

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On the Race for Empire

As the wealth and power of the United States grew, relative to that of other nations of the world, the American people were divided on how much the United States should impose its authority on other lands. Some saw American expansionism as a natural next step in the nation's growth, while others saw expansionism as an expression of greed and false superiority by the dominant nations of the world.

Read the passages below on the subject of American imperialism. Then answer the questions that follow.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST

William G. Sumner, Yale University professor, in an 1898 speech

There is not a civilized nation which does not talk about its civilizing mission just as grandly as we do. The English, who really have more to boast of in this respect than anybody else, talk least about it, but the Phariseism with which they correct and instruct other people has made them hated all over the globe. The French believe themselves the guardians of the highest and purest culture. . . . The Germans regard themselves as charged with a mission, especially to us Americans, to save us from egoism and materialism. The Russians, in their books and newspapers, talk about the civilizing mission of Russia in language that might be translated from some of the finest paragraphs in our imperialistic newspapers. . . .

[T]he Spaniards have, for centuries, considered themselves the most zealous and self-sacrificing Christians, especially charged by the Almighty, on this account, to spread true religion and civilization over the globe. . . . Now each nation laughs at all the others when it observes these manifestations of national vanity. You may rely upon it that they are all ridiculous by virtue of these pretensions, including ourselves. The point is that each of them repudiates the standards of the others, and the outlying nations, which are to be civilized, hate all the standards of civilized men.

We assume that what we like and practice, and what we think better, must come as a welcome blessing to Spanish-Americans and Filipinos. This is grossly and obviously untrue. They hate our ways. They are hostile to our ideas.

Our religion, language, institutions, and manners offend them. . . .

Now, the great reason why all these enterprises which began by saying to somebody else, "We know what is good for you better than you know yourself and we are going to make you do it," are false and wrong is that they violate liberty; or, to turn the same statement into other words, the reason why liberty, of which we Americans talk so much, is a good thing is that it means leaving people to live out their own lives in their own way, while we do the same.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST

Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League, October 17, 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 regret that it has become necessary in the land of Washington and Lincoln to reaffirm that all men, of whatever race or color, are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We maintain that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We insist that the subjugation of any people is "criminal aggression" and open disloyalty to the distinctive principles of our government. . . .

The United States have always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right. . . .