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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1978 Volume III: 20th Century American History and Literature

Empire Beyond the Seas

Guide for Curriculum Unit 78.03.07

by Richard A. Silocka

This unit looks at some of the reasons why the United States acquired an overseas empire, earning the title of an “imperialist” nation. The narrative begins with working definitions of the different forms of imperialism that exist. The text then turns to U.S. history. Beginning with an explanation of the spirit of “Manifest Destiny” that ruled American expansionist policy, the unit presents background material to substantiate the claim that the country was fulfilling her right to outward continental boundaries. By the turn of this century, American capitalists were seeking new areas in which to invest their surplus money, new sources of raw materials to feed industry, and new markets for industrial products. Such economic pressures work in concert with a growing belief in the need for increased national security that would safeguard democracy for America and her allies. The treaty that ended the Spanish-American War (1898) reflected such expansionist enthusiasm (that, after all, had stimulated entry into the war in the first place). The narrative concluded with a summary of the course of American imperialist policies up to the outbreak of World War I. A detailed course outline goes beyond the narrative to include policies established under President Theodore Roosevelt. The unit includes a full explanation of appropriate resource readings in addition to lists of textbooks and audio-visual materials. Sample lessons include handouts and charts that can be reproduced for classroom use.

(Recommended for use in High School History II classes.)

Key Words

Spanish-American War History Imperialism American

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