

Imperialism and America

American Expansionism

Why did Americans support imperialism?

In 1893, **Queen Liliuokalani** of Hawaii gave up her throne. Hawaii was about to be taken over by the United States.

By the 1880s, many American leaders thought the US should establish colonies overseas. This idea was called **imperialism**—the policy in which stronger nations extend economic, political, or military control over weaker territories. European countries had competed for territory all over the world. Most Americans gradually accepted the idea of overseas expansion.

Three factors fueled American imperialism: desire for military strength, thirst for new markets, and a belief in the superiority of American culture.

Admiral **Alfred T Mahan** of the US Navy supported growing American naval power so the US could compete with other nations. The US built such modern battleships as the *Maine* and the *Oregon*. The new ships made the US the world's largest naval power.

By the late 1800s, technology had changed American farms and factories. They produced more than the Americans could consume. So the US needed foreign trade. American businesses needed markets for their products and raw materials for their factories.

The third root of American imperialism was a belief that the people of the United States were better than the people of other countries. This racist belief came from people's pride in their Anglo-Saxon (Northern European) heritage. People sometimes felt they had a duty to spread their culture and Christian religion among other people.

How did the Hawaiian Islands become a US territory?

William Seward was Secretary of State for presidents Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. In 1867 he purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million (\$.02 per acre!). Some opponents in Congress made fun of the deal calling it "Seward's Icebox" or "Seward's Folly", but Alaska was actually very rich in natural resources such as oil, timber, and gold.

The Hawaiian Islands, in the Pacific Ocean, had been important to the US since the 1790s. Merchants had stopped there on their way to China and India. In the 1820s, American missionaries founded Christian schools and churches on the islands.

A number of Americans had established sugar plantations in Hawaii. In the mid-1800s, these large farms accounted for about three-quarters of the wealth in the islands. Plantation owners brought thousands of laborers to Hawaii from Japan, Portugal, and China. This weakened the influence of the native Hawaiians. By 1900, the foreign laborers outnumbered the Hawaiians three to one.

In 1875, the United States agreed to import Hawaiian sugar duty-free. Over the next 15 years, Hawaiian sugar production increased nine times. The McKinley tariff caused a crisis for Hawaiian sugar growers. With the duty (tax) on their sugar, Hawaiian growers faced stiff competition from other growers. The powerful Hawaiian sugar growers called for the US to annex Hawaii. The US military had already understood the value of Hawaii. In 1887, the US forced Hawaii to let it build a naval base at **Pearl Harbor**, Hawaii's best port.

When the Hawaiian king died in 1891, his sister became queen. Queen Liliuokalani wanted a new constitution that would give voting power back to ordinary Hawaiians. American business interests did not want this to happen. American business groups organized a revolt against the queen. The US ambassador John L Stevens helped them. The planters took control of the island. They established a temporary government and made American businessman **Sanford B Dole** the president.

Stevens urged the US government to annex the Hawaiian Islands. President Grover Cleveland refused to take over the islands unless a majority of Hawaiians favored that. In 1897, however, William McKinley became president. He favored annexation. In 1898, Hawaii became a US territory.

The Spanish-American War

What happened when Cuba rebelled against Spain?

Between 1868 and 1878, Cubans fought their first war for independence from Spain. The rebels did not win, but they did force Spain to abolish slavery in 1886. After that, US capitalists invested heavily in sugar plantations in Cuba.

Sugar was the most important product of Cuba. The US was the main market for the sugar. As long as the US did not charge a tariff on Cuban sugar, the Cuban economy thrived. But the Cuban economy collapsed in 1894, when a tariff on sugar was imposed.

In 1895, Cubans began a second war for independence. The rebellion was led by **Jose Marti**. He was a Cuban poet and journalist who had been living in exile in New York. The rebels wanted the US to join their cause.

American opinion was mixed. Some wanted to support Spain, in order to keep their investments safe. Others wanted to help the Cuban people win their freedom from Spain, just as the United States had won their independence from England 120 years before.

Why did Americans become angry with Spain?

In 1896, Spain sent an army to Cuba to restore order. The army was led by General **Valerino Weyler**. Weyler rounded up the entire rural population of central and western Cuba. He kept 300,000 people as prisoners in concentration camps. That way they could not help the rebels. Many of them died of hunger and disease.

This story was widely reported in the US. Rival newspapers in New York made the terrible events sound even worse. They exaggerated the brutality of the story in order to attract readers. These sensational stories became known as **yellow journalism**- reporting that exaggerates the news in order to make it more exciting.

William McKinley became president in 1897. At that time, many Americans wanted the US to help the rebels in Spain. McKinley tried to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. His efforts had several positive results. Spain sent General Weyler home, changed the concentration camp policy, and gave Cuba limited self-government.

Then two events made Americans very angry at Spain. The first was the publication of a letter that insulted the American president. The de Lomé Letter was written by a Spanish diplomat. It criticized McKinley for being weak. Although some Americans agreed that the president was weak, they did not want to hear this criticism from a Spanish official.

Only a few days after the letter was published, something worse happened. The battleship the **USS Maine** was stationed in Cuba to protect American lives and property. On February 15, 1898, the ship exploded. The ship sank, and 260 officers and crew on board died. The cause of the explosion was not known. However, newspapers blamed Spain. Americans cried for war.

Where and when did the fighting take place?

On April 20, 1898, the US went to war with Spain. The first battle actually took place in the Philippines. The Philippines had been a Spanish colony for 300 years. They had rebelled many times. In 1896, they began another rebellion.

On May 1, 1898, the American naval commander **George Dewey** sailed into Manila Bay in the Philippines. His ships destroyed the Spanish fleet there. In the next two months, US soldiers fought on the side of the Filipino rebels. The Spanish surrendered to the US in August.

In Cuba, the American navy blocked off the harbor of Santiago de Cuba. Spanish ships could not leave. Then American troops landed on the island in June 1898.

One unit of volunteer soldiers was called the **Rough Riders**. Theodore Roosevelt was one of their leaders. They helped win the important battle of **San Juan Hill**. American newspapers made Roosevelt a hero.

When the Spanish ships tried to leave the harbor, their fleet was destroyed. This led the Spanish to surrender on July 25.

Spain quickly agreed to a peace treaty. The **Treaty of Paris** granted Cuba its independence. Spain gave Puerto Rico and the Pacific island of Guam to the US. The US paid \$20 million for the annexation of the Philippine islands. The Treaty of Paris touched off a great debate in the US about imperialism. President McKinley was in favor of it. But some Americans said annexing territories violated the spirit of the Declaration of Independence by denying self-government to the new territories. Booker T. Washington and Samuel Gompers also opposed the treaty. The Senate approved the treaty on February 6, 1899.



COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER



Vocab words and Names: Define the following terms or briefly describe the importance of each person to imperialism

- Queen Liliuokalani
- Imperialism
- Alfred T Mahan
- Sanford B Dole
- Pearl Harbor
- Jose Marti
- Yellow journalism
- USS Maine
- Rough Riders

Questions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences based on the readings

1. What were the three reasons Americans supported imperialism?
2. What was called "Seward's Icebox" or "Seward's Folly?"
3. Explain how the Hawaii islands lost control of their islands:
4. How did Cuba's two wars for independence affect American business interests?
5. What two events led Americans to call for war against Spain?
6. What three territories did the US get from the war with Spain following the Treaty of Paris?
7. Complete the following chart on your paper by filling in important details about the reasons behind American imperialism

The Roots of American Imperialism		
Economic Reasons	Political and military reasons	Racist reasons
What did Admiral Mahan urge the US to do to protect its interests?		

8. For each year on the timeline below, identify one important event in the history of US involvement in Hawaii

US Imperialism in Hawaii	
1875	
1887	
1891	
1897	
1898	

9. For each of the following, write a brief explanation of how they helped cause the outbreak of the Spanish-American War

Causes: How did each of the following help to cause the outbreak of the Spanish-American War?
1. American business owners
2. Jose Marti
3. Valerino Weyler
4. Yellow Journalism
5. De Lomé Letter
6. USS Maine

10. Essay: In a paragraph (5-7 sentences), summarize the causes and results of American imperialism.



