

## **MODEL RESPONSE**

**DBQ - Imperialism: To what extent was late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century United States expansionism a continuation of past United States expansionism and to what extent was it a departure?**

By the year 1901, the United States possessed the third-largest navy in the world, a considerable overseas empire, and a burgeoning reputation as a world power. It had acquired this international precedence through its involvement in the fervent imperialism of the era; the rapid expansion, colonization, and competition that was occupying the most influential nations of the world, including Britain, France, Germany, and Japan. America's new found role as a colonial power was not, however, a sudden development. Whereas the United States expansionism of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries was a clear continuation of the social and cultural principles that had fueled the nation's past expansionism, it was to a greater degree a departure from the methods of the past through its pursuit of new economic and political motives.

American imperialism of the late 1800s and early 1900s demonstrated the same cultural and social justification of previous expansionism. The original doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which emerged in the 1840s to accompany westward continental expansion, advocated a belief that America was destined by God to expand its borders across the continent in order to spread the blessings of liberty. As Senator Albert J. Beveridge explicates in his 1900 speech to 56<sup>th</sup> Congress (Doc. E), this belief was equally influential in later imperial America; he expresses the Americans' self-recognition as God's chosen people, a race not only blessed, but bound by a holy duty to enlighten the rest of the world through their own expansion. This was the sentiment of "The White Man's Burden", described in Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem of this title, which invoked the social responsibility of the American race to elevate the primitive peoples of the earth. In the past, this duty had been attempted by the Christian missionaries' permeation of the Indian tribes of the west, and was continued at the turn of the nineteenth century by the United States' alleged efforts to

civilize the inhabitants of foreign territory. Josiah Strong reaffirmed this ethnocentricity in his book *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (Doc. B) as he described the holy mission of the Anglo-Saxon race to spread civil liberty and Christianity throughout continents across the globe. He thereby justified American imperialism with an assertion of cultural and racial superiority that had been a motivation of American expansion since the early nineteenth century.

Although expansionism around the year 1900 shared some similar motivation with that of earlier decades, it was to a greater degree the result of new economic and political pursuits. Past expansion had involved annexing adjacent territory contiguous with the existing states that enabled the spread of American settlement; it was utilized for the spread of agriculture and the American population, and all acquired territory was intended to ultimately become states. Contrastingly, new territory in the age of imperialism was acquired with the economic intent of use as a colony: a provider of raw materials and markets for the products of industrialism. By denying citizenship to the inhabitants of the territory of the Philippines in the Insular Case *Downes v. Bidwell* (Doc. H) the Supreme Court demonstrated that the Constitution did not “follow the flag”, thereby proving that the United States had no intention of granting new territories equal status to states; they would instead be colonies serving American economic interests that contrasted with the settlement-based expansion of past decades.

A further deviation from past expansionism that served as a political motivation of imperialism was the United States’ attempt to fill a role as a world power. This entailed competition with other nations in an imperialist race to claim foreign territory. In his 1899 book *The Interest of America in Sea Power* (Doc. C), Alfred T. Mahan expressed the need for America to prevent foreign acquisition of ideal territories that would serve American economic interests. He further mentioned the pressure that other expanding empires were exerting upon the United States to acquire crucial territories before another power did. Jingoists Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt answered this demand by supporting entrance into the Spanish-American war, primarily

to acquire new territory; Roosevelt ordered the taking of Manila Bay from Spain's Philippine territory the moment war was declared in 1898. As president of the United States, Roosevelt would also be a proponent of America's political dominance. He expressed in his Annual Message to Congress (Doc. F) in 1904 the responsibility of the United States to monitor and maintain the social and political stability of all nations in the Western Hemisphere. He compared his nation to an international police force that would inevitably dominate the affairs of all Latin American nations. This political motivation was clearly a development new to American imperialism, since past expansionism had only extended the country's borders and maintained its policy of isolationism.

The early twentieth century heralded an era of American expansionism that broke with past principles in its pursuit of economic and political interests, while it maintained cultural and social incentives of past continental expansion. As the United States began to acquire a colonial empire however, it became apparent that the allegedly noble social motives of Manifest Destiny and the spread of liberty merely served to justify the true secular intentions beneath imperialism: a desire for commercial gain and international power. It was ultimately a pursuit of these self-serving interests that fueled American imperialism and catapulted the nation to a position of dominance.