Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist

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In the antithesis of Western imperialism and colonial nationalisms and the still uncertain synthesis the United States has had a significant and in some ways a determining role. By the extension of its frontiers into the Caribbean and the Pacific at the turn of the century, the United States found itself an imperialist power. American imperialism consciously endeavored to bring what was best of the Western way of life to its colonial peoples. Nevertheless, it depended on the conventional instruments of military force and colonial-civil government imposed by the conqueror. For the United States the Philippines became the fittest subject for this Westernizing process for which Theodore Roosevelt was the outstanding spokesman and apologist. Under President Roosevelt’s direction the work of civilizing a backward people received a full American expression, and from a consideration of that enterprise the temper of American imperialism may be sounded.¹ Drawing from the Philippine experiment and from experience with the Caribbean countries Roosevelt combined practical judgments with certain intellectual and emotional attitudes to elaborate a comprehensive doctrine of imperialism.²

¹ "I would say that when they [the Filipinos] are fit to walk alone they should walk alone, but I would not pledge myself as to a definite date for giving them independence. . . . I would certainly try to prove to the islanders that we intended not merely to treat them well but to give them a constantly increasing measure of self-government, and that we should be only too delighted when they are able to stand alone." Roosevelt to H. K. Love, Nov. 24, 1900, Roosevelt Mss. "I do not believe that as the world is now constituted permanent good comes to any nation merely from the smashing of some other nation. I acted upon this belief when as President I insisted upon our promise to Cuba being kept and Cuba being freed, and when I started the Philippines on a road which inevitably led to their ultimate independence [sic]." Roosevelt to Edmund R. O. von Mach, Nov. 7, 1914, Ibid. Hereafter, all citations not otherwise identified are to Roosevelt Mss. Letters from Roosevelt will be listed as “to.” Books by Roosevelt will be listed without his name.

² The letters of Theodore Roosevelt in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress are the principal sources for studying Roosevelt’s imperialist doctrine. The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, 8 vols. (Cambridge, 1951-54) edited by Elting E. Morison, et al. (hereafter cited as Letters), are the most important published source. The Works of Theodore Roosevelt, 24 vols. Memorial Edition, New York, 1922-26, hereafter cited as Works) have been used to survey speeches and other public writings. Some use has been made of
His doctrine was compounded of a sense of the superiority of the white race, particularly the Anglo-Americans, and the persuasions of democracy; of the Western individualist’s urge to dominate and his wish, often more than a pious one, to be the preceptor of lesser civilizations and the protector of unfortunate human beings. For Roosevelt the justification of imperialism consisted in the opportunity for human improvement that it afforded subject peoples. There are, in consequence, two critical, distinguishing norms for interpreting his philosophy of imperialism: the resources and the means whereby the process of civilization was carried forward by the powers, and the benefits accruing to backward peoples measured by their adaptability to Western institutions in general and to principles of self-government in particular.

Theodore Roosevelt was a nationalistic patriot and an imperialist in his very bones. On July 18, 1918, he wrote to the like-minded Albert J. Beveridge that “... nationalism is the keynote of your attitude and mine — just exactly as it was of Marshall’s...” Roosevelt’s writings as they appeared in individual monographs and pamphlets. The best single volume on this aspect of Roosevelt is Howard K. Beale’s *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore, 1956). All the biographies give attention to Roosevelt as imperialist but the emphasis generally is on action rather than theory. A perceptive brief analysis is that of John M. Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge, 1954). George F. Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1958) is a recent useful survey.

3 To Edward VII, Feb. 12, 1908; Edward VII to Roosevelt, March 5, 1908; to Mahan, March 18, 1901; to Cecil Spring-Rice, Nov. 1, 1905.

4 “Our people do not desire to hold foreign dependencies and do believe in self-government for them. Not a European nation would have given up Cuba as we gave it up. . . . We keep Porto Rico because we can not help ourselves.” To Silas McBee, Aug. 27, 1907. “We can not permanently see Cuba prey to misrule and anarchy; on the other hand I loathe the thought of assuming any control over the island such as we have over Porto Rico and the Philippines. We emphatically do not want it; and nothing but direct need could persuade us to take it. . . . As a matter of fact what I have been ardently hoping for has been not that we should reduce Cuba to a position of the Philippines but that the Philippines would have made such progress that we could put them in the position of Cuba.” To George O. Trevelyan, Sept. 9, 1906. See also Roosevelt, “The World Movement,” *History as Literature and Other Essays* (New York, 1913), pp. 113-114.

5 “It is our duty toward the people living in barbarism to see that they are freed from their chains,” he [Roosevelt] told Minnesotans a fortnight before he became President, “and we can free them only by destroying barbarism itself.” Beale, op. cit., p. 34.
and Hamilton’s. I have never known a professional internationalist who was worth his salt.”

While touring British Africa (1910) he had confided to his friend, Arthur Hamilton Lee: “I am, as I expected I would be, a pretty good imperialist.” Such attitudes were part of Roosevelt’s temper and era. Though of Dutch extraction he felt himself a conscious and living part of Anglo-American culture. Pugnacious by instinct “TR” believed implicitly in the benefits of competition, concluding that human progress was its ordained end and viewing the Anglo-Americans as the embodiment of progress in the race. The times that Theodore Roosevelt moved in were shot through with the thought of Darwin, and, though he refused to apply “Darwinian” postulates to social situations without considerable refinement, a competitive mood colored much of his imperialist doctrine. Roosevelt held firmly to the position that it was a “natural process” that these people best fitted for expansion and self-government should control the backward regions of the world. Pre-eminent among such peoples were the English-speaking races. Evidence of this historical perspective is written large in the opening paragraph of Roosevelt’s early study, The Winning of the West:

During the past three centuries the spread of the English-speaking peoples in the world’s waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature in the world’s history, but also the event of all others most far reaching in its effects and its importance.

7 Letters, VII, 32.
8 “To you India seemed larger than Australia. In the life history of the English speaking people I think it will show very much smaller. The Australians are building up a great Commonwealth, the very existence of which, like the existence of the United States, means an alteration in the balance of power of the world and goes a long way towards insuring the supremacy of the men who speak our tongue and have our ideas of social, political and religious freedom and morality.” To Spring-Rice, Aug. 11, 1899. For an illuminating analysis of Roosevelt’s intellectual roots see Blum, op. cit., pp. 24-36.
9 Works, XVIII, 341-354: “Of course the best thing that can happen to any people that has not already a high civilization of its own is to assimilate and profit by American and European ideas, the ideas of civilization and Christianity, without submitting to alien control; but such control, in spite of all its defects, is in a very large number of cases the prerequisite condition to the moral and material advance of the peoples who dwell in the darker corners of the earth.” Works, XVIII, 344.
The colonial migrations of European settlers and the westward movement of American pioneers were expressions of the superior energy and the higher civilization of the West. The British settlers in Africa reminded him so forcefully of his "beloved westerners" that he felt entirely at home among them. Roosevelt, therefore, readily likened the conquest and control of the Philippines to the taming of the American Great Plains. He justified the wrestling of land from the barbarian Indians as a service to humanity and saw the American experiment in the far Pacific in a similar light. The American record in Minnesota and the Dakotas was not without mistakes nor would it be in the Philippines but, whatever the errors, Americans were justified in their conquests because civilization was advanced. This apologia for imperialism Roosevelt had first proposed in The Winning of the West. It mattered little whether the American whites had won the land by fair treaty or by force, or by a mixture of these methods, "so long as the land was won. It was all-important that it should be won, for the benefit of civilization and in the interests of mankind." To oppose such action as immoral or unjust argued a "warped, perverse, silly morality." Roosevelt maintained that conquest, even involving war and its barbarities, American over Indian, Boer over Zulu, Cossack over Tartar, and New Zealander over Maori had "laid deep the foundations for the future greatness" of mighty peoples.10

In the conquest of vast stretches of the earth inhabited by backward peoples Roosevelt claimed a leading role for Americans and for himself, if possible, direct involvement. "The only job which I think I would really like to do," he told Maria Longworth Storer (Dec. 2, 1899) as the United States prepared to take up the administration of colonies, "is a job I shall not be offered, viz., the Governor-Generalship of the Philippines with a free hand. That would be a job worthwhile undertaking. . . ." Shortly thereafter, he complained to his good friend, Henry Cabot Lodge, that the Vice-Presidency, were he nominated and elected, would cut him off from all chances of governing the Philippines, "a job emphatically worth doing." Less than two years later he became President and, thus, attained an unrivalled position for directing the civilizing of the Philippines. But the presidential eminence did not provide him with the sense of participation and accomplishment that would have been his as a great American proconsul.

In his admiration for William Howard Taft and Leonard Wood as successful, proconsular administrators appears his own unfulfilled ambition to serve the outposts of empire. He spoke of Taft as a man “who knows the [Philippine] Islands like a book and cares for the Islanders not merely as if they were his little brown brothers but his little brown children. . . .” Wood, he believed, had encountered more difficulties in the Moro country and had overcome them more satisfactorily than British administrators had done under less onerous conditions in the Malay Settlements. To his son, Kermit, he (Nov. 23, 1906 described an American official in Puerto Rico as “a perfect trump and such a handsome athletic fellow and a real Sir Galahad. Any wrong doing and especially any cruelty makes him flame with fearless indignation.” Letters of later years reveal his frustration at not having had personal direction of colonial administration. Drawing upon observations of British rule in Egypt and the Sudan where he had visited in 1910, Roosevelt wrote to Whitelaw Reid: “There are plenty of jobs for which I am not competent, but I must say, I should greatly like to handle Egypt and India for a few months. At the end of that time I doubtless would be impeached by the House of Commons, but I should have things moving in fine order first.

To the task of civilizing backward folk Theodore Roosevelt brought certain preconceptions which are the core of his imperialism. An enduring conviction that the white race was destined to spread its culture across the world was its first tenet. This white race, defined by European geography, the Christian religion, a cultural link with Greece and Rome, and a kinship of blood, fur-

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11 To Silas McBee, Aug. 27, 1907; to Whitelaw Reid, Sept. 11, 1905; to Edward Everett Hale, Dec. 17, 1901.
12 To Joseph G. Cannon, March 2, 1907; to Whitelaw Reid, Sept. 11, 1905; to Lodge, April 30, 1906; to Leonard Wood, Nov. 27, 1908.
13 To Reid, March 24, 1910. For Roosevelt's views of Egyptian nationalism see David H. Burton, “Theodore Roosevelt and Egyptian Nationalism,” Mid-America, April, 1959. Roosevelt was influenced by the British Agent General in Egypt, Lord Cromer whom he attempted to persuade to visit the United States in 1903 and to present his views on the administration of the Philippines and Cuba. To Earl Cromer, Jan. 15, 1903. Roosevelt called Cromer's Modern Egypt a “really great book.” To Francis R. Wingate, July 29, 1908.
nished the superior peoples of the modern era, ordained to rule because they possessed the energy and ability to control other races. Their superiority had been won, it was not innate. Roosevelt recognized that only in the last twenty-five hundred years had the Europeans, the “higher races,” been dominant, prospering “only under conditions of soil and climate analogous to those obtaining in their old European homes.” In ancient times the fair-skinned inhabitants of northern Europe had been the barbarians in need of culture and law from the Mediterranean.

Expansive energies might vary from epoch to epoch. In the modern era Roosevelt drew little distinction between English conquests in Egypt and the Sudan, French Algerian exploits, and Russian advances in Turkestan. In each case the expansive energies of a superior people worked for progress. These centrifugal movements, similar to earlier Roman, Carthaginian, and Spanish expansion, would leave a heritage of similar improvements in the life of the conquered barbarian tribes. He discounted the argument that these nations expanded only to die, for “the universal law of death . . . is part of the universal law of life. In the end the man who works dies as surely as the man who idles; but he leaves his work behind him.” Thus, it was important to expand and influence history. “Rome expanded and passed away but all western Europe, both Americas, Australia, large parts of Asia and Africa to this day continue the history of Rome. But what slightest

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15 *Works*, XIV, 236; to David B. Schneder, June 19, 1905.

16 “English rule in India and Egypt like the rule of France in Algiers or of Russia in Turkestan means a great advance for humanity. English rule in India has been one of the mighty feats of civilization, one of the mighty feats of the white race during the past four centuries, the time of its extraordinary expansion and dominance. That you have committed faults I have not the slightest doubt, though I do not know them — my business being to know the faults we have committed in the Philippines ourselves of which I am well aware, and as to which I am steadily trying to advance and perfect remedies.” To Sidney Brooks, Nov. 20, 1908; to James Bryce, Sept. 10, 1897; to Cecil Spring-Rice, Dec. 2, 1899.

17 To Elmer H. Copen, July 3, 1901. “. . . You have done such marvelous things in India that it may be you will gradually as century succeeds century by keeping your hold transform the Indian population not in blood, probably not in speech, but in government and in culture, and thus leave your impress as Rome did hers on Western Europe.” To Spring-Rice, Aug. 11, 1899.
faint trace of Rome's ancient rival Etruria is now to be found in living form? None, for Etruria was stationary while Rome expanded." The Anglo-Americans were the contemporary Romans upon whom fell the double mantle of opportunity and responsibility for shaping the history of modern man.18

What mattered was not expansion simply for conquest but what that expansion underscored: the higher culture of the energetic races. It was Roman influence on language, law, literature, governmental system, and the whole way of looking at life that counted: the civilizing process for the benefit of the barbarians that Rome — or the United States — brought under its yoke.19 Linked inseparably to civilization was the peace of the world. "The object lesson of expansion is that . . . peace can not be had until the civilized nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarian nations." Peace and order had followed Russian penetration of Turkestan, French expansion into Algiers, English conquests in Burma, the Malay States and Egypt, and would attend possession of the Philippines.20 Occupation of the barbarian reaches of the world reduced the risk of international war by bringing more areas under the influence of the civilized states. These states, Roosevelt believed, were unlikely to start a conflict which could only injure civilization.

Roosevelt did not even require a democratic government from superior races, for he favored the expansions of Czarist Russia. Not the form of government, though he obviously had the strongest preference for democracy, but expansive quality distinguished a nation as superior. Indeed, in spite of all his pre-occupation with the white race, he recognized the contemporary Japanese as a superior race because they were capable of conquests.21 The Koreans and the Chinese appeared to be stationary races and

18 To Elmer H. Copen, July 3, 1901; Works, XIV, 103-106.
19 Works, XV, 338; to Copen, July 3, 1901.
20 Works, XIV, 249; to Schurz, Sept. 8, 1905; to Sidney Brooks, Nov. 20, 1908.
21 Works, XIV, 237. "The victory [of Japan over Russia] will make Japan by itself a formidable power in the Orient because all the other powers having interests there will have divided interests, divided cares, divided burdens — whereas Japan will have but one care, one interest, one burden." To Spring-Rice, Mar. 9, 1904. See also Works, XX, 473-481, in which Roosevelt praised the 1912-3 report of Count Terauchi, Governor-General of Korea for the civilizing work of the Japanese in Korea.
Roosevelt was not minded to help them against Japanese domination. A country without the spirit or force to defend itself deserved to go under. Roosevelt called this the "natural process." The Koreans and Chinese were not racially equal to the Japanese. Of the Chinese "TR" observed wryly to John Hay (Sept. 2, 1904): "They are of the same race [as the Japanese] only in the sense that a Levantine Greek is of the same race with Lord Milner." Roosevelt’s racism was, then, flexible enough to keep pace with time and tide and the fortunes of war. Nonetheless his emphatic concern was with the white race, and, primarily, with the Anglo-Americans.

The greatest bequest of a civilized nation to barbarians in ancient or modern times was government under law, of which self-government was the ultimate in evolution and in justice. For nationalities capable of self-government Roosevelt felt kinship, while a people given to chaos and banditry earned his contempt. Human progress required the more politically sophisticated races to rule people unable to govern themselves until they had sufficiently matured. Men must have government, and must govern themselves or submit to government from without. Should they, because of lawlessness, fickleness, folly, or self-indulgence refuse to rule themselves, then subjugation would be their lot. The only way to escape this dominion was to demonstrate a capacity for self-rule. Self-government could not be a gift; it had to be earned, unfolding from the capacities of the social body.

It is no light task for a nation to achieve the temperamental qualities without which institutions of free government are but an empty mockery. Our people are now successfully governing themselves, because for more than a thousand years they have been slowly fitting themselves, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, toward this end. What has taken us thirty generations to achieve we can not expect to see another race accomplish out of hand, especially when large portions of that race start very

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22 To Hay, Jan. 28, 1905.
23 To Denison, Aug. 3, 1914.
24 For example: China, Roosevelt, "Mechanics' Pavilion Address," Beale, op. cit. p. 181; Mexico, to Susan D. D. Cooley, Dec. 2, 1914; Colombia, to Thayer, July 2, 1915; Santo Domingo, to Root, April 30, 1906, and to Eliot, April 4, 1904; Venezuela, to von Sternburg, July 12, 1901.
25 To Cooley, Dec. 2, 1904; to Hale, Dec. 3, 1908; Works, XII, 593.
far behind the point which our ancestors had reached even thirty generations ago.26

As the self-governing Western powers fashioned their empires, democracy in some form, attenuated perhaps, would inevitably find its way into the colonies and into the thinking of the subject peoples anxious to use it to advance their burgeoning nationalisms. The resulting problems were difficult. The typical Western legislature was, as Roosevelt well knew, composed of members usually quite unfamiliar with conditions prevailing in Burma or Puerto Rico. Thus, there was little likelihood that it could devise the necessary colonial laws. Such imperialist irresponsibility might have been acceptable when the paramount interest was in exploiting colonial areas. That day had passed. But a subject people was almost certainly unprepared to govern itself and this condition was further complicated by the tendency of democratic politicians to indulge the fancies of native nationalist demands. Colonial administration must avoid exploitation and “mawkish sentimentality.” Hoping that any general departure of Europeans from colonies was many decades distant he nevertheless recognized that dominion over many colonial areas was unlikely to be permanent. This judgment reveals a sturdy realism in Roosevelt’s imperialism, for he argued that the overwhelming numbers of aborigines would eventually assimilate the white population, and that “men of our stock do not prosper in tropical climates.”27

Roosevelt agreed that conquest usually meant the use of force. So long as conquest meant progress for mankind it was good. “It

26 Works, XVII, 128. Roosevelt also recognized the appeal of the western form of government. “The influence of European government principles is strikingly illustrated by the fact that admiration for them has broken down the iron barrier of Moslem conservatism so that their introduction has become a burning question in Turkey and Persia; while the very unrest, the importance of European or American control in India, Egypt or the Philippines, takes the form of demanding that the government be assimilated more closely to what it is in England or the United States.” Ibid., pp. 113-114. On the same point Roosevelt wrote: “Think of the peoples of Europe stumbling upward through the Dark Ages, doing much work in a wrong way, sometimes falling back, but ever coming forward again, forward, forward, forward, until our great civilization as we now know it was developed at last out of the struggles and failures and victories of millions of men who dared to do the world’s work.” The New York Tribune, Oct. 10, 1910, quoted in Beale, op. cit., pp. 77-8. See also, to Willard, April 28, 1911, Letters, VII, 250-6.

27 To Reid, Sept. 3, 1908; Works, XIV, 238-9.
is only the growth of European powers in military efficiency,” the
president wrote to Carl Schurz (Sept. 8, 1905), “that freed it
[Europe] from the dreadful scourge of the Turk. Unjust war is
dreadful,” he went on, but “a just war may be the highest duty.”
“If England had disarmed to the point of being unable to con-
er the Sudan and protect Egypt, so that the Mahdists had estab-
lished their supremacy in northeastern Africa, the result would
have been a horrible and bloody calamity to mankind.” Similarly
Roosevelt supported American-British military cooperation in the
Yangtze valley, suggested by A. T. Mahan in The Problem of
Asia, as in the interests of Asia and the world. Military conquests
meant some bloodshed; “but to withdraw from the contest for
civilization because of the fact that there were attendant cruelties,”
was in his opinion, “utterly unworthy of a great people.”

Only the civilized nations could participate responsibly in inter-
national affairs. Backward races unable to maintain domestic
order could not be expected to assist in the maintenance of inter-
national law. To think otherwise struck Roosevelt as “mere folly,”
“the silliest kind of silliness,” “absolutely feebleminded on our part.”
To ask Mexico or Venezuela, for example, to guarantee the Mon-
roe Doctrine was “like asking the Apaches or Utes to guarantee
it.” Perhaps the most striking evidence of the Rooseveltian faith
in the influence of civilization is to be found in his conviction that
war between civilized peoples might soon become extinct. “... More and more civilized peoples are realizing the wicked folly of
war and are attaining that condition of just and intelligent regard
for the rights of others which will in the end, as we hope and be-
lieve, make worldwide peace possible.” Thus, if any colonial
people did achieve in a national form the industrial or military
prosperity to compete with the Western Powers, the very process

28 To Schurz, Sept. 8, 1905; to Mahan, March 18, 1901; to William B.
Cutting, April 18, 1909.
29 “If China became civilized like Japan; if the Turkish Empire were
abolished, and all of uncivilized Asia and Africa held by England or France or
Russia or Germany, then I believe we should be within sight of a time when
a general international agreement could be made by which armies and navies
could be reduced so as to meet merely the needs of internal and international
police work.” To Henry White, Aug. 14, 1906. See also, to Cooley, Dec. 2,
1914.
30 To Archibald B. Roosevelt, Dec. 2, 1914.
31 Works, XVII, 133.
of achievement would have seen the civilization of that people. Thereafter, they could be dealt with not by recourse to war, but peacefully as in the case of a civilized state.\textsuperscript{32}

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Roosevelt looked on American acquisition of the Philippines, and the attendant responsibility for civilizing a backward people as providential. Generally, he did not think of the economic advantages offered by the Islands. Americans would be helping their "brethren of the Philippine Islands so far forward on the path of self-government and orderly liberty that that beautiful archipelago shall become a center for civilization for all eastern Asia and the islands round about."\textsuperscript{33} Yet was this to be as easy as it might sound? Colonial administration should strive for the best interests of the colonial people. The best interests of the Filipinos required a period of preparation for self-government under American tutelage. This he explained to Andrew Carnegie (April 5, 1907).

In the Philippine Islands we are training a people in the difficult art of self-government. . . . We are doing this because we have acted in a spirit of genuine disinterestedness, of genuine and single-minded purpose to the benefit of the islanders — and I may add, in a spirit wholly untainted by that silly sentimentality which is often more dangerous to both the subject and the object than downright iniquity.

The critical task was to introduce the Filipinos to the art of self-rule without arousing the kind of virulent Aguinaldan nationalism that demanded the dangerously premature ouster of the United States.

The President had few reservations about using Army regulars against the Aguinaldan nationalists until the area was pacified sufficiently to permit the introduction of civil government.\textsuperscript{34} Like the Chinese Boxers the rebels resisted Western political leadership,

\textsuperscript{32} Works, XIV, 247.

\textsuperscript{33} Beale, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 181, 76. The latter provides an instance of Roosevelt's economic apology for imperialism. See to Raymond Reyes Lala, June 27, 1900.

and like the Apaches they tried to thwart the spread of civilization. Roosevelt displayed little sympathy with Filipino nationalists unwilling to exchange Spanish for beneficent American colonialism.

According to Roosevelt’s standards Filipino backwardness appeared in their deficient appreciation of the essence of self-rule: the majesty of law. This made them incapable of effective self-government. As the issue of America’s rule in the Islands became national, Roosevelt vigorously espoused United States paternalism. “So far as I am aware not one competent witness who has actually known the facts believes the Filipinos capable of self-government at the present time.” American withdrawal would mean confusion and bloodshed. The backwardness of the Islanders and the efforts of the United States to overcome this condition are mirrored in Roosevelt’s annual presidential message to Congress. In each of these addresses he claimed that progress was being made but much still remained to be accomplished. In the first message the President cautioned against giving the Filipinos “a degree of independence for which they are unfit.” The annual message of 1903 emphasized the necessarily gradual character of the preparatory program for self-rule. The following year Roosevelt pointed out that the many tribes and races in the Islands were still incapable of existing in independence or of building their own civilization. The United States had to continue its mission of helping the people “to rise higher and higher in the scale of civilization and capacity for self-government.” In his final message to the Congress the President was somewhat more sanguine of eventual success but insisted that “no one can prophesy the exact date when it will be wise to consider independence as a fixed and definite policy.”

Enabling a people to assume the prerogative of self rule “is not a matter to be determined by reading Rousseau in the closet but by studying the needs of the individual case,” Roosevelt observed to Charles W. Eliot on Sept. 4, 1904. In the first instance, the needs of the Philippines were such that the United States must refrain from promising independence. Loose talk of independence merely obscured for the American people their own duty in the

35 Works, XVI, 558, 501.
36 Ibid., XVI, 475, 538.
Islands. The talk stemmed partly from base political motives, for Roosevelt believed that the Bryan Democrats favored Filipino freedom to embarrass his administration. Talk of independence compounded the difficulties of government by encouraging the insurrectionaries to hope that the United States would soon withdraw. If such talk ended, the United States could provide the Islanders with the conditions for the evolution of self-government. The American army stationed in the Islands would be a sound guarantee of their security. Roosevelt was convinced that an army under American direction brought not only peace and order but freedom as well; the army would be a shield for the Philippines against aggression and subversion from within. Thus, a steady progression toward democracy began by providing the Filipinos with the material and moral resources of American democracy. Schools, libraries, and roads were built. Sanitation and health measures were put into effect. Individual rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness under the American flag were insured against violation. From these initiatives Roosevelt expected a true Filipino democracy to emerge. The administrators of the laws, the American public servants, had to be men of the highest caliber in ability and integrity. Early in the controversy over possession of the Islands Roosevelt through Secretary of State Hay urged upon President McKinley the need of “appointing the most competent men available. . . .”38 Honest able administrators were especially important for possessions overseas. Whereas at home, it was argued, the people had the means of ridding themselves of undesirable public men, “in far off islands things are different. There wrong doing is more easy and those that suffer from it more helpless.” Consequently, “the highest standards [of administration] must be demanded.” Roosevelt looked for the same probity from private American citizens whose business took them to the Philippines.39 The process of civilization was a serious endeavor for dedicated minds and hands.

By providing the material and moral support Theodore Roosevelt did not propose to “give” the Filipinos self-government. But he did believe that the people of the Islands were capable of eventually achieving democracy if properly schooled by the United

38 To E. O. Wolcott, Sept. 15, 1900; Works, XVI, 557-8; The Roosevelt Doctrine, pp. 79-80; to Eliot, April 4, 1904; to Hay, July 1, 1899.
39 Works, XVIII, 362, 356-7; XVII, 309.
States. The American undertaking in the Philippines was at once more difficult and more satisfying than British efforts in the Malay Settlements or in Egypt. The United States aimed to ready the native inhabitants for self-rule; the British had not undertaken such a significant task for the Egyptian fellahin. Because the Philippines were inhabited by a folk of some Christian culture with an upper class partly European in stock, this political apprenticeship was both reasonable and necessary. Because the practice of democracy was the great American ideal it was imperative that the United States advance the cause of democracy wherever possible. In Roosevelt's thinking the ideals of democracy provided sound warrant for American imperialism.

A major step in the political schooling of the Filipinos was their participation in the civil service, that is, in the administration of the law. The lower ranks of the service should be as native as possible, as Roosevelt saw it, and in the upper echelons such commissioners, judges, and governors as were Filipino should have exactly the same share in the operation of government as their American colleagues. But to make certain that the increasingly native administration remained efficient Roosevelt advised constant supervision in order to eliminate undesirable personnel and to promote deserving public servants. All this was by way of preliminary to the "giant stride forward in testing their capacity for self-government": the first Filipino legislature. In it the natives would be making the laws under which they were to live and not simply carrying into effect the regulations of an imperialist state. That, in turn, could well evoke greater nationalist demand for complete freedom from American control, once the experimental process had begun. He was sensitive to this nationalist agitation to be free of leading strings, sure that the needs of the people during the early years of tutelage "were moral and industrial, not political." There was no necessity and some danger in cultivating a "patriotic national sentiment" since this might easily be confounded with rebel Aguinaldanism. Sober performance of duty was what was required of the Filipinos.

How then was the United States to know when the Filipino people were truly ready for national independence. The test could

40 To Schurman, Aug. 26, 1904; to Reid, Jan. 23, 1906; to Silas McBee, Aug. 27, 1907; to Joseph G. Cannon, Sept. 12, 1904.
41 Works, XVII, 306-8, 387, 447; to Eliot, June 20, 1904.
not be a simple one to be determined by the calendar or by the loud demands of native politicians. To him the basis of judging a people's ability to rule was self-restraint and respect for law individually and collectively demonstrated. Freedom was the "substitution of self-restraint for external restraint. [Thus] it can be used only by a people capable of self-restraint; and they alone can keep it, or are ethically entitled to use it." The Filipinos had to exhibit their understanding of this principle and maintain it practically for some years before they could qualify as a free people. Otherwise, if independent, they might allow the return of banditry and chaos at home and constitute a threat to the well-behaved nations. Duty had enjoined the Americans to establish a stable government in the Philippines and there persisted the duty to maintain the government until the natives were able to sustain it themselves. This line of argument dissolved to Roosevelt's satisfaction the proposition that a people was entitled to self-government before having demonstrated its capacity to use it wisely and restated in realistic terms the apology for United States imperialism.\(^42\)

A great nation could not decline the challenge of its destiny. Roosevelt excoriated those Americans who were unwilling to assume a share of the white man's burden. In the Philippines it would have been easy to do nothing for the natives, and, in leaving the islands, to consign them to savagery. Instead, the United States must do the hard thing and attempt "to bring the Filipinos forward in the path of self-governing liberty." Not only was this important for the islanders themselves but it was the best way of promoting international peace. "Remember," he warned a Cincinnati audience in 1899, "that expansion is not only the hand-maid of greatness, but above all the hand-maid of peace. The day when universal peace is possible can only come when the nations of the world have grown civilized. In some places this state of things can come about by expansion of the great orderly peace loving powers."\(^43\) Such a mandate to extend civilization and world peace in the Far East was imposed on the United States and required the retention of the Philippine Islands.

\(^{42}\) "We ourselves must be the judges as to when they [the Filipinos] become 'fit' and when it would be 'prudent' to approve of independence." To Joseph G. Cannon, Sept. 12, 1904; to Eliot, April 4, 1904; Works, XVI, 557-558.

\(^{43}\) To Eliot, April 4, 1904; to Hale, Dec. 17, 1901; to Lodge, Sept. 30, 1906; to McBee, Aug. 27, 1907; to Cannon, Sept. 12, 1904; Works, XVI, 499.
Dangers for the world lurked wherever ill-prepared people fumbled with self-government, as was illustrated in Haiti, Venezuela, Santo Domingo, Colombia, and Cuba. Writing in 1914 Roosevelt observed that democracy, "the highest ideal of government," "is an ideal for which only the highest races are fit." In the countries south of the United States more trouble had come from failure to recognize this fact than from all other causes put together. For example, the French Revolution enabled Haiti to become an absolute democracy, the first West Indian island to live under what was intended to be a free government. The results had amply shown that it would have been infinitely better for the Haitians to have suffered anything else, even years of slavery, than to have been handed a democratic form of government for which they simply were not fitted. If the Haitians were to learn self-restraint, respect for law, and civilization, they needed an apprenticeship such as the Filipinos were serving under the United States. The irregular behavior of Venezuela and Santo Domingo caused Roosevelt to affirm his belief that some nations were not ready to take up the responsibilities of freedom. Interference by the superior nations to police these countries was fully warranted. On July 12, 1901, he told his friend Speck von Sternburg: "If any South American state misbehaves toward any European country let the European country spank it." As President, Roosevelt defended American intervention in both countries. United States action not only meant the prevention of misery and chaos, but served to protect American national interests from the ambitions of other superior, expansive nations. This intervention was described by the President as an honest policy from which no gain was expected. As for United States pressure on Colombia during the Isthmian canal crisis Roosevelt defended his diplomatic war of nerves on the grounds that construction of a canal was in the interests of human progress. The "bandits of Bogota," "homicidal corruptionists," by their unprincipled efforts to delay or prevent the canal had given another warning of the dangers of independence for countries to whom the advancement of civilization was a matter of secondary importance.44

These views were the lessons of imperialistic adventures. Ear-

lier, without this experience, Roosevelt had been enthusiastic for
the unconditional independence of Cuba. After the destruction
of the *Maine* he insisted that “the one possible solution of a perma-
nent nature” for the Cuban affair was the independence of the
island. “The sooner we make up our minds to this, the better,”
he wrote John Ellis Roosevelt (March 9, 1898). But the removal
of Spanish control left a power vacuum that the Cubans them-
selves were unable to fill. At first, Roosevelt appeared confident
that America’s part in Cuba’s destiny was to adopt a hands-off
policy. In a letter to Elihu Root published in *The New York
Tribune*, May 21, 1904, he explained that the United States had
driven out tyranny and had remained in Cuba until it had estab-
lished civil order and laid the foundations of self-government and
prosperity. But he shortly learned the lesson that the foundations
of self-government and prosperity must be deeply laid and slow-
ly aged. Revolutionary outbreaks in independent Cuba made
Roosevelt realize that the Cubans there were unable to measure
up to their newly acquired political responsibilities. Armed inter-
vention by the United States followed in 1906. Even then the
President did not favor annexation of the Island; “emphatically
we do not want it,” he exclaimed to George Otto Trevelyan.
Nonetheless the Cubans had failed to govern themselves, the
need for American direction and guidance remained, and “TR’s”
chagrin was considerable. He described himself to Henry White
as “so angry with that infernal little Cuban republic that I would
like to wipe its people off the face of the earth.”45 But, after all,
Cubans were not sprung from Anglo-Saxon stock and American
guarantee for Cuban good behavior became another phase of
our destiny as a great nation. In each of these episodes the failure
of Central American peoples to achieve what Roosevelt considered
a proper degree of political stability had given rise to remedial
action by a superior state whose duty it was to promote the in-
terests of civilization, if necessary, by the imperialistic methods of
armed intervention and military occupation.

The distinctiveness of Roosevelt’s view of the American im-
peralist mission is evident in his remarks on the imperial ven-
tures of other nations, which were readily justified by the back-

45 *Letters*, IV, 801; to Trevelyan, Sept. 9, 1906; to Henry White, Sept.
13, 1906; to Root, July 20, 1908.
ward condition of the conquered races. Might these same norms in turn be applied to conquests of Europeans or people of European stock by other European states? What judgment did Roosevelt pass, for example, on the Boer War or on World War I? As the distinguishing criteria of Roosevelt's imperialist doctrine were the expansive energies of superior races and the civilizing benefits of conquest, then a conflict between expansive superior nations, a conflict likely to injure civilization, strongly suggests a contradiction in the normative elements of his imperialist outlook. Contradiction there was and Roosevelt's judgment as to where justice lay in the Boer War and in World War I demonstrates that in the final consideration the determining norm was the interest of civilization rather than the expansive energies of a people.

The Boer War first dramatized the conflict of values inherent in Roosevelt's doctrine. The Boers were a people of European stock schooled in self-government yet in the war they became the victims of British imperialism. "TR's" sympathies were divided. He greatly admired the Boers as rugged pioneers, the conquerors and civilizers of a barbarian region, and, thus, benefactors of mankind. They were "belated Cromwellians, with many fine traits," he confided to his English friend Spring-Rice. But they stood in the way of expansion by an English-speaking race which, he was convinced, must be dominant in South Africa. The Boers were battling on the wrong side of civilization. What was to follow conquest by the British, however, was not the ordinary sequel to the defeat of an inferior people. Instead a "fusion of the races and the development of South African civilization . . . under the British flag" should begin at once, the Dutch citizens enjoying "exactly the same rights as the English. . . ." South Africa was to be a "White Man's Africa, a great Commonwealth where the Dutch and the English will mingle. . . ." In balancing divergent sympathies the one freighted with the greater import, the advance of civilization under Anglo-Saxon leadership, prevailed. The interest of civilization as Roosevelt judged those interests were worth more than the right of the Boers to self-determination. Such was his judgment immediately after the event, and when years had passed to lend perspective. "Civilization demanded the triumph of the English," he wrote his son, Theodore (April 1, 1901). And in 1915 in the midst of a greater war he
once again observed that "it was essential to the welfare of Africa that the English should win."  

The faith Theodore Roosevelt placed in the conscience of the civilized nations as a guarantee of human progress was sorely tested in World War I. The spectacle of superior peoples engaged in an internecine struggle for nationalistic advantage also forced him to distinguish sharply between "self-determination" for superior and inferior races as part of a final determination of the meaning of imperialism. The distinction made was a logical reflection of what Roosevelt had said and done as a proponent of Western expansion. Europeans were to be given every opportunity to decide for themselves how they would be governed while backward peoples as yet unfit for independence must be governed from the outside.

To provide sufficient opportunity for Europeans to rule themselves, even though organized into the smallest of states, was the responsibility of the larger nations. It was "one of the great international duties" to insure that small, highly civilized, and well-behaved states like Belgium, Holland, Uruguay, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden be protected against oppression and conquests. They had played an honorable part in the development of civilization and their rights were to be respected on that account. The penalty the superior nation was certain to pay if it failed in its duty was most serious. "Barbarism, savagery and squalid obstruction" was the price of indifference. Because no international body existed to prevent or punish unjust aggression it evidently fell to the civilized nations to police the world. But Roosevelt continued to distinguish between conquest by France in Algiers, for example, and that of Germany in Belgium. The critical difference was between the Algerian and Belgian people and their respective political stability.

Unlike many of his contemporaries Roosevelt never yielded

46 To Henry White, March 30, 1896; to von Sternburg, Nov. 27, 1899; to Spring-Rice, March 2, 1900; Dec. 2, 1899; to Strachey, Jan. 27, 1900; to Oliver, July 22, 1915.


48 "In international matters to make believe that nations are equal when they are not equal is as productive of far-reaching harm as to make the same pretense about individuals in a community. Keir Hardie has attempted to insist that in Natal the native Kaffirs should be treated on a political equality
to the argument that self-determination was right and proper for all peoples. He was committed to the conviction that "some nations are not fit for self-determination, that democracy within their limits is a sham and that their offenses against justice and right are such as to render interference by their more powerful and more civilized neighbors imperative." Bitterly critical of any one who failed to make the same distinction he described such people as having "consciences of separate, water-tight compartments." The Wilson Administration was singled out in particular. Roosevelt thought it the worst kind of hypocrisy to speak loftily of self-determination and, at the same time, to make use of marines in Haiti and Santo Domingo.\(^4^9\) He resented the glaring inconsistency, not the armed intervention in the "festering republics" to the south. For the postwar period he preferred a national rather than an international administration of colonial regions. Such experiments as there had been in international administration, for example, in Samoa and the Congo, had worked "uncommonly badly." The victorious powers should decide upon colonial control along national lines.\(^5^0\) Roosevelt continued to believe that certain civilized nations might still be trusted to govern wisely in the interests of the backward races.

In spite of attention given colonial matters the major elucidation of Roosevelt's imperialist viewpoint occasioned by World War I grew out of German conquests in the west and the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the east of Europe. On the face of it this involved the principle of self-determination; in reality the war launched by the Central Powers forced Roosevelt to choose between the expansive quality of a superior nation and the injury to the human race and its civilization as the ultimate value. The former president was profoundly disturbed by World War I: "the question of liberty or servitude for the well-behaved nations of the world depend[ed] upon which of the opposing sides was victorious." The aggressive alliance of Ger-


\(^5^0\)To van Hise, Nov. 15, 1918.
many and Austria-Hungary, dramatized by the German thrust across Belgium, was the foe to be beaten if civilization was to avoid a calamitous set-back.\textsuperscript{51} At one time Roosevelt had hoped that the embryonic nations of the Empire would develop their national aspirations peacefully. He had favored the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 because he saw the Austro-Hungarians as mentors to a people not then ready for independence, and the annexation as providing an opportunity for work similar to the American mission in the Philippines. The aggression of 1914 changed Roosevelt's views. It revealed Austria-Hungary as well as Germany to be an enemy of civilization and freedom. Both in western and eastern Europe the right of self-determination must be afforded the subject nations once the Central Powers had been called to account. The wrongs of Belgium had to be adjusted, the people of Alsace-Lorraine allowed to choose their own government. But self-determination as a policy was to have more significant expression in eastern Europe. Roosevelt did not go the length of proposing that the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires be replaced by new tyrannies: these empires were to be broken up to enable Poles, Yugo-slavs, Serbs, Croats, Rumanians, Italians, Greeks, and Arabs to decide their own political futures along nationalist lines. So important was this objective that Roosevelt urged the Allies never to make peace until it had been achieved. And the United States was advised to do all it could by force of arms and encouragement to revolution among the subject nations to bring it about. Europe "must be reconstructed on the basis of the principle of nationalities."\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{51} To Michailovitch, July 11, 1918; \textit{National Strength and International Duty} (Princeton, 1917), p. 90.

\textsuperscript{52} To Taft, Dec. 29, 1908; \textit{National Strength and International Duty}, p. 91; to Spring-Rice, Feb. 18, 1915; \textit{Works}, XXI, 409; "The Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires must be broken up if we intend to make the world even moderately safe for democracy. There must be a revived Poland, taking in all Poles of Austria, Prussia and Russia; a greater Bohemia, taking in Moravia and the Slovaks; a great Jugo-Slav community including Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the Rumanians in Hungary should become part of Rumania and the Italians in Austria part of Italy. The Turk must be driven from Europe and Christian and Arab freed. Only in this manner can we do justice to the subject peoples tyrannized by the Germans, Magyars and Turks. Only in this way can we remove the menace of German aggression which has become the haunting night-mare for all civilizations, especially in the case of the small well-behaved liberty loving peoples." \textit{Roosevelt in the Kansas City Star}, pp. 65-6; to Michailovitch, July 11, 1918.
The span of Theodore Roosevelt’s imperialist experience extended from the plains of the American west to the battlefields of Europe, coinciding with the years when Western control of the world’s backward regions was at flood-tide. Conquests of large areas of Africa and Asia which had struck him as “natural,” marked a rivalry that ended in a general war menacing many of his most cherished values. At this point he drew back instinctively. As attracted as Roosevelt had been to the tenet of the expansive superiority of the white race, his final judgment was characteristic of the man. Granting that his estimate of what constituted human progress was highly personalized and sometimes jaundiced, Roosevelt’s dedication to the promotion of progress was more meaningful to him than the superior race thesis. His doctrine of imperialism was a stern one that included war, misery, and bloodshed, for Roosevelt was a stern and serious public man. It was a doctrine tempered however by a civilized heart, for Roosevelt accounted himself a civilized human being. The expansive quality of the Western peoples might well be the source and means of civilization. But it was the upward curve of progress that counted most to him.