**Learning Objective:**

Explain the similarities and differences in attitudes about the nation’s proper role in the world.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military interactions between empires, nations, and peoples shape the development of America and America’s increasingly important role in the world.*

1. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, new U.S. territorial ambitions and acquisitions in the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific accompanied heightened public debates over America’s role in the world.
2. Imperialists cited economic opportunities, racial theories, competition with European empires, and the perception in the 1890s that the western frontier was “closed” to argue that Americans were destined to expand their culture and institutions to peoples around the globe.
   1. 19th Century Territorial Acquisitions and Diplomacy
      1. The acquisition of Alaska from Russia was panned as “Seward’s Folly” in 1867. It reduced foreign possession in North America and allowed Americans to benefit from the abundance of natural resources there.
      2. Napoleon III of France took advantage of the American Civil War by sending French troops to occupy Mexico. As soon as the Civil War ended in 1865, Secretary of State William Seward invoked the Monroe Doctrine and threatened U.S. military action unless the French withdrew. Napoleon III backed down and the French troops left Mexico.
      3. In 1881 Secretary of State James G. Blaine advocated the creation of an International Bureau of American Republics to promote a customs union of trade and political stability for the Western Hemisphere. The assassination of President Garfield temporarily kept Blaine from forming this organization until 1889. The Bureau subsequently evolved into the Pan American Union in 1910 and then the Organization of American States in 1948.
      4. In 1886, the U.S. obtained by treaty with Hawaii the Pearl Harbor Naval Base. U.S. business interests led to an American effort to depose Hawaii’s monarchy. In 1891, Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani resisted American attempts to promote a protectorate over Hawaii. By 1893, pro-American sugar planters overthrew the native Hawaiian government and established a new government friendly to the United States. Hawaii was annexed in 1898.
      5. In 1895, the dispute over the border of Britain’s colony of Guiana threatened war with Venezuela, especially after gold was discovered in the area. Although initially at odds with Britain, the U.S. eventually came to support British claims against Venezuela when Britain agreed to recognize the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America. Britain also sought U.S. cooperation in its dispute with Germany in South Africa, which in time led to the Boer War. The realignment of the United States and Britain would play a significant role during World War I.
   2. Reasons for Imperialism
      1. Expansionists followed the example of European imperialism in Africa. With industrialism achieved, business and political interests sought new sources of raw materials, additional markets for surplus goods, and places to invest surplus capital. Businesses and foreign policymakers increasingly looked outside U.S. borders in an effort to gain greater influence and control over markets and natural resources in the Pacific Rim, Asia, and Latin America.
      2. Unlike Manifest Destiny, imperialism included the idea of moral improvement by bringing the blessings of civilization to less technologically advanced people. Thousands of missionaries introduced Christianity and American customs to people around the world, particularly China. Some of the missionaries also brought with the racist concepts of white supremacy. They felt they were undertaking the “White Man’s Burden” by advancing the less developed nations.
      3. Written by Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890) argued that control of the sea was the key to world dominance. The book was very influential in promoting the growth of U.S. naval power during the late nineteenth century. In 1883, Congress authorized the construction of new steel ships that would take the U.S. Navy in a twenty-year period from 12th to 3rd in world naval ranking. The New Navy policy was promoted by Alfred Thayer Mahan and Theodore Roosevelt.
      4. Newspaper and magazine editors found that they could increase circulation by printing adventure stories about distant and exotic places. Yellow journalism involved the publishing of sensational stories. Stories in the popular press increased public interest and stimulated demands for a larger U.S. role in world affairs.
3. Anti-imperialists cited principles of self-determination and invoked both racial theories and the U.S. foreign policy tradition of isolationism to argue that the U.S. should not extend its territory overseas.