**American Imperialism**

At first, Americans were reluctant to expand beyond North America. But during the mid-1800s, some Americans began to argue that the U.S. needed to increase its economic and military power by gaining control of more territory. This was an outgrowth of Manifest Destiny. This belief led to the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. Meanwhile, the U.S. negotiated special trading rights with nations such as Japan. Near the end of the 1800s, developments in Latin America captured the attention of the U.S.

A Cuban revolt against Spanish colonial rule dominated the headlines of the "yellow press" (sensationalist newspapers). Then in 1898, while at Havana, Cuba, the **U.S.** **battleship "Maine"** exploded. Quick to blame Spain, many Americans demanded war. The resulting Spanish-American War was a turning point in U.S. history. After some debate over the wisdom and morality of becoming an imperialist power, the victorious U.S. took control of former Spanish possessions such as the Philippines and Puerto Rico. The war also prompted other U.S. expansionist moves.

First, the U.S. and the Republic of Hawaii agreed that the U.S. should annex Hawaii in 1898. The U.S. was interested because of Hawaii's militarily strategic location. Second, the U.S. acquired land on the Isthmus of Panama. The U.S. government was interested in building a canal there because it was necessary to protect U.S. interests in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The U.S. Navy could go between both oceans easier with such a canal. European nations were threatening to intervene in Latin American countries in order to collect debts owed to them by some governments there. President [Theodore Roosevelt](javascript:;) issued his **Roosevelt Corollary** to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904. The corollary stated that the U.S. could intervene in the internal affairs of Latin American countries in order to ensure that they would meet their international obligations.

Both Presidents [William Howard Taft](javascript:;) and [Woodrow Wilson](javascript:;) exercised this power by sending U.S. troops into Latin America to "straighten out" economic problems or political unrest. Latin American nations thought these actions violated their sovereignty. Meanwhile in the U.S., many Americans objected to U.S. imperialist policies. They formed the **Anti-Imperialist League** and lobbied against annexing such lands as Hawaii and the Philippines. They argued that the U.S. betrayed its democratic principles by denying the people in these territories their right of self-determination. However, many, if not most, Americans supported U.S. expansion abroad. Some were highly ethnocentric and nationalistic. They believed both Americans and the peoples of U.S. possessions would benefit from expanding American culture and power.

By the early 20th century, the U.S. was now concerned about and involved in affairs beyond its own continent. Motivated by a combination of economic, military, and ideological concerns, America had developed interests throughout Latin America and the Pacific. Like the nations of Europe, the U.S. had become an imperial power. In doing so, it had arrived upon the world stage.

**The Spanish American War**

Near the end of the 1800s, developments in Latin America also captured the attention of the U.S. The Cuban people had been unhappy with Spanish rule for a long time, and rebelled in 1895. The fighting was bitter as both sides suffered horrendous casualties. Americans followed the war with great interest. Some wanted to incorporate Cuba and its rich sugar-based economy into the U.S. Many Americans were sympathetic to the rebels and saw the Cubans as underdogs fighting against their cruel Spanish masters, a view put forth as propaganda by the "yellow press."

The yellow press consisted of newspapers that popularized a sensationalist form of news writing that was known as "**yellow journalism**." They included Joseph Pulitzer's New York "World" and William Randolph Hearst’s New York "Journal." When McKinley became president in 1897, he made his preference for Cuban independence clear, though he hoped to avoid going to war. McKinley was concerned about protecting American citizens and investment in Cuba. Therefore, he sent the U.S. battleship "Maine" to Havana in 1898. On February 15th, it was destroyed in an explosion while in the harbor at Havana, Cuba. It was alleged that Spain had blown the ship up, although there was no evidence to support this.

This angered many Americans and public opinion (aroused by the yellow press) demanded retribution. The U.S. Congress declared that Cuba had the right to be independent and demanded that Spain withdraw. War was declared on Spain, effective on April 21, 1898. In the Teller Amendment, Congress also proclaimed that it had no plans to annex Cuba for itself and would grant Cuba its full independence.

Spain was easily defeated on both land and sea. The first battle of the Spanish-American War occurred in Manila Bay in the Philippine Islands. There, Admiral George Dewey quickly and easily defeated the Spanish fleet. In June and July, the U.S. also rapidly defeated Spanish forces stationed in Cuba and Puerto Rico. During the war, Theodore Roosevelt, who had resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, organized a unit of volunteers known as the **Rough Riders**. The Rough Riders received a lot of publicity, particularly for their role in capturing San Juan Hill at the Battle of Santiago

**Effects of the Treaty: Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Guam**

Puerto Rico became a major source of sugar and coffee for the U.S., as well as an important military strategic center in the Caribbean. In 1900, Congress passed the Foraker Act, which established a civil government for the island, although the U.S. controlled it. Although initially Puerto Ricans were denied constitutional rights, they did secure the right to become citizens in 1917. Although the U.S. did not acquire Cuba, it did not relinquish control over the nearby island.

Congress passed the [**Platt Amendment**](javascript:;) in 1901, which declared that the U.S. had the right to intervene in Cuba's foreign and internal affairs in order to maintain stability and protect it from foreign threats. To accomplish this, the U.S. said that it had the right to establish a naval base. Cubans, longing for independence, were not pleased with this state of affairs; however, in order to end U.S. occupation, they were forced to incorporate it into their constitution. Guam and the Philippines, along with Hawaii (annexed in 1898), provided the U.S. with a series of ports in the Pacific that could be used as bases and trade centers.

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| Vocabulary Term | Definition | Characteristics | Example |
| U.S.S. Maine |  |  |  |
| Roosevelt Corollary |  |  |  |
| Anti-Imperialist League |  |  |  |
| Spanish American War |  |  |  |
| Yellow Journalism |  |  |  |
| Rough Riders |  |  |  |
| Platt Amendment |  |  |  |

Spanish American War

1. What event caused the United States to go to war with Spain in 1898?
2. How did the Panama Canal benefit the United States economically and politically?
3. Do you think the Spanish American War would have occurred if the Roosevelt Corollary was issued before 1898?
4. What was the main argument of the Anti-Imperialist League against annexing Pacific islands?
5. How did “yellow journalism” influence the way Americans viewed the war?
6. Do we still see yellow journalism today? In what ways?
7. How did naval bases like the one established in Cuba by the Platt Amendment enhance U.S. influence around the world? Has the influence of these bases continued into the modern era?
8. The Spanish American War was referred to as “a splendid little war” by the then U.S. secretary of state. Was this an accurate description of the war or did the war have more of an impact on world affairs than originally thought?