

## The Age of U. S. Expansion an Introduction

### Setting the Context

You will need to understand the following basic concepts as a context for your study of U.S. imperialism. You probably already have studied most or all of these concepts earlier in your study of history. However, you need to review the topics below before exploring the age of expansion.

- The **Monroe Doctrine** of 1823 defined United States foreign policy in the Americas for the rest of the nineteenth century and beyond. It declared that the United States had an interest in the Western Hemisphere and that European powers must not meddle in the affairs of any developing nations there. The United States was a young nation in 1823 and did not really have the power to back up the Monroe Doctrine. However, the policy was used to justify the sending of U.S. troops into Mexico in 1866 (to intimidate the French) and the purchase of Alaska in 1867.
- The idea of **manifest destiny** gained popularity in the 1830s and 1840s. (The term was coined in 1845 by newspaper columnist John L. O'Sullivan.) As people began settling the western territories, wresting control of the land from the original Native American inhabitants, many Americans came to believe that it was their nation's "manifest destiny" to possess the entire North American continent. Later in the century, this idea easily gave way to larger dreams of expanding America's influence around the world.
- By the late nineteenth century, the growing industrial economy of the United States was producing many more goods than the nation itself could consume. This **overabundance of industrial goods** led the United States to look for new markets abroad.
- European nations such as England, Spain, France, Russia, Portugal, Germany, and Belgium had already carved up Africa and large parts of Asia into colonies and "spheres of influence" by the late 1900s. To remain competitive, the United States reacted to **European imperialism** by looking for a way to secure its own economic future through a policy of expansionism.

1. What are the main reasons for U.S. Imperialism?

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## Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899

*This is an excerpt from the famous poem, written by Britain's imperial poet, was a response to the American take over of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. McClure's Magazine 12 (Feb. 1899)*

Take up the White Man's burden--  
The savage wars of peace--  
Fill full the mouth of Famine  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hopes to naught.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
No tawdry rule of kings,  
But toil of serf and sweeper--  
The tale of common things.  
The ports ye shall not enter,  
The roads ye shall not tread,  
Go mark them with your living,  
And mark them with your dead.

### Vocabulary

**Sloth** *n.* Aversion to work or exertion; laziness; indolence.

**Heathen** *adj* : not acknowledging the God of Christianity and Judaism and Islam *n* : a person who does not acknowledge your God.

**Tawdry**: Gaudy and cheap in nature or appearance. Shameful or indecent

**Question:** Read the excerpt from the poem above and explain what you feel the author is trying to say about the need for American imperialism.

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