

American Imperialism and Isolationism

Document 1

Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885)

...this race of unequalled energy, with all the majesty of numbers and the might of wealth behind it-the representative, let us hope, of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization ... will spread itself over the earth... can anyone doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the "survival of the fittest"?

Document 2

Albert Beveridge, *Congressional Record*, 56th Congress, 1st Session (1900)

... God has not been preparing the English speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish a system where chaos reigns. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. Were it not for such a force as this the world would relapse into barbarism and night.

Document 3

Theodore Roosevelt, *Fourth Annual Message to Congress* (1904)

...All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. 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. 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 by some civilized nation...

Document 4

American Anti-Imperialism League (1899)

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 insist that the subjugation of any people is "criminal aggression" and open disloyalty to the distinctive principles of our Government... The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right.

Document 5

Robert M. La Follette, Speech, U.S. Senate (July 1916)

Believing in democracy, in the right of self-government-ready to defend the precious heritage of our own sovereignty led us here and now resolve and declare that we will never permit the armed force of the United States to be used to despoil our sister republics of their property, nor to interfere with their right to govern themselves according to their own standard, nor violate their sovereignty-as sacred to them as [American] sovereignty is to us....

Document 6

Source: Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, 1897.

To affirm the importance of distant markets, and the relation to them of our own immense powers of production, implies logically the recognition of the link that joins the products and the markets,—that is, the carrying trade; the three together constituting that chain of maritime power to which Great Britain owes her wealth and greatness. Further, is it too much to say that, as two of these links, the shipping and the markets, are exterior to our own borders, the acknowledgment of them carries with it a view of the relations of the United States to the world radically distinct from the simple idea of self-sufficingness? . . . There will dawn the realization of America's unique position, facing the older worlds of the East and West, her shores washed by the oceans which touch the one or the other, but which are common to her alone.

Despite a certain great original superiority conferred by our geographical nearness and immense resources,—due, in other words, to our natural advantages, and not to our intelligent preparations,—the United States is woefully unready, not only in fact but in purpose, to assert in the Caribbean and Central America a weight of influence proportioned to the extent of her interests. We have not the navy, and, what is worse, we are not willing to have the navy, that will weigh seriously in any disputes with those nations whose interests will conflict there with our own. We have not, and we are not anxious to

provide, the defence of the seaboard which will leave the navy free for its work at sea. We have not, but many other powers have, positions, either within or on the borders of the Caribbean.

Document 7

Source: John Hay, United States Secretary of State, The Second Open Door Note, July 3, 1900.

In this critical posture of affairs in China it is deemed appropriate to define the attitude of the United States as far as present circumstances permit this to be done. We adhere to the policy . . . of peace with the Chinese nation, of furtherance of lawful commerce, and of protection of lives and property of our citizens by all means guaranteed under extraterritorial treaty rights and by the law of nations. . . . We regard the condition at Pekin[g] as one of virtual anarchy. . . . The purpose of the President is . . . to act concurrently with the other powers; first, in opening up communication with Pekin[g] and rescuing the American officials, missionaries, and other Americans who are in danger; secondly, in affording all possible protection everywhere in China to American life and property; thirdly, in guarding and protecting all legitimate American interests; and fourthly, in aiding to prevent a spread of the disorders to the other provinces of the Empire and a recurrence of such disasters. . . . The policy of the Government of the United States is to seek a solution which may bring about permanent safety and peace to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire.

Document 8

Source: President Theodore Roosevelt, Fourth Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1904.

There are kinds of peace which are highly undesirable, which are in the long run as destructive as any war. Tyrants and oppressors have many times made a wilderness and called it peace...It is our duty to remember that a nation has no more right to do injustice to another nation, strong or weak, than an individual has to do injustice to another individual; that the same moral law applies in one case as in the other. But we must also remember that it is as much the duty of the Nation to guard its own rights and its own interests as it is the duty of the individual so to do. . . .

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. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. 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. 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 by some civilized nation, and . . . the exercise of an international police power.

Document 9

Albert J. Beveridge, candidate for United States Senate, "The March of the Flag" speech, 1898

"In 1789 the flag of the Republic waved over 4,000,000 souls in thirteen states, and their savage territory which stretched to the Mississippi, to Canada, to the Floridas. The timid minds of that day said that no new territory was needed; and, for the hour, they were right. But [Thomas] Jefferson, through whose intellect the centuries marched; Jefferson, who dreamed of Cuba as an American state; Jefferson, the first Imperialist of the Republic—Jefferson acquired that imperial territory which swept from the Mississippi to the mountains, from Texas to the British possessions, and the march of the flag began! . . . Jefferson, strict constructionist of constitutional power though he was, obeyed the Anglo-Saxon impulse within him. . . . And now obeying the same voice that Jefferson heard and obeyed, that [Andrew] Jackson heard and obeyed, that [James] Monroe heard and obeyed, that [William] Seward heard and obeyed, that [Ulysses] Grant heard and obeyed, that [Benjamin] Harrison heard and obeyed, our President today plants the flag over the islands of the seas, outposts of commerce, citadels of national security, and the march of the flag goes on!"

Document 10

Theodore Roosevelt, "National Duties," address given at the Minnesota State Fair, September 1901

"Let me insist again . . . upon the fact that our duty is twofold, and that we must raise others while we are benefiting ourselves. In bringing order to the Philippines, our soldiers added a new page to the honor-roll of American history... [T]he islands now enjoy a peace and liberty of which they have hitherto never even dreamed... Every encouragement should be given to their commercial development, to the introduction of American industries and products; not merely because this will be a good thing for our people, but infinitely more because it will be of incalculable benefit to the people of the Philippines.

"We shall make mistakes; and if we let these mistakes frighten us from our work we shall show ourselves weaklings. . . We committed plenty of blunders . . . in our dealings with the Indians. But who does not admit at the present day that we were right in wresting from barbarism and adding to civilization the territory out of which we have made these beautiful [United] States? And now we are civilizing the Indian and putting him on a level to which he could never have attained under the old conditions."

Document 11

Henry Cabot Lodge, senator, speech to the United States Senate, 1900

"I believe, we shall find arguments in favor of the retention of the Philippines as possessions of great value and a source of great profit to the people of the United States which cannot be overthrown. First, as to the islands themselves. They are over a hundred thousand square miles in extent, and are of the greatest richness and fertility. From these islands . . . there is no tropical product which cannot be raised in abundance. . . .

" . . . With the development of the islands and the increase of commerce and of business activity the consumption of foreign imports would rapidly advance, and of this increase we should reap the chief benefit. . . .

" . . . Manila, with its magnificent bay, is the prize and the pearl of the East. In our hands it will become one of the greatest distributing points, one of the richest emporiums of the world's commerce. Rich in itself, with all its fertile islands behind it, it will . . . enable American enterprise and intelligence to take a master share in all the trade of the Orient! . . . A policy which proposes to open wider markets to the people of the United States . . . seems to me a great and noble policy."

George Washington Farewell Address, 1796

. . . nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations and passionate attachments for others should be excluded and

that in place of them just and amicable feelings towards all should be cultivated. The nation which indulges towards another an habitual hatred, or an habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest. Antipathy in one nation against another disposes each more readily to offer insult and injury, to lay hold of slight causes of umbrage, and to be haughty and intractable when accidental or trifling occasions of dispute occur. . .

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith...

Harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest.