

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS: AMERICAN IMPERIALISM

Directions: Read the primary documents and answer the questions.

The Rough Riders in Action – Theodore Roosevelt (1899)

- 1) What was the only sound TR ever heard his men cheer in battle? Why do you suppose that was?
- 2) What about TR's leadership at San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War might have made him a popular candidate for vice president (and later, president)?

"Hawaii Under Annexation" – Sanford Dole (1900)

- 3) Dole freely acknowledges that most Hawaiians did not want to be annexed. Think back to what we have already covered...why were they annexed?
- 4) For what reasons does Dole say that many Hawaiians did not want to be annexed?
- 5) What does Sanford Dole believe will be the outcome of the unification of "little Hawaii" with "great America"?

Some Anti-Imperialist Sentiments – The Anti-Imperialist League (1900)

- 6) What two presidents does the Anti-Imperialist League imply would be disappointed with American imperialism? On what philosophical ideas do they base that assertion?
- 7) What does the Anti-Imperialist League say about the troops in the Philippine-American War?
- 8) What two documents does the Anti-Imperialist League say have been betrayed because of what the U.S. was doing in the Philippines? Why?
- 9) During the period of American imperialism many politicians and citizens argued that anyone who was not supportive of U.S. foreign policy was undermining the nation. The belief was basically, "if you aren't with us, you are against us..." What does the Anti-Imperialist League say about these ideas? Do you agree?
- 10) Do you think that the Anti-Imperialist League's comparison of slavery and imperialism in the final paragraph is accurate? Explain.

State of the Union Address – William H. Taft (1912)

- 11) What does Taft say has been the American goal for countries like Honduras and Nicaragua?
- 12) Why do you think Taft argues that maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine in the Panama Canal Zone and Caribbean is more important than anywhere else?
- 13) Explain what Taft says is the second benefit of American investment in Central America.
- 14) Why does Taft say American Marines had to be sent into Nicaragua?
- 15) In the final paragraphs, why does Taft argue for increased American involvement abroad?

Reflective Questions

- 16) What do you think George Washington would say about the actions you have been reading about? Do you agree with what you think he would say? Explain.
- 17) What do you think Andrew Jackson would say about the actions you have been reading about? Do you agree with what you think he would say? Explain.
- 18) What do you think Sitting Bull would say about the actions you have been reading about? Do you agree with what you think he would say? Explain.
- 19) What do you think about the actions you have been reading about? Explain.

THE ROUGH RIDERS IN ACTION – THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1899)

Theodore Roosevelt, at the time a Colonel in the U.S. Army, led a United States Army regiment, the Rough Riders, who fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. His book The Rough Riders was published in 1899. A brief excerpt showing the gallant spirit of his men appears here.

Suddenly, above the cracking of the carbines, rose a peculiar drumming sound, and some of the men cried, "The Spanish machine guns!" Listening, I made out that it came from the flat ground to the left, and jumped to my feet, smiting my hand on my thigh, and shouting aloud with exultation, "It's the Gatlings, men, our Gatlings!" Lieutenant Parker was bringing his four Gatlings into action, and shoving them nearer and nearer the front. Now and then the drumming ceased for a moment; then it would resound again, always closer to San Juan Hill, which Parker, like ourselves, was hammering to assist the infantry attack. Our men cheered lustily. We saw much of Parker after that, and there was never a more welcome sound than his Gatlings as they opened. It was the only sound which I ever heard my men cheer in battle.

The infantry got nearer and nearer the crest of the hill. At last we could see the Spaniards running from the rifle pits as the Americans came on in their final rush. Then I stopped my men for fear they should injure their comrades, and called to them to charge the next line of trenches, on the hills in our front, from which we had been undergoing a good deal of punishment. Thinking that the men would all come, I jumped over the wire fence in front of us and started at the double; but, as a matter of fact, the troopers were so excited, what with shooting and being shot, and shouting and cheering, that they did not hear, or did not heed me; and after running about a hundred yards I found I had only five men along with me. Bullets were ripping the grass all around us, and one of the men, Clay Green, was mortally wounded; another, Winslow Clark, a Harvard man, was shot first in the leg and then through the body. He made not the slightest murmur, only asking me to put his water canteen where he could get at it, which I did; he ultimately recovered. There was no use going on with the remaining three men, and I bade them stay where they were while I went back and brought up the rest of the brigade. . . .

I ran back, jumped over the wire fence, and went over the crest of the hill, filled with anger against the troopers, and especially those of my own regiment, for not having accompanied me. They, of course, were quite innocent of wrongdoing; and even while I taunted them bitterly for not having followed me, it was all I could do not to smile at the look of injury and surprise that came over their faces, while they cried out, "We didn't hear you, we didn't see you go, Colonel; lead on now, we'll sure follow you." I wanted the other regiments to come too, so I ran down to where General Sumner was and asked him if I might make the charge; and he told me to go and that he would see that the men followed. By this time everybody had his attention attracted, and when I leaped over the fence again, with Major Jenkins beside me, the men of the various regiments which were already on the hill came with a rush, and we started across the wide valley which lay between us and the Spanish intrenchments. . . . Long before we got near them the Spaniards ran, save a few here and there, who either surrendered or were shot down. When we reached the trenches we found them filled with dead bodies in the light blue and white uniform of the Spanish regular army. There were very few wounded. Most of the fallen had little holes in their heads from which their brains were oozing; for they were covered from the neck down by the trenches.

“HAWAII UNDER ANNEXATION” – SANFORD DOLE (1900)

Born in Hawaii, Sanford Dole came from one of the many missionary families that settled there in the 1800s. He attended Williams College in Massachusetts and was admitted to the bar in Boston in 1868. After returning to Hawaii, Dole played a prominent role in local politics. Dole helped draft the “Bayonet Constitution” which stripped native Hawaiians of most of their ruling authority. He later served as the president of the Republic of Hawaii from 1894 to 1900 following the coup d’etat carried out by a combination of the U.S. Marine Corps and American citizens living in Hawaii. He then became the first appointed governor of the Territory of Hawaii from 1900 to 1903. Sanford Dole was a cousin once removed (they shared the same grandparents) of James Dole, founder of the Dole Pineapple Company. At the turn of the century, he wrote down his thoughts on annexation, a few of which appear here.

The majority of native Hawaiians have opposed annexation, some from political reasons, based upon the hope of an eventual restoration of the monarchy; others from traditional familiarity with nominal native rule, involving their feelings and prejudices; others from an undefined anxiety lest the annexation of Hawaii to the United States would injure them through loss of civil rights, political privileges, social standing or in some other way which they could not forecast on many or all of these grounds, with all of which race sentiment was an element of more or less force. . . .

It is most important that the political development of Hawaii shall be a growth from former conditions rather than that the present political plant should be uprooted and another started in its place. It is fortunate there was no sudden change of the civil system upon the transfer of sovereignty. That in itself was shock enough for the time being. . . . Without doubt the union of little Hawaii with great America lifts the curtain before a future full of great possibilities to Hawaii. . . .

We shall undoubtedly have our disappointments. There will be some bad mixed with the good. But there will be growth beyond all our precedents. Our local world will be larger and we shall be in touch with the great communities of the rest of the world. We are Americans now, for better or worse.

SOME ANTI-IMPERIALIST SENTIMENTS – THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE (1900)

Many people in the United States opposed American expansion overseas, especially at the time of the Spanish-American War. The Anti-Imperialist League was formed in 1899, and campaigned against William McKinley in the 1900 election. Excerpts from the League’s platform appear here.

We hold that the policy known as imperialism is hostile to liberty and tends toward militarism, an evil from which it has been our glory to be free. We regret that it has become necessary in the land of Washington and Lincoln to reaffirm that all men, of whatever race or color, are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We maintain that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We insist that the subjugation of any people is "criminal aggression." . . .

We earnestly condemn the policy of the present National Administration in the Philippines. It seeks to extinguish the spirit of 1776 in those islands. We deplore the sacrifice of our soldiers and sailors, whose bravery deserves admiration even in an unjust war. We denounce the slaughter of the Filipinos as a needless horror. We protest against the extension of American sovereignty by Spanish methods. . . .

The United States have always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right.

. . . Much as we abhor the war of "criminal aggression" in the Philippines, greatly as we regret that the blood of the Filipinos is on American hands, we more deeply resent the betrayal of American institutions at home. . . .

Whether the ruthless slaughter of the Filipinos shall end next month or next year is but an incident in a contest that must go on until the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are rescued from the hands of their betrayers. Those who dispute about standards of value while the foundation of the Republic is undermined will be listened to as little as those who would wrangle about the small economies of the household while the house is on fire. The training of a great people for a century, the aspiration for liberty of a vast immigration are forces that will hurl aside those who in the delirium of conquest seek to destroy the character of our institutions.

We deny that the obligation of all citizens to support their Government in times of grave National peril applies to the present situation. If an Administration may with impunity ignore the issues upon which it was chosen, deliberately create a condition of war anywhere on the face of the globe, debauch the civil service for spoils to promote the adventure, organize a truth-suppressing censorship and demand of all citizens . . . their unanimous support while it chooses to continue the fighting, representative government itself is imperiled. . . .

We hold, with Abraham Lincoln, that "no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. When the white man governs himself, that is self-government, but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism." "Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in us. Our defense is in the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men in all lands. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it."

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS – WILLIAM H. TAFT (1912)

President William Howard Taft's foreign policy was labeled by some as "dollar diplomacy" because of its support of United States business in relations with other countries. In 1912, Taft sent marines to Nicaragua to install a more United States-friendly government and to force acceptance of a loan from New York bankers. Taft was strongly criticized for this action. The following excerpts are from his final State of the Union Address to Congress in December 1912.

The foreign relations of the United States actually and potentially affect the state of the Union to a degree not widely realized and hardly surpassed by any other factor in the welfare of the whole nation. The position of the United States in the moral, intellectual, and material relations of the family of nations should be a matter of vital interest to every patriotic citizen. The national prosperity and power impose upon us duties which we cannot shirk if we are to be true to our ideals. . . .

In Central America the aim has been to help such countries as Nicaragua and Honduras to help themselves. They are the immediate beneficiaries. The national benefit to the United States is twofold. First, it is obvious that the Monroe Doctrine is more vital in the neighborhood of the Panama Canal and the zone of the Caribbean than anywhere else. There, too, the maintenance of that doctrine falls most heavily upon the United States. It is therefore essential that the countries within that sphere shall be removed from the jeopardy involved by heavy foreign debt and chaotic national finances and from the ever present danger of international complications due to disorder at home. Hence, the United States has been glad to encourage and support American bankers who were willing to lend a helping hand to the financial rehabilitation of such countries because this financial rehabilitation and the protection of their customhouses from being the prey of would-be dictators would remove at one stroke the menace of foreign creditors and the menace of revolutionary disorder.

The second advantage to the United States is one affecting chiefly all the Southern and Gulf ports and the business and industry of the South. The republics of Central America and the Caribbean possess great natural wealth. They need only a measure of stability and the means of financial regeneration to enter upon an era of peace and prosperity, bringing profit and happiness to themselves and at the same time creating conditions sure to lead to a flourishing interchange of trade with this country.

I wish to call your especial attention to the recent occurrences in Nicaragua, for I believe the terrible events recorded there during the revolution of the past summer—the useless loss of life, the devastation of property, the bombardment of defenseless cities, the killing and wounding of women and children, the torturing of noncombatants to exact contributions, and the suffering of thousands of human beings—might have been averted had the Department of State, through approval of the loan convention by the Senate, been permitted to carry out its now well-developed policy of encouraging the extending of financial aid to weak Central American states, with the primary objects of avoiding just such revolutions by assisting those republics to rehabilitate their finances, to establish their currency on a stable basis, to remove the customhouses from the danger of revolutions by arranging for their secure administration, and to establish reliable banks. During this last revolution in Nicaragua, the government of that republic having admitted its inability to protect American life and property against acts of sheer lawlessness on the part of the malcontents, and having requested this government to assume that office, it became necessary to land over 2,000 Marines and Bluejackets in Nicaragua. Owing to their presence the constituted government of Nicaragua was free to devote its attention wholly to its internal troubles, and was thus enabled to stamp out the rebellion in a short space of time. When the Red Cross supplies sent to Granada had been exhausted, 8,000 persons having been given food in one day upon the arrival of the American forces, our men supplied other unfortunate, needy Nicaraguans from their own haversacks.

I wish to congratulate the officers and men of the United States Navy and Marine Corps who took part in reestablishing order in Nicaragua upon their splendid conduct, and to record with sorrow the death of seven American Marines and Bluejackets. Since the reestablishment of peace and order, elections have been held amid conditions of quiet and tranquility. Nearly all the American Marines have now been withdrawn. The country should soon be on the road to recovery. . . .

It is not possible to make to the Congress a communication upon the present foreign relations of the United States so detailed as to convey an adequate impression of the enormous increase in the importance and activities of those relations. If this government is really to preserve to the American people that free opportunity in foreign markets which will soon be indispensable to our prosperity, even greater efforts must be made. Otherwise the American merchant manufacturer, and exporter will find many a field in which American trade should logically predominate preempted through the more energetic efforts of other governments and other commercial nations. . . .

Congress should fully realize the conditions which obtain in the world as we find ourselves at the threshold of our middle age as a nation. We have emerged full grown as a peer in the great concourse of nations. We have passed through various formative periods. We have been self-centered in the struggle to develop our domestic resources and deal with our domestic questions. The nation is now too mature to continue in its foreign relations those temporary expedients natural to a people to whom domestic affairs are the sole concern. . . .

The successful conduct of our foreign relations demands a broad and a modern view. We cannot meet new questions nor build for the future if we confine ourselves to outworn dogmas of the past and to the perspective appropriate at our emergence from colonial times and conditions. The opening of the Panama Canal will mark a new era in our international life and create new and worldwide conditions which, with their vast correlations and consequences, will obtain for hundreds of years to come. We must not wait for events to overtake us unawares. With continuity of purpose we must deal with the problems of our external relations by a diplomacy modern, resourceful, magnanimous, and fittingly expressive of the high ideals of a great nation.