

Motivations for Imperialism

Directions: Read the primary source documents below and answer the guiding questions to better understand the material. Determine a Categorical Motivation for Imperialism from each source that helps to answer why the U.S. wanted to imperialize.

(Categorical Motivation for Imperialism from Source #1) _____

Source #1: Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*, American Home Missionary Society, 1885.

“It seems to me that God, with infinite wisdom and skill, is training the Anglo-Saxon race for an hour sure to come in the world’s future...The unoccupied arable (farmable) lands of the earth are limited, and will soon be taken...Then will the world enter upon a new stage of its history – *the final competition of races, for which the Anglo-Saxon is being schooled*... Let us hope, then, that this race of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization...will spread itself over the earth. If I read not amiss, this powerful race will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond. And can anyone doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the ‘survival of the fittest?’”

1. How does the author depict the United States in his comments? What words does he use to describe America?

2. What two reasons does the author use to justify the expansion of American borders? Why should the United States expand and spread around the world?

(Categorical Motivation for Imperialism from Source #2) _____

Source #2: Navy Captain Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 1890.

“Having therefore no foreign establishments, either colonial or military, the ships of war in the United States, during time of war, will be like land birds, unable to fly far from their own shores. To provided resting places for them, where they can fuel and repair, would be one of the first duties of a government proposing itself the development of the power of the nation at sea.”

3. What two reasons does the author use to justify the expansion of American borders? Why should the United States expand and spread around the world?

4. In your opinion, is the author correct in describing “the duties of a government?” Do you agree or disagree with the author’s point of view? Explain.

(Categorical Motivation for Imperialism from Source #3) _____

Source #3: Albert Beveridge, Senate Campaign Speech titled *March of the Flag*, 1898.

“American factories are making more than the American people can use: American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours...We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing points for American products. We will cover the ocean with our merchant marine. Great colonies governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us, will grow about our posts of trade. Our institutions will follow our flag on the wings of commerce.”

5. What reasoning does the author use to justify the expansion of American borders? Why should the United States expand and spread around the world?
-
-
-

(Categorical Motivation for Imperialism from Source #4 and #5) _____

Source #4: In his theory of natural selection, Charles Darwin made the following observations:

- “1. The resources of an environment are limited. Creatures produce more offspring than can possible survive. Members of a species must compete for limited resources and for survival.
2. No two members of a species are exactly alike. Each organism contains an individual combination of inherited traits. Some traits are useful for survival; other traits are not.
3. Organisms that have useful traits reproduce in greater numbers. Their offspring inherit the traits. Organisms with unfavorable traits eventually die off. The fittest survive.
4. Nature selects different traits at different times. Varieties within species gradually create a new species.”

Source #5: Anonymous basic argument for Social Darwinism (often attributed to Englishman Herbert Spencer, who applied Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection to human societies.)

“Within the human species, nations are locked in a struggle for survival. Everywhere, civilized nations are supplanting barbarous nations. Advanced civilization, obviously, has inherited valuable traits from its ancestors. Underdeveloped cultures, except in hostile climates, will soon die off. Therefore, natural order obligates powerful, civilized nations to appropriate (take and give out) the limited resources to the weak.”

6. Does the argument for Social Darwinism follow the principles of Darwin’s theory? Why or why not? Compare and Contrast Darwin’s theory of natural selection with that of Social Darwinism.
-
-
-

Wrap-Up Discussion Question

7. Do you believe the United States would be the global superpower it is today if it were not for the imperialistic views and motivations, such as the ones you have just analyzed? Explain.
-
-
-