

American imperialism in the nineteenth century

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American Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century was a very important era in our country. Imperialism is the acquisition of control over the government and the economy of another nation; usually by conquest. The United States became an imperialistic world power in the late nineteenth century by gaining control over the Hawaiian Islands and after the Spanish American War (1898), Guam, the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico. (Davidson, Delay, Heyrman, Lytle & Stoff, 2008) This policy was adopted to keep up with the world powers like Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and Russia.

Compared to the European-style imperialism the possession by conquest American imperialism was said to be more pure because it was done without conquest; it was completed with exportation of products, ideas, and influence. As countries became dependant on industrialism they needed the foreign trade to bring in the capital. Companies within the country could purchase products but that only moved the capital from producer to purchaser within our own economy. Securing the interests of trade was not an easy task as there were five other world empires trying to complete the same goal.

Americans preferred the more indirect approach to imperialism, free enterprise. It was a win-win approach for America, everyone stood to gain by the rapid and expanding social and economic networks that were going to be secured. Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that if the US was to be a great nation we needed to protect its interest in the foreign markets. He persuaded Congress to build a new Navy that consisted of large cruisers and battleships that were steam powered vessels made of steel. Congress agreed and the program to rebuild the Navy began in the 1880's.
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The United States Navy was the third best in the world by 1900 and now had to means to become an imperial power and protect its vested interests.

(Davidson, Delay, Heyrman, Lytle, & Stoff, 2008) The United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867; the deal was negotiated by William H Seward the Secretary of State and an ardent expansionist who was committed to enhancing the nation's trade and military standing. We established a presence in Samoa during the 1870's and the importance of Hawaii was recognized in the early portion of the nineteenth century.

By 1875 the US had complete control of Pearl Harbor. American Imperialism grew momentum during the Spanish-American War (1898). The war only lasted four months but it was a turning point for America as it resulted in the acquisition of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. (Gale Encyclopedia, 1999) In 1899 the Anti-Imperialist League was founded. The League was the largest lobbying organization through the nineteenth century; the purpose of this organization was to oppose the US annexation of the Philippines.

Even though the League had popular members like Andrew Carnegie, Jane Addams, and Williams James they struggled with a consistent message. It was this inconsistency that hindered their efforts to win the support within the Republican Party. After the Treaty of Paris was approved by Congress the League's strength declined. Many of the League activists were charged with treason, causing even more decline in the support of their political cause. The expansion into the Caribbean continued and in 1903 the United States

instigated a Panama revolution. The United States immediately entered a treaty with Panama to build the Panama Canal.

In 1904 President Roosevelt declared that the US reserved the right to intervene in the affairs of smaller western hemisphere nations should these smaller countries fails to meet their financial obligations to European creditors. This was the so-called “ Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. Over the next several years this policy was applied in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua. Overall, American Imperialism could have been more successful. In the end the interventions came to be expensive and more often caused bitterness and resentment with the affected countries.

Since trade with the Far East did not grow like expected business sought to expand their markets within the Western Hemisphere. This required a different approach, one of good will and not tension. With this the Age of Imperialism as we knew it was over. In 1933 the United States formally renounced intervention to the world at an international conference in Uruguay. However after the 1959 revolution in Cuba the United States formulated a new round of international intervention by the Central Intelligence Agency in Cuba, Honduras, Chile, Nicaragua and numerous other foreign countries. (Gale Encyclopedia, 1999)