

“Walk tall and carry a big stick.” Those were the words that President Roosevelt uttered when explaining American foreign policy. This African proverb was used to describe American imperialism, which had begun at the beginning of the Reconstruction period and continues to run today. Robber barons of the industrial age kept one goal in mind when expanding into other nations: establish trade so that the American industry can increase. Because of the desire to increase the American industry, as a result of the industrial revolution, imperialism reached an all-time high. The United States, under the influence of growing industry and the power of capitalism, used the Monroe Doctrine, Open Door Notes, and the Roosevelt Corollary in order to expand into different nations and increase the booming economy of the United States.

During the post-Civil War and Reconstruction Era, the United States had experienced a large economic boom as industries had begun to grow and capitalism had begun to take a further influence among American investors. With the surge of lower class and immigrant labor, American industrialists were able to expand their companies and create large monopolies over smaller businesses in order to keep their stronghold in the American economy. However, “As efficient machines produced more and more industrial and agricultural goods, consumption could not maintain the pace,” creating the need to expand the American market (LaFerber, 8). Overseas, Europe was beginning to colonize different nations, such as different countries in Africa and Asia, which expanded their market and international revenue. The United States felt a need to match up with Europe and increase their market, causing an immense competition between the two. According to Walter LaFerber, “the United States began measuring itself for Britain’s

shoes: exporting more than importing, and making up the difference by buying back American securities, purchasing foreign stocks and bonds, and building American-owned transportation systems and industries abroad” (LeFerber, 9). By expanding the American market, it would not only match up to Britain’s growing market, but the United States would also make itself appealing to other nations willing to trade, causing their economy and trade relations to grow. The United States also had other underlying reasons to start imperializing other nations.

New technology had emerged as industries grew. In the 1880s, Congress had decided to use extra spending money to update the military. They had decided to provide the U.S. navy with steel in order to update ships, which had before were made out of wood, which could be proven flimsy and subject to easy destruction. The use of stronger defense ships was originally supposed to be used in order to defend the American coasts and waters; it was never before thought to be a used for imperialism (Ninkovich, 11). Later, in the 1890s, President McKinley had imposed a tariff on all imported goods that were coming into the U.S. This, much to the robber barons’ interests, had helped to increase home revenue since it would cause Americans to buy American-made goods. However, there was one exception to the tariff: Hawaiian sugar. In Hawaii around the time of its annexation by the United States, there were American sugar plantation owners who, in order to make Hawaii more open to American markets, had encouraged the American annexation of Hawaii. They helped to organize a coup against Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani and the United States had later annexed Hawaii. With the annexation of Hawaii, the United States would be able to import more sugar and other exotic

products to the mainland. The U.S. would also be closer to the Asian markets, which hold many good trade opportunities. Among other things, the United States also felt the need to send missionaries out to “savage lands” and bring Christianity to those who were not familiar with the religion as well as introduce capitalism and democracy to other nations. By the 1870s, the United States was very much dependent on international trade. Many factors caused the United States to gain the confidence—and some might say excuses—to imperialize other nations. The factors began to form as early as 1823, when James Monroe was president, who issued a doctrine that opened a door for American control.

“Expansion overseas was not a new idea,” historian Robert Zinn explains in his book *A People’s History of the United States*. “Even before the war against Mexico...the Monroe Doctrine looked southward into and beyond the Caribbean,” (Zinn, 297). During this time of political turmoil in Latin America, Spain was losing its colonies as Latin American nations were beginning to gain their independence. President Monroe then issued the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, which stated that no European nation could colonize any part of the Western Hemisphere. This would allow the United States access to any Latin American nation in Central and South America and the Caribbean (and eventually the Philippines and later Asia). The Doctrine had stated: “We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety,” (Richardson). Not only did the Monroe Doctrine see any colonizing European nation as a threat, it virtually

closed off the whole Western Hemisphere from Europe, causing the United States to have limitless access to Latin American trade markets, which were ideal at the time because not only were the Latin American markets in need of trade, but they were in close proximity of the United States. Furthermore, American traders would be protected in Latin American markets because of the Monroe Doctrine's emphasis on anti-European colonialism in Latin America and American-only access. Latin American markets seemed to be a "virgin prize" for the United States (LaFerber, 186). Within the late 1880s and early 1890s, American interests in Latin America were increased as the United States had helped to push towards control in Latin America by helping Spanish colonies gain their independence and taking charge in internal affairs in Latin American nations.

In the 1898, the United States and Spain had gone to war briefly in the Spanish-American War. Cuba, as well as other Spanish colonies, was fighting for its independence from Spain. Seeing the war as an opportunity for the United States to intervene with the struggle for independence under the protection of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States had gotten involved with the war. Many politicians and citizens felt "that the United States needed to take aggressive steps, both economically and militarily, to establish itself as a world power," (Encarta, "Spanish-American War"). Led by Cuban revolutionary leader Jose Marti, Cuba had developed anti-Spaniard sentiments, which were also felt by Americans. In January of 1898, mayhem erupted in Havana and in order to control it, the United States decided to send the naval warship, the *Maine*, to the Caribbean and anchor itself off the coast of Cuba. This was in an effort to protect American investors who were residing in Cuba during that time. On February 15,

the *Maine* had exploded and it was believed that the Spaniards were responsible for the tragedy (it would not be confirmed in 1976 that it was faulty boilers that had caused the explosion). After this incident, President William McKinley had declared war on Spain.

The United States had entered the Spanish-American War with great speed and strength. The United States blockaded Cuba immediately to prevent Spaniard troops from receiving overseas supplies from Spain. By doing this, Spaniard troops would not be able to withstand the Cuban revolutionaries. In Asia, US forces were beginning to wage war against Spanish troops stationed in the Philippines; the archipelago was seen as a perfect doorway to Asia. With the Philippines under US control, the Asian markets and access to them would be available for American investors. The US saw victory four months later when the Treaty of Paris was signed by the United States and Spain on December 10, 1898. The treaty had made Spain responsible for Cuban debt and allowed the United States to temporarily annex Cuba. Under the Teller Amendment, which was passed by Congress after President McKinley had declared war, the United States was not allowed to annex Cuba like they did in Hawaii. In addition, the Treaty of Paris allowed Guam and Puerto Rico to cede to the United States. Later, the US paid Spain \$20 million for the Philippine islands. With Asian and Latin American land and markets under its belt, the United States had all the necessary provisions to expand into other nations to increase internal and international revenue.

In Asia, the United States had successfully annexed the Philippines and it also had its eye on other nations. Since the 1860s, the United States had sent American diplomats to China to establish good relations to further the interests of American industrialists to

open their markets to Asia. Some of the eight ministers that were sent to China from 1861 to 1898 thought that China was a strong and powerful nation, ideal for trading. However, some thought that China was a backwards nation in need of American change. “The methods of [the ministers]—conciliation and coercion—represented the extremes in the American options in China,” (Anderson, 1). With these “two options,” the United States had a chance to annex China or to just establish trade—or possibly both. When increasing relations with China, and the growing tensions of US annexation of Hawaii and Latin American nations, many American politicians had one question: Should the United States exert a strong and influential will on China or pursue a different approach that respects the country and the people and culture that flow within it? Secretary of State John Hay:

“...formally announced to the world that the United States sought to ‘preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity’ and to ‘safeguard...the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire.’...Hay’s initiatives blended masterfully the ideals and self-interests of the United States and eventually became part of the nation’s foreign policy” (Anderson, 171).

China was falling apart by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the spheres of influence established by European nations and as well as the Boxer Rebellion later in 1900, China was on a downwards spiral towards chaos.

Determined to establish trade with the Chinese, John Hay had develop a policy called the Open Door Notes. These Notes were determined to preserve the Chinese culture and government all while establishing a sufficient and commercial trade. The Notes, recognizing that many European nations had spheres of influence in China, stated that “all nations shall enjoy perfect equality of treatment for their commerce,” (“Open

Door Notes”). The Notes also stated that China had the right to regulate and accept all forms of trade and that Chinese tariff of any kind should be abided by the nations with spheres of influence. The nations that were present in China did not formally agree to the Notes nor did they voice that it was a good idea. The United States had wanted to rule out the possibility of gaining a sphere of influence. The Open Door Notes had created an ideal system that would increase American trade and commerce and bring American investors money. With these Notes, they thought, the markets would be open freely and they would be able to mold China their own way to make sure that they had made their money to further the growing industry. The Boxer Rebellion (the Chinese fighting against foreign investors) had challenged the Open Door Notes, but the United States had a stronghold on American trade in China. Asia was a perfect and ideal place to expand to because it held many riches that could further increase the American economy and the growth of an active industry. With the Asiatic door open for the United States, the American industrialists could establish an extensive trade with other nations, exploit what China had to offer, and eventually establish itself as the trading king of the world. Meanwhile in Latin America, another doctrine was about to be established that could solidify American expansion.

The Spanish-American War had left brand new Latin American markets for the United States. Not only that, but the war “firmly established the United States as a major military power,” (Encarta, “Spanish-American War”). In 1901, the United States passed the Platt Amendment, which stated that the United States was able to intervene with internal Cuban affairs. “It stipulated the conditions that would have been met by Cuba

before American occupying forces would leave,” (Ninkovich, 97). It also stated that Cuba could not make any deals, contracts, or treaties with any other foreign nation, which was beneficial towards American industrialists because it would ensure that the United States would have trade relations with Cuba, and, eventually, the rest of Latin America. The United States had taken its newly acquired colonies and turned them into Americanized trading countries; the US had rebuilt cities, established public school systems, and brought in American troops to protect them from unwanted nations. The Dominican Republic in the early 1900s was struggling with debt to other European nations, all of which amounted to \$32 million. Fearing that other nations might take attack and take over the Dominican Republic, President Theodore Roosevelt has issued a corollary to prevent this. Known as the Roosevelt Corollary, it was an expansion of the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt’s “Big Stick” policy. The Roosevelt Corollary had stated that the United States could intervene in the political, social, and economic situations of any nation in the Western Hemisphere. This put the United States in the position of “world police” due to the fact that the United States would be able to regulate different nations. The Roosevelt Corollary would not have been formed had it not been for the immense trade opportunity that the Dominican Republic had. In addition, the corollary had pertained to any other Latin American nation, furthering the security that the United States had in ensuring that markets were open for trade. Roosevelt had stated: “If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States,” (“The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe

Doctrine”). This part of the corollary seems to say that as long as any nation pays its dues in trade and commerce to the United States, it would not have any concern about the United States invading it. Roosevelt used this corollary to build one of the world’s most used structures: the Panama Canal.

The idea had been presented to the United States in 1880 when President Hayes called for the construction of a canal that would operate under American control. “The Spanish-American War demonstrated...how useful a canal would be in shifting the weight of American naval power from one ocean to the other,” (Ninkovich, 106). However, the massive project did not take real shape until Roosevelt stepped into office. Protected by his own corollary, Roosevelt decided to construct a canal in Panama that ran from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. With this canal, American trade ships could easily pass through the two oceans to go from the western to the eastern hemisphere without having to withstand a long journey south. The canal was constructed in 1907 and was run by the United States to ensure that imports and exports had safely made it to American ports. The Roosevelt Corollary had justified the US intervention in foreign nations; it seemed to have come off as a good corollary. However, it had only further increased the US’ foreign policy on other nations as well as their “Americanization.”

As with any nation’s foreign policy, there were supporters and there were those who had condemned the actions. Members of the Anti-Imperialist League were members of the latter. Founded by William James in 1898, it was a league that was comprised of scholars, anti-labor activists, and even steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie. Together, the

members condemned and publicly exposed the actions and atrocities that were done in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. Socialists in America had preferred that the United States should take on a policy of isolationism and prevent from getting involved in other nations' problems when they had problems at home. Those who had supported imperialism were among the high nobles of American society: Robber Barons, such as J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller of the Standard Oil Company, politicians, and the president. They saw imperialism as an opportunity to increase the economy of the United States because with new nations, they would be able to bring in extensive trade and international revenue. With the annexation of nations such as Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, new doorways to trade would be opened and American industrialists would be able to build up their industries more. A contemporary example would be the use of sweatshops in foreign countries such as Honduras and Indonesia. Large clothing companies, such as the GAP and Old Navy, use these sweatshops in order to increase the earnings. Because of imperialism, America feels the need to step into other nations and set up large shops in order to make *American* products for *American* people all in an effort to use mass labor to produce large quantities of goods to sell and create large revenue. This is not only imperialism and its affects, it is also exploitation of other nations, which is what has happened since the age of imperialism.

During the age of imperialism, many American industries were interested in expanding their markets in order to increase their revenue. With the use of the Monroe Doctrine, the Open Door Notes, and the Roosevelt Corollary, the United States was successful in invading other nations and taking over their markets for the benefit of

increasing the American economy. By getting involved in wars and in the internal affairs of other nations, the United States had created a large scale empire aimed at increasing and expanding American industries. Robber barons and politicians had encouraged imperialism in an effort to utilize the markets that would soon be available for their use. Imperialism still has its lasting effects today. Puerto Rico is an active colony of the United States, Hawaii is a state, Guam is still a territory, and the United States is currently dealing with the internal affairs of Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps, since America is established as a world police, imperialism in America will never go away. It had started when the United States had wanted to expand into Western territory and it continues today with Iraq. So much for the claim that even though American imperialism began late, “it broke up more quickly than the rocks of history than its European counterpart,” (Ninkovich, 10). Mr. Ninkovich, American imperialism is still here and it has lasted longer than our European counterpart.

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