

Names: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

From the Historians: American Imperialism (15 points)

*Don't Know Much About History* (224-227)

1. How did the story of the battleship Oregon illustrate the need for a canal?

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2. What made Panama a more attractive location for a construction of a canal?

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3. How did Teddy Roosevelt try to get around the high price Colombia was asking for the territory need to build a canal in Panama?

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*"An International Frontier Opens as the Western Frontier Closes"* (307-309)

4. Why did Woodrow Wilson, Alfred Mahan, and Carl Schurz believe American needed to develop an overseas empire?

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5. What was Roosevelt's "corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine?

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6. Why did Roosevelt enjoy foreign affairs?

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7. Why did Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson occasionally send the marines into Central America?

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*A People's History of the United States* (303-305)

8. What were some of the economic interests Americans had in Cuba?

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9. What did the U.S. government insist on before pulling out its military?

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10. What was the Platt Amendment?

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*A Short History of the United States (190-193)*

11. How did the United States play a role in Cuban rebellion against Spain?

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12. How did “yellow journalism” influence American opinion before the Spanish-American War?

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13. How does this author feel about the United States acquiring the Philippines? Explain!

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14. How did the United States acquire the Virgin Islands?

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Group Question:

15. Discuss this question as a group; then write an answer that reflects your group's opinion: How does a country's economic policies or interests relate to its foreign policy (its interactions with other countries)?

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1845 by John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, who said that "Providence" had chosen this country "by the right of our manifest destiny" to spearhead a drive throughout the entire North American continent for "the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self government entrusted to us." What had begun as an argument "to overspread and possess" the continent had now become a global mission, at least with regard to disseminating the blessings of liberty and democracy. The nation forgot the warning of John Quincy Adams, who had declared that the United States should be "the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all" nations but that it must not go "abroad in search of monsters to destroy." To do so would inaugurate America's search for "dominion and power" in the world and would ultimately result in the loss of its own "freedom and independence."

Disregarding this sage advice, the United States at the tail end of the nineteenth century, spotted its first "monster to destroy": Spain. Rebels in Cuba had initiated an insurrection against Spanish rule on the island in an effort to obtain their independence. This revolution had resulted in part because of a failed economy brought on by the tariff policies of the United States, which had imposed heavy duties on raw sugar, the island's principal export. Spain's brutal response in crushing the rebellion evoked sympathetic outcries of protest from the United States. The horror stories of the treatment of Cuban civilians by Spanish officials involving rape, assault, and torture were just the sort of juicy material some American journalists loved to feed to a lurid-hungry reading public in the United States. Such "yellow journalistic" newspapers (so called because of a cartoon titled the "Yellow Kid" that appeared in them) such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* published detailed accounts of alleged Spanish depredations committed against Cuban nationals. These made for irresistible reading. As though responding to the public mood, Congress passed a concurrent resolution in February 1896 favoring recognition of Cuban belligerency. The situation heated up when, on February 15, 1898, the USS *Maine*, on a visit to Havana, was sunk by an explosion in which 260 officers and sailors perished. The finger of guilt was pointed directly at Spanish officials. Jingoists had a field day trumpeting what the nation would do in retaliation—as

though proof of Spain's guilt already existed. Growled one Congressman on the floor of the House of Representatives, "It ought to be understood in Spain and it ought to be understood in every country on the globe, that while this great country sincerely desires to be at peace, it is prepared for war, if war becomes necessary."

A reply from Spain about the sinking was eagerly awaited, but in April 1898 Congress passed another resolution recognizing Cuban independence and demanding the immediate withdrawal of Spanish authority from Cuba. The President was authorized to use military force to implement this resolution if necessary. The Teller Amendment to the resolution stated that the United States had no intention of annexing Cuba but would "leave the government and control of the island to its own people" once peace had been established. President McKinley signed the resolution on April 20. Immediately, Spain broke off diplomatic relations with the United States, and on April 24 declared war, whereupon Congress responded with its own declaration on April 25.

Most Americans felt a sense of honor and national pride, along with a desire to share the blessings of liberty and democracy, and so they eagerly engaged in what came to be called "a splendid little war." The Spanish-American War provided the United States with a series of naval and land victories in Cuba as well as the Philippine Islands, another Spanish possession. In May, Commodore George Dewey entered Manila Bay in the Philippines and completely destroyed what little Spanish navy was present to guard the islands. In Cuba some 17,000 American troops descended on the island, the most prominent of which was one regiment, known as the Rough Riders, commanded by Colonel Leonard Wood and Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who had resigned as assistant secretary of the navy to participate in the invasion.

Spain suffered one humiliating military disaster after another and lost an army and its fleet. A young, wealthy, powerful, emerging giant had provoked a poor, weak, decrepit ancient and brought it to its knees. Spain sued for peace in July, and a preliminary treaty was signed in Washington on August 12. The final peace treaty was negotiated in Paris on December 10, 1898. Spain recognized Cuba's independence and ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States as a war in-

demnity. It also surrendered the Philippine Islands in return for \$20 million.

President McKinley claimed that he had been troubled over what to do about the Philippines and had prayed for divine guidance. "I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight," he remembered. "I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance." The answer came in the middle of the night: "that we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable . . . that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government . . . 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, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them."

Uplift and civilize them! Even Christianize them, despite the fact that most "Filipinos" were Roman Catholics. Bring them the blessings of Americanized freedom and democracy so that some day Filipinos would become wealthy and powerful. Any number of Americans actually believed it was their moral duty to bring an "enlightened society" to the benighted Filipinos, while certain business interests lusted after expanding trade with Asian countries as they looked westward to develop new markets.

In demanding the Philippine Islands the United States had foolishly and needlessly embarked on an imperialistic course that not only divided the nation politically but set into motion forces that would later provoke a bloody war. By thrusting itself into Asian affairs, where it had little real interest or concern, the country courted catastrophe—and it came on December 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor.

The decision of the United States to purchase the Philippines came as quite a shock to the people of the islands, and they rose up in rebellion. They had expected independence and now, under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo, they were prepared to fight to achieve it. American troops put down the insurrection, an action that contradicted everything this nation professed about liberty and democracy. President McKinley appointed a commission—headed by William Howard Taft, a federal circuit court judge—to establish a government in the Philippines. It would take almost fifty years before the Philippine people would achieve their freedom. In 1916 the Jones Act provided self-

government for the islands and promised early independence. But it took several more decades before that independence was granted. And in 1917 the United States purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark for \$25 million.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY began with several momentous events. First, on March 14, the Currency or Gold Standard Act, by which gold—and only gold—became the standard unit of currency, was passed, thus marking the end of a two-decade struggle to make silver equal to gold. Then the following November the nation reelected McKinley as President, along with Theodore Roosevelt as Vice President, a selection that Marcus Hanna, the skillful manager of the 1896 campaign, strongly opposed because of Roosevelt's reform record as governor of New York. The Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan and Adlai E. Stevenson on a platform of anti-imperialism, anti-trust, and free silver. A Socialist Party nominated Eugene V. Debs of Indiana and Job Harriman of California. A Prohibition Party and a People's Party also put forward candidates for the presidential office.

Less than a year later, on September 6, 1901, President McKinley was shot by Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist, at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, and he died a week later, on September 14. The new President, Theodore Roosevelt, tried to reassure the nation by promising to "continue, absolutely unbroken the policy of President McKinley," but he was known to champion such progressive causes as child labor laws, food and drug regulation, conservation, railroad reform, and trust busting. A number of party leaders expressed concern about what he might do as chief executive. "Now look," exclaimed Marcus Hanna, "that damned cowboy is President of the United States."

Indeed, these leaders had good reason to feel concern. Populists and all manner of social reformers from the East and West joined Roosevelt under the banner of what was called Progressivism, a movement formed to further popular government and progressive legislation. They insisted that the nation needed labor laws regarding women and children, legislation regulating wages and hours, and statutes that defined safety and health conditions in factories. Trusts and railroads

Identified himself with the East, Wilson courted Bryan, retracting his earlier criticism, and won a symbolic relationship with the West. But Wilson's great advantage over Roosevelt was his identification with the South. His birthplace, the South, Wilson declared, was "the only place in the country, the only place in the world, where nothing has to be explained to me." This first southerner elected to the Presidency since before the Civil War praised the region of his youth. There was, he said, "nothing to apologize for in the past of the South—absolutely nothing to apologize for." This, for Wilson, included slavery, which "had done more for the Negro in two hundred and fifty years than African freedom had done since the building of the pyramids."

Wilson was part of a whole generation of young southern intellectuals who had come North to be educated and who hoped that the South could be integrated into the patterns of northern urban and industrial life. When Wilson and the Democrats captured the Presidency and Congress in 1912, southerners became the leaders of Congress as well as important members of Wilson's Cabinet.

Wilson's goal was to change the complexion of the Democratic party so that it would more successfully synthesize "progressivism" and the interests of the new industrial elite than Roosevelt had in remaking the Republican party. He pleased southern and western farmers and northern consumers by lowering the tariff. He supported a Federal Farm Loan Act and a Warehouse Act that fulfilled a demand for government storage of crops made by the Populists in 1890. He showed paternalistic concern for labor by supporting the Adamson Act, which established an eight-hour day for railroad workers. In his "New Freedom" speeches, like Roosevelt in his "Square Deal" speeches, Wilson promised to protect the average American against the giant corporations. "What this country needs above everything else is a body of laws which will look after the men on the make," Wilson had orated. "The only way to enrich America is to make it possible for any man who has got the brains to get into the game."

But like Roosevelt, he agreed that the corporation was "indispensable to modern business enterprise." "Nobody," he declared, "can fail to see that modern business is going to be done by corporations. The old time of individual competition is gone by." More than Roosevelt, he was able to achieve the legislation which met the "progressive" demand for government commissions to regulate the

corporations and the demand of the corporations for government commissions to regulate the economy. He had moved vigorously to provide personal leadership to mobilize the new Democratic majority in Congress.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Reserve Board were the two great legislative accomplishments of his administrations. The "progressives" who believed in the possibility of nonpolitical experts running the FTC expected it to make the corporations responsible to consumers. But those members of the industrial elite who staffed the Commission considered the purpose of the FTC to be to overcome irrational competition and encourage rational corporate planning. Edward Hurley, the head of the FTC, hoped "we can recommend to Congress some legislation that will allow them [coal companies] to come here and fix prices."

This was also the case with the Federal Reserve System. The "progressives" saw it as taking economic power out of the hands of private bankers and putting it in the hands of experts representing the people. But, in practice, the system encouraged the large national banks and discouraged the small state banks and thus solidified the pre-eminence of the great New York financial institutions.

"Our industries have expanded to such a point that they will burst their jackets if they cannot find a free outlet to the markets of the world," Wilson told the Democratic Convention in 1912. "Our domestic markets no longer suffice. We need foreign markets." A fellow student of Frederick Jackson Turner at Johns Hopkins, Wilson agreed that the closing of the agricultural frontier had caused a national crisis. He also agreed with Turner in the 1890s that overseas expansion could provide a new frontier. Again it was Wilson rather than Roosevelt who most strongly expressed the industrial elite's desire to develop an overseas frontier.

This concern for a new frontier had become a dominant theme in Congress by 1890. "A policy of isolation did well enough when we were an embryo nation, but today things are different," declared Senator Orville H. Platt in 1893. "We are the most advanced and powerful people on earth, and regard to our future welfare demands an abandonment of the doctrine of isolation." He concluded, "It is to the ocean that our children must look, as they once looked to the boundless West."

A dramatic change took place, therefore, during the 1890s in the

conduct of foreign affairs. Presidents and their foreign-policy advisers began to assume that America was a world power, that vital American economic, political, and military interests existed overseas. They stressed the need for a more systematic foreign policy, one that would include a sense of continuity with the past. A new Republican or Democratic administration should perpetuate the policies of its predecessor. Those at the head of government assumed a sense of interrelatedness in world affairs: the success of American policy in the Far East would be linked to its success in Central America or any other place on the globe. It was expected that the executive branch could and should initiate policy and then generate public and congressional support for it. Policy makers in the world, then, needed an appreciation of the instruments of foreign affairs, and recognized the need for a large and skillful diplomatic corps and a large and powerful navy.

The only question that faced the political elite in the 1890s was the nature of the new empire. Some, like Captain A. T. Mahan, the great theoretician of the new Naval War College, called for annexing overseas colonies "as outlets for the home products and as a nursery of commerce and shipping." Others, like Carl Schurz, agreed that "we cannot have too many markets." But he asked whether overseas markets could be obtained "only by annexing to the United States the countries in which they are situated."

Although the United States did annex the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the proponents of the "Open Door" empire won the larger debate. "Had we no interests in China," stated a report of the United States Senate, "the possession of the Philippines would be meaningless." Confident in the superiority of the American economy, the most rapidly growing in the world, foreign-policy leaders believed that American interests could penetrate to every area of the globe without the use of military power. "Open Door" notes were sent to Japan and all the European nations that had economic interests in China stating that the United States wanted to preserve the territorial integrity of China and opposed further colonization by Europeans.

England supported the American "Open Door" policy in China at the same time that the British government supported American domination in Central America. Forced to concentrate its naval forces against the rapidly developing German fleet, England with-

drew from the Caribbean and canceled plans for a canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific. President Roosevelt quickly walked into the power vacuum and encouraged a revolution in the Colombian province of Panama.

Roosevelt also declared a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, that the United States would oversee the internal affairs of all Caribbean and Central American republics and intervene when necessary to keep those affairs stable. The preservation of this internal stability would remove any cause or excuse for European intervention in these areas. Having served notice of American hegemony there, Roosevelt saw to the building of the Panama Canal, which would be controlled militarily by the United States.

Roosevelt delighted in foreign affairs, where he did not have to work artfully with Congress and the public to get legislation enacted. "The biggest matters, such as the Portsmouth Peace, the acquisition of Panama, and sending the fleet around the world," he affirmed, "I managed without consultation with anyone; for when a matter is of capital importance, it is well to have it handled by one man only." Woodrow Wilson agreed with Roosevelt. "The initiative in foreign affairs, which the President possesses without any restriction whatever, is virtually the power to control them absolutely." The "progressive" commitment to a strong executive was finding its greatest fulfillment in foreign policy.

Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson periodically sent marines into Central American and Caribbean republics to stabilize the local political situations and protect American investments. Military governments in Cuba and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War gave American leaders confidence that they could bring rational order to the rest of the world. General Leonard Wood proudly declared that "for the first time, probably in its history, Havana has an honest and efficient government, clean of bribery and speculation." An American reporter praised "the establishment, in a little over three years, in a Latin military colony, in one of the most unhealthy countries of the world, of a republic modeled closely upon the lines of our own great Anglo-Saxon republic."

Thus, for the new corporate and political elites, their success in organizing rational space in American cities, in controlling the millions of European peasants who had come to these cities, in educating these masses in the efficient ways of industry, according to the discipline of linear time, could be repeated throughout the entire

comes from the *Report of the Commission to Investigate the Conduct of the War Department in the War with Spain*, made to the Senate in 1900.) Thousands of soldiers got food poisoning. There are no figures on how many of the five thousand noncombat deaths were caused by that.

The Spanish forces were defeated in three months, in what John Hay, the American Secretary of State, later called a "splendid little war." The American military pretended that the Cuban rebel army did not exist. When the Spanish surrendered, no Cuban was allowed to confer on the surrender, or to sign it. General William Shafter said no armed rebels could enter the capital city of Santiago, and told the Cuban rebel leader, General Calixto García, that not Cubans, but the old Spanish civil authorities, would remain in charge of the municipal offices in Santiago.

American historians have generally ignored the role of the Cuban rebels in the war; Philip Foner, in his history, was the first to print García's letter of protest to General Shafter:

I have not been honored with a single word from yourself informing me about the negotiations for peace or the terms of the capitulation by the Spaniards.

... when the question arises of appointing authorities in Santiago de Cuba . . . I cannot see but with the deepest regret that such authorities are not elected by the Cuban people, but are the same ones selected by the Queen of Spain. . . .

A rumor too absurd to be believed, General, describes the reason of your measures and of the orders forbidding my army to enter Santiago for fear of massacres and revenge against the Spaniards. Allow me, sir, to protest against even the shadow of such an idea. We are not savages ignoring the rules of civilized warfare. We are a poor, ragged army, as ragged and poor as was the army of your forefathers in their noble war for independence. . . .

Along with the American army in Cuba came American capital. Foner writes:

Even before the Spanish flag was down in Cuba, U.S. business interests set out to make their influence felt. Merchants, real estate agents, stock speculators, reckless adventurers, and promoters of all kinds of get-rich schemes flocked to Cuba by the thousands. Seven syndicates battled each other for control of the franchises for the Havana Street Railway, which were finally won by Percival Farquhar, representing the Wall Street interests of New York. Thus, simultaneously with the military occupation began . . . commercial occupation.

The *Lumbermen's Review*, spokesman for the lumber industry, said in the midst of the war: "The moment Spain drops the reigns of government in Cuba . . . the moment will arrive for American lumber interests to move into the island for the products of Cuban forests. Cuba still possesses 10,000,000 acres of virgin forest abounding in valuable timber . . . nearly every foot of which would be saleable in the United States and bring high prices."

Americans began taking over railroad, mine, and sugar properties when the war ended. In a few years, \$30 million of American capital was invested. United Fruit moved into the Cuban sugar industry. It bought 1,900,000 acres of land for about twenty cents an acre. The American Tobacco Company arrived. By the end of the occupation, in 1901, Foner estimates that at least 80 percent of the export of Cuba's minerals were in American hands, mostly Bethlehem Steel.

During the military occupation a series of strikes took place. In September 1899, a gathering of thousands of workers in Havana launched a general strike for the eight-hour day, saying, ". . . we have determined to promote the struggle between the worker and the capitalist. For the workers of Cuba will no longer tolerate remaining in total subjection." The American General William Ludlow ordered the mayor of Havana to arrest eleven strike leaders, and U.S. troops occupied railroad stations and docks. Police moved through the city breaking up meetings. But the economic activity of the city had come to a halt. Tobacco workers struck. Printers struck. Bakers went on strike. Hundreds of strikers were arrested, and some of the imprisoned leaders were intimidated into calling for an end to the strike.

The United States did not annex Cuba. But a Cuban Constitutional Convention was told that the United States army would not leave Cuba until the Platt Amendment, passed by Congress in February 1901, was incorporated into the new Cuban Constitution. This Amendment gave the United States "the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty. . . ." It also provided for the United States to get coaling or naval stations at certain specified points.

The Teller Amendment and the talk of Cuban freedom before and during the war had led many Americans—and Cubans—to expect genuine independence. The Platt Amendment was now seen, not only by the radical and labor press, but by newspapers and groups all over the United States, as a betrayal. A mass meeting of the American Anti-

Imperialist League at Faneuil Hall in Boston denounced it, ex-governor George Boutwell saying: "In disregard of our pledge of freedom and sovereignty to Cuba we are imposing on that island conditions of colonial vassalage."

In Havana, a torchlight procession of fifteen thousand Cubans marched on the Constitutional Convention, urging them to reject the Amendment. But General Leonard Wood, head of the occupation forces, assured McKinley: "The people of Cuba lend themselves readily to all sorts of demonstrations and parades, and little significance should be attached to them."

A committee was delegated by the Constitutional Convention to reply to the United States' insistence that the Platt Amendment be included in the Constitution. The committee report, *Penencia a la Convención*, was written by a black delegate from Santiago. It said:

For the United States to reserve to itself the power to determine when this independence was threatened, and when, therefore, it should intervene to preserve it, is equivalent to handing over the keys to our house so that they can enter it at any time, whenever the desire seizes them, day or night, whether with good or evil design.

And:

The only Cuban governments that would live would be those which count on the support and benevolence of the United States, and the clearest result of this situation would be that we would only have feeble and miserable governments . . . condemned to live more attentive to obtaining the blessings of the United States than to serving and defending the interests of Cuba. . . .

The report termed the request for coaling or naval stations "a-mutilation of the fatherland." It concluded:

A people occupied militarily is being told that before consulting their own government, before being free in their own territory, they should grant the military occupants who came as friends and allies, rights and powers which would annul the sovereignty of these very people. That is the situation created for us by the method which the United States has just adopted. It could not be more obnoxious and inadmissible.

With this report, the Convention overwhelmingly rejected the Platt Amendment.

Within the next three months, however, the pressure from the United States, the military occupation, the refusal to allow the Cubans to set up their own government until they acquiesced, had its effect;

the Convention, after several refusals, adopted the Platt Amendment. General Leonard Wood wrote in 1901 to Theodore Roosevelt: "There is, of course, little or no independence left Cuba under the Platt Amendment."

Cuba was thus brought into the American sphere, but not as an outright colony. However, the Spanish-American war did lead to a number of direct annexations by the United States. Puerto Rico, a neighbor of Cuba in the Caribbean, belonging to Spain, was taken over by U.S. military forces. The Hawaiian Islands, one-third of the way across the Pacific, which had already been penetrated by American missionaries and pineapple plantation owners, and had been described by American officials as "a ripe pear ready to be plucked," was annexed by joint resolution of Congress in July of 1898. Around the same time, Wake Island, 2,300 miles west of Hawaii, on the route to Japan, was occupied. And Guam, the Spanish possession in the Pacific, almost all the way to the Philippines, was taken. In December of 1898, the peace treaty was signed with Spain, officially turning over to the United States Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, for a payment of \$20 million.

There was heated argument in the United States about whether or not to take the Philippines. As one story has it, President McKinley told a group of ministers visiting the White House how he came to his decision:

Before you go I would like to say just a word about the Philippine business. . . . The truth is I didn't want the Philippines, and when they came to us as a gift from the gods, I did not know what to do with them. . . . I sought counsel from all sides—Democrats as well as Republicans—but got little help.

I thought first we would only take Manila; then Luzon, then other islands, perhaps, also.

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 more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way—I don't know how it was, but it came:

- 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 discredit.
- 3) That we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and
- 4) That there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all and to

"protectorate" in the American Pacific for years to come. Five thousand Americans died fighting the Filipinos.

The other development that came home from Cuba was a real, live war hero in Teddy Roosevelt. Unashamedly, he rode his Rough Rider fame into the statehouse of New York in 1898, where his reform-minded ideas unsettled fellow Republicans and the industries they represented. A number of Republicans felt it would be an eminently prudent idea to stash Teddy away in the Vice-President's office, where he couldn't do any harm. Senator Mark Hanna did not join in this thinking. The Chairman of the Republican Party, Hanna commented, "Don't any of you realize there's only one life between this madman and the presidency?"

Roosevelt initially balked at the post, believing that the office was a political dead end. The bullet fired by anarchist Leon Czolgosz, which struck President McKinley in Buffalo in September 1901, changed all of that. At age forty-two, Theodore Roosevelt became the youngest President in American history. In one of his first acts in office, he invited Booker T. Washington to the White House. It was an act that the South would never forgive or forget.

### *Who built the Panama Canal?*

While America prepared for war in Cuba, the American battleship *Oregon*, stationed off the coast of California, was ordered to Cuba. Steaming around South America, the *Oregon* was followed in the press like the Kentucky Derby. The voyage took two months, and while the *Oregon* arrived in time to take part in the battle of Santiago Harbor, it was clear that America needed a faster way to move its warships from ocean to ocean.

This wasn't a new idea. The dream of connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific had been held almost since Balboa stood on the cliffs of Darien in modern Panama. President Grant sent a survey team to look for the best route to dig a canal across Central America, and an American company later built a small railroad line to take steamship passengers across the isthmus, drastically cutting travel time from coast to coast.

Plenty of other people saw the commercial as well as strategic

advantages of this undertaking. In 1880 a French group led by Ferdinand de Lesseps, chief architect of the Suez Canal, put together a company with the capital of thousands of investors to build a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, then still a part of Colombia. In the growing macho mood of America's leaders, President Hayes announced that no European country would control such a canal, saying, "The policy of the country is a canal under American control."

Corruption on a grand scale, miserable engineering plans, the harsh realities of the Central American jungle with its rainy-season floods, earthquakes, yellow fever, and malaria doomed the de Lesseps effort. After some preliminary excavations and thousands of deaths by accident and disease, the French company abandoned its canal cut amid a national scandal and left everything behind, the rusted machinery looking like some mechanical dinosaurs fossilized in the dense jungle.

After the war in Cuba and the *Oregon* incident, the American appetite for a canal was reawakened. President McKinley authorized a commission to investigate the best route for the canal. When Roosevelt, the great apostle of American sea power, took the White House, the enthusiasm became that of a raging bull. Initially, Roosevelt tilted toward a Nicaraguan canal, a longer route but thought to be an easier dig. A Nicaraguan canal also offered the advantage of being closer to American ports on the Gulf of Mexico. An angry Senate debate followed, with Senator Mark Hanna leading the way for Panama. When the French company dropped the asking price for its assets from \$109 million to \$40 million, the Panama route became more attractive. Only one problem remained. The "dagos" in Colombia, in Roosevelt's phrase, who still owned the territory, were asking too much.

The solution presented to Roosevelt was simple. If Colombia stood in the way, just make a new country that would be more agreeable. Led by a former director of the French canal company with U.S. Army assistance, Panamanians revolted against Colombia in November 1903. The American battleship *Nashville* steamed south and pointed its guns in Colombia's direction, and Panama was born with the U.S. Navy for a midwife.

Recognized faster than any new government had ever been,

Panama's regime received \$10 million, a yearly fee of \$250,000 and guarantees of "independence." In return the United States got rights to a ten-mile swath across the country—the Canal Zone—"in perpetuity." Since the zone comprised most of Panama and would be guarded by American troops, the United States effectively controlled the country. Years afterward, Roosevelt would proudly say, "I took the Canal and let Congress debate."

A few months later, Americans took over the remnants of the French project, and in 1904 the first Americans were in Panama. From day one, the work was plagued by the same problems the French met: tropical heat, the jungle, and the mosquitoes. One of the few positive results of America's Cuban experience was the discovery that mosquitoes spread yellow fever, and the disease had been eliminated from Havana during the American occupation. But there were still plenty of people who thought the idea that mosquitoes carried disease was nonsense and they kept U.S. Army doctor William Gorgas, the health officer in Panama, from carrying out a plan of effective mosquito control.

When railroad builder John Stevens came to Panama in 1905 as head of the project, to give the dig the organization it needed, he also gave Dr. Gorgas a free hand to eliminate malaria and yellow fever, a task accomplished with remarkable efficiency, given the circumstances of the environment and lack of scientific appreciation. Unfortunately, Jim Crow also came to Panama. Most of the laborers were blacks from the Caribbean. They were housed and fed separately, and paid in silver, while whites were paid in gold. According to David McCullough's epic account of the creation of the canal, *The Path Between the Seas*, the death rate by accident and disease for blacks was about five times that of whites in Panama.

Without explanation, Stevens left the dig, replaced by army engineer George W. Goethals. Roosevelt put an army man in charge so he couldn't quit as previous administrators had done in the face of the project's overwhelming difficulties. Taking over in 1907 and building on the plan and reorganization left behind by Stevens, Goethals completed the canal ahead of schedule and under budget, despite the challenges the canal posed and the enormous changes the original plan had undergone as work

proceeded. More remarkably, according to McCullough, it was completed without suspicion of corruption, graft, kickbacks, or bribery.

First planned under McKinley, aggressively begun by Roosevelt, and carried out by his successor Taft, the Panama Canal was completed in 1914, under Woodrow Wilson. Ironically, the grand plans for a gala opening were canceled. War in Europe was looming, and news of the canal's completion was lost in preparations for the coming hostilities.

*What was the "big stick"?*

That he would start a revolution to suit his needs came as no surprise to anyone who knew Theodore Roosevelt. His record to that point—as cattle rancher, New York State legislator, Civil Service Commissioner, New York City Police Commissioner, Navy Secretary, soldier, Governor of New York, and then President—had been to act forcefully and leave questions of law, propriety, and good sense for others. His favorite saying, used often in public and private, was an old African proverb: "Speak softly, and carry a big stick; you will go far."

Although he rarely spoke softly himself, he was always ready to use a big stick, abroad and at home. His first chance to use the big stick came when 140,000 mine workers went on strike in May 1902. Underpaid, forced to buy overpriced supplies in company stores and to live in company-owned houses, the miners were kept in perpetual debt and had organized as the United Mine Workers (UMW) under John Mitchell. The mine companies, owned almost exclusively by the railroads (meaning, for the most part, J. P. Morgan), refused to recognize the union or to negotiate. As the work stoppage threatened to cripple an economy largely run on coal power, Roosevelt stepped in and threatened to use troops. But unlike the past, when they had been used as deadly strikebreakers to force workers back into the mines, these troops would operate the mines in the "public interest." With this "big stick" over their heads, the mine owners agreed to accept the ruling of an Arbitration Commission, which ruled favorably for the miners. The victory was more Roosevelt's than the union's,