Introduction: Rising Empire

For Theodore Roosevelt, February 22, 1909, was one of the most satisfying days of his presidency. He was only ten days away from turning over the presidential mandate to his chosen successor, William Howard Taft, and only two months away from departing on safari to Africa. What was occupying him on February 22 was the return of the Great White Fleet, the sixteen first-class battleships that he had sent around the world as a show of American power. He had seen them off on December 9, 1907, at Hampton Roads, Virginia, at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. Fourteen and a half months later he was back at Hampton Roads aboard the presidential yacht *Mayflower* to watch them come home from the longest cruise ever taken by any navy, nearly forty-five thousand miles.

The naval towns of Hampton and Norfolk were jubilant in expectation, their buildings arrayed with bunting and banners. Out in the bay, hundreds of steamers, yachts, and other pleasure boats of all sizes and varieties braved squalls to await the great ships. Emerging out of the mist and rain, they looked ghostly and strange in their brilliant white, set off by the black smoke from their three tall funnels. In fact, they were the navy's last white ships; while they were at sea, the Navy Department had begun the conversion to the less visible, more war-effective battleship gray. The white ships sailed in one by one in a column seven miles long, each flying three large ensigns. Simultaneously they fired a twenty-one-gun salute to the president, then each repeated the salute individually as it passed the *Mayflower*.

In top hat and frock coat, Roosevelt visited each division flagship in

the harbor and addressed the crews. Aboard the *Connecticut*, the fleet's flagship, he told the assembled sailors:

> Over a year has passed since you steamed out of this harbor, and over the world's rim, and this morning the hearts of all who saw you thrilled with pride as the hulls of the mighty warships lifted above the horizon. You have been in the Northern and the Southern Hemispheres; four times you have crossed the line; you have steamed through all the great oceans; you have touched the coast of every continent. . . .
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> As a war machine the fleet comes back in better shape than it went out. In addition, you, the officers and men of this formidable fighting force, have shown yourselves the best of all possible ambassadors and heralds of peace. . . . We are proud of all the ships and all the men in this whole fleet, and we welcome you home to the country whose good repute among nations has been raised by what you have done.

In attendance on a navy yacht were members of the House and Senate Naval Affairs committees. Their presence was a quiet triumph for Roosevelt, since in 1907 the chairman of the Senate committee, Eugene Hale of Maine, had tried to block the cruise by withholding funds. East Coast congressmen feared that a Pacific mission for the fleet would undercut its primary objective of protecting America's Atlantic coast. President William McKinley, Roosevelt's predecessor, would undoubtedly have conciliated this point of view. But Roosevelt ignored it, telling the senators he had enough money to get the fleet into the Pacific; it would just have to stay there if they failed to appropriate funds to bring it home.

This episode, which Roosevelt relished telling in his memoirs, illustrated the growing power of the presidency over Congress, which had dominated American politics since the Civil War. Roosevelt did not customarily disregard Congress—he relied heavily on his closest friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts—but his two terms had marked the resurgence of a strong executive.

One important absentee at Hampton Roads was greatly missed by the president, Admiral of the Navy George Dewey, its only four-star, who had been planning to attend but was ill with sciatica. Roosevelt, as assistant secretary of the navy in the McKinley administration, had

lifted Dewey from an obscure post to the command of the Asiatic Squadron. Dewey had thus been positioned to destroy the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay at the start of the Spanish-American War in 1898.

Another absentee was Admiral Robley "Fighting Bob" Evans, who had commanded the Great White Fleet at the outset but had to retire for health reasons before it crossed the Pacific. Evans also had a distinguished war record. In 1898 in the victorious Battle of Santiago Bay, off Cuba, he had skippered the *Iowa*, to which the Spanish commander, Vice Admiral Pascual Cervera, had been brought as a prisoner. Evans had given Cervera full honors, and his sailors had cheered the vanquished Spaniard, moving him to bow his head for a full minute in gratitude and surrender.

The itinerary of the fleet recapitulated the distance the United States had come in the decade since the Spanish-American War. From Chesapeake Bay the battleships had steamed south to the Caribbean, which had become an American lake with the ejection of Spain from Cuba and Puerto Rico. They had then moved down the east coast of South America, through the Strait of Magellan, and up the west coast, stopping along the way in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Mexico.

The call at Valparaíso, Chile, would have stirred memories for Admiral Evans. In 1891, as captain of the gunboat *Yorktown*, he had dealt with a near war between Chile and the United States over the killing of two American sailors in a Valparaíso bar. One reason that the Harrison administration decided to settle the incident by diplomacy was its fear that the Chilean Navy might be superior to the American one. But by the time of Evans's visit with the Great White Fleet, that shocking disparity had been erased. The naval buildup now guaranteed American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. Elihu Root, first as the secretary of war in charge of administering Cuba and Puerto Rico, then as a secretary of state who took Latin America seriously, had given political solidity to that dominance. Because of Roosevelt's aggressive diplomacy in wresting Panama from Colombia, a canal was under construction that would make the Caribbean central in saving future fleets from the long voyage around the Horn.

Even without the canal, which was not to open until 1914, the United States already had a two-ocean navy, the second strongest in the world behind Great Britain's. The difference with 1898 was dra-

matic. The naval victory in Cuba had been won with only four first-class battleships; these all were now supplanted by twenty brand-new vessels of the most modern fighting class. The military strategist Alfred T. Mahan had convinced American policy makers that naval power was the supreme expression of military supremacy and the proof of a nation's greatness.

The fleet's cruise also demonstrated, as Roosevelt put it, that "the Pacific was as much our home waters as the Atlantic." The ships had visited Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, China, the Philippines, and Japan. Both Hawaii and the Philippines had become American colonies in 1898, the former by peaceful annexation, the latter by military victory. China was a growing focus of interest and the subject of the Open Door policy of John Hay, secretary of state under McKinley and Roosevelt. Japan, the emerging great power in Asia, was a principal reason for Roosevelt's dispatch of the fleet: He wanted to impress the Japanese with American strength while persuading them of his peaceful intentions. To his satisfaction, the reception in Yokohama had been friendly, warm, and highly respectful.

The fleet had left the Pacific for the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, passed through the Suez Canal, steamed across the Mediterranean (units of it stopping to assist victims of a major earthquake in Sicily), and come home across the Atlantic. The cruise not only impressed the world with America's newfound military strength but excited the imagination of Americans as well. A million people had turned out in San Francisco to welcome the ships before their voyage across the Pacific. This enthusiasm laid the basis for a cherished objective of Roosevelt's: steady congressional funding of new battleships. Most important of all, the circumnavigation of the Great White Fleet gave substance to Roosevelt's assertion: "We have definitely taken our place among the great world powers."

Roosevelt noted in his autobiography that the day the fleet returned to Hampton Roads was George Washington's birthday. The first president, though remembered for his warning against U.S. entanglement in European affairs, was, like Roosevelt, an advocate of empire. In 1783 he referred to the United States as a "new empire" and a "rising empire," and three years later he said: "However unimportant America may be considered at present . . . there will assuredly come a day, when this country will have some weight in the scale of

Empires." That day came in 1898, when the United States burst upon the world scene with a spectacular series of conquests.

On April 25, 1898, two months after the sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana Bay, the United States went to war with Spain over Cuba. On May 1, some eight thousand miles away in the Philippines, Dewey destroyed the Spanish fleet off Manila. On June 21 the U.S. Navy, a thousand miles to the east, seized the tiny Spanish-held island of Guam, with its fine harbor. The zigzag pattern of conquest continued from the Caribbean to the Pacific and back. On July 1, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, attired in a brass-buttoned uniform he had just bought from Brooks Brothers, led his Rough Riders in an exuberant charge—on foot—up San Juan Hill, in eastern Cuba. Routing an overmatched Spanish force, the American soldiers took the heights overlooking Santiago Bay, where, two days later, the U.S. Navy won the battle for Cuba by capturing Admiral Cervera's entire squadron. On July 7, President McKinley, exulting in the expansionist fervor, annexed Hawaii, which had been under the de facto control of American sugar planters since 1893. On August 13, Manila fell to Dewey. The next day, the U.S. Army took control of the Spanish island colony of Puerto Rico after an efficient nine-day campaign launched almost as an afterthought to the action in Cuba.

On December 10, by the Treaty of Paris, Spain ceded to the United States the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico, none of which had been an important prewar objective for the United States. Spain also renounced sovereignty over Cuba, which *had* been the principal U.S. target, thus opening the island to American military rule. And so by force of arms the United States in only a few months gained territorial possessions on both the Atlantic and Pacific sides of its continental mass.

Nor did imperial expansion end with 1898. In an 1899 division of Samoa with Germany, the United States acquired the strategic deep-water harbor of Pago Pago. The navy took Wake Island, an unowned and uninhabited atoll, in the same year. A jagged line of American bases, or coaling stations, as they were called in the age of steam, ran from California to Hawaii to Midway (which had been acquired in 1867) to Samoa to Wake to Guam to the Philippines. This chain of possessions made possible the extension of American political and economic influence to China, an opportunity that Hay's Open Door

policy was designed to seize. The burst of imperial activity culminated in the plan to link America's Atlantic and Pacific holdings via a canal across the narrow waist of Central America. President Roosevelt set this project in motion in 1903 by subverting the sovereignty of Colombia and assisting a revolutionary Panamanian government that was willing to sign the requisite treaty.

America would never again acquire so much territory as it did during those explosive five years between 1898 and 1903. Roosevelt's presidency from 1901 to 1909 consolidated the country as a member of the circle of great powers. A turning point had been reached in the way the United States related to the world. Now Americans and their leaders could act with self-confidence, a sense of their own power, and an abiding belief that they could shape international life according to their values.

At critical periods of its history the United States has always managed to find leaders whose ability and character were equal to the great challenges they faced. The revolutionary period had Washington, Adams, Hamilton, and Jefferson. The Civil War produced Lincoln and Grant. In the years after World War II the neophyte President Harry Truman and a group of brilliant advisers were able to create a Western coalition, backed by American power, that could blunt the Soviet threat.

The birth of the American empire a hundred years ago was similarly endowed. Five major figures stand out not only because they were influential in establishing America's global power but also because their characters and beliefs helped determine how that power would be used. Of course these five men did not operate outside the context of their historical circumstances. The United States had been trying for decades to expand overseas, and the weakness of Spain, leading to insurrections in Cuba and the Philippines, offered an unprecedented opportunity. Nevertheless, the nature of that expansion, and its consequences right up to today, owe a great deal to the kind of men they were.

John Hay, Captain Alfred T. Mahan, Elihu Root, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Theodore Roosevelt can fairly be called the fathers of modern American imperialism and the men who set the United States on the road to becoming a great power. Mahan, Lodge, and Roosevelt devised the strategy that took the United States into the

war with Spain. Mahan was the "man of thought," as he called himself, working out a rationale for expansion that made him the preeminent military strategist in all American history. Lodge was the political manipulator, deftly exploiting his prominence in the U.S. Senate to win support for the war. Roosevelt was the activist, using his position as assistant secretary of the navy to inspire and persuade higher-ups, including President McKinley himself.

Hay and Root made their mark after the victory over Spain. Both had doubts about the imperial venture, and both worked to moderate its consequences. Hay, as secretary of state under McKinley and Roosevelt, devised a coherent U.S. policy toward Asia and, even more important, cemented a close relationship with Great Britain that survives to this day. Root, as secretary of war under the same two presidents, created—in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines—America's first colonial administration, transferring to it some of the best features of the American legal system.

These five were remarkable men by any measure. Two of them, Roosevelt and Root, won the Nobel Peace Prize. All were intellectuals and thought of themselves as such. All except Root were notable authors. Roosevelt wrote thirty-eight books, and Lodge twenty-seven, mostly on themes of American history. While much of this writing was perishable, Roosevelt's four-volume *The Winning of the West* deserves to be considered an American classic. Hay was a poet, a best-selling novelist, and coauthor of a popular biography of Abraham Lincoln. Mahan produced an analysis of the influence of sea power in history that profoundly affected American policy and became required reading in the British, German, and Japanese navies. Root, who had been one of the most talented corporate lawyers of his time, became after his government service a forceful advocate of the rule of law in international relations.

It may be argued that others have as great a claim as these five to be included in the parentage of American imperialism. The four principal outside claimants are treated extensively in this book: the naval hero George Dewey; the military governor of Cuba Leonard Wood; the colonial governor of the Philippines William Howard Taft; and President McKinley himself. The pugnacious Dewey was a brilliant sailor and a man of sometimes striking insight into the Filipino mentality, but he lacked Mahan's intellectual breadth as well as his fellow

officer's ability to dominate opinion. Wood and Taft were conscientious public servants—Taft an exceptional one—but they were implementing a colonial strategy devised almost single-handedly by Root. McKinley remains a tantalizing enigma. The views of historians differ on whether he consciously masterminded America's war with Spain or was dragged unwillingly into it. The evidence seems to support the latter interpretation, thus reducing McKinley's importance as a force behind imperialism. Finally, one figure who is not usually considered an imperialist, Woodrow Wilson, was in fact a committed one. But his frequent interventions in Latin America followed a strategy mapped by Mahan, Roosevelt, and even his future nemesis Lodge.

Of the five fathers of imperialism, four were of the same generation, all but the precocious Roosevelt, who was twenty years younger than Hay, the oldest of the others. All were easterners except Hay, a midwesterner who was educated in the East. Roosevelt and Lodge were born wealthy and followed similar career paths: Harvard, writing, and politics. The other three came from the professional middle class: Hay the son of an Illinois country doctor; Mahan and Root the sons of teachers at West Point and Hamilton College respectively.

All except Mahan were active in the Republican party. They frequented the same clubs: the Century Association in New York, the Metropolitan Club in Washington. In the cozy atmosphere of small-town Washington they were mutual admirers and good friends who enjoyed one another's company at work and at leisure. Despite their diverse backgrounds, they used their abilities, their intellects, and their political ties with three of the most powerful states (Ohio, New York, and Massachusetts) to ascend to the small leadership class that ran the United States.

These five exceptional men were individually susceptible to human failings: arrogance, insensitivity, faulty analysis, impulsiveness or irresolution, shortsightedness. They were not omniscient and did not always see clearly the options available or the most productive paths to desired results. They reflected the collective prejudices of their class, particularly on matters of race. They were neither icons in a historical pageant nor villains in a morality play. Their actions and decisions, the consequences of which still affect Americans, were neither perfect nor inevitable but were often clouded by the fallibility that affects us all.

Hay, who owed his career to the luck of being hired in 1860 as an aide to President-elect Abraham Lincoln, was pursued all his life by self-doubt, depression, and difficulty in standing up to pressure. Yet he was a humane and entertaining companion, one of Washington's best storytellers. With Roosevelt, crude insensitivity often accompanied phenomenal energy; his inane exaltations of war must have jarred people like McKinley and Hay, who remembered the horrors of the Civil War. Mahan oscillated between remoteness and irascibility. Though an unmatched analyst of naval strategy, he was only a mediocre seaman. Lodge had a prickly personality and a large dose of Back Bay arrogance, but he worked selflessly and effectively to make his friend Roosevelt president. Root established an impressive system of colonial rule, yet he presided over a dirty war against an authentic Filipino rebellion.

The five combined to set the course of American foreign policy for the century to come. That course was not free of obstacles. Opponents of the war with Spain and the acquisition of the island colonies thundered their criticism in the Senate and across the country. The anti-imperialists came from a broad spectrum of American life: politicians like Grover Cleveland, industrialists like Andrew Carnegie, trade unionists like Samuel Gompers, immigrant commentators like Carl Schurz, and writers like Mark Twain. Their arguments against an American empire ranged from constitutional ones (betraying American traditions) to economic (taking on unnecessary burdens) and racist (bringing in inferior peoples). Criticism of the conduct of American forces in putting down a stubborn insurrection in the Philippines presaged a later debate over the behavior of American soldiers in Vietnam. The anti-imperialists failed to stop the imperial juggernaut, but they did help entrench human rights as a permanent concern of U.S. foreign policy.

Theodore Roosevelt never doubted that he was acting morally or that morality was a major feature of his policy. He was seldom blind to purely pragmatic considerations, as his skillful diplomacy with a rising Japan illustrates. Nor was he above using moral arguments for instrumental aims. His concern for the Cuban revolutionaries vanished after they had served their purpose of inciting the United States to war. But Roosevelt and Lodge were students and publicists of American history, and they really did believe that their country had a mission to

spread the bounties of its civilization beyond its borders. Even John Hay, no ideologue, thought that the United States should pick up Britain's faltering flag and show that empires can operate for the good of their subjects. For all five men, the manifest destiny that had led the United States to defeat Mexico and conquer the American West should now unfold on a global scale.

Ironically, just as the United States was extending its influence into the world, it was in the process of attracting unprecedented foreign influences within its borders. The period of the new imperialism was also a time of the largest immigration America had ever received. Not surprisingly, the sweeping processes of imperialism and immigration influenced each other. Imperialists drew much of their intellectual sustenance from the racial doctrines that were then widely taught, including at America's finest universities. Their belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy made them natural enemies of mass immigration from eastern and southern Europe and from Asia. For Henry Cabot Lodge, the fight against immigration was a sacred cause second only to his championing of imperialism.

Any balance sheet on the actions of Roosevelt and his four partners must abound in contradictions. By the end of the nineteenth century the United States had the wealth, the aspirations, and the accumulated frustrations to break out onto the world stage. Spain's mismanagement of Cuba, together with its striking military weakness, presented an issue made to order for the ravenous New York yellow press and the activists who were close to the vacillating President McKinley. Still, despite the growing jingoist sentiment, it was remarkable that Roosevelt, Lodge, and Mahan—a subcabinet official in the Navy Department, a senator yet to achieve a committee chairmanship, and a military intellectual—could persuade senior officials and finally the president himself that war was desirable.

There were strong strategic and humanitarian reasons for seizing Cuba, and the relatively rapid granting of independence to the island in 1902 showed a commendable sensitivity to Cuban concerns. On the other hand, from 1898 on, Americans tended to treat Cubans with arrogance, thrusting aside the revolutionaries who had made possible the U.S. victory over Spain and reserving the right to intervene at will in the future. The manic charges of Yankee imperialism made later by Fidel Castro, whose father had fought the American

Army in 1898 as a Spanish soldier, gained some of their effect from the consequences of the Spanish-American War.

The case for taking and holding the Philippines was dubious. Unlike Cuba, the Philippines had not been an object of American interest until late in the nineteenth century. The islands began to figure in the navy's contingency planning for a possible war with Spain, but Cuba was still the primary objective. Dewey's lightning victory posed the question of what to do with them. Even Mahan advocated retaining only part of the captured territory, but McKinley decided to keep the whole archipelago. The Philippines, and Hawaii, became the first pure colonies in American history.

The decade between 1898 and the end of Roosevelt's presidency began the long process of preparing the United States for global leadership as a great—ultimately *the* great—power. That leadership increased steadily throughout the twentieth century. America's hesitation over entry into the First World War was less a retreat from global involvement than the product of a debate, which continues today, over how closely America's security is tied to Europe. In World War II and the Cold War that followed it, American engagement was decisive in defeating the two terrible scourges of the century, Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia.

This is a book about imperialism, a word not very popular among Americans as a description of their past. It was not very popular in 1898 either. Even Roosevelt and Lodge, two full-blooded imperialists, found euphemisms. For Roosevelt the preferred description was "Americanism"; for Lodge it was the "large policy." For both, "expansionism" was a barely acceptable definition of U.S. policy.

Of the five, only Mahan had no fear of defining and using the word "imperialism." He gave its traditional territorial meaning—the acquisition and holding of colonies and dependencies—a political dimension as well. Imperialism, he wrote, is "the extension of national authority over alien communities." This broader definition implies that a country does not have to own the territory of an alien community in order to exercise imperial authority over it. This book uses Mahan's interpretation, but with the proviso that imperialism as practiced by the United States contained unique features.

Since the book assigns considerable importance to five individuals operating against a historical background of constraints and opportu-

nities, Part One is largely biographical. It describes in some detail the lives and careers of Hay, Mahan, Root, Lodge, and Roosevelt and the elements of character that shaped their approach to imperialism before the war of 1898. Part Two focuses on the decade beginning with that war and running through Theodore Roosevelt's presidency: the birth of American imperialism, the work of the five men who created and shaped it, the great debate between imperialists and anti-imperialists, the essence and worth of the United States as a colonial nation, and its path to the status of world power. A final chapter traces the momentous effect of the 1898 period on America's journey to becoming the strongest power in the world during the twentieth century.

Readers of this book will not be treated to a saga of triumphant America led by a small company of heroic figures. Nor will they be assaulted by a revisionist diatribe against the use of American power to keep weaker peoples down. The reality of America's rise to great power status was much more complex than a stereotyped account from the right or the left can convey. There was both darkness and light in the characters and actions of the principal American protagonists. Those peculiarly American combinations of ideology and pragmatism, of power and principle, and of racism and tolerance were as much a feature of the United States of 1898 as they are of the United States today.

Theodore Roosevelt and his friends thus foreshadowed the often awesome ambiguities of America's global involvement throughout the twentieth century. One of Roosevelt's Harvard professors, William James, who detested the imperialism practiced by his former pupil, wrote of 1898: "We gave the fighting instinct and the passion of mastery their outing . . . because we thought that . . . we could resume our permanent ideals and character when the fighting fit was done." But the fighting fit did change America's ideals and character. Today, for better or worse, we still live with the consequences, and under the shadow, of the imperial actions taken a century ago.

Part One

THE MUSIC MAKERS

We are the music-makers,
  And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
  And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
  On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
  Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
  And out of a fabulous story
  We fashion an empire's glory;
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
  Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
  Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages lying
  In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
  And Babel itself with our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
  To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
  Or one that is coming to birth.

—ARTHUR WILLIAM EDGAR O'SHAUGHNESSY
(1844–1881)