

# Us imperialism

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Imperialism is defined as the policy of extending a nation's authority by territorial acquisition or by the establishment of economic and political control over other nations; the notion of a globally stretching "American Empire" with such connotations was first made popular after the Spanish-American War of 1898 with the US annexation of the Philippines. Although previous US expansionism shares many similarities with this "new" age of expansionism, they also diverged from one another in several key ways. This new stage of American expansionism took place through the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century and was quite analogous to the original or traditional type expansionism conducted by the US throughout its history proceeding this time period in several aspects. The first of which was the strong belief that expanding was a destined duty supported by God. When the US first gained its independence in 1776 span most of the east coast with the exception of Florida and extended only minimally into the mainland continent, but by the late 1800s the nation stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific adding new states and territory and expanding across the entire continent. This relatively quick and vast expansion was a result of the idea known as Manifest Destiny, coined by columnist John O'Sullivan in 1845. The idea basically articulated that belief that the United States was destined to expand across the North American continent, from the Atlantic Seaboard to the Pacific Ocean. As a result of such a belief the US government did everything within its power to make this growth possible. This ranged from the buying of and making deals for territories from other foreign powers, like the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France, to the taking of California and parts of New Mexico

and Arizona from Mexico after the US Victory in the Mexican American War. This type of belief that imperialism was a necessary duty held true for the new age. This was not exclusive to the US and was widely accepted throughout most of the colonizing European powers as well. People at the time believed that God had made the “white race”; in the US special emphasis was put on the Anglo Saxon race, superior to all others as evidenced by their grander civilizations, numbers, wealth, and Christian beliefs. They saw these advantages as evidence that God wanted them to spread over the world imposing their rule on other races and lesser civilizations of the globe when inevitably the world’s supply of unoccupied land was depleted. This was especially the view of missionary minded Americans such as Reverend Josiah Strong, who called for Christian missions spanning the entire globe; their ideas stemmed from the Social Gospel (Document B). The Social Gospel involved the use of Christian ideals to help cope with the problems of the time, many of which were caused by rapid industrialization. This entitled way of thinking again helped inspire the United States to expand as well as convincing its people that such an expansion was rightful and meant to be, and again they did so because of these ideas and quite successfully so. The next ways in which the old and new ages were alike was in the treatment of the native peoples of the regions that the United States expanded into. During both time periods US policy toward the people already residing in any area newly acquired was biased and insensitive with little to no regard of the for the good or desires of the natives. During early American expansion the victims of such actions were almost exclusively Native Americans. As Americans pushed west they came

into contact with a myriad of different tribes inhabiting different parts of the North American continent. The US government and these Indian tribes began to clash with each other quickly and soon what is widely seen as an unofficial extermination campaign began. This campaign carried on for decades until the US had spread a completely across the continent fighting and weakening individual tribes until they submitted to US dominance. Even after this Native Americans were still treated unfairly, having to contend with horrific US anti-Indian legislation. For Instance the Indian Removal Act, which took away Indian land and forced onto plots of land mandated for them do reside in, known as reservations. The most famous of which was the trial of tears, during which the Cherokee people were forced to march the one thousand mile distance from Georgia to Oklahoma under horrible conditions resulting in the deaths of 4, 000 Cherokees. Another injustice toward the Indian peoples was their excluded from US citizenships and the rights and protections that come with it until 1924 with the passage of the Snyder Act. The treatment of those in the territories and colonies of the United States during this time during the late 1800s and early 1900s in that they again like the Native Americans were subject to harsh military action. This occurred shortly after Spain sold the Philippines to the United States for 20 million dollars. The Filipino people were under the mistaken assumption that after the withdrawal of Spain they would receive their independence, so as the US began to institute its rule in the colony Filipinos revolt under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo. The US government responded not by granting the Philippines its independence but instead by engaging in an armed conflict called by the American Anti-imperialist League, founded by Mark Twain in

1898, a “ war of criminal aggression”. Although the US eventually won out due to far superior military might the process of doing so many Filipinos were slaughter putting Filipino blood on American hands (Document D). Inhabitants of the new age US imperial holdings were just as their Native American counterparts of the past denied rights and privileges and citizens. It was decided during this period that Congress would be granted jurisdiction over US foreign colonies and territories and control over the civil rights and statuses of those in them. This resulted from the Supreme Court case *Downes vs. Bidwell*, where a Puerto Rican exporter sued over the fact that he had to pay an import duties on his goods arguing that he was not technically importing them seeing as how Puerto Rico was a US territory. As Congress never saw fit to make grant such inhabitants of the “ US Empire” they were not given rights under or protected by the Constitution as US citizens were (Document H). This lack of rights for natives in these lands opened the door to abuses and despotism from the United States government as well as other entities for instance big business, trying to serve their own needs and desires at any cost. The similarities between both states of US expansionism are represented both in its attitude toward its own expansion and in its handling of the existing populaces in the areas acquired. The more recent imperial period beginning in the late 1800s was also in numerous key facets a departure from previous US policies and preceding expansionism. To begin there was a major difference in venue between the two periods. During the early era US expansion was limited to the North American continent only spreading out and making larger the already existing American nation to the surrounding area. This mostly consisted of westward extension toward the

Pacific Ocean, and the settling largely wooded country side that was quite relatively scarcely populated with only a number of Native American Indian tribes. However the latter era was a more global form of expansion. Instead of having growth limited to the continent and immediate area the US began to obtain colonies and territories thousands of miles away in other parts of the world such as the Philippines, the only official colony, Puerto Rico, and Guam. According to the father of the modern US navy, Admiral Alfred T. Mahan the US had to start looking outward to distant territorial options due to the increasing need for raw materials and other growing production needs, an expansionistic desire from the American public, and the geographic position of the nation between the Atlantic and Pacific (Document C). The perceived need to keep up with the growing colonial possessions and therefore wealth and power of the European nations was also a driving force behind this colonizing outward look. The US had fallen behind in this arena as shown in works like Thomas Nast's "The World Plunderers", which shows the dominant European nations of Germany, England, and Russia taking land off different regions of the globe. The US is not however represented here among these powerful colonizing nations, serving to show how far behind the US was in that way and how it did not play as large or powerful role as these other countries (Document A). These new colonial territories were not made up of under populated wilderness ready for settlement, but instead were populated and held developed native societies with their own customs that the US government had to deal with. This type of new era colonial style interaction is exemplified in events like the Filipino revolt against their American rulers for independence. Not only

did US expansion change becoming more global, but US diplomatic expansionism foreign policy changed as well. During the initial time of expansionism the US foreign policy was focused on expansion through the gaining of land. While during the later time the US was still fixated on the attainment of land gains they began to also focus on expansion through the expansion of American influence throughout the world. During this time the US became somewhat less isolationist and introverted and looked to expand trade with other nations and sway over other nations rather than real “ colonial” control. The goal of the United States was according to Senator Albert J Beveridge in the 1900 to use its colonial possession of the Philippines to control the Pacific Ocean, which he believed to be “ the ocean of the commerce of the future”. This control over the Pacific would supposedly allow the US unrestricted trade with Asia, making it “ the power that rules the world” (Document E). This idea in practice resulted in the institution of the open door policy. This policy involved the forceful persuasion of China by the United States to engage in trading with the US and other European powers. To keep from fighting between these powers separate “ spheres of influence” were set up for each colonial power in which they could trade and conduct business as they pleased. This policy worked well making the US arguably the largest and most important foreign power in the region as shown by the political cartoon “ American Diplomacy” (Document G). The United States also opened up Japan to trade with the Commodore Perry’s expedition to the nation in 1853. These types of influence foreign diplomacy were not only employed by the US in the Pacific but in the Latin America as well with particular regard to Central America. This was known as the

Roosevelt Corollary, President Roosevelt's interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine that required the US to interfere in the affairs of countries affected by wrongdoing and or impotence of the Western Hemisphere not for land but for the "welfare" of such countries (Document F). The Platt Amendment helped to support and legitimized the Corollary by guarantying US participation in Cuban dealings, both foreign and domestic and appeared to be at the time quite a success. The practice of dollar diplomacy took US influence over the Latin American to a new level by using both political and military authority to safeguard US citizens' investments in the regions. This was used when President Taft sent US marines into Nicaragua in 1912 in order to keep safe American business interests. Such policies served to expand American control through increase in indirect influence instead of an increase in land and colonization. The variances between the old and new ways of expansion manifest themselves primarily in the change from continental territory gains to globally and the shift from a singular expansion attention on land to a attention on influence based expansion. United States expansionism has undergone changes throughout the years and at the same time stayed constant in many respects. Expansionism from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century was a continuation of past expansionism in that the religious and superiority driven attitude toward expansionism and the treatment of those already occupying the colonized areas remained the same. However it was a departure from previous expansionism because of its more global connotations and its focus on diplomatic influence as opposed to land. It is evident that regardless of their



specific differences the old era of US expansion and the new era are their own distinct entities.