

Chapter 19

Foreign Policy: Setting a Course of Expansionism

Was American foreign policy during the 1800s motivated more by realism or idealism?

19.1 Introduction

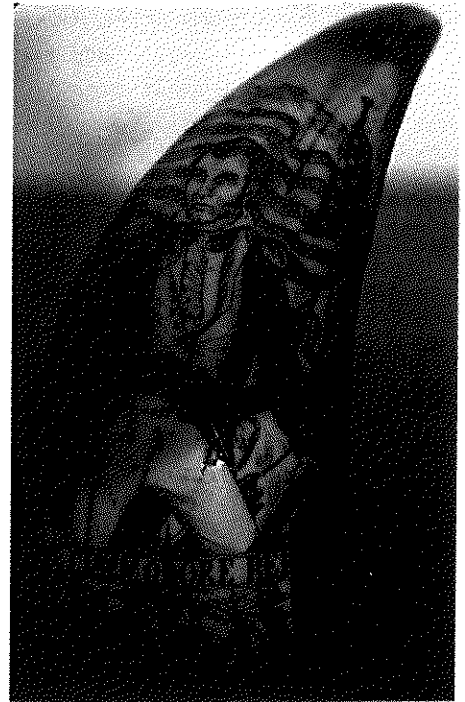
On July 8, 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry led a small fleet of American warships into Edo Bay, in Japan. Edo is now called Tokyo. Perry had come to open up Japan to American shipping and trade.

For over 200 years, Japan had been almost a closed country. Fearing that foreign influence would threaten its power, the government had restricted trade to a few Chinese and Dutch merchants. As a result, most Japanese knew nothing of the Industrial Revolution. For example, they had never seen a train or steamship. So they were astonished when the black-hulled American warships steamed into Edo Bay, bristling with cannons and belching smoke. The vessels, which the Japanese called “black ships,” posed a threat to Japan’s isolation.

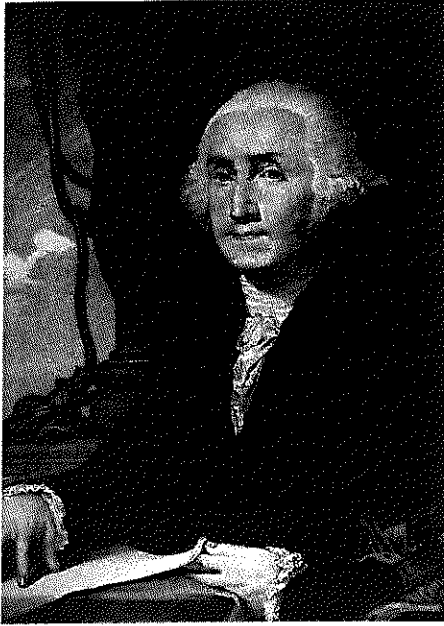
The United States had tried, but failed, to open up Japan before. This time, however, the United States had sent one of its top naval officers, Commodore Perry, with a letter from President Millard Fillmore addressed to the Japanese emperor. The letter was an offer of peace and friendship, but the warships were a sign that the United States might be willing to use force in the future. The letter asked that shipwrecked American sailors be protected and that American ships be allowed to stop for water, fuel, and other supplies. It also proposed the opening of trade between the United States and Japan.

The Japanese government promised to consider the president’s letter. Perry returned with a larger fleet in 1854 to negotiate a treaty. The Japanese did not agree to trade, but they did agree to the other requests. This treaty paved the way for an 1858 treaty that opened Japan to trade with the United States.

These treaties with Japan were part of a broader effort to advance American interests in Asia. They were key victories for American **foreign policy**. Foreign policy is the set of goals, principles, and practices that guide a nation in its relations with other countries. In this chapter, you will learn how both realists and idealists shaped American foreign policy during the 1800s.



Commodore Matthew Perry led a fleet of four American warships to Japan in 1853 in an effort to open the island nation to U.S. trade. Perry is shown above in an engraving on a walrus tusk. The painting on the facing page depicts one of the American “black ships” in Edo Bay during Perry’s visit to Japan.



George Washington's Farewell Address was published in newspapers in 1796. As part of his advice to the nation, he urged neutrality in foreign relations. He feared that forming alliances would lead to harmful entanglements in European affairs.

19.2 Early Developments in U.S. Foreign Policy

In 1796, late in his second term as president, George Washington presented his final message to the nation. Although known as **Washington's Farewell Address**, it was not delivered as a speech but instead appeared in newspapers. While Washington focused mainly on domestic issues, he ended with a discussion of foreign affairs. "It is our true policy," he said, "to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world." These words would shape American foreign policy for more than a century to come.

Fundamentals of U.S. Foreign Policy From Washington's time to the present, the president has led the way in formulating the nation's foreign policy. The State Department, led by the secretary of state, advises the president and carries out the details of U.S. policy. Congress also plays a role by debating and voting on foreign policy issues. A treaty with another nation does not become legally binding unless the Senate approves it by a two-thirds vote.

Presidents have a variety of tools to use in pursuing foreign policy goals. One is **diplomacy**, the art of conducting negotiations with other nations. Diplomacy may lead to informal agreements as well as treaties. A second tool is financial aid in the form of grants or loans. Such aid can be used to support friendly nations or influence their policies. A third tool is the threat or the use of armed force.

Over the past two centuries, two schools of thought, known as realism and idealism, have shaped U.S. foreign policy. **Realism** is based on the belief that relations with other countries should be guided by national self-interest. From this perspective, foreign policy should pursue practical objectives that benefit the American people. Such objectives might include national security, increased trade with other nations, and access to overseas resources.

Idealism in foreign policy is based on the belief that values and ideals should influence how countries relate to one another. From this point of view, foreign policy should be used to promote America's founding ideals—particularly democracy, liberty, and rights—to ensure a better world not just for Americans, but for all people.

At any given time, realism or idealism may dominate this country's relations with other nations. But most of the time, U.S. foreign policy reflects a blend of the two schools of thought.

Washington Advocates Neutrality and Unilateralism George Washington established two key principles of U.S. foreign policy. The first, **neutrality**, was a response to the outbreak of war between France and Great Britain in 1793. Neutrality is the policy of refusing to take sides among warring nations.

Idealists were eager to side with France, pointing out that the United States and France had signed a treaty of alliance during the War of Independence. It was now time, they argued, for the United States to stand by its ally. They were also enthralled by the French Revolution. In 1789, French leaders had issued a statement of revolutionary ideals known as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Two years later, they had abolished France's monarchy and established a republic. Many Americans were eager to support the French in their struggle for liberty.

Realists argued against taking sides. They warned that with a tiny army, the United States was ill prepared for war. Moreover, a British blockade of its ports would cripple an already wobbly economy. Convinced that war would be disastrous for the young nation, Washington issued a proclamation of neutrality. It stated that the policy of the United States was to “pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent [warring] powers.”

In his Farewell Address, Washington took neutrality a step further. “The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is,” he advised, “. . . to have with them as little political connection as possible.” This advice was translated by the presidents who followed Washington into a policy of **unilateralism**. Under this policy, the United States “went it alone” in its relations with other countries. It did not seek either military or political alliances with foreign powers.

Defending Neutrality: The War of 1812 As a neutral nation, the United States had both rights and duties. It could not give aid to either side in a conflict. Nor could it allow a warring nation to use its harbors or territories as a base of operations. In return, the United States also claimed certain rights. One was the right of its citizens to live in peace without fear of attack. A second was the right to trade freely with other nations, including those at war.

The seemingly endless war in Europe tested Americans’ commitment to neutrality. Both France and Britain seized U.S. ships to prevent goods from reaching the other’s ports. Even more alarming, the British began kidnapping American sailors from U.S. ships, claiming they were deserters from the British navy. Both the ship seizures and the kidnappings violated what Americans saw as their rights as citizens of a neutral nation.

Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson used every foreign policy tool short of war to defend the right of American ships to trade freely without being attacked. Neither had much success.

In 1809, President James Madison took up the challenge of defending neutrality. For a time, he seemed to be making some progress with France. When the British still refused to end attacks on neutral ships, Madison asked Congress for a declaration of war.

The senators and representatives who voted for war did so for a mix of reasons. Those motivated more by idealism cast their votes to defend “free trade and sailors’ rights.” Those motivated mainly by realism believed that a war with Great Britain would give the United States the opportunity to expand its borders into Canada.

The **War of 1812** lasted more than two years. With no victory in sight, peace talks began in Ghent, Belgium, in mid-1814.

The Treaty of Ghent called for “a firm and universal Peace between His Britannic Majesty and the United States.” But it left the issues that caused the war unresolved. Still, the young nation had stood up to Britain. “Not one inch of territory ceded or lost” boasted Americans as the war drew to a close.



The Granger Collection, New York

During the War of 1812, the British bombarded Fort McHenry, near Baltimore, Maryland. But the defenders prevented the city from being captured. The sight of the fort’s flag still waving inspired Francis Scott Key to write “The Star-Spangled Banner.” In 1931, it was officially named the national anthem.

The Monroe Doctrine declared the Americas off limits to European colonization and interference. This 1896 cartoon portrays the United States as having the power to keep European nations out. The doctrine was also used to justify the spread of U.S. influence in the region.



The Granger Collection, New York

The Monroe Doctrine Bans Colonization When James Monroe took office as president in 1817, he faced new challenges. One came from Russia, which already controlled Alaska. In 1821, Russia issued a decree extending its colony south into territory claimed jointly by the United States and Great Britain.

Meanwhile, revolutions were sweeping across Latin America. Americans cheered as one colony after another freed itself from Spain, but rumors soon emerged that Spain meant to recolonize the region. Britain then invited the United States to join it in warning European leaders against taking such action.

Monroe chose a more unilateral approach. In a speech to Congress in 1823, he warned that “the American continents” were closed to “future colonization by any European powers.” He also stated that the United States would consider European interference in the new Latin American republics “as dangerous to our peace and safety.” These twin policies of **non-colonization** and **non-interference** in the Western Hemisphere became known as the **Monroe Doctrine**.

The United States invoked the Monroe Doctrine only a few times during the 1800s. One of those occasions came about when Venezuela asked for help in settling a long-standing dispute with Britain over its border with British Guiana, a British colony in South America. Venezuela appealed to the United States in the name of the “immortal Monroe” to intervene. Siding with the Venezuelans, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts warned,

If Great Britain is to be permitted to . . . take the territory of Venezuela, there is nothing to prevent her taking the whole of Venezuela or any other South American state . . . The supremacy of the Monroe Doctrine should be established and at once—peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

—Henry Cabot Lodge, *North American Review*, 1895

Britain agreed to negotiate with Venezuela, but only after deciding that it was not worth going to war with the United States over a few thousand square miles of mosquito-infested jungle. Still, Americans saw the settlement of the Venezuelan boundary dispute as a victory for the Monroe Doctrine. “Never again,” crowed the *Chicago Journal*, “will a European nation put forth claims to American territory without consulting the government of the United States.”

19.3 The U.S. Pursues a Policy of Territorial Expansion

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson arranged for American diplomats to attempt to buy New Orleans, a port city at the mouth of the Mississippi River. At the time, New Orleans was part of the French colony of Louisiana. Jefferson feared that French control of the port would pose a threat to American trade flowing down the Mississippi.

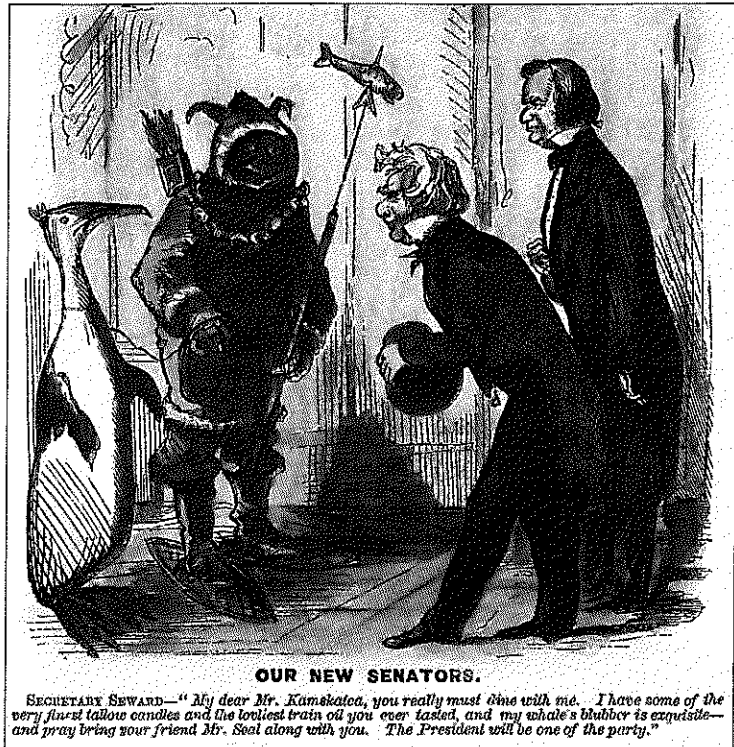
Much to Jefferson's surprise, the French offered to sell all of Louisiana. For the price of \$15 million, less than 3 cents an acre, the United States could double its territory. Jefferson agreed to the offer. Senate approval of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty late that year signaled a new goal for U.S. foreign policy: expansionism.

Expansion Through Diplomacy The new policy of territorial expansion was motivated by both idealism and realism. Idealists were inspired by the idea of manifest destiny—the belief that the United States was meant to spread its founding ideals and democratic way of life across the continent and beyond. Realists believed that expansion made the nation more secure by removing foreign threats on its borders. Adding new lands also gave the new nation growing room. If possible, expansionists hoped growth could come about through diplomacy. Louisiana, after all, had been acquired through diplomatic means.

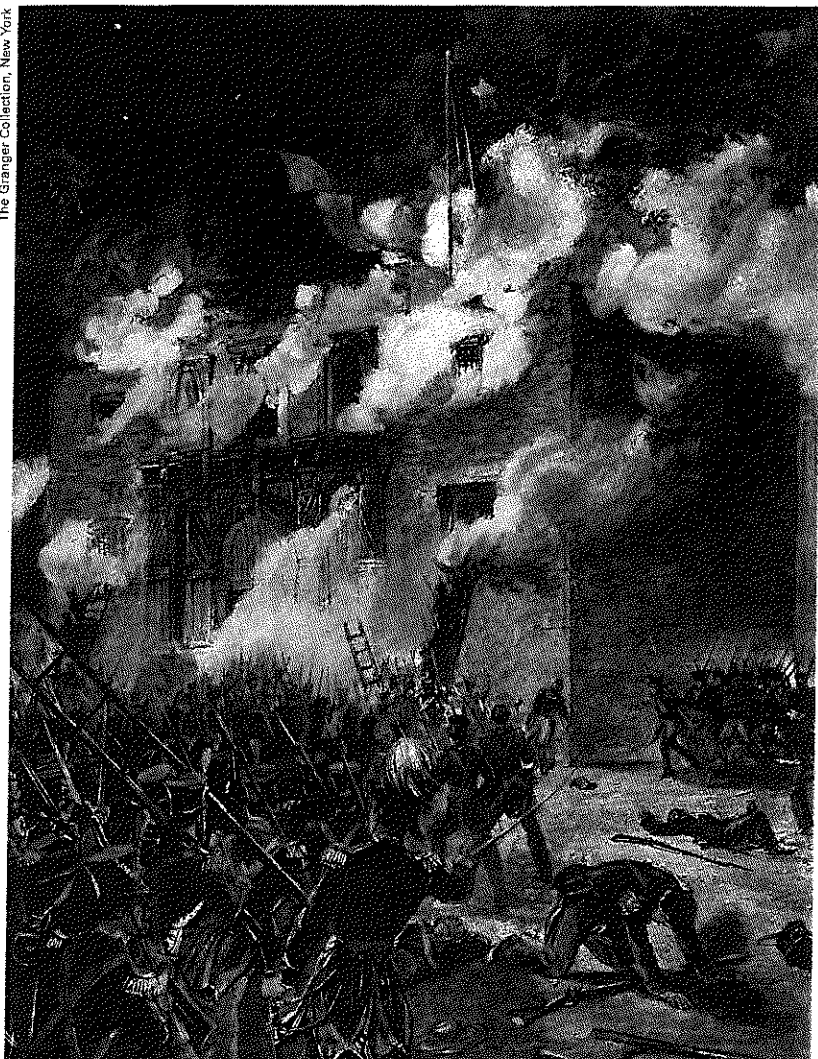
Diplomacy worked well in some cases. In 1819, U.S. diplomats persuaded Spain to **cede** Florida to the United States. Expansionists then looked west to Oregon, an area that included what is now known as the Pacific Northwest. Oregon, however, was also claimed by Great Britain. The two nations had jointly occupied Oregon since 1818, and Britain had repeatedly refused U.S. attempts to extend the boundary to the 54th parallel.

Tensions increased in 1845 when President James K. Polk declared that the United States had a “clear and unquestionable” claim to the entire area. Some expansionists even called for war if Britain refused to leave. Their rallying cry of “Fifty-four forty or fight” referred to the latitude 54°40', the northern limit of the region. Unwilling to go to war over Oregon, Britain signed a treaty in 1846 dividing the region at the 49th parallel. The United States now stretched to the Pacific Ocean.

Diplomacy also brought about the purchase of Alaska in 1867. Faced with the choice of pouring money into Alaska to defend it or of making money by selling it, Russia decided to offer this huge region to the United States. Secretary of State William Seward jumped at the chance, negotiating a price of \$7.2 million and signing a treaty early the next day. Many Americans made fun of “Seward's Icebox,” but later it became clear that Alaska had vast natural resources, including gold.



This cartoon pokes fun at the 1867 purchase of Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million. With this purchase, the United States gained about 586,000 square miles at a cost of approximately 2 cents an acre. At the time, many Americans saw Alaska as a frozen wasteland. They changed their minds later, especially after gold was found there in 1880.



The Alamo was built as a mission but was occasionally used as a fort. In 1836, a force of about 180 Texans held the Alamo for several days against a large Mexican army. Their leader, William Travis, sent out a plea for help, saying, "I shall never surrender or retreat." The Texans died in battle or were executed before help could arrive.

increase the power of the central government. Faced with the prospect of losing the right to run their own affairs, the Texans revolted. Early in 1836, they declared Texas to be an independent country and named Sam Houston as their commander in chief.

Determined to crush the **Texas Revolution**, Santa Anna marched north with an army of several thousand troops. On reaching San Antonio, Texas, he found a band of Texas volunteers defending an old mission called the Alamo. The defenders included the famous frontiersman Davy Crockett, crack rifleman Jim Bowie, and a group of Texas freedom fighters led by William Travis. Santa Anna raised a black flag that meant, "Expect no mercy." Travis answered with a defiant cannon shot. After a 13-day siege, the Mexicans overran the Alamo and executed all of the defenders who had survived the assault.

Two weeks later, a force of three or four hundred Texan volunteers led by James Fannin was captured by Mexican troops near Goliad. Badly outnumbered, the Texans surrendered. On orders from Santa Anna, hundreds of prisoners of war were executed. Their bodies were stacked in piles and burned.

A few weeks later, the Texans had their revenge. After luring Santa Anna deep into Texas, Sam Houston sprang a trap beside the San Jacinto River.

The Annexation of Texas Diplomacy did not work as smoothly when Americans looked south to Texas. In 1821, a businessman named Moses Austin received permission from Spain to found a colony in Texas, which at that time was part of Mexico. When Austin died suddenly, his son Stephen took over the enterprise. Stephen Austin arrived in Texas just as Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Mexican officials agreed to let Austin begin his colony, but only if the settlers he attracted consented to learn Spanish, become Mexican citizens, and join the Catholic Church.

By 1830, there were about 25,000 Americans living in Texas. As their numbers grew, tensions between the Americans and the Mexican government began to rise. The Americans disliked taking orders from Mexican officials. They resented having to deal with official documents in Spanish, a language most of them were unwilling to learn. Those who had brought slaves with them to Texas were upset when Mexico ended slavery in 1829. American slaveholders in Texas ignored the law and kept their slaves in bondage.

Hoping to reduce these tensions, Stephen Austin traveled to Mexico City to 1833. Instead of negotiating with Austin, General Santa Anna, the dictator of Mexico, threw him in jail. Santa Anna also amended Mexico's constitution to

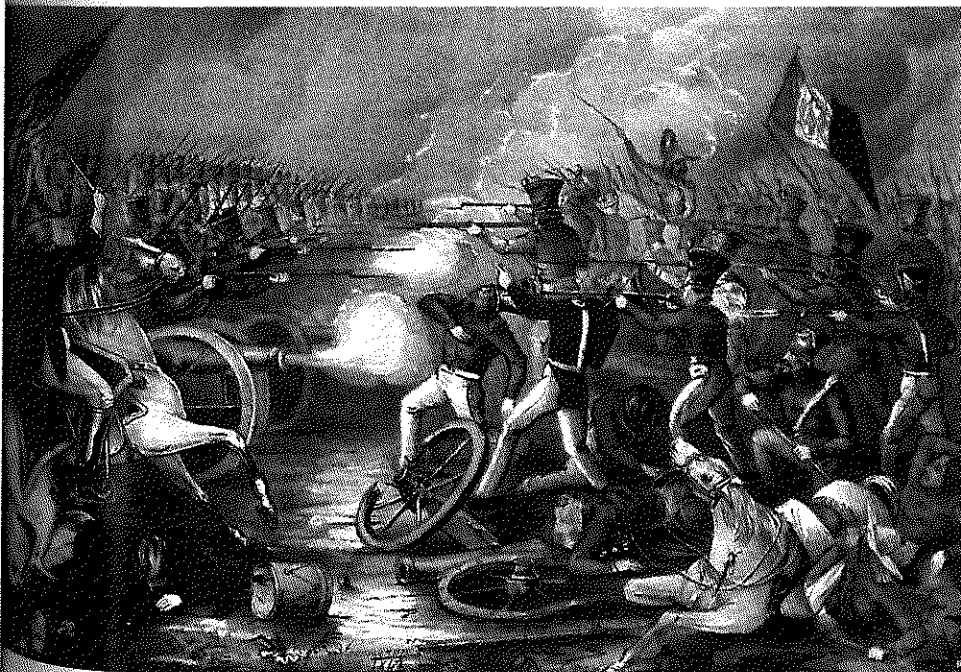
Shouting, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" as their war cry, the Texas volunteers overran the Mexican army. To win his freedom, Santa Anna signed two treaties agreeing to an independent Texas with the Rio Grande as its southern border. On his return to Mexico, however, the general declared that his country was not bound by any agreement on Texas.

Now an independent country, Texas became known as the Lone Star Republic because of the single star on its flag. Most Texans and many Americans wanted Texas to become part of the United States. The issue was complicated, however, by the fact that Texas allowed slavery. Whenever the question of annexing Texas came up in the Senate, Northerners who opposed slavery voted no. Not until 1845 was Texas finally admitted to the Union as a slave state.

Polk Provokes a War with Mexico The annexation of Texas by the United States angered Mexico, which had never accepted the loss of this territory. The two nations also disagreed on where to draw the Texas-Mexico border. The United States recognized the Rio Grande as the dividing line. Mexico put the border much farther north. President Polk sent a diplomat to Mexico City to try to settle the border dispute. He also instructed the diplomat to offer to buy New Mexico and California. The Mexican government refused to negotiate.

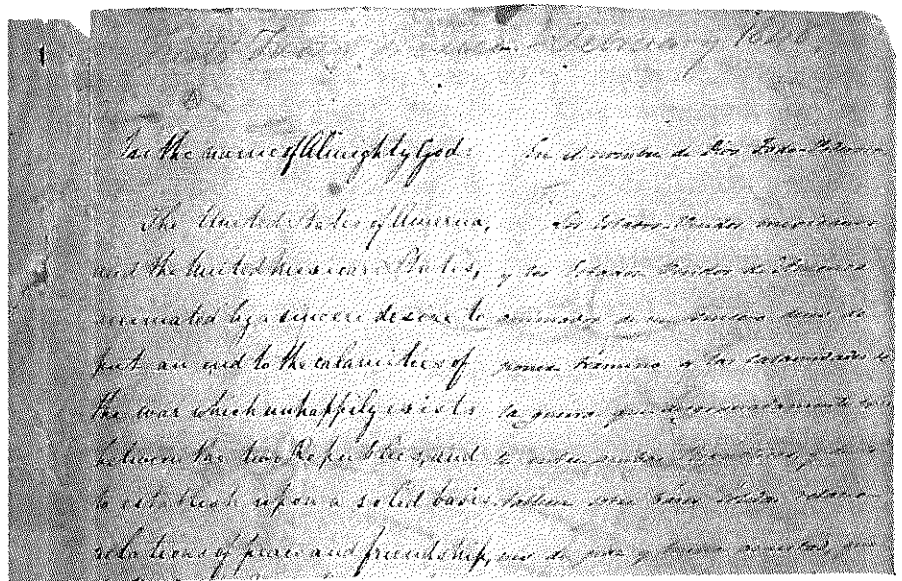
Polk then decided to provoke a clash with Mexico. In 1846, he sent troops to occupy the north bank of the Rio Grande, deep inside what Mexico considered its territory. As Polk expected, the Mexican army attacked. He then called for war, claiming that Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood." Congress declared war two days later.

The Mexican army fought bravely, but it had little success. Aided by superior weapons and leadership, U.S. troops moved quickly through northern Mexico. At the same time, other U.S. forces seized New Mexico and California. The **Mexican War** finally ended after Americans captured Mexico City in 1847.

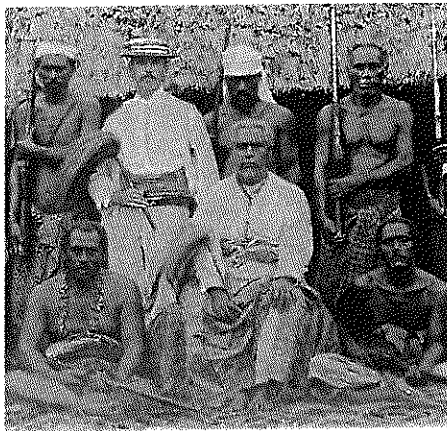


This painting shows American troops defeating the Mexican army at the Battle of Buena Vista. This battle gave the United States control of northern Mexico. As a result of the war, the United States gained almost all of the present American Southwest, from Texas west to California.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was recorded by hand in both English and Spanish. On the first page of the treaty, shown here, both nations express a desire to end the “calamities of the war” (“calamidades de la Guerra”) and establish “relations of peace and friendship” (“relaciones de paz y buena amistad”).



In 1848, the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico formally recognized the annexation of Texas, with the Rio Grande as its border. It also ceded a huge region stretching from Texas to California to the United States. In return for the Mexican Cession, the United States paid Mexico \$15 million. While idealists worried that the war had been an unjust land grab, realists cheered the results. The United States had increased its territory by about one third. Mexico, in contrast, had lost half of its territory.



Germany, Britain, and the United States competed for influence in the Samoan Islands in the late 1800s. As a result, the islands seethed with bitter rivalries and civil wars. King Mataafa, seen here with two advisors, gained and lost the kingship three times in this troubled period.

The Beginnings of Imperialism The acquisition of California from Mexico and Oregon from Britain gave the United States a new window on the Pacific Ocean. Business leaders were eager to open up new markets for American goods across the Pacific in China and Japan. The question was how best to do this. Many European nations, they observed, were expanding their overseas markets by acquiring colonies in Africa and Asia. This new wave of colonization was inspired by a policy known as imperialism, or empire building. The colonies acquired by the imperialist powers supplied resources for their industries and served as markets for their manufactured goods.

While some Americans were reluctant to join this rush for empire, many were happy to acquire islands that could serve as supply stations for U.S. ships in the Pacific. In 1867, the United States claimed the uninhabited Midway Islands. It was hoped that these tiny islands, located northwest of the Hawaiian Islands, could serve as a coaling station for steamships.

The Samoan Islands were even more attractive as a way station for U.S. ships. This island group lies about halfway between Hawaii and Australia. In the 1870s, the United States, Germany, and Britain signed treaties with the Samoan king giving them access to the islands. Later the three countries made Samoa a **protectorate**—a nation protected and controlled by a stronger nation. Later Britain gave up its claim to Samoa. In 1899, the islands were divided between Germany and the United States. American Samoa provided U.S. ships with an excellent harbor at the port of Pago Pago and also became an important military post. It has remained a territory of the United States to this day.

Differing Viewpoints

19.4 Should the U.S. Become an Imperialist Power?

As the United States approached the end of the 1800s, Americans began to debate whether or not the country should continue to expand overseas. Some argued that acquiring an overseas empire would enable the United States to play a stronger role in world affairs. Others opposed becoming an imperialist power for both moral and pragmatic reasons.

Henry Cabot Lodge: The U.S. Must Expand to Compete Pointing to the European scramble for colonies, some Americans argued that from a practical perspective, the United States must expand to compete economically. Their arguments often reflected a social Darwinist emphasis on “survival of the fittest.” Henry Cabot Lodge, a powerful member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, strongly urged the country to join the imperialist club:

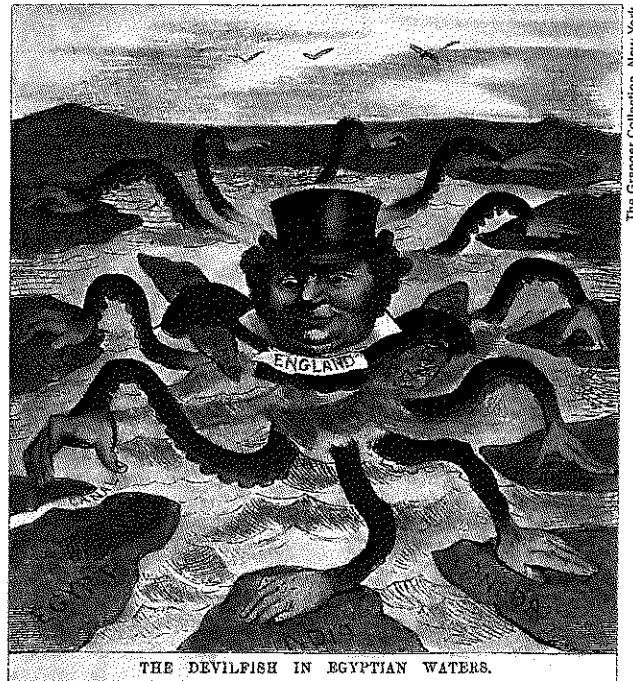
Small states are of the past and have no future. The modern movement is all toward the concentration of people and territory into great nations and large dominions. The great nations are rapidly absorbing for their future expansion and their present defense all the waste places of the earth. It is a movement which makes for civilization and advancement of the race. As one of the great nations of the world, the United States must not fall out of the line of march.

—Henry Cabot Lodge, “The Business World vs. the Politicians,” 1895

Carl Schurz: The U.S. Should Become a Power for Peace Others saw imperialism as fundamentally un-American. They wondered how the United States could spread its democratic ideals abroad if it did not respect the rights of other nations. Anti-imperialist politician and reformer Carl Schurz acknowledged that the nation should defend its interests. But he also believed that U.S. foreign policy should promote peace, not conquest:

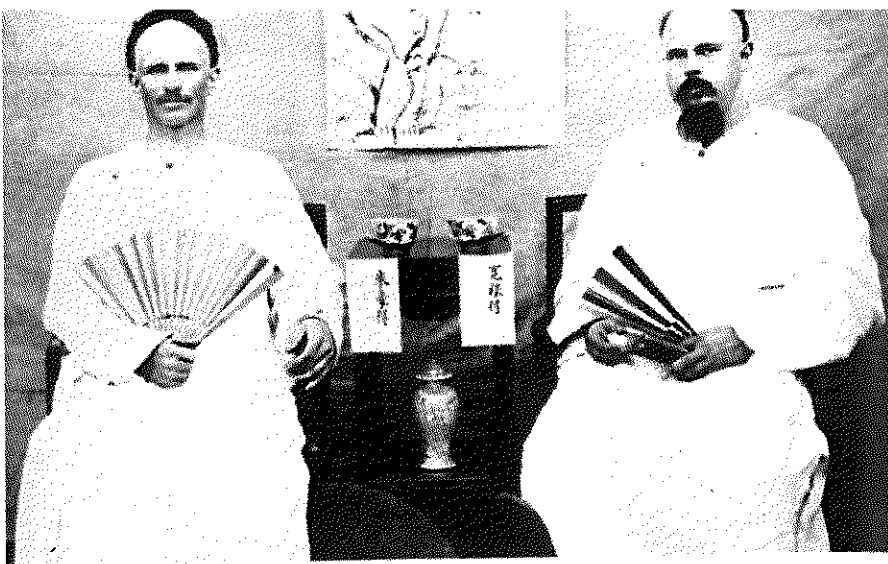
In its dealings with other nations [the United States] should have scrupulous regard, not only for their rights, but also for their self-respect. With all its . . . resources for war, it should be the great peace power of the world . . . It should seek to influence mankind, not by heavy artillery, but by good example and wise counsel. It should see its highest glory, not in battles won, but in wars prevented. It should be so invariably just and fair, so trustworthy . . . that other nations would instinctively turn to it as . . . the greatest preserver of the world’s peace.

—Carl Schurz, from a speech to the New York Chamber of Commerce, 1896



In the late 1800s, the imperialist nations of Europe established new colonies in various parts of the world. In this cartoon, Great Britain is pictured as a giant octopus with its tentacles grabbing up lands across the globe. The word *devilfish* is another name for octopus.

These Americans worked as Christian missionaries in China around 1900. Both are dressed in the Chinese clothing of that time. China was opened to western missionaries in the mid-1800s. Many Christian groups stayed in China until 1949, when the new Communist government expelled them.



Josiah Strong: The U.S. Should Spread “Anglo-Saxon Civilization” Still other Americans supported imperialism from a moral rather than an economic perspective. They saw much of the world as living in darkness. It was the duty of the United States, in their view, to bring the light of freedom and Christianity to those dark places. Josiah Strong, a Christian missionary leader, was a leader of this group.

In his influential book *Our Country*, Strong wrote that the United States had a “divine mission” to spread its “Anglo-Saxon civilization” around the world. When he used the term Anglo-Saxons, Strong was referring to white English-speaking peoples. In his view, Anglo-Saxon civilization was superior to all others because it was founded on the twin ideas of civil liberty and Christianity. “To be a Christian and an Anglo-Saxon and an American,” he wrote, “is to stand at the very mountain top of privilege.” While such views seem racist today, they were widely accepted a century ago. Strong wrote,

It seems to me that God, with infinite wisdom and skill, is training the Anglo-Saxon race for an hour sure to come in the world’s future . . . Then this race of unequalled energy . . . the representative, let us hope, of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization . . . will spread itself over the earth . . . This powerful race will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond . . . Is there room for reasonable doubt that this race . . . is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?

—Josiah Strong, *Our Country*, 1885

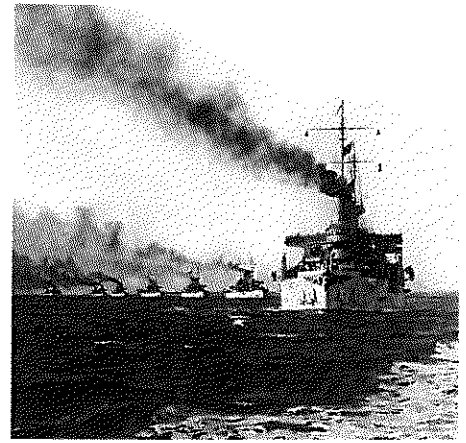
Alfred T. Mahan: The U.S. Must Become a Great Sea Power Other supporters of imperialism were more concerned with national power than the spread of civilization. This was true of naval officer and military historian Alfred T. Mahan. In an important book titled *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, Mahan argued that sea power was key to national greatness. The time had come, he believed, for Americans to pay more attention to becoming a major world power. “Whether they will or no, Americans must now begin to look outward,” Mahan wrote in an article summarizing his views. “The growing

production of the country demands it. An increasing volume of public sentiment demands it.”

To Mahan and his supporters, becoming a world power meant building a strong navy. This would require not only ships, but also well-protected harbors. It would also require naval repair facilities and coaling stations overseas in U.S.-controlled territories like American Samoa. Mahan wrote that influence in world affairs

requires underlying military readiness, like the proverbial iron hand under the velvet glove. To provide this, three things are needful: First, protection of the [nation’s] chief harbors by fortifications and coast-defence ships, which gives defensive strength . . . Secondly, naval force, the arm of offensive power, which alone enables a country to extend its influence outward. Thirdly, it should be an inviolable [unbreakable] resolution of our national policy, that no foreign state should henceforth acquire a coaling position [station] within three thousand miles of San Francisco . . . For fuel is the life of modern naval war; it is the food of the ship; without it the modern monsters of the deep die.

—Alfred Thayer Mahan, “The United States Looking Outward,”
Atlantic Monthly, 1890



Influenced by Alfred T. Mahan’s writings, Congress authorized the rebuilding of the U.S. Navy. In 1907, 16 U.S. battleships launched a world tour. Known as the Great White Fleet, the ships covered 43,000 miles with stops at six continents. The 14-month tour was a vivid demonstration of U.S. sea power.

Summary

During the 1800s, U.S. foreign policy was guided by two goals. The first was to keep the United States free of foreign alliances and out of foreign conflicts. The second was to expand the United States across the North American continent. As Americans began to look outward in the late 1800s, they debated the nation’s proper role in world affairs.

Realism and idealism U.S. foreign policy is generally a blend of realism and idealism. With realism, the focus is on practical concerns and national self-interest. With idealism, the focus is on moral values and the spread of American ideals.

Neutrality and unilateralism Following the advice given by Washington in his Farewell Address, the United States tried to stay neutral in foreign wars and avoid alliances with other countries. The War of 1812 was fought in part to defend American rights as a neutral nation.

The Monroe Doctrine The Monroe Doctrine warned European powers that the United States would view efforts to establish colonies in the Americas or interfere with new Latin American republics as hostile to its interests.

Continental expansion Following a policy of expansion through diplomacy, the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory, Florida, Oregon Territory, and Alaska. By winning the Mexican War, it gained vast lands in the Southwest.

Overseas expansion In the late 1800s, the United States began to look overseas for new territory and influence. At the same time, Americans began to debate the role and value of overseas expansion.