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## Perspectives on the Spanish-American War 1898–1899

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### #1. President William McKinley's Message to Congress April 11, 1898

*[Note: Below is a brief excerpt from McKinley's lengthy request for congressional authorization for the United States to intervene in Cuba, where Spain had long been failing to suppress an insurrection aimed at Cuban independence. While many Americans supported intervention to create a "Cuba Libre" ("Free Cuba"), McKinley clearly had other priorities. It's important to note that McKinley did not rush to war with Spain, but he privately declared that during the course of the war "we must keep all we get" and "when the war is over we must keep all we want." As these comments suggested, the war was not going to be limited to Cuba, and he did not intend for the United States to conclude the conflict empty handed. –D. Voelker]*

[1] The grounds for such intervention may be briefly summarized as follows:

[2] First. In the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there, and which the parties to the conflict are either unable or unwilling to stop or mitigate. It is no answer to say this is all in another country, belonging to another nation, and is therefore none of our business. It is specially our duty, for it is right at our door.

[3] Second. We owe it to our citizens in Cuba to afford them that protection and indemnity for life and property which no government there can or will afford, and to that end to terminate the conditions that deprive them of legal protection.

[4] Third. The right to intervene may be justified by the very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people and by the wanton destruction of property and devastation of the island.

[5] Fourth, and which is of the utmost importance. The present condition of affairs in Cuba is a constant menace to our peace and entails upon this Government an enormous expense. With such a conflict waged for years in an island so near us and with which our people have such trade and business relations; when the lives and liberty of our citizens are in constant danger and their property destroyed and themselves ruined; where our trading vessels are liable to seizure and are seized at our very door by war ships of a foreign nation; the expeditions of filibustering that we are powerless to prevent altogether, and the irritating questions and entanglements thus arising—all these and others that I need not mention, with the resulting strained relations, are a constant menace to our peace and compel us to keep on a semi war footing with a nation with which we are at peace. . . .

[6] In view of these facts and of these considerations I ask the Congress to authorize and empower the President to take measures to secure a full and final termination of hostilities between the Government of Spain and the people of Cuba, and to secure in the island the establishment of a stable government, capable of maintaining order and observing its international obligations, insuring peace and tranquility and the security of its citizens as well as our own, and to use the military and naval forces of the United States as may be necessary for these purposes.

[7] And in the interest of humanity and to aid in preserving the lives of the starving people of the island I recommend that the distribution of food and supplies be continued and that an appropriation be made out of the public Treasury to supplement the charity of our citizens. . . .

Source: Mark Kornbluh, ed., Landmark Document[s] in American History (Spring 2001), <http://www.h-net.org/~hst203/documents/mckinley.html>. Paragraph numbers added.

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## #2. Congress's Joint Resolution for the Recognition of the Independence of the People of Cuba April 20, 1898

*[Note: Congress responded to McKinley's request with the following joint resolution. The fourth provision below was proposed by Senator Henry Teller (Colorado), and is therefore known as the Teller Amendment. Prior to the war, then, Congress stated different priorities than McKinley. It's important to note, however, that on March 2, 1901, Congress specified via the Platt Amendment that in order for Cuba to reestablish independence, it would have to approve a constitution that allowed the United States to intervene unilaterally in the interest of protecting stability (including property). The U.S. did in fact intervene militarily three times over the next fifteen years or so, and to this day the U.S. maintains a naval base in Cuba that was made possible by the Platt Amendment. —D. Voelker]*

[1] Whereas the abhorrent conditions which have existed for more than three years in the Island of Cuba, so near our own borders, have shocked the moral sense of the people of the United States, have been a disgrace to Christian civilization, culminating, as they have, in the destruction of a United States battle ship [Maine], with two hundred and sixty-six of its officers and crew, while on a friendly visit in the harbor of Havana, and can not longer be endured, as has been set forth by the President of the United States in his message to Congress of April eleventh, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, upon which the action of Congress was invited: Therefore,

[2] Resolved, First. That the people of the Island of Cuba are, of right ought to be, free and independent.

[3] Second. That it is the duty of the United States to demand, and the Government of the United States does hereby demand, that the Government of Spain at once relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba and withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters.

[4] Third. That the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, directed and empowered to use the entire land and naval forces of the United States, and to call into the actual service of the United States the militia of the several States, to such extent as may be necessary to carry these resolutions into effect.

[5] Fourth. That the United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said Island except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the Island to its people.

Source: Charles Eliot Norton, ed., *American Historical Documents, 1000–1904*, vol. 43, The Harvard Classics (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com, 2001), <http://www.bartleby.com/43/45.html>. Paragraph numbers added.

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**#3. Albert J. Beveridge, “The March of the Flag”  
September 16, 1898**

*[Note: In late 1898, when Albert Beveridge—soon to be elected U.S. Senator from Indiana—delivered this speech, the status of the recent acquisitions from the Spanish-American War remained to be settled. Using the trope of the “march of the flag,” Beveridge argued that the nation had a duty to extend civilization to the people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines while simultaneously bolstering American economic strength. —D. Voelker]*

(Speech opening the Indiana Republican Campaign at Tomlinson Hall, Indianapolis, September 16, 1898. This speech was made the Republican campaign document for Indiana, Iowa and other states.)

[1] It is a noble land that God has given us; a land that can feed and clothe the world; a land whose coastlines would inclose half the countries of Europe; a land set like a sentinel between the two imperial oceans of the globe, a greater England with a nobler destiny.

[2] It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing working-folk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven-directed purposes—the propagandists and not the misers of liberty.

[3] It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people; a history heroic with faith in our mission and our future; a history of statesmen who flung the boundaries of the Republic out into unexplored lands and savage wilderness; a history of soldiers who carried the flag across blazing deserts and through the ranks of hostile mountains, even to the gates of sunset; a history of a multiplying people who overran a continent in half a century; a history of prophets who saw the consequences of evils inherited from the past and of martyrs who died to save us from them; a history divinely logical, in the process of whose tremendous reasoning we find ourselves to-day.

[4] Therefore, in this campaign, the question is larger than a party question. It is an American question. It is a world question. Shall the American people continue their march toward the commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign as the children of liberty wax in strength, until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind?

[5] Have we no mission to perform, no duty to discharge to our fellow-man? Has God endowed us with gifts beyond our deserts and marked us as the people of His peculiar favor, merely to rot in our own selfishness, as men and nations must, who take cowardice for their companion and self for their deity—as China has, as India has, as Egypt has?

[6] Shall we be as the man who had one talent and hid it, or as he who had ten talents and used them until they grew to riches? And shall we reap the reward that waits on our discharge of our high duty; shall we occupy new markets for what our farmers raise, our factories make, our merchants sell—aye, and, please God, new markets for what our ships shall carry?

[7] Hawaii is ours; Porto Rico is to be ours; at the prayer of her people Cuba finally will be ours; in the islands of the East, even to the gates of Asia, coaling stations are to be ours at the very least; the flag of a liberal government is to float over the Philippines, and may it be the banner that Taylor unfurled in Texas and Fremont carried to the coast.

[8] The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent. How do they know that our government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them? . . .

[9] We did not need the western Mississippi Valley when we acquired it, nor Florida, nor Texas, nor California, nor the royal provinces of the far northwest. We had no emigrants to people this imperial wilderness, no money to develop it, even no highways to cover it. No trade awaited us in its savage fastnesses. Our productions were not greater than our trade. There was not one reason for the land-lust of our statesmen from Jefferson to Grant, other than the prophet and the Saxon within them. But, to-day, we are raising more than we can consume, making more than we can use. Therefore we must find new markets for our produce.

[10] And so, while we did not need the territory taken during the past century at the time it was acquired, we do need what we have taken in 1898, and we need it now. The resources and the commerce of these immensely rich dominions will be increased as much as American energy is greater than Spanish sloth. In Cuba, alone, there are 15,000,000 acres of forest unacquainted with the ax, exhaustless mines of iron, priceless deposits of manganese, millions of dollars' worth of which we must buy, to-day, from the Black Sea districts. There are millions of acres yet unexplored.

[11] The resources of Porto Rico have only been trifled with. The riches of the Philippines have hardly been touched by the fingertips of modern methods. And they produce what we consume, and consume what we produce—the very predestination of reciprocity—a reciprocity “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” They sell hemp, sugar, cocoanuts, fruits of the tropics, timber of price like mahogany; they buy flour, clothing, tools, implements, machinery and all that we can raise and make. Their trade will be ours in time. Do you indorse that policy with your vote? . . .

[12] The commercial supremacy of the Republic means that this Nation is to be the sovereign factor in the peace of the world. For the conflicts of the future are to be conflicts of trade—struggles for markets—commercial wars for existence. And the golden rule of peace is impregnability of position and invincibility of preparedness. So, we see England, the greatest strategist of history, plant her flag and her cannon on Gibraltar, at Quebec, in the Bermudas, at Vancouver, everywhere.

[13] So Hawaii furnishes us a naval base in the heart of the Pacific; the Ladrões another, a voyage further on; Manila another, at the gates of Asia—Asia, to the trade of whose hundreds of millions American merchants, manufacturers, farmers, have as good right as those of Germany or France or Russia or England; Asia, whose commerce with the United Kingdom alone amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars every year; Asia, to whom Germany looks to take her surplus products; Asia, whose doors must not be shut against American trade. Within five decades the bulk of Oriental commerce will be ours. . . .

[14] Wonderfully has God guided us. Yonder at Bunker Hill and Yorktown His providence was above us. At New Orleans and on ensanguined seas His hand sustained us. Abraham Lincoln was His minister and His was the altar of freedom the Nation's soldiers set up on a hundred battlefields. His power directed Dewey in the East and delivered the Spanish fleet into our hands, as He delivered the elder Armada into the hands of our English sires two centuries ago. The American people can not use a dishonest medium of exchange; it is ours to set the world its example of right and honor. We can not fly from our world duties; it is ours to execute the purpose of a fate that has driven us to be greater than our small intentions. We can not retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for liberty and civilization.

Source: Albert J. Beveridge, *The Meaning of the Times, and Other Speeches* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1908), 47–57. Paragraph numbers added.

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#### #4. The Anti-Imperialist Position March 25, 1899

To the People of the United States:

[1] The full ratification of the treaty with Spain will cause a technical change in the relations of the United States to the Philippine Islands, but will afford no reason for any change of the views of the anti-imperialists in regard to the future of the islands, nor will it in the least affect the clear duty of this Republic.

[2] We are now engaged in warfare with the inhabitants of those islands. It is unprofitable to discuss the question as to which party began hostilities. No other result could have been expected, when the lines of two opposing military forces were held so close and in such tense condition that little was needed to cause an explosion.

[3] The evidence is very clear that [Emilio] Aguinaldo was brought to the islands by our own war-ship, that his aid was accepted and desired in our military operations against the Spaniards, and that hopes of independence were encouraged by our consuls and other officers; that a

parliament of the islands, organized by representatives elected by 186 towns and provinces, chose Aguinaldo President, and framed a constitution, which was promulgated, defining the powers and duties of the separate departments of the government with remarkable clearness and ability, and that the government so formed fairly represented the intelligence of the people of the islands.

[4] It is also undeniable that on January 5 President McKinley issued a proclamation through General Otis, declaring that on the 10th of the previous month the Philippine Islands had been ceded to this country by Spain by the signature of the Treaty of Paris, and further ordered him to extend the military government of the United States “to the whole of the ceded territory,” and to demand the surrender of Iloilo, which was then held by the Filipinos in an orderly manner by capture from the Spaniards.

[5] It cannot be claimed in law that this assumption of power was warranted in advance of the ratification of the treaty by both parties, and there can be no doubt that the arbitrary claim greatly aggravated the people of the islands, whose hope of independence seemed thus rudely destroyed.

[6] No declaratory resolution as to the future of the islands was assented to by the Administration before the ratification of the treaty by the Senate, and none has been made since.

[7] Any right that we assert to ownership of the Philippines must rest, therefore, either upon conquest or upon purchase from their Spanish oppressors, or upon both; and in any case it is, as we believe, inconsistent with the principles of this Republic, and fraught with danger to its peace and to the peace of the world.

[8] The first result we already witness—a war of subjugation, which must embitter the people we seek to rule, and which, however successful, must bring disaster and death to our soldiers and unmeasured cost to our people.

[9] Profoundly impressed with the seriousness of the situation, it is the purpose of the anti-imperialists to continue the circulation of literature, to assist in the formation of leagues, and, by public meetings, and every proper means known to a free people, to agitate for the revival in the land of the spirit of Washington and Lincoln, to protest against a spirit of militarism and force, to oppose the colonial idea and a permanently large standing army, and to assert the vital truths of the Declaration of Independence embodied in the Constitution and indissolubly connected with the welfare of this Republic.

[10] They urge, therefore, all lovers of freedom, without regard to party associations, to cooperate with them to the following ends:

[11] First—That our Government shall take immediate steps toward a suspension of hostilities in the Philippines and a conference with the Philippine leaders, with a view to preventing further bloodshed upon the basis of a recognition of their freedom and independence as soon as proper guarantees can be had of order and protection to property.

[12] Second—That the Government of the United States shall tender an official assurance to the

inhabitants of the Philippine Islands that they will encourage and assist in the organization of such a government in the islands as the people thereof shall prefer, and that upon its organization in stable manner the United States, in accordance with its traditional and prescriptive policy in such cases, will recognize the independence of the Philippines and its equality among nations, and gradually withdraw all military and naval forces.

[The list of 29 signators includes Samuel Gompers and Andrew Carnegie.]

Source: *The Outlook* 61 (25 March 1899), pp. 698–699. Paragraph numbers added.

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**#5. Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life”  
April 10, 1899**

*[Note: Teddy Roosevelt fought in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and became a leading advocate of American imperialism. He delivered this speech to Chicago’s Hamilton Club a couple of months after the Senate had ratified the treaty with Spain that established the Philippines as a colony of the United States. “The Strenuous Life” exuberantly defended American imperialism using arguments rooted not only in American economic self-interest but also in notions of masculine vigor, racial fitness, and national destiny. The following year, Roosevelt was elected vice president, and he succeeded to the presidency in September, 1901, after McKinley was killed by an assassin. –D. Voelker]*

[1] In speaking to you, men of the greatest city of the West, men of the State which gave to the country Lincoln and Grant, men who preeminently and distinctly embody all that is most American in the American character, I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires more easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph. . . .

[2] A life of slothful ease, a life of that peace which springs merely from lack either of desire or of power to strive after great things, is as little worthy of a nation as of an individual. . . .

[3] In the last analysis a healthy state can exist only when the men and women who make it up lead clean, vigorous, healthy lives; when the children are so trained that they shall endeavor, not to shirk difficulties, but to overcome them; not to seek ease, but to know how to wrest triumph from toil and risk. The man must be glad to do a man’s work, to dare and endure and to labor; to keep himself, and to keep those dependent upon him. The woman must be the housewife, the helpmeet of the homemaker, the wise and fearless mother of many healthy children. . . . When men fear work or fear righteous war, when women fear motherhood, they tremble on the brink of doom; and well it is that they should vanish from the earth, where they are fit subjects for the scorn of all men and women who are themselves strong and brave and high-minded.

[4] As it is with the individual, so it is with the nation. It is a base untruth to say that happy is the nation that has no history. Thrice happy is the nation that has a glorious history. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat. If in 1861 the men who loved the Union had believed that peace was the end of all things, and war and strife the worst of all things, and had acted up to their belief, we would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives, we would have saved hundreds of millions of dollars. Moreover, besides saving all the blood and treasure we then lavished, we would have prevented the heartbreak of many women, the dissolution of many homes, and we would have spared the country those months of gloom and shame when it seemed as if our armies marched only to defeat. We could have avoided all this suffering simply by shrinking from strife. And if we had thus avoided it, we would have shown that we were weaklings, and that we were unfit to stand among the great nations of the earth.

[5] Thank God for the iron in the blood of our fathers, the men who upheld the wisdom of Lincoln, and bore sword or rifle in the armies of Grant! Let us, the children of the men who proved themselves equal to the mighty days, let us, the children of the men who carried the great Civil War to a triumphant conclusion, praise the God of our fathers that the ignoble counsels of peace were rejected; that the suffering and loss, the blackness of sorrow and despair, were unflinchingly faced, and the years of strife endured; for in the end the slave was freed, the Union restored, and the mighty American republic placed once more as a helmeted queen among nations.

[6] We of this generation do not have to face a task such as that our fathers faced, but we have our tasks, and woe to us if we fail to perform them! We cannot, if we would, play the part of China, and be content to rot by inches in ignoble ease within our borders, taking no interest in what goes on beyond them, sunk in a scrambling commercialism; heedless of the higher life, the life of aspiration, of toil and risk, busying ourselves only with the wants of our bodies for the day, until suddenly we should find, beyond a shadow of question, what China has already found, that in this world the nation that has trained itself to a career of unwarlike and isolated ease is bound, in the end, to go down before other nations which have not lost the manly and adventurous qualities. If we are to be a really great people, we must strive in good faith to play a great part in the world. We cannot avoid meeting great issues. All that we can determine for ourselves is whether we shall meet them well or ill. In 1898 we could not help being brought face to face with the problem of war with Spain. All we could decide was whether we should shrink like cowards from the contest, or enter into it as beseemed a brave and high-spirited people; and, once in, whether failure or success should crown our banners.

[7] So it is now. We cannot avoid the responsibilities that confront us in Hawaii, Cuba, Porto Rico, and the Philippines. . . .

[8] The timid man, the lazy man, the man who distrusts his country, the over-civilized man, who has lost the great fighting, masterful virtues, the ignorant man, and the man of dull mind, whose soul is incapable of feeling the mighty lift that thrills “stern men with empires in their brains”—all these, of course, shrink from seeing the nation undertake its

new duties; shrink from seeing us build a navy and an army adequate to our needs; shrink from seeing us do our share of the world's work, by bringing order out of chaos in the great, fair tropic islands from which the valor of our soldiers and sailors has driven the Spanish flag. These are the men who fear the strenuous life, who fear the only national life which is really worth leading. They believe in that cloistered life which saps the hardy virtues in a nation, as it saps them in the individual; or else they are wedded to that base spirit of gain and greed which recognizes in commercialism the be-all and end-all of national life, instead of realizing that, though an indispensable element, it is, after all, but one of the many elements that go to make up true national greatness. No country can long endure if its foundations are not laid deep in the material prosperity which comes from thrift, from business energy and enterprise, from hard, unsparing effort in the fields of industrial activity; but neither was any nation ever yet truly great if it relied upon material prosperity alone. All honor must be paid to the architects of our material prosperity, to the great captains of industry who have built our factories and our railroads, to the strong men who toil for wealth with brain or hand; for great is the debt of the nation to these and their kind. But our debt is yet greater to the men whose highest type is to be found in a statesman like Lincoln, a soldier like Grant. They showed by their lives that they recognized the law of work, the law of strife; they toiled to win a competence for themselves and those dependent upon them; but they recognized that there were yet other and even loftier duties—duties to the nation and duties to the race.

[9] We cannot sit huddled within our own borders and avow ourselves merely an assemblage of well-to-do hucksters who care nothing for what happens beyond. Such a policy would defeat even its own end; for as the nations grow to have ever wider and wider interests, and are brought into closer and closer contact, if we are to hold our own in the struggle for naval and commercial supremacy, we must build up our power without our own borders. We must build the isthmian canal, and we must grasp the points of vantage which will enable us to have our say in deciding the destiny of the oceans of the East and the West. . . .

[10] In the West Indies and the Philippines alike we are confronted by most difficult problems. It is cowardly to shrink from solving them in the proper way; for solved they must be, if not by us, then by some stronger and more manful race. If we are too weak, too selfish, or too foolish to solve them, some bolder and abler people must undertake the solution. Personally, I am far too firm a believer in the greatness of my country and the power of my countrymen to admit for one moment that we shall ever be driven to the ignoble alternative.

[11] The problems are different for the different islands. Porto Rico is not large enough to stand alone. We must govern it wisely and well, primarily in the interest of its own people. Cuba is, in my judgment, entitled ultimately to settle for itself whether it shall be an independent state or an integral portion of the mightiest of republics. But until order and stable liberty are secured, we must remain in the island to insure them, and infinite tact, judgment, moderation, and courage must be shown by our military and civil representatives in keeping the island pacified, in relentlessly stamping out brigandage, in protecting all alike, and yet in showing proper recognition to the men who have fought for Cuban liberty.

[12] The Philippines offer a yet graver problem. Their population includes half-caste and native Christians, warlike Moslems, and wild pagans. Many of their people are utterly unfit for self-government, and show no signs of becoming fit. Others may in time become fit but at present can only take part in self-government under a wise supervision, at once firm and beneficent. We have driven Spanish tyranny from the islands. If we now let it be replaced by savage anarchy, our work has been for harm and not for good. I have scant patience with those who fear to undertake the task of governing the Philippines, and who openly avow that they do fear to undertake it, or that they shrink from it because of the expense and trouble; but I have even scanted patience with those who make a pretense of humanitarianism to hide and cover their timidity, and who cant about “liberty” and the “consent of the governed,” in order to excuse themselves for their unwillingness to play the part of men. Their doctrines, if carried out, would make it incumbent upon us to leave the Apaches of Arizona to work out their own salvation, and to decline to interfere in a single Indian reservation. Their doctrines condemn your forefathers and mine for ever having settled in these United States. . . .

[13] I preach to you, then, my countrymen, that our country calls not for the life of ease but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The twentieth century looms before us big with the fate of many nations. If we stand idly by, if we seek merely swollen, slothful ease and ignoble peace, if we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at hazard of their lives and at the risk of all they hold dear, then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world. Let us therefore boldly face the life of strife, resolute to do our duty well and manfully; resolute to uphold righteousness by deed and by word; resolute to be both honest and brave, to serve high ideals, yet to use practical methods. Above all, let us shrink from no strife, moral or physical, within or without the nation, provided we are certain that the strife is justified, for it is only through strife, through hard and dangerous endeavor, that we shall ultimately win the goal of true national greatness.

Source: Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1902), 1–21. Paragraph numbers added.

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### Discussion Questions:

1. How did aims of the Spanish-American War evolve over time? Who was actually making the policy decisions?
2. Why did Beveridge and Roosevelt support American expansion? How were their concerns tied to other developments of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century America?
3. What was the outcome of the Spanish-American War? In what ways did it extend well beyond Cuba?



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