



The Question of an American Empire

Student Name _____ Date _____

Activity 1: Imperialism beliefs in late 19th century American Society: Pro and Con

Directions (Group 1: Imperialists/Expansionists): Read the following documents and list on the chart the key arguments (you should have at least four points in each column) made by Imperialists in order to prepare for your town hall discussion.

“The United States Looking Outwards,” Alfred Thayer Mahan, 1890:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/protected/alfred.htm>

Alfred Thayer Mahan was a U.S. Navy officer and military historian who believed that national security and commercial prosperity depended on a strong naval force; and that the United States needed overseas possessions, or at least control of critical bases, to be able to project its naval power into distant areas. Mahan's writings about the importance of seapower influenced the thinking of many world leaders, including Theodore Roosevelt and the German Kaiser, William II.

To turn now from the particular lessons drawn from the history of the past to the general question of the influence of government upon the sea career of its people, it is seen that that influence can work in two distinct but closely related ways.

First, in peace: The government by its policy can favor the natural growth of a people's industries and its tendencies to seek adventure and gain by way of the sea; or it can try to develop such industries and such sea-going bent, when they do not naturally exist; or, on the other hand, the government may, by mistaken action check and fetter the progress which the people left to themselves would make. In any one of these ways the influence of the government will be felt, making or marring the sea power of the country in the matter of peaceful commerce; upon which alone, it cannot be too often insisted, a thoroughly strong navy can be based.

Secondly, for war: The influence of the government will be felt in its most legitimate manner in maintaining an armed navy, of a size commensurate with the growth of its shipping and the importance of the interests connected with it. More important even than the size of the navy is the question of its institutions, favoring a healthful spirit and activity, and providing for rapid development in time of war by an adequate reserve of men and of ships and by measures for drawing out that general reserve power which has before been pointed to, when considering the character and pursuits of the people.

Undoubtedly under this second head of warlike preparation must come the maintenance of suitable naval stations, in those distant parts of the world to which the armed shipping must follow the peaceful vessels of commerce. The protection of such stations must depend either upon direct military force, as do Gibraltar and Malta, or upon a surrounding friendly population, such as the American colonists once were to England, and, it may be presumed, the Australian colonists now are. Such friendly surroundings and backing, joined to a reasonable military provision, are the best of defences, and when combined

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with decided preponderance at sea, make a scattered and extensive empire, like that of England, secure; for while it is true that an unexpected attack may cause disaster in some one quarter, the actual superiority of naval power prevents such disaster from being general or irremediable. History has sufficiently proved this. England's naval bases have been in all parts of the world; and her fleets have at once protected them, kept open the communications between them, and relied upon them for shelter. Colonies attached to the mother-country afford, therefore, the surest means of supporting abroad the sea power of a country. . . . Such colonies the United States has not and is not likely to have. . . Having therefore 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....

The question is eminently one in which the influence of the government should make itself felt, to build up for the nation a navy which, if not capable of reaching distant countries, shall at least be able to keep clear the chief approaches to its own. The eyes of the country have for a quarter of a century been turned from the sea; the results of such a policy and of its opposite will be shown in the instance of France and of England. Without asserting a narrow parallelism between the case of the United States and either of these, it may safely be said that it is essential to the welfare of the whole country that the conditions of trade and commerce should remain, as far as possible, unaffected by an external war. In order to do this, the enemy must be kept not only out of our ports, but far away from our coasts.

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Albert Beveridge, The March of the Flag, 1899:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1898beveridge.html>

Albert Beveridge, an associate of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, was a historian, noted orator, and U.S. Senator from Indiana (1899-1911). He was an outspoken advocate of American imperialism and later a leading progressive. This speech was delivered during his 1898 election campaign near the end of the Spanish-American War as Americans debated whether to acquire new territories as a consequence of their victory over Spain.

It is a noble land that God has given us; a land that can feed and clothe the world; a land whose coastlines would inclose half the countries of Europe; a land set like a sentinel between the two imperial oceans of the globe, a greater England with a nobler destiny.

It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing working-folk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven-directed purposes-the propagandists and not the misers of liberty.

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It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people; a history heroic with faith in our mission and our future; a history of statesmen who flung the boundaries of the Republic out into unexplored lands and savage wilderness; a history of soldiers who carried the flag across blazing deserts and through the ranks of hostile mountains, even to the gates of sunset; a history of a multiplying people who overran a continent in half a century; a history of prophets who saw the consequences of evils inherited from the past and of martyrs who died to save us from them; a history divinely logical, in the process of whose tremendous reasoning we find ourselves today.

Therefore, in this campaign, the question is larger than a party question. It is an American question. It is a world question. Shall the American people continue their march toward the commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign as the children of liberty wax in strength, until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind?

Have we no mission to perform no duty to discharge to our fellow man? Has God endowed us with gifts beyond our deserts and marked us as the people of His peculiar favor, merely to rot in our own selfishness, as men and nations must, who take cowardice for their companion and self for their deity-as China has, as India has, as Egypt has?

Shall we be as the man who had one talent and hid it, or as he who had ten talents and used them until they grew to riches? And shall we reap the reward that waits on our discharge of our high duty; shall we occupy new markets for what our farmers raise, our factories make, our merchants sell-aye, and please God, new markets for what our ships shall carry?

(...)The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent. How do they know what our government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them?

And, regardless of this formula of words made only for enlightened, self-governing people, do we owe no duty to the world? Shall we turn these peoples back to the reeking hands from which we have taken them? Shall we abandon them, with Germany, England, Japan, hungering for them? Shall we save them from those nations, to give them a self-rule of tragedy?

They ask us how we shall govern these new possessions. I answer: Out of local conditions and the necessities of the case methods of government will grow. If England can govern foreign lands, so can America. If Germany can govern foreign lands, so can America. If they can supervise protectorates, so can America. Why is it more difficult to administer Hawaii than New Mexico or California? Both had a savage and an alien population: both were more remote from the seat of government when they came under our dominion than the Philippines are to-day.

(...)The commercial supremacy of the Republic means that this Nation is to be the sovereign factor in the peace of the world. For the conflicts of the future are to be conflicts of trade-struggles for markets-commercial wars for existence. And the golden rule of peace is impregnability of position and invincibility of preparedness. So, we see England, the greatest strategist of history, plant her flag and her cannon on Gibraltar, at Quebec, in the Bermudas, at Vancouver, everywhere.

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So Hawaii furnishes us a naval base in the heart of the Pacific; the Ladrones another, a voyage further on; Manila another, at the gates of Asia - Asia, to the trade of whose hundreds of millions American merchants, manufacturers, farmers, have as good right as those of Germany or France or Russia or England; Asia, whose commerce with the United Kingdom alone amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars every year; Asia, to whom Germany looks to take her surplus products; Asia, whose doors must not be shut against American trade. Within five decades the bulk of Oriental commerce will be ours. (...)The American people can not use a dishonest medium of exchange; it is ours to set the world its example of right and honor. We can not fly from our world duties; it is ours to execute the purpose of a fate that has driven us to be greater than our small intentions. We can not retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for liberty and civilization.

Arguments made for Imperialism	Your personal interpretation/comments



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Directions (Group 2: Anti-Imperialists): Read the following documents and list on the chart the key arguments (you should have at least four points in each column) made by Imperialists in order to prepare for your town hall discussion.

“Manifest Destiny” Carl Schurz, October 1893: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ncps:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ABK4014-0087-82\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ncps:@field(DOCID+@lit(ABK4014-0087-82)))

Carl Schurz, a German immigrant, had a lifelong relationship with the Republican Party as a liberal Republican Senator from Missouri from 1869-1875, and also serving as Secretary of the Interior. After his public service, he remained vocal up to his death as an Editorial Writer for HarpWeek Magazine. After his public service, he argued vociferously for social and political reform and against American imperialism. He opposed the Spanish-American War and denounced the annexation of Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico as unconstitutional and a violation of the principles of the Declaration of Independence.

WHENEVER there is a project on foot to annex foreign territory to this republic the cry of manifest destiny is raised to produce the impression that all opposition to such a project is a struggle against fate....The new manifest destiny precept means, in point of principle, not merely the incorporation in the United States of territory contiguous to our borders, but rather the acquisition of such territory, far and near, as may be useful in enlarging our commercial advantages, and in securing to our navy facilities desirable for the operations of a great naval power. Aside from the partisan declaimers whose interest in the matter is only that of political effect, this policy finds favor with several not numerically strong but very demonstrative classes of people Americans who have business ventures in foreign lands, or who wish to embark in such; citizens of an ardent national ambition who think that the conservative traditions of our foreign policy are out of date, and that it is time for the United States to take an active part and to assert their power in the international politics of the world, and to this end to avail themselves of every chance for territorial aggrandizement; and lastly, what may be called the navy interest officers of the navy and others taking especial pride in the development of our naval force, many of whom advocate a large increase of our war - fleet to support a vigorous foreign policy, and a vigorous foreign policy to give congenial occupation and to secure further increase to our war fleet. These forces we find bent upon exciting the ambition of the American people whenever a chance for the acquisition of foreign territory heaves in sight.

...According to the spirit of our constitutional system, foreign territory should be acquired only with a view to its admission, at no very distant day, into this Union as one or more States on an equal footing with the other States. The population inhabiting such territory, and admitted into the Union with it, would have to be endowed with certain rights and powers, and the United States would have to

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undertake certain obligations with regard to them. The people of the new States would not only govern themselves as to their home concerns, but also take part in the government of the whole country through the Senators and Representatives sent by them to Congress, as well as through the votes cast in the elections of our Presidents and in adopting or rejecting constitutional amendments...In other words, this republic would admit them as equal members to its national household, to its family circle, and take upon itself all the responsibilities for them which this admission involves. To do this safely it would have to act with keen discrimination.

...The advocates of the annexation policy advance some arguments which require but a passing notice. They say that unless we take a certain country offered to us Hawaii, for instance some other power will take it, and that, having refused ourselves, we cannot object. This is absurd.

Having shown ourselves unselfish, we shall have all the greater moral authority in objecting to an arrangement which would be obnoxious to our interests.

We are told that unless we take charge of a certain country it will be ill-governed and get into internal trouble. This is certainly no inducement. This republic cannot take charge of all countries that are badly governed. On the contrary, a country apt to get into internal trouble would be no desirable addition to our national household.

We are told that the people of a certain country wish to join us, and it would be wrong to repel them. But the question whether a stranger is to be admitted as a member of our family it is our right and our duty to decide according to our own view of the family interest.

We are told that we need coaling stations in different parts of the world for our navy, also if it be a small one, and that the rich resources of the countries within our reach should be open to American capital and enterprise. There is little doubt that we can secure by amicable negotiation sites for coaling stations which will serve us as well as if we possessed the countries in which they are situated. In the same manner we can obtain from and within them all sorts of commercial advantages. We can own plantations and business houses in the Hawaiian Islands. In the American tropics we can build and control railroads; we can purchase mines, and have them worked for our benefit; we can keep up commercial establishments in their towns-in fact, we are now doing many of these things and all this without taking those countries into our national household on an equal footing with the States of our Union, without exposing our political institutions to the deteriorating influence of their participation in our government, without assuming any responsibilities for them which would oblige us to forego the inestimable privilege of being secure in our possessions without large and burdensome armaments. Surely the advantages we might gain by incorporating the countries themselves in the Union appear utterly valueless compared with the price this republic would have to pay for them.

The fate of the American people is in their own wisdom and will. If they devote their energies to the development of what they possess within their present limits, and look for territorial expansion only to the north, where some day a kindred people may freely elect to cast their lot with this republic, their manifest destiny will be the preservation of the exceptional and invaluable advantages they now enjoy, and the growth on a congenial soil of a vigorous nationality in freedom, prosperity, and power. If they yield to the allurements of the tropics and embark in a career of indiscriminate aggrandizement, their manifest destiny points with equal certainty to a total abandonment of their conservative traditions of policy, to a rapid deterioration in the character of the people and their political institutions, and to a future of turbulence, demoralization, and final decay.

William Jennings Bryan, "The Paralyzing Influence of Imperialism," 1900

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bryan.htm>

William Jennings Bryan, a three-time Democratic Party nominee for President of the United States (1896, 1900, and 1908), was an outspoken critic of an American imperialism, even though he supported the U.S. declaration of war against Spain in 1898 on humanitarian grounds. Although a near-pacifist, he volunteered for military service during the war and was selected colonel of a Nebraska militia unit, which did not see combat or deploy overseas. Bryan's 1900 presidential campaign focused on his opposition to the acquisition of the Philippines and to the economic policies of the McKinley administration, which Bryan viewed as favoring the wealthy classes and as antithetical to Jeffersonian democracy.

(...)The principal arguments advanced by those who enter upon a defense of imperialism are: First, that we must improve the present opportunity to become a world power and enter into international politics.

Second, that our commercial interests in the Philippine Islands and in the Orient make it necessary for us to hold the islands permanently.

Third, that the spread of the Christian religion will be facilitated by a colonial policy.

Fourth, that there is no honorable retreat from the position which the nation has taken.

The first argument is addressed to the nation's pride and the second to the nation's pocketbook. The third is intended for the church member and the fourth for the partisan.

It is sufficient answer to the first argument to say that for more than a century this nation has been a world power. For ten decades it has been the most potent influence in the world. Not only has it been a world power but it has done more to affect the policies of the human race than all the other nations of the world combined. Because our Declaration of Independence was promulgated, others have been promulgated. Because the patriots of 1776 fought for liberty, others have fought for it. Because our Constitution was adopted, other constitutions have been adopted.

The growth of the principle of self-government, planted on American soil, has been the overshadowing political fact of the 19th century. It has made this nation conspicuous among the nations and given it a place in history, such as no other nation has ever enjoyed. Nothing has been able to check the onward march of this idea. I am not willing that this nation shall cast aside the omnipotent weapon of truth to seize again the weapons of physical warfare. I would not exchange the glory of this republic for the glory of all the empires that have risen and fallen since time began.

...This is the commercial argument. It is based upon the theory that war can be rightly waged for pecuniary advantage and that it is profitable to purchase trade by force and violence...The Democratic Party is in favor of the expansion of trade. It would extend our trade by every legitimate and peaceful means; but it is not willing to make merchandise of human blood...It is not necessary to own people in order to trade with them. We carry on trade today with every part of the world, and our commerce has expanded more rapidly than the commerce of any European empire. We do not own Japan or China, but we trade with their people. We have not absorbed the republics of Central and South America, but we trade with them. Trade cannot be permanently profitable unless it is voluntary.

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When trade is secured by force, the cost of securing it and retaining it must be taken out of the profits, and the profits are never large enough to cover the expense. Such a system would never be defended but for the fact that the expense is borne by all the people while the profits are enjoyed by a few.

Imperialism would be profitable to the Army contractors; it would be profitable to the shipowners, who would carry live soldiers to the Philippines and bring dead soldiers back; it would be profitable to those who would seize upon the franchises, and it would be profitable to the officials whose salaries would be fixed here and paid over there; but to the farmer, to the laboring man, and to the vast majority of those engaged in other occupations, it would bring expenditure without return and risk without reward.

Farmers and laboring men have, as a rule, small incomes, and, under systems which place the tax upon consumption, pay much more than their fair share of the expenses of government. Thus the very people who receive least benefit from imperialism will be injured most by the military burdens which accompany it. In addition to the evils which he and the former share in common, the laboring man will be the first to suffer if Oriental subjects seek work in the United States; the first to suffer if American capital leaves our shores to employ Oriental labor in the Philippines to supply the trade of China and Japan; the first to suffer from the violence which the military spirit arouses, and the first to suffer when the methods of imperialism are applied to our own government. It is not strange, therefore, that the labor organizations have been quick to note the approach of these dangers and prompt to protest against both militarism and imperialism.

...The religious argument varies in positiveness from a passive belief that Providence delivered the Filipinos into our hands for their good and our glory to the exultation of the minister who said that we ought to "thrash the natives (Filipinos) until they understand who we are," and that "every bullet sent, every cannon shot, and every flag waved means righteousness."

We cannot approve of this doctrine in one place unless we are willing to apply, it everywhere. If there is poison in the blood of the hand, it will ultimately reach the heart. It is equally true that forcible Christianity, if planted under the American flag in the far-away Orient, will sooner or later be transplanted upon American soil. . . .

The destiny of this republic is in the hands of its own people, and upon the success of the experiment here rests the hope of humanity. No exterior force can disturb this republic, and no foreign influence should be permitted to change its course. What the future has in store for this nation no one has authority to declare, but each individual has his own idea of the nation's mission, and he owes it to his country as well as to himself to contribute as best he may to the fulfillment of that mission...

Arguments made against Imperialism	Your personal interpretation/comments