Manifest Destiny and American Imperialism in the Caribbean & Pacific as it Relates to European Colonization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Trent Crockett

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History is filled with countless examples of colonization and imperialism in almost every country or nation in the world. Imperialism does not always pertain to soldiers or troops from one country taking over another country but it may also include the concept of economic imperialism. Arguably, the United States of America inherited and adopted a culture of imperialism and a history of an entitled mindset toward land, as seen with Manifest Destiny, from Europe. American history has numerous instances of imperialism including Manifest Destiny, the annexation of Hawaii, purchase of American Samoa, and the seizures of Guam and Puerto Rico.

Imperialism, according to Humboldt state university[[1]](#footnote-1), is a form of foreign policy that involves the use of political or economic control over another group of people. Specifically, this policy would undermine their sovereignty and would disallow them to make their own political and economic policy. Many nations throughout history have implemented imperialist policies, most notably European countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, and Portugal. Figure 1 in the appendix shows a map[[2]](#footnote-2) of colonial possessions in the world in 1800. In terms of European nations, Spain and the United Kingdom own most of the land in North America. Some historians and some textbooks do not consider the early American presidents such as President Jefferson, President Jackson, President Monroe, and President Polk as presidents that expanded imperialist policy. This is argued because westward expansion is viewed, to some, simply as an expansion into land that was connected to their land. This introduces the idea of Manifest Destiny and the argument that America was ordained by God to expand westward to the Pacific Ocean, and was therefore not imperialistic[[3]](#footnote-3). However other historians, particularly revisionist historians, believe otherwise and argue that westward expansion was, in fact, imperialistic. One historian, Howard Zinn, makes the argument in *A People’s History of the United States* that the United States was always imperialistic[[4]](#footnote-4). Zinn cites various interventions and conflicts the United States has been involved in in the nineteenth century such as in Argentina, Angola, and Nicaragua. Zinn also cites numerous island acquisitions such as Howland, Baker, and Jarvis Islands, Midway Island, and the Aleutian Islands[[5]](#footnote-5). Howard Zinn is generally considered a more liberal historian, but on the end of the political spectrum there is conservative historian Robert Kagan. Kagan argues in *Dangerous Nation* that America has indeed always been an imperialist nation, but he views that notion almost a necessary evil or even a positive, citing his views on American exceptionalism[[6]](#footnote-6). In the late 1800s, many prominent Americans viewed imperialism as a vital part of American life. Some of these people included political leaders, intellectuals, patriots, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, and arguably most importantly, big businessmen who saw new American territories as an outlet for excess goods produced. American Imperialism, when not accounting for westward expansion, most pertains to Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The expansion of Caribbean and Pacific imperialism by America can be, at least partly, attributed to Captain Alfred Thayler Mahan, author of *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History.* In the book, Captain Mahan argues in favor of the creation of a much larger and more powerful naval power for America.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Navy would be used for the acquisition of the colonies in the Caribbean. He claimed that the colonies in the Caribbean would be useful naval stations and strategic points for the construction of the Panama Canal. American imperialism in Latin America did not include the creation of politically colonized nations. America used economic imperialism and the expansion of economic opportunity for America. Corporations like United Fruit Company exploited the region for economic gain[[8]](#footnote-8). As seen in Figure 2 in the appendix, the map shows numerous countries and areas where American had some intervention in, whether economically or politically.

The first major instance of America, as an independent country, is the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny is the notion that Americans have a God given right to expand their land from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The term “Manifest Destiny” was first used in reference to westward expansion in 1845 by a magazine editor named John L. O’Sullivan. It was a notion that the expansion westward was inevitable.[[9]](#footnote-9) Prior to the break out of the Civil War in 1861, Manifest Destiny was used to justify the expansion into Oregon, Texas, California, and New Mexico.[[10]](#footnote-10) After the Civil War, Manifest Destiny had basically died out, but the purchase of the Alaska territory had revitalized the notion in the American people.[[11]](#footnote-11) The onset of a “Manifest Destiny” attitude occurred in the 1600s and 1700s when European colonies would instantaneously look to expand their colonies westward. In America, the west would always be attractive to the eyes of settlers and America would constantly expand its territory through the Civil War. Under the Jefferson Administration, President Jefferson expanded American territory by purchasing the Louisiana territory with the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of America.[[12]](#footnote-12) During the War of 1812, American expansionists desired expansion into Florida and also wanted to annex Canada.[[13]](#footnote-13) In 1818, Andrew Jackson would invade Florida and the Adams-Onìs Treaty would settle Florida border disputes as well as relinquish Spanish claim to Oregon.[[14]](#footnote-14) Under the Jackson Administration, President Jackson would expand into Florida and the south, forcefully removing the Southeast Native Americans and placing them further west. This event would be known as the Trail of Tears.[[15]](#footnote-15) In the 1840s, American diplomats resolving disputes in Oregon as well as defeating Mexico in the Mexican American War would result in another instance of drastic growth for America.[[16]](#footnote-16) Manifest Destiny has the most direct relation to European colonialism due to the fact that it spawned out of the expansion of colonies. Manifest Destiny would spawn future American imperialism in the pacific and the Caribbean.

The Spanish-American War lead to a few territory gains for the United States including Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and control over Guantanamo Bay. As stated previously, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer was in favor of American imperialism. They also helped push the United States into the Spanish-American War with the use of yellow journalism[[17]](#footnote-17) by molding public opinion into supporting war with Spain with intentions of liberating Cuba. Not only did the media giants of the time push for the Spanish-American War, but so did Gonzalo de Quesada, author of *Cuba Great Struggle for Freedom,* a book written in 1898. He writes in the introduction an appeal to the American people to push toward supporting the war. In his book, Quesada says[[18]](#footnote-18):

This work stirs anew the sympathy of the American people for the brave Cuban Patriots who have resolved to free their beautiful Island from the oppression under which it has long suffered and bled. The conflict has been waged before, but never with such grim resolution and heroic bravery. The day of victory is not far distant.

While there were voices prominently in favor of the war and imperialism, there were those who were opposed to it, if not for humanitarian reasons, then for economic reasons. This can be seen in the 1904 pamphlet “The Cost of War and Warfare” written by Edward Atkinson. In the pamphlet, Atkinson cites multiple stats including:

The cost of war and warfare from 1898 to 1903 inclusive has been over nine hundred million dollars ($900,000,000)[[19]](#footnote-19)…Over six hundred million dollars ($600,000,000) may be charged by taxpayers to the effort to deprive the people of the Philippine Islands of their liberty.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The Spanish-American War ended with The Treaty of Paris. In the treaty, Spain agreed to several provisions including the independence of Cuba and giving control of Guantanamo Bay to the United States, ceding Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States, and they sold the Philippines to the United States for twenty million dollars[[21]](#footnote-21). While Cuba was technically independent, the United States remained in the island nation for three years until 1901 in order to supervise the creation of the nation’s constitution, ensuring that it would favor United States interests[[22]](#footnote-22). America only agreed to leave Cuba after they agreed to the Platt Amendment. The Spanish American war, at the very least the optics of it, appeared to be a massive land grab on behalf of the American government. With the surrender of Guam on June 20, 1898, the Hawaii annexation resolution on June 15, 1898, and later the acquisitions of the Philippines and Puerto Rico, resistance to widespread imperialism grew with the American Anti-Imperialist League[[23]](#footnote-23). Some members included Andrew Carnegie and Mark Twain. In addition to the Spanish-American War, another example of American influencing foreign policy to positively effect America is the Panama Canal. As seen in Figure 2, America has supported Panamanian revolts against the nation of Columbia in exchange for the construction of the Panama Canal. While small scale in comparison, the land grabs by American are not dissimilar to that of European colonization during the Age of Colonialism such as the westward expansion after the French and Indian War and the expansion of territory in the early colonies.

During the turn of the century period, America acquired other territories outside of those listed in the Treaty of Paris. Some of these acquisitions include Hawaii, American Samoa, and the United States Virgin Islands. Not all territories were gained through violent force and war, these two being an example. The process through which these territories were gained is evidence against American imperialism being completely similar to European colonization and expansion. For the Hawaii islands, America annexed the territory in 1898. Hawaii was a strategic position for the American economy and military. Hawaii was a prime spot for whaling, missionaries, and sugar cane production[[24]](#footnote-24). In 1893, Hawaii’s queen was usurped from power by a group of American planters who believed that a coup would ultimately remove the threat of a tariff being placed on their sugar. In 1894, the planters sought to annex the island nation but the President, Grover Cleveland, was opposed to the idea of annexing Hawaii[[25]](#footnote-25). Instead of annexation, President Cleveland wanted to restore the queen of Hawaii to power, but ultimately in 1898, President McKinley annexed the nation as it was a part of the Republican party platform in 1896[[26]](#footnote-26). The territory would not become a state until 1959. American Samoa, today, is an unincorporated territory of the United States and was acquired by America in 1904 when the eastern islands were ceded. However, Congress did not accept the cession until 1929[[27]](#footnote-27). Samoa was separated into western Samoa, which would become the independent Republic of Samoa and the eastern Samoa, which would become American Samoa. Prior to territorial acquisition, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States all compete for economic and political leverage in Samoa.[[28]](#footnote-28) In 1899, the Tripartite Pact would be enacted which would divvy up Samoa between Germany and the United States. The United Kingdom would withdraw their land claims to the island nation.[[29]](#footnote-29) American Samoa is a territory that provides a strategic location for the military due to the naval station at Pago Pago Harbor.[[30]](#footnote-30) The United States Virgin Islands is an organized unincorporated territory of the United States and is historically referred to as the Danish West Indies. The acquisition process began in 1867 when the United States attempted to purchase the islands from Denmark.[[31]](#footnote-31) The first attempt in 1867 was started by the Secretary of State William Henry Seward. Seward wanted the islands as a part of his idea of peaceful territorial expansion. Secretary Seward was able to negotiate a treaty with the Danish government. The treaty was ratified by the Danish parliament; however, it was rejected by the United States Senate. Later at the turn of the century under the McKinley Administration, Secretary of State John Hay also desired the acquisition of the islands. Hay wanted the islands as a part of his idea for both American expansion, but also as part of his plans for the future Panama Canal. However, the purchase was once again delayed. The issue of the Danish West Indies acquisition once again rose in 1915 when President Wilson and his Secretary of State Lansing feared that the German could possibly annex Denmark due to the outbreak of World War I. The Danish and American governments entered a treaty which was finally ratified by the King of Denmark, King Christian X, and the United States Senate.[[32]](#footnote-32) It was signed into law on January 16, 1917 by President Woodrow Wilson. The transfer of the Danish West Indies would happen on March 31, 1917 where the United States payed Denmark $25,000,000 in gold.[[33]](#footnote-33) These three territorial acquisitions were obtained through means that did not require war or military force and are therefore dissimilar from the trend of forcefully expanding and wiping out the population through war or genocide from European colonization.

European colonization as it is known today in history began around 1500 with the age of modern colonization.[[34]](#footnote-34) European nations had discovered a sea route around the southern coast of Africa in 1488 as well as America in 1492.[[35]](#footnote-35) The major European nations had expanded through the discovery of land, conquest of indigenous peoples, and the settlement of the conquered lands. These nations included Spain, Portugal, the Dutch Republic, England, and France. Portugal’s empire was based upon the sea. Due to the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, Portugal was able to claim and occupy land east of the imaginary line set by the treaty.[[36]](#footnote-36) Spain was able to settle everything west of the line. Portugal would end up ruling India, Brazil, and the East Indies.[[37]](#footnote-37) Spain would occupy the larger West Indian islands by 1512 but mostly ignored the smaller land masses.[[38]](#footnote-38) Spain would expand to the mainland in 1508 with Panama, Mexico in 1519, and the Incan Empire in 1531. Spanish conquistadores had also entered modern day Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina.[[39]](#footnote-39) For France, colonization efforts would not last long in Rio de Janeiro and Florida, however France would further colonize modern day Nova Scotia and would found Quebec after the defeat of the Iroquois in New York.[[40]](#footnote-40) As for the United Kingdom, they would colonize the Leeward Islands and the Bermuda Islands[[41]](#footnote-41) in addition to the colonies in the mainland that would later become the United States. The colonies of Virginia, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay were created by stock companies[[42]](#footnote-42) from England and the New England colonies where founded as derivatives of Massachusetts[[43]](#footnote-43). England would expand further mainland and create even more colonies such as Pennsylvania and Delaware[[44]](#footnote-44). After the French and Indian War, the Treaty of Paris of 1763 would give Britain all of the North American land to the east of Mississippi river[[45]](#footnote-45). Some colonial acquisitions by America echo a more modern version of European acquisitions such as both Treaties of Paris mentioned. The Treaty of Paris after the French and Indian War cedes land to England and Spain from the French whereas the Treaty of Paris after the Spanish-American War cedes land to America from Spain. While this is not a strong argument on its own, it does reflect a repetition in history. Another example would be colonial expansion of colonies by France in Canada, Spain in Latin and South America, and England in Northeastern America compared to the westward expansion of America in the 1800s as well as Pacific and Caribbean territorial acquisitions. The desire of Panama by Spain is also not dissimilar to the desire of Panama by America. While, Spain sought to settle the small isthmus, America wanted to mold the region to its interests.

Colonization and imperialism through the centuries did not mirror each other, but rather imperialism evolved out of colonization, creating a more modern version of the foreign policy ideology. European colonialism would create an attitude and ideology of land entitlements in European colonists and future Americans. After the American Revolution, colonialism would shift into the concept of Manifest Destiny and spawn the idea that American is blessed by God and destined to expand America to the Pacific Ocean and beyond. In turn, Manifest Destiny would evolve into American imperialism in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea with the Spanish-American war, annexations, and purchases of land.

Appendix

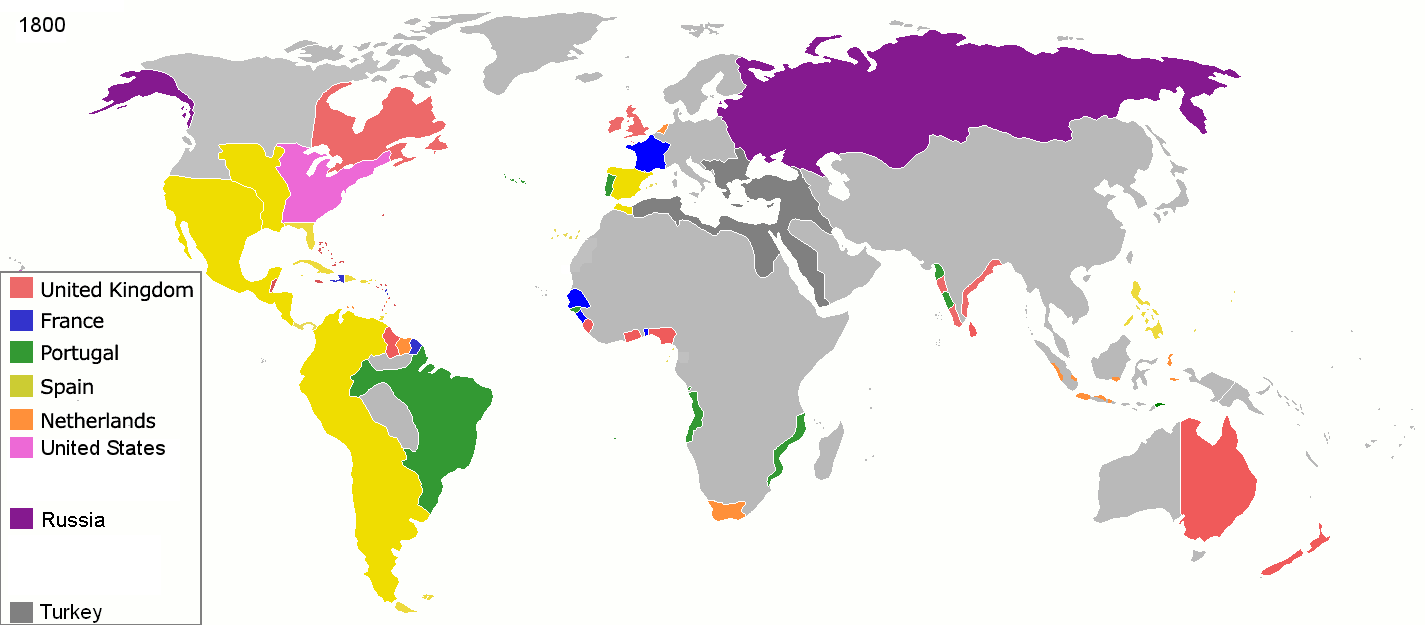
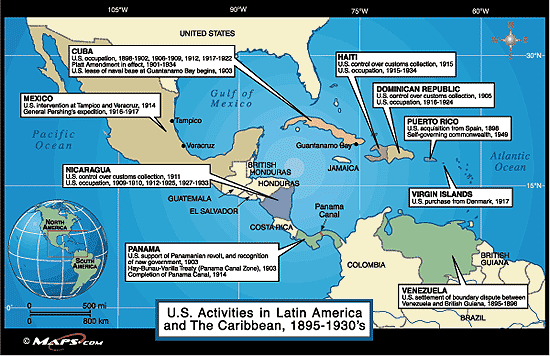
Figure 1. Source: Humboldt State University

Figure 2. Source: Humboldt State University

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