

The Expansion of the Empire

From the first days of English settlement, the boundaries of the New World were shaped by expansionist policies that pushed out the Indians, drove out the French and the Spanish, and eventually overwhelmed the Mexicans. When we examine foreign policy from this perspective, it is clear that the late nineteenth century represented, not a revolutionary departure from past policies, but an evolutionary shift. How else can we explain the three international wars and the untold number of wars between the colonists and the Indians that preceded the American Revolution among “the 103 military interventions in other countries between 1798 and 1895”?

Despite the widespread support for “progress” surrounding the quest for empire, many Americans spoke out against the shortsighted goals of expansionist, interventionist, and imperialistic policymakers. Without these voices, students may inaccurately believe that expanding the empire was a universally accepted and supported goal of all Americans. Our goal, then, is to divest our students of this mythical belief and to introduce them to the eloquent voices of resistance to empire.

Document-Based Questions

CALIXTO GARCIA

1. What are General Garcia’s complaints? Do you think they are legitimate? How do you think the United States government justified its actions in regard to General Garcia?
2. What is your impression of Garcia and his followers? How and why were the descriptions of uncivilized, savage, and barbarian applied to them?
3. Why would the victorious United States government reappoint the same Spanish authorities who had been in Cuba prior to the revolution?

LEWIS H. DOUGLASS

1. Why did some African Americans oppose the presidency and policies of William McKinley?
2. To what and to whom is Lewis H. Douglass referring when he writes about “that section of the country from which this administration accepts dictation and to the tastes of which the President, undoubtedly, caters”? How do the voices in other chapters of this book reinforce this assertion?
3. To what governmental hypocrisy does Douglass refer in this document? Do you agree? Explain.

THE ATLANTA, GEORGIA, A.M.E. CHURCH

1. Do you agree with the author that blacks should not enter the army because they have no social, economic, or political stake in the United States?
2. Why would “a Cuban from Havana” be “compelled to ride” in a Jim Crow car? What was his reaction to segregation?
3. Why does the author view the flag as a “miserable dirty rag”?

I. D. BARNETT, ET AL.

1. I.D. Barnett notes that his people have suffered, “since your accession to office.” Given what you know about the Jim Crow South, was life more difficult under McKinley than under previous presidents? Explain.
2. What is the author’s grievance with the administration in terms of Cuba?
3. How is the hypocrisy to which I.D. Barnett alludes similar to that addressed by Lewis Douglass?

SAMUEL CLEMENS (MARK TWAIN)

1. What is a satirist? Why is this essay an example of political satire?
2. Who are the heroes of Samuel Clemens’ essay? Why do you think the President and American newspapers were silent on the massacre of the Moros?
3. What forms of racism do you find described in Clemens’ essay?

SMEDLEY D. BUTLER

1. Why does Smedley Butler think that war is a “racket”? Why do you think he didn’t recognize this fact until he retired from the military?
2. What are the costs of the wars that are made by millionaires and billionaires?
3. This book was written thirty-seven years after the Spanish-American War. What might have prompted Butler to write this book on the eve of World War II?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 12, “The Expansion of Empire”

After reading Chapter 12 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are four possible main points.

1. Colonial expansion into the Pacific Ocean was the logical extension of manifest destiny.
2. Two of the primary goals of foreign policy at the turn of the century were to locate new markets for our surplus products and to gain access to raw materials and labor.
3. Although many American people supported United States imperialist ideology, a vocal and substantial minority of Americans belonging to every socioeconomic group opposed such policies.
4. Racist beliefs fueled many of the imperialist policies applied to Cuba and the Philippines.

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 12, “The Expansion of Empire” and in *A People’s History*, Chapter 12, “The Empire and the People”

If your students are also reading *A People’s History*, they should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points in Chapters 12 in both books. Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People’s History* are used together.

5. In the face of new foreign policies that enabled Americans to become an overseas colonial and commercial power in the Caribbean, in Latin America, in the Pacific Islands, and in Asia, not all Americans agreed with imperialism, and many were quite vocal in their opposition.
6. The promoters of imperialism believed that America was an exemplary model of economic, political, and spiritual development that should be extended to other peoples and nations that were not able to solve their own problems.
7. At the end of the Spanish American War, the United States had become a global colonial power.
8. The domestic and international costs of American imperialism at the turn of the Century were high.
9. The long-range repercussions of imperialist policies of this era are still being felt

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 12, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. Why did the United States want to intervene in Cuba? How did the United States government justify remaining in Cuba after the war?
2. Why do you think Secretary of State John Hay referred to the Spanish American war as “a splendid little war”?
3. Why did many Americans support the imperialistic actions discussed in this chapter?
4. How does Samuel Clemens’ line, “The splendid news appeared with splendid display-heads in every newspaper in this city,” reflect his opinion of President Theodore Roosevelt?
5. Why do you think President George W. Bush cited the invasion and occupation of the Philippines as a model for the Iraq occupation in 2003? What are the parallels between the two invasions?

6. How do the voices in this chapter support Smedley D. Butler's belief that "war is a racket"? What is a racket? Do you believe war is a racket? Explain.
7. What is a "war millionaire"? Do you think the rich have a great deal to gain by going to war? Why do ordinary people bear the brunt of war? Explain.
8. What is an "entangling alliance"?
9. Which of the voices you learned about in this chapter most or least resonated with you? How and why?

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 12 in both books. For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

10. Why do you think there was so much opposition to the war with the Philippines but very little to the war with Cuba?
11. Why do you think that Theodore Roosevelt wrote in 1897, "I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one"? Do you think we needed a war at the turn of the century? Why, or why not?
12. What was the Monroe Doctrine? How does it pave the way for the imperialistic foreign policies of the late nineteenth century?
13. What do you think the writer of the *Washington Post* editorial meant when he wrote that at the eve of the Spanish-American war, "The taste of Empire is in the mouth of the people" (*People's History*, p. 299)? Do you agree or disagree with his statement?
14. How does this chapter influence your understanding of Theodore Roosevelt as both a leader and a man?
15. What is the open-door-policy that Howard Zinn claims "became the dominant theme of American foreign policy in the twentieth century" (*People's History*, p. 301) ?
16. What "special interests" benefited from the wars with Cuba and the Philippines?

17. Why do you think there was so much “excitement” over the sinking of the *Maine*?
18. Why do you think that United States historians “have generally ignored the role of the Cuban rebels in the war” (*People’s History*, p. 309)? Why do you think there is little mention in traditional textbooks about the resistance of the Filipinos to the American occupation of the Philippines?
19. What was the Teller Amendment, and why was the United States able to circumvent its provisions after the war was over? Why do you think the Cubans eventually capitulated by agreeing to the Platt Amendment?

Evaluation Tools

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. A great deal of mythology surrounds the newspaper circulation wars waged by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer before, during, and after the war with Cuba. Find out as much as possible about both newspaper empires in the late nineteenth century and the power of both owners. Read articles in both newspapers leading up to war. Do you think the press was irresponsible in its coverage of the conflict in Cuba? Was it at least partially responsible for bringing the United States into war? Explain. Could this happen in the United States today?
2. Find out more about the Anti-Imperialist League. When was it founded? What were its goals and actions? How was it able to attract such well-known members of the upper class? Where and how was it most influential? Are there any organizational equivalents in the twenty-first century? If so, who do you think would be attracted to such organizations? How are their goals similar to and different from those organizations operating at the turn of the century? Explain.
3. In I.D. Barnett’s open letter to President William McKinley, written in

1899, he decries the fact that his messages to Congress contain “incomprehensible silence on the subject of our wrongs.” Examine President McKinley’s annual and other messages to Congress at the turn of the century. What are the primary topics of his discussions on domestic policy? On foreign policy? Are his primary interests any different from those of President Grover Cleveland, who preceded him in office, and President Theodore Roosevelt, who followed? How and why? Explain.

4. In his 1906 essay, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) describes his response to the “Moro Massacre.” The majority inhabitants of Moro Province—the independent Muslim Filipinos—refused to give in to United States leadership. Comparing the “uncivilized” Moros to American Indians, the United States military ordered them to submit or to be exterminated. By 1906, the Moros were defeated: 600 were killed in one battle, women and children included. Learn more about this conflict with the Moros. Find other primary accounts of the massacre. How do you think this incident has contributed to contemporary feelings about the United States in the Muslim-dominated part of the Philippines?
5. Read more of Mark Twain’s political essays written at the turn of the century. How do they illustrate an anti-imperialist stance? Then find various pro-imperialist essays from the time period. Compare and contrast their contents. Which do you find most or least persuasive? Explain.
6. After examining the sample from “103 interventions in the affairs of other countries between 1798 and 1895,” select one of these interventions for further research. How and why did the United States intervene? What were the results of such intervention? Did the American public generally support the government’s actions? Who spoke out against it? What have been the long-term repercussions of our intervention?
7. Find out more about the Haitian revolution and creation of the first black republic in 1803. What were the causes and consequences of the revolution on the Haitian people? What role did ordinary people play in the success of the revolution? What lessons did United States foreign policymakers learn from the revolution? What is the twenty-first-century relationship between the Haitian and the United States governments? Do you think this contemporary relationship has been shaped by the 1803 revolution? Explain.

8. Learn more about the origins of May Day celebrations in the United States and overseas. What was the original purpose of May Day? How was it celebrated? Is May Day still celebrated in the United States? Is it celebrated abroad? How and why?
9. Learn more about the annexation of Hawaii. Begin by examining the 1893 proposal to annex Hawaii at www.alohaquest.com/archive/treaty_annexation_1893.htm; then the 1897 formal letter of protest at www.hawaiian-kingdom.org/protest_1898.shtml; and finally the congressional joint resolution at www.hawaiiankingdom.org/us-joint-resolution-1898.shtml. Using a search engine of choice, find other primary documents that both oppose and support the annexation of Hawaii. What does reading these primary documents add to your understanding about the annexation of Hawaii? Then learn more about recent attempts by some Native Hawaiians to become independent and regain their sovereignty.
10. Read George Washington's Farewell Address. What, in President Washington's words, are the consequences of involving ourselves in the affairs of other nations? Have other presidents followed his advice? How realistic was it at the turn of the twentieth century to avoid "entangling alliances"? How realistic is it in the twenty-first century?

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Scholars have written many books and articles about the racism that propelled the United States into war with Cuba and the Philippines, and kept both peoples under the colonial yoke of the United States years after their "liberation." Using evidence from the readings, defend or refute the assertion of racism.
2. Using examples from the readings, explain how the imperialistic actions of the United States government in regard to the wars with Cuba and the Philippines continue to influence our relations with those countries today.
3. Using examples from the readings, support or refute the idea that war is profitable. Who profits most from war? Who profits least?
4. Drawing from examples in the readings, explain who supported expansionist foreign policies at the turn of the twentieth century. What was the basis of that support? Who resisted such policies and why? Do you see any

parallels between early-twentieth-century expansionist foreign policies and those of the early twenty-first century? Explain.

5. Using examples from the readings, explain why United States labor unions supported the Cuban rebels in their fight against Spain, but opposed American expansionism. Why do you think there were “mixed reactions of labor” to the war in the Philippines? How were the two wars similar and different? Would you have supported either or both of the wars? Explain.
6. Do you agree or disagree with the assertion that colonial expansion into the Pacific Ocean was the logical extension of Manifest Destiny? Support your answer with examples from the readings.
7. Provide specific examples to support the contention that foreign policy at the turn of the century was fueled by the need to find new markets for America’s surplus products.
8. Describe the domestic and international costs of American imperialism at the turn of the century.
9. At the end of the Spanish American War, the United States had become a global colonial power. Using ample examples from the readings, explain how and why this happened.
10. In *Voices*, Howard Zinn states, “From the end of the Revolutionary War on, the history of the United States is one of continuous expansion” (p. 239). Using examples from the readings, support this statement.

SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES

1. Create a wall-sized map entitled, “American Imperialism: 1800–1910.” Locate all the territories that the United States added to its borders and its colonial possessions during this time. Near the map’s legend, write five “bottom line” themes that would describe characteristics of United States expansionist policies during this period. Present your map and themes to your classmates.
2. Imagine that you are a reporter for an independent newspaper in February 1898 and you have been asked to write a well-balanced, non-jingoistic investigative article on the sinking of the battleship *Maine*. Write your article and read it to the class. Ask your classmates to compare and contrast what you

wrote with the way the events in regard to the sinking were actually portrayed in the Hearst and Pulitzer papers.

3. Write two letters that reflect what you believe might have been President McKinley's response to Lewis H. Douglass and I.D. Barnett's pleas to oppose the growth of empire.
4. Stage a discussion between George Washington, William McKinley, and George W. Bush about the wisdom of becoming involved in "entangling alliances."