

CHAPTER 18

IMPERIALISM

BENCHMARK:

Analyze the reasons that countries gained control of territory through imperialism and the impact on people living in the territory that was controlled.

This benchmark addresses reasons for the rise of imperialism after 1877 and the impact imperialism had upon the people living in the territories that came under United States control. Imperialism is a policy used by strong countries to gain social, political, and economic control over foreign territories. During these years, the United States, along with its rise as the world's industrial leader, became a major world power rivaling European nations such as Britain and Germany. In particular, it is important to understand American imperialism in regions such as the Far East, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, and Latin America. You will also need to understand the causes and results of the Spanish-American War and the impact imperialism had on people in territories controlled by other nations.

★ REASONS FOR IMPERIALISM ★

From the earliest years of nationhood, many Americans looked for ways to expand the United States, both territorially and economically. But why do some nations engage in imperialistic expansion, while others become the controlled territory? Why did the United States, in particular, become increasingly expansionist and imperialistic in the period after Reconstruction?

Before the Civil War, most territorial expansion occurred within the North American continent. Up to around the 1890s, most Americans embraced an isolationist approach to foreign affairs. The United States was protected on both sides by vast oceans, and American citizens generally wanted to keep the rest of the world at arm's length.

Economic Growth

Shortly after Reconstruction (1880s–1890s), however, things began to change. By then, most of the continental United States had been settled, and the nation experienced an explosive period of business and industrial growth. By the turn of the century, the economy of the United States was the world's strongest. As a result, many business leaders and industrialists became much more interested in the outside world. Industrial and agricultural output grew rapidly to

the point where it became necessary for businesses to find foreign markets to sell their goods. Factory owners also needed to obtain certain raw materials not available in the United States for particular manufacturing processes.

Business leaders wanted the help of the United States government to expand their access to markets and raw materials. They hoped that through business dealings in foreign nations—supported by favorable economic and diplomatic policies—they would be able to continue to grow and prosper. In turn, politicians, often Republicans with close ties to business leaders, supported the use of foreign policy to achieve these goals. For example, both President Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts endorsed the use of diplomacy in the service of economic expansion and new markets.



Test Yourself

What economic factors following Reconstruction helped cause the rise of imperialism in the United States?

In his book, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (1890), Alfred T. Mahan, a naval officer and historian, supported the imperialistic beliefs and tendencies of several American leaders, including Roosevelt. Mahan argued that in order for a nation to have adequate access to markets and become a world power, it must possess a strong navy. Using the arguments of his influential book, military leaders persuaded Congress to provide funding for the strengthening of the United States Navy. They also encouraged government leaders to acquire islands to use as fueling and supply ports. Within ten years of the book's publication, the United States possessed the world's third largest navy.

Psychological Issues

Many Americans had other reasons, besides economic considerations, for supporting imperialism. Some people hoped that interest and involvement in foreign affairs would divert attention from worries and concerns about domestic problems.

Ideological Beliefs

Many people believed that the ideas of the British naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1822), who developed the theory of evolution and natural selection to explain the origins of plant and animal species and human beings, could be adapted to address economic, social, and political problems. In the United States, a growing interest in *Social Darwinism* increased support for imperialistic adventures. Darwin's idea of the “survival of the fittest” was misapplied to nations. According to the theory, only the strongest nations could survive and prosper. The United States, supporters of this view argued, would have to

become strong diplomatically, militarily, and economically, and acquire territories whenever and wherever possible.

In the 1840s, the idea of *manifest destiny* became part of the American political vocabulary. At that time, manifest destiny referred to the belief that it was the sacred duty of the United States to expand its institutions across the entire North American continent. John O'Sullivan, a magazine editor, coined the phrase in the mid-1840s when he wrote that "our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." By the 1890s, imperialists were eager to apply manifest destiny to the rest of the world and to acquire territories in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Religious Beliefs

Religious reasons also contributed to the growing popularity of imperialism during the last decades of the 19th century. Many American Protestants such as the Reverend Josiah Strong believed that Anglo-Saxons (white, English-speaking people) had a responsibility to colonize beyond American borders in order to spread Christianity and the American way of life. They supported imperialism because they believed it was their duty to take the benefits of their "superior" American society to less fortunate people in the world.



Test Yourself

What beliefs associated with Social Darwinism caused some Americans to support imperialistic policies?

Influence of the Press

Newspapers and magazines also fueled imperialist tendencies by publishing sensationalistic articles that featured exotic, faraway places. Jingoistic, or intensely nationalistic, stories in newspapers such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* advanced arguments for increased U.S. involvement in foreign affairs and the expansion of American territory.

Reasons Americans Supported Territorial Expansion Through Imperialism

Economic: Need for new markets and raw materials

Psychological: Diversion from domestic problems

Ideological: Social Darwinism misapplied to foreign affairs

Religious: Christian duty to spread Christianity and benefits of Western civilization

Political: Some politicians had ties to business interests that wanted new markets.

Strategic: Influenced by Mahan's book, military leaders wanted to build a strong navy and establish bases around the world.

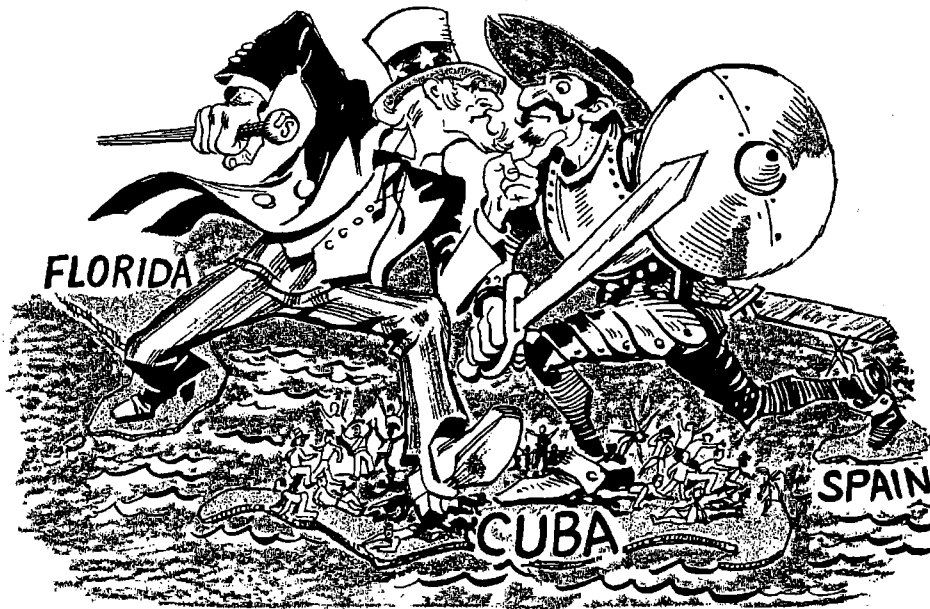
Media: Newspapers that supported an imperialistic foreign policy influenced many readers.

★ THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR ★

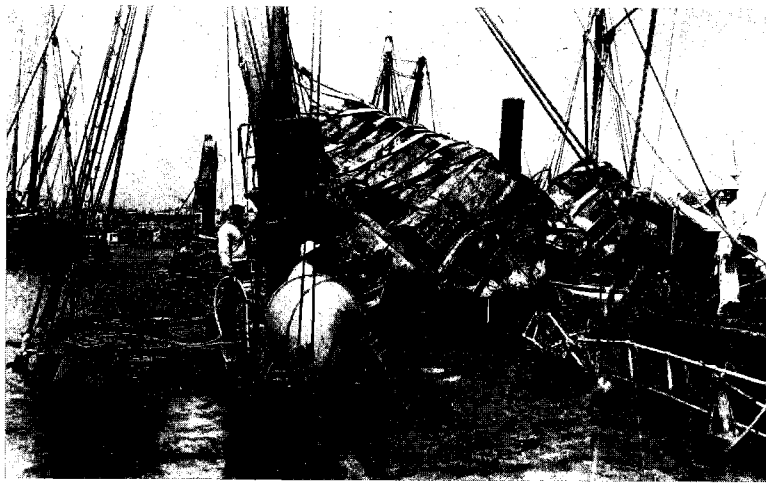
The event that most clearly demonstrates the imperialistic tendencies of the United States at the turn of the century is the Spanish-American War. Cuba had been a colony of Spain since the 16th century. By the 1890s, however, the Spanish Empire was in decline, and independence movements developed in many of its colonies. In 1895, Cuban rebels initiated a revolt against Spanish rule. As rebel attacks became more numerous and violent, Spanish officials retaliated with brutal measures. Between 1896 and 1898, about 100,000 Cuban civilians were killed by Spanish troops.

Cuba

Imperialistic-minded Americans had long desired to expand American control over Cuba, located just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. Refugees fleeing the Cuban civil war came to the United States and circulated stories, some truthful and some exaggerated, about Spanish atrocities against Cuban rebels and civilians. Hearst's *New York Journal* and Pulitzer's *New York World*, competing for



U.S.-Spanish tensions on the eve of war



Divers investigate the wreckage of the *U.S.S. Maine*.

sales and circulation, printed lurid, sensational stories of atrocities in Cuba that outraged many Americans and inflamed public opinion against Spain. Public pressure to support the Cuban rebels increased throughout President Grover Cleveland's administration and continued when William McKinley took office in 1897. At first, the president resisted public opinion, which was incited by the "yellow" press, and refused to intervene.

"Remember the Maine!" On February 15, 1898, the American battleship *U.S.S. Maine*, anchored in Havana harbor, exploded, killing over 260 sailors. The press controlled by Hearst, Pulitzer, and others immediately blamed the Spanish for sinking the ship. To this day, the exact cause of the explosion remains unknown. President McKinley demanded that Spain agree to a cease-fire with the Cuban rebels, which it did. Many Americans, however, who were influenced by the yellow press, clamored for war. No longer able to resist public opinion, in April 1898, McKinley sent a war message to Congress that presented four reasons why the United States should provide military support to the Cuban rebels:

1. "... to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there. . . ."
2. "We owe it to our citizens in Cuba to afford them . . . protection and indemnity for life and property. . . ."
3. "The right to intervene may be justified by the very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people and the wanton destruction of property and devastation of the island."
4. "The present condition of affairs in Cuba is a constant menace to our peace and entails upon this Government an enormous expense."

Congress responded on April 20, 1898, with a joint resolution authorizing the use of American force. Congress also passed the Teller Amendment, which stated that the United States would not annex or take political control of Cuba. The amendment promised that Cuba would have its independence after the fighting ended.

The Philippines

The fighting began not in Cuba but in the Philippines. In anticipation of hostilities, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt had ordered the newly enlarged American navy to the Philippines, which had been a Spanish colony for nearly four centuries. Inspired by the battle cry, "Remember the *Maine!*," Commodore George Dewey and the American fleet steamed into Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, and quickly overwhelmed the Spanish navy. On land, American troops and Filipino rebels joined forces to attack the Spanish troops. With the fall of the city of Manila on August 13, the United States now controlled the Philippines.

Victory in Cuba. The U.S. invasion of Cuba encountered several difficulties. Composed largely of volunteers, American troops were poorly trained and ill-equipped. In fact, more American troops died from disease than in battle. Over 5,000 Americans died from diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, and malaria. Fewer than 400 died as a result of fighting.

The fighting in Cuba lasted over four months. In May, a Spanish fleet entered the harbor at Santiago. American ships moved in quickly to blockade the coast and trap the Spanish fleet in the harbor. One month later, American soldiers landed in Cuba, supporting Cuban forces that kept Spanish troops at bay. On July 1, American and Cuban troops, including Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders and African American troops from the Ninth and Tenth cavalries, defeated Spanish forces in the Battle of San Juan Hill. Two days later, the Spanish fleet attempted to break out of Santiago Bay and was destroyed by the American navy. Spain realized that it could no longer defend the island. The fighting ended in August, and Spain asked for terms of surrender.



Theodore Roosevelt (center with glasses) with the Rough Riders

Peace Terms. Spain and the United States signed a formal peace treaty in Paris on December 10, 1898, ending what Secretary of State John Hay called “a splendid little war.” The treaty gave almost all of Spain’s colonies—Cuba, the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico—to the United States.

Revolt in the Philippines. The defeat of the Spanish in the Philippines sparked a contentious debate in the United States about what to do with the island. Imperialists in the United States wanted to annex the Philippines. By contrast, anti-imperialists believed that the United States should follow the principles of the Declaration of Independence and grant the Filipino people their independence. The Treaty of Paris called for annexation, but the United States Senate had to ratify the treaty with a two-thirds vote. Anti-imperialists mounted a spirited campaign to defeat the treaty, but the Senate narrowly approved it. The Philippines became an American territory.

Many Filipino citizens were outraged that the United States would free them from Spanish control but then annex the islands. Emilio Aguinaldo, who had fought with U.S. forces against Spain, led a guerrilla war against the new occupiers. Americans were not prepared for the stiff resistance of Aguinaldo’s Filipino rebels. Before they finally defeated the Filipino forces in 1902, thousands of American and Filipino guerrillas died.



Test Yourself

Why did Filipinos resist American occupation of their nation?

U.S. troops occupied Cuba until 1909. The Teller Amendment eventually allowed Cuba to gain its independence. Congress, however, approved the annexation of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam, making the United States a world power rivaling the strongest European powers. The Philippines later became independent, but Guam and Puerto Rico remain territories of the United States today.



Test Yourself

Why did Cuba gain its independence after the war, while the Philippines and Guam became U.S. territories?

★ THE ANNEXATION OF HAWAII ★

In the 1820s, American missionaries arrived in the Hawaiian islands in order to spread Christianity. The islands’ good harbors and strategic location attracted Americans involved in the whaling industry. About a decade later, American business leaders introduced sugarcane farming and gradually developed large plantations, bringing in thousands of Japanese and Chinese laborers. Before long, American interests owned much of the land and came to have great influence in Hawaiian business and political affairs.

Although the United States recognized Hawaii as an independent nation in 1842, American influence in its affairs continued to grow. When the American government allowed the importing of Hawaiian sugar into the U.S. with no tariffs, profits from sugar production in the islands increased rapidly, and American plantation owners in Hawaii benefited enormously. In 1887, the United States negotiated with Hawaiian officials to obtain permission to build a naval base at Pearl Harbor in exchange for renewal of the favorable no-tariff agreement. Since many Hawaiians depended on plantation work for their livelihood, Hawaiian leaders agreed to the arrangement.

In the 1890s, American-based sugar producers, who had to compete against growers in Hawaii, persuaded Congress to end the tariff exemption. The growers now had to pay tax on the sugar they shipped to the United States. In order to be competitive in the American market, they dropped the price they charged for their sugar. Their profits also fell, and they faced financial ruin.

The growers looked for a solution, and they devised a plan to make Hawaii part of the United States. If the islands were an American territory, they would not have to pay the sugar tariff, and their profitability would be restored. In 1893, the sugar planters—with support of U.S. Marines—led a revolt against Queen Liliuokalani, who had started to take away some of the power held by Americans in the islands. American business leaders set up a provisional government headed by Sanford Dole, which was quickly recognized by the chief American diplomat in Hawaii. This new Hawaiian government wrote a treaty of annexation, hoping that the Congress would approve it and make Hawaii a territory of the United States. President Grover Cleveland opposed the treaty. When William McKinley became president in 1897, he pushed for the treaty's ratification. In addition to supporting American business interests in the islands, McKinley believed that Hawaii's strategic location in the Pacific and the naval base at Pearl Harbor were important to the defense of the United States. Anti-imperialists were able to delay ratification for over a year, but in 1898, Congress voted in favor of the treaty and annexation. In 1900, Hawaii officially became a territory of the United States. It became a state in 1959.

★ THE OPEN DOOR POLICY IN CHINA ★

American imperialists also eyed the Far East for expansion of trade and influence. Secretary of State John Hay feared that other nations, especially European powers, were gaining too much power in China. Throughout the 1890s, France, Germany, Great Britain, Russia, and Japan established centers of trade in China called *spheres of influence*. Each nation had the power to control trade and commerce within its particular sphere or region. Hay worried that these nations would gain an economic advantage by preventing the United States from sharing in the very profitable Chinese trade.

In 1899, Hay sent a diplomatic note to nations that had spheres of influence in China. He asked those nations to agree to an "Open Door" policy for all nations in China. This Open Door policy meant that all nations would share equal trading privileges in China. The nations that received Hay's note did not want to accept a proposal that would benefit the United States at their expense, but they did not reject the policy outright.

The Boxer Rebellion

At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese nationalists led by members of the Society of Harmonious Fists, also known as the Boxers, staged a revolt against foreigners in China. They killed several Christian missionaries and attacked foreign settlements throughout the nation, trapping hundreds of Westerners in the city of Beijing. In August 1900, foreign troops, including some from the United States, defeated the Boxers and rescued the people trapped in the city. Victorious foreign governments forced the Chinese to sign favorable trade agreements and pay indemnities to insure against any future damages.



Animals representing different nations want their piece of China.

Fearing that foreign troops in China might try to occupy the nation, Hay sent a second Open Door note to the invading nations. In the note, he stated that China's independence and territorial borders should be respected, and that the United States still supported the policy that all nations have access to "equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese empire." These Open Door notes set U.S. policy in China for several administrations after McKinley's.

★ "BIG-STICK" DIPLOMACY ★

On September 6, 1901, nearly six months after his second inauguration, President McKinley was shot by an anarchist during a visit to the Pan American Exhibition in Buffalo, New York. McKinley died eight days later. Vice President Theodore Roosevelt became the nation's leader. Roosevelt, a hero of the Battle of San Juan Hill in Cuba, was a proponent of American expansionism. He once said that the United States in foreign policy should "speak softly and carry a big stick." The press quickly attached the "big-



Illustration depicting the fatal shooting of President McKinley in 1901

stick" label to his administration's foreign policy. Roosevelt believed the United States should be a world power, and his aggressive foreign policy made American imperialists happy. Anti-imperialists, by contrast, wanted the United States to maintain its tradition of not being involved in global affairs.

★ THE PANAMA CANAL ★

Many people wanted to build a canal through Central America that would connect the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean. Such a canal meant that ships in the Atlantic Ocean would not have to sail around the South American continent to reach the Pacific. In 1878, a French company began building a canal across the isthmus of Panama, but disease and engineering problems forced it to abandon the project. Now that the United States owned territories ranging from the Philippines in the Pacific to Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, Roosevelt believed it was a strategic necessity to revive the canal project and provide more rapid travel to the nation's most remote bases.

At first, Roosevelt's plans were frustrated because Colombia controlled Panama at that time and refused to reach an agreement with the United States on building a canal through its territory. In 1903, frustrated by lack of progress in negotiations with the Colombian government, Roosevelt provided American support to an uprising in Panama. The Panamanian rebels quickly succeeded in freeing their nation from Colombian control and established an independent government. In 1903, the government signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty with the United States, giving the Americans control of a canal zone through the isthmus. Construction on the canal began in 1904, and the project was completed ten years later. It remains one of the world's great engineering feats.



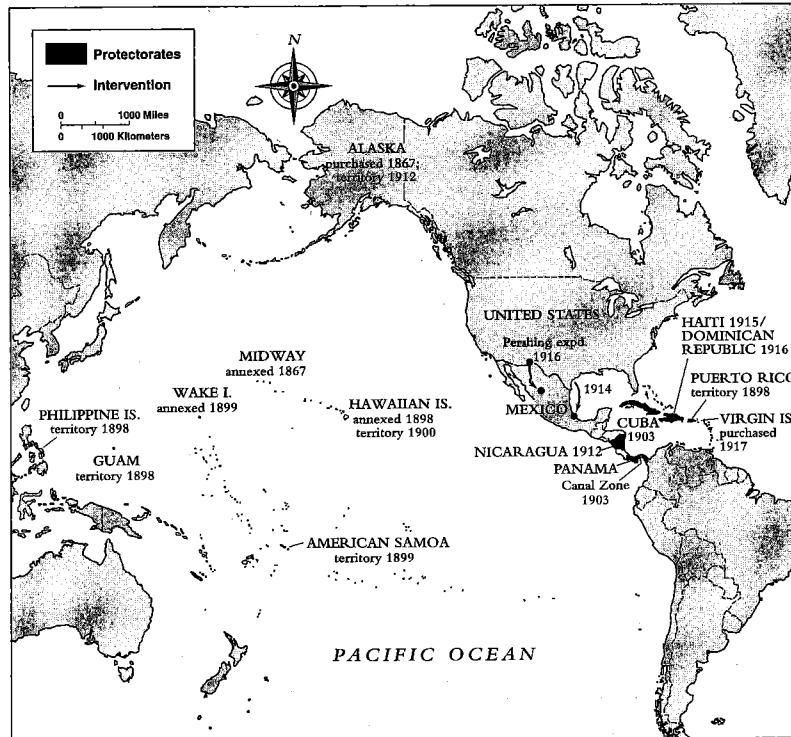
President Roosevelt (center) oversees construction of the Panama Canal.

While many Americans applauded Roosevelt's efforts to build the canal, anti-imperialists and Latin Americans resented his aggressive tactics. In 1925, Congress voted to pay Colombia \$25 million for the loss of Panama.

★ THE ROOSEVELT COROLLARY TO THE MONROE DOCTRINE ★

Latin America was the scene of other examples of Roosevelt's big-stick approach to foreign policy. In the early 1900s, several Central American nations suffered from financial woes and owed debts to European creditors. In 1902, the British sent a warship to Venezuela to collect what was owed to them. Another financial crisis brewed in the Dominican Republic (then called Santo Domingo) in 1904, and it appeared that other European nations might send forces there. Roosevelt believed such actions by European nations would violate the Monroe Doctrine (1823), which held that European nations could not establish colonies or intervene in the Western Hemisphere. In December 1904, Roosevelt issued a policy that became known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. This policy stated that the United States would exercise "international police power" in response to chronic misconduct by any nation in the Western Hemisphere. Roosevelt threatened to send troops to collect taxes in Central American nations for other nations until the debts were paid.

Over the course of the next two decades, based on Theodore Roosevelt's big stick diplomacy, William Howard Taft's "dollar diplomacy," and Woodrow Wilson's "moral diplomacy," the United States sent forces into Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Many people in these Latin American nations resented U.S. intervention in their affairs, and these actions fostered poor relations throughout the region for many decades to come.



Territorial acquisitions of the United States, 1867–1917

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- There are several reasons in addition to economic considerations that led to the rise of American imperialism, including ideological, religious, political, strategic, and humanitarian.
- Many Americans were anti-imperialistic and opposed U.S. efforts to gain territory overseas.
- The United States became a world power following the Spanish-American War, possessing territories such as the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico.
- Many citizens in territories controlled or acquired by the United States resented their loss of freedom and self-determination. Some violently resisted, such as the people in the Philippines.
- American business interests engineered the acquisition of Hawaii as a U.S. territory.
- Theodore Roosevelt's "big-stick" diplomacy led to the building of the Panama Canal and to interventions in several Central American nations' affairs.
- Secretary of State John Hay's "Open Door" notes to nations that held spheres of influence in China set U.S. policy there for many years to come.

EXERCISES

CHECKING WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. What change in the United States after Reconstruction was a factor in the rise of imperialism?
 - A. Thousands of people were killed in the Civil War.
 - B. Business and industry suffered a severe decline.
 - C. Businesses required foreign sources for raw materials and markets in which to sell their products.
 - D. People feared that European nations were an imminent threat to invade the United States.

2. In his book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (1890), Alfred T. Mahan argued that
 - A. the United States was so well protected by both oceans that a strong navy was unnecessary
 - B. most powerful empires relied upon armies rather than naval power
 - C. the U.S. Navy in 1890 was already strong enough and should not be enlarged
 - D. to become a world power, a nation must possess a strong navy.

3. Which idea associated with Social Darwinism led to increased support for imperialism?
 - A. survival of the fittest
 - B. self-determination
 - C. self-government
 - D. anticolonialism

4. Supporters of imperialism would be most likely to use which of the following ideas to argue in favor of territorial acquisition?
 - A. universal suffrage
 - B. manifest destiny
 - C. self-determination
 - D. freedom of religion

5. Which of the following provided for Cuba's independence after the Spanish-American War?
 - A. the Teller Amendment
 - B. the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty
 - C. Social Darwinism
 - D. manifest destiny

6. What event caused American intervention in Cuba against Spanish colonial rule?
 - A. the Battle of San Juan Hill
 - B. the Battle of Manila Bay
 - C. the passage of the Teller Amendment
 - D. the sinking of the battleship *Maine*

7. Which U.S. president was associated with "big-stick" diplomacy?
 - A. William McKinley
 - B. Theodore Roosevelt
 - C. Grover Cleveland
 - D. Woodrow Wilson

8. Which of the following clearly demonstrated resentment and resistance of colonized people against an occupying nation?
 - A. the signing of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty
 - B. the American-led rebellion in Hawaii
 - C. the rise of the "yellow press" in the late 1890s
 - D. Aguinaldo's actions in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War

9. John Hay's Open Door notes are most closely associated with
 - A. spheres of influence in China

- B. exemption from sugar tariffs for Hawaiian growers
 - C. the Teller Amendment on Cuba
 - D. the Panama Canal Zone.
10. The Roosevelt Corollary was an expansion of the
- A. Bill of Rights
 - B. Teller Amendment
 - C. Monroe Doctrine
 - D. Treaty of Paris (1898).

USING WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. Describe a scenario in which an American president might invoke the Roosevelt Corollary today.
2. Do an Internet search for "imperialism." In what context is the term used today?

What references are made to the United States regarding imperialism? Make a list of topics.

THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. Write a letter to the editor in which you take a position on going to war in Cuba or on the acquisition of the Philippines as a U.S. territory following the Spanish-American War. State your view and support it with arguments based on events of the time.
2. If you were a Filipino living in the Philippines in 1900, how would you have felt about Emilio Aguinaldo's revolt against American occupation troops? Explain your answer.