

Theodore Roosevelt, Imperial Uplift, and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy

John Grant

Scholars tend to downplay or even ignore Theodore Roosevelt's thoroughgoing break with American Founding principles in his imperial foreign policy. For a century, the principles of freedom of action and non-intervention in the purely internal affairs of other nations had informed American foreign relations; these principles necessarily followed from those of the original social compact. But Roosevelt subordinated these ends to other aims as part of a larger Progressive political reorientation. After describing the original American founding principles, this article will treat Roosevelt's shift in his oversight of war in the Philippines as well as his transformation of the Monroe Doctrine. America's primary interests, securing American rights and American independence, became confused with the business or primary interests of other nations, such as uplifting the Filipinos. American interests thereafter became entangled with other nations, and the new view of uplift required the extensive supervision of the interests of other nations.

The most striking aspect of Theodore Roosevelt's vision of justice in foreign relations was his thoroughgoing rejection of the social compact theory of the founding and his embrace of philanthropic imperialism.¹ In foreign affairs in general and war in particular, Roosevelt maintained that our foreign policy should be guided above all by an attempt to uplift other nations into righteousness and civilization; uplifting the uncivilized, which necessarily entails the expansion of civilization, would lead to the prevalence of righteous peace in the world as well as national greatness for America. In a radical break with the principles of the founding, the expansion required for righteous peace was not based on any immediate threat to the security of American rights, and American imperialism did not require the consent of those needing to be uplifted.

This is not to say that Roosevelt was unconcerned about American national security, but the security of American rights and freedom of action or independence in foreign affairs

The author would like to thank Sarah Akey for research assistance and numerous helpful conversations about Theodore Roosevelt's political thought.

¹ By imperialism, I mean non-consensual political rule not founded on a concern for security of rights or independence.

were not the principal aims of foreign policy for Roosevelt. This novel, Progressive orientation is clearly manifest in Roosevelt's oversight of the war he inherited in the Philippines as well as his transformation of the Monroe Doctrine.² The triumph of the Progressive orientation has had momentous consequences. One may summarize the great transformation of our foreign policy by Roosevelt and his successors in this way: America's primary interests, securing American rights and American independence, became confused with the business or primary interests of other nations. Our interests are not only entangled with the interests of other nations; American uplift requires us to supervise the interests other nations. This confusion is still with us.

THE TRADITION REJECTED BY ROOSEVELT

America had largely, if not univocally, adhered to the social compact theory of the founding in its foreign policy until the aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898. The great exception to the consensus concerning justice had been the antebellum struggle over the meaning of Manifest Destiny.³ In general there was broad agreement among policymakers from the administration of George Washington through the presidency of Grover Cleveland about the principles of justice which animated our foreign policy as well as the key policy measures that necessarily follow from the founding principles.⁴

A summary view of the social compact theory of the founding as it pertains to foreign affairs is necessary to grasp fully the radical character of Roosevelt's view of foreign policy.⁵

² I concentrate on these episodes because they illustrate Roosevelt's views of justice in relation to war and American foreign policy very clearly.

³ See Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 63-103, 405-409 for a helpful account of the pre-Civil War battle over the meaning and justice of expansion in American politics.

⁴ Angelo Codevilla offers a clear and concise account of the purposes of American foreign policy up to the Spanish-American War in *To Make and Keep Peace Among Ourselves and with All Nations* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2014), 53-91. Codevilla recognizes that the Declaration of Independence was of critical importance, but he does not explain early American foreign policy in terms of the social compact theory. He does provide the most useful explanation of the maxims and chief policies of pre-Progressive foreign policy known to me.

⁵ See John W. Grant, "William Howard Taft on America and the Philippines" in *Toward an American Conservatism: Constitutional Conservatism during the Progressive Era*, ed. Joseph Postell and Johnathan O'Neill (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 121-29 for a more thorough discussion of the principles and core policies of the social compact theory of the founding. I will rely principally on documents which express the consensus view of the founders, such as statements of Congress, state constitutions, and other public statements of elected officials in order to understand the social compact theory of the founding. This is the only way to understand the consensus view of justice which animated the founders; the private writings and personal histories of leading figures cannot be relied on

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

The enumeration of self-evident truths in the Declaration of Independence begins with the assertion “that all men are created equal” and “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” It follows that “Governments are instituted among Men” in order “to secure these rights.” Governments derive their “just powers” from “the consent of the governed.”⁶

Other important founding-era documents elaborate on these fundamental principles. In the Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776, equality is described thusly: “All men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity.”⁷ The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 asserts that “All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights.”⁸ The residents of Northampton, Massachusetts, discussing the proposed state constitution in the Return of Northampton from 1780, explained that the meaning of “born free and equal ... is true only with respect to the right of dominion, and jurisdiction over one another.”⁹ In other words, equality means that all human beings are born free of the non-consensual political rule of other human beings; all men are naturally equal in their power and dominion. This natural equality of jurisdiction and political power is the foundation of the requirement for the consent of the governed.

Equality necessarily entails the consent of the governed: equal human beings freely come together to form a government that will secure their inalienable natural rights. The people must have the right to ongoing consent in the form of representation and, if government fails in its duty to secure rights, the right to revolution. The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 provides a clear articulation of this doctrine. “The body-politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws

to grasp the prevailing consensus. See Thomas G. West, “The Universal Principles of the American Founding,” in *The American Founding: Its Intellectual and Moral Framework*, ed. Daniel N. Robinson and Richard Williams (New York: Continuum, 2012) for a defense of the view that the social compact theory was the prevailing view of justice in the founding.

⁶ *The Founders' Constitution*, eds. Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, 5 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1:9.

⁷ *The Founders' Constitution*, 1:6.

⁸ *The Founders' Constitution*, 1:11.

⁹ *The Founders' Constitution*, 1:529.

PIETAS

for the common good.”¹⁰ The “common good” was understood to be the “protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people ... not ... the profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.... Each individual of the society has a right to be protected by it in the enjoyment of his life, liberty, and property, according to standing laws.” All the powers of government are “originally in the people, and being derived from them, the several magistrates and officers of government ... are at all times accountable to them.” None of the property of any individual, can with justice, be taken from him ... without his own consent, or that of the representative body of the people: In fine the people ... are not controlable by any other laws, than those to which their constitutional representative body have given their consent.”¹¹ Just government requires the ongoing consent of the governed through representation as well as the security of rights brought about by the enforcement of impartial laws. It should be noted that the social compact is exclusive. All human beings have rights which must be respected, but the obligation to secure rights applies only to the members of the social compact.

If government fails to secure the common good, “The people alone have an incontestable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to ... reform, alter, or totally change the same, when their protection, safety, happiness, and prosperity require it.”¹² In the Declaration of Independence, this same idea is expressed more boldly. When government fails in its end of securing rights through the consent of the governed, “It is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government ... as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”¹³ When ongoing consent in the form of representation cannot secure rights, consent may be withdrawn through the exercise of the right to revolution.

The natural equality of individuals has an analogue in foreign affairs—the equality of nations. In the Declaration of Independence, this concept is expressed in the idea that the “powers of the earth” are entitled to a “separate and equal station” according to the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.”¹⁴ We have seen that individual equality means that human beings are by nature free and independent of non-consensual political rule. The Declaration

¹⁰ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:11.

¹¹ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:12.

¹² *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:12. See Jaffa, *How to Think About the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1978), 75–140 for a thorough treatment of the place of ongoing consent in the social compact theory of the founding.

¹³ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:9–10.

¹⁴ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:9.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

teaches that the equality of states means that “Free and Independent States ... have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.”¹⁵ In other words, states are rightly free, equal, and independent; they may not justly be subjected to the rule of other states in determining how to best secure their rights.

KEY POLICIES: INDEPENDENCE AND NON-INTERVENTION

The key foreign policies that follow necessarily from the principles of the social compact theory are freedom of action and non-intervention in the purely internal affairs of other nations. Freedom of action is required if nations are to follow their obligation under the law of nature and nature’s God to maintain their separate and equal station in the world. It is also practically necessary as a matter of policy to make judgments relating to war, peace, and commerce that are not subordinated to the interests of another sovereign power.

George Washington, in a well-known passage in his Farewell Address, advised Americans of the importance of maintaining freedom of action in foreign affairs. “The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little *political* connection as possible.”¹⁶ A crucial reason to avoid political connections is that other nations have “primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation.” Following Washington’s advice is essential if the United States is to be free to “choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall Counsel.” Washington understood that America must not become involved with interests not our own through political connections with other nations; eschewing political connections is essential to maintaining independence and hence the freedom to pursue American interests constrained only by the requirements of justice.

Non-intervention is obviously related to freedom of action; intervening in the internal affairs of other nations is a form of political connection to primary interests not connected to the security of rights or independence of the interfering nation. The Monroe Doctrine further illustrates the importance of independence and non-intervention for the founders and their successors. The Monroe administration declared, in language recalling the social

¹⁵ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:10.

¹⁶ Kurland and Lerner, *Founders’ Constitution*, 1:685.

PIETAS

compact theory of the founding, that as a “principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”¹⁷ Since the European nations had a “political system” that was “essentially different” from that of the United States, any expansion of European power in the Americas would be a threat to the newly independent nations as well as “dangerous to our peace and safety.”¹⁸ While the ban on future European colonization was due to the recent expansion of independent nations in the Americas and the threat that European powers might seek to re-establish lost colonial possessions, Monroe acted only because the rights and interests of the United States were involved. Our policy was not driven by the belief that America had either the right or the duty to secure the rights and independence of other nations.

The Monroe Doctrine was not only intended to protect the independence of the United States. It was also aimed at clarifying the importance and meaning of non-intervention in American foreign policy. “Our policy in regard to Europe ... is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the government de facto as the legitimate government for us.”¹⁹ Washington’s distinction between the primary interests of America and those of other nations is intrinsically tied to non-intervention. “In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do.”²⁰

It is clear that “internal concerns” has the same sense as “matters relating to themselves.” The internal concerns of other powers, internal because they are not American concerns, are most importantly the primary interests of the concerned nation. The internal concerns of other nations include their form of government; this is why America is to consider the existing government as legitimate, even when it does not conform to our principles. “It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense.”²¹ The interests of other nations become American concerns

¹⁷ James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, in *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, ed. James D. Richardson, 10 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), 2:778.

¹⁸ Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 787. The “our” in this context refers to the United States.

¹⁹ Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 787-88.

²⁰ Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 787.

²¹ Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 787.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

when our rights or our independence of action are threatened; in all other instances the United States should respect the independence and rights of other powers and not interfere in their internal affairs.

This respect for the freedom of action of other nations when they are not invading or seriously menacing American rights is a natural consequence of the social compact theory of the founding. Equal human beings form nations which are in turn equal to one another in their rights; all nations are entitled to a separate and equal station, bound only by the laws of nature and nature's God. The equality of nations under the laws of nature and nature's God can have no meaning if one nation may intervene in the purely internal affairs of another nation.

As we will see, Theodore Roosevelt denied the founding principles in thought and in deed. Roosevelt rejected the principles of equality and the need for consent as the basis of legitimate rule; he also discarded the clear distinction between American business and the affairs of other nations affirmed by the founders. Roosevelt was an advocate of the right of the civilized nations to rule uncivilized nations for their betterment but without their consent.

SITUATING ROOSEVELT

The sole armed conflict overseen by Roosevelt was the ongoing guerilla war in the Philippines. He inherited this war after the assassination of McKinley in 1901. McKinley had superintended the war with Spain and decided to continue to occupy the Philippines in the wake of American victory, but even before becoming president Roosevelt was an enthusiast for the war and the ensuing occupation.²² His zeal was not based on a need to secure American rights while respecting the equal rights of the Filipinos: Roosevelt embraced the war and the subsequent attempt to uplift the Filipinos, without their consent, into civilization because it was America's manly duty to expand civilization and hence enlarge the area of the world where the peace of righteousness prevailed. In other words, Roosevelt embraced a form of imperialism that was explicitly in opposition to the principles of the founding.

²² See Evan Thomas, *The War Lovers: Roosevelt, Lodge, Hearst, and the Rush to Empire, 1898* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010) for a lively historical account of Roosevelt's enthusiasm for war with Spain.

PIETAS

Scholars tend to downplay or even ignore the thoroughgoing break with the founding that characterizes Roosevelt's imperialism.²³ Political scientist Will Morrisey, in *The Dilemma of Progressivism*, emphasizes that imperialism for Roosevelt meant securing the rights of those ruled without their consent and preparing them for eventual liberty. "Publicly . . . Roosevelt held fast to his insistence that the new empire would be an empire for, if not immediately of, liberty of the colonized."²⁴ Angelo Codevilla recognizes Roosevelt's "expansive sentiments," but his treatment focuses on the difference between Roosevelt's hard-headed diplomatic and military policies and the utopianism of the Progressives that followed.²⁵ Morrisey's and Codevilla's arguments are correct insofar as they go. But it is striking that while both acknowledge the importance of the founding principles, neither addresses the break with the founding principles and policies of Roosevelt's denial of the equality of the Filipino people manifested in the refusal to obtain the consent of the governed in the American occupation of the Philippines and the related entanglement in the purely internal affairs of the Filipino people.²⁶

Diplomatic historian Walter LaFeber correctly notes that "Warriors such as Theodore Roosevelt argued that Americans had to remain in the Philippines to develop their own character and teach the natives self-government."²⁷ The change in American policy is explained as a transformation from republic to empire, but LaFeber does not indicate any awareness that the new orientation rejected the social compact theory of the founding, and he does not explain the distinction between republic and empire.²⁸ Another prominent diplomatic historian, Robert H. Ferrell, also notes the change toward an imperial policy by Roosevelt, but Ferrell does not notice any denial of America's earlier principles.²⁹ By failing

²³ See Jean Yarbrough, *Theodore Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 2012), 113-17, 183 for an instance of a scholar who sees that Roosevelt was rejecting the social compact theory of the founding in his policy toward the Philippines.

²⁴ Will Morrisey, *The Dilemma of Progressivism: How Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson Reshaped the American Regime of Self-Government* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 87.

²⁵ Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 96, 98-99.

²⁶ Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 53-56; Morrisey, *Dilemma of Progressivism*, x, xxi, xxii-xxiii35. Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 10-11, 92-95 does discuss the injustice of American rule in the Philippines, but Roosevelt is presented as "cooling" on imperial commitments in favor of hard-headed assessments matching military resources to military commitments. We will see that Roosevelt was zealous concerning the issue of American imperial uplift for uncivilized foreigners to produce the peace of righteousness before, during, and after his time as President.

²⁷ Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad 1750 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 1994), 217.

²⁸ LaFeber, *The American Age*, 224-27.

²⁹ Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy: A History* (New York: Norton, 1975), 429-34.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

to discuss Roosevelt's relationship to the founding principles, neither Ferrell nor LaFeber are able to see the revolutionary character of the new orientation in American foreign policy.

LaFeber and Ferrell do not see how radical the changes wrought by Roosevelt were in principle and practice, but they do see the novelty of Roosevelt's views on foreign policy. Some historians see continuity rather than innovation. Max Boot argues that America has always been an imperial power. He does acknowledge that American imperialism has gone through different phases, but anti-imperialism is not tied to the social compact theory of the founding.³⁰ Opposition to Roosevelt's imperialism, Boot maintains, arose from Mugwumps who believed we should merely set an example and racists who were afraid of the effects of mixing with Filipinos.³¹ Robert Kagan goes so far as to claim that since the principles of the Declaration of Independence are universal, imperialism arises out of the founding. "Americans from the beginning were interested not only in protecting and advancing their material well-being; they also believed their own fate was in some way tied to the cause of liberalism and republicanism both within and beyond their borders."³² Our acquisition of the Philippines was simply the logical culmination of the founding according to Kagan.³³

It is common for contemporary political scientists and historians to fail to see the fundamental transformation of American foreign policy affected by Roosevelt's imperial turn, but a number of Roosevelt's contemporaries understood that our occupation of the Philippines was an open rupture with our founding principles. The great exemplar of a contemporary statesman who opposed our imperial venture in the Philippines due to its manifestly unjust character was Republican Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts.³⁴ Hoar argued that those favoring American annexation and occupation of the Philippines were really maintaining that America has "a right to conquer, hold, and govern a subject people of ten millions, without any constitutional legal restraint, such people being entitled to no

³⁰ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xiii-xx. For one example of Boot's general argument, we may consider his discussion of the war with the Barbary Pirates fought in the Jefferson administration. Boot understands this to be the instance where "[T]he United States had taken its first uncertain steps toward becoming the world's policeman, the protector of commercial shipping, and upholder of international laws against piracy and other transgressions" (29).

³¹ Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 106.

³² Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 42.

³³ Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 42-43, 300, 406-416.

³⁴ See Grant, "Taft on America and the Philippines," 129-32 for a broader discussion of the debate on the Philippines.

PIETAS

constitutional rights, but subject to the uncontrolled will of the American Congress.”³⁵ Defenders of the new imperialism were “turning our guns and bayonets, if need be, upon the people of the Philippine Islands, compelling them to submit to a government whose powers ... are not to depend upon their consent ... and depriving them forever of the equality which the Declaration of Independence ... declares they were created.”³⁶ Hoar compared American rule in the Philippines to antebellum slavery while pointing to the fact that there was more constitutional warrant for domestic slavery in antebellum America than there was for imperialism. “The constitutional argument for slavery was ten times as strong as the argument [for American rule in the Philippines].... The slave master said he owned men for their good.... [America] proposes to own nations for their good.”³⁷ Hoar, like the founders, understood that political rule without consent is the very definition of slavery, even when the good of those ruled without their consent is the aim.

Hoar was not merely a lone voice crying in the wilderness. The Democratic Party in 1900 openly affirmed the founding principles and condemned American annexation of the Philippines. “We, the representatives of the Democratic party of the United States assembled in National Convention, on the Anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, do reaffirm our faith in that immortal proclamation of the inalienable rights of man, and our allegiance to the Constitution framed in harmony therewith by the fathers of the Republic.”³⁸ This general statement was followed by a very specific reminder that all legitimate government requires the consent of the governed; government without the consent of the governed is decried as tyrannical. “We declare again that all governments instituted among men derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; that any government not based upon the consent of the governed is a tyranny.” This general attack on government without consent is followed by a specific denunciation of American rule in the Philippines. “We condemn and denounce the Philippine policy of the present administration. It has involved the Republic in an unnecessary war, sacrificed the lives of many of our noblest sons, and placed the United States ... in the false and un-American position of crushing with

³⁵ George Frisbie Hoar, *No Constitutional Power to Conquer Foreign Peoples and Hold Their People in Subjection Against Their Will: Speech of Hon. George F. Hoar of Massachusetts in the Senate of the United States, January 9, 1899* (Boston, MA: Dana Estes & Company, 1899), 15.

³⁶ Hoar, *No Constitutional Power to Conquer Foreign Peoples*, 15.

³⁷ Hoar, *No Constitutional Power to Conquer Foreign Peoples*, 16.

³⁸ Democratic Party, “Democratic Party Platform, 1900,” *The American Presidency Project*, UC Santa Barbara.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

military force the efforts of our former allies to achieve liberty and self-government.” The guerilla war being fought by the United States in the Philippines was labeled an act of “criminal aggression.”

It may not be evident to most scholars today, but it is clear that in Roosevelt’s time there were prominent elements in both political parties that understood the imperialism endorsed by Roosevelt to be an overt rejection of the founding principles. We will now turn to Roosevelt to see his rationale in his own words. It will quickly become evident that Roosevelt discarded the social compact theory of the founding and the central policies flowing from the founding principles.

AMERICA’S DUTY IN THE PHILIPPINES: ASSERTIVE UPLIFT AND NATIONAL GREATNESS

As we have seen, in the social compact theory of the founding, the principal task of government is the security of rights of the members of that particular social compact through the ongoing consent of the governed. The duty of government to *secure* or protect the equal natural rights to life, liberty, and property is an obligation which applies only to its own citizens. The only duty which government has toward non-citizens is to *respect* or not violate their rights, but respect for the natural rights of foreigners requires that the United States not rule them without their consent unless our rights are invaded or seriously menaced. In order to fulfill these duties, legitimate governments must pursue policies of independence and non-intervention.³⁹

Roosevelt’s position was entirely different from that of the founders: he held that we have a duty to secure the rights of the Filipinos. Indeed, America not only has a duty to secure the rights of the Filipinos, it has an obligation to uplift them to a more civilized condition. In the prosecution of this duty, we are bound to deny, for an indefinite period of time, the Filipino people the right to consent to our rule. Once uplifted, the Filipinos will at some point be able to govern themselves. There will be consent of the governed in the Philippines, but it will happen when the United States thinks the Filipinos are adequately prepared for it. It is important to note that at no point did Roosevelt think that the Filipinos harmed or even threatened to harm the rights of Americans; in fact, he acknowledged that our occupation of the Philippines was a liability to American national security. The new doctrine of imperial

³⁹ See Grant, “Taft on America and the Philippines,” 123-25.

PIETAS

uplift makes it impossible to seek freedom of action while pursuing a policy of non-intervention. For Roosevelt, America must be entangled in the affairs of the Philippines (among other nations) if we are to pursue national greatness, uplift of the Filipinos, and the peace of righteousness for the world.

Roosevelt did not conceive of our duty to the Filipinos as simply a painful obligation—he held that doing our duty in the Philippines would be a positive good for us as well as for the Filipinos and even the world. An examination of one of Roosevelt’s exemplary speeches on the subject shows that while he maintained that we had a duty or responsibility to rule the Filipinos for their good, there were important benefits to America that would follow from fulfilling this obligation. These benefits were a leading motivation for his enthusiasm for imperialism in the Philippines. These prospective goods were principally moral or spiritual and not economic.⁴⁰

The good that may be obtained by Americans could only come about through what Roosevelt called “The Strenuous Life.” This is not a life of “ignoble ease” or “easy peace.” It is a “life of toil and effort, of labor and strife.” This life is only possible “to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.”⁴¹ Why should Americans subject themselves to these hardships? Roosevelt thought these onerous obligations were worthwhile because “it is only through strife, through hard and dangerous endeavor, that we shall ultimately win the goal of true national greatness.”⁴² Failing to accept the difficult path of the strenuous life means America will not attain the goal of national greatness.

The strenuous life requires demanding virtue on the part of all citizens. “In the last analysis a healthy state can exist only when the men and women who make it up lead clean,

⁴⁰ See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Norton, 1972), 27–89 and Charles Conant, “The Economic Basis of Imperialism,” *North American Review* 167, no. 502 (September 1898): 326–40 for accounts which emphasize economic motivations for American imperialism. But if we seek to understand Roosevelt on his own terms, we see he did not understand American imperialism to be driven by commercial benefits. This is not to say that Roosevelt believed we could not do well while doing good.

⁴¹ Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” in *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*, ed. Louis Auchinloss (New York: Library of America, 2004), 755. This speech is from 1899, before Roosevelt became Vice President. Roosevelt’s policies as President followed his argument in this speech very closely, but typically the rationale for his actions was not as thoroughly developed in his public presidential messages as in his pre or post-presidential writings and speeches. For an example of how closely Roosevelt hewed to the logic of “The Strenuous Life” in his policies toward the Philippines in his presidency, see Roosevelt, “Message Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress at the Beginning of the Second Session of the Fifty-Seventh Congress,” in *Addresses and Presidential Messages of Theodore Roosevelt: 1902-1904* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1904), 346–47.

⁴² Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 766.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

vigorous, healthy lives; when the children are so trained that they shall endeavor, not to shirk the difficulties, but to overcome them.” A civilization that lacks these characteristics deserves not only contempt; it merits destruction. “When men fear work or fear righteous war, when women fear motherhood, they tremble on the brink of doom; and well it is that they should vanish from the earth, where they are fit subjects for the scorn of all men and women who are themselves strong and brave and high-minded.”⁴³ The strenuous life is the path to national greatness, and the strenuous life demands that Americans accept challenging duties as their proper lot in life.

Roosevelt argued that embracing a mission of imperial uplift in the Philippines was a necessary element in the strenuous life. “In 1898 we could not help being brought face to face with the problem of war with Spain. All we could decide was whether we should shrink like cowards from the contest, or enter into it as beseemed a brave and high-spirited people.” In terms of the aftermath of the war, Roosevelt declared, “We cannot avoid the responsibilities that confront us in Hawaii, Cuba, Porto Rico, and Philippines.” It appears that Roosevelt was simply on the side of assertive, militant action rather than pacific inaction, but this is not quite correct. The reason to bring “order out of chaos in the great, fair tropic islands from which the valor of our soldiers and sailors has driven the Spanish flag” is to avoid “that cloistered life which saps the hardy virtues.”⁴⁴ The United States must be willing to accept strife if Americans are not to become merely “an assemblage of well-to-do hucksters who care nothing for what happens beyond.”⁴⁵ The war with Spain and the ensuing occupation to uplift the Filipinos were understood to be necessary if Americans were not to become a nation of Lotus-eaters. The fact that Roosevelt says nothing about the security of American rights or independence is telling.

In addition to the pernicious consequences for the character and moral development of the American nation, failure to accept the strenuous life of imperial uplift in the Philippines would allegedly have been harmful to the Filipinos. “It is worse than idle to say that we have no duty to perform, and can leave to their fates the islands we have conquered. Such a course would be the course of infamy. It would be followed at once by utter chaos in the wretched

⁴³ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 756.

⁴⁴ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 758.

⁴⁵ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 759.

islands themselves.”⁴⁶ American assertiveness should be deployed on behalf of national greatness and order in the Philippines geared toward eventual Filipino self-government.

Roosevelt did not deny that Americans had obligations at home, but the duties of the nation for Roosevelt were not, as they were for the founders, securing American rights and independence while respecting the rights of others. “While a nation’s first duty is within its own borders, it is not thereby absolved from facing its duties in the world as a whole; and if it refuses to do so, it merely forfeits its right to for a place among the peoples that shape the destiny of mankind.”⁴⁷ Assertive uplift was to be beneficial for the Filipinos while also promoting national greatness and America’s ability to have a place in forming the future of the human race.

Roosevelt did not merely have a generic notion of the meaning of uplift or only a vague idea of the challenges involved. He saw that “the problems are different for the different islands” (e.g. Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines). The Philippines were the most difficult case, because “Their population includes half-caste and native Christians, warlike Moslems, and wild pagans. Many of their people are unfit for self-government, and show no signs of becoming fit. Others may in time become fit but at present can only take part in self-government under a wise supervision, at once firm and beneficent.”⁴⁸ If we were to abandon the Philippines, the despotic rule of Spain would be “replaced by savage anarchy” and “our work has been for harm and not for good.”⁴⁹ From the founders’ perspective, leaving the Philippines would only have been harmful if American independence or the rights of American citizens were made less secure. Roosevelt’s concerns—assertive manliness leading to national greatness and uplift for the Filipinos—were not those of the founders.

The evidence shows us that we must go further. Roosevelt not only proposed policies that rejected the founding principles; he was conscious of the fact that he was rejecting the view of justice which animated the social compact theory. We have just seen that Roosevelt thought that the Filipinos fell into two categories; they were either simply unfit for self-government, or they were at best able to participate in self-government under American

⁴⁶ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 759.

⁴⁷ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 763.

⁴⁸ See Yarbrough, *Theodore Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition*, 69, 74–77, 81–82, 94, 96, 197, 205, 266 and Morrissey, *The Dilemma of Progressivism*, 74–75 for helpful discussions of Roosevelt’s views on race and self-government. I will concentrate here on Roosevelt’s denial of natural rights and consent of the governed rather than the grounds of that denial.

⁴⁹ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 764.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

supervision. American officials, unelected and unaccountable to the Filipino people, were to be the rightful judges in determining the capacity of the Filipinos for self-government. It is necessary to recognize that speaking of participating in self-government under the tutelage of another nation is a euphemism; as Senator Hoar and the Democratic Party of 1900 understood, from the founders' perspective, one nation ruling another nation without the consent of the governed is despotism.

It is clear that Roosevelt was cognizant of this difficulty. It is clear because he spoke about the opposition to imperial uplift based on the founding principles. After castigating those fearful of governing the Philippines, he went on to say that "I have even scant patience with those who make a pretense of humanitarianism to hide and cover their timidity, and who cant about 'liberty' and the 'consent of the governed,' in order to excuse themselves for their unwillingness to play the part of men." Roosevelt was confident in dismissing the advocates of the natural right to liberty of all men and the related teaching of consent of the governed because "their doctrines, if carried out, would make it incumbent upon us to leave the Apaches of Arizona to work out their own salvation, and to decline to interfere in a single Indian reservation."⁵⁰ Those citing the founding principles as a basis for contemporary public policy were, in Roosevelt's eyes, merely dreamy cowards whose arguments would deny America national greatness and even make it impossible to deal with issues at home such as Indian affairs.

Setting aside the issue of timidity, the claim that we must disregard the natural right to liberty and the consent of the governed in the Philippines because it is a utopian doctrine is, to say the least, problematic. America's relationship to the Indians and American expansion are complex topics, but there is one very obvious difference between America's dealings with the Indians and American uplift in the Philippines: the Indians were on the North American continent. This meant that there was an immediate national security issue involved.⁵¹ As the Monroe Doctrine put it, "With the movements in this hemisphere we are of necessity more

⁵⁰ Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," 764. See Grant, "Taft on America and the Philippines," 131-32 for some other leading early Progressive views on consent and American imperialism.

⁵¹ For instance, see S.C. Gwynne, *The Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010) for an account of the grave, long-term national security issues related to US relations with the Comanches.

PIETAS

immediately connected, and by causes which must be obvious to all enlightened and impartial observers.”⁵²

The founders and their successors did not deny the natural rights of the Indians in principle. For instance, Jefferson, in his Second Inaugural Address, described the Indians as “Endowed with the faculties and the rights of men.”⁵³ The Northwest Ordinance, one of the four organic laws of the United States, declared, “The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty they never shall be invaded or disturbed unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.”⁵⁴

The founders recognized that the Indians were equal in rights, including the right to consent, to other human beings. The obvious objection is that Indian rights were often violated. The key response to this objection is that there is a very great difference between deviation from principle and a rejection of the principle.⁵⁵ A cognizance of principles means that a return to the principle is possible in the wake of an injustice or lapse from principle; a rejection of the principle precludes such a return. Roosevelt was not only violating the principles of the social compact theory with his doctrine of imperial uplift; he was rejecting equal natural rights and the consent of the governed altogether.

In practice, the immediate requirements in the Philippines in 1899 were described in this way by Roosevelt. “The first and all-important work to be done is to establish the supremacy of our flag. We must put down armed resistance before we can accomplish anything else.” Next, “We must see to it that the islands are administered with absolute honesty and with good judgment.” America would govern the Philippines without the consent of the Filipinos, but Roosevelt was very serious about the importance of virtue in American administration of the Islands. “We must send out there only good and able men, chosen for their fitness, and not because of their partizan [sic] service, and these men must not only administer impartial justice to the natives ... [they] must show the utmost tact and firmness, remembering that, with such people as those with whom we are to deal, weakness

⁵² Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 787.

⁵³ Thomas Jefferson, “Second Inaugural Address,” in *Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 520.

⁵⁴ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:28-29.

⁵⁵ See Ralph Lerner, *The Thinking Revolutionary: Principle and Practice in the New Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1987), 139-73 for an in-depth, nuanced treatment of the difficult question of the founding principles and America’s relationship with the Indians.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

is the greatest of crimes.”⁵⁶ American colonial administrators must be just, but they must not be soft.

The strenuous life required the military defeat of the Filipino independence movement in the near term and firm, upright administration in the long term. Roosevelt thought that militant uplift in the Philippines was essential to American national greatness and educating the Filipinos toward eventual self-government. To be blunt, Roosevelt’s position entailed the necessity of killing or otherwise crushing the Filipinos rebellion immediately while denying the Filipino people the right to govern themselves indefinitely. Roosevelt aimed at doing what was both noble and good for the United States and the Philippines, but the noble and good ends required means that brought about great loss of life and brutality. In addition to the loss of life on both sides in the protracted guerilla war, American forces resorted to harsh tactics such as the “water-cure” to suppress the rebellion.⁵⁷

Roosevelt, unlike the founders, never evidenced any concern for the corrosive effects of non-consensual rule on both the rulers and the ruled. Jefferson, reflecting on the effects of slavery on moral character, noted that slavery had evil consequences for both slaves and masters.

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other.... And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriae of the other.⁵⁸

Jefferson thought that slavery, or non-consensual political rule, promotes despotic habits in those who rule and servility on the part of the ruled. The damage to the moral character of both master and slave is accompanied by the impossibility of a common good—masters and slaves are necessarily enemies. As we saw above, the founders understood the common good to be the “protection, safety, prosperity and happiness of the people.”⁵⁹ When one part of

⁵⁶ Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” 765.

⁵⁷ See Gregg Jones, *Honor in the Dust: Theodore Roosevelt, War in the Philippines, and the Rise and Fall of the America’s Imperial Dream* (New York: New American Library, 2012) for a comprehensive, lively account of Roosevelt’s prosecution of the war in the Philippines and the atrocities committed by both sides in the war.

⁵⁸ Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, in *Jefferson: Writings*, 214–15.

⁵⁹ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:12.

PIETAS

the people is denied their natural right to liberty and the right to consent to government, a common good is impossible.⁶⁰ This was the situation in the Philippines.

Roosevelt's project also embroiled America in the internal affairs of the Islands: this intervention in what the founders understood to be matters relating only to the Filipino people imposed severe limitations on American freedom of action. For example, Roosevelt understood that America's annexation of the Philippines created a danger of war with Japan that would not otherwise exist, but he decided America must stay in the Islands to carry out the project of uplifting the Filipino people. Roosevelt described the Philippines as "our heel of Achilles. They are all that makes the present situation with Japan dangerous."⁶¹ The pursuit of national greatness and uplift trumped the security of American rights and independence of action.

Roosevelt did not merely fail to see the corrosive effects of imperial uplift on both Americans and Filipinos, he steadfastly maintained that both would benefit from America's rule. And the benefits of American administration in the Philippines were said to extend to all of mankind. "If we do our duty aright in the Philippines, we will add to that national renown which is the highest and finest part of national life, will greatly benefit the people of the Philippine Islands, and above all, we will play our part well in the great work of uplifting mankind."⁶² National greatness and non-consensual rule went hand in hand for Roosevelt.

PHILANTHROPIC IMPERIALISM: AMERICAN NATIONAL GREATNESS AND THE PEACE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

We have seen that Roosevelt maintained that uplifting the Filipinos was good for both the Philippines and the United States; America's project in the Islands was also a part of the "great work of uplifting mankind." Mankind would be benefitted by expanding the zone of civilization; the expansion of civilization is the principal condition for bringing about the

⁶⁰ See Grant, "Taft on America and the Philippines," 124-25 on the founders view of the relationship between slavery and imperialism and Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 95-96 on the longer-term consequences on American character and policy of imperialism.

⁶¹ Henry F. Pringle, *The Life and Times of William Howard Taft* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1939), 1:301-302. See also Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 98-99. Codevilla praises Roosevelt for seeing that imperialism in the Philippines endangered American security, but he does not address the fact that Roosevelt did not alter his views or American policy in light of the threat.

⁶² Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," 764-65. See also Roosevelt, "National Duties," in *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*, 774-77 for a restatement of the basic orientation of the "Strenuous Life" given right before Roosevelt became President.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

peace of righteousness on a world scale. Roosevelt held this view before he was in national office, as vice president, president, and even after leaving office. The social compact theory was not blind to the distinction between civilization and barbarism and the attendant benefits of civilization, but the only reason to fight barbarism was, as we saw above, if American rights were invaded or seriously menaced. In the new view, America will be more secure *ultimately*, but only as a consequence of the imperial expansion of civilization; American security will be a consequence of the expansion of civilization through uplift.

The argument for the philanthropic imperialism practiced by America in the Philippines was developed in “Expansion and Peace,” an article Roosevelt wrote shortly before his election as vice president. After a lengthy discussion of the necessity for war to bring about righteous peace, and the ignobility and horrors that flow from an attitude of peace at all costs, Roosevelt argued that “the growth of peacefulness between nations ... has been confined strictly to those that are civilized.”⁶³ Roosevelt saw that war between civilized nations was possible, but he thought that such wars were, over time, becoming less and less frequent. “Wars between civilized communities are very dreadful, and as nations grow more civilized, we have every reason, not merely to hope, but to believe that they will grow rarer and rarer.”⁶⁴ This hope was enough to help sustain Roosevelt’s confidence that wars waged for the uplift of mankind could eventually bring about the prevalence of the peace of righteousness in the world. And the alternative, allowing barbarism to exist unmolested, could not be countenanced because it precludes peace. “With a barbarous nation peace is the exceptional condition. On the border between civilization and barbarism, war is generally normal because it must be under the conditions of barbarism.... In the long run civilized man finds he can keep the peace only by subduing his barbarian neighbor.... [T]he barbarian will yield only to force.”⁶⁵

For Roosevelt, civilization brings peace, and barbarism brings war. “Every expansion of civilization makes for peace. In other words, every expansion of a great civilized power means a victory for law, order, and righteousness. This has been the case in every instance of

⁶³ Theodore Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace” in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt in Fourteen Volumes* (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1901), 28.

⁶⁴ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 27–28.

⁶⁵ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 28–29. One of the sobering examples given by Roosevelt in this context is “the Afghan on the border of British India.”

PIETAS

expansion during the present century.”⁶⁶ Roosevelt’s earlier optimistic hope for peace is expressed as a certainty: *every* expansion of civilization makes for peace. The examples of successful imperial uplift provided by Roosevelt are the French in North Africa, England in the Sudan, and Russia in Central Asia, as well as the good relations between Western colonial powers in the Pacific.⁶⁷ “Above all, there has been the greatest possible gain in peace. The rule of law and of order has succeeded to the rule of barbarous and bloody violence. Until the great civilized nations stepped in there was no chance for anything but such bloody violence.”⁶⁸

America’s westward expansion was, in Roosevelt’s eyes, identical to the successful projects of the French in Algeria or the English in the Sudan. “Where we abut on Canada there is no danger of war.... But elsewhere war had to continue until we expanded over the country.... In North America, as elsewhere throughout the entire world, the expansion of a civilized nation has invariably meant the growth of the area in which peace is normal throughout the world.”⁶⁹ Roosevelt was extremely confident that America’s success in expanding civilization and peace across the continent would be matched by success in the Philippines. “The same will be true of the Philippines.... [A]s it is, this country will keep the Islands and will establish therein a stable and orderly government, so that one more fair spot on the world’s surface shall have been snatched from the forces of darkness.”⁷⁰

Roosevelt did fear one thing that could ruin the expansion of civilization and hence peace—Americans declining to live the strenuous life of imperial uplift. Peace that allows evil to exist is not only unrighteous, it leads to misery with no good arising from the misery. Of course he thought that “unjust war is a terrible sin.”⁷¹ But is it not unjust to crush barbarism, even when the security of one’s own nation is not at risk. It is indeed just to expand the boundaries of civilization, even in the absence of any direct threat to America. Roosevelt uses the example of the Turkish massacre of Armenians to illustrate his point. He does not maintain that American rights were invaded or seriously menaced, but he argues that is not the standard we should apply. Peace was kept, but “infinitely greater human misery was inflicted

⁶⁶ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 29.

⁶⁷ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 30-31, 33-34.

⁶⁸ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 31.

⁶⁹ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 32-33.

⁷⁰ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 33.

⁷¹ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 26.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

during this peace than in the late wars of Germany with France, of Russia with Turkey.⁷² By way of contrast, “The result of the last Turko-Russian war was an immense and permanent increase in happiness for Bulgaria, Servia [sic], Bosnia, and Herzegovina.”⁷³ The logic is clear: Russia did good to non-Russians in its recent war, so America should not aim first at securing American rights and independence. The United States must think instead of the “human misery” that will result if barbarism is not pushed back, and the happiness that will come about as a consequence if barbarism is defeated—regardless of whether America is directly menaced or not.

In addition to philanthropic considerations, there is another, deeper necessity that impels American expansion. According to Roosevelt, the only choices available to any nation are a glorious legacy brought about by expansion or stagnation followed by anonymous extinction. An expanding, civilized nation may still perish, but it will leave splendid spiritual and material legacies. After praising the example of ancient Rome, Roosevelt says, “Similarly to-day it is the great expanding peoples who bequeath to the future ages the great memories and material results of their achievements, and the nations which shall have sprung from their loins, England standing as the archetype and best exemplar of all such mighty nations. But the peoples that do not expand leave, and can leave, nothing behind them.”⁷⁴ Expansion is presented here as a sort of existential necessity.

In the social compact theory of the founders, expansion was possible, but in principle it was constrained, particularly by the requirement of consent of the governed. For instance, the need for all legitimate government to rely on the consent of the governed meant that all new territory acquired, if it were to be retained, must eventually become a state on equal terms with existing states.⁷⁵ One of the purposes of the Northwest Ordinance was “to provide ... for the establishment of States, and permanent government therein, and for their admission to a share in the Federal councils on an equal footing with the original States.”⁷⁶

The social compact theory required the Constitution to follow the flag—territories of the

⁷² Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 24; see 25–26.

⁷³ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 25.

⁷⁴ Roosevelt, “Expansion and Peace,” 34–35.

⁷⁵ For example, territory in Mexico occupied by American armies during the Mexican-American War was not retained, so it did not have to be made into a state(s) on equal terms with other states. The territory acquired permanently from Mexico in the Southwest and California was a different matter; under the social compact theory, it had to be made into states eventually, and the people had to have the opportunity to emigrate or be made citizens.

⁷⁶ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:28.

United States could not be placed in a position of permanent dependency. Before the Spanish-American War, all territory of the United States was acquired with a view to becoming a state(s) on an equal footing with existing states and citizens equal to other citizens of the United States. Roosevelt's argument justified holding territory indefinitely with no idea that it would become a state. The subjects of these territories are not American citizens in the full sense; they are not allowed to provide ongoing consent.⁷⁷

The limitations of the social compact theory were fetters that must be cast off if America were to expand properly; for Roosevelt, the expansion necessary in his time required that America govern the Philippines without the consent of the governed to facilitate American national greatness and the uplift into eventual freedom of the Filipino people. If America were to continue to adhere to the principles of the founding, an inglorious stagnation and eventual death with no great moral legacy or perhaps even posterity would be the inevitable consequences. And of course the failure to expand civilization would lead to a greater degree of human misery, especially the miseries of war.

ROOSEVELT'S IMPERIAL UPLIFT: THE UNITY OF THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

The elaborate rationale for America's duty to participate in the project to uplift mankind in "The Strenuous Life" and "Expansion and Peace" was closely followed in the actual policies Roosevelt implemented as president. In his First Annual Message to Congress, Roosevelt explained his plans relating to uplift in the Philippines in great detail. He described the Philippines as "very rich tropical islands, inhabited by many varying tribes, representing widely different stages of progress toward civilization." American government in the Islands is aiming "to help these people upward along the stony and difficult path that leads to self-government." Our goals in the Island are noble. "Our aim is high. We do not desire to do for the islanders merely what has elsewhere been done for tropic peoples by even the best

⁷⁷ See Grant, "Taft on America and the Philippines," 130-31 on the contrast between the founders and the early Progressives on the issue of expansion. Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006) provides a thorough treatment of the transformation of constitutional law required to justify the new imperialism. Robert Statham, *Colonial Constitutionalism: The Tyranny of United States' Offshore Territorial Policy and Relations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002) describes the problematic constitutional status of American overseas territories. The United States today still governs a large colonial empire where the subjects are denied the fullness of American citizenship. For instance, none of the citizens of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the US Virgin Islands, or the Northern Mariana Islands are represented in Congress on equal terms with citizens of the fifty states.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

foreign governments. We hope to do for them what has never before been done for any people of the tropics—to make them fit for self-government after the fashion of the really free nations.”⁷⁸ As president, Roosevelt was eminently clear about his intention to uplift the numerous Filipino tribes from their disparate levels of civilization into a condition where they could govern themselves.

He understood this expansion of civilization would not be easy. “What has taken us thirty generations to achieve, we cannot expect to see another race accomplish out of hand, especially when large portions of that race start very far behind the point which our ancestors had reached even thirty generations ago.” As in his pre-presidential thoughts on the matter discussed above, Roosevelt affirms that “we must show both patience and strength, forbearance and steadfast resolution.”⁷⁹ The United States must act like a good parent in the Philippines—patient, firm, and kind.

Roosevelt was totally untroubled by the denial of consent to the Filipinos. If anything, he thought we were perhaps giving them too much freedom. “In our anxiety for the welfare and progress of the Philippines, it may be that here and there we have gone too rapidly in giving them local self-government. It is on this side that our error, if any, has been committed.” The great danger was not in the denial of consent or the threat to American security posed by our entangling ourselves in the affairs of the Islands: “The only fear is lest in our over-anxiety we give them a degree of independence for which they are unfit, thereby inviting reaction and disaster.”⁸⁰ Roosevelt goes so far as to say that “there is not the slightest chance of our failing to show a sufficiently humanitarian spirit. The danger comes in the opposite direction.”⁸¹ The danger foreseen by Roosevelt was American indulgence; he admitted no other problems for Filipinos or Americans arising from America’s project of imperial uplift.

The actual government of the Islands under Roosevelt was based on The Philippine Organic Act, passed by Congress in 1902. The act shows what Roosevelt and others meant practically when they spoke of uplift to self-government. Concretely, uplift in the Philippines

⁷⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, “Message Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress at the Beginning of the First Session of the Fifty-Seventh Congress,” in *Addresses and Presidential Messages*, 316. The message is from December of 1901.

⁷⁹ Roosevelt, “Message Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress,” 316. See Yarbrough, *Theodore Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition*, especially 10–83 for a fine account of Roosevelt’s views on progress, history, and race.

⁸⁰ Roosevelt, “Message Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress,” 317.

⁸¹ Roosevelt, “Message Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress,” 318.

PIETAS

meant such American-style novelties such as religious liberty (requiring the disestablishment of the Catholic Church), freedom of speech and of the press, the right not to be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, habeas corpus, and prohibitions on bills of attainder, ex post facto laws, and patents of nobility. When the Philippine Commission appointed by the president deemed conflict in the islands to have ended, a Filipino assembly would be elected and assume the legislative powers previously exercised by the Commission. The executive power in the islands was a civil governor appointed by the president of the United States.⁸²

We see how serious Roosevelt was about America's duty to uplift the Filipinos. Many rights familiar to Americans were granted to the Filipinos, and steps toward self-government were taken. But it is important to note rights found in the US Constitution that were not allowed to Filipinos. For instance, the right to bear arms and the right to a jury trial were not permitted to Filipinos. The omission of the right to bear arms is an indication of the denial of the right to revolution. The right to revolution, as noted above, is ultimately the right to withdraw consent. The lack of a right to bear arms points to the fact that the Filipinos were not consenting to government by America. Roosevelt had already explained why consent was impossible—the Filipinos were at a lower level of civilization, and hence not equal to Americans. Similarly, the lack of jury trials meant that ordinary Filipino citizens were not part of the judicial process; judgment by a jury of one's peers means judgment by one's equals. But the United States could not, given the prevalent view, admit that Filipinos deserved to be judged by their equals.

This is not to mention the fact that the Filipinos had no share in the election of either their own civil governor or the president of the United States. Indeed, the Organic Act, which was a sort of constitution for the Islands, was made by the United States Congress; the Filipino people had no representation in the Congress which made the law. Roosevelt was serious about providing as much local self-government as he and other American officials deemed possible, but even after the cessation of hostilities this did not extend to genuine ongoing consent.

⁸² "The Philippine Organic Act of 1902," *ChanRobles Virtual law Library*. See especially the "bill of rights" in section 5 and the provisions for the election of an assembly in sections 6-7. A Filipino assembly was first elected in 1907.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

In the 1774 “Declaration and Resolves,” the Continental Congress had declared, “That the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council; and as the English colonists are not represented, and from their local and other circumstances, cannot properly be represented in the British Parliament, they are entitled to free and exclusive power of legislation in their provincial legislatures.”⁸³ The people of the Philippines were in the same status as the American colonists in the period leading up to the Revolutionary War—some measure of local self-government, but ultimately subject to a foreign government that denied their right to ongoing consent.

Roosevelt’s views did not change. At the very end of his term, in his last annual message to Congress in 1908, he was celebrating the success and advocating that America stay the course in its project of imperial uplift in the Islands. After praising the “moderation and self-restraint” of the newly created legislative assembly, Roosevelt offered words of cautious hope. “The Filipino people, through their officials, are therefore making real steps in the direction of self-government. I hope and I believe that these steps mark the beginning of a course which will continue till the Filipinos become fit to decide for themselves whether they desire to be an independent nation.” The Filipino people were thought to be on the right path, but Americans must be wary of thinking that it is possible to grant the Islands independence. “[D]uring the past ten years, the inexorable logic of facts shows that this government must be supplied by us and not by them.... [W]e can not give them self-government save in the sense of governing them so gradually they may, *if they are able*, learn to govern themselves.”⁸⁴ Even after almost ten years of American governance, Roosevelt was still forced to admit that the Filipinos might not be capable of self-government. “I trust that within a generation the time will arrive when the Philippines can decide for themselves whether it is well for them to become independent, or to continue under the protection of a strong and disinterested power.”⁸⁵ A generation might not be long enough for the Filipino people to assume a separate and equal station with the other powers of the world.

⁸³ *The Founders’ Constitution*, 1:2.

⁸⁴ Roosevelt, “Eighth Annual Message: December 8, 1908,” *The American Presidency Project*. Emphasis mine. The Islands did not actually become independent until 1946.

⁸⁵ Roosevelt, “Eighth Annual Message: December 8, 1908.”

PIETAS

In practice, this meant that Roosevelt thought America should be committed to managing what the founders termed the primary interests of the Filipinos for the purpose of uplift indefinitely. Carrying out this project meant that American freedom of action would be curtailed indefinitely too. Roosevelt's concerns about the Philippines as America's Achilles's heel, and the related consequences for American independence of action, were to be proven prophetic by the disastrous events of 1941.

Interventionism and the Confusion of Interests: The Roosevelt Corollary and Uplift

The dramatic transformation of American foreign policy under Roosevelt was not confined to the project of imperial uplift in the Philippines. As discussed above, the original Monroe Doctrine involved policy prescriptions which followed from the social compact theory of the founding. Respect for the separate and equal station of other nations and the desire to secure American rights required the United States to pursue related policies of freedom of action and non-intervention. Under the original Monroe Doctrine, the only reason for the United States to become involved in what would otherwise be the purely internal affairs of other nations was in instances where our rights were outright invaded or at least seriously menaced. America cast off these policies in the Philippines, and these maxims were also rejected in the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Roosevelt replaced the older Monroe Doctrine with a new interpretation which proclaimed the right of the United States to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations in the Americas for the sake of uplift.

A lucid explanation of the rationale for the new understanding of the Monroe Doctrine was provided by Roosevelt in his Fourth Annual Message to Congress. It must be noted that Roosevelt understood that uplift was first of all necessary at home—he did not advocate imperialism for the sake of civilization abroad without acknowledging that America needed to keep progressing in civilization. “We have plenty of sins of our own to war against, and under ordinary circumstances we can do more for the general uplifting of humanity by striving with heart and soul to put a stop to civic corruption, to brutal lawlessness, and violent race prejudices here at home than by passing resolutions against wrongdoing elsewhere.”⁸⁶ Uplift at home is a priority, but we must still be willing to go abroad to slay monsters in order to alleviate human misery and fight barbarism. “The cases must be extreme in which such a

⁸⁶ Roosevelt, “Fourth Annual Message to Congress: December 6, 1904,” *The American Presidency Project*.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

course [of intervention] is justifiable. There must be no effort made to remove the mote from our brother's eye if we refuse to remove the beam from our own. But in extreme cases action may be justifiable and proper."

Roosevelt understood "extreme cases" to mean "chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power." In other words, nations judged to be civilized by the United States need not be concerned about American intervention. "While they thus obey the primary laws of civilized society they may rest assured that they will be treated by us in a spirit of cordial and helpful sympathy. We would interfere with them only in the last resort, and then only if it became evident that their inability or unwillingness to do justice at home and abroad had violated the rights of the United States or had invited foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations."

This last statement seems to cohere with the earlier view of the founders: apparently only threats to American rights would bring about the intervention of the United States. But then we must ask why the statesmen such as Monroe and John Quincy Adams who had made policy in light of the founding principles specifically denied that America had the right to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations, yet Roosevelt thought it was necessary to claim that America could intervene in matters that, for earlier American statesmen, would have been considered to be affairs for separate and equal nations to judge independently. The difference lies in what Roosevelt thought to be a threat to the United States. The earlier view, as expressed in the Monroe Doctrine, was that our rights had to be "invaded" or at least "seriously menaced" before we could rightfully take action. Foreign nations had the right to determine how to best handle their primary interests, including decisions about their form of government. The new view, as we have seen, demanded that barbarism be opposed whether it threatened the United States directly or not; America also had a duty to address situations that could lead to great "human misery." The novel understanding of justice, which sees barbarism simply as a threat to America, allows for intervention to promote uplift.

PIETAS

Roosevelt's understanding of this matter is further clarified in his comments on the success of the Platt Amendment. The Platt Amendment granted Cuba independence, but it also allowed the United States to manage Cuba's foreign policy and explicitly granted America the right to intervene in Cuba. This can best be understood when compared with Roosevelt's understanding of what it means for the Filipinos to "participate" in self-government: it seems that subjection to a foreign power is compatible with independence, as long as the foreign power is acting to uplift the subjected nation into civilization.⁸⁷

The view of justice animating the Roosevelt Corollary is the same doctrine at the heart of the vision of imperial uplift in the Philippines. America has the right and the duty to judge the civilizational status of other nations, and when they are found wanting, the United States has the right and duty to uplift them in the interest of American national greatness and the peace of righteousness. America must then involve herself in the internal affairs of nations which do not pose any direct threat to American rights or independence; the earlier distinction between the purely internal affairs or primary interests of other nations was discarded. Roosevelt's optimism about the expansion of civilization through imperial uplift carried out by European and American powers continued after he left office.⁸⁸

The momentous effects of the changes wrought by Roosevelt are with us today.

AN AMBIGUOUS LEGACY

Roosevelt was the first President to articulate and implement a vision of progressive imperial uplift. America's venture in the Philippines proved to be unpopular, and open imperialism has never been the explicit foreign policy of the United States since then.⁸⁹ But the idea that America has the right and duty to bring about the peace of righteousness through intervention in the internal affairs of other nations is still very much with us. It is fair to say that both of America's political parties hold this view. Two recent examples demonstrate the prevalence of the idea that America has a right and a duty to uplift other nations into the peace of righteousness. George W. Bush, in his Second Inaugural Address, maintained, "We are led,

⁸⁷ See Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 218-19. Cuba was in this status until 1934.

⁸⁸ See Roosevelt, *African and European Addresses* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1910), especially 87-142.

⁸⁹ See Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, 94ff. Kagan, in works such as *Dangerous Nation* and *Boot* in *The Savage Wars of Peace* are examples of public intellectuals who have tried to revive overt imperial uplift. It appears that this view may be popular among intellectuals, but it doesn't seem to enthuse voters.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, IMPERIAL UPLIFT, AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

by events and common sense, to one conclusion: the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.”⁹⁰ This is not merely a matter of wishing for the best or setting a good example. “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.” Bush, like Theodore Roosevelt, believed that America should expand the contemporary view of American justice around the world in order to bring about peace. If anything, Bush was more optimistic than Roosevelt—Bush was interested in promoting his view of civilization in “every nation and culture.”

It is difficult to see any substantive difference between Presidents Bush and Obama on this issue. Obama, in his “A New Beginning” speech at Cairo University, offered his audience a lengthy list of changes that must be made to predominantly Islamic countries in the Middle East. At points Obama seems as if he is rejecting the interventionist doctrines of Roosevelt and Bush. He says, “No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other.” We are also told that “America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election.” But this argument is immediately qualified. “But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice ... the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.”⁹¹ Other demands related to Israel, nuclear weapons in Iran, religious freedom, and women’s rights. Obama, like Roosevelt and Bush, rejects the idea that nations occupy a separate and equal station in relation to other nations. Like Roosevelt and Bush, Obama does not distinguish between the primary interests of America and the purely internal affairs of other nations.

One may argue that the imperial uplift initiated by Roosevelt and the other iterations of this doctrine practiced by his successors have brought great benefits to the world.⁹² But

⁹⁰ George W. Bush, “Second Inaugural Address: January 20, 2005,” *The American Presidency Project*.

⁹¹ Barack Obama, “A New Beginning: June 4, 2009,” *The American Presidency Project*.

⁹² See Robert Kagan, “Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire: What Our Tired Country Still Owes the World.” *New Republic*, May 26, 2014). Kagan argues that America has a duty to continue to provide order in the world; he maintains that the US has been indispensable to beneficial world order since the end of World War II.

PIETAS

perhaps it is time to raise the question if we should consider returning to the idea that all nations, when not invading or seriously menacing the rights of others, have a right to be the judge of their own primary interests, including their form of government. It may be that America could best secure its own rights and best pursue its own lawful interests if it were not minding the business of much of the rest of the world.⁹³

⁹³ See Codevilla, *To Make and Keep Peace*, for an extended discussion of the need for America to mind its own business while pursuing a strong national defense.