# Imperialism in 19th Century

Remember how everyone thought the frontier was now "closed"? Many answered that dilemma by deciding that it was time to expand into more than simply the American West. They would expand into other people's territories too.

During this period, America felt awesome. **Nationalism**was spreading like a virus all over the globe, causing nations to feel exceptionally proud of their own "race," history, language, and culture. In Europe, this would result in imperialism (the urge to spread their awesomeness) and, eventually, World War I (the attempt to prove their awesomeness in battle).

In America, this resulted in a search for overseas markets and influence. It helped that **William H. Seward**was Secretary of State in the 1860s and '70s: he had kicked off imperialism by buying Alaska and booting France out of Mexico. It also helped that the American navy was finally being strengthened. The "Mosquito Fleet" of the early 1800s wasn't going to help Americans with any kind of foreign trade, but when **Captain Alfred T. Mahan**wrote**The Influence of Sea Power on History,**arguing how incredibly important a strong navy was to making a nation a superpower, America's interest was kindled and the navy put on some muscle.

One of the first places to fall in the face of American imperialism was **Hawaii**. American businessmen had come in and taken over the economy and government way back in the 1870s, and in the 1890s, they finally overthrew the last Hawaiian queen. Know who a major player in that whole kerfuffle? Sanford Dole, the owner of Dole Fruit Company. You'll never look at a tin of canned peaches the same way again…

Then came the **Spanish-American War.**As in Hawaii, high American tariffs (like the **McKinley Tariff**)were to blame for economic woes, since suddenly Cuba lost the American market and its economy started to slide downhill. This sparked a revolution against the Spanish occupiers, which Americans were only too happy to comply with. After all, they loved an opportunity to kick foreign powers out of the Americas. Plus, they thought it rather lovely that little Cuba was taking a leaf out of America's book and staging a War of Independence.

The war was short and sweet—the latter adjective, of course, applicable only for the Americans. The **Treaty of Paris**gave the **Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam**to the US, which was fantastic because they served as stepping-stones to a lucrative trade with Asian countries.

The US argued heatedly over whether or not to annex the Philippines. Some people said no, because making a colony would demonstrate that the US was no better than Europe, which at that time was running all around Asia and Africa and cutting them into slices for their empires. Other people said yes, that America had a duty to spread its ideals of democracy and civilization to others. This was called the **"white man's burden"—**the heavy "duty" to civilize "darker" races. In the end, America caved: it would annex the Philippines, it said, only until they were ready to have their own little democratic republic.

It couldn't very well do the same to Cuba: after all, it had agreed to helpCuba overthrow a foreign power, not squat in the empty void. In the **Teller Amendment,**the US promised the Cubans that it wouldn't annex them. Problem was, it also refused to pull out all its troops until Cuba also signed the **Platt Amendment,**which declared that Cuba had to ask the US's permission before signing any treaties, andthat the US had to be allowed to interfere in Cuban affairs—"for its own good," of course. Finally, the US was to be allowed to have a naval base there.

America would very much have likedto have this kind of power in Asia, since it was interested in foreign trade there. However, relations with Asia were sticky. The US asked for an **open door policy**in Asia (aka, allowing any Western nations to come in and trade) but the British weren't ready to share the sandbox. They had a lot of power in China and intended to keep it.

However, America wasn't ready to abandon its grand new ideas of Bugging Other Nations and Acquiring More Global Power. It would soon find a champion in a new, powerful, and charismatic president: Old "Rough and Ready," **Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt**.