

Imperialism dbq

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



Imperialism DBQ Between 1898 and 1914, the United States had many strategic, economic, and ethnocentric motivations for practicing Imperialism. While America was imperialist mostly for strategic reasons, strategic and economic factors often coincided, and America's motivations almost always had undertones of ethnocentrism. During this time period, American imperialism was most prominent in the Caribbean. One major example was when the U. S. intervened in Cuba to help liberate them from Spanish rule. Congress even passed the Teller Amendment, which granted Cuba its freedom after it was set loose from Spain. However, the U. S. mandated that the Platt Amendment be written into the Cuban Constitution. The Amendment stipulated that Cuba not acquire any debt greater than it could pay off, or enter into any treaties which potentially compromised its liberty. While this event occurred before 1898, it still exemplifies American imperialism, and highlights America's strategic motivations. One way, in which this was a strategic intervention by the U. S., was that it gave Spain less power in the Western Hemisphere, and America acquired the islands of Guam and Puerto Rico. In Alfred T. Mahan's book, *The Interest of America in Sea Power*, he expresses the idea that U. S. held on to the islands, and in Cuba's case, passed the Platt Amendment, to ensure that no other European powers, such as Germany, would attempt to control the nations (Document H). Thus, to strengthen America's strategic interests in the Caribbean, Roosevelt issued his famous Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904. It stated that the U. S. reserved the right to intervene in Caribbean and Latin American affairs, especially to pay off their debts to other countries. The summation of America's Caribbean policy can be seen as having a mostly

strategic background, for the U. S. was primarily concerned with ensuring that no European power took advantage of any country by holding them in their debt. Yet, the reasons for keeping Eastern powers out of the West were often connected to economic interests. U. S. interference in Cuba was largely due to the fact that farmers were striking against the Spanish government, and the U. S. needed to appease the farmers since many Americans had much invested in Cuban crops. This idea was even expressed in a 1900s quote, which claimed “ where the American dollar goes, so goes the American flag” (Document I). Yet, what America didn’t have invested in the Caribbean was made up for with, as U. S. diplomat to China Charles Denby stated, a “ foothold...in the Far East, ” which gave America “ standing, influence...[and] valuable trade” “ near the center of the great lines of commerce from the East to the West” (Document A). Another instance which demonstrates American imperialism in the late 1800s, but before 1898, was the construction of the Panama Canal. The canal was key to America’s ability to ship things from East to West, by cutting through the Caribbean, highlighting America’s economic interest in the region. All of these economic factors can be seen as strategic as well, for they were all means to gain power and success in the global economic competition. The Roosevelt Corollary intended to keep Eastern powers out of Western affairs primarily to prevent them from having an economic or political advantage over the U. S. Yet both of these factors were rooted in the idea that the U. S. had the right to dominate the Western hemisphere. Whites, and Americans in particular, have long held onto the belief in the superiority of their own race. In his novel *Our Country: Its Possible Future*, Josiah Strong even wrote that God

had prepared the whites most adequately for “ the final competition of races” by giving them “ unequalled energy. ” His views are also made clear when he refers to Anglo-Saxons as having “ the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization” (Doc C). These claims were furthered by Julius Pratt in his novel *Expansionists* of 1898, when he wrote that “ the superior virility of the American race” had created a “ superior beneficence of American political institutions” (Doc F). Many Americans believed that a white man’s burden existed to advance other civilizations, since Americans were the most advanced people on Earth. The New York Tribune applied this idea to the Caribbean policy in 1903, when it was written that even “ cannibals...[and] the half-ape creatures of the Australian backcountry...[and the] wildest tribes” govern themselves. Yet, upholding the belief in the supremacy of the American government, they cynically asked of the beastly nations, “ but what kind of government is it” (Document E). Still, the most pressing evidence that both American strategic and economic motivations were rooted in ethnocentrism is found by closely examining the Roosevelt Corollary of 1904. When Roosevelt wrote this addition to the Monroe Doctrine, he provided for exceptions that permitted Imperialism. He stated that “ chronic wrongdoing” and “ impotence” of another country, which resulted in the “ loosening of the ties of civilized society, ” would require “ intervention by some civilized nation” (Doc G.) In this corollary, his terms such as “ wrongdoing”, “ impotence, ” and “ civilized” are all completely subject to American interpretation. Thus, he not only implies that other countries must behave according to how America sees fit, but he determines that no other nations of the world except for America, may interpret what

actions constitute intervention. He also demeans the presumably Caribbean nations by suggesting that they might require assistance from some superior nation that is “civilized.” Furthermore, Roosevelt’s belief in the superiority of America is reflected in his argument that the U. S. should be the only nation to control the affairs of the entire Western half of the world, and by prohibiting Eastern nations from intervening. It is clear how both strategic and economic factors led to American Imperialism during the early 1900s, yet all guidelines for foreign policy stemmed from American ethnocentrism. The U. S. believed it reserved the right to control other countries that it deemed inferior, and essentially used other nations as economic and political tools. American Imperialism was not always just to gain power for the U. S., but it was also to make sure no other nations were able gain said power.