POPEYE OF THE WESTERN WORLD
CHARACTERISTICS OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

- Intervention
- Territorial acquisition
- Belligerency
EXPANSION

• The thirteen colonies that became the United States were born of the expansionist impulses of the British Empire. Then those thirteen colonies rebelled and won independence from an imperial power.

• Ironically the U.S. eventually developed into an empire surpassing the greatest projections of British hegemony. Today the U.S. asserts its economic, political, and military power worldwide.

• Changing interactions among ideology, economics, military strength, and domestic politics fueled American continental and overseas expansion.

• Desire for land, natural resources, and access to new markets

• Industrial, transportation, and market revolutions accelerated pressures for expansion
EXCEPTIONALISM

“American Progress, or Manifest Destiny” by John Gast, 1872
IDEOLOGIES OF EXPANSION

• John Winthrop (1630): “Men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the Lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people upon us.”

• Herman Melville advocated continental and maritime expansion (1850): “We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world…. God has predestined … the rest of the nations must be in our rear.”

• Thomas Paine offered a secular argument for continental expansion (1776): “We have it in our power to begin the world again.”
EXTENDING THE SPHERE

• Madison contended that the only way to sustain a republican government was to ensure an abundance of resources and social space.

• Jefferson argued that expansion is necessary to avoid class conflict and to provide for population growth.

• Madison (1787): “This form of government, in order to effect its purposes, must operate not within a small but extensive sphere.”

• Jefferson (1809): “I am persuaded no constitution was ever before as well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government.”
CHALLENGES

• Managing a large, diverse republic
• Subjugating Native Americans
• Louisiana Purchase
• War of conquest against Mexico
• Struggle over slavery in the territories (expansion vs. containment)
• Reconstructing the Union
• Rebuilding and rejuvenating the industrial economy
• New industrial leaders demanded overseas markets
MAHAN

• Until very late in the nineteenth century Americans had devoted their attention to completing the nation’s “manifest destiny” and industrializing the country. By the time the Census Bureau announced the official end of the frontier in 1890, forward-looking Americans already noted possibilities abroad. Alfred Thayer Mahan’s book, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, had demonstrated that Britain’s strong navy transformed that country into a world power. Both major and lesser European powers inspired Americans with their empire-building through the acquisition of African and Far Eastern colonies. Businessmen craved profitable new markets, secure sources of raw materials, and lucrative investments. For many, the time seemed right for an expanded sphere of influence.
ORIGINS OF WAR

- Crisis in Spanish-American relations emerging from the Cuban rebellion against Spanish rule and Spain’s brutal but ineffective response
- Americans recalling their war for independence sympathized with Cuban rebels and demanded Cuban independence
- The “yellow press” led by Pulitzer and Hearst sensationalized Cuban heroism and Spanish atrocities and nourished the belief that America was destined to intervene for the sake of Cuban freedom
- Expansionists suggested that intervention offered opportunity to turn Caribbean into an American sea and to fulfill our “manifest destiny”
- Pressure from U.S. businessmen to secure American property and investments
- Sinking of the *Maine*
- DeLome letter
- Ideology of imperialism and jingoism
- American idealism and nationalism
- McKinley’s failure to prevent war
IDEOLOGY OF IMPERIALISM

• International Darwinism
• Sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority and the “white man’s burden”
• Politicians such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, and geopolitical theorists Brook Adams and Homer C. Lea expressed the view that a strong nation required overseas markets, coaling stations, and colonies to play its proper role in the “great game” of international power politics.
“REMEMBER THE MAINE!”

- The explosion which sank the U.S.S. *Maine*, claiming the lives of 260 American sailors, in February 1898 was the spark that inflamed war fever in the U.S. Once a U.S. Navy court of inquiry asserted that the ship had been sunk by an external explosion, war was almost unavoidable. American public opinion was clearly convinced of Spain’s guilt and demanded vengeance. Historians later revealed new evidence exonerating Spain. In 1976 retired Admiral H.G. Rickover, after a detailed examination of the *Maine*’s wreckage, concluded that an internal explosion damaged the ship. Rickover suggested that the explosion had been caused by the accidental ignition of gunpowder from the heat of a coal fire.
CHRONOLOGY

1893
- January – U.S. Marines assist American businessmen in overthrowing Queen Lil’
- March – President Cleveland withdraws the treaty, submitted by his predecessor, which would have annexed Hawaii.

1894
- July – Congress imposes tariffs on imported Cuban sugar, contributing to an economic depression in Cuba.

1895
- February – A new revolt against Spanish rule breaks out in Cuba.
- July – The United States forces Britain to back down in a dispute with Venezuela. U.S. leaders declare that their country is “practically sovereign” in the Western Hemisphere.
CHRONOLOGY

1896
• February – Spanish General Weyler establishes “reconcentration” camps in Cuba in an attempt to put down the Cuban revolt.
• May – Spain rejects an American offer to help end the conflict in Cuba.
• August – A revolt against Spanish rule breaks out in the Philippines.
• November – Republicans win control of Congress and the White House.

1897
• June – President McKinley submits a new treaty to the Senate to annex Hawaii.
• November – The Spanish government recalls General Weyler and eases its harsh measures against Cuban civilians.
CHRONOLOGY

1898

• February – A private letter from the Spanish ambassador to Washington criticizing McKinley is printed in American newspapers.
• The U.S.S. Maine sinks in Havana harbor.
• March – Congress approves McKinley’s request for $50 million to begin preparations for war.
• April – Spain proposes a truce in Cuba but rejects U.S. offers to mediate the Cuban revolt.
• Congress proclaims Cuba independent and authorizes McKinley to use force.
• Spain declares war on the United States.
• May – U.S. warships destroy the Spanish fleet in Manila harbor.
• June – Guam is occupied by the U.S. Navy.
• An American invasion force lands in Cuba.
• July – U.S. forces overcome Spanish defenses guarding Santiago, Cuba.
• U.S. warships destroy Spain’s Caribbean fleet.
• Spanish forces in Puerto Rico surrender.
• Congress approves the annexation of Hawaii.
• The Spanish government requests peace negotiations.
CHRONOLOGY

• August – The U.S. and Spain sign a preliminary peace treaty.
• U.S. and Filipino forces capture Manila.
• October – McKinley sends a negotiating team to Paris to finalize a peace treaty with Spain.
• The Anti-Imperialist League is organized in the U.S.
• November – U.S. negotiators demand the United States be given full control of the Philippines.
• December – Spain agrees to U.S. demands, signing the Treaty of Paris of 1898.

1899
• February – Fighting breaks out between Filipino nationalists and U.S. forces occupying the Philippines.
• The Senate ratifies the Treaty of Paris of 1898.
• September – The United States reaffirms the “open door” policy toward China.
CHRONOLOGY

1901
• March – Emilio Aguinaldo, leader of the Filipino nationalists, is captured by U.S. forces. Aguinaldo pledges his allegiance to the U.S.

1934
• March – U.S. statute providing for Philippine independence after a ten-year transitional period of Commonwealth government signed by President Franklin Roosevelt.

1935
• November – Philippine Commonwealth is established. The U.S. promises to grant the Philippines independence within ten years.

1941
• December – Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, prompting the U.S. to enter World War II.

1942
• May – Japan captures the Philippines from U.S. forces.

1944
• October – The U.S. recaptures the Philippines from Japan.

1946
• July – The U.S. grants the Philippines complete independence.
“A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR”

• The Spanish-American War was fought as an idealistic humanitarian crusade to liberate Cuba and it served as an outlet for Americans’ aggressive impulses caused by the “psychic crisis” of a changing America in the 1890s.

• In his address to Congress on April 11, 1898, President McKinley highlighted four reasons for American intervention in Cuba: (1) “To put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and miseries now existing there”; (2) “to afford our citizens in Cuba protection and indemnity for life and property”; (3) to avoid “very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people, and by 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 … where our traditional vessels are liable to seizure and are seized at our very door by war ships of a foreign nation, the expenditures of filibustering and irritating questions and entanglements thus arising.”
Imperialists’ beliefs and assumptions:
- Just as destiny guided our nation across the North American continent, so now it points to expansion southward and eastward across the seas.
- God has bestowed a special mission on the American people, choosing us to bring progress, Christian virtues, republican government, and order to distant and long-suffering lands. For the Filipinos, annexation by the U.S. offers them their best, and perhaps only, hope of creating a stable, effective government.
- Our nation’s continued prosperity depends on finding new markets overseas to absorb America’s surplus production.

Republican Senator Albert Beveridge (IN) captured imperialist sentiment in his speech of February 15, 1899: “The Republic never retreats… The Republic is the highest form of civilization, and civilization must advance…. The Philippines are ours forever…. And now God has given us the Pacific empire for civilized administration…. Rebellion against the authority of the flag must be crushed without delay,… And, besides, this Republic must have a mighty navy in any event. And new markets secured, new enterprises opened, new resources in timber, mines and products of the tropics acquired, and the vitalization of all our industries which will follow, will pay back a thousandfold all the government spends in discharging the highest duty to which the Republic may be called…. And so God leads, we follow the flag, and the Republic never retreats.”

Regeneration through aggression and violence
• Originally, President McKinley had claimed it would be “criminal aggression” to annex the Philippines. However, he told the story of his conversion to a group of visiting imperialists, the missionary committee of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Essentially he argued that the Filipinos were “unfit for self-government” and that the U.S. must fulfill its mission to “uplift,” “civilize,” and “Christianize” them.
ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE

• Anti-imperialists opposed expansion because they believed it would threaten our “democratic” values.
• The “anti-imperialists”, like the “imperialists,” often had racist motivations.
• Anti-imperialists’ beliefs and assumptions:
  – Imposing our will on a foreign country violates the spirit of America’s most fundamental values.
  – As American leaders have known from the earliest days of the republic, the U.S. should steer clear of the evil intrigues of the Old World.
  – The American form of government grew out of our country’s unique experience. It’s not something that can be transplanted into the soil of an alien culture.
• Supporting arguments include:
  – Establishing overseas colonies will be a drain on our government and offer few economic or military advantages in return.
  – Bringing nearly ten million Filipinos under U.S. control will aggravate our country’s racial problems and undercut the position of American workers by opening up a new set of anti-democratic, militaristic values.
  – Protecting an overseas empire will entangle the U.S. in alliances with other imperial powers and eventually draw us into war.
  – Annexing territory for the purpose of colonialism rather than statehood will corrupt our political system by creating a new class of subjects denied the benefits of citizenship.
Senator Ben Tillman (SC): “You are undertaking to annex and make a component part of this government islands inhabited by ten millions of the colored race, one half or more of whom are barbarians of the lowest type. It is to the injection into the body politic of the United States of that vitiated blood, that debased ignorant people, that we object.”

Carl Schurz, newspaper editor: “I warn the American people that a democracy cannot deny its faith as to the vital conditions of its being—it cannot long play the king over subject populations without creating within itself ways of thinking and habits of action most dangerous to its own vitality.”
TR AND THE CULT OF HEROIC VIRILITY

• TR embodied many of the core values of his time. Although often very controversial, TR enjoyed immense popularity, suggesting that most Americans shared his values. In 1897, as assistant secretary of the navy, TR said: “No danger exists of an over-development of warlike spirit; the danger is of precisely the opposite character. A wealthy nation, slothful, timid, or unwieldy, is an easy prey for any people which still retains the most valuable of all qualities, the soldierly virtues. Peace is a goddess only when she comes with a sword girt on the thigh. The ship of state can be steered safely only when it is always possible to bring her against any foe.”

Values: adventure, strength, rugged individualism, Social Darwinism, heroism, justice, etc.
“THE AMERICAN CENTURY”

• America waged war against Spain to “liberate” Cuba and for the cause of honor and humanity, but in the process it acquired an empire that extended from the Caribbean to the Pacific. Ultimately the U.S. somehow became a colonial master in the Philippines. Increasingly, the reluctant colossus grew quite accustomed to exerting its power worldwide as it discovered ambitions it never thought it had.

• The Spanish-American War of 1898 was the culmination of a great wave of American nationalism. It marked the first year of the “American century” as the U.S. emerged an international power. An era of expansionism was born.

• American hegemony brought rapid improvements in living conditions, education, institutions of self-government, sanitation, and health care.
QUAGMIRE

- Americans handily the Spanish occupying force in the Philippines and claimed the country as its own. Within a few months of the Philippines “liberation,” the United States found itself fighting a rebellion against the new occupiers.

- The conflict against Filipino insurgents degenerated into a bloody quagmire lasting three years, involving 126,000 American troops, and costing over 4,000 American lives. The insurgents suffered 16,000 casualties, while 200,000 civilians perished as a result of famine, pestilence, or the misfortune of being caught too close to the fighting. The war cost the U.S. $600 million before the insurgents were subdued.
FREEDOM FIGHTERS

- Guerrilla warfare
- Hit-and-run tactics
- Knew the land (jungle terrain) much better
- Usually gained support of peasants
- Accustomed to climate
- Terrorism
- Waning support for America on the homefront

Emilio Aguinaldo
LESSONS

- Isolate guerrillas through the use of “strategic hamlets,” “free-fire zones,” “search and destroy missions,” “reconcentrado camps, the fortification of small strong points, small-unit infantry actions, divide and conquer strategies, etc.
- Pressured guerrillas to keep them off-balance, short of supplies, constantly on the run, suffering from sickness, hunger, and declining popular support
- Atrocities committed by both sides
- Fortunately for U.S. forces, the insurgents had to operate in isolated islands.
- Improved logistics, tropical medicine, communications, etc.
- Fair and equitable civil government, civic reforms, and “benevolent pacification”
- The costly lessons Americans learned in our first Southeast Asian war could have been used in Vietnam sixty years later. But as the old adage suggests, those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.
“HELP POPEYE, HELP!”

- Sometimes it seems that wherever there is a problem in the world the U.S. comes to the rescue, just like Popeye. However, Americans sometimes fail to face the facts that a superpower has its limits.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


