

EXPANSIONISM IN THE 1890S

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that had prompted Europeans to settle the New World in the first place: greed, glory, and God. We will examine expansionism as a reflection of profits, patriotism, piety, and politics.

Patriotism: Asserting National Power

In 1898, a State Department memorandum stated that "we can no longer afford to disregard international rivalries now that we ourselves have become a competitor in the worldwide struggle for trade." The national state, then, should support commercial interests.



Henry Cabot Lodge, "The Business World vs. The Politicians" (1895)

Americans, therefore, also saw expansion in terms of national glory and greatness. In the late 1890s, a group formed around assistant secretary of the navy

Theodore Roosevelt and Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge emerged as highly influential leaders of a changing American foreign policy.

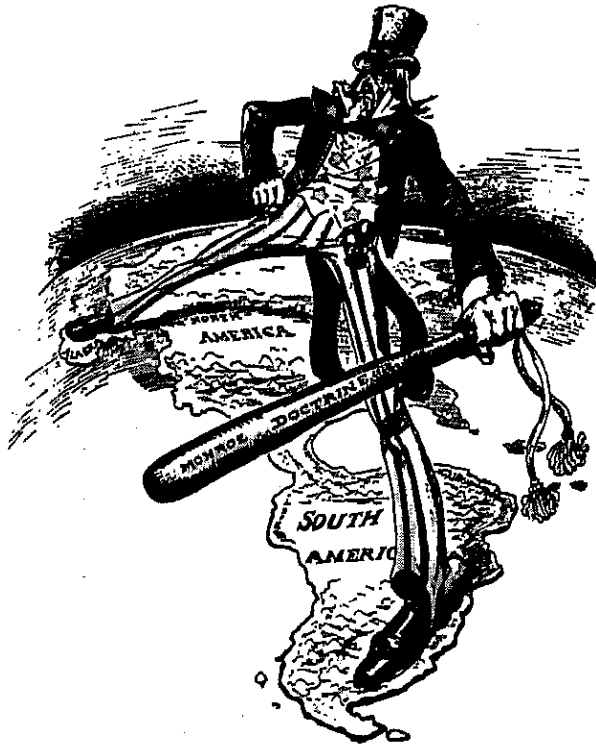
These intensely nationalistic young men shifted to what Lodge called the "large policy" by which economic interests would take second place to questions of what he and Roosevelt called "national honor." By 1899, a State Department official wrote that the United States had become "a world power. . . . Where formerly we had only commercial interests, now we have territorial and political interests as well."

Naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan greatly influenced the new foreign policy elite. Mahan's books argued that in a world of Darwinian struggle for survival, national power depended on naval

supremacy, control of sea lanes, and vigorous development of domestic resources and foreign markets. He advocated colonies in both the Caribbean and the Pacific, linked by a canal built and controlled by the United States. In a world of constant "strife" where "everywhere nation is arrayed against nation," he said, it was imperative that Americans develop sea power and "look outward."

DOCUMENT

Albert Thayer Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power* (1897)



Uncle Sam's Imperial Stretch Citing the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt-Lodge "large policy" as justification, U.S. imperial interests at the turn of the century spread American economic, political, and military influence from Alaska across the Caribbean to South America. Uncle Sam is looking westward. Why?

(Bettmann/Corbis)

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Piety: The Missionary Impulse

As Mahan's statements suggest, a strong sense of duty and the missionary ideal of doing good for others also motivated expansionism—and sometimes rationalized the exploitation and oppression of weaker peoples. Roosevelt, Lodge, Mahan, and other Americans (such as George W. Bush in a later age) all would have agreed with the following summary of expansionist arguments:

Certain nations are more civilized than others, especially those peopled by English-speaking, white, Protestant Anglo-Saxons. They enjoy free enterprise and democratic political institutions, which means representative government, distributive power, and the rule of law. Further evidence of the civilized nature of such nations includes their advanced technological and industrial development, large middle classes, and a high degree of education and literacy. The prime examples in the world are England and the United States.

In the natural struggle for existence, those races and nations that survive and prosper prove their fitness and superiority. The United States, as a matter of history, geographic location, and political genius, is so favored and fit that God has chosen it to uplift less favored peoples. This responsibility cannot be avoided. It is a national duty, or burden—the "white man's burden"—that civilized nations undertake to bring peace, progressive values, and ordered liberty to the world.

The argument begins with principles of modernization and ends in statements of America's pious sense

of itself as morally exceptional. A missionary put it more crudely in 1885: "The Christian nations are subduing the world in order to make mankind free."

Josiah Strong, a Congregationalist minister, was perhaps the most ardent advocate of American missionary expansionism. In a book titled *Our Country* (1885), he argued that in the struggle for survival among nations, the United States had emerged as



Josiah Strong,
Our Country
(1885)

the center of Anglo-Saxonism and was "divinely commissioned" to spread political liberty, Protestant Christianity, and civilized values over the earth. "This powerful race," he wrote, "will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of

the sea, over upon Africa and beyond." Indiana senator Albert Beveridge agreed, saying in 1899 that God had prepared English-speaking Anglo-Saxons to become "the master organizers of the world to establish and administer governments among savages and senile peoples."

Missionaries carried Western values to non-Christian lands around the world, especially China. The number of American Protestant missionaries in China increased from 436 in 1874 to 5,462



Albert
Beveridge, "The
March of the
Flag" (1898)

in 1914, and the estimated number of Christian converts in China jumped from 5,000 in 1870 to nearly 100,000 in 1900. Although the number of converts was much less than missionaries hoped, this tiny fraction of the Chinese population included young reformist intellectuals who,

steeped in Western ideas, helped overthrow the Manchu dynasty in 1912. Economic relations between China and the United States increased roughly at the same rate as missionary activity.

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Politics: Manipulating Public Opinion

Although less significant than the other factors, politics also played a role. As in the past, public opinion on international issues shaped presidential politics. The psychological tensions and economic hardships of the 1890s depression jarred national self-confidence. Foreign adventures then, as now, provided a distraction from domestic turmoil and promised to restore patriotic pride and win votes.

This process was helped by the growth of a highly competitive popular press, the penny daily newspapers, which brought international issues before a mass readership. When New York City newspapers, notably William Randolph Hearst's *Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *World*, competed in stirring up public support for the Cuban rebels against Spain, politicians dared not ignore the outcry. Daily reports of

Spanish atrocities in 1896 and 1897 kept public moral outrage constantly before President McKinley. His Democratic opponent, William Jennings Bryan, entered the fray, advocating American intervention in Cuba on moral grounds of a holy war to help the oppressed. Bryan even raised a regiment of Nebraska volunteers for war, but the Republican administration kept him far from battle and therefore far from the headlines.

Politics, then, joined profits, patriotism, and piety in motivating the expansionism of the 1890s. These four impulses interacted to produce the Spanish-American War, the annexation of the Philippine Islands and subsequent war, and the energetic foreign policy of President Theodore Roosevelt.

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Profits: Searching for Overseas Markets

Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana bragged in 1898 that "American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours." Americans such as Beveridge revived older dreams of an American commercial empire in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. American businessmen saw huge profits beckoning in heavily populated Latin America and Asia, and they wanted to get their share of these markets, as well as access to the sugar, coffee, fruits, oil, rubber, and minerals that were abundant in these lands.

Understanding that commercial expansion required a stronger navy and coaling stations and colonies, business interests began to shape diplomatic and military strategy. Senator Orville Platt of Connecticut said in 1893: "A policy of isolationism did well enough when we were an embryo nation, but today things are different." But not all businesspeople in the 1890s liked commercial expansion or a vigorous foreign policy. Some preferred traditional trade with Canada and Europe rather than risky new ventures in Asia and Latin America. Some thought it more important to recover from the depression than to annex distant islands.

the depression prompted businesses to expand into new markets to sell surplus goods. The tremendous growth of American production in the post-Civil War years made expansionism more attractive than drowning in overproduction, cutting prices, or laying off workers, which would increase social unrest. The newly formed National Association of Manufacturers, which led the way, proclaimed in 1896 that "the trade centers of Central and South America are natural markets for American products."

Despite the 1890s depression, products spewed from American factories at a staggering rate. The United States moved from fourth place in the world in manufacturing in 1870 to first place in 1900, doubling the number of factories and tripling the value of farm output. The United States led the world in railroad construction and such mass-produced technological products as agricultural machinery, sewing machines, electrical implements, cash registers, and telephones. Manufactured goods grew nearly fivefold between 1895 and 1914. The total value of American exports tripled, from \$434 million in 1866 to nearly \$1.5 billion in 1900. By 1914, exports had risen to \$2.5 billion, a 67 percent increase over 1900. The increased trade continued to go mainly to Europe rather than Asia. In 1900, for example, only 3 to 4 percent of U.S. exports went to China and Japan. But interest in Asian markets continued to grow (the number of American firms in China rose from 50 in 1870 to 550 by 1930), especially as agricultural output continued to increase and prices stayed low.

Investments followed a similar pattern. American direct investments abroad increased from about \$634 million to \$2.6 billion between 1897 and 1914. Although the greatest activity was in Britain, Canada, and Mexico, most attention focused on actual and potential investment in Latin America and Eastern Asia. Central American investment increased from \$21 million in 1897 to \$93 million by 1914, mainly in mines, railroads, and banana and coffee plantations. At the turn of the century came the formation and growth of America's largest multinational corporations: the United Fruit Company, Alcoa Aluminum, Du Pont, American Tobacco, and others. Initially slow to respond to investment and market opportunities abroad, these companies soon supported an aggressive foreign policy.