 1898



Unexpected Imperialistic Plums

Taciturn George Dewey became a national hero overnight. He was promptly promoted to the rank of admiral, as the price of flags rose sharply. An amateur poet blossomed forth with this:

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

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 steaming-hot bay while troop reinforcements were slowly assembled in America.

Foreign warships meanwhile had begun to gather in the harbor, ostensibly to safeguard their nationals in Manila. The Germans sent five vessels—a naval force more powerful than Dewey’s—and their haughty admiral defied the American blockade regulations. After several disagreeable incidents, Dewey lost his temper and threatened the arrogant German with war “as soon as you like.” Happily, the storm blew over. The British commander, by contrast, was conspicuously successful in carrying out London’s new policy of friendliness. A false tale subsequently circulated that the British dramatically interposed their ships to prevent the Germans from blowing the Americans out of the water.

Long-awaited American troops, finally arriving in force, captured Manila on August 13, 1898. They collaborated with the 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. The truth is that the United States could have used these island “Crossroads of the Pacific” without annexing them, so eager was the white-dominated Honolulu government to compromise its neutrality and risk

the vengeance of Spain. But an appreciative American public would not leave Dewey in the lurch. A joint resolution of annexation was rushed through Congress and approved by McKinley on July 7, 1898.

The residents of Hawaii were granted U.S. citizenship with annexation and received full territorial status in 1900. These events in the idyllic islands, though seemingly sudden, were but the culmination of nearly a century of Americanization by sailors, whalers, traders, and missionaries.

The Confused Invasion of Cuba

Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Spanish government ordered a fleet of warships to Cuba. It was commanded by Admiral Cervera, who protested that his wretchedly prepared ships were flirting with suicide. Four armored cruisers finally set forth (one without its main battery of guns). They were accompanied by six torpedo boats, three of which had to be abandoned en route.

Panic seized the eastern seaboard of the United States. American vacationers abandoned their seashore cottages, while nervous investors moved their securities to inland depositories. Demands for protection poured in on Washington from nervous citizens, and the Navy Department was forced to dispatch some useless old Civil War ships to useless

places for morale purposes. Cervera finally found refuge in bottle-shaped Santiago harbor, Cuba, where he was 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 Cervera. Leading the invading force was the grossly overweight General William R. Shafter, a leader so blubbery and gout-stricken that he had to be car-

ried about on a door. The ill-prepared Americans were 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-hungry Theodore Roosevelt, who had resigned from the Navy Department to serve as lieutenant colonel. Although totally without military experience, he used his strong political pull to secure his commission and to bypass physical standards. 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. The Rough Riders, fearing that they would be robbed of glory, rushed one of the transports and courageously held

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.”

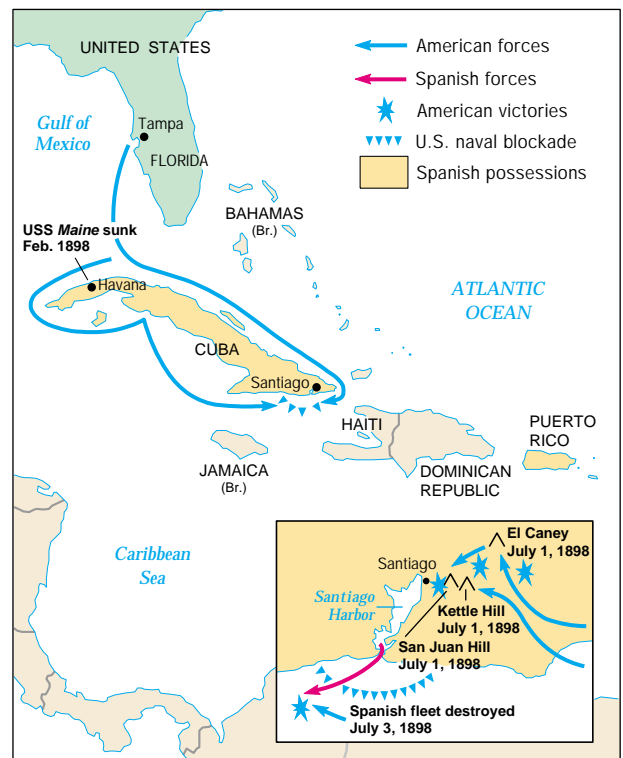
their place for almost a week in the broiling tropical sun. About half of them finally got to Cuba without most of their horses, and the bowlegged regiment then came to be known as “Wood’s Weary Walkers.”

Shafter’s landing near Santiago, Cuba, was made without serious opposition. Defending Spaniards, even more disorganized than the Americans, were unable to muster at this spot more than two thousand men. Brisk fighting broke out on July 1 at El Caney and San Juan 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 see his victim double up like a jackrabbit. He later wrote a book on his exploits, which the famed satirist, “Mr. Dooley” remarked, ought to have been entitled *Alone in Cuba [sic]*.

Curtains for Spain in America

The American army, fast closing in on Santiago, spelled doom for the Spanish fleet. Admiral Cervera, again protesting against suicide, was flatly ordered to fight for the honor of the flag. The odds against him were heavy: the guns of the USS *Oregon* alone

threw more metal than his four armored cruisers combined. After a running chase, on July 3 the



The Cuban Campaign, 1898

foul-bottomed Spanish fleet was entirely destroyed, as the wooden decks caught fire and the blazing infernos were beached. About five hundred Spaniards were killed, as compared with one death for the Americans. “Don’t cheer, men,” admonished Captain Philip of the *Texas*. “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. The American army, commanded by the famed Indian-fighter General Nelson A. Miles, met little resistance, as most of the population greeted the invaders as liberating heroes. “Mr. Dooley” was led to refer to “Gin’ral Miles’ Gran’ Picnic an’ Moonlight Excursion.” By this time Spain had satisfied its honor, and 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, dysentery, and yellow fever became so severe that hundreds were incapacitated—“an army of convalescents.” Others suffered from odorous canned meat known as “embalmed beef.” Fiery and insubordinate Colonel Roosevelt, who had no regular military career to jeopardize, was a ringleader in making “round-robin”^{*} demands on Washington that the army be moved before it perished. About twenty-five thousand men, 80 percent of them ill, were transferred to chilly Long Island, where their light summer clothing finally arrived.

One of the war’s worst scandals was the high death rate from sickness, especially typhoid fever. This disease was rampant in the unsanitary training camps in the United States. All told, nearly four hundred men lost their lives to bullets; over five thousand succumbed to bacteria and other causes.

McKinley Heeds Duty, Destiny, and Dollars

Late in 1898 the Spanish and American negotiators met in Paris, there to begin heated discussions. McKinley had sent five commissioners, including

^{*}A “round robin” is a document signed in circular form around the edges so that no one person can be identified (and punished) as the first signer.



three senators, who would have a final vote on their own handiwork. 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 astonished Spaniards who, lacking a cable, had not known that a war was on. They also picked up Puerto Rico, the last remnant of what had been Spain’s vast New World empire. 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. 640–641).

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 a completely alien 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

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.”

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 other alternatives 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, might then try to seize them, and the result might be a world 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 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. “If this be commercialism,” cried Mark Hanna, then “for God’s sake let us have commercialism.”

A tormented McKinley, so he was later reported as saying, finally went down on his knees seeking divine guidance. An inner voice seemed to tell him to take all the Philippines and Christianize and civilize them. This solution apparently coincided with the demands of the American people as well as with the McKinley-Hanna outlook. The mixture of things spiritual and material in McKinley’s reasoning was later slyly summarized by a historian: “God directs us—perhaps it will pay.” Profits thus joined hands with piety.

Fresh disputes broke out with the Spanish negotiators in Paris, once McKinley had reached the thorny decision to keep the Philippines. Manila had been captured the day *after* the armistice was signed, and the islands could not properly be listed among the spoils of war. The deadlock was broken when the Americans at length agreed to pay Spain \$20 million for the Philippine Islands—one of the best bargains the Spaniards ever drove and their last great haul from the New World. House Speaker “Czar” Reed sneered at America’s having acquired millions of Malays, at three dollars a head, “in the bush.” He resigned in protest against America’s new imperial adventure.

America’s Course (Curse?) of Empire

The signing of the pact of Paris touched off one of the most impassioned debates in American history. Except for glacial Alaska, coral-reefed Hawaii, and a handful of Pacific atolls acquired mostly for whaling stations, the Republic had hitherto acquired only contiguous territory on the continent. All previous acquisitions had been thinly peopled and capable of ultimate statehood. But in the Philippines, the nation had on its hands a distant tropical area, thickly populated by Asians of alien race, culture, tongue, religion, and government institutions.

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

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

United States, including the presidents of Stanford and Harvard Universities, the philosopher William James, and the novelist Mark Twain. The anti-imperialist blanket even stretched over such strange bedfellows as the labor leader Samuel Gompers and steel titan Andrew Carnegie. “God-damn the United States for its vile conduct in the Philippine Isles!” burst out the usually mild-mannered Professor 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.”

Anti-imperialists had still other arrows in their quiver. The Filipinos panted for freedom, and to annex them would violate the “consent of the governed” philosophy in the Declaration of Independence. Despotism abroad might well beget despotism at home. Finally, annexation would pro-

pel the United States into the political and military cauldron of the Far East.

Yet the expansionists or imperialists could sing a seductive song. They appealed to patriotism and to the glory of annexation—“don’t let any dastard dishonor the flag by hauling it down.” Stressing the opportunities for exploiting the islands, they played up possible trade profits. Manila, in fact, might become another Hong Kong. The richer the natural resources of the islands appeared to be, the less capable of self-government the Filipinos seemed to be. Rudyard Kipling, the British poet laureate of imperialism, urged America down the slippery path:

*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.

In the Senate the Spanish treaty ran into such heated opposition that it seemed doomed to defeat. But at this juncture the silverite Bryan unexpectedly sallied forth as its champion. As a Democratic volunteer colonel whom the Republicans had kept out of Cuba, he apparently had no reason to help the McKinley administration out of a hole. But free silver was dead as a political issue. Bryan's foes assumed that he was preparing to fasten the stigma of imperialism on the Republicans and then sweep into the presidency in 1900 under the flaming banner of anti-imperialism.

Bryan could support the treaty on plausible grounds. He argued that the war would not officially end until America had ratified the pact. It already had the islands on its hands, and the sooner it accepted the document, the sooner it could give the Filipinos their independence. After Bryan had used his personal influence with certain Democratic senators, the treaty was approved on February 6, 1899, with only one vote to spare. But the responsibility, as Bryan had foreseen, rested primarily with the Republicans.

Perplexities in Puerto Rico and Cuba

Many of Puerto Rico's 1 million inhabitants lived in poverty. The island's population grew faster than its economy. By the Foraker Act of 1900, Congress accorded the Puerto Ricans a limited degree of popular government and, in 1917, granted them U.S. citizenship. Although the American regime worked wonders in education, sanitation, transportation, and other tangible improvements, many of the inhabitants still aspired to independence. Great numbers of Puerto Ricans ultimately moved to New York City, where they added to the diversity of its immigrant culture.

A thorny legal problem was posed by the questions, 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? 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 windfalls. The Fil-

ipinos and Puerto Ricans 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 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. A cleanup of breeding places for mosquitoes wiped out yellow fever in Havana, while removing the recurrent fear of 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 hated restriction severely hobbled the Cubans. They reluctantly bound themselves not to impair their independence by treaty or by contracting a debt beyond their resources. They further agreed that the United States might intervene with troops to restore order and to provide mutual protection. 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 still occupies its twenty-eight-thousand-acre beachhead under an agreement that can be revoked only by the consent of both parties.

New Horizons in Two Hemispheres

In essence, the Spanish-American War was a kind of colossal coming-out party. Despite a common misconception, the conflict did not cause the United States to become a world power. Dewey's thundering guns merely advertised the fact that the nation was already a world power.

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 south-east 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 em-

ployed 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.

When World War II ended in 1945, the sudden advent of cheap air travel sparked an immigration explosion. 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 thousands 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.

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.”

The war itself was short (113 days), spectacular, low in casualties, and uninterruptedly successful—despite the bungling. American prestige rose sharply, and the European powers grudgingly accorded the Republic more respect. In Germany Prince Bismarck reportedly growled that there was a special Providence that looked after drunkards, fools, and the United States of America. At times it seemed as though not only Providence but the Spaniards were fighting on the side of the Yankees. So great, in fact, was America’s good fortune that rejoicing citizens found in the victories further support—misleading support—for their indifference to adequate preparedness.

An exhilarating new spirit thrilled America, buoyed along by the newly popular military marching-band music of John Philip Sousa. National pride was touched and cockiness was increased by what John Hay called a “splendid little war.”* Enthusiasm over these triumphs made easier the rush down the thorny path of empire. America did not start the war with imperialistic motives, but after falling through the cellar door of imperialism in a drunken fit of idealism, it wound up with imperialistic and colonial fruits in its grasp. The much-criticized British imperialists were pleased, partly because of the newfound friendship, partly because misery loves company. But America’s German rival was envious, and Latin American neighbors were deeply suspicious of Yankee greed.

By taking on the Philippine Islands, the United States became a full-fledged Far Eastern power. Hereafter these distant islands were to be a “heel of Achilles”—a kind of indefensible hostage given to Japan, as events proved in 1941. With singular shortsightedness, the Americans assumed dangerous commitments that they were later unwilling to defend by proper naval and military outlays.

But the lessons of unpreparedness were not altogether lost. Captain Mahan’s big-navyism seemed vindicated, and pride in the exploits of the navy energized popular support for more and better battleships. A masterly organizer, Elihu Root, took over the reins at the War Department. He estab-

*Anti-imperialist William James called it “our squalid war with Spain.”

lished a general staff and founded the War College in Washington. His genius later paid dividends when the United States found itself involved in the world war of 1914–1918.

One of the happiest results of the conflict was the further closing of the “bloody chasm” between North and South. Thousands of patriotic southern-

ers 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.”

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 the Philippines

1900 Hawaii receives full territorial status
Foraker Act for Puerto Rico

1901 Supreme Court *Insular Cases*
Platt Amendment

1902 U.S. troops leave Cuba

1917 Puerto Ricans granted U.S. citizenship

For further reading, see page A19 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.
