

American imperialism in the 19th and 20th century essay sample

War



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“Imperialism is the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas; broadly: the extension or imposition of power, authority, or influence” (1) American Imperialism has been a practice of the United States since before the American Revolution. Acts of greed and selfishness led to America’s first taste of imperialism. Christopher Columbus came to America over five hundred years ago.

They fought the natives, took their lands by killing them and then made them slaves. Devine Manifestation was the belief that God sent them fourth to possess the land for expansion and growth. The United States, one of the most powerful countries in the world, has sought to expand, control, or influence nations and their people that are not strong enough to defend themselves successfully. The United States almost always has something to gain when “helping” other countries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the United States stated to realize what potential they had as a world power. They had become the leading producer of wheat and cotton. They developed as an industrial nation, and were successful with producing favorable international treaties. United States leaders saw no reason they should not try to expand and become an imperial power. With the expanding economy, it was necessary for them to begin immediately before Europe had complete colonial control over the world. The United States was looking to build trading posts around the world so they could benefit from the wealth of other nations. During the 1890’s, the United States did not think it was in their best interests to remain <https://assignbuster.com/american-imperialism-in-the-19th-and-20th-century-essay-sample/>

isolationist, so they decided to change and take their place as one of the world powers.

One of the largest reasons the United States isolation foreign policy changed was because of naval officer Alfred T. Mahan and his book, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*. In his book, Mahan laid out the strategy to control the seas by using ships to become an influential world power. He argued “ no nation could prosper without a large fleet of ships engaged in international trade, protected by a powerful navy operating from overseas bases”(2) His book laid the foundation for the development of an expansionist foreign policy. Mahan called for the Panama Canal to be built so the east coast could be connected with Asian markets so that United States could become an integral part of foreign trade by selling their excess products.

He also advocated for the development of naval bases in the Caribbean and Pacific on islands such as Hawaii, the Philippines, and Cuba. Many politicians, along with President Theodore Roosevelt, agreed with Mahan’s ideas for foreign policy. Mahan supported Big Stick Diplomacy, the ideology that the United States should “ speak softly but carry a big stick.” The United States needed to become the police of the Caribbean by stepping into the affairs of other countries, only when necessary, in order to maintain the well being of North and South America. This policy became known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine because the United States was confirming their power in the Caribbean rather than with European interventions.

It was not just the presidents and influential politicians but also the American public who believed the United States should begin to expand. Since the western frontier had been settled, Americans were looking for other ways in which to fulfill their “manifest destiny.” The new ideas of expansion went over well with the American people at the time, and so the actions the United States took was justified for the people.

It is clear historians would say that if the United States did not intervene in World War I or II, authority there would have stopped. This is because alliances would also have stopped in a Nazi Europe and Soviet East. There would not have been any possibility of having bases in an ideologically hostile arena. The Washington Consensus would be unnecessary. “Parents of teenagers know that if they have structured their children’s beliefs and preferences, their power will be greater and will last longer than if they had relied on active control”(3)

In other words, “after US military intervention, endorsement rather than occupation of Europe was required, and this came via a gargantuan expenditure programme (5.5% of US Gross Domestic Product in its first year alone) called the Marshall Plan, which aided war-torn Europe with funds in order to quell American fears of it turning to Communism”(4) European alliances were required to enhance the United State’s vision for the future, which was acting as political and trade partners. The Truman Doctrine was an early example of how the United States tried to tailor the political position of the world. In the case, Europe had make conditions favorable to flourish. This could have been interpreted as the creation of an ideological empire.

These actions cemented the view that liberal democracy, although more loosely capitalistic compared to the laissez-faire American-style, was the standard to follow.

After World War II, the existence and presence of United States military in other countries is also an indicator of the extent of imperialism. There are “ 156 countries with U. S. troops; 63 of which also have fully functioning bases”(5) With the disbandment of the Soviet Union, The United States now has military bases near Russian borders. “ The fact that such territorial violation has existed would seem to legitimate the view that America is an empire - at least in the sense that it is supreme to those countries that its forces impregnate - or perhaps simply that these countries see no loss in playing host” (6) The question that needs to be answered is whether these countries were directed by the United States or an agreement with the super-power from the beginning?

As World War II drew to a close in 1945, the global imperialist terrain altered dramatically. “ Before World War II there were six great powers: Great Britain, France, Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, and the United States. By the end of the war, the United States stood alone, easily the most powerful nation in the world, its power greatly increased by its mobilization and war effort, its rivals defeated, and its allies exhausted.”(7) The imperialist war “ destroyed the old balance of power, leaving Germany and Japan crushed and impotent and reducing Great Britain and France to second or even third-rate powers.”(8) The United States Gross National Product during the war had doubled due to the over 12 million men under arms. By the end of the war it

accounted for “ half of the world’s manufacturing capacity, most of its food surpluses, and almost all of its financial reserves.

The United States held the lead in a wide range of technologies essential to modern warfare and economic prosperity. Possession of extensive domestic oil supplies and control over access to the vast oil reserves of Latin America and the Middle East contributed to the US position of global dominance.”(9)

The United States had the most powerful military in the world and enjoyed a global monopoly on atomic weapons. The Navy dominated the seas, the Air Forces the skies, the Army occupied Japan, and part of Germany. The United State’s strength was favored by the advantage from being geographically isolated from both world wars. The United State’s homeland had not suffered the massive destruction of the means of production that the European nations had experienced. Its civilians were spared the terror of air raids, bombardments, deportations, and concentration camps that led to the death of millions of non-combatants in Europe.

The effects of American imperialism have been positive; however it would be unrealistic to assume that the American agenda and intervening effects have been altogether beneficial and successful. “ The world is a much more dangerous place as a result of America’s determination to save it.”(10) This is due to excessive involvement in areas of deep-rooted tribal conflicts, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is likely that the Cold War would not have benefited the American cause for the spread of capitalism and democracy if it weren’t for the acceptance that each side’s influence be restricted. The period of the Cold War was intrinsic; however, despite this, the more

involvement the United States has today, the more the world “ will become more militarized, and less democratized.”(11) There is some truth to this claim, but the success of various involvements in post-war Europe and post 1991 Eastern Europe would seem sufficient enough for future interventions, despite the existing effects left by the recent Iraq War.

It is apparent that throughout its history, the United States has had the capacity to intervene in various countries and conflicts. It is evident that the United States has not intervened in these matters for the sole purpose of furthering its own interests. Although, it is also clear that the spread of a belief broadly aligned with the United State’s desire to further enhance its own success. It is a widespread view that the United States has been a global “ super hero” throughout the 20th century and has wielded its considerable influence for humanitarian purposes. It is important to recognize that the ways in which the United States has shaped the world of today in West Germany, in South Korea, with the destiny of the Cold War, and now with the ‘ War on Terror’. If one is to consider the United Sates as an empire it would not be in the conventional sense of territorial occupation. Regardless of the definition, the depth of the Unite State’s strength having been so undeniable, the legacy of many of its successful international pursuits have been widespread and will undoubtedly outlast its own supremacy.

Notes

1. Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 2012. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imperialism> (accessed November 28, 2012).
2. Foner, Eric. Give Me Liberty! An American History. New York: W. W Norton <https://assignbuster.com/american-imperialism-in-the-19th-and-20th-century-essay-sample/>

& Company, 2012.

3. Hughes, Leighton James. "Has American Imperialism Shaped the World in the 20th Century?" e-International Relations. March 2012. <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/30/has-american-imperialism-shaped-the-world-in-the-20th-century/> (accessed December 6, 2012).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid

6. Ibid

7. International Communist Current. November 27, 2004. http://en.internationalism.org/ir/113_us_policy.html (accessed December 7, 2012).

8. Ibid

9. Ibid

10. Hughes, Leighton James. "Has American Imperialism Shaped the World in the 20th Century?" e-International Relations. March 2012. <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/30/has-american-imperialism-shaped-the-world-in-the-20th-century/> (accessed December 6, 2012).

11. Ibid

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Foner, Eric. Give Me Liberty! An American History. New York: W. W Norton & Company, 2012. Hughes, Leighton James. "Has American Imperialism Shaped the World in the 20th Century?" e-International Relations. March 2012. <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/30/has-american-imperialism-shaped-the-world-in-the-20th-century/> (accessed December 6, 2012). International Communist Current. November 27, 2004. http://en.internationalism.org/ir/113_us_policy.html (accessed December 7, 2012). <https://assignbuster.com/american-imperialism-in-the-19th-and-20th-century-essay-sample/>

org/ir/113_us_policy.html (accessed December 7, 2012). Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 2012. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imperialism> (accessed November 28, 2012).