

## Introduction: The Question of Annexation

In 1891, the beautiful Hawaiian islands were ruled by Queen Liliuokalani. While Hawaii was a sovereign nation, much of its economy was dominated by American sugar plantation owners. The Hawaiian islands had long been a valuable prize. Situated halfway across the Pacific, Hawaii offered a crucial stopping point for American ships en route to East Asia. Moreover, the islands' rich volcanic soil was ideal for growing profitable tropical crops such as sugar, pineapples, and coffee.

Most of these American plantation owners favored bringing the islands officially under U.S. control. To that end, they orchestrated a coup with the help of U.S. Marines in January 1893 that toppled Hawaii's queen. The government that came to power quickly approved a treaty to allow the United States to annex, or take over, Hawaii.

Incoming president Grover Cleveland withdrew the treaty. Cleveland believed that annexation would corrupt traditional American values of freedom and equality. He also opposed Hawaii's new leaders, who in his mind had unjustly deprived the Hawaiian queen of her throne.

***“It has been the boast of our government that it seeks to do justice in all things without regard to the strength or weakness of those with whom it deals. A substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as the rights of the injured people [the native Hawaiians] requires we should endeavor to repair. If a feeble but friendly state is in danger of being robbed of its independence and its sovereignty by a misuse of the name and power of the United States, the United States cannot fail to vindicate its honor and its sense of justice by an***

***earnest effort to make all possible reparations.”***

—President Grover Cleveland

Although the United States did not annex Hawaii in 1893, the question of annexation was hardly over, and by the end of 1898 the United States had not only annexed Hawaii, but also, as a result of war with Spain, taken Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.

### ***What is this reading about?***

“A splendid little war,” is one famous description of the Spanish-American War. The war itself was brief and the casualties were comparatively low, but the policy choices that followed laid the foundation for America's international leadership in the twentieth century. Earlier questions of liberty that had concerned President Cleveland, and of economic control that concerned the American planters in Hawaii, spread to larger portions of the American population in the late 1890s.

In Part I of the reading, you will review the cultural, economic, and political landscape in the United States during the 1890s and how it contributed to involvement overseas. In Part II, you will learn about the events of the Spanish-American War. You will then have the opportunity to participate in the debate over the question which brought the United States into a new era: Should the United States acquire Spain's former colonies? Finally, you will assess the decisions made at the time. Did they betray the values upon which the United States was founded? Or were they the inevitable results of America's rise to global power?

Today, Americans ponder many of the same questions that gripped the United States more than a century ago. Americans are again considering their identity, the role their country should play in the world, and the values they most prize. This reading will help you to place today's issues in their historical context.

## Part I: The Origins of a Global Power

**W**hy did Americans begin to look overseas in the nineteenth century? After all, President Washington, in his farewell address in 1796, had warned Americans to “steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” Indeed, Washington’s successors for the next seventy-five years focused on expanding across the North American continent and trying to avoid becoming involved in the ambitions of the nations of Europe.

### *How did Westward Expansion bring power to the United States?*

By the late nineteenth century, Europeans had already expanded their influence and their rule over most of the globe. They had colonized Latin America, North America, and Australia, and were just beginning to carve up Africa as well. For much of that time, the United States tried to avoid being a pawn in these European conquests. America’s vulnerability led leaders to look not across oceans to gain power but instead across the continent.

By the 1890s the United States had acquired massive lands to the west. These lands held resources that increased the country’s

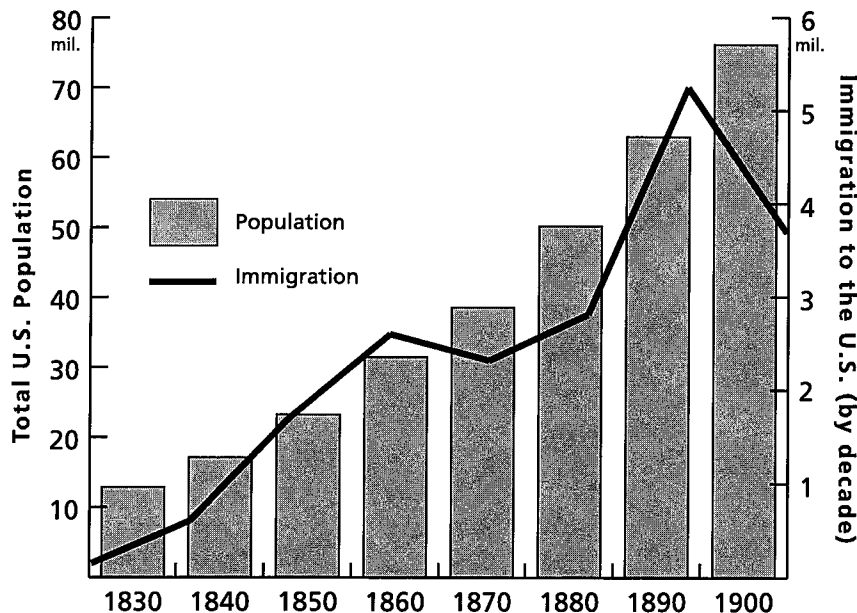
wealth and as a result the United States built up significant economic and political power, enough even to challenge the nations of Europe. No longer could a hostile, lurking European country threaten American territory. Americans too had come to believe in the concept of Manifest Destiny, a conviction that the mission of the United States was to expand, to bring democracy to others, and to spread American values across the continent and perhaps even the world.

George Washington would have scarcely recognized his country as it approached the twentieth century. The struggling republic that he helped mold had become, in many respects, the strongest nation on earth.

### The Changing United States

Virtually everything had changed since America’s early years. Not only had the United States emerged as an economic and political giant, but its people and their everyday lives had been radically altered. America’s self-image was changing as well—and with it the values that shaped the U.S. response to other world nations.

**Population Growth and Immigration (1830-1900)**



### *How did immigration change the United States?*

Population growth and economic expansion recast the face of America in the late nineteenth century. Much of the transformation was related to immigration.

Of the seventy million people living in America in the mid-1890s, more than 45 percent were immigrants or the children of immigrants. The pace of immigration rose sharply in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the immigrants

U.S. Immigration from Leading Countries Between 1850-1900					
* = less than 0.1%					
	36.9%	24.4%	15.4%	12.8%	11%
	34.8%	35.2%	27.4%	27.5%	15.7%
	13.5%	14.9%	21.1%	15.5%	8.9%
	0.9%	5.5%	7.6%	12.7%	10.5%
	*	0.2%	1.3%	3.5%	12.2%
	*	0.2%	2.2%	6.0%	14.5%
	*	0.5%	1.7%	5.1%	16.3%

themselves were broadening America's ethnic diversity.

Earlier generations of immigrants had come largely from northwestern Europe, but the wave of immigration that began in the 1880s drew substantially from eastern and southern Europe. For the first time large numbers of Slavs, Italians, and Jews came to the United States. Most of the new immigrants settled in the bustling cities of the northeast.

### ***How did urban growth transform the United States?***

The increase in immigration spurred urban growth. In George Washington's day, less than 5 percent of America's population lived in cities of eight thousand or more inhabitants. By the end of the nineteenth century, one-third of Americans were city dwellers. New York, with three million people, was one of the largest cities in the world, and Chicago, at almost 1.5 million people, was not far behind. With bigger cities came problems: overburdened transportation systems, inadequate sanitation, rising crime, substandard housing, and political corruption.

With Americans pouring into the cities, agriculture began to slip from its central place in American society. When the United States declared independence in 1776, 90 percent of Americans made their living directly or indirectly from the land. By the end of the nineteenth century, manufacturing had

overtaken agriculture as the leading source of national wealth. Suburbs also came into being with the introduction of commuter rail lines.

Many Americans, and in particular the newer immigrants, worked in manufacturing plants in the cities. During the 1890s, iron and steel production became the most important industries in the nation, surging ahead of meat packing and flour milling. New inventions and discoveries in electricity, chemicals, and oil made possible other industries. The machine age made rapid inroads in the countryside, as farmers increasingly relied on railroads to receive supplies and ship their crops to market. Steam-driven farm machinery began to replace human and animal muscle in the fields.

For many people who could trace their ancestry to northern and western Europe, this influx of a new type of immigrant, as well as the increase in manufacturing, was unsettling. These people, themselves immigrants of an earlier era, were concerned that the newer immigrants were not as industrious, or intelligent, or capable of furthering the "pioneering" nature of America. They saw their presence as a threat to U.S. success because they believed that the new immigrants were changing the character of the United States away from an agricultural, settled society to one of rapid change.

At the same time, industry needed the labor of these newer immigrants to help propel the economy. For some people, this depen-

dency on immigrant labor, combined with a disdain for the people performing that labor, painted a picture of an America in danger. For many of America's elites, despite their country's economic growth, the changes in immigration and industry signaled a change in American life and American values that they did not want.

### ***How did trade make the United States a world power?***

The new immigrants helped to manufacture huge numbers of goods that other countries valued. International trade steadily gained significance in the U.S. economy towards the end of the century. The annual value of American exports passed the \$1 billion mark during the 1890s, outdistancing imports by a sizable margin. The kinds of U.S. exports shifted as well.

Cotton, grain, beef, tobacco, and dairy products had long been the mainstays of U.S. trade. Advances in transportation and machine-assisted farming increased the export of agricultural goods during this era. Additionally, American manufacturers began to compete successfully with their European counterparts in the international market. By 1900, nearly one-third of American exports consisted of manufactured goods. Big businesses gained political power as small farmers were increasingly sidelined.

U.S. leaders viewed their country's trade surplus as crucial to America's continued prosperity. They geared U.S. foreign policy to find overseas markets to buy the output of America's factories and farms. Britain, Germany, and other wealthy nations worried about growing U.S. economic power. These nations sought to protect their own factories by placing high taxes, known as tariffs, on imported manufactured goods. European tariffs compelled U.S. exporters to turn to the less developed countries of Latin America and Asia to expand their sales. China, the most populous country in the world, was especially attractive.



Main Street, Salt Lake City, in the 1890s.

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### ***How did the 1893 depression fuel concerns about the United States?***

A severe economic depression in the spring of 1893 shook American optimism. Sparked by the unexpected bankruptcy of two major railroads, the New York Stock Exchange tumbled. Within a year, more than five hundred banks and sixteen thousand businesses went bankrupt. Stockpiles of goods that business could not sell caused prices to decline. Millions of Americans lost their jobs. While an economic recovery began in late 1896, the United States did not regain the prosperity of the early 1890s until 1901.

The depression led many workers to realize how vulnerable they were in an economy based on industry and manufacturing. Many saw labor strikes as one of the few ways they could gain recognition and control in their working lives. In 1894 alone, more than 500,000 workers went on strike and an additional 600,000 lost their jobs because of strike-related actions. The strikes and other

labor unrest were frightening for people as they brought instability to many Americans. City dwellers worried about insecurity, laborers worried about losing their jobs, and plant owners worried about losing profits. Similarly, for the nation's farmers, the depression of 1893 only worsened a slump in income that had started in 1888.

The depression raised concerns for many people that the United States would not be able to compete globally, that the combination of new waves of immigrants, urbanization, and industrialization had not, in fact, been good for America. Many worried what the future would hold.

## Looking Outward

Notions of American identity, or sense

of self, contributed to the fear as well. Since European settlers founded the first colonies, white Americans had seen the North American continent as vast, bountiful, and largely empty. As settlers moved westward, the experience of "taming" the frontier shaped the American character. The abundance of fertile land for farming, the discovery of rich mineral resources, even the destruction of Native American societies all contributed to the white American identity.

### *How did the concept of "frontier" shape America's national identity?*

White Americans, particularly those whose families had arrived many decades previously, viewed themselves as belonging to a dynamic and opportunity-filled society. The values they chose to define the nation—re-

## McKinley vs. Bryan

The 1893 depression highlighted a deepening economic divide within the American people. Many of the nation's farmers were going into more and more debt. Manufactured goods were expensive, crop prices were falling as a result of oversupply, and the prices railroads charged to move the agricultural goods to market were high. Laborers were struggling as well with low wages, poor working conditions, and long hours. At the same time, wealthy businessmen, many of whom owned the factories that produced the high-priced goods, or the railroads which traversed the country, had seen increasing profits before the 1893 depression. During the depression, pressure mounted on American politicians to put the U.S. economy back on track. Differing views about the remedy for their country's economic problems divided Americans into two groups—those that favored "cheap" money and those that favored "tight" money.

Those who favored cheap money, mostly farmers in debt, supported an increase in the money supply to lower interest rates. Lower interest rates, they thought, would ease their debt burden and prop up crop prices. Others, including President Grover Cleveland, held the opposite position. They believed that an excess of money in circulation had caused the depression in the first place. The proponents of tight money said that increasing the money supply would cause unstoppable inflation and cripple the national economy.

The money supply became a central issue in the 1896 presidential election, which offered Americans two starkly different visions of where the United States should be heading. The Republican candidate, Senator William McKinley of Ohio, was the favorite of American business interests. William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic candidate, stood up for the struggling small farmers. He painted a picture of a sharply divided nation. On one side, according to Bryan, was the tremendous wealth of bankers and factory owners in the big cities. On the other was the poverty of working men and women laboring in the fields and mines of the countryside.

In the end, McKinley won 7.1 million votes to 6.5 million for Bryan. McKinley nearly swept the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific coast states, while the South and the West went for Bryan.

sourcefulness, bravery, pragmatism, ingenuity, individualism, egalitarianism, and patriotism—were closely tied to their concept of the western frontier.

It is important to note that not all people who lived in America shared this view of American identity. Native Americans, whose land was confiscated, black Americans, who were subject to racist laws, and Asian laborers, who built railroads and worked in gold fields were often excluded from the benefits of this “egalitarian” nation.

In addition to helping to shape many Americans’ concept of their national identity, the frontier had also fueled the country’s economic growth. Much of the United States’ development in the nineteenth century stemmed from the exploration, settlement, and exploitation of the country’s land. The availability of cheap or, in some cases, free land also attracted a stream of immigrants from Europe and provided opportunity for adventurous people. Because a typical factory worker or farm hand earned less than \$2 a day, millions had been inspired by the prospect of heading for the frontier to seek their fortunes.

As a result of this earlier migration westward, the national census of 1890 revealed that the United States no longer contained a huge stretch of land unsettled by whites. To be sure, there were still large pockets of land that continued to draw settlers westward, but the frontier was no more.

In fact, the boundaries of the continental United States were more or less set by the middle of the nineteenth century. On the east and the west, two great oceans defined the country’s limits. To the north, negotiations with Britain had settled border disputes with Canada. In the southwest, the Mexican-American War and the Gadsden Purchase had established the U.S.-Mexican border.

Without more land to conquer and inhabit, many white Americans, especially those from “old” families whose ancestors had immigrated many years before, looked to the future with concern. The identity they had attached to the frontier seemed to be in jeopardy. Could their nation’s prosperity be sustained without

an abundance of land and untapped resources? Would the divisions between economic classes harden and spark social tensions? Could the American values of expansion, resourcefulness, and hardiness survive in a country that seemed to have reached its physical limits?


***How did some Americans suggest the United States could answer these fears?***

While fears existed about the future, many political elites (people who held political power such as senators or governors) were also feeling the time was ripe for greater involvement overseas. The United States had territorial control from east to west, Native Americans had been quelled, and the issue of slavery, a thorny political problem, had been resolved. In some ways, the United States, despite the social unrest, was as powerful as nations in Europe. The fear about the changing American character and the belief in American power combined to convince some people that a more aggressive approach to dealing with other nations would be the best way to ensure the continued economic success of the United States.

Some businessmen and politicians believed that overseas expansion—especially into Chinese markets—would fuel economic growth. They saw that the tens of millions of potential consumers there could be an outlet for the surplus of American products. They also saw that Japan and European nations were starting to make deals with China and impose rules on China’s trade. The American leaders feared that if the United States did not follow suit, these competing powers would prevent the United States from ever accessing the Chinese market.

***“Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it.... The position of the United States, between the two Old Worlds and the two great oceans, makes the same claim....”***

—Alfred Thayer Mahan, Naval historian, 1890



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Historian Alfred Thayer Mahan believed that controlling land in Central America, through which the United States could build a canal, would assist the United States in trading with both eastern nations such as China and nations to the west, in Europe. Other economic leaders took up this idea and championed it for the next several years. These people kept tabs on the involvement of foreign nations in Central America as well as China, looking for ways the United States could gain footholds there. Many advocated increased involvement in Caribbean islands such as Cuba and Pacific islands such as Hawaii to further support future east-west trade.

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—Secretary of the Treasury John Carlisle

Others believed that expansion would help the United States gain greater political power. They felt that the United States needed to catch up with Britain, France, and other European powers, who had been building overseas empires, in extending America's influence abroad. All of these advocates of further involvement abroad were called expansionists.

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For some among the expansionists, acquiring a few strategic ports to service American ships and to open doors to foreign markets was sufficient. Others wanted the United States to build a sizeable overseas empire in which the United States would conquer and rule over strategic foreign territories and nations (a policy called imperialism). This control would enable the United States to secure export markets, raw materials, and cheap labor. The imperialists, as this second group was known, considered its strategy central to America's role in the world. Just as supporters of Westward Expansion, or Manifest Destiny earlier in the nineteenth century believed that America's mission was to expand across the continent, the imperialists held that the course of history was pointing the United States abroad.

### **"The Final Competition of Races"**

One way the imperialists justified their ideas was to call upon a set of pseudo-scientific theories popular at the time known as "social Darwinism." Social Darwinism had its origins in Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. According to Darwin, animal species evolve over time to adapt to their environment through natural selection. His phrase "survival of the fittest" described this selection process: those animals most adapted—or "fittest"—to their environment would survive, while others would die out. The followers of Darwin applied the same principles in an effort to chart the social and economic progress of different groups of people.

Proponents of social Darwinism explained differences among the world's racial and ethnic groups in terms of evolution. For social Darwinists, the cultures of western Europe—and particularly the Anglo-Saxons of Britain—had demonstrated their superiority by extending their influence over much of the globe. Imperialism, in their opinion, reflected the "survival of the fittest." Social Darwinists claimed that the "success" of western Europeans was a result of their being more suited to positions of power than other races and cultures. They considered the domination of

western European cultures as a natural process in the advancement of civilization.

***"The great nations are rapidly absorbing...all the waste places of the earth. It is a movement which makes for civilization and the advancement of the race. As one of the great nations of the world, the United States must not fall out of the line of march."***

—Henry Cabot Lodge, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts

### **What was "scientific racism"?**

Like social Darwinists, followers of what is now known as scientific racism assigned differences among people according to racial and ethnic groups. These scientists saw mental abilities and personality traits as racial characteristics. Whites were considered innately superior to other races. Even among white Europeans, sharp distinctions were drawn. The peoples of northern Europe, such as the English and the Germans, were thought to be the most intelligent and energetic. Blacks in Africa, the United States, and elsewhere were considered among the lowest levels of humankind.

***"By the nearly unanimous consent of anthropologists this type (the pure Negro of central Africa) occupies the lowest position in the evolutionary scale.... The attempt to suddenly transform the Negro mind by foreign culture must be as futile as the attempt would be to suddenly transform his physical type."***

—Encyclopedia Britannica, 1884

Scientific racism rested on a foundation of faulty biological research and historical analysis. Particular importance was attached to brain size and skull development. (The same factors were used at the time to assert that men were innately more intelligent than women.) The achievements of individual blacks, such



as the scientist George Washington Carver, were dismissed as rare exceptions.

Racism was not uniquely targeted against African Americans. From the earliest days of the Republic, Native Americans suffered from prejudice, mistreatment, and violence as well. Asian Americans experienced racism as soon as they arrived in the United States. While the explanation of racial differences through scientific “discovery” might have been new in the late nineteenth century, the presence of racism in American society was not.

Scientific racism went hand-in-hand with the theories of social Darwinism. Together, they affirmed the view that the United States and a handful of European nations were destined by nature to dominate the world. Prominent universities and newspapers gave scientific racism further legitimacy. America’s leaders largely accepted the conclusions of scientific racism, and the majority of Americans seldom questioned its basic principles.

### ***How was Protestantism connected to social Darwinism?***

In the 1890s, many Protestant churches, agreeing with the ideas of social Darwinism, suggested that the role of Americans in the world should be to “lift up” the “downtrodden” of other nations, and sent missionaries overseas to do this work. Influential religious leaders believed that God had specially blessed Americans and that the duty of Americans and other Anglo-Saxons was to civilize the world. Some viewed imperialism as part of God’s plan for the human race. One leader, Reverend Josiah Strong, wrote a highly popular book which said that Anglo-Saxons had been preparing throughout history, as they moved westward, to eventually take over the world. To Strong, the destiny of the United States was to be the future leader of this new, civilized world.

### **“Separate but Equal”**

The 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, ratified after the Civil War, established that African Americans enjoyed the same political and legal rights as other Americans. In fact, the spirit of the amendments was soon subverted by new laws in the South, as well as in many northern states, that separated the races. State governments created two sets of schools, parks, cemeteries, and other public institutions. In practice, the discriminatory laws, known as “Jim Crow,” meant that blacks were typically denied a good education, adequate services, and job opportunities.

Jim Crow laws seemed to be an easy target for a legal challenge on constitutional grounds. A test case came before the Supreme Court in 1896 in response to a Louisiana law that required “equal but separate accommodations” for white and black railroad passengers. Homer Plessy, a shoemaker who was one-eighth black, defied the law. Found guilty in state courts, he appealed his case all the way to the Supreme Court. By a seven to one majority, however, the court upheld the constitutionality of the law.

In the majority opinion, the justices held that the 14th amendment was not intended to promote integration between blacks and whites. They also rejected the notion that the Constitution should be used to overcome racist attitudes.

The African-American community met the Plessy v. Ferguson decision with widespread disappointment. The Supreme Court’s ruling confirmed for many blacks their second-class status in society, especially since facilities for blacks were rarely equal to those reserved for whites. Other black Americans became more determined to break down racial barriers. However, more than fifty years would pass before significant progress could be made in breaking down this type of Jim Crow segregation.

***“It seems to me that God, with infinite wisdom and skill, is training the Anglo-Saxon race for an hour sure to come in the world’s future.... The unoccupied arable lands of the earth are limited, and will soon be taken.... Then will the world enter upon a new stage of its history—the final competition of races, for which the Anglo-Saxon is being schooled.... Then this race of unequalled energy... will spread itself over the earth.”***

—Rev. Josiah Strong

Some thought that when the United States had concluded its expansion to other parts of the world, peace would reign over the entire globe. Some even thought that it was the duty of “civilized nations” such as the United States to eliminate political instability in other parts of the world so as to ensure civilization and export markets would spread properly.

## Spreading the American Way Overseas

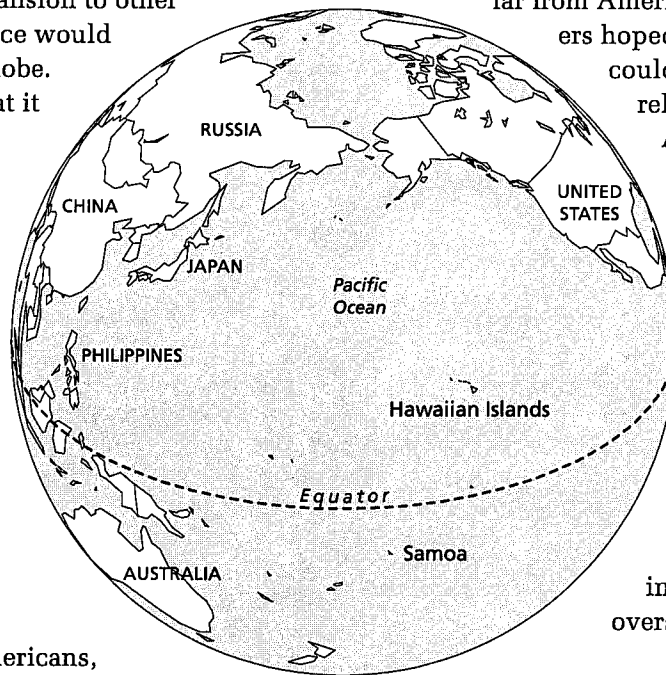
Many ordinary Americans, as well as most politicians, were content that the United States should be only an example, or at best an advisor to these “uncivilized” parts of the world. President William McKinley, whom Americans had elected in 1896, initially opposed imperialism as well. McKinley supported protecting American manufacturing industries. Like most leading Republicans, he called for economic expansion overseas, but he stopped short of arguing for the annexation of new territories.

***“Our diplomacy should seek nothing more and accept nothing less than is***

***due us. We want no wars of conquest; we must avoid the temptation to territorial aggression. War should never be entered upon until every agency of peace has failed; peace is preferable to war in almost every contingency. Arbitration is the true method of settlement of international as well as local or individual differences.”***

—President McKinley, inaugural address

On the other side were the group of imperialist-minded political and military leaders who sought to extend America’s reach to areas far from America’s shores. These leaders hoped that the United States could stabilize any “quarrelsome” nations so that American commerce and influence could travel safely across the seas. Little by little their writings and world events began to convince others in power of their views. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the United States became more and more involved in conflicts overseas.



### ***How did the United States come to control parts of Samoa?***

In 1878 the United States Senate agreed to a treaty that promised American assistance in case of foreign interference in Samoa, a group of tiny Pacific islands, in return for free access to Samoa’s harbor. Shortly thereafter Germany and Britain each made plans to take over parts of Samoa. For eight years the United States was involved in the conflict which also included Germany, Britain, and various Samoan groups. The United States even sent weapons and warships. In the end the islands were partitioned. In 1898, portions of Samoa became an

American territory. To the expansionists, this development meant that American ships now had a permanent, secure resting and refueling point on their way to Australia, where they could trade.

***Why was the United States concerned about British involvement in Venezuela?***

On the other side of the world in 1895, the U.S. Secretary of State, Richard Olney, became concerned that Britain was bullying Venezuela, which shared a border with the British colony of Guiana and held large deposits of gold. Olney did not want Britain—or any other European countries—to get the idea that they could carve up Latin America for colonies as they had recently done in Africa. Such action would prevent the United States from expanding its own commercial ties to Latin America. Olney invoked the Monroe Doctrine to try to prevent Britain from taking any further steps.

***“Today the United States is practically sovereign on this [Latin American] continent, and its fiat is law...”***

—U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney

This complex and lengthy dispute with Britain was frequently heated. At times it almost seemed the two nations were headed to war. In the end, Britain and the United States agreed to a commission that would investigate and settle the border dispute. The commission did not include any Venezuelans.

***Why did the United States annex Hawaii?***

Finally, in 1897 Hawaii came to the forefront again. About one quarter of Hawaii’s population were Japanese immigrants who worked in the American sugar plantations. When the white American government tried to restrict Japanese immigration, Japan sent a message—and a cruiser—telling the United States not to do so. American political lead-

ers, including President McKinley, who had become convinced of the imperialists’ ideas, agreed that at some point in the not-too-distant future those Japanese immigrants would gain power on the islands and begin to demand rights. They might even prevent the United States from accessing the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor. To maintain control, President McKinley put forward a resolution to annex the islands. It passed by huge margins in both the House and Senate, and Hawaii became a colony of the United States in 1898.

***“We need Hawaii as much and a good deal more than we did California. It is manifest destiny.”***

—President McKinley

In addition to these three examples, the United States intervened in 1891 in a revolution in Chile, and in 1894 in the Brazilian revolution. The United States also negotiated with many different groups in Nicaragua from 1893 to 1895, including sending the Marines to quell disturbances, so as to be sure that an American canal-building company could continue to operate there. (Ultimately, the canal was built in Panama, not Nicaragua.) These examples reflect the willingness of the United States in the end of the nineteenth century to ensure political stability abroad and therefore to provide a stable environment for American commerce.

The 1890s was a period of great change for the United States. For many Americans, these changes were alarming and frightening. Leaders considered a number of different approaches to restore economic well being, promote American ideals, and assert American power. A significant element of U.S. policy in the 1890s was involvement overseas, usually without considering the desires of the people who lived there. Eventually, this approach would lead to war.