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# 1898: The Start of American Imperialism, or its End?

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## Introduction

For nearly a century, the year 1898 has been regarded as *the* unmistakable line of demarcation for American imperialism. In that year two significant events transpired, each with very different origins and outcomes, yet remarkably similar in political underpinnings and implications. The Spanish-American War resulted in the acquisition of 119,564 square miles of new territory for the United States, with the effective control of an additional 42,426 square miles of Cuba in the immediate post-war years.<sup>1</sup> As the physical war with Spain was being waged in the Caribbean and Pacific, another highly political war was being waged in the U.S. Congress over whether or not to annex the Hawaiian Islands. The result of that battle was the acquisition of an additional 10,931 square miles of United States territory. In total, by the end of 1898, the United States had extended its sovereignty over 172,921 square miles of territory which it had not held at the beginning of that year. It ranks as the sixth largest instance of territorial expansion in the nation's history, not counting the original thirteen colonies, and was the final, lasting extension of United States sovereignty over inhabited areas.<sup>2</sup> Was this imperialism? Yes. However, it was the *end*, not the beginning of imperialism by the United States.

Now, at the outset of any discussion, especially one that is bound to include controversy and debate, it is essential that there are agreed upon definitions of the terminology to be used. This, in and of itself, is a considerable task, for as long as there is more than one human being on this planet, there will be more than one view of any given subject. Therefore, my task in this

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Territorial Acquisitions, <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1049.html>, accessed 2015. Total area of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico Islands.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Louisiana 827,987mi<sup>2</sup>, Alaska 591,000mi<sup>2</sup>, Mexican Cession 529,189mi<sup>2</sup>, Texas 389,166mi<sup>2</sup>, and Oregon 286,541mi<sup>2</sup>. <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1049.html>

section is not necessarily to win the reader over to the same definitions I will be presenting and using. Rather, I will be explaining the methodology and reasoning I employed while formulating these definitions, their need, and their limitations.

It is anticipated there will be objections to these definitions, both from those who will say that I am being too restrictive, as well as from those who will say that I concede too much. I hope that the efforts which I make to address at least some of these objections are met with kind criticism. I would ask that the reader not immediately dismiss the totality of the arguments presented should I fail to sufficiently qualify any particular point. It is a concession on my part, and one which I believe the historiography supports, that the topic of *imperialism* is as much philosophical as historical, and I make no ridiculous claim to have found a definitive historical truth, only to offer a different lens through which we may view the subject. The viability of that lens, however, depends upon a clear understanding of its manufacture and employment, so let us begin.

### **An Indefinable Term?**

Within the realm of scholarly work, the singularly most-often quoted phrase regarding the term *imperialism* is provided by Oxford Professor Sir Keith Hancock: “Imperialism is no word for scholars...The emotional echoes which it arouses are too violent and contradictory. It does not convey a precise meaning.”<sup>3</sup> Despite Dr. Hancock’s warning about the ‘unworthiness’ of such a term, many scholars have gone on to write about the subject. Some, such as Paul K. MacDonald or Kenneth Pomeranz, would acknowledge the challenge of the vagueness, while others, like Robert Zevin, would point more to the, “righteous or offended indignation”

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<sup>3</sup> A. G. L. Shaw, "A Revision of the Meaning of Imperialism," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 7, no. 2 (06, 1961), 198.

generated by employment of the term.<sup>4</sup> None of these concerns, however, would stop any of these or any other scholar from pressing forward with an analysis of some form regarding the topic. I have found in my review of the historiography, that the predominant view which emerges is one that seems less concerned with attempting to *define* imperialism, and more concerned with either a) its causes, or b) its forms. One might question, how can such an analysis be achieved or be useful without an agreed upon definition? The answer therein lies with the idea that a term need not be defined, so long as it may be explained. The field of physics provides us perhaps the best possible example of such a rule when it must deal with the idea of gravity, which is a term which cannot be defined without relating to its causal properties. As a result, physicists do not concern themselves with such a definition, but simply acknowledge that gravity is.

Much of the same can be said for the study of *imperialism* to date. So many divergent and disputed definitions have found their way into the common vernacular that many authors, scholarly and otherwise, have simply moved on from an analysis of *what* imperialism is, to more (seemingly) complex assessments of the *how*, *why*, and *who* concerning the *effects* of ‘imperialism.’ Such an abdication of definition generally leaves the authors free to insert their own notions of *what* imperialism is, as needed, to frame their own arguments. Even if an author does take the time to present the diverseness in definitions, it is almost always done as a cursory measure to highlight the desirability of not going over it.

None of this is necessarily meant to criticize the authors whose work falls within this description. Their work has been, and is, very valuable to our ability to interpret and understand history. I only wish to illustrate that the scholarship thus far is incomplete, and will remain so, unless we attempt to regain a clearer perception of the subject. Until then, we are like art students

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Zevin, "An Interpretation of American Imperialism," *Journal of Economic History* 32, no. 1 (03, 1972), 316.

arguing over the color of the sky: all agree that it exists “somewhere up there,” but no one is willing to say what color it is. If you say, “The sky is blue,” then you will be regarded as a simpleton. “It is clearly more teal,” or, “It is a sort of aqua-marine,” some will insist, while the poetically inclined will pronounce, “It is black, bejeweled with points of light,” and still others will take an existential approach suggesting that, “There is no sky, only color.” When it comes to *imperialism*, it is precisely this sort of dilemma which Joseph M. Siracusa points out in his criticism of William Leuchtenburg’s thesis: “As to what actually constituted imperialism, it simply could not be shown; for, as in the case of beauty, proof resides solely in the eye of the beholder.”<sup>5</sup>

### Causation as Definition

Some of the more well-known names on the subject – i.e. Hobson, Lenin, Schumpeter, Veblen, etc. – steered clear of constraining definitions for imperialism, if they defined it at all. Instead, they developed causation theories of imperialism, and in turn cited evidence of the causes as proof of the existence of imperialism. For example, Hobson, Lenin, and Veblen all cited economic causes for imperialism, although to greatly varying degrees, and then pointed to the existence of those economic circumstances as evidence of the imperialism.<sup>6</sup> Hobson and Veblen were using a self-identified, widely acknowledged British *Empire* as their model, and could thus utilize the term *imperialism* with very little explanation since it is a foregone conclusion that empires behave imperialistically. It is as much rhetorical trickery as it is anything else. To say that imperialism is, “predatory...rooted in economic self-interest,” speaks to

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph M. Siracusa, "Progressivism, Imperialism, and the Leuchtenburg Thesis, 1952–1974: An Historiographical Appraisal\*," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 20, no. 3 (1974), 317. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8497.1974.tb01120.x.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel H. Kruger, "Hobson, Lenin, and Schumpeter on Imperialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16, no. 2 (04, 1955), 252-259.

personal economic views, but provides very little by which we can measure what those actions actually are.<sup>7</sup> Even if I were to agree, as Hobson asserts, that imperialism is economically driven, and necessarily involves subjugation and exploitation of foreign markets – there are no defined actions which I may use as a rubric for identifying when imperialism is taking place and how it can be distinguished from the mere exercise of foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes when authors attempt to provide a definition, they will provide one which clearly fits their model, yet it will actually end up muddling the issue even more. In analyzing Joseph Schumpeter's, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, Daniel Kruger notes that Schumpeter begins by asserting that, "... 'imperialism' has been so abused as a slogan that it threatens to lose all meaning," and then goes on with his own definition of imperialism as, "the objectless disposition on the part of the state to unlimited forcible expansion."<sup>9</sup> Kruger explains that Schumpeter is seeking to explain imperialism, as a cause, not rooted in economics, but rather in more ancient and basic terms of survival. Framing imperialism as a relic, Schumpeter concluded (in 1951) that it is a waning phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> Kruger is contrasting Schumpeter's view of the causes for imperialism with that of Hobson and Lenin, showing that Schumpeter, as a capitalism apologist, was attempting to provide a definition which absolved capitalist economics from any "fault" for imperialist actions.<sup>11</sup> Murray Greene would later criticize Schumpeter's definition as, "untenable as a generalized theory" and "an un-historic abstraction." Greene's reasoning in discrediting Schumpeter is not necessarily the goals or conclusions which Schumpeter reaches, but the underlying definition on which Schumpeter offers and predicates his arguments. By

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Edgell and Jules Townshend, "John Hobson, Thorstein Veblen and the Phenomenon of Imperialism: Finance Capital, Patriotism and War," *American Journal of Economics & Sociology* 51, no. 4 (10, 1992)409.

<sup>8</sup> Shaw, *A Revision of the Meaning of Imperialism*, 198

<sup>9</sup> Kruger, *Hobson, Lenin, and Schumpeter on Imperialism*, 257

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 258

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 259

referring to imperialist activity as “objectless...expansion for the sake of expansion,”

Schumpeter is not only asserting that imperialism has no specific cause, but also that when it happens, it is always as an exercise of war, exclusively for territorial expansion.<sup>12</sup>

In *An Interpretation of American Imperialism*, Zevin also shares a skepticism of Schumpeter, Hobson, and others regarding their views of the causes (or lack thereof) for imperialism. Zevin points out that there is no singular theory which has yet been produced that accounts for all empires – especially the ‘American Empire’<sup>13</sup> The best example of the complexity of the problem which Zevin puts forth is the complication of analyzing civil wars: “Were Sherman’s march through Georgia and the Nigerian destruction of Biafra examples of imperialism or merely extreme cases of the everyday exercise of sovereign rights by states within their own domain?”<sup>14</sup> That, however, does not stop Zevin from developing his own definition which he uses in his study to test the causation theories developed by Hobson, Schumpeter, and others. For Zevin, “...imperialism is activity on the part of any state which establishes or subsequently exercises and maintains qualified rights of sovereignty beyond the previous boundaries within which such rights were exercised.”<sup>15</sup> Here we have our first real attempt by an author to make a definitive statement as to what *actions* he wishes to view as ‘imperialism,’ although he acknowledges that it is crafted specifically to test the other theories, and therefore may be artificially constraining when it comes to the larger discussion of the subject. In any case,

<sup>12</sup> MURRAY GREENE, "SCHUMPETER'S IMPERIALISM—A CRITICAL NOTE," *Social Research* 19, no. 4 (December, 1952), 453-463.

<sup>13</sup> Zevin, *An Interpretation of American Imperialism*, 316-360

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 320

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 319

the goal of his study was economic in nature, and still focused on the causes of imperialism, thus, he never took his definition further.<sup>16</sup>

### Definition by Form

Writings in which definitions for imperialism abound are those that, rather than trying to develop causal theories, instead connect their definitions to the forms which imperialism takes. The two most identifiable of these forms are, Cultural Imperialism and Economic Imperialism, and their studies tend to focus much more upon the process and effects of imperialism as opposed to the actual cause. The first of these, Cultural Imperialism, as a self-contained entity of study has just recently become prevalent, as the close of the Cold War and the rise of international Islamic terrorism has refocused analysis of powerful nations (mainly the United States) and their influence in the rest of the world. While Economic Imperialism, as a form of analysis, has been around for much longer, it too is enjoying something of a renaissance – especially amongst political and news pundits – who continue to grapple with the complexity and rapidity of economic change in the modern world.

Both the Cultural and Economic forms tend to lean on a broad definition of empire and imperialism, as MacDonald describes it, "...less by overt relations control, but rather by a general imbalance in power and influence."<sup>17</sup> It is this definition, in one form or another, which has guided the preponderance of imperial studies of at least the past seventy years. It is a very useful definition if, rather than seeking to give a definable meaning as to *what* imperialism is, you are more concerned with the *effects* imperialism produces. In other words, as long as you establish and accept the general premise that imperialism is nothing more than a relationship of a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Paul K. MacDonald, "Those Who Forget Historiography are Doomed to Republish it: Empire, Imperialism and Contemporary Debates about American Power," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 1 (Jan., 2009), 45-67.

‘powerful nation over a weaker one,’ then inserting it into any analysis of international relations becomes not only possible, but in some cases, even desirable. It makes the term a generally negative rhetorical device which is, as Raymond Aaron puts it, “[a] name given by rivals, or spectators, to the diplomacy of a great power”<sup>18</sup>

Regarding definitions for imperialism, Anthony Pagden states, “...defining it so widely as to include any power runs the risk of rendering the concept indeterminate.”<sup>19</sup> Here the question is raised, as it was previously, of where, or at what point, ‘imperialism’ is substituted for ‘foreign policy’? William Appleman Williams explains in his description what constitutes foreign policy:

Three continuing and interacting processes produce foreign policy. First, the domestic and overseas activity of the citizenry, and of the other countries, which forces a government to take action in the international area. Second, the nature of that official action. And third, the reactions that such policies provoke among its own people and on the part of the foreigners who are affected.<sup>20</sup>

The authors who argue for Causation and Form definitions tend to favor only the first and third portions of this description; setting up what they believe is a complete cause and effect model. In doing so, Williams’ second point, the *nature of that official action* becomes malleable and blanketed in an ambiguous term – *imperialism*. To borrow from the physics analogy: It would be like explaining that you let go of a glass and it broke on the floor. This description tells you the cause (letting go of the glass) and what the effect was (the breaking of the glass on the floor). What it does not explain is what caused the glass to go from your hand to the floor (gravity). This may seem an absurd example since we commonly experience gravity; but it does

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Aaron, quoted in Anthony Pagden, "Imperialism, Liberalism & the Quest for Perpetual Peace," *Daedalus* 134, no. 2 (Spring, 2005), 46.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> William Appleman Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (11, 1955), 379.

draw attention to the fact that without the contextual explanation of the role gravity played, the overall interpretation of the event is left vulnerable to misunderstanding. This is why I tend to favor the argument that the second point of Williams' explanation must be adequately defined if we are to understand the nature of the foreign policy in general. As this relates to our discussion, all imperialism is foreign policy, but not all foreign policy is imperialism.

### A Quantifiable Definition

How then do we go about addressing what Oscar V. Campomanes refers to as, "The historic and historiographical conundrum...of recognizing, critiquing, or naming it *as imperialism*"?<sup>21</sup> Can we divorce the action from either the cause or the effect to produce a definition that is applicable in all, or most, situations? Is there an acceptable definition to be found which would enable historians and analysts to review the past and categorically label events as imperialistic? If there is, then it is a definition that will inevitably come at the expense of those whose work seeks, for whatever reason, a broader interpretation; namely, those whose work is more dependent on the definition fitting the proposed hypothesis, rather than the other way around. It is into this questionable debate which I will now hazard to put forth my own definition of imperialism:

The extension and exercise of political sovereignty, by any intended action, of one sovereign over another, with the intent to retain such sovereignty, once gained.

While this definition may strike a remarkable resemblance to Ziven's, I have attached two important conditions to mine which I believe Ziven overlooks or purposefully leaves out. The first is that, unlike Ziven, I maintain that for the act to be "imperial" in nature, it must be *intended* as such on the part of the state. Not necessarily in origin, but in consequence. The

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<sup>21</sup> Oscar V. Campomanes, "1898 and the Nature of the New Empire," *Radical History Review*, no. 73 (Winter, 1999), 132.

Mexican Cession in 1848 is a prime example of this. The *intent* of the war was not to gain California or the rest of the Southwest; but it was *intended* to end a border dispute (i.e., the extent of sovereignty) between the United States and Mexico. The consequence of that *intended* action resulted in the acquisition of new territory for the United States which was *intended* to be held - thus, imperialism. Which brings up the second distinction, and more poignant in today's world, which is the intent to *retain* the acquired sovereignty, intact and indefinitely, as a part of the aggressor's sovereignty.

### **But Just What Is Sovereignty?**

As MacDonald states, "...it is often difficult to accurately assess when one state has assumed the political sovereignty over another in an imperial manner." However, in this instance, Mac Donald was referring to the difficulty posed in a more 'form' oriented approach to Cultural or Economic imperialism.<sup>22</sup> I would assert that even a brief review of international legal traditions does in fact form a clear perception of what constitutes 'sovereignty.' Within these traditions exist the philosophical and legal reasoning which informed the actions of the modern imperial players, including the United States, and which must be understood in order to understand the definition I put forth.

Much of the work to understand the international conception of sovereignty has been thoroughly undertaken by Stephen G. Bragaw in: *Thomas Jefferson and the American Indian Nations: Native American Sovereignty and the Marshall Court*. This work is not only invaluable to helping our understanding of international concepts of sovereignty, but also in the application of that conception specifically to the United States. Bragaw points out that very early on, the

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<sup>22</sup> MacDonald, *Those Who Forget Historiography are Doomed to Republish it: Empire, Imperialism and Contemporary Debates about American Power*, 51

young United States needed to establish a policy to deal with the Native American tribes which found themselves within the territorial bounds of the new nation. Much of this “new” policy would actually end up being based on older, long-established policies borrowed from colonial times and British rule. The British, in turn, had based their treatment of the tribes within the treaty system on international norms that went back at least three-hundred years to the fifteenth-century.<sup>23</sup> Much of this international law, *jus gentium*, had evolved from even earlier Vatican canon law which sought to govern the relations between Christian sovereigns, and between Christian and “heathen” sovereigns. This law found various incarnations and modifications, most notably from Francisco de Vittoria, who for the first time argued that the native inhabitants of a land, regardless of their status, had natural rights of sovereignty to that land. John Locke would later expand on this idea of right of soil which would lead the English, as well as other European powers, to adopt policies which in some form or another allowed for the “extinguishment” of the sovereign title held by the natives.<sup>24</sup> Let us postpone the question of what gives one sovereign the right to extinguish the title of another for a moment to first better understand sovereignty.

Pagden states, “Ever since 1648, the modern nation-state has been one in which imperium has been regarded as indivisible,” with imperium being synonymous with sovereignty.<sup>25</sup> Until the American Revolution, sovereignty - both in terms of political and military authority - was bound to a single monarch or governing body, such as Parliament; not necessarily connected or tied directly to boundary lines. Even though a hierarchical and territorial system of governance existed within these systems, there was rarely any dispute over the centralized authority, imperium, of the sovereign. Rome, Greece, Persia, Mongolia – all

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen G. Bragaw, "Thomas Jefferson and the American Indian Nations: Native American Sovereignty and the Marshall Court," *Journal of Supreme Court History* 31, no. 2 (07, 2006)161. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5818.2006.00133.x.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-162

<sup>25</sup> Pagden, *Imperialism, Liberalism & the Quest for Perpetual Peace*, 51

ancient empires prior to the eighteenth-century - bound imperium up in very select governing bodies; usually just one person.<sup>26</sup> The United States radically altered this conception in 1776 with its split-sovereignty model, first within the Articles of Confederation, and later in the Constitution. For the first time in history, the founding documents and conception of a nation acknowledged the existence of multi-leveled and *shared* sovereignty, and that sovereignty was unequivocally connected to defined borders. In fact, much of the language of the Constitution concerns itself with the reconciliation of the differences between the sovereign States of the Union, even establishing in certain areas the *overriding* sovereignty of the Federal government, acting as the whole. In that sense, one could seemingly contend that the mere existence of the United States is a continual and perpetual instance of active imperialism.

Now, before I get accused of rhetorical theatrics, I wish to state that the only reason I go through all of this is to draw attention to the fact that, with the advent of the United States, a new and distinct concept of sovereignty emerged --- one that was not restricted to a monarch and disputed territorial boundaries, but instead connected to what would become modern nation-state political bodies, constrained by defined territorial borders. This newly codified model of sovereignty, however, still needed to contend with Vittoria's *jus gentium*, when it came to dealing with other sovereigns.<sup>27</sup> That means, to address MacDonald's concern, that in order to effectively "extinguish" the sovereignty of another nation, it must either be purchased or conquered, establishing the purchasing or conquering sovereignty in its place – i.e., imperialism.

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<sup>26</sup> This is still reflected in naval traditions, where the commanding officer is referred to in ceremony by the title of his/her command. For example, the captain of the USS Enterprise, when boarding or leaving the ship would be announced as, "Enterprise, Arriving (Departing)", just as the President of the United States, in the same instance would be announced as, "United States, Arriving (Departing)".

<sup>27</sup> Bragaw, *Thomas Jefferson and the American Indian Nations: Native American Sovereignty and the Marshall Court*, 162

Any other arrangement between sovereigns, regardless of the scruples involved, falls outside of an ‘imperial’ definition.

### **Extinguish: Verb. – Bring to an End; Wipe Out of Existence; Annihilate**

So then, what does history tell us regarding the issue of “extinguishing sovereignty”? In general it shows us that the haphazard simplicity provided through warfare is the most often utilized method. The conquest of a society inevitably produces, even if it be transitory, an extinguishment of the sovereignty which existed prior to the conquest. Does this mean that every war which has ever been fought is an instance of imperialism? Under my definition of imperialism, the answer is most decidedly, no. Remember, I maintain that in order for there to be an act of imperialism, both the initiating action, and the long-term disposition of effect must be an intentional extension and exercise of sovereign power. World War II may provide the simplest example of a situation where there was never intent, either in joining the war or in its conclusion, to retain any conquered territory for the purpose of exercising sovereign authority. Once the Axis powers were defeated, after a brief period of subjugated tutelage and rebuilding, full sovereignty was returned to the local population and the Allies (mostly) receded to pre-war borders. Conversely, take as an example the Mexican-American War, where there was, from the outset, a dispute over the sovereign control of territory. Through the course of that war the United States conquered vast amounts of territory, and succeeded in displacing the sovereignty of Mexico. Since it was the intent of the United States to gain and hold sovereignty over territory which it did not have prior to the act of war, it is clearly a case of imperialism. This was despite

the fact that the U.S. returned most of the conquered territory to the restored sovereignty of Mexico.<sup>28</sup>

This does not mean that any time a nation wishes to add territory it merely needs to act imperialistically and is justified in doing so. Though it certainly happened that way in past instances of empire, Vittoria's arguments, which were heavily influenced by the philosophies of Augustine's just-war theory, made it clear that in the "modern era" there had to be a justifiable pretext to the invasion and disposition of a neighboring sovereign. Often this was contingent on whether or not the "heathen" sovereign allowed the teaching of the Christian Gospel within his land. If he did, then no pretext for imperialism existed, but if not, well, all bets were off. As time went on, this reasoning evolved to become more trade/use oriented, leading ultimately to the view John Locke would articulate in his *Second Treatise on Government* and Emmerich Vattel would echo in his, *The Law of Nations or the Principles of Natural Law*, that essentially said the "right of soil" depended not on mere possession, but on effective use.<sup>29</sup> In other words, it is not enough to assert sovereignty over land; it must also be shown that the land is being put to its 'best use'. If the sovereign occupiers of a land were not making the best use of it, then that became the justified pretext by which a 'civilized' nation could perform an act of imperialism and extinguish the sovereign title of the indigenous population – by war and/or by treaty.

Practical application of this is found in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War. With the stroke of a pen the sovereign territory of the new United States was defined. Although this new boundary incorporated areas which were technically

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<sup>28</sup> Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 245.

<sup>29</sup> Bragaw, *Thomas Jefferson and the American Indian Nations: Native American Sovereignty and the Marshall Court*, 162

within the bounds of most of the original colonial charters, nothing like meaningful sovereign *de facto* control over western portions of these areas existed. It was the frontier, by all definitions of the term. As an additional complication, the question of the sovereign status of the Indian tribes within this new territorial boundary was somewhat debatable, since they were not a party to the treaty process which ended the war. By the principles of *jus gentium* this was not seen as anything to be concerned about since the United States, by the Treaty of Paris, was the legal successor of the “discovering nation.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, the legal reasoning at the time suggested that whatever previous relationship the Indians had with Great Britain would naturally continue under the United States, assuming of course that it was in the best interest of the United States to do so.

As such, the question lingered for three years until passage of the Indian Ordinance of 1786. This ordinance primarily affirmed the Articles of Confederation, giving sole sovereignty to the national congress to treat with, “...the several nations of the Indians...” It also established superintendence, a system continued from the British, setting up northern and southern Indian districts in the national domain.<sup>31</sup> A year later, the Northwest Ordinance would codify the *jus gentium* principle of “right to soil” by stipulating that:

The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.<sup>32</sup>

The importance of this cannot be understated. In one document there is the acknowledgement of the sovereign status of the “nations of Indians,” and in the other, the express statement that the only permissible method of extinguishing that sovereignty is through either war or purchase (via treaty). Thus we can, by applying our definition for imperialism,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> An Ordinance for the Regulation of Indian Affairs, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 31, 490-493.

<sup>32</sup> An Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States, North-West of the River Ohio, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 32, 334-343.

categorically conclude that every instance of U.S.-Indian relations from July 4, 1776 thru the end of the Treaty System in 1871 was in fact, imperialism.<sup>33</sup> That is ninety-five years of continual acts of imperialism *before* the “start” of the ‘American Empire’!

Right or wrong, the philosophical and legal reasoning behind this and all other post-Columbian instances of imperialism is clearly seen in the context with which the new United States formulated its own policies, for both Indian relations and foreign policy in general. It would become the ideology known as ‘Manifest Destiny’, through which and in concert with the issue of slavery, would define the territorial expansion which occurred during the first century of American independence.<sup>34</sup> It is a concept which was codified within the Constitution as the principle of eminent domain, which acknowledges the government’s right of preemption, if it asserts that it will make better use of the land than a private citizen.<sup>35</sup>

#### “When was U.S. Imperialism?”<sup>36</sup>

It is thus perfectly reasonable for Campomanes to ask the above question, and to continue: “...why the categorical privilege...of ‘1898’ in considerations of its formation?”<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Campomanes did not go on to answer this question in any definitive way. He was using it merely as a rhetorical illustration of the difficulty presented with discussing ‘American Empire,’ and went no more in depth than to suggest that the question is up for grabs - precisely because the answer is so dependent upon the definition employed as to *what* imperialism is.

<sup>33</sup> Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, Sixth, Abridged ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 318.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-258

<sup>35</sup> *U.S. Constitution, Amendment 5*; The 2005 Supreme Court case, *Kelo v. City of New London* expanded this meaning to include compulsory transfer of ownership from one private individual to another private individual if the receiving individual was to provide a “public purpose”.

<sup>36</sup> Campomanes, *1898 and the Nature of the New Empire*, 132

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Since the preceding section has remedied such a problem by providing a clear definition, we may look for an answer.

Let us set aside the specifics of 1898 for a moment and move to a more cursory look at the behavior of the United States since 1776 to see what events meet our established definition for imperialism. For the sake of brevity, Table 1 illustrates some of the more well-known events in U.S. territorial expansion or foreign military involvement, and fits them into the broad categories of what *was* and what *was not* American imperialism. I am not claiming this list to be exhaustive in any measure; I will leave it to the reader to evaluate the completeness of this list. Given the fact that since July 4, 1776, there have been only twenty-nine years (non-consecutive) in which there has been *no* involvement of the American military in “foreign” lands, it would seem an exceedingly wasteful exercise to attempt to cover all events in this paper.

Table 1

<b>Imperialism</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Not Imperialism</b>	<b>Date</b>
Indian Relations	1871	The Barbary Wars	1805/15
Louisiana	1803	Civil War	1865
Florida(s)	1819	The Philippines	1898
Texas	1845	Cuba	1898
Oregon	1846	Panama	1903
Mexican Cession (Southwest and California)	1848	Nicaragua	1933
Gadsden Purchase	1853	World War I World War II	1918 1945
Alaska	1867	Korea	1953
Hawaii	1898	Viet Nam	1975
Guam	1898	Grenada	1983
Puerto Rico	1898	Iraq (Gulf War and Liberation)	1991 2011
Samoa	1899	Bosnia	1996
Virgin Islands	1917	Afghanistan	Present

\*Note – Dates are reflective of the end of official action for a given event.

With only a few exceptions between each column, reading from top to bottom, left to right is, for all intents and purposes chronologically linear. More to the point, and to reiterate, the year 1898 stands out as a bridge between the two columns. Yet, the table also highlights what appears to be a paradox. How could the same event, the Spanish-American War, be represented in both columns? How can one war be both imperialistic yet not at the same time? This is when attention must be brought back to our definition, which has as a requisite the intended *retention* of sovereignty, once gained.

It should also be mentioned here that as historians we must confine ourselves to the availability of primary sources which we use to draw our conclusions. Speculations about conspiracy theories, cover-ups, and ulterior motives make for good fiction novels and box-office movie thrillers, but rarely do they find a meaningful place within the field of serious historical study. When we look at the *intent* in the actions of a nation or the actors which bring them about in history, we are bound by the records in which they appear. In regard to what follows, I welcome anyone who wishes to challenge the “true intent” of the actions of the U.S. government or its actors for the events which I cover if they differ from what is presented. I only stipulate that any such challenge is brought with accompanying credible evidence.

### **The Un-Imperial Empire**

We have seen how the Mexican-American War provides a clear example of intent for territorial expansion in both the justification for military action and in the retention of territory at the conclusion of peace. The Spanish-American War then provides us an example where the intent for territorial expansion was not there (officially) at the outset of the war, although it

certainly may have been on the minds of some once hostilities became inevitable.<sup>38</sup> Nowhere is there in any speeches by President McKinley, nor in any resolutions or declarations of Congress, any mention or hint of gaining territory for the United States. In fact, the joint resolution in which Congress authorized the President to use force against the Kingdom of Spain in Cuba had attached to it the Teller Amendment, which expressly stated that the United States would *not* annex Cuba, once liberated.<sup>39</sup> Since we did in fact return sovereignty to Cuba in 1902, under no circumstances does our experience with that island fit into our definition for imperialism.<sup>40</sup>

Many argue that the U.S. didn't *really* give sovereignty back to Cuba, and point to the Platt Amendment as proof. Upon reading the provisions which Senator Platt laid out in 1901, there is clearly a question as to whether and to what extent the United States was infringing upon the sovereignty that it was in the process of returning to Cuba. It certainly would not be expected that any nation would consider itself sovereign if it allows what appears to be unrestricted authorization to another sovereign, "to intervene for the preservation of...independence."<sup>41</sup> However, are the stipulations of the Platt Amendment such a large departure from established international norms of the day, or from the forms which post-war relations would take in the twentieth-century? For example, Article 1 of the Treaty of San Francisco (formally ending WW II) states, "The Allied Powers recognize the full sovereignty of the Japanese people over Japan

<sup>38</sup>David J. Voelker, *Perspectives on the Spanish-American War 1898–1899*, (2009),

<http://www.historytools.org/sources/Spanish-American-War.pdf>. This source attributed a private quote to President McKinley which said, "...we must keep all we get [and] when the war is over keep all we want." I have not been able to verify the authenticity of the quote, and no citation was provided by the author of the article.

<sup>39</sup> Chapter 24, 55 Congress, Session 2, Joint Resolution: For the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect.

<sup>40</sup> Guantanamo Bay Military Installation is a land-lease which is covered in the provisions of both the Platt Amendment and the Relations With Cuba Treaty of 1904.

<sup>41</sup> "The Platt Amendment," in William A. Link et al., *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era : A Documentary Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

and its territorial waters.”<sup>42</sup> While this seems fairly straight forward, Article 3 goes on to stipulate that:

Japan will concur in any proposal of the United States to the United Nations to place under its trusteeship system, with the United States as the sole administering authority, [lists geographical restraints]. Pending the making of such a proposal and affirmative action thereon, the United States will have the right to exercise all and any powers of administration, legislation and jurisdiction over the territory and inhabitants of these islands, including their territorial waters.<sup>43</sup>

It would certainly seem that this Treaty (signed by 48 nations) saw no contradiction in the idea that, while ‘full sovereignty’ had been returned, a portion of Japan would remain at the discretionary control of the United States. Although the U.S. would ultimately choose not to exercise this provision, I cite it here as a comparative example. Clearly, by the middle of the twentieth-century such a seemingly contradictory concept of sovereignty passed international scrutiny. Would it have done so fifty years prior or fifty years later?

I will defer an attempt to answer either of those questions to another paper, or another author who seeks to take up a more detailed examination of diplomatic histories at the end of the nineteenth-century. In the meantime, I will rest my arguments on the foundation that, Platt Amendment and all, Cuba was returned to full sovereign status in 1902 when it adopted its own constitution. This was a sovereign status which was reaffirmed two years later in a treaty of relations signed between the United States and Cuba.<sup>44</sup> And given that the next 33 years of relations with Cuba were governed by that agreement, none of the actions during that time may be cited as separate efforts at imperial action. Thus, with Cuba there was no intent in origin or consequence, and obviously there was never intent to retain that which it never sought. Cuba’s

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<sup>42</sup> Treaty of Peace with Japan, September 8, 1951, *TIAS 2490*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Relations With Cuba, January 20, 1904, *TS 438*

place in the non-imperialist column of Table 1 is indisputable. The Philippines, on the other hand, may need more explanation.

It may be helpful in clarifying the issue of the Philippines if we first understand the disposition and categorization of both Guam and Puerto Rico as imperial. As we have illustrated, there was no intent to gain territory at the outset of the war. However, in the process of waging the war, and as a consequence of the peace treaty with Spain, the United States gained possession of both islands. It therefore meets the requisite of intent for the action portion of our definition; and since we never stated any intent to, and have not yet, relinquished control over either island, it also meets our second requisite of intent to retain sovereign control.

### **The Un-Imperial Empire Part II**

The Philippines presents us with a much more complex situation. The archipelago was not officially part of the original war aim; however, it was a long-coveted island group due to its location and proximity to the Asian market. Earlier in the 1890's, U.S. Navy Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan aggressively advocated the idea of a stronger Navy to secure our growing commercial interests in the Pacific. He and others envisioned a series of coaling stations (for ships' fuel) under U.S. control to help achieve this aim, and thus, he supported the general idea of holding overseas colonies.<sup>45</sup> However, as Walter LaFeber points out, Mahan was conceptualizing the use of colonies much differently than any of his predecessors by, "...stressing colonies as strategic bases for a navy and deemphasizing colonies as markets."<sup>46</sup> This seems very much contrary to causation theorists like Hobson, Veblen, and Lenin.

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<sup>45</sup> Walter LaFeber, "A Note on the "Mercantilistic Imperialism" of Alfred Thayer Mahan," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48, no. 3 (12, 1961), 681.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Even more than ‘imperialism’, the word ‘colony’ seemed to be anathema within the American psyche. The idea of a colonial system always harkened public sentiment back to Revolutionary days, and the general notion that if the United States were to gain and hold colonial possessions, that it would be a “betrayal” of the principles of the republic.<sup>47</sup> This seems especially odd, considering the fact that all of westward expansion, from the time of the Louisiana Purchase through the Gadsden Purchase – even Alaska – was, for all intents and purposes, colonialism. Couching such expansion in the phraseology of ‘territory’ instead of ‘colony.’ seems to have the effect of absolving all opposition to the practice.

This is certainly not to say that territorial expansion had not been free from vigorous debate until the Spanish-American War. Nearly *every* instance of territorial expansion precipitated its own unique “constitutional crisis” from the Louisiana Purchase onward. Even before 1803, during the formative years of the nation, the question of how to deal with ‘national domain’ sparked heated, sharply divided debate. The Constitution does speak plainly about the fact that there may *be* territories, and that the Federal government is the *administrator* of those territories, but it is completely silent on *how* those territories come into existence. This generated much debate early on.<sup>48</sup> Even after many of those problems had been resolved in the process of adding Louisiana, many more issues – slavery, land usage, Indian relations, etc. – would keep the debate alive.

By the time of the Spanish-American War, the argument had shifted to questions of “fitness” for statehood. Senator George Vest of Missouri argued that he, “...did not deny or question the power of Congress to acquire new territory, but that it must be held afterwards with

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<sup>47</sup> James Landers, "Island Empire: Discourse on U.S. Imperialism in Century, *Cosmopolitan*, McClure's -- 1893-1900," *American Journalism* 23, no. 1 (Winter, 2006), 105.

<sup>48</sup> Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States*, 165

the purpose of making it into States.”<sup>49</sup> In debating the question of whether or not to annex the Philippines, Vest asserted that to do so would place the island chain on an inevitable path toward statehood. However, Representative Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts disagreed with Vest and declared, “The Power of the United States in any territory or possession outside the limits of the states themselves is absolute.”<sup>50</sup> Lodge maintained that statehood was far from inevitable, and that Congress had the ultimate power to decide the fate of any territory. Each side of the debate furnished numerous Supreme Court decisions to bolster their respective arguments. In the end, the perceived legality of whether or not the U.S. would take the Philippines took a back seat to the “more tangible” questions of national interest, political calculation, and public opinion of whether or not we *should*.

Passionate imperialists, like Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, lent a very strong voice to this discussion with memorable speeches such as, “March of the Flag.”<sup>51</sup> He also undertook a fact-finding tour to Asia, which included stops not only in the Philippines, but also in Japan, where he met with Prime Minister Ito. In the course of their discussion, the Prime Minister explained to Beveridge, regarding the Philippines:

[Ito] First, you must keep them.

[Beveridge] I asked him why?

[Ito] Because your national honor is involved; because it is to your interest, not at once, but greatly, almost incontestably so in the future; and because if you do not, another Power will immediately take them, involving the world in war in all probability, for which you will be responsible.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Congressional Record*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., 290

<sup>50</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, quoted in Walter Lafeber, “The ‘Lion in the Path’: The U.S. Emergence as a World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science)* 101, no. 5 (Winter, 1986), 712.

<sup>51</sup> Albert J. Beveridge, *March of the Flag*, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/1898beveridge.asp>, accessed 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Claude Gernade Bowers, *Beveridge and the Progressive Era* (New York: Literary Guild, 1932), 110.

It would seem that such reasoning made its way back to President McKinley. Beveridge did meet with McKinley upon his return to Washington, and it is likely that he would have shared the Prime Minister's thoughts with the President; but just how much that influenced McKinley's decision is not known. The best surviving record that we have which gives us insight to the President's reasoning is an interview which took place in November of 1899, but did not appear in print until January of 1903 in the *Christian Advocate*:

And one night late it came to me this way—I don't know how it was, but it came: (1) That we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them...<sup>53</sup>

So it would seem then that Table 1 is in error, and that the Philippines more properly belong in the category of imperialism. The intent of action portion is met, just as it was for Puerto Rico and Guam, and here we have the President stating what appears to be a clear intent to keep the archipelago indefinitely. Yet, appearances can be deceiving. I will concede that the first portion of our definition is met; no question. However, I cannot totally subscribe to the intent to keep the islands as being fulfilled.

In the first place, the United States never fully conquered the islands of the Philippines. The orders which Commodore Dewey acted under were not explicit in terms of gaining and holding any ground – or even of capturing Manila itself:

Dewey, Asiatic Squadron: War has commenced between the United States and Spain. Proceed at once to Philippine Islands. Commence operations at once,

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<sup>53</sup> James F. Rusling, "Interview with President McKinley," *Christian Advocate (1866-1905)*, Jan 22, 1903, 137.

particularly against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy. Use utmost endeavors. Long. (Secretary of the Navy)<sup>54</sup>

The only specific goal in this instance was to prevent the Spanish fleet anchored in Manila Bay from becoming a threat to the west coast of the United States. The fact that it ended as such a decisive naval victory actually resulted in some later speculation (fueled in part by Dewey himself) that the Spanish actually surrendered before the “battle,” and that the only shots fired were to save the honor of the Spanish governor.<sup>55</sup> In any case, while the United States Navy annihilated the Spanish fleet, it was the Filipino freedom fighters under Emilio Aguinaldo who successfully subdued the remaining Spanish forces on Luzon, which led to the islands being offered in the treaty negotiations at the end of the war. Unfortunately, it was also true that it was the Filipinos who had conquered the islands themselves which led to Filipino insurrection and resistance once the U.S. decided not to leave immediately.

The aforesaid leads to the second point: although there was nothing as stark as the Teller Amendment governing the disposition of the Philippines immediately following the war, there was also nothing as official as annexation. This is a misunderstood fact which creeps into histories about the Philippines, They were not annexed – they were ceded, for \$20 million dollars, as a part of the treaty ending the war.<sup>56</sup> This is what allowed the fire stoking the debate over colonies to grow, and as such, left the issue of disposition of the Philippines open. To put it plainly, Guam and Puerto Rico were simply too small and insignificant, both in square miles of land and in population, for the American public to care. The Philippines, however, was composed of 10 million people who were about to be brought, in some manner, into the

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<sup>54</sup> William J. Lawrence, *A Concise Life of Admiral George Dewey, U.S.N.*, ed. Library of Congress, Vol. 2 (Boston: J.F. Murphy, 1899), 63.

<sup>55</sup> Geo F. Cotterill, "Observations: Dewey's Shocking Testimony," *The Seattle Mail and Herald*, Vol 5, 1902.

<sup>56</sup> Treaty of Paris, December 10, 1898, *TS 343*

American fold. This was highly controversial, and the permanency of the Philippines as a U.S. possession was far from decided.

Articles which appeared in popular magazines at the time, like *Cosmopolitan*, published statements such as, “Nobody will pretend that...the Philippines are designed to become a state.” Or in *Century* magazine, where the author stated, “In no circumstances likely to exist within a century should they [the Philippines] be admitted as a State of the Union...” These articles, ironically one arguing in favor of keeping the islands, the other against, show that the reasoning on both sides was remarkably similar. The philanthropically-minded imperialist and the xenophobic anti-imperialist both relied on essentially racist and nearly identical arguments to justify their particular stance.<sup>57</sup> Even the women’s suffrage movement jumped into the debate which threatened to splinter their cause. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony took opposing sides over the war, Stanton being in favor and Anthony opposing.<sup>58</sup>

These debates would continue throughout the next several years, but would taper off once the anti-American insurrection led by Aguinaldo had been successfully quelled in 1901. From that time forward the only official concern was setting up a stable provisional government which would lead the way forward. For this task McKinley had already tapped Federal Circuit Court Judge and former Solicitor General William Howard Taft, who served as provisional governor.<sup>59</sup> During this time the debate over independence for the Philippines remained active within political circles, but had largely died out in the mainstream American thought process. Meanwhile, the island group slowly made progress toward becoming a self-governing state –

<sup>57</sup> Landers, *Island Empire: Discourse on U.S. Imperialism in Century, Cosmopolitan, McClure's -- 1893-1900*, 113-114

<sup>58</sup> Allison L. Sneider, "The Impact of Empire on the North American Woman Suffrage Movement: Suffrage Racism in an Imperial Context," *UCLA Historical Journal* 14 (01, 1994), 19-20.

<sup>59</sup> Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States*, 471

but did so outside of the regular territorial process, as outlined in the Northwest Ordinance and Organic Acts, that took place in all other past instances of territorial expansion. Fifteen years after the end of fighting and the establishment of a provisional government, the Jones Act passed in 1916 promised independence for the archipelago. Although it would take another thirty years to realize – the delay in no small part due to the Great Depression in the United States, World War I, and further complications as a result of four years of occupation by the Japanese during World War II – independence did come. On July 4, 1946, full sovereignty was returned to Republic of the Philippines.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the Philippines is placed outside of our definition for imperialism.

### **Hawaii?**

The remaining significant 1898 event is the annexation of Hawaii. I do not feel it necessary to belabor the how's and why's of the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands. I have already placed their entry into the domain of the United States squarely within the imperial column. However, it is important to note that discussions within the media of the day as well as within the political sphere were laced with the same general arguments and concerns as with the Philippines.<sup>61</sup> There were in fact very few instances where Hawaii and the Philippines were discussed or debated separately, especially in light of the fact that for many the end of the actual fighting during the Spanish-American War was simply a formality. News of Dewey's capture of Manila had already reached the mainland by summer, and many were already making business

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Landers, *Island Empire: Discourse on U.S. Imperialism in Century, Cosmopolitan, McClure's -- 1893-1900*, 96

plans for “the new colony.”<sup>62</sup> Of course, many of these “business plans” amounted to little more than political rhetoric, since the actual disposition of either island chain had yet to be decided.

The distinctive feature of Hawaii in this discussion is its retention as a territory and eventual state. I am still perplexed at how or why two Pacific Island chains, both entering the control of the United States during the same year, harboring many topographical and environmental similarities, would take such vastly divergent paths. The only plausible explanation that is offered is, much in support of the causation theorists, economic. The number of existing American business interests at the time, coupled with the events of the Spanish-American War (and a generally pro-expansionist President), and a minority indigenous population, gave the Hawaiian annexation movement its final successful nudge.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

Imperialism has sometimes been defined as, “...the policy and practice of forming and maintaining an empire...”<sup>64</sup> In this sense, and by my own definition, there is no doubt that the United States *is* an empire. From the Indian Ordinance of 1786, through to the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands in 1898, the United States engaged in an active, imperialistic, expansion of its national sovereignty. Many came to believe that the rapidity with which the nation expanded was the work of a divine hand; that it was the “manifest destiny” of the nation “to overspread the continent.”<sup>65</sup> It would also become a signature feature for some, like Frederick Jackson Turner, who saw the defining characteristics of America in the dynamism of the frontier process – which depended upon expansion to provide a frontier. Turner himself even mused in 1896 whether or

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 109

<sup>63</sup> Thomas J. Osborne, "The Main Reason for Hawaiian Annexation in July, 1898," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (Summer, 1970), 161-178.

<sup>64</sup> Zevin, *An Interpretation of American Imperialism*, 317

<sup>65</sup> "ANNEXATION." *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review (1837-1851)*, Jul/Aug 1845, 5.

not the conquering of the continent, "...might mean a drastic assertion of national government and imperial expansion under a popular hero."<sup>66</sup>

It becomes extremely difficult to argue that the events of 1898, the ascendancy of Theodore Roosevelt to the U.S. presidency, and the brief flirtation with colonialism in that era do not meet Turner's prediction. However, it also should be clear at this point that following 1898, Americans decidedly turned their backs on the idea of any further imperial actions. If we define imperialism as: the extension and exercise of political sovereignty, by any intended action, of one sovereign over another, with the intent to retain such sovereignty, once gained - then only once following the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War, did the United States permanently extend its sovereignty over an inhabited area, the Virgin Islands in 1917.<sup>67</sup> How then can these events, and the date 1898, stand as the "start" of 'American Imperialism'?

Clearly, the twentieth-century, and so far the beginning of the twenty-first-century, have presented us with a plethora of new international relations and dynamics. How countries conduct foreign policy, how alliances and treaties are negotiated and interpreted, and how inevitable conflicts involving questions of sovereignty get resolved, all provide fertile ground for analysts and experts to probe. There is considerable nuance to be found within each of these questions which must not get lost or overlooked by improperly – and quite frankly, lazily – lumping it all under the term *imperialism*.

Have we helped the discussion? Has the definition which we have employed here equipped us to better understand the events of today, and label them as "imperialism"? Perhaps - you see, my goal, as I laid out at the beginning of this paper, was to find a definition which

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<sup>66</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Problem of the West," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept, 1896, 297.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Territorial Acquisitions, <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1049.html>, accessed 2015

would enable historians to look at the *past* and identify imperialism. It is of no use when attempting to analyze events as they unfold, simply because so much of the definition is contingent upon the long-term disposition of any imperial-like endeavor. As we saw, it took over forty years to settle whether or not the Philippines were to be an imperial prize or independent.

What we do know is that our definition is applicable throughout the histories of empires, both ancient and recent. Moving forward, historians will have at their disposal an uncontested rubric by which they may approach imperial studies. This will also encourage, as suggested above, other disciplines which look at historical events, to sharpen their own definitions and explanations of causation and effects. The historians will again own their subject, telling the economist, the social-behaviorist, the fill-in-the-blank outside expert, “No, you cannot redefine history to fit your model any longer.”

The United States *is* an empire. It made itself one by practicing unceasing imperialism for the first one-hundred and twenty-two years of its existence. It will remain an empire until the dissolution of the Union. However, to continue to argue that the year 1898 marks the beginning of this empire is to be willfully blind to the events of earlier history. The ‘American Empire’ did not begin in 1898, nor did this empire end in 1898. What the year 1898 did mark, unquestionably, was an end to the process of growing that empire. 1898 marks the *end* of ‘American Imperialism.’

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