

Democratic party to have a better chance of winning elections. But it was political deal-makers, not revolutionary farmers, who won most elections. Eventually, the populist movement was lost in the sea of Democratic politics.

In the 1896 election, the corporations and press threw their support behind the Republican candidate, William McKinley. It was the first campaign in which massive amounts of money were spent, and McKinley was the winner. Like many politicians, he turned to patriotism to drown out class resentment. "I am glad to know that the people in every part of this country mean to be devoted to one flag, the glorious Stars and Stripes," he said. Then McKinley showed that he thought that money was as important, as sacred, as patriotism. He added, "the people of this country mean to maintain the financial honor of this country as sacredly as they maintain the honor of the flag."

## THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

"I SHOULD WELCOME ALMOST ANY WAR, for I think this country needs one." Those words were written in 1897, in a letter to a friend, by Theodore Roosevelt, who would later become president of the United States. Why would he think that the nation needed a war?

Maybe a war would take up some of the rebellious energy that people were pouring into strikes and protests. Maybe it would unite the people with the armed forces against a foreign enemy. And there was another reason—an economic one.

Before he was elected president, William McKinley had said, "We want a foreign market for our surplus goods." Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana spelled it out in 1897. He said:

American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours.

These politicians and others believed that the United States had to open up other countries to American goods—even if those markets were not eager to buy. If factories and farms could sell their surplus production overseas, American companies would keep earning money, and the economy might avoid the crises that had sparked class war in the 1890s.

War was probably not a thought-out plan among most of the elite ruling classes. Instead, it grew naturally from two sources, capitalism and nationalism. Capitalism demanded more markets. Nationalism, the spirit of strong national pride, made people think that the United States had a right, or even a duty, to expand itself and to shape the affairs of other countries.

## The Taste of Empire

STRETCHING THE UNITED STATES' ARM overseas was not a new idea. The war against Mexico had already carried the United States to the Pacific Ocean. Before that, in 1823, President James Monroe had produced the Monroe Doctrine. This statement made it clear that the United States claimed an interest in the politics of the entire Western Hemisphere—North, Central, and South America. It warned the nations of Europe not to meddle with countries in the Americas.

The United States, however, didn't feel that it had to stay out of other countries' affairs. Between 1798 and 1895, the United States sent troops to other countries, or took an active role in their affairs, 103 times. In the 1850s, for example, the U.S. Navy used warships to force Japan to open its ports to American shipping.

At the end of the nineteenth century, many military men, politicians, and businessmen supported the idea of still more foreign involvement. A writer for the *Washington Post* said:

A new consciousness seems to have come upon us—the consciousness of strength—and with it a new appetite, the

yearning to show our strength. . . . The taste of Empire is in the mouth of the people. . . .

### The Spanish-American War

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE MIGHT BE MORE willing to enter into an overseas conflict if it looked like a good deed, such as helping a nation's people overthrow foreign rule. Cuba, an island close to Florida, was in that situation. For centuries Spain had held Cuba as a colony. Then, in 1895, the Cubans rebelled against Spanish rule.

Some Americans thought that the United States should help the Cubans because they were fighting for freedom, like the colonists in the Revolutionary War. The U.S. government was more interested in who would control Cuba if the Spanish were thrown out.

Race was part of the picture, because Cuba had both black and white people. The administration of President Grover Cleveland feared that a victory by the Cuban rebels might lead to "a white

(left)

Cuban fighters in the war for independence from Spain roast a pig during a break in the fighting, 1896.



and a black republic." A young British empire builder named Winston Churchill, son of an American mother, had the same thought. In 1896 he wrote a magazine article saying that even though Spanish rule in Cuba was bad, and the rebels had the support of the Cuban people, it would be better if Spain stayed in control. If the rebels won, Cuba might become "another black republic." Churchill was warning that Cuba might be like Haiti, the first country in the Americas to be run by black people.

As Americans debated about whether to join the war in Cuba, an explosion in the harbor of Havana, Cuba's capital, destroyed the U.S. battleship *Maine*. The ship had been sent to Cuba as a symbol of American interest in the region. No evidence was ever produced to show what caused the explosion, but the loss of the *Maine* moved President McKinley and the country in the direction of war. It was clear that the United States could not get Spain out of Cuba without a fight. It was also clear that the United States couldn't carve out American military and economic interests in Cuba without sending troops to the island.

In April 1898 McKinley asked Congress to

declare war. Soon American forces moved into Cuba. The Spanish-American War had begun.

John Hay, the U.S. secretary of state, later called it a "splendid little war." The Spanish forces were defeated in three months. Nearly 5,500 American soldiers died. Only 379 died in battle. The rest were killed by disease and other causes. One cause was certainly the tainted, rotten meat sold to the army by American meatpackers.

What about the Cuban rebels who had started the fight with Spain? The American military pretended that they did not exist. When the Spanish surrendered, no Cuban was allowed to discuss the surrender, or sign the treaty. The United States was in control. U.S. troops remained in Cuba after the surrender. Soon, U.S. money entered the island, as Americans started taking over railroads, mines, and sugar plantations.

The United States told the Cuban people that they could write their own constitution and form their own government. It also told them that the U.S. Army would not leave the island until Cuba's new constitution included a new American law called the Platt Amendment. This law gave the United States the right to involve itself in Cuba's

affairs pretty much whenever it wanted. General Leonard Wood explained to Theodore Roosevelt in 1901, "There is, of course, little or no independence left Cuba under the Platt Amendment."

Many Americans felt that the Platt Amendment betrayed the idea of Cuban independence. Criticism went beyond the radicals (socialists and others with extreme or revolutionary views) to mainstream newspapers and civic groups. One group critical of the Platt Amendment was the Anti-Imperialism League. One of the League's founders was William James, a philosopher at Harvard University, who opposed the United States' trend toward empire building and meddling in other country's affairs. In the end, though, the Cubans had no choice but to agree to the Platt Amendment if they wanted to set up their own government.

### Revolt and Racism in the Philippines

THE UNITED STATES DID NOT ANNEX CUBA, or make it part of U.S. territory. But the Spanish-American War did lead to annexation of some other territories that Spain had controlled. One was Puerto Rico, an island neighbor of Cuba. The United States had already taken over the Hawaiian Islands from its Hawaiian Queen, and the war gave it control of some other Pacific islands, too: Wake Island, Guam, and the large island cluster called the Philippines.

Americans hotly debated whether or not they should take over the Philippines. One story says that President McKinley told a visiting group of ministers how he had come to the decision to annex the Philippines. As he prayed for guidance, he became convinced 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 then I went to bed and went to sleep and slept soundly."

The Filipinos, however, did not get a message from God telling them to accept American rule. Instead, in February 1899 they rose up in revolt against the United States, just as they had revolted several times against Spain.

The taste of empire was on the lips of politicians and businessmen throughout the United States, and they agreed that the United States must keep control of its new territory. Talk of money mingled with talk of destiny and civilization. "The Philippines are ours forever," Senator Beveridge told the U.S. Senate. "And just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable markets [markets with no limits or boundaries]. We will not retreat from either."

It took the United States three years to crush the Filipino rebellion. It was a harsh war. Americans lost many more troops than in Cuba. For the Filipinos the death rate was enormous, from battle and from disease.

McKinley said that the fighting with the rebels started when the rebels attacked American forces. Later, American soldiers testified that the United States had fired the first shot.

The famous American author Mark Twain summed up the Philippine war with disgust, saying:

We have pacified some thousands of the islanders and buried them; destroyed their fields; burned their villages, and turned their widows and orphans out-of-doors. . . . And so, by these Providences of God—the phrase is the government's, not mine—we are a World Power.

(left)  
A long line of African American soldiers who fought in the Spanish-American War, 1899.

The Anti-Imperialist League worked to educate the American public about the horrors of the Philippine war and the evils of imperialism, or empire building. It published letters from soldiers on duty in the Philippines. There were reports of soldiers killing women, children, and prisoners of war. A black soldier named William Fulbright wrote from Manila, the capital of the Philippines, "This struggle on the islands has been naught but a gigantic scheme of robbery and oppression."

Race was an issue in the Philippines, as it had been in Cuba. Some white American soldiers were racists who considered the Filipinos inferior. Black American soldiers in the Philippines had mixed feelings. Some felt pride, the desire to show that blacks were as courageous and patriotic as whites. Some wanted the chance to get ahead in life through the military. But others felt that they were fighting a brutal war against people of color—not too different from the violence against black people in the United States, where drunken white soldiers in Tampa, Florida, started a race riot by using a black child for target practice.

Back in the United States, many African Americans turned against the Philippine war

because they saw it as a racial conflict, the white race fighting to conquer the brown. They were fighting injustice at home, too. A group of African Americans in Massachusetts sent a message to President McKinley, criticizing him for doing nothing to advance racial equality.

Throughout the nineteenth century, black Americans, along with women, workers, and the poor, had raised their voices against oppression. Many had found ways to resist the harshest effects of a political and economic system that ignored them. In the coming century, they would take their own steps toward change.