

## History 118 US Since 1877 Discussion Transcript for February 18, 2021

### Main Reading: Yawp, chapter 19

*This Yawp chapter covered a range of themes related to different forms of imperialism (territorial, economic, cultural) as well as deeper consideration of immigration and rising anti-immigrant sentiment in the US during the turn of the twentieth century. Post-Civil War America was clearly becoming more global in its outlook, but that globalism was still often bitterly contested. Here are selections from student comments:*

#### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

STUDENT COMMENT: This chapter covers the few decades following the American Civil War and questions whether the United States was a type of empire. After all, succeeding 1865, the U.S. inserted itself into many scenarios or conflicts around the world, sometimes creating friction where there didn't need to be. Examples include areas such as the Middle East, Pacific, Latin America, etc. and the U.S. also "expanded on a long history of exploration, trade, and cultural exchange" (YAWP, 19). Specifically, in the Middle East, the U.S. actually did not have as much contact. In fact, there was limited trade, and therefore not a significant economic link between the two. So, most contact between the U.S. and the Middle East was when the U.S. went there to help with "education, science, and humanitarian aid" (YAWP, 19). Although they were of course there to help, there were opposing perspectives of such "help" like Mark Twain, who traveled there with a big group in 1867. He said, "we generally made them feel rather small, too... because we bore down on them with America's greatness until we crushed them" (YAWP, 19). That excerpt was from a satirical piece he wrote called *The Innocents Abroad*, which perfectly captures how the U.S. Government and Americans in general, felt compelled to impose their supposed "greatness" onto other people and cultures.

STUDENT COMMENT: The United States' physical intervention in other countries to influence domestic policy, much of which can be argued as imperialism, began as missionary and humanitarian work, such as in Hawaii and China in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The degree of involvement became afterwards economic, like in the acquisition of the Guano Islands for fertilizer, and then by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century precedents set by Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt made matters violent and political, particularly in Spanish American and Philippine American Wars (1898-1902) and in the Roosevelt Corollary. [YAWP chapter editors] Ellen Adams and Amy Kohout make interesting links between these affairs and US industry as well as immigration. The overall trend in these phenomena were that changes made by the US or western European countries were made in the name of progress which is destiny, or god's plan in the view of Christians, and since progress is good, anything that deviates must, as President Theodore expresses, have "order and civilization" sustained. This linear motion for society justified the US's endeavors overseas, and these three categories are connected in such behavior.

## **ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT**

**STUDENT COMMENT:** As the chapter informs us, there were over 25 million new people who were mostly Italian, Polish and Eastern European Jews. Their diverse ethnic groups and culture became barriers in the formation of being an American. Their presence brought about the question of what constitutes as a unique American identity and the threat these new people had on that identity. American born citizens also complained about the cheap labor they offered and the lack of jobs that might ensue from that. There were arguments that many of them were “unfit for American democracy” or that they were aggressive and violent. In 1876, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn voiced the opinions many 19th century Americans had, that these new immigrants were lazy, ignorant and increased crimes in society and introduced new disease in the American public. In August 1882, Congress denied admission to people who were paupers, convicted criminals and those with mental illness. In 1885, it expanded the list to workers who might immigrate on American labor contracts, and six years later, the list included people with contagious diseases, and in 1900s it added socialists and anarchists to the club. While these applied to all immigrants, Asian immigrants faced extra regulations. California passed the Page Act in 1875, which banned convicted criminals, laborers brought involuntarily and female prostitutes (a move the chapter informs us was to restrict Chinese women). In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Acts, which banned any Chinese laborers from the U.S. Additionally, in 1907, there was the Gentleman’s Agreement forged by the American and Japanese governments, in which the Japanese government stopped issuing passports to working-class immigrants. These restrictions were steeped in racial hostility that argued that Chinese and other Asian people were inferior and therefore unfit to be American. I think what this highlights is the contradiction of America’s image. Whereas national symbols like the Statue of Liberty represents America’s immigratory roots, it does not always reflect the views of those who got here first.

## **ANTI-IMPERIALISM**

**STUDENT COMMENT:** The 1899 political cartoon “School Begins” is a heavily satirical cartoon depicting Uncle Sam teaching a schoolhouse of students that represent American territories. The back of the room is occupied by well-behaved white children which represent U.S. states. The front row is a series of crude, dark skin looking children who signify newly invaded overseas territories. Uncle Sam bears down on the front row, demonstrating the wrath of U.S. on foreign lands. Ironically, the back board reads “England has governed her colonies whether they consent or not. By not waiting for their consent she has greatly advanced the world’s civilization.” About a century previous to the cartoon’s publication the U.S. was a colony of England, the dramatic change in national attitude in favor of imperialism is striking and hypocritical. Additionally, another sign indicates the success of the U.S. in preserving union despite the lack of consent from the south which may indicate why national attitudes swung to being in favor of heavy-handed governing. Importantly, standing at the door is a Chinese student who has not been welcomed in and a Native American child who is cowering and holding his book upside down. The Chinese student is literally excluded from the classroom in reflection of the anti-immigration Chinese exclusion acts which are antithetical to the American ideal of a country of immigrants. The Native student is failing to learn and is neglected in the classroom which is reflective of the country’s neglectful treatment of people already living in

the U.S. Through irony and political imagery, the cartoon shows the entirety of arguments against increasing American imperialism.

STUDENT COMMENT: The United States acquired the Philippines from Spain in the Treaty of Paris in December of 1898, effectively ending the Spanish-American War. However, instead of granting Filipinos their independence after years of Spanish oppression, President McKinley and the United States "occupied the islands and from 1899 to 1902," waging "a bloody series of conflicts against Filipino insurrectionists that cost far more lives than the war with Spain" (Yawp 19). If the United States was a democratic force, why did American forces attempt to overthrow Emilio Aguinaldo's leadership? Aguinaldo was a Filipino revolutionary leader fighting for the same freedom and independence American colonists achieved a little over 100 years beforehand. It lies in the question of American hypocrisy, justifying the conquering of the Philippines as "a Protestant, civilizing mission" to hide its real motives to create a new American Empire (Yawp 19). Led by the Anti-Imperialist League, members such as Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, and Jane Addams denounced American actions, arguing it curbed "self-governance." However, many supported anti-imperialist movements for the wrong reasons, realizing it could be manipulated to protect the "American purity that stood imperiled by contact with strange and foreign people" (Yawp 19). Therefore, the United States was a rising world powerhouse, but at what moral cost, as its democratic values were becoming lost in a justification of American cultural domination and greed.