

# American expansionism

Economics



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The 1840s and 1890s saw an expansion of American territory, as a result of several economic, political, and cultural factors. In both cases of American expansionism, the Americans believed that we must expand our borders in order to keep the country running upright. Also, the Americans believed that the United State, being one of the strongest of the nations, had a need to become even stronger. This is shown in the "manifest destiny" of the 1840's. Apart from the similarities, there were also several differences that included the American attempt to stretch their empire across the seas and into other parts of the world.

Opponents of expansion in the 1840s did not oppose gaining new lands, but opposed the possible spread of slavery in the new territories. The opposition to expansion in the 1890s was based on concerns of controlling people far away of different cultures, but not opposed to the economic benefits. Throughout history, the United States had come off as a nation that would take what they wanted at any cost. This was prevalent in both cases of expansion as the Americans risked war and national safety for the sake of gaining land.

During the 1840s, America's Manifest Destiny was the main reason for western expansion, since it was the idea that America was given a God-given right to stretch across the continent. The idea of Manifest Destiny encouraged men and women to move west and have big dreams. Aggressive nationalists invoked the idea to justify Indian removal, war with Mexico, and American expansion into Cuba and Central America. More positively, the idea of manifest destiny inspired missionaries, farmers, and pioneers, who dreamed only of transforming plains and fertile valleys into farms and small

towns. . The Indians were heathens and needed to be Christianized and controlled The Mexican war was controversial and bitterly divided American public opinion. The underlying cause of the Mexican War was the movement of American pioneers into lands claimed by Mexico. The immediate reason for the conflict was the annexation of Texas in 1845. When Texas was annexed, Mexico expelled the American ambassador and cut diplomatic relations, yet it did not declare war. President Polk, on the other hand, told his commanders to prepare for the possibility of war.

Polk ordered American naval vessels to position themselves outside Mexican ports and he sent American forces in the Southwest to Corpus Christi, Texas. In the fall of 1845, the President offered \$5 million if Mexico agreed to recognize the Rio Grande River as the southwestern boundary of Texas. Earlier, the Spanish government had defined the Texas boundary as the Nueces River, which is 130 miles north and east of the Rio Grande. The United States also offered up to \$5 million for the province of New Mexico--which included Nevada and Utah and parts of four other states--and up to \$25 million for California.

Polk was anxious to acquire California because in mid-October 1845, he had been led to believe that Mexico had agreed to cede California to Britain as payment for debts. The Mexican government, already furious over the annexation of Texas, refused to accept an American envoy. The failure of the negotiations led Polk to order Brigadier General Zachary Taylor to march 3,000 troops southwest from Corpus Christi, Texas, to "defend the Rio Grande" River.

Late in March of 1846, Taylor and his men set up camp along the Rio Grande, directly across from the Mexican city of Matamoros, on a stretch of land that Polk had claimed “ American Soil” where the Mexicans supposedly fired at the American soldiers. the war was an expansionist power play dictated by an aggressive Southern slave owners intent on acquiring more slave states. Beginning in the 1890s, the United States began to practice some of the same imperialistic policies that it had previously criticized major European powers for.

Social Darwinism emerged leading Americans to believe that A belief that the world's nations were engaged in a Darwinian struggle for survival and that countries that failed to compete were doomed to decline also contributed to a new assertiveness on the part of the United States. In 1893, a small group of sugar and pineapple-growing businessmen, aided by the American minister to Hawaii along with heavily armed U. S. soldiers and marines, deposed Hawaii's queen. Subsequently, they imprisoned the queen and seized 1. 75 million acres of crown land and conspired to annex the islands to the United States.

The businessmen who conspired to overthrow the queen claimed that they were overthrowing a corrupt, dissolute regime in order of advance democratic principles. They also argued that a Western power was likely to acquire the islands since Hawaii had the finest harbor in the mid-Pacific and was viewed as a strategically valuable coaling station and naval base. In 1851, King Kamehameha III had secretly asked the United States to annex Hawaii, but Secretary of State Daniel Webster declined, saying " No power ought to take possession of the islands as a conquest... or colonization. But

later monarchs wanted to maintain Hawaii's independence. The native population proved to be vulnerable to western diseases, including cholera, smallpox, and leprosy. By 1891, native Hawaii's were an ethnic minority on the islands. Americans also pushed for an "Open Door" trading policy in China, which stated that all major powers, including the United States, should have an equal right to trade in China. Efforts to expand American influence abroad were motivated by economic, political, religious, and social factors. There were also opponents to imperialism who often based their opposition on moral grounds.

American imperialistic impulses flourished during the Spanish-American War; newly created American naval power was one important factor in the defeat of Spain. The steps leading to this war began in 1868, when Cuban colonists revolted against the Spanish, who controlled the island. The Spanish made some efforts to control the efficiency of their operations in Cuba, but generally failed in their promises of allowing more self-government on the island. In 1895, an economic depression, caused by falling sugar and tobacco prices, hit the native population especially hard, and another revolt took place.

American investors, plantation owners, and government officials initially did not support the rebellion. But when the Spanish put Cubans in concentration camps, the Cuban exile community in the United States pressured America to intervene on the side of the rebels, yet the United States resisted these efforts. Pressure on McKinley to intervene increased when Cuban rebels started to destroy American economic interests in Cuba, such as sugar mills.

But one event that occurred on February 15, 1898 was the major turning point. A ship, called the U. S. S.

Maine, had been sent to Havana harbor to protect American interests after violent riots broke out in Cuba in January. The sinking of the Maine was undoubtedly caused by an explosion on board, everyone blamed the Spanish to fire at the U. S. even though no one was never able to conclusively determine why or how the ship was sunk. Fearing that America would want to annex Cuba, supporters of Cuban independence in Congress had inserted the Teller Amendment in the original congressional bill calling for war against Spain. This amendment stated that America would not annex Cuba under any circumstances.

Nevertheless, President McKinley authorized that the Cubans would be ruled by an American military government. The military government did authorize the Cubans to draft a constitution in 1900 but also insisted that the Cubans agree to all of the provisions of the Platt Amendment. It stated that Cuba could not enter into agreements with other countries without the approval of the United States and that the United States had the right to intervene in Cuban affairs " when necessary," and that America be given two naval bases on the Cuban mainland.

The Platt Amendment remained in force in Cuba until the early 1930s. In the Treaty of Paris ending the war, Spain recognized the independence of Cuba and, for a payment of \$20 million, gave the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam over to the United States. After contentious debate within the United States, America finally decided to annex the Philippines; it took three years

for American forces to defeat Filipino rebels, who instead of fighting the Spanish now resisted their new occupiers, the Americans.

A French building company had already acquired the rights to build such a canal in the region of Panama, which at the time was controlled by Colombia). In 1902, the United States bought the rights from the company to construct the land, but this agreement was opposed by the Colombians. A "revolt" was organized in Panama by the French. United States warships sailed off the coast of Panama to help the "rebels." The United States was the first to recognize Panama as an independent country; newly installed Panamanian officials then gave America territory to build a canal.

By the terms of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1904, the United States received permanent rights and sovereignty over a 10-mile-wide area on which they planned to build the canal. In return, Panama was given \$10 million. Construction of the canal began shortly afterward. Americans finished building the Panama Canal in 1914; the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine further increased American influence in Latin Foreign trade becoming increasingly important to American economy.