Imperialism and the Spanish American War

Reading 1

Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West....The frontier is the line of the most rapid and effective Americanization....The frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people....The legislation which most developed the powers of the national government, and played the largest part in its activity, was conditioned on the frontier....The pioneer needed the goods of the coast, and so the grand series of internal improvements and railroad legislation began, with potent nationalizing effects....But the most important effect of the frontier has been the promotion of democracy here and in Europe. As has been indicated, the frontier is productive of individualism....It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control....The frontier states that came into the Union in the first quarter of a century of its existence came in with democratic suffrage provisions, and had reactive effects of the highest importance upon the older states....

To the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients....What the Mediterranean Sea was to the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that, and more, the ever retreating frontier has been to the United States directly, and to the nations of Europe more remotely. And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893

Reading 2

The two great needs of mankind, that all men may be lifted into the light of the highest Christian civilization, are, first, a pure, spiritual Christianity, and, second, civil liberty....It follows then, that the Anglo-Saxon, as the great representative of these two ideas, the depository of these two great blessings, sustains peculiar relations to the world's future, is divinely commissioned to be, in a peculiar sense, his brother's keeper.

Josiah Strong, 1885
Reading 3

God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-admiration. No....He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples....He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the redemption of the world.

Senator Albert J. Beveridge, 1900

Reading 4

The West Indies drift toward us, the Republic of Mexico hardly longer has an independent life....With the completion of the Panama Canal all Central American will become part of our system. We have expanded into Asia, we have attracted the fragments of the Spanish dominions, and reaching out into China we have checked the advance of Russia and Germany....The United States will outweigh any single empire....The whole world will pay her tribute.

Brooks Adams, 1902

Reading 5

I transmit to the Senate...the annexation of the Dominican Republic to the United States....I feel an unusual anxiety for the ratification of this treaty, because I believe it will rebound greatly to the glory of the two countries interested, to civilization, and to the extirpation of the institution of slavery....

The acquisition of the Dominican Republic is desirable because of its geographical position. It commands the entrance to the Caribbean Sea and the Isthmus transit of commerce. It possesses the richest soil, best and most capacious harbors, most salubrious climate, and the most valuable products of the forest, mine, and soil of any of the West Indian Islands.

President Grant, 1870, on a treaty of annexation of the Dominican Republic
Reading 6

The island of San Domingo, situated in tropical waters, and occupied by another race, of another color, never can become a permanent possession of the United States. You may seize it by force of arms or by diplomacy, where a naval squadron does more than the minister, but the enforced jurisdiction cannot endure. Already by a higher statute is that island set part to the colored race....

I protect against this legislation as another stage in a drama of blood. I protest against it in the name of Justice outraged by violence, in the name of Humanity insulted, in the name of the weak trodden down, in the name of Peace imperiled, and in the name of the African race, whose first effort at Independence is rudely assailed.

Senator Charles Sumner's response, 1870

Reading 7

First. In the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there [in Cuba], and which the parties to the conflict are either unable or unwilling to stop or mitigate....

Second. We owe it to our citizens in Cuba to afford them that protection and indemnity for life and property....

Third. The right to intervene may be justified by the very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people and by the wanton destruction of property and devastation of the island.

President McKinley's call for war against Spain, 1898

Reading 8

When next I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confess I did not know what to do with them....I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance....And one night late it came to me this way....

(1) That we could not give them back to Spain--that would be cowardly and dishonorable;
(2) That we could not turn them over to France or Germany--our commercial rivals in the Orient--that would be bad business and discreditable;
(3) That we could not leave them to themselves--they were unfit for self-government--and they would soon have anarchy and misrule worse than Spain's war;
(4) That there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.

President McKinley on the Philippines
Reading 9

Thus...duty and interest alike, duty of the highest kind and interest of the highest and best kind, impose upon us the retention of the Philippines, the development of the islands, and the expansion of our Eastern commerce.

Henry Cabot Lodge

Reading 10

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 the territories without their consent; we govern our children without their consent. I answer, would not the natives of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of the Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them?

Senator Albert J. Beveridge, 1900

Reading 11

A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right.

Platform of the Anti-Imperialist League

Reading 12

If we seek merely swollen, slothful ease and ignoble peace, if we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at the hazard of their lives and at the risk of all they hold dear, then bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world.

Theodore Roosevelt, 1900
Reading 13

There is a homely adage which runs, "Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far." If the American nation will speak softly and yet build and keep at a pitch of the highest training a thoroughly efficient navy, the Monroe Doctrine will go far.

Theodore Roosevelt, 1901

Reading 14

It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any projects as regards the other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly and prosperous....Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention...[and] force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an internal police power.

Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1904