

# Jingoes, Goo-Goos, and the Rise of America's Empire

*It was called "a splendid little war." Launched 100 years ago this spring, the short, decisive struggle with Spain set the United States on the path to empire. More lastingly, the author shows, the vision and policies of those who steered the victorious nation "foreshadowed the often awesome ambiguities of America's waxing and waning global involvements during the whole of the 20th century."*

*by Warren Zimmermann*

**I**n 1898, America's role in the world changed forever. A country whose power and influence had been largely limited to the continent of North America suddenly acquired a global reach that it would never relinquish.

The march of events behind this transformation has the staccato urgency of an old Movietone newsreel. On April 25, 1898, two months after the sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana Bay, the United States goes to war with Spain over Cuba. On May 1, some 8,000 miles away in the Philippines, Admiral George Dewey destroys the Spanish fleet off Manila. On June 21, the U.S. Navy seizes the tiny, Spanish-held island of Guam, with its fine Pacific harbor, 1,000 miles east of Manila.

The zigzag pattern of conquest continues, from the Caribbean to the Pacific and back. On July 1, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, attired in a brass-buttoned uniform just bought from Brooks Brothers, leads his Rough Riders in an exuberant charge—on foot—up San Juan Hill in eastern Cuba. Routing a poorly armed Spanish force, Roosevelt's troops take the heights overlooking Santiago Bay, where, two days later, the U.S. Navy wins the battle



for Cuba by capturing an entire Spanish squadron. On July 7, President William McKinley, exulting in the expansionist fervor, annexes Hawaii, under de facto control of American sugar planters since 1893. On August 13, Manila falls to Dewey. The next day, the U.S. Army takes control of the Spanish island colony of Puerto Rico after an efficient nine-day campaign launched almost as an afterthought to the action in Cuba. On December 10, by the Treaty of



*The sinking of the USS Maine on February 15, 1898, took 260 American lives and helped spark the Spanish-American War. Yet no evidence has ever connected the Spanish with the fatal explosion.*

Paris, Spain cedes to the United States the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico, none of which had been important prewar American objectives. Spain also renounces sovereignty over Cuba, which *had* been the principal U.S. objective, thus opening the island to American military rule.

**A**nd so, by force of arms, America in only a few months' time had gained territorial possessions on both the Atlantic and Pacific sides of its continental mass. Nor did imperial expansion end with 1898. In an 1899 division of Samoa with Germany, the United States acquired the strategic deep-water harbor off Pago Pago. A jagged line of bases, or "coaling stations" as they were called in the age of steam, now ran from California to Hawaii to Samoa to the Philippines. This chain of possessions made possible the extension of American political and economic influence to China—an opportunity Secretary of State John Hay's Open Door Policy of 1899 was designed to seize.\* The new imperialism culminated in the linking of America's Atlantic and Pacific holdings via a canal across the narrow waist of Central America. President Roosevelt set this project in motion in November 1903, subverting the government of Colombia to produce an ostensibly revolutionary

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\*Hay's letter to European powers with established spheres of influence in China requested that they allow equal trade opportunities for all countries within their zones.

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Panamanian government willing to sign the requisite treaty.

By 1903, America's role in the world had been transformed. Throughout the 19th century the country had expanded steadily, but its growth had been overland—to the Hispanic south, to the sparsely populated west, even to noncontiguous Alaska. Now, however, the nation expanded overseas—indeed, all its new acquisitions were islands. This burst of offshore conquests, compressed into the last two years of the old century and the first three of the new, made the United States a genuine empire.

The United States would never again acquire as much territory as it did during those eventful years, but that half-decade marked a turning point in the way America related to the world. It gave Americans and their leaders self-confidence, a sense of their own power, and an abiding belief that they could shape international life according to their values. Thus, it foreshadowed the often awesome ambiguities of America's waxing and waning global involvements during the whole of the 20th century.

Some who played a direct part in the struggle against Spain were able to anticipate its consequences for America's rise to the status of an influential and assertive global power. Shipping out with the invasion fleet from Tampa to Santiago Bay in June 1898, Colonel Leonard Wood—soon to become military governor of Cuba—wrote to his wife: “Hard it is to realize that this is the commencement of a new policy and that this is the first great expedition our country has ever sent overseas and marks the commencement of a new era in our relations with the world.”

## I

**W**hy did America launch itself so abruptly upon an imperialist course? Wasn't this a nation that had taken to heart George Washington's admonition against “foreign entanglements,” a nation, moreover, that had spent most of the 19th century in an isolation guaranteed by two wide oceans and the protection of the British navy? No less a man than Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, a principal author of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, which asserted U.S. hemispheric authority, had said, “America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”

The answer is that this picture of isolation was never quite accurate. By the early 19th century, the United States was already a would-be imperialist power. President James Monroe soberly qualified his eponymous doctrine with careful limits on what the United States might do in the Western Hemisphere. But he also left his successors considerable leeway to define and defend American interests, a latitude they freely exploited. President James Knox Polk's victory in the Mexican War (1846–48) confirmed U.S. title to Texas and brought into U.S. possession territory that would become the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. In a dispute with Great Britain over

the Venezuelan boundary, President Grover Cleveland's secretary of state, Richard Olney, asserted in 1895, "Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition."

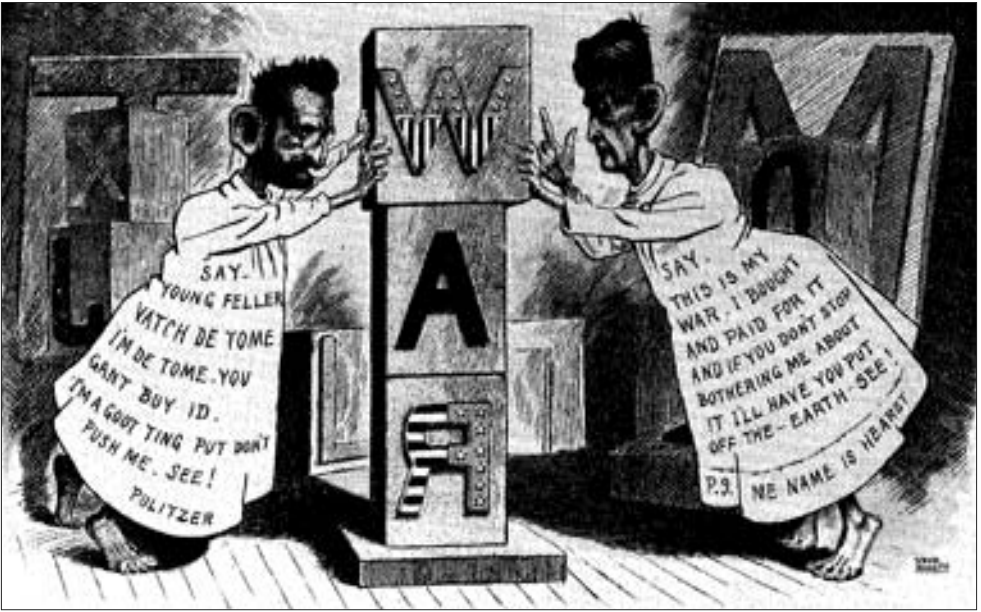
Cuba had long been a special attraction. No fewer than four American presidents before McKinley, beginning with Polk in 1848, tried to buy the island from Spain. The settlement of the Pacific coast also stirred President Polk to negotiate with Colombia to open the way for an isthmian canal. Secretary of State William Henry Seward, who acquired Alaska in 1867, also sought the Virgin Islands, as well as British Columbia and Greenland. President Ulysses S. Grant's efforts to annex Santo Domingo in 1870 got as far as a tie vote in the Senate. Canada was a perennial target of American imperialists; Theodore Roosevelt was not the first American president to cast covetous eyes on it.

**T**he Pacific, for which no Monroe Doctrine existed, was not exempt from American designs. Hawaii, where Americans had fishing and missionary interests early in the century and lucrative sugar plantations later, was always considered the most delectable morsel. In 1842, the United States warned Britain off the islands, and in 1849 repeated the warning to France. A quarter-century later, the Grant administration sought a protectorate over Hawaii, and the administration of James A. Garfield pondered its annexation. Elsewhere in the Pacific, the United States struck a deal in 1872 with the king of Samoa for a naval base, but the agreement failed in the Senate. Interestingly, the Philippines, under the desultory rule of Spain, did not evoke much American interest throughout the century.

For the most part, America's early imperial gestures went nowhere. Clearly, something had changed during the last decades of the century to make the United States a more decisive player in the imperial game.

One change was the exhaustion of the territorial frontier after the Civil War, combined with a surge of wealth that made the United States the world's largest economy by the 1890s. These facts of historical geography and economics diverted restless energies overseas. Official attention to Cuba and Hawaii was largely stimulated by American sugar interests there. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge equated trade with territory: "We must not be left behind. . . . In the economic struggle the great nations of Europe for many years have been seizing all the waste places, and all the weakly held lands of the earth, as the surest means of trade development."

A second factor was a new sense of mission that dominated the latter part of the century, an idealistic fervor that partook equally of Darwin and God. In *Our Country* (1895), Congregationalist minister Josiah Strong outlined the true path to the 185,000 Americans who bought his book. Americans, he preached, are a "race of unequaled energy, with all the majesty of numbers and the might of wealth behind it—the representative, let us hope, of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization. [Having] developed peculiarly aggressive traits cal-



Newspaper owners Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst compete in whipping up war fervor.

culated to impress its institutions upon mankind, [America] will spread itself across the earth. . . . And can any one doubt that this race, unless devitalized by alcohol and tobacco, is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?"

The Darwinian notion of racial competition fit nicely with the American doctrine of Manifest Destiny, by which the West had been conquered and the Indians subdued. The most enthusiastic proponent of both was Theodore Roosevelt, who took a racialist, if not exactly racist, view of history. "All the great masterful races," he claimed, "have been fighting races, and the minute that a race loses the hard fighting virtues, then . . . it has lost its proud right to stand as the equal of the best. . . . Cowardice in a race, as in an individual, is the unpardonable sin." Roosevelt's muscular philosophy led him to extol war in a manner that sounds particularly callow to those who look back through the smoke of two devastating world wars. "No triumph of peace," he went on, "is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war."

Third, these moral and biological arguments were reinforced by the development of an American imperial strategy calling for a large navy, Pacific bases, an isthmian canal, and, above all, an assertive role for a growing world power bound for rivalry with Great Britain, Germany, and Japan.

Finally, the new imperialism was stimulated by a phenomenon that remains with us today—the influence of the press.

William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer realized that a war with Spain over Cuba would sell newspapers. Long before hostilities broke out, Hearst sent the artist Frederic Remington to Havana. Idle and bored, Remington cabled his boss, "Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return." In a famous reply,



*U.S. troops celebrate news of the Spanish surrender of Santiago, Cuba.*

Hearst cabled, "Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war." In a way, he did. Hearst and his rival Pulitzer shamelessly invented Spanish atrocities against Cuban revolutionaries. And when the *Maine* blew up, Hearst's *New York Journal* sprang to accuse the Spanish. "THE WARSHIP MAINE WAS SPLIT IN TWO BY AN ENEMY'S SECRET INFERNAL MACHINE," it blared, though it had no evidence (and none was ever found) that the Spanish were responsible. When war was declared, Hearst took credit for it. "HOW DO YOU LIKE THE JOURNAL'S WAR?" one headline rhetorically exulted. The yellow press may not have been solely responsible for the war, but its soaring circulation figures suggest that it turned the American public toward intervention.

The last decade of the 19th century brought to a climax, and ultimately decided, a battle between those who urged American expansion and those who opposed it. The conflicting passions provided a valuable and sometimes eloquent debate over basic American traditions and values. Less benign were the calumny, insult, and invective that often marked the rhetoric. From the safe distance of his expatriate life in London, Henry James called Roosevelt "a dangerous and ominous jingo." (The word comes from a London music-hall ballad: "We don't want to fight/ But by Jingo if we do,/ We've got the ships, we've got the men,/ We've got the money too!") Roosevelt dismissed James as a "miserable little snob." His generic epithet for his anti-imperialist opponents was "goo-goos," a contemptuous reference to self-proclaimed advocates of "good government."

The role of powerful personalities working in opposition and in concert is often as important as that of impersonal forces in shaping world-historical developments. One way to understand the cause, consequences, and character of America's imperial breakout is to look closely

at the men most responsible for it. While a list of “jingo” would be long, five figures stand out: John Hay, secretary of state under McKinley and Roosevelt, and the only one of the five whose political career spanned the entire period between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War; Alfred T. Mahan, a naval officer and military philosopher of genius; Elihu Root, a New York corporation lawyer who, as secretary of war under McKinley and Roosevelt, was responsible for the administration of the Philippines and Cuba; Henry Cabot Lodge, the devious junior senator from Massachusetts, for whom American imperialism was close to a sacred creed; and Theodore Roosevelt himself, who towered over even these giants in his intellect, energy, and determination.

**T**hese five could fairly be called the fathers of modern American imperialism. Coming together at a critical period of American history, they helped to shape it. For that, they bear comparison with a later group, the “wise men” who, working around President Harry Truman, helped to shape American policy during another hinge period, the early days of the Cold War in the late 1940s and early ’50s.

All of the earlier group were of the same generation, except for the precocious Roosevelt. All were easterners, except Hay. All were members of the Republican Party, and all, except Mahan, were active in it. As avid students of English history, they shared an admiration for Britain’s military power and imperial grandeur. All except Root were notable authors. Roosevelt wrote 38 books, Lodge 50; Mahan was the author of a military classic on the influence of sea power; Hay was a poet, a best-selling novelist, and co-author of a popular biography of Lincoln. They were also mutual admirers and good friends who enjoyed each other’s company at work and at leisure. Roosevelt, with his capacity for friendship and his love of ideas, was the catalyst: close to each of the other four, he was largely responsible for bringing them together.

## II

**J**ohn Hay, the oldest of the five, was born in Indiana in 1838, the son of a doctor who moved his family to Warsaw, Illinois, when John was three. An artistic and sensitive boy, Hay graduated from Brown as class poet and then joined his uncle’s law office in Springfield as an apprentice. It was there that he had a life-defining piece of luck—the lawyer who occupied the office next to Milton Hay’s was Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln was elected president a year later, he took Hay, age 22, to Washington as a junior assistant. Hay worshiped Lincoln, and in middle age paid the martyred president a scholarly tribute by devoting 10 years to an authoritative biography written in collaboration with fellow White House aide John Nicolay.

Hay had a protean career as a diplomat, journalist, and writer. He served in Paris, Vienna, and Madrid before becoming ambassador to



the Court of Saint James. A prolific contributor to journals, he was also for a time editor of the *New York Tribune*. He won fame with a collection of uplifting poems called *Pike County Ballads*, first serialized in 1871. The quality of its western-dialect doggerel was, as even a small sample shows, uniformly dreadful:

He seen his duty, a dead-sure thing,—  
And went for it thar and then;  
And Christ ain't a going to be too hard  
On a man that died for men.

Hay also wrote a popular novel, *The Breadwinners* (1883), defending law and order, property, and capitalism against the strikes and riots of the immigrant working class.

Despite his social conservatism, Hay was a modest and vulnerable man, whose lifelong bouts of depression made him doubt his own worth. He formed a decades-long Damon and Pythias friendship with the broody intellectual Henry Adams, whose political views were far more liberal than his own. The two were inseparable, taking joint vacations in Europe and even building neighboring houses on



John Hay

Washington's Lafayette Square. Hay's wit was a prime attraction at Adams's power breakfasts, though Hay, unlike Adams, was not a snob. He kept broad political company, including, as Adams noted, "scores of men whom I would not touch with a pole."

Hay did not become secretary of state until September 1898, after the Spanish had been defeated in Cuba and the Philippines. He was thus an implementer rather than an initiator of the new imperialism. Though an imperialist, he was a reluctant one. As the

American navy steamed to victory in Santiago and Manila bays, Hay from the embassy in London wished Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos autonomy or independence, not colonization by the United States. A letter to Theodore Roosevelt containing the famous phrase, "It has been a splendid little war," can actually be read as cautionary, since he added, "[The war] is now to be concluded, I hope, with that fine good nature, which is, after all, the distinguishing trait of the American character." Only weeks later, he praised Andrew Carnegie for an article attacking imperialism. But Hay was an Anglophile, and the spectacle of Britain's decline probably moved him toward his eventual acceptance of a kind of imperialism. "The serious thing," he wrote to Adams in 1900, "is the discovery—now past doubt—that the British have lost all skill in fighting; and the whole world knows it, and is regulating itself accordingly."

### III

**A**lfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) was a brilliant misfit in an organization with little tolerance for misfits. Of impeccable military lineage, he was the son of the dean of faculty at West Point and an Annapolis graduate himself. He preferred writing and research to sea duty, provoking one superior officer to call him a “pen-and-ink sailor.” Yet it was on a cruise to France at the age of 23 that he discovered the idea that shaped his life’s work. The French army’s occupation of Mexico City convinced Mahan that the Monroe Doctrine was no stronger than the capacity of a U.S. fleet to support it. He had not thought of himself as an imperialist until the mid-1880s. He had opposed colonies precisely because they would require a large military establishment. But the logic of his analysis—first in lectures at the Naval War College, then in books—made him the primary philosopher of imperialism. “I am an imperialist,” he said, “because I am not an isolationist.”



*Alfred Thayer Mahan*

Mahan’s great work, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (1890), remains a masterpiece of clarity, analysis, and fine prose. Its thesis is that a great nation must be a strong sea power, and that this requires “a wide-spread healthy commerce and a powerful navy.” The hero of Mahan’s book was Great Britain, but the intended audiences were American politicians and the barnacle-encrusted U.S. Navy, which was still configured for coastal defense rather than control of the sea-lanes. Mahan issued a picturesque warning: “Having . . . no foreign establishments, either colonial or military, the ships of war of the United States, in war, will be like land birds, unable to fly far from their own shores. To provide resting-places for them, where they can coal and repair, would be one of the first duties of a government proposing to itself the development of the power of the nation at sea.”

Mahan saw Hawaii and the Philippines as two necessary “resting places.” He also favored an isthmian canal to join the three American seaboard: the Atlantic, the Gulf, and the Pacific. The “piercing of the Isthmus,” he argued, would expose “the defenseless condition of the Pacific coast.” Though an Anglophile, Mahan understood the potential threat from Britain, as well as from Germany and Japan. Here one can see a circular argument: America needed a large navy to contest its rivals at sea; it needed a canal to join its coasts and its fleets; it needed colonies in the Pacific to protect the canal and a bigger navy to protect the colonies. Thus did one act of imperialism beget another. Mahan, a devout Christian,

believed deeply in the morality of his doctrines. He held that the United States had an obligation to expand so that its civilization, culture, and religion could be spread abroad for the benefit of the more backward nations.

This austere, introverted naval captain—after retirement he wrote a book about his spiritual development—was no self-promoter. He needed an agent, and he found one in Theodore Roosevelt. The two met in 1887, when Roosevelt came to lecture at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Roosevelt had in fact preceded Mahan in arguing in print that the United States needed a stronger navy. In his book *The Naval War of 1812*, begun at Harvard and published in 1882 when he was only 24, Roosevelt contended that the United States had won the war because of the quality of a navy that had since been allowed to decline. Roosevelt praised *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* to his cosmopolitan intellectual coterie, inadvertently ensuring that it became a required text in the rival navies of Germany, Japan, and Great Britain. Thus Mahan became the dominant strategist not just of the American navy but of many of the major navies of the world.

## IV

**E**lihu Root (1845–1937) enjoyed the early career of a conventionally brilliant member of the minor eastern establishment. His colonial forebears had moved from Connecticut to Hamilton, New York, where his father, Oren (known as “Cube Root”), taught mathematics at Hamilton College. Elihu graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Hamilton, attended law school at New York University, joined the Union League and a fishing club on Martha’s Vineyard, and bought a summer house in Southampton. As a young lawyer representing big corporations, he had the pushiness and arrogance of one to whom everything came easy. In a case against “Boss” William M. Tweed, the judge suggested that Root, a junior member of the defense

team, spend more time with his conscience. This fastidious lawyer had a steel-trap mind, remarkable organizational ability, and a capacity for ruthlessness. Even his friend John Hay commented on his “frank and murderous smile.”

Root also had keen political instincts. He backed Theodore Roosevelt, 13 years his junior, for the New York State Assembly when Roosevelt was 23. He supported Roosevelt again in 1886, when he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of New York City, and worked closely with him when he was New York City police commissioner in 1896. In 1898,



Elihu Root

when Roosevelt ran for governor of New York, Root established the candidate's New York residence against claims that he had moved to Washington. Roosevelt, like others who valued Root's services, saw him as a lawyer who showed clients how to do what they wanted to do, not what they were prevented from doing. Root was not above special pleading, however. Solicitous of E. H. Harriman, J. P. Morgan, and other captains of industry whom he represented, he talked the new governor out of radical reforms that would have upset the business and financial communities.

**R**oot, like Hay, was a grudging imperialist. Following the sinking of the *Maine*, he wrote to a friend, "I deplore war. I have earnestly hoped that it might not come. I deny the obligation of the American people to make the tremendous sacrifices which it must entail. . . . I prefer that we should not do it; I don't think we are bound to do it; I would prevent it if I could." But being above all a pragmatist, Root supported the war once it was joined. He accepted President McKinley's offer of the War Department in July 1899 for the purpose of administering the islands taken from Spain. "So I went to perform a lawyer's duty upon the call of the greatest of all our clients, the Government of our country."

The sleek career trajectory of this consummate organization man, together with his stern and disciplined work habits, made him difficult to like and sometimes even to take seriously. Gore Vidal, alluding to Root's distinctive bangs, dismissed him as "an animated feather-duster." His portraits in the New York headquarters of the Council on Foreign Relations, which he helped to found, and in the Metropolitan Club, of which he was the president, certainly make him look like a dandy.

President Roosevelt, however, did not underestimate him. Roosevelt called Root "the greatest man that has arisen on either side of the Atlantic in my lifetime, . . . the brutal friend to whom I pay the most attention." The compliment was not all hyperbole. Root grew in his job, combining mental acuity, directness, and managerial genius with a sense of fairness in the governing of America's new colonial subjects.

## V

**O**f the five men considered here, Henry Cabot Lodge (1850–1924) was the one who most deserved the title of "jingo." The scion of two patrician Boston families, he earned undergraduate and graduate degrees at Harvard and joined its faculty under the protective wing of Henry Adams, then a professor of medieval history. He was an obsessive writer and published biographies of Alexander Hamilton, Daniel Webster, and George Washington before he was 40. He was also a determined politician, who lost three elections in Massachusetts before winning a seat in Congress in 1886 and then being elected to the Senate in 1892. Lodge's experience in politics, both winning and losing, helped



Henry Cabot Lodge

make him the supreme political tactician of his time.

Lodge seems to have had two personalities—one for his closest friends and one for others. To Henry Adams, his lifelong friend, he was “an excellent talker, a voracious reader, a ready wit, an accomplished orator, with a clear mind and a powerful memory, . . . English to the last fibre of his thought—saturated with English traditions, English taste—revolted by every vice and by most virtues of Frenchman and German.” Others found him frigid, crusty, aristocratic, intransigent (Mark Hanna, the Ohio Republican Party boss, called him the stubbornest man he had ever met), narrow-minded, conspiratorial, and (according to President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard) “degenerated.” One of his fellow senators compared him to the soil of Massachusetts—“highly cultivated but very thin.” To everyone, he was tenacious.

Lodge may have come to his view of the world through his family. He was the heir to a shipping fortune, and his wife was the daughter of an admiral. From the platform of the Congress, he spoke out early and often for the annexation of Cuba and a permanent naval presence in Hawaii, and he conspired with Roosevelt for the seizure of the Philippines. He wrote in 1895, “From the Rio Grande to the Arctic Ocean there should be but one flag and one country. . . . Every consideration of national growth and national welfare demands it.” Lodge was driven by the conviction of America’s superiority and its right to “conquest, colonization, and territorial expansion.” His views were more than a little bigoted. His activism in the Congress against new immigrants was directed mainly against Chinese, Italians, Russians, and Eastern Europeans. “We are at this moment,” he claimed, “overcrowded with undesirable immigrants.”

Henry Cabot Lodge was, in a sense, Theodore Roosevelt’s bad angel. The two had similar social and intellectual backgrounds, sharing Harvard and the Porcellian Club. Lodge taught Roosevelt at Harvard, and they collaborated in the progressive wing of the Republican Party. They co-authored a book for juveniles, *Hero Tales from American History* (1895), full of derring-do and violence. Their devotion to imperialism was identical and fierce, and they plotted strategy together. So close were they that, when Roosevelt became president, Lodge cut a separate entrance in his house on Massachusetts Avenue so the president could enter unobserved. Still, the two were profoundly different. Lodge’s secretive nature contrasted with Roosevelt’s openness and ebullience. And Lodge’s bigotry, unlike Roosevelt’s racialism, was unleavened by an innate largeness of spirit.

## VI

**T**heodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) was close to Mahan, Hay, Root, and Lodge, and he admired all four. But for all his contradictions, he was a bigger man than any of them. It is striking how early and often he was spotted for greatness—by family friends, Harvard cronies, politicians, and cowboys. His extraordinary memory, his multiple enthusiasms, his supreme self-confidence, and his unbounded energy made him a force of nature. He is “pure act,” said Henry Adams, who was no act. Roosevelt held major positions at startlingly early stages of his life: minority leader of the New York State Assembly at 24, U.S. civil service commissioner at 31, New York City police commissioner at 36, assistant secretary of the Navy at 38, governor of New York at 40, vice president and president of the United States at 42.

Roosevelt was born in New York City, son of a well-to-do importer who devoted much of his leisure to helping wayward children. As a boy, “Teedie” developed many of the traits that, with his storied energy, were to make him a forceful political leader. He mastered a variety of subjects; he loved manly sport; he had a snobbish sense of superiority and, with it, his father’s charitable commitment; he was confident of his rectitude; he loved to preach and write. At 18, he published the first of his 38 works, a scientific catalogue on summer birds of the Adirondacks. At Harvard he boxed, joined the most fashionable clubs, and graduated in 1880 in the top 15 percent of his class.

So blessed was Roosevelt with success that it is easy to forget the handicaps he overcame. He was blind in one eye, yet was a prodigious reader and author. He was sickly and asthmatic, and his heart was so weak that his doctors feared that his compulsive exercising would kill him. He bore with stoicism the immeasurable tragedy of losing, at 25, his wife and his mother on the same day. He had great qualities of courage and determination. He was an unabashed self-promoter, but, then, there was much to promote. He was a genuine reformer in the New York assembly and a real hero on San Juan Hill. He had enemies and rejoiced in them; some of them thought he was crazy. McKinley’s man Mark Hanna tried to block him from the vice-presidential nomination in 1900, wailing, “Don’t any of you realize that there’s only one life between that madman and the Presidency?”

Roosevelt came to his imperialist views through the expansive energy of his character and his particular understanding of



*Theodore Roosevelt*

American history. Like Mahan, he was a big-navy man; like Hay, he was an Anglophile who believed that America had to replace a faltering Britain in maintaining the balance of power. In *The Winning of the West* (1889), his stirring account of America's territorial expansion, he showed indecent contempt for the rights of Indians: "The most righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under debt to him." Then, shifting to a global canvas: "American and Indian, Boer and Zulu, Cossack and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori,—in each case the victor, horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people."

With views such as those, it was only a step to the two principles that guided Roosevelt during his first foreign-policy assignment at the Navy Department. First, he believed that the spread of the more advanced peoples (preferably English-speaking) over the less advanced benefited mankind as a whole. Second, he maintained that when American interests clashed with those of another state, the former had to be defended. Roosevelt did put some limits on his imperial rapacity. To Carl Schurz, a dedicated anti-imperialist, he wrote, "Unjust war is dreadful; a just war may be the highest duty." And in theory, if not always in practice, he took a moderate view of the Monroe Doctrine. He saw it as an "Open Door" in South America: "I do not want the United States or any European power to get territorial possessions in South America but to let South America gradually develop its own lines, with an open door to all outside nations."

Roosevelt rejected "imperialism" as a description of his approach. He tolerated "expansion." The word he preferred was "Americanism." The author of heroic tales of America, the doer of heroic deeds, he saw his country as truly beneficent toward the lesser nations. Even before he came into positions of policy responsibility, he would sit in the Metropolitan Club with his allies Mahan and Lodge and plan ways for the United States to wrest the imperial baton from ineffectual, corrupt, unworthy Spain. Long before he became president, Roosevelt was the most influential advocate of America's new imperialism.

## VII

**T**his new imperialism was certain to arouse strong opposition from those convinced that it betrayed American traditions or sold out American interests. The anti-imperialists were a collection of idealists, businessmen such as Andrew Carnegie, trade unionists such as Samuel Gompers, writers such as Mark Twain, prominent members of Congress, and even some racists. Their most powerful advocate was Grover Cleveland. In his first inaugural address, in 1885, he stated baldly, "I do not favor a policy of acquisi-

tion of new and distant territory or the incorporation of remote interests with our own.” Inaugurated for the second time in 1893, President Cleveland withdrew the treaty annexing Hawaii that his predecessor had submitted to the Senate. In 1895, he kept the United States from taking sides in the Cuban insurrection against Spain. But Cleveland’s influence was limited to the years he was in office. In 1897, McKinley succeeded him and brought Roosevelt, Hay, and Root to positions of power.

The spiritual leader of the anti-imperialists was a remarkable figure, Carl Schurz. Like Carnegie, Schurz was not born an American. A native of Prussia, he emigrated to the United States at 23, having been a student activist in the European revolutionary movements of 1848. Schurz established a political base in the Midwest as the chief spokesman for German Americans. He was a friend of Lincoln’s, a Civil War major general who fought bravely at Second Manassas and Gettysburg, a U.S. senator from Missouri, and secretary of the interior under President Rutherford Hayes. A tall, imposing man with a full beard and absolute moral conviction, Schurz excelled as an orator and journalist. He opposed every move by the imperialists on Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines, causing Roosevelt to attack him as a “prattling foreigner.” He invoked with passion and eloquence an American heritage into which he had not been born. He feared that empire would undermine the foundations of democracy, subjugate foreign peoples against their will, and necessitate a large permanent military establishment. “My country, right or wrong,” Schurz proclaimed. “If right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right.”

Schurz was a founder of the Anti-Imperialist League, launched with heavy symbolism in revolutionary Faneuil Hall in Boston in 1898, following the victory over Spain. The league’s members represented the highest-minded of the anti-imperialists, graduates (as most of them were) of Harvard and Yale. They pointed out that the U.S. Constitution contained no provisions for vassals, and they made ominous references to the fate of imperial Rome. Their influence, however, was limited to some of the better universities and men’s clubs along the eastern seaboard.

For varying reasons, American business and American labor tended toward anti-imperialism. Steel baron Andrew Carnegie’s opposition to expansion combined his pacifist leanings with his belief that war was destructive to commerce. Labor leader Samuel Gompers focused on the need to exclude low-wage Asians, an argument still used in the U.S. labor movement against Mexicans. Other anti-imperialists were openly racist. “Are we to have a Mongolian state in this Union?” asked Representative John F. Fitzgerald, John F. Kennedy’s grandfather, on the floor of the House. Few anti-imperialists, however, were consistent in their beliefs. The venerable George Frisbie Hoar, senior senator from Massachusetts and the most eloquent anti-imperialist in Congress, had supported the annexation of



Hawaii. Even Schurz, that model of rectitude, had once advocated the annexation of Canada and expressed doubt that Cubans or Filipinos were capable of American-style self-government, not being up to the standards of the “Germanic races.” William Jennings Bryan, Democratic candidate for president in 1896 and 1900 and an anti-imperialist, alienated the bankers and lawyers at the core of the movement by making silver the key issue in the 1896 campaign. Bryan blurred his image further by signing up for active duty in the war against Spain.

The force of anti-imperialism, and its variety, showed that the imperial style was not unanimously acceptable to the American people. Some of the dissidents’ arguments—especially those contrasting imperial activity with America’s core values—were revived much later, during the Vietnam War, and even retain relevance today. Yet for all their passion, the enemies of the new imperialism seemed old-fashioned and out of touch. They looked back to a mythic American past, while Roosevelt and his friends laid claim to a bountiful future. Indeed, there were significant age differences. Schurz was 69 in 1898; Senator Hoar was 72; Andrew Carnegie was 63. By contrast, Hay was 60, Mahan 58, Root 53, Lodge 48, Roosevelt 40, and Albert Beveridge, the imperialist firebrand in the Senate, only 36. The anti-imperialists were on the losing end of historical change. McKinley’s re-election in 1900 weakened them mortally, and Roosevelt’s election in 1904 destroyed them as a political force.

## VIII

**F**rom 1898 to 1903, Roosevelt, Lodge, and Mahan were involved in virtually every action that transformed the United States into an imperial power. Hay and Root came to Washington after the initial surge of conquest, but they helped carry it forward even as they sought to temper its excesses.

McKinley’s election in 1896 brought to the presidency an affable Civil War veteran—usually known as “Major McKinley”—whose greatest virtue was the ability to get along with people. McKinley had few strong views on anything, including imperialism. He began by opposing it. “We want no wars of conquest,” he said in his inaugural address in March 1897, “we must avoid the temptation of territorial aggression.” But Henry Cabot Lodge persuaded McKinley to take Roosevelt, at the time New York City police commissioner, as assistant secretary of the Navy. Roosevelt, Lodge, and Mahan already knew what they wanted: Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii. The Cuban revolution against Spain gave them their chance.

The father of the revolution was José Martí, a Cuban intellectual who lived 14 years of his short life in the United States and organized the insurrection from New York City. Martí admired America’s individualism but hated its materialism; the last thing he wanted was an American takeover of Cuba. “Through the independence of

Cuba,” he said, “it is my duty . . . to prevent the USA from spreading over the West Indies and falling with added weight upon other lands of Our America.” After landing in Cuba with an invading force, Martí was killed on the first day of the Cuban revolution—May 19, 1895. He was 42. His successors were less distrustful of American motives, and Hearst used their information and misinformation to wage his newspaper war against Spain.

When McKinley took office, Cuba was already a major source of tension between the United States and Spain. The president exerted diplomatic pressure to force the Spanish, with some success, to behave less brutally toward the Cuban insurrectionists. After the *Maine* blew up on February 15, 1898—under circumstances that today appear to have been accidental—Roosevelt railed at McKinley’s lack of reaction: “The President has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair.”

On February 25, in a breathtaking act of insubordination, Roosevelt took advantage of the Friday afternoon departure of his boss, the elderly Secretary John D. Long, to put the entire U.S. Navy on a war footing. While the secretary went about some medical errands, Roosevelt instructed Admiral George Dewey in Hong Kong to attack the Philippines in the event of war. McKinley kept looking for a diplomatic solution; he offered to buy Cuba from the queen of Spain for \$300 million (40 times what the United States had paid for Alaska); she found the price too low. War became unavoidable.

Roosevelt’s stroke was brilliant. Though the Philippines had never been a bone of contention with Spain, Roosevelt and his coconspirators understood their strategic value as a base and as a naval stepping stone to the Asian continent. Dewey’s lightning attack in Manila Bay, followed by the naval victory at Santiago Bay in eastern Cuba and the almost unnoticed annexation of Hawaii that same summer, accomplished in a few short weeks most of the imperial agenda of Roosevelt, Lodge, and Mahan. Roosevelt’s own exploits on San Juan Hill, in a campaign in which the Americans had the advantage of the Spaniards in both manpower and firepower, made him a national hero. Four months later, he was the governor-elect of New York; two years after that, the vice president-elect.

Despite the intense American interest in Cuba throughout the 19th century and the urgings of General Leonard Wood, the military governor from 1899 to 1902, the victors of Santiago Bay made no plans to annex the island. Roosevelt, Lodge, and Secretary of War Root all opposed annexation. But Root insisted on permanent installations (including the naval base at Guantánamo Bay) and the right of American intervention in the case of anarchy or threat by another power. He argued: “The trouble about Cuba is that, although technically a foreign country, practically and morally it occupies an intermediate position, since we have required it to become a part of our political and military system, and to form a part of our lines of



*Datto Piang, King of Mindanao, poses with American officers and administrators. Though paternalistic governors, Americans brought schools, land reform, and a new political system to the Philippines.*

exterior defense.” (President John F. Kennedy could have quoted this sentence verbatim to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in October 1962.) After military government ended in 1902, an American civilian government presided until 1909, when Cuba gained its independence.

The United States shared basic objectives with anti-Spanish revolutionaries in both Cuba and the Philippines. Yet the Americans managed to alienate both. The cause in each case was the American unwillingness to concede power. In Cuba the rebels were barred from the surrender ceremony at Santiago and from the subsequent peace conference. The American soldiers, who were mostly southern, did not get along with the insurrectionary forces, who were mostly black. Ironically, the greatest negative effect on U.S. interests may have come not from the antipathy of the Cuban rebels but from the hostility of one Spanish soldier who had been transferred to Cuba from Spain at the time of the war. Angel Castro hated the

Americans for having prevented the Spanish army from defeating the rebels. No doubt he vented his hostility in front of his son Fidel, born in 1926.

In the Philippines the American invaders earned even greater enmity among the local population. There the occupying force fought Filipino revolutionaries for nearly four years, from 1898 to 1902, in a war that cost 200,000 (mostly civilian) Filipino lives. The Philippine revolution against Spain began in 1896. It was led by Emilio Aguinaldo, of middle-class Spanish-Chinese background, who wanted to create an independent government on the American model. Aguinaldo allowed the Americans to persuade him not to attack Manila before they landed their troops. His trust was misplaced; Dewey cut him out of the surrender ceremony. To Aguinaldo, the American occupiers became indistinguishable from the Spanish, and he decided to fight them.

Thus did the United States alienate and destroy a revolutionary movement that had taken its values from America's own struggle for independence. Roosevelt and Lodge—in their determination to annex the Philippines, in their blindness to the desires and rights of its people, and in the face of McKinley's dithering and the American public's apathy—were the fathers of this unnecessary war. Aguinaldo was captured in March 1901, and Roosevelt, as president, proclaimed military victory in July 1902. Independence did not come to the Philippines until 1946, but at least the revolutionary leader lived to see it. In 1960, the man whom Elihu Root had called a “Chinese half-breed” and who was now at 92 his country's national hero, received from the American ambassador to the Philippine Republic, Charles Bohlen, the sword he had been wearing when he was captured by the American army.

## IX

Americans like to pretend that they have no imperial past. What was done in their name in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Panama—all in the space of five years—proves them wrong. American acquisitiveness may have been less extensive than the global foraying of Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal, but it was just as indifferent to the interests of local populations. After the flush of conquest, however, some restraints were exercised that were unique, or at least typically American. For this, most credit must go to Elihu Root.

Root was charged by President McKinley, and later by President Roosevelt, to establish a civil society in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. In Cuba he had competent administrators, and they turned the island over to its people in 1909 in better economic and political shape than they had found it. With Puerto Rico, Root hesitated to impose a wholly American system on a Hispanic population; so he preserved traditional Spanish civil law. He also instituted a

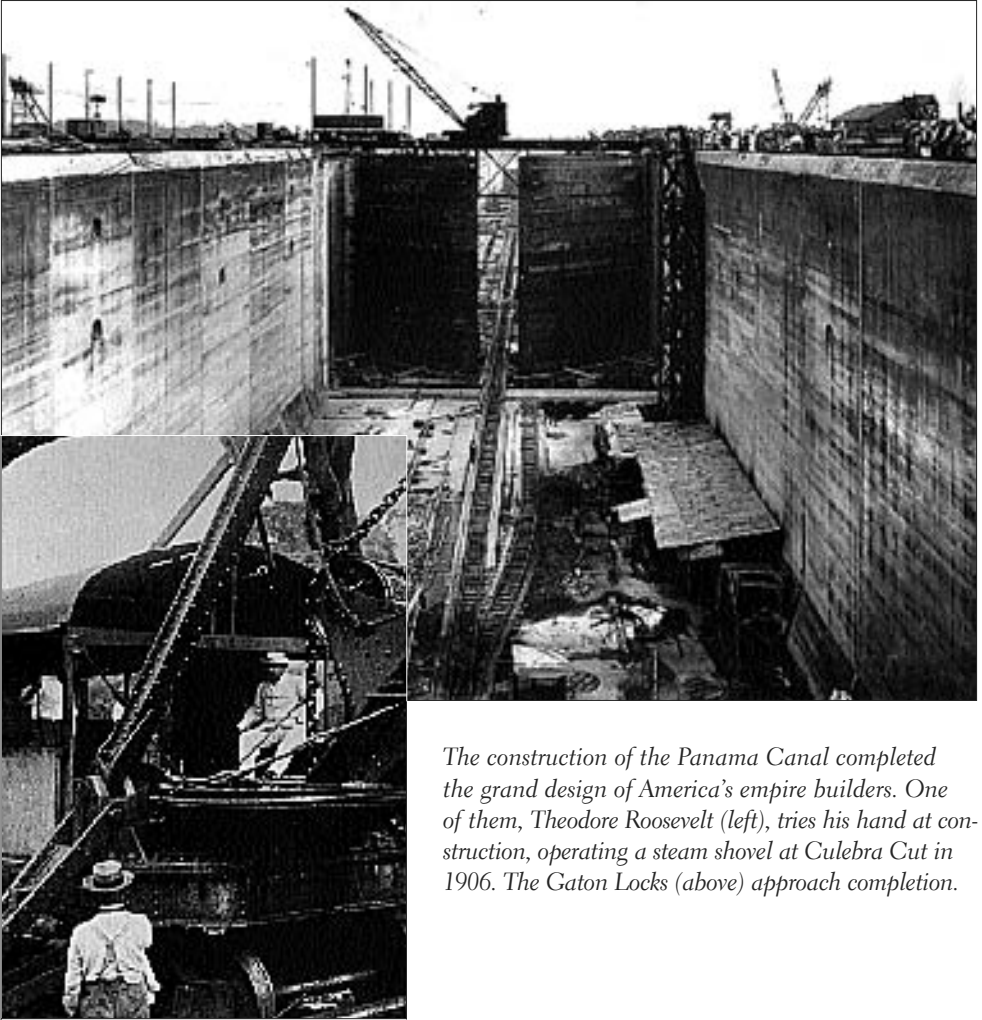
financial reform ensuring that locally generated revenues would be used locally, and he won large appropriations from Congress for education on the island. While he opposed independence and statehood, he ensured considerable self-government for Puerto Rico, ending the military administration in 1900 and establishing an elected house of delegates. In the Philippines, Root had an inspired civilian governor—William Howard Taft, an Ohio judge who had never been seen on the imperialist enterprise. Under the umbrella of American sovereignty, Root and Taft developed a political system providing for broad local powers, the rule of law, and individual freedoms. It was paternalistic, but it produced in 1907 the first elected legislature in Asia. Under Taft's leadership, Americans initiated land reforms and built roads, ports, hospitals, and schools. The Philippines, as a result, soon had the highest literacy rate in Southeast Asia.

Secretary of State Hay, like Secretary of War Root, was a mixture of jingoism and moderation. On one hand, Hay's negotiations with the British in 1901, voiding an earlier agreement that had made any isthmian canal a cooperative enterprise, produced a treaty giving the United States exclusive rights to build, control, and fortify the canal. His treaty in 1903 with the newly installed puppet government of Panama delivered a 10-mile-wide canal zone to the United States. On the other hand, Hay tried unsuccessfully to limit U.S. gains in the Philippines to a coaling station, and his sympathetic approach to the Philippine insurgents, had it prevailed, might have tempered and shortened their conflict with the U.S. Army. Hay's open door for trade with China was two-sided: though it extended U.S. imperial interests through the Pacific, it was a tacit renunciation of territorial claims on the Asian mainland.

Even Roosevelt was capable of restraint and reflection. After absorbing Cuba and Puerto Rico, he showed little appetite for other Caribbean possessions. Speaking of the island of Santo Domingo, he said, "I have about the same desire to annex it as a gorged boa constrictor might have to swallow a porcupine wrong-end-to." And he came to see the annexation of the Philippines as an economic and military mistake. Anticipating a Japanese threat in Asia, he warned that the Philippines would become "our heel of Achilles if we are attacked by a foreign power." The fall of the Philippines to Japan in 1942 confirmed his prescience. America's leading jingo came to advocate early independence for his most notable acquisition.

## X

**I**n the taking of colonies, America was no different (except in scale) from the major European powers engaged in the late-19th-century struggle for empire. In the administration of its acquisitions, however, America's record has been largely positive. Hawaii has become a state. The Philippines were promised, and



*The construction of the Panama Canal completed the grand design of America's empire builders. One of them, Theodore Roosevelt (left), tries his hand at construction, operating a steam shovel at Culebra Cut in 1906. The Gaton Locks (above) approach completion.*

finally received, independence, and relations between the two countries remain close. Puerto Ricans consistently voted for close ties with the United States, with no significant popular sentiment for independence. Theodore Roosevelt's America became a classic imperialist power, but it went on to become a moderate and generally effective colonial governor.

The five-year period in which America became an imperial state unleashed forces that have affected its entire subsequent history. For the first time, the United States had used its armies overseas. With two smashing naval victories, it had proven the value of a powerful navy. With the republic on the way to becoming a global military power, Americans were coming to believe, with Roosevelt, that the world was interdependent and that America must play a major role in it. In entering on the world stage, America had exercised its peculiar propensity to join narrow interests with messianic goals, to combine raw power with high purpose. The events and debates of 100 years ago have left their mark on American leaders and their actions ever since.

Woodrow Wilson, contrary to common belief, was as much an acolyte as an adversary of Theodore Roosevelt. An interventionist in both word and deed, Wilson supported the annexation of the Philippines and Puerto Rico and believed that the United States should not hesitate to export its values. As president, he continued Roosevelt's policy of intervention in Latin America, initiating occupations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic that lasted 19 and eight years respectively.

America's preoccupation with stability in Latin America—one of the key reasons for the war with Spain over Cuba—carried into the post-World War II period, as is shown by the actions of several successive U.S. presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower's CIA-backed overthrow of a leftist Guatemalan government in 1954; an abortive effort by John F. Kennedy to dispose of Cuban president Fidel Castro in 1961; a brief occupation of the Dominican Republic by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 to forestall a leftward trend; the participation of Richard M. Nixon's CIA in the ouster of leftist Chilean president Salvador Allende in 1973; Ronald Reagan's invasion of Grenada in 1983; the capture of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega in 1990 during the administration of George Bush; and the expulsion of a Haitian military dictatorship by Bill Clinton in 1994 to return an elected president to office and to curb the flow of refugees bound for the United States.

All of these examples reflect the mixture of moralism and self-interest that characterized Theodore Roosevelt's approach to the hemisphere. In more than a few cases, repeated use of American muscle stirred resentment within Latin America and prevented the establishment of normal relations. President Jimmy Carter's achievement of a treaty in 1977 to relinquish the Panama Canal, which won justifiable praise in Latin America, stood clearly outside the Rooseveltian tradition.

The acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines in 1898 strengthened American interests in Asia during the decades before World War II. In fact, that war began for the United States as an Asian war, with the Japanese attack on Hawaii. In its ideological focus and its projection of American military power, the postwar strategy of containment, designed to curb Soviet (and Chinese) aggression, was a classic extrapolation of the imperialism of 1898–1903. Almost all the American soldiers killed during the Cold War died in Korea and Vietnam—a sober reminder of Asia's importance to U.S. policy as well as of the benefits and risks of overseas wars. The Vietnam War in fact bore an eerie resemblance to the war against the Filipino insurrectionists. In both conflicts, American troops fought homegrown nationalists, though in the Vietnamese case the nationalists were heavily supported by foreign powers. And, in both, significant U.S. casualties, combined with reports of atrocities committed by Americans, weakened public support for the U.S.

commitment as the war dragged on. But victory in the Philippines averted a backlash against military actions abroad; defeat in Vietnam caused one. Since the fall of Saigon in 1975, American presidents have been wary of extensive ground engagements.

**T**he five who created the first genuine American imperialism worked together in a way seldom seen in American history. Roosevelt's missionary zeal and breadth of vision, Mahan's rigorous development of a strategy for making America a great power, Root's conscientiousness and good sense, Hay's combination of loyalty and questioning, and Lodge's masterful ability to win support of the Congress—all of these elements, taken together, contributed crucially to America's entry upon the world scene. They also mirror most of the policy contradictions that have marked U.S. policy in the 20th century: the idealism and the cynicism, the cultural arrogance and the humanitarian impulse, the intended and the unintended consequences of globalism, the extension of American domestic values abroad at the expense of some of those values at home. Roosevelt believed that "our chief usefulness to humanity rests on our combining power with high purpose." Twentieth-century American foreign policy has been conducted between those poles, often, but not always, with success.

With the hindsight of 100 years, it seems clear that the actions of Roosevelt and his friends helped to change the way America has viewed the world and acted in it. One of Roosevelt's Harvard professors, William James, who detested the imperialism practiced by his former pupil, wrote of 1898: "We gave the fighting instinct and the passion of mastery their outing . . . because we thought that . . . we could resume our permanent ideals and character when the fighting fit was done." But the fighting fit did change our ideals and our character. Today, for better or worse, we still live with the consequences—and under the shadow—of the imperial actions taken a century ago.

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