Kathryn Howes

February 6, 2012

4B

As the United States grew and caught up to Europe economically, technically, and such by the late 19th century, they grew to the point of looking to imperialist expansion. Imperialism in the late 1800s and early 1900s shaped American foreign policy through ideas of economic protection, social Darwinism, and the need for a new West.

The industrialized and thus expanded American economy put America into the global economy. Staying there would require, simply put, imperialism as put forth in Alfred Thayer Mahan’s thesis. The desire to stay there was strong enough to demand that there be continued areas of economic influence, as described in the Secretary of State Hay’s Open Door Notes concerning China. Economic concerns are also evident in document A’s speech by McKinley, when he speaks of turning the Phillipines to their economic rivals would be ‘bad business and discreditable.’

The attitude that white men were much more advanced than any other race was quite popular at this time. Offshoot sentiments developed from this social Darwinism that the duty of white men to help other races come up to the level—as demonstrated in Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden”. This call was taken up by the Americans—even further in that the American democratic system was what needed to be spread. Belief in this duty is openly displayed in the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine: the civilized nation of the United States can interfere when things go wrong in order to bring them back up to civilization. The Spanish American War is another proof of this belief. Since the Spanish were obviously mishandling their possessions of Cuba and the Phillipines, the United States interfered and took them over. That the White Man’s Burden was the idea behind this is shown in a speech from McKinley about the Phillipines: “…we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self government…there was nothing left for us to do but take them all, and to educate the Filipinos…” with Cuba in the Platt Amendment, and to some extent both in Beveridge’s “The March of the Flag.”

When the Census Bureau declared the frontier closed at the end of the 19th century, brought forth the influential thesis of Franklin Jackson Turner: American character was determined by the fact that there was frontier to be settled. This brought up a need for a new West, and so Americans turned to the Pacific. Document I shows how the nation was searching for “Another Star To His Flag.”

The world’s ideas of economic protection and social Darwinism, and the need for a new American West were what influenced America’s foreign policy towards imperialism.