

PART FIVE

STRUGGLING FOR JUSTICE AT HOME AND ABROAD



1899–1945

The new century brought astonishing changes to the United States. Victory in the Spanish-American War made it clear that the United States was now a world power. Industrialization ushered in giant corporations, sprawling factories, sweatshop labor, and the ubiquitous automobile. A huge wave of immigration was altering the face of the nation, especially the cities, where a majority of Americans lived by 1920. With bigger cities came bigger fears—of crime, vice, poverty, and disease.

Changes of such magnitude raised vexing questions. What role should the United States play in the world? How could the enormous power of industry be controlled? How would the millions of new immigrants make their way in America? What should the

country do about poverty, disease, and the continuing plague of racial inequality? All these issues turned on a fundamental point: should government remain narrowly limited in its powers, or did the times require a more potent government that would actively shape society and secure American interests abroad?

The progressive movement represented the first attempt to answer those questions. Reform-minded men and women from all walks of life and from both major parties shared in the progressive crusade for greater government activism. Buoyed by this outlook, Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson enlarged the capacity of government to fight graft, “bust” business trusts, regulate corporations, and promote fair labor prac-

tices, child welfare, conservation, and consumer protection. These progressive reformers, convinced that women would bring greater morality to politics, bolstered the decades-long struggle for female suffrage. Women finally secured the vote in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.

The progressive era presidents also challenged America's tradition of isolationism in foreign policy. They felt the country had a moral obligation to spread democracy and an economic opportunity to reap profits in foreign markets. Roosevelt and Taft launched diplomatic initiatives in the Caribbean, Central America, and East Asia. Wilson aspired to "make the world safe for democracy" by rallying support for American intervention in the First World War.

The progressive spirit waned, however, as the United States retreated during the 1920s into what President Harding called "normalcy." Isolationist sentiment revived with a vengeance. Blessed with a booming economy, Americans turned their gaze inward to baseball heroes, radio, jazz, movies, and the first mass-produced American automobile, the Model T Ford. Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover backed off from the economic regulatory zeal of their predecessors.


"Normalcy" also had a brutal side. Thousands of suspected radicals were jailed or deported in the Red Scare of 1919 and 1920. Anti-immigrant passions flared until immigration quotas in 1924 squeezed the flow of newcomers to a trickle. Race riots scorched several northern cities in the summer of 1919, a sign of how embittered race relations had become in the wake of the "Great Migration" of southern blacks to wartime jobs in northern industry. A reborn Ku Klux Klan staged a comeback, not just in the South but in the North and West as well.

"Normalcy" itself soon proved short-lived, a casualty of the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed. As Americans watched banks fail, and businesses collapse, and millions of people lose their jobs, they asked with renewed urgency what role the government should play in rescuing the nation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's answer was the "New Deal"—an ambitious array of relief programs, public works, and economic regulations that failed to cure the Depression but furnished an impressive legacy of social reforms.

Most Americans came to accept an expanded federal governmental role at home under FDR's leadership in the 1930s, but they still clung stubbornly to isolationism. The United States did little in the 1930s to check the rising military aggression of Japan and Germany. By the early 1940s, events forced Americans to reconsider. Once Hitler's Germany had seized control of most of Europe, Roosevelt, who had long opposed the isolationists, found ways to aid a beleaguered Britain. When Japan attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, isolationists at last fell silent. Roosevelt led a stunned but determined nation into the Second World War, and victory in 1945 positioned the United States to assume a commanding position in the postwar world order.

The Great Depression and the Second World War brought to a head a half-century of debate over the role of government and the place of the United States in the world. In the name of a struggle for justice, Roosevelt established a new era of government activism at home and internationalism abroad. The New Deal's legacy set the terms of debate in American political life for the rest of the century.

America on the World Stage

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1899–1909

*I never take a step in foreign policy unless I am assured that I shall
be able eventually to carry out my will by force.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, 1905

Liberty-loving Filipinos assumed that they, like the Cubans, would be granted their freedom after the Spanish-American War. They were tragically deceived. The Senate refused to pass such a resolution granting Filipino independence. Bitterness toward the American troops mounted. It finally erupted into open insurrection on February 4, 1899, under Emilio Aguinaldo.

The war with the Filipinos, unlike the “splendid” little set-to with Spain, was sordid and prolonged. It involved more savage fighting, more soldiers killed, and far more scandal. Anti-imperialists redoubled their protests. In their view the United States, having plunged into war with Spain to free Cuba, was now fighting ten thousand miles away to rivet shackles on a people who asked for nothing but liberty—in the American tradition.

“Little Brown Brothers” in the Philippines

As the ill-equipped Filipino armies were defeated, they melted into the jungle to wage vicious guerrilla warfare. Many of the outgunned Filipinos used barbarous methods, and the infuriated American troops responded in kind. A brutal soldier song betrayed inner feelings:

*Damn, damn, damn the Filipinos!
Cross-eyed kakiak ladrones [thieves]!
Underneath the starry flag
Civilize 'em with a Krag [rifle],
And return us to our own beloved homes.*

Atrocity tales shocked and rocked the United States, for such methods did not reflect America's



United States Possessions to 1917

better self. Uncle Sam's soldiers resorted to such extremes as the painful "water cure"—that is, forcing water down victims' throats until they yielded information or died. Reconcentration camps were even established that strongly suggested those of "Butcher" Weyler in Cuba. America, having begun the Spanish war with noble ideals, now dirtied its hands. One New York newspaper published a reply to Rudyard Kipling's famous poem:

*We've taken up the white man's burden
Of ebony and brown;
Now will you kindly tell us, Rudyard,
How we may put it down?*

The backbone of the Filipino insurrection was finally broken in 1901, when American soldiers cleverly infiltrated a guerrilla camp and captured Aguinaldo. But sporadic fighting dragged on for many dreary months.

The problem of a government for the conquered islanders worried President McKinley, who, in 1899,

appointed the Philippine Commission to make appropriate recommendations. In its second year, this body was headed by future president William H. Taft, an able and amiable lawyer-judge from Ohio who weighed about 350 pounds. Forming a strong attachment to the Filipinos, he called them his "little brown brothers" and danced light-footedly with their tiny women. But among the American soldiers, sweatily combing the jungles, a different view of the insurgent prevailed:

*He may be a brother of Big Bill Taft,
But he ain't no brother of mine.*

McKinley's "benevolent assimilation" of the Philippines proceeded with painful slowness. Millions of American dollars were poured into the islands to improve roads, sanitation, and public health. Important economic ties, including trade in sugar, developed between the two peoples. American teachers—"pioneers of the blackboard"—set up an unusually good school system and helped

they began to tear away valuable leaseholds and economic spheres of influence from the Manchu government.

A growing group of Americans viewed the vivisection of China with alarm. Churches worried about their missionary strongholds; manufacturers and exporters feared that Chinese markets would be monopolized by Europeans. An alarmed American public, openly prodded by the press and slyly nudged by certain free-trade Britons, demanded that Washington do something. Secretary of State John Hay, a quiet but witty poet-novelist-diplomat with a flair for capturing the popular imagination, finally decided upon a dramatic move.

In the summer of 1899, Hay dispatched to all the great powers a communication soon known as the Open Door note. He urged them to announce that in their leaseholds or spheres of influence they would respect certain Chinese rights and the ideal of fair competition.

The phrase *Open Door* quickly caught the public fancy and gained wide acceptance. Hay's proposal caused much squirming in the leading capitals of the world. It was like asking all those who did not have thieving designs to stand up and be counted. Italy alone accepted the Open Door unconditionally; it was the only major power that had no leasehold or

make English a second language. But all this vast expenditure, which profited America little, was ill received. The Filipinos, who hated compulsory Americanization, preferred liberty. Like caged hawks, they beat against their gilded bars until they finally got their freedom, on the Fourth of July, 1946. In the meantime, thousands of Filipinos emigrated to the United States (see “Makers of America: The Filipinos,” pp. 650–651).

Hinging the Open Door in China

Exciting events had meanwhile been brewing in far-away and enfeebled China. Following its defeat by Japan in 1894–1895, the imperialistic European powers, notably Russia and Germany, moved in. Like vultures descending upon a wounded whale,

The commercial interests of Britain and America were imperiled by the power grabs in China, and a close concert between the two powers would have helped both. Yet as Secretary of State John Hay (1838–1905) wrote privately in June 1900,

“Every Senator I see says, ‘For God’s sake, don’t let it appear we have any understanding with England.’ How can I make bricks without straw? That we should be compelled to refuse the assistance of the greatest power in the world [Britain], in carrying out our own policy, because all Irishmen are Democrats and some [American] Germans are fools—is enough to drive a man mad.”

sphere of influence in China. Britain, Germany, France, and Japan all accepted, but subject to the condition that the others acquiesce unconditionally. Russia, with covetous designs on China's Manchuria, politely declined. But John Hay artfully interpreted the Russian refusal as an acceptance and proclaimed that the Open Door was in effect. Under such dubious midwifery was the infant born, and no one should have been surprised when the child proved to be sickly and relatively short-lived.

Open Door or not, patriotic Chinese did not care to be used as a doormat by the Europeans. In 1900 a superpatriotic group known as the "Boxers" broke loose with the cry, "Kill Foreign Devils." Over two hundred missionaries and other ill-fated whites were murdered, and a number of foreign diplomats were besieged in the capital, Beijing (Peking).

A multinational rescue force of some eighteen thousand soldiers, including twenty-five hundred Americans, arrived in the nick of time and quelled the rebellion. Such participation in a joint military operation, especially in Asia, was plainly contrary to the nation's time-honored principles of nonentanglement and noninvolvement.

The victorious allied invaders acted angrily and vindictively. They assessed prostrate China an excessive indemnity of \$333 million, of which America's share was to be \$24.5 million. When Washington discovered that this sum was much more than enough to pay damages and expenses, it remitted about \$18 million. The Beijing government, appreciating this gesture of goodwill, set aside the money to educate a selected group of Chinese students in the United States. These bright young scholars later played a significant role in the westernization of Asia.

Secretary Hay now let fly another paper broadside, for he feared that the triumphant powers might use the Boxer outrages as a pretext for carving up China outright. His new circular note to the powers in 1900 announced that henceforth the Open Door would embrace the territorial integrity of China, in addition to its commercial integrity.

Defenseless China was spared partition during these troubled years. But its salvation was probably due not to Hay's fine phrases, but to the strength of the competing powers. None of them could trust the others not to seek their own advantage.

MAKERS OF AMERICA

The Filipinos

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States, its imperial muscles just flexed in the war with Spain, found itself in possession of the Philippines. Uncertain of how to manage this empire, which seethed resentfully against its new masters, the United States promised to build democracy in the Philippines and to ready the islanders for home rule. Almost immediately after annexation, the American governor of the archipelago sent a corps of Filipino students to the United States, hoping to forge future leaders steeped in American ways who would someday govern an independent Philippines. Yet this small student group found little favor in their adopted country, although in their native

land many went on to become respected citizens and leaders.

Most Filipino immigrants to the United States in these years, however, came not to study but to toil. With Chinese immigration banned, Hawaii and the Pacific Coast states turned to the Philippines for cheap agricultural labor. Beginning in 1906 the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association aggressively recruited Filipino workers. Enlistments grew slowly at first, but by the 1920s thousands of young Filipino men had reached the Hawaiian Islands and been assigned to sugar plantations or pineapple fields.

Typically a young Filipino wishing to emigrate first made his way to Manila, where he signed a contract with the growers that promised three years' labor in return for transportation to Hawaii, wages, free housing and fuel, and return passage at the end of the contract. Not all of the emigrants returned; there remain in Hawaii today some former field workers still theoretically eligible for free transport back to their native land.

Those Filipinos venturing as far as the American mainland found work less arduous but also less certain than did their countrymen on Hawaiian plantations. Many mainlanders worked seasonally—in winter as domestic servants, busboys, or bellhops; in summer journeying to the fields to harvest lettuce, strawberries, sugar beets, and potatoes. Eventually Filipinos, along with Mexican immigrants, shared the dubious honor of making up California's agricultural work force.

A mobile society, Filipino-Americans also were overwhelmingly male; there was only one Filipino woman for every fourteen Filipino men in California in 1930. Thus the issue of intermarriage became acutely sensitive. California and many other states prohibited the marriage of Asians and Caucasians in demeaning laws that remained on the books until 1948. And if a Filipino so much as approached a

Caucasian woman, he could expect reprisals—sometimes violent. For example, white vigilante groups roamed the Yakima Valley in Washington and the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys in California, intimidating and even attacking Filipinos whom they accused of improperly accosting white women. In 1930 one Filipino was murdered and others wounded after they invited some Caucasian women to a dance. Undeterred, the Filipinos challenged the restrictive state laws and the hooligans who found in them an excuse for mayhem. But Filipinos, who did not become eligible for American citizenship until 1946, long lacked political leverage.

After World War II, Filipino immigration accelerated. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of Filipinos in the United States nearly doubled, with women and men stepping aboard the new transpacific airliners in roughly equal numbers. Many of these recent arrivals sprang from sturdy middle-class stock and sought in America a better life for their children than the Philippines seemed able to offer. Today the war-torn and perpetually depressed archipelago sends more immigrants to American shores than does any other Asian nation.

hero of San Juan Hill. Capitalizing on his war-born popularity, he had been elected governor of New York, where the local political bosses had found him headstrong and difficult to manage. They therefore devised a scheme to kick the colorful colonel upstairs into the vice presidency.

This plot to railroad Roosevelt worked beautifully. Gesticulating wildly, he attended the nominating convention, where his western-style cowboy hat had made him stand out like a white crow. He had no desire to die of slow rot in the vice-presidential “burying ground,” but he was eager to prove that he could get the nomination if he wanted it. He finally gave in to a chanting chorus of “We want Teddy!” He received a unanimous vote, except for his own. A frantic Hanna reportedly moaned that there would be only one heartbeat between that wild-eyed “madman”—“that damned cowboy”—and the presidency of the United States.

William Jennings Bryan was the odds-on choice of the Democrats, meeting at Kansas City. The free-silver issue was now as defunct as an abandoned mine, but Bryan, a slave to consistency, forced a silver plank down the throats of his protesting associates. Choking on its candidate’s obstinacy, the Democratic platform proclaimed, as did Bryan, that the paramount issue was Republican overseas imperialism.

Campaign history partially repeated itself in 1900. McKinley, the soul of dignity, sat safely on his front porch, as before. Bryan, also as before, took to the stump in a cyclonic campaign, assailing both imperialism and Republican-fostered trusts.

The superenergetic, second-fiddle Roosevelt out-Bryaned Bryan. He toured the country with revolver-shooting cowboys, and his popularity cut heavily into Bryan’s support in the Midwest. Flashing his magnificent teeth and pounding his fist fiercely into his palm, Roosevelt denounced all dastards who would haul down Old Glory.

Bryanites loudly trumpeted their “paramount” issue of imperialism. Lincoln, they charged, had abolished slavery for 3.5 million Africans; McKinley had reestablished it for 7 million Filipinos. Republicans responded by charging that “Bryanism,” not imperialism, was the paramount issue. By this accusation they meant that Bryan would rock the boat of prosperity once he got into office with his free-silver lunacy and other dangerous ideas. The voters were much less concerned about imperialism than about “Four Years More of the Full Dinner Pail.”

When the smoke cleared, McKinley had triumphed by a much wider margin than in 1896:

Imperialism or Bryanism in 1900?

President McKinley’s renomination by the Republicans in 1900 was a foregone conclusion. He had piloted the country through a victorious war; he had acquired rich, though burdensome, real estate; he had established the gold standard; and he had brought the promised prosperity of the full dinner pail. “We’ll stand pat!” was the poker-playing counsel of Mark Hanna, since 1897 a senator from Ohio. McKinley was renominated at Philadelphia on a platform that smugly endorsed prosperity, the gold standard, and overseas expansion.

An irresistible vice-presidential boom had developed for “Teddy” Roosevelt (TR), the cowboy-

7,218,491 to 6,356,734 popular votes, and 292 to 155 electoral votes. But victory for the Republicans was not a mandate for or against imperialism. Many citizens who favored Bryan's anti-imperialism feared his free silver; many who favored McKinley's "sound money" hated his imperialism. One citizen wrote to former president Cleveland: "It is a choice between evils, and I am going to shut my eyes, hold my nose, vote, go home and disinfect myself." If there was any mandate at all it was for the two *Ps*: prosperity and protection. Content with good times, the country anticipated four more years of a full dinner pail crammed with fried chicken. "Boss" Platt of New York gleefully looked forward to Inauguration Day, when he would see Roosevelt exit Albany and "take the veil" as vice president.

TR: Brandisher of the Big Stick

Kindly William McKinley had scarcely served another six months when, in September 1901, he was murdered by a deranged anarchist. Roosevelt became president at age forty-two, the youngest thus far in American history. Knowing he had a reputation for impulsiveness and radicalism, he sought to reassure the country by proclaiming that he would carry out the policies of his predecessor. Cynics sneered that he would indeed carry them out—to the garbage heap.

What manner of man was Theodore Roosevelt, the red-blooded blue blood? Born into a wealthy and distinguished New York family, he had fiercely built up his spindly, asthmatic body by a stern and self-imposed routine of exercise. Graduating from Harvard with Phi Beta Kappa honors, he published at the age of twenty-four the first of some thirty volumes of muscular prose. Then came busy years,

The contest over American imperialism took place on the Senate floor as well as around the globe. In 1900 Senator Albert J. Beveridge (1862–1927), Republican from Indiana, returned from an investigative trip to the Philippines to defend its annexation:

"The Philippines are ours forever. . . . And just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not abandon our opportunity in the Orient. We will renounce our part in the mission of our race: trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world."

Two years later Senator George F. Hoar (1826–1904), Republican from Massachusetts, broke with his party to denounce American annexation of the Philippines and other territories:

"You cannot maintain despotism in Asia and a republic in America. If you try to deprive even a savage or a barbarian of his just rights you can never do it without becoming a savage or a barbarian yourself."

which involved duties as a ranch owner and bespectacled cowboy (“Four Eyes”) in the Dakotas, followed by various political posts. When fully developed, he was a barrel-chested five feet ten inches, with prominent teeth, squinty eyes, droopy mustache, and piercing voice.

The Rough Rider’s high-voltage energy was electrifying. Believing that it was better to wear out than to rust out, he would shake the hands of some six thousand people at one stretch or ride horseback many miles in a day as an example for portly cavalry officers. Not surprisingly, he gathered about him a group of athletic, tennis-playing cronies, who were popularly dubbed “the tennis cabinet.”

Incurably boyish and bellicose, Roosevelt loved to fight—“an elegant row.” He never ceased to preach the virile virtues and to denounce civilized softness, with its pacifists and other “flubdubs” and “mollycoddles.” An ardent champion of military and naval preparedness, he adopted as his pet proverb, “Speak softly and carry a big stick, [and] you will go far.” If statesmen had the big stick, they could work their will among foreign nations without shouting; if they lacked it, shouting would do no good. TR had both a big stick and a shrill voice.

Wherever Roosevelt went, there was a great stir. At a wedding he eclipsed the bride, at a funeral the corpse. Shockingly unconventional, he loved to break hoary precedents—the hoarier the better. He was a colossal egoist, and his self-confidence merged with self-righteousness. So sure was he of the correctness of his convictions that he impetuously branded people liars who disagreed with him. As a true cosmopolite, he loved people and mingled with those of all ranks, from Catholic cardinals to professional prizefighters, one of whom blinded a Rooseveltian eye in a White House bout.

An outspoken moralizer and reformer, Roosevelt preached virtue from the White House pulpit. Yet he was an opportunist who would cut a deal rather than butt his head against a stone wall. He was, in reality, much less radical than his blustery actions would indicate. A middle-of-the-roader, he stood just a little left of center and bared his mule-like molars at liberals and reactionaries alike.

Roosevelt rapidly developed into a master politician with an idolatrous personal following. After visiting him, a journalist wrote, “You go home and wring the personality out of your clothes.” TR—as he was called—had an enormous popular

appeal, partly because the common people saw in him a fiery champion. A magnificent showman, he was always front-page copy; his cowboyism, his bear shooting, his outsize teeth, and his pince-nez glasses were ever the delight of cartoonists. Though a staunch party man, he detested many of the dirty-handed bosses. But he learned, as Cleveland never did, to hold his nose and work with them.

Above all, Roosevelt was a direct-actionist. He believed that the president should lead, and although he made mistakes, he kept things noisily moving—generally forward. Never a lawyer, he condemned the law and the courts as too slow. He had no real respect for the delicate checks and balances among the three branches of the government. Finding the Constitution too rigid, he would on occasion ignore it; finding Congress too rebellious, he tried a mixture of coercion and compromise on it. The president, he felt, may take any action in the general

interest that is not specifically forbidden by the laws of the Constitution. As one poet noted,

*The Constitution rides behind
And the Big Stick rides before,
(Which is the rule of precedent
In the reign of Theodore.)*

Colombia Blocks the Canal

Foreign affairs absorbed much of Roosevelt's bullish energy. Having traveled extensively in Europe, he enjoyed a far more intimate knowledge of the outside world than most of his predecessors.

The Spanish-American War had emphasized the need for the long-talked-about canal across the Central American isthmus, through which only printer's ink had ever flowed. Americans had learned a sobering lesson when the battleship *Oregon*, stationed on the Pacific Coast at the outbreak of war in 1898, had to steam all the way around South America to join the fleet in Cuban waters. An isthmian canal would plainly augment the strength of the navy by increasing its mobility. Such a waterway would also make easier the defense of such recent acquisitions as Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines, while facilitating the operations of the American merchant marine.

Initial obstacles in the path of the canal builders were legal rather than geographical. By the terms of the ancient Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, concluded with Britain in 1850, the United States could not secure exclusive control over such a route. But by 1901 America's British cousins were willing to yield ground. Confronted with an unfriendly Europe and bogged down in the South African Boer War, they consented to the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty in 1901. It not only gave the United States a free hand to build the canal but conceded the right to fortify it as well.

Legal barriers now removed, the next question was, Where should the canal be dug? Many American experts favored the Nicaraguan route, but agents of the old French Canal Company were eager to salvage something from their costly failure at S-shaped Panama. Represented by a young, energetic, and unscrupulous engineer, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, the New Panama Canal Company suddenly dropped the price of its holdings from \$109 million to the fire-sale price of \$40 million.

After much debate, Congress in June 1902 decided on the Panama route. The scene now shifted to Colombia, of which Panama was an unwilling part. A treaty highly favorable to the United States was negotiated between Washington and a Colombian government agent in Bogota. It granted to the United States a lease for a six-mile-wide zone in perpetuity in exchange for \$10 million and an annual payment of \$250,000. The Colombian senate rejected the treaty, putting a higher value on this precious isthmian strip. Evidence later unearthed indicates that had Washington been willing to pay an additional \$15 million, the pact would have been approved.

Roosevelt was infuriated by his setback at the hands of what he called "those dagoes." Frantically eager to be elected president "in his own right" in 1904, he was anxious to "make the dirt fly" to impress the voters. "Damn the law," he reportedly cried in private, "I want the canal built!" He assailed "the blackmailers of Bogota" who, like armed highwaymen, were blocking the onward march of civilization. He failed to note that the U.S. Senate also rejects treaties.

Uncle Sam Creates Puppet Panama

Impatient Panamanians, who had rebelled numerous times, were ripe for another revolt. They had counted on a wave of prosperity to follow construction of the canal, and they feared that the United States would now turn to the Nicaraguan route. Scheming Bunau-Varilla was no less disturbed by the prospect of losing the company's \$40 million. Working hand in glove with the Panama revolutionists, he raised a tiny "patriot" army consisting largely of members of the Panamanian fire department, plus five hundred "bought" Colombian troops—for a reported price of \$100,000.

The Panama revolution occurred on November 3, 1903, with the incidental killing of a Chinese civilian and a donkey. Colombian troops were gathered to crush the uprising, but U.S. naval forces would not let them cross the isthmus. Roosevelt justified this highly questionable interference by a strained interpretation of the treaty of 1846 with Colombia. (This pact obligated Washington to maintain



Big Stick in the Caribbean

In 1901 Roosevelt declared, “If a man continually blusters . . . a big stick will not save him from trouble; and neither will speaking softly avail, if back of the softness there does not lie strength, power. . . . If the boaster is not prepared to back up his words, his position becomes absolutely contemptible.”

the “perfect neutrality” of the isthmus, obviously against outsiders.)

Roosevelt moved rapidly to make steamy Panama a virtual outpost of the United States. Three days after the uprising, he hastily extended the right hand of recognition. Fifteen days later, Bunau-Varilla, who was now the Panamanian minister despite his French citizenship, signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty in Washington. The price of the canal strip was left the same, but the zone was widened from six to ten miles. The French company gladly pocketed its \$40 million from the U.S. Treasury.

Roosevelt, it seems clear, did not actively plot to tear Panama from the side of Colombia. But the conspirators knew of his angrily expressed views, and they counted on his using the big stick to hold Colombia at bay. Yet the Rough Rider became so indiscreetly involved in the Panama affair as to create the impression that he had been a secret party to the intrigue.

Unhappily, the United States suffered a black eye as a result of Roosevelt’s “cowboy diplomacy.” European imperialists, who were old hands at this sort of thing, could now raise their eyebrows in scorn at America’s superior moral pretensions—and they did.

Completing the Canal and Appeasing Colombia

The so-called rape of Panama marked an ugly downward lurch in U.S. relations with Latin America. Much fear had already been aroused by the recent seizure of Puerto Rico and by the Yankee stranglehold on Cuba. The fate of Colombia, when it dared defy the Colossus of the North, indicated that its weak fellow republics were not safe. The era of the bullying “Big Brother” policy was brazenly launched.

Roosevelt heatedly defended himself against all charges of evildoing. He claimed that he had received a “mandate from civilization” to start the canal and that Colombia had wronged the United States by not permitting itself to be benefited. To deal with these “blackmailers,” he insisted, was like “nailing currant jelly to the wall.”

But TR was not completely candid. He failed to point out that the Nicaragua route was about equally feasible and that it was available without a revolution. Yet this alternative would have involved some delay, and the presidential election of 1904 was fast approaching.

Active work was begun on “making the dirt fly” in 1904, but grave difficulties were encountered, ranging from labor troubles to landslides. The organization was finally perfected under an energetic but autocratic West Point engineer, Colonel George Washington Goethals. At the outset sanitation proved to be more important than excavation. Colonel William C. Gorgas, the quiet and determined exterminator of yellow fever in Havana, ultimately made the Canal Zone “as safe as a health resort.”

Americans finally succeeded where the French had failed. In 1914 the colossal canal project was completed at an initial cost of about \$400 million, just as World War I was breaking out. The whole enterprise, in the words of the English writer James Bryce, was “the greatest liberty Man has ever taken with Nature.”

TR’s Perversion of Monroe’s Doctrine

Latin American debt defaults created the conditions for further Rooseveltian involvement in affairs south of the border. Nations such as Venezuela and

the Dominican Republic were chronically in arrears in their payments to European creditors, particularly Britain and Germany. Seeking to force payment, German warships sank two Venezuelan gunboats and bombarded a town in early 1903.

This ironfisted intervention aroused Roosevelt. He feared that if the Germans or British got their foot in the door as bill collectors, they might remain in Latin America, in flagrant violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Roosevelt therefore devised a devious policy of “preventive intervention,” better known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. He declared that in the event of future financial malfeasance by the Latin American nations, the United States itself would intervene, take over the customshouses, pay off the debts, and keep the troublesome powers on the other side of the Atlantic. In short, no outsiders could push around the Latin nations except Uncle Sam, Policeman of the Caribbean.

This new brandishing of the big stick in the Caribbean became effective in 1905, when the United States took over the management of tariff collections in the Dominican Republic, an arrangement formalized in a treaty with the Dominicans two years later. Dominican officials, who had raked in much juicy graft, were not happy with such interference, and they acquiesced only after some strenuous arm-twisting from Washington. But from a debt-collecting point of view, the customhouse intervention was a success.

Roosevelt’s corollary, though tacked onto the Monroe Doctrine, bore only a strained relation to the original dictum of 1823. Monroe had in effect

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) wrote to a correspondent in February 1904,

“I have been hoping and praying for three months that the Santo Domingans would behave so that I would not have to act in any way. I want to do nothing but what a policeman has to do. . . . As for annexing the island, I have about the same desire to annex it as a gorged boa-constrictor might have to swallow a porcupine wrong-end-to.”

said to the European powers, “Thou shalt not intervene.” TR changed this warning to mean, “We shall intervene to prevent you from intervening.” The Roosevelt doctrine was actually so radical as to be a completely new policy, but it gained readier acceptance by being associated with the honored name of Monroe. Yet in its own right, the corollary had considerable merit as a preemptive stroke.

Roosevelt’s rewriting of Monroe’s doctrine had its dark side. It probably did more than any other single step to promote the “Bad Neighbor” policy begun in these years. As time wore on, the new corollary was used to justify wholesale interventions and repeated landings of the marines, all of which helped turn the Caribbean into a “Yankee lake.” Latin Americans mistakenly cursed the unoffending Monroe, when they should have cursed the offending Roosevelt. To them it seemed as though the Monroe Doctrine, far from providing a shield, was a cloak behind which the United States sought to strangle them.

The shadow of the big stick likewise fell on Cuba in 1906. Revolutionary disorders brought an appeal from the Cuban president, and “necessity being the mother of invention,” U.S. Marines were landed. These police forces were withdrawn temporarily in 1909, but in Latin American eyes the episode was

but another example of the creeping power of the Colossus of the North.

Roosevelt on the World Stage

Booted and spurred, Roosevelt charged into international affairs far beyond Latin America. The outbreak of war between Russia and Japan in 1904 gave him a chance to perform as a global statesman. The Russian bear, having lumbered across Asia, was seeking to bathe its frostbitten paws in the ice-free ports of China’s Manchuria, particularly Port Arthur. In Japanese eyes, Manchuria and Korea in tsarist hands were pistols pointed at Japan’s strategic heart. Russian troops had invaded Manchuria during the Boxer outbreak of 1900 and, despite solemn promises, were not withdrawing. The tsar was obviously stalling until his trans-Siberian railroad could be finished, as it would be in a few months. With the clock ticking against them, the Japanese suddenly began war in 1904 with a devastating surprise pounce on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. They proceeded to administer a humiliating series of beatings to the inept Russians—the first serious military setback to a European power by a non-European force since the Turkish invasions of

the sixteenth century. But as the war dragged on, Japan began to run short of men and yen—a weakness it did not want to betray to the enemy. Tokyo officials therefore approached Roosevelt in the deepest secrecy and asked him to help sponsor peace negotiations.

Roosevelt agreed and shepherded the delegates of the two sides together at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1905. The Japanese presented stern demands for a huge indemnity and the entire strategic island of Sakhalin, while the Russians stubbornly refused to admit the depths of their defeat. Blustering at both sides behind the scenes, Roosevelt forced through an accord in which the Japanese received no indemnity for the losses and only the southern half of Sakhalin.

For achieving this agreement, as well as for helping arrange an international conference at Algeciras, Spain, in 1906 to mediate North African disputes, Roosevelt received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906. But the price of TR's diplomatic glory was high for U.S. foreign relations. Two historic friend-

ships withered on the windswept plains of Manchuria. American relations with Russia, once friendly, soured as the Russians implausibly accused Roosevelt of robbing them of military victory. Revelations about savage massacres of Russian Jews further poisoned American feeling against Russia. Japan, once America's protégé, felt robbed of its due compensation. Both newly powerful, Japan and America now became rivals in Asia, as fear and jealousy between them grew. To many Americans, the Japanese were getting too big for their kimonos.

Japanese Laborers in California

Adding to tensions between America and Japan was the issue of Japanese migration to America's Pacific Coast. The Japanese government prohibited emigration of its citizens until 1884, when it began allowing temporary laborers to work on sugar plantations in Hawaii. From there thousands of Japanese

were recruited for work in California as farm laborers, railroad workers, and servants. Like the Chinese before them, Japanese immigrants did the nation's most arduous, dangerous work but were barred from becoming citizens. And like the Chinese, Japanese immigrants confronted racist hostility. Although Japanese residents never amounted to more than 3 percent of the state's population, white Californians ranted about a new "yellow peril" and feared being drowned in an Asian sea.

A showdown on the influx came in 1906 when San Francisco's school board, coping with the aftermath of a frightful earthquake and fire, ordered the segregation of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean stu-

dents in a special school to free more space for whites. Instantly the incident boiled into an international crisis. The people of Japan, who were highly sensitive on questions of race, regarded this discrimination as an insult to them and their beloved children. On both sides of the Pacific, irresponsible war talk sizzled in the yellow press—the real "yellow peril." Roosevelt, who as a Rough Rider had relished shooting, was less happy over the prospect that California might stir up a war that all the other states would have to wage. He therefore invited the entire San Francisco Board of Education, headed by a bassoon-playing mayor under indictment for graft, to come to the White House.

TR finally broke the deadlock, but not until he had brandished his big stick and bared his big teeth. The Californians were induced to repeal the offensive school order and to accept what came to be known as the "Gentlemen's Agreement." This secret understanding was worked out, during 1907–1908, by an exchange of diplomatic notes between Washington and Tokyo. The Japanese, for their part, agreed to stop the flow of laborers to the American mainland by withholding passports.

Roosevelt worried that his intercession between California and Japan might be interpreted in Tokyo as prompted by fear of the Japanese. Accordingly, he hit upon a dramatic scheme to impress the Japanese with the heft of his big stick. He daringly decided to send the entire battleship fleet on a highly visible voyage around the world.

Late in 1907 sixteen sparkling-white, smoke-belching battleships started from Virginia waters. Their commander pointedly declared that he was

ready for "a feast, a frolic, or a fight." The Great White Fleet—saluted by cannonading champagne corks—received tumultuous welcomes in Latin America, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Australia.

As events turned out, an overwhelming reception in Japan was the high point of the trip. Tens of thousands of kimonoed schoolchildren had been trained to wave tiny American flags and sing "The Star-Spangled Banner"—reportedly in English. In the warm diplomatic atmosphere created by the visit of the fleet, the Root-Takahira agreement of 1908 was reached with Japan. The United States and Japan solemnly pledged themselves to respect each other's territorial possessions in the Pacific and to uphold the Open Door in China. The once fight-thirsty Roosevelt, who thus went out of his way to avoid a war with Japan, regarded the battleship cruise as his most important contribution to peace. The voyage of the white fleet also gave Uncle Sam a new recruiting slogan: "Join the Navy and See the World."

Chronology

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| <p>1899 Aguinaldo launches rebellion against United States in the Philippine Islands
First American Open Door note</p> <p>1900 Boxer Rebellion and U.S. expedition to China
Second Open Door note
McKinley defeats Bryan for presidency</p> <p>1901 McKinley assassinated; Roosevelt assumes presidency
Filipino rebellion defeated
Hay-Pauncefote Treaty</p> <p>1902 Colombian senate rejects canal treaty</p> <p>1903 Panamanian revolution against Colombia
Hay–Bunau–Varilla treaty</p> <p>1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine</p> | <p>1904–1914 Construction of the Panama Canal</p> <p>1905 United States takes over Dominican Republic customs
Roosevelt mediates Russo-Japanese peace treaty</p> <p>1906 San Francisco Japanese education crisis
Roosevelt arranges Algeciras conference</p> <p>1906–1909 U.S. Marines occupy Cuba</p> <p>1907 Great White Fleet</p> <p>1907–1908 “Gentlemen’s Agreement” with Japan</p> <p>1908 Root–Takahira agreement</p> |
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VARYING VIEWPOINTS

Why Did America Become a World Power?

American imperialism has long been an embarrassing topic for students of American history, who remember the Republic’s own revolutionary origins and anti-colonial tradition. Perhaps for that reason, many historians have tried to explain the dramatic overseas expansionism of the 1890s as some kind of aberration—a sudden, singular, and short-lived departure from time-honored American principles and practices. Various explanations have been offered to account for this spasmodic lapse. Scholars such as Julius Pratt pointed to the irresponsible behavior of the yellow press. Richard Hofstadter ascribed America’s imperial fling to the “psychic crisis of the 1890s,” a crisis brought on, he argued, by the strains of the decade’s economic depression and the Populist upheaval. Howard K. Beale emphasized the contagious scramble for imperial possessions by the European powers, as well as Japan, in these years.

In Beale’s argument, the United States—and Theodore Roosevelt in particular—succumbed to a

kind of international peer pressure: if other countries were expanding their international roles and even establishing colonies around the globe, could the United States safely refrain from doing the same? In Beale’s view, Theodore Roosevelt was no simple-minded imperial swashbuckler, but a coolly calculating diplomatic realist who perceived that if the United States did not hold its own against other powers, it would soon risk being pushed around, even in its own hemisphere, despite the Monroe Doctrine.

Perhaps the most controversial interpretation of American imperialism has come from a so-called New Left school of writers, inspired by William Appleman Williams (and before him by V. I. Lenin’s 1916 book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*). Historians such as Williams and Walter LaFeber argue that the explanation for political and military expansion abroad is to be found in economic expansion at home. Increasing industrial output, so the argument goes, required ever more raw materials

and, especially, overseas markets. To meet those needs, the nation adopted a strategy of “informal empire,” shunning formal territorial possessions (with the conspicuous exception of the Philippines), but seeking economic dominance over foreign markets, materials, and investment outlets. That “revisionist” interpretation, in turn, has been sharply criticized by scholars who point out that foreign trade accounted for only a tiny share of American output and that the diplomacy of this period was far too complex to be reduced to “economic need.”

Most recently, historians have highlighted the importance of race and gender in the march toward empire. Roosevelt and other imperialists perceived their world in gendered terms. American society,

many feared, was losing touch with the manly virtues. It had grown soft and “feminine” since the closing of the frontier. Imperialists also saw the nations of the world in a strict racial hierarchy, with “primitive” blacks and Indians at the bottom and “civilized” Anglo-Saxons at the top. In this worldview the conquest of “inferior” peoples seemed natural—a tropical tonic to restore the nation’s masculine virility. Scholars who emphasize these explanations of imperialism are less likely to see the expansionism of the 1890s as an aberration in American history. Instead, they argue, these overseas adventures were part of a long tradition of race-fueled militarism, from the nation’s earliest Indian wars to Cold War engagements in Korea and Vietnam.

For further reading, see page A20 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.
