

The spanish-american war and imperialism

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Q5-How did the Spanish-American War turn into a war of imperial expansion?

Shawn Lannin 2/26/2013 The Spanish-American War originally started off as The United States protecting Cuba from its Spanish rulers essentially, but quickly evolved into colonial expansion. The war became a war of imperial expansion in the late 1800's due to America's new "outward" focuses on global markets and growing concerns of economic competition/expansion from other world powers. America, once a colony itself was now looking to expand its influence into other parts of the globe as its European cousins had been doing for quite some time.

Before, during, and after the war Americans had growing concerns about the Pacific and East Asia. These foreign markets possessed vast amounts of natural resources and fertile lands for the taking; many expansionists had differing reasons for imperialistic expansion. Some argued religious purposes, some the spread of the White-Anglo-Saxon race, (White Mans Burden) while others stressed economic and military reasons to expand abroad. Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, a naval strategist, believed in a strong navy and that America should turn its focus outward and expand its influences into the world.

Mahan also urged the acquisition of Pacific islands for military and naval superiority. Islands such as Puerto Rico, Hawaii, The Philippines, and Guam soon became targets of America's imperialistic aim. These islands could be used strategically to protect merchant fleets in route from Asia and also for military and economic purposes, for example the natural harbor found in Hawaii's Pearl Harbor served as a great naval base and served as a stepping-

stone to Asia, while the fertile volcanic soils were perfect for sugar plantations.

Expansionists also sought to protect their trade rights and foreign policies such as The Open Door Policy, which gave free trade rights in East Asian markets. China was in turmoil at the time and other world powers were exhibiting land grabs while trying to carve out “spheres of influence” to control trade in Chinese markets. Expansion in the Pacific would not only secure our rights to trade but would protect our interests over seas as well.

Nations across the world were colonizing weaker countries through the concept of Social Darwinism and America didn't want to fall by the way side so to speak. We had to keep up with the world powers and protect our best interest. It was a time of empires and after decades of isolationism, America decided it was time to show the world our power. By 1898 America had defeated Spain and with its defeat came the annexation of several island nations that we used to our benefit for years to come.