

Racial Darwinism, Nationalism, and War:  
The Philosophical Foundations of Theodore Roosevelt's Foreign Policy

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### **Abstract**

*The early twentieth century saw drastic changes in American foreign policy, as the United States assumed its place in world affairs to a degree never seen before in the young nation's history. Although some of this shift can be explained by America's augmenting military and economic power, some of it can also be explained as a "scientific" and philosophical phenomenon drawn from various strands of Social Darwinism. Drawing from a mix of primary and secondary sources, I argue that Theodore Roosevelt's imperialistic foreign policy was influenced by the "racial science" of his day, a "science" born out of Social Darwinism. As such, I identify the key characteristics of the dominant racial philosophies (including narratives and myths) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and trace them back to biological Darwinism. Next, I identify the unique elements of Roosevelt's personal philosophies and distinguish them from other prominent thinkers of the day. Finally, I examine Roosevelt's record as president, particularly in the realm of foreign policy and tie his actions to these abstract concepts. My essay shows, in short, that abstract notions like Manifest Destiny, the Aryan Narrative, and Social Darwinism were instrumental in forming Roosevelt's worldview and were carried out during his presidency. American action in Cuba, the Philippines and Japan can be explained, to some degree, by hard power politics, but to Roosevelt, these missions took on a philosophical dimension that seems to be understated in the literature.*

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## Introduction

“Speak softly and carry a big stick.” This simple expression of the foreign policy of Theodore Roosevelt is an iconic and favorably regarded phrase in the lexicon of American political history. President Roosevelt’s foreign policy, however, was founded on concepts far deeper than the innocuous Machiavellianism of this phrase might suggest. Social Darwinism, a leading philosophy of his time, justified this imperialistic foreign policy because Roosevelt believed that the United States could be a force for progress on behalf of the less developed nations. Theodore Roosevelt adopted a complex philosophy that championed the Aryan race-- yet endorsed racial assimilation-- and stressed both the importance and unimportance of the Darwinian principle of “natural selection” in the development of a civilization. Furthermore, he incorporated the popular American philosophies of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine into this overarching philosophy to further support American imperialism. From all of these foundations, Theodore Roosevelt crafted a muscular, yet crafty and not purely militaristic, American foreign policy designed to “civilize” nations like the Philippines and Cuba, maintain American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, and allow the United States to continue developing the unique “American race” jeopardized by the loss of the Frontier.

This essay is divided into three broad sections. First, I establish the philosophical and theoretical context of the late nineteenth century, by establishing the widespread prevalence and importance of Social Darwinism, race theories, and imperialist dogma of the time period. In the second section, I trace Roosevelt’s writings and life circumstances to define the unique philosophical strands he developed before and during his presidency. Finally, I look to his actions as president in Cuba, the Philippines, and Japan where many of these philosophical foundations manifest through his words and actions.

## **Part I: The Philosophical Context of the Late Nineteenth Century**

### **Social Darwinism**

“Social Darwinism” is a philosophy that can be succinctly defined, but was also a philosophical phenomenon that transcended practically every division between academic fields and ideological boundaries because it appealed to nearly every subfield in the decades following the release of *The Origin of Species*. The “social” descriptor narrows the inquiry down to any realm of human interaction. Therefore, a Social Darwinist could be an economist who believes that unrestrained competition among companies and firms will result in the best products being produced at the best prices for consumers. Or, a Social Darwinist could be a political scientist who argues that the strongest will emerge from political conflicts and rule over the weakest in some kind of Hobbesian pact. Moreover, a historian can be a Social Darwinist if he views history as a process of man’s progression in technology, rationality, or any other characteristic. In short, “social” refers to any study of human interaction, which generally cannot be readily observed in some kind of pure laboratory setting.

“Darwinism,” of course, refers to the evolutionary framework spelled out by Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species*. Simple Darwinism is distinguished from Social Darwinism in that the focus of the latter is not (at least, exclusively) on biological evolution. Biological evolution features heavily in some strands of Social Darwinism, but certainly not in all of them. “Social Darwinism” can be succinctly defined as a philosophy where some aspect of human civilization or interaction is studied within the parameters of an evolutionary framework. “Natural selection” may be the causal mechanism of biological Darwinism, but it is not necessarily the causal mechanism of all strands of *Social Darwinism*. Although natural selection is prominent in the more biological strands, some strands of Social Darwinism adopt a more

behavioral explanation of why certain groups (races, nations, etc...) advance more rapidly than others. As such, this definition is vague enough to cover most forms of Social Darwinism without taking away the most crucial characteristic: the evolutionary process. Defining "Social Darwinism" *writ large* is not especially difficult, but because so many groups adopted the framework, one must be careful to clarify exactly which manifestation he is referring to when discussing Social Darwinism.

In addition to the connection to Darwin's biological work, Social Darwinism has social roots in Kantian philosophy. Well before Darwin burst on the scene with *The Origin of Species*, Kant had articulated a framework for understanding human nature that utilized a pseudo-evolutionary framework (McCarthy, 2009). To Kant, "progress" was achieved through the development of man's rational capacity- a process that would not be evenly dispersed among the various races. Although Kant believed that all races of mankind were "equal," in both a Biblical sense of being equal before the Maker and in terms of their inherent biological ability to reason, he also articulated a hierarchical ranking of the races that measured how far each race had advanced towards an "ultimate end." Preceding other great German philosophers, such as Hegel and Marx, Kant crafted a historical philosophy of linear progression culminating with a grand "end." The "end" that Kant envisioned was the "fullest development of human capacities" (ibid). These capacities, however, were not strictly limited to the realm of intellect and reason. Indeed, the first civilization to exist only constituted a political or legal entity in Kant's mind. Basic order was the only function of such a society. As cultures "advance," mostly through wielding more of man's inherent rationality, they also develop a stronger sense of morality. Ultimately, humans would be able to create a "Kingdom of Ends" where man's moral and intellectual capacities would reach their pinnacle (McCarthy, 2009). The "Kingdom of Ends,"

however, implies a drive towards a “monocultural world,” where all distinctions based on race, geography, gender and intellect would be rendered null as all people would have reached the apex of human development. This Kantian framework would serve as a model for Marxists, Hegelians, and Darwinians of all stripes.

As previously mentioned, the term, “Social Darwinism,” has been applied to numerous, often-competing ideologies that were prominent in the late nineteenth century. As Himmelfarb (1995) points out, Darwin has been cited by groups supporting completely contradictory philosophies for the past century and a half, such as laissez-faire capitalists, socialists, racists, and civil rights activists. The Darwinian idea of general “progress,” be it through “survival of the fittest” or some other causal mechanism, fit well with the beliefs of many of these groups. The most obvious example would be the laissez-faire economists, with whom the term is most associated, who argued that unrestrained competition among individuals and businesses would produce the strongest economies (ibid). Marxists, however, also adopted Darwin because they noted the parallels between evolution and the dialectic process. Similarly, “survival of the fittest” appealed to both Malthusians and “Group Social Darwinists,” like Theodore Roosevelt, who asserted that maximizing reproduction was crucial to the advancement of a race (Jones, 1982). Advocates of racial segregation looked to Social Darwinism to justify their claims of racial superiority because of natural selection and the disparities in the present conditions of the race (Himmelfarb, 1995). However, desegregationists also used Darwin’s work to argue that the intermixing of the races could produce the best offspring (ibid). On a less utilitarian level, advocates for racial equality often pointed out that sharing a “common ancestor” should be adequate justification for treating members of all races equally. In short, Darwin’s biological principles appealed to a wide spectrum of beliefs and causes, and pinpointing an overarching

definition of what constitutes “Social Darwinism” has proven impractical for historians and theorists because of these conflicting applications.

Despite the difficulties in crafting a workable illustration of how Social Darwinism was most commonly applied, the United States served as a giant laboratory for Social Darwinism in the late nineteenth century. Herbert Spencer, for example, was the leading intellectual who attempted to apply biological evolution to social phenomena, but his work was far more accepted and appreciated in the United States than in his native United Kingdom (Hofstadter, 1944). American academics of all leading intellectual fields (sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, and economists) were all too willing to apply the Darwinian evolutionary framework to their own research (Hofstadter, 1944). One of the strongest reasons for this was the increased ease of explaining the American status quo in that period of American history. For example, the ruthless competition among steel magnates and railroad tycoons was often explained away as a manifestation of the “survival of the fittest” or the “struggle for existence” (ibid). The example of the unrestrained capitalism of the late nineteenth century is only one example of Social Darwinism taking root and turning America into a natural laboratory during that time period.

Another clear indication that Social Darwinism was a widespread and critically important philosophy in the context of the late nineteenth century America was its acceptance and usage by philosophical conservatives *and* liberals, albeit for different reasons. Hofstadter (1944) considered Social Darwinism to be a “conservative” philosophy, but one that allowed for some of the most classically *liberal* of traditions, such as laissez-faire economics. While acknowledging that the terms “conservative” and “liberal” are, and have always been, rather fungible in the lexicon of American politics, Hofstadter nonetheless found examples where

Social Darwinism fit into the contemporary definitions of both ends of the spectrum. Social Darwinism could be considered a “conservative” philosophy in that it defended the status quo as the prerogative of the “fittest”- especially in the realm of economics. However, Social Darwinism can also be understood as a “liberal” philosophy because of its emphasis on the “progression” of mankind towards a more advanced state (even if these advanced states varied considerably in form). As noted previously, Social Darwinism was the choice philosophy of numerous left-leaning ideologues throughout that time. Eugenicists, Marxists, and Malthusians, for example, all found a way to incorporate the progressive principles of Social Darwinism into their particular vision of “progressivism” during this time. In the context of the late nineteenth century, Social Darwinism was a popular, widespread phenomenon that appealed to thinkers and practitioners of many ideologies and academic fields of the era.

### **Race Theory**

During the late nineteenth century, race also featured prominently in many facets of American life and thought. Darwinism, at this time, constituted a *sufficient* but not a *necessary* condition for the development of philosophies of racial superiority. As Hofstadter (1944) noted, Americans had been well-versed in racial theories long before the ascension of Charles Darwin. The theory of Aryanism, for example, had been penned by Gobineau in the early 1850’s, and provided some historical and scientific support for the ideas of Aryan supremacy. More visibly, America’s history of slavery and Indian removal, of course, far preceded Darwin, although those particular histories had been founded upon religious, economic, and romantic foundations, rather than biological science (ibid). Slave owners, for example, often invoked Biblical passages to justify slavery. Likewise, many expansionists looked to romantic theories (such as Manifest Destiny) to justify the removal of Native Americans and the conquest of Mexico (Hofstadter,

1944). Darwin, in other words, provided a new framework for studying race that proved to be quite popular in the late nineteenth century. He did not introduce racism, only a new way of justifying racial ideologies, philosophies, and policies.

What exactly is meant by the term “race?” The Oxford Dictionary defines “race,” broadly, as “each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics.” The key word of this definition is “physical”- implying that the crucial distinction among different peoples result from differences in their physical makeup. Therefore, differences in height, skin color, genetic disorders, hair color, eye color, and other physical traits are understood, in the current vernacular, to constitute the major differences between the innumerable races of humans living on our planet. A subdefinition that the Oxford Dictionary provides, however, broadens this definition a little further by saying that a “race” can be alternatively defined as “a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc...; an ethnic group.” Clearly, this definition marginalizes the importance of strictly *physical* differences that can be observed between people of different races and draws in cultural factors that may distinguish groups who roughly share the same physical features, but diverge greatly in other aspects of life. By this subdefinition, the Americans and the British can technically be considered to be “different races.” Although sharing similarities in terms of physical characteristics, the Americans and British have vastly different cultures (“rugged individualism” vs aristocracy) and divergent histories, and thus can be justifiably called “different races.” This implies that one’s understanding of “race” can be quite flexible and adaptable to the specific topic of interest. However muddy the definition of “race” is in the contemporary context, it was far murkier in the context of the late nineteenth century.

Madison Grant (1918), an influential conservationist and eugenicist of the early twentieth century, provides some insight as to what constituted race in the context of the late nineteenth century. In the introduction to his book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, Grant expressed his desire to “elucidate the meaning of history in terms of race.” He then went on to define race as the “physical and psychical characteristics” of the people he was studying (which were the inhabitants of Europe, at the time). Moreover, he claimed, “practically all historians, while using the word race, have relied on tribal or national names as its sole definition.” To Grant, race can be understood not only in terms of the physical features of a group of people, but even more broadly, in “tribal” and “national” terms. More noteworthy, however, is his use of “psychical characteristics” as a determinant of race. This implies that mental differences exist across the various races that are not strictly a function of biology (otherwise it would be redundant to include “psychical” in the definition, since any mental discrepancies could only result from physical differences).

Grant’s definition, as it turns out, is only the tip of the iceberg. Even if “psychical” characteristics are not strictly the result of biology, they are, nonetheless “hereditary” (Grant, 1918). Grant notes the “immutability of...bodily characteristics, with which is closely associated the immutability of psychical predispositions and impulses.” This suggests that some of these mental characteristics are, of course, biological, but biology does not account for all of these differences, in Grant’s understanding. “Social cleavages,” for example, account for some of the racial divergences among those sharing the same nationality (Germans, French, Russians, etc...). As such, Grant tells us that “race” is something “*entirely* distinct from either nationality or language” (emphasis added). Later on, he argues that the failure to distinguish between the three phenomena (race, language, and nationality) has been a “serious impediment” to “understanding

racial values.” “Nationality,” for example, is as fluid as the boundaries produced by a war or invasion, and thus is not as “immutable” as a physical or “psychical” commonality among members of the specific race. Similarly, an individual can often learn a language without possessing any blood ties to the nation of the language’s origin. Constituting “race,” therefore, are individual features common among members of a group that are permanent and hereditary, even if such features are not the strict result of biological genes.

Lamarckianism provides a more solid foundation for these mental characteristics being hereditary than Grant provides. Lamarck, in contrast to Grant, asserted the importance of “behavioral evolution” instead of exogenous structural factors like “social cleavages.” Although both emphasize the importance of biology to the adaptability and success of a race, Lamarck believed that biological changes resulted from “habitual actions” undertaken by humans in order to enhance their “own satisfaction” (Stocking, 1968). In doing so, these behavioral changes and impulses become as much a part of one’s DNA as genes that predispose one to a certain disease (ibid). Grant never spells out how exactly these “mental” factors are passed down, if not through biological means, but Lamarck provides a behavioral explanation of biological evolution.

Lamarck’s disciples, just like Darwin’s, adopted his framework and adapted it to suit their own set of beliefs. Some, like Spencer, used it to explain the “higher mental faculties” of certain races over the others (Stocking, 1968). Lamarckianism was also useful to Spencer in justifying the need for increased competition, as the characteristics needed for victory in a competition would be acquired genetically in future generations, advancing the fortunes and characteristics of the race (ibid). However, other Social Darwinists invoked Lamarckianism in order to emphasize the collective racial benefits of *cooperation* rather than competition (ibid). These figures wanted to circumvent natural selection, which would eliminate the weakest in a

society, by figuring out ways to progress that would not exterminate those who were not the strongest (Stocking, 1968). Nonetheless, all agreed that Lamarck's "acquired characteristics" helped to explain the perceived differences in behavior and mental functions that Social Darwinists observed among the various races. Moreover, "adaptability," in a truly Darwinian sense, elevated certain races above the others, both physically and mentally. Some of Lamarck's critics defended their own observations (such as an apparent "lung deficiency among Jews") using his basic arguments of "acquired characteristics." One crucial implication of Lamarckianism was the idea that "ongoing social processes could still affect racial heredity" (Stocking, 1968). In other words, races positioned at the top of the racial hierarchy would still have to protect their position because of the possibility that the "lower races" could adapt and eventually usurp their position, at least for those like Spencer who asserted a competitive view of human civilization. Although Lamarck's basic framework spawned numerous strands in the same way that Darwin's did, his basic rationale was a critical component of the dominant race theories of that day.

### **Imperialism, the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, and the Frontier**

One other set of theories is critical to understanding the foundations of Theodore Roosevelt's guiding philosophy: the American theories of the Monroe Doctrine, the "Frontier," and "Manifest Destiny." Each of these theories is ultimately rooted in the American Revolution and its aftermath, and Roosevelt strongly believed in all of these theories. The Monroe Doctrine had been the foundation of American foreign policy since 1823. This principle held that citizens of the Western Hemisphere were "not to be considered as subjects for colonization by European powers." In essence, this meant that European powers were to stay out of the Americas forever. Manifest Destiny, broadly speaking, was the belief that Americans had a sacred duty to expand

their borders to the Pacific, subjugating and civilizing the barbaric indigenous people that stood in their way, if need be. John O'Sullivan coined the term in his essay which spoke of a "new history" that included a "boundless future" for the nation that would culminate with the establishment of the "noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High." The "Frontier" went hand-in-hand with Manifest Destiny, as it represented the land that would need to be conquered for this "destiny" to be realized. These interrelated theories captured the imagination of many Americans throughout the nineteenth century, especially one future president.

Despite being a crucial foundation of starry-eyed expansionism and imperialism in the decades that followed, the Monroe Doctrine was actually an expression of *realpolitik* by President Monroe in 1823. In the wake of the carnage wrought by the Napoleonic Wars, Monroe sought to keep the Europeans out of the Americas for good, in order to safeguard the traditional American foreign policy of staying out of European conflicts (Gilderhus, 2006). The statement sought to codify the hegemony of the United States over the Western Hemisphere and ensure that no European power would be able to colonize any more Latin American or South American country. In practice, this doctrine would not only prevent war between the United States and the perpetually-quarrelling European powers, it would also give America freer access to the markets of Latin and South America (ibid). By establishing American hegemony, Monroe implicitly assumed a paternalistic role for the United States over the other countries of the Western Hemisphere. This meant that the United States would come to the defense of any American country attacked by a European power and that America reserved the right to intervene in any country in the event that the country "misbehaved" or did something excessively contrary to the interests of the United States (Gilderhus, 2006). Monroe's original statement, however, denied

the possibility that the United States would become a colonial power to fill the void left by the dying European empires:

...It is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can anyone believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition in any form with indifference. If we look to the comparative strength and resources of Spain and those new Governments, and their distance from each other, it must be obvious that she can never subdue them. It is still the true policy of the United States to leave the parties to themselves, in hope that other powers will pursue the same course. . . (Monroe, 1823)

The Monroe Doctrine, therefore, set a paternal role for the United States, but not a colonial role. As such, the Monroe Doctrine was an act of *realpolitik* rather than ideological idealism that, nonetheless, carved out a niche for the United States as the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere and would serve as a fundamental building block for the imperialist philosophies and theories that would emerge throughout the rest of the nineteenth century.

Compared to the Monroe Doctrine, the idea of “Manifest Destiny” was far more abstract and far less grounded in the principles of realism (in the language of International Relations literature), but just as consequential. Manifest Destiny had largely religious roots, but also incorporated elements of the Monroe Doctrine, Jeffersonianism, and Darwinism to create an imperialist dogma that emphasized the need for America to constantly continue to expand and conquer new lands. The religious foundations of Manifest Destiny can be traced back to the great theologians of American history, such as Winthrop, who emphasized America’s prominent position as the “shining city on a hill” and, perhaps, the modern incarnation of the Kingdom of Israel (Clark, 1932). Winthrop’s imagery would be echoed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, conjuring up images of a land personally blessed by the Almighty to become a temple for God to begin his eternal reign (ibid). These theological arguments inspired

the idea that America had some sort of exceptional destiny that would manifest when America could create an empire for God.

Several other influences, perhaps less honorable, also contributed to the power of Manifest Destiny in the United States. First, Jefferson's "empire of liberty" was a secular alternative narrative to the "city on a hill" doctrine articulated by charismatic American theologians. Jefferson's vision of a democratic, agrarian America certainly manifested in the societies that formed from westward expansion. Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase, of course, helped to make this possible by officially placing much of the western lands under the authority of the United States (Clark, 1932). Ironically, Jefferson seemed to foresee the eventual existential crisis that would occur once the entire west had been conquered by predicting that the Pacific Ocean would one day limit America's ability to expand. Nonetheless, Jefferson envisioned American expansion decades before it ever happened. The other major influence on Manifest Destiny was an idea of Racial Darwinism that emphasized the duty Americans had to "conquer the barbarians" and guide them on the path to "civilization" and enlightenment (ibid). Foreshadowing the principles of Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" (which would not be published until 1899), this view held that being farther along on the scale of "civilization" meant that white Americans had a duty to help the Indians advance beyond the "barbarian" stage in which they were perpetually stuck. Roosevelt, especially in his pre-presidency days, was drawn to these ideas, which all fused together to articulate a well-intentioned, but perhaps misguided, imperialist foreign policy.

Finally, the idea of the "Frontier" is important to flesh out. As we will see later, Roosevelt was one of many adventurous souls concerned about the "closing of the Frontier," which refers to the idea that settlers had no more land to conquer. For one thing, the American

government had defeated and subjugated all Indian tribes by the end of the century. This development allowed settlers to increasingly populate the west with new cities and towns all over the map, which in turn had left very few areas open to cultivation. To believers in Manifest Destiny, this constituted a crisis. To solve this problem, a new “frontier” would need to be opened up for America to conquer, subjugate, and ultimately “civilize” (Cronon, 1987). Two historians, Frederick Jackson Turner and Brooks Adams, developed addendums to the original Manifest Destiny theory that argued for overseas imperialism and resolved the crisis by simply requiring a new frontier (Williams, 1955). Adams, for instance, argued that American democracy *depended* on continuously expanding the Frontier (Williams, 1955). In other words, the unique morality and equality of American democracy would perish if Americans had no frontier to conquer. These arguments appealed to many prominent American officials, including Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Roosevelt, who wanted to turn the Turner Thesis (and Adams Addendum) into official American policy (ibid). If the new frontier was overseas, so be it. In Roosevelt’s estimation, as long as the United States had a new frontier to conquer, they would never have to risk falling into decadence and losing the unique identity of American democracy.

## **Part II: Roosevelt’s Philosophy**

President Roosevelt’s particular brand of Social Darwinism incorporated bits and pieces from many diverse strands of Social Darwinism. The roots of this strand go back to his childhood. As a young man, Roosevelt was instructed in both the Darwinian tradition of his aristocratic father and the pro-Confederate views of his mother (Bradley, 2009). Even though his father pampered the sickly, asthmatic Theodore as a child, he impressed upon TR the importance of the “vigorous life” as a means of ensuring the maximum physicality of the race. He “would not tolerate in us children selfishness, cruelty, idleness, cowardice, or untruthfulness” (Roosevelt,

1913). Throughout the rest of his life, Roosevelt would make sure to compensate for his lack of a “natural prowess” by training and avoiding the “idleness” his father detested (ibid). Not only did he believe that he needed to stay fit for the sake of his own health, but he also proclaimed that, “a healthy state can exist only when the men and women who make it up lead clean, vigorous lives” (Roosevelt, 1899). In practical terms, this meant that “the young men of this country should realize that it is the duty of every one of them to prepare himself so that in time of need he may steadily become an efficient soldier” (Roosevelt, 1913). His father also made sure to make him aware of his blood “stock,” which was primarily Dutch, but also a mixture of Huguenots (French Protestants) and other European nationalities. Such was the importance of stock to Roosevelt that he began his autobiography begins with a detailed description of his ancestry on both sides. His southern mother, whom he described in his autobiography as “entirely unreconstructed,” complemented these teachings by portraying blacks as racially inferior to whites. In spite of his mother’s influence, however, TR did not fully adopt any kind of southern narrative, instead completely supporting the Union both during the Civil War and after it. Ultimately, Roosevelt fused these parental influences together to create an evolutionary philosophy that stressed the importance of white supremacy, but retained some measure of respect for all races, at least to the extent that slavery was immoral.

Another aspect of his youth that contributed to his brand of Social Darwinism was his love of natural biology and Darwinism, itself. According to his autobiography, he enjoyed nature and wildlife from his earliest days, and aimed to become a biologist. As such, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* was immensely influential to the young Roosevelt (Yarbrough, 2012). Even if he did not realize some of the larger implications of natural selection when first reading Darwin, the work would place certain seeds of doubt in his mind about the role of a

Creator in creating, maintaining, and advancing human life (ibid). More specifically, the notion of “self-evident human rights” would eventually become less “self-evident” to Roosevelt, and replaced by a self-evident “struggle” among races that would justify abandoning these rights for a greater good (ibid). Regardless of how soon the human implications of basic evolution became apparent to the young Roosevelt, his childhood fascination with evolutionary biology contributed to his eventual core philosophy.

Roosevelt’s formal education played a huge role in the formation of his brand of Social Darwinism. Introduced to German literature and philosophy at the age of fourteen, he gained an immense appreciation for Hegelianism and other German philosophers (Roosevelt, 1913). By the time he entered Harvard, he viewed history through the lens of “survival of the fittest” and accepted William Sumner’s belief in laissez-faire competition as “canonical” (Yarbrough, 2012). At Harvard, he studied Sumner and other leading Social Darwinists, admiring their approach to history for its scientific rigor. Despite not being the greatest of students, Roosevelt was taught by the likes of Nathaniel Shaler who introduced him to widely-accepted teachings such as “Teutonic Germ Theory” in courses such as “German Historical Prose” (Dyer, 1980). “Teutonic Germ Theory” was a narrative stating that ancient Germans populated Britain and turned it into the great mother of all English empires. Furthermore, the blood of these Germans displaced that of other races in Britain, whereas it was absorbed by other races in other parts of Europe. As such, the English were the best descendants of the mighty Teutonic Germans (Dyer, 1980). In essence, many of Roosevelt’s Harvard professors neatly sewed many of his pre-existing Darwinian and racial beliefs into a narrative he would build upon in his own scholarship.

Although Teutonic Germ Theory and basic Social Darwinism served as the core of Roosevelt’s racial theories, his overarching racial philosophy was far more developed and

complex. As previously noted, his general racial theories were founded upon the “best scholarly opinion of the time” (Dyer, 1980). To Roosevelt, race offered coherent explanations for all manners of human differences, but he never nailed down one distinct definition of what exactly he meant by “race.” At various points throughout his writings, Roosevelt used “race” to denote differences in nationalities, languages, tribes, ethnicities, and other features (Yarbrough, 2012). An especially important “race” in Roosevelt’s view was the distinctive “American race,” occasionally termed the “Kentuckian” race (ibid). This American race was distinguished by a predominantly English bloodline, a thirst for adventure, and self-rule among the people (ibid). Unfortunately, Roosevelt uses the term “race” so liberally in his writings that no definition is universally utilized across his numerous works.

In general, however, Roosevelt’s definition of “race” seems to emphasize “blood” and “history” as the core defining characteristics. Skin color, of course, was another feature of Roosevelt’s racial theory, but he placed less of a premium on it than blood or history because it was merely a manifestation of the other two factors. In Roosevelt’s view, weaker races could eventually assimilate through breeding into the superior race, which would improve the makeup of blood in future generations. Moreover, Roosevelt believed that incorporating new blood into a race would strengthen the dominant race, rather than weaken it- as long as the weaker race assimilated into the dominant race, and not the other way around. Consequently, Roosevelt proudly boasted of being “like the Americans of tomorrow...for I have the blood of men who came from many different European races” (1910). Furthermore, such assimilation would spawn “new” races from the ashes of the previously existing races. For the “weaker” race, this process would result in the “dying out” of their old race as they either “rapidly change” into a newer race and nation or “completely die[d] out” in the way that “certain tribes of savages, the Tasmanians,

for instance, and various little clans of Indians” had died out because they refused to be absorbed into the dominant race (1910). If the conquered race chose to assimilate, however, the dominant race would pick up their worthy traits, as Darwinian Theory would predict. This assimilation would also benefit the conquered race because they would have “for the first time entered on the career of civilized communities” (Roosevelt, 1910). Therefore, asserting that “a great nation rarely belongs to any one race,” Roosevelt advocated for some degree of mixing blood with other races in order to optimize the stock of a nation (1910). As such, while factors like skin color were important, blood was the ultimate racial determinant to President Roosevelt.

“History” also factored into Roosevelt’s racial theories. To Roosevelt, history could be studied scientifically, since history was the study of an “immense period where form succeeds form, type succeeds type, in obedience to the laws of evolution, of progress and retrogression, of development and death, which we as yet understand only in the most imperfect manner” (Roosevelt, 1910). Roosevelt made sure to apply this methodology and framework to his studies of history. A good example of this allegedly “scientific” approach to history is the aforementioned Teutonic Germ Theory, a narrative he took quite seriously. In Roosevelt’s view, the Germans were one of the few people who had managed to resist being conquered by the Romans, a victory that ensured the continuity of their culture in the centuries that followed (Dyer, 1980). More importantly, the victory gave them ample time to progress in isolation until they were ready to conquer foreign lands and spread their culture and blood around the world (ibid). Roosevelt excitedly chronicled the expansion of this race to England and their subsequent expansion across the seas and around the globe. The American “race” was, in his view, a worthy descendant of these valorous Germans whose “stock” and fighting skill had allowed them to defeat the Romans. Since racial superiority was not solely about genetic superiority, a race’s

“history” would help to account for some of the defining characteristics of a race that blood could not account for, such as courage and intelligence.

The Teutonic Narrative, which more specifically articulates the history behind Teutonic Germ Theory, illustrates the process of racial progression. Combining Darwinism with his Hegelian sense of history, Roosevelt ardently believed that a race, such as the Aryan race, started out in a “savage” state of consistent warfare and chaos (Dyer, 1980). During the rule of the Roman Empire, the Germans who survived would have been in this state, being disorganized and bloodthirsty. Eventually, after learning some primitive form of self-government and organizing into some semblance of a state, the race would progress into the “barbarian” stage, where they would attempt to conquer other nations and in doing so, would learn “military virtues” (ibid). In this stage, a figure like Genghis Khan or Hannibal would rule the people and instill the discipline, order, and virtues necessary to eventually become a “civilized” nation. For the Aryans, this stage might have been the domination of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons. Next came the stage of “civilized manliness” whereby the people would learn how to maintain order in society, yet would still retain the military virtues. In this stage, the race will expand their national boundaries, when necessary, and never fear to engage in combat with barbarians and others who threaten them. In the Teutonic Narrative, this stage is best exemplified by the worldwide expansion of the British Empire. This stage, to Roosevelt, was the ideal stage because it combined the strenuous life with the ideals of a well-ordered society.

When a race would become too complacent, however, it would descend into a “decadent” stage where the “growth of soft luxury” would lead to corruption, invasion, and decline (Roosevelt, 1910). The Teutonic Narrative reflected this with the decline of the British Empire (which would not reach full swing until after Roosevelt’s death), of which Roosevelt would

likely argue that aristocratic softness accounted for the declining ferocity of British soldiers, since this largely constituted his explanation of the fall of Rome:

There is nothing mysterious about Rome's dissolution at the time of the barbarian invasions; apart from the impoverishment and depopulation of the Empire, its fall would be quite sufficiently explained by the mere fact that the average citizen had lost the fighting edge, an essential even under a despotism and therefore far more essential in free, self-governing communities such as those of the English-speaking peoples of today. (Roosevelt, 1910)

As such, when the "virile qualities atrophy," the demise of a nation or race would follow because "the nation has lost what no material prosperity can offset" (Roosevelt, 1910). An important note to make about this process is that it was *not* unidirectional. A race could move backwards and avoid the consequences of luxury and complacency if the right conditions were present. Roosevelt's own life lends support to this notion, as he began his life in the stage of "over-civilization" (being both pampered and sickly) and worked hard to adopt the vigorous and virtuous life later on in his life. Roosevelt did not fear moving backwards into a more "barbaric" stage, but he did fear advancing into the decadent and weak stages of an "over-civilized" society.

One other aspect of Roosevelt's racial theory is important to note. Unlike some Social Darwinists, Theodore Roosevelt was not a eugenicist because of his racial views. In contrast, Roosevelt believed that high birth rates were *crucial* to the success of any race. In the same paragraph where Roosevelt denounced the atrophying of "virile qualities," he asserted that, "it needs but little of the vision of a seer to foretell what must happen in any community if the average woman ceases to become the mother of a family of healthy children" (Roosevelt, 1910). To Roosevelt, low birth rates indicated that a race was becoming undisciplined and "dying" (Dyer, 1980). As such, those who conscientiously avoided marriage or reproduction were nothing short of "race criminals" who were contributing to "race suicide" (ibid). Going back to the fall of Rome, for instance, Roosevelt casually mentioned "depopulation" as a principle cause,

along with impoverishment that needed no further elucidation because the deleterious effects were so obvious, even more so than the ill effects of losing “the fighting edge.” Roosevelt deplored the low birth-rates of Europe and feared that the United States would soon follow Europe down the path of suicidal birth rates. High birth rates were, therefore, crucial to the survival and prosperity of any race or nation.

Combining all of these racial factors together, it becomes apparent that “race” meant much more to Roosevelt than simple genetics. To Roosevelt, “race” encompasses everything from blood to history to culture to knowledge. Roosevelt linked race with the idea of “national greatness” in his general racial narrative and intricately tied conquest and military power to the idea of maintaining racial might. As such, a race could be a tribe, nation, or any group with a unique “common ancestor.” Moreover, Roosevelt did not believe that the characteristics of a race were immutable because he believed that all races were “equipotent” in their ability to reach the same levels of grandeur (and eventually decadence) over time because of the general “common ancestor” of all races (Dyer, 1980). In Roosevelt’s estimation, exogenous factors like “environment” and “education” could compensate for any genetic deficiencies among the members of a race (ibid). At the time of his writings, however, Roosevelt believed that the Aryan race represented the highest levels of civilization, while other races (save the Japanese) were languishing in the “savage” or “barbarian” stages, and likely would be for the long-term (Roosevelt, 1913, 210).

### **Roosevelt and Imperialist Philosophies**

In his *Autobiography*, Roosevelt asserted that “In foreign affairs, the principle from which we never deviated was to have the nation behave toward other nations precisely as a strong, honorable, and upright man behaves in dealing with his fellow-men” (Roosevelt, 1913).

Moreover, “it is wicked for the Nation to fail in either justice, courtesy, or consideration when dealing with any other power, big or small” (Roosevelt, 1913). Although peace would be preferable to “unjust war,” Roosevelt held that America had a “duty always to act not only justly, but generously towards the weak” which indicates a sense that America should use her military prowess to protect her weaker neighbors in the Americas (ibid). In Roosevelt’s eyes, these actions are consistent with the goal of acting “honorably” towards all other nations. Clearly, some sense of idealism permeated the thinking of Roosevelt in the realm of foreign policy.

In his 1904 “Statement to Congress,” President Roosevelt articulated his famous “Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.” During this speech, Roosevelt not only defended the existing Monroe Doctrine, but he expanded it to assert America’s right to actively intervene anywhere in the Western Hemisphere where the United States’ interests were jeopardized by European powers:

All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous... 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.... 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. (Roosevelt, 1904)

Furthermore, he passionately argued that the United States had the *duty* to actively intervene in any American nation being overrun by coups and other “extreme cases in which such a course is justifiable” (ibid). Noting that no international tribunal existed to prevent or punish international wrongdoing, he asserted that “a self-respecting, just, and far-seeing nation should... keep prepared... to repel any wrong, and in exceptional cases to take action which in a more advanced stage of international relations would come under the head of the exercise of the international

police.” Especially when a besieged nation is too weak to repel invaders, “it becomes a matter of sheer duty for some outside power to interfere in connection with them,” (Roosevelt, 1913). In other words, the Roosevelt Corollary granted America the duty to protect the innocent and work to advance the “interest of humanity at large” (Roosevelt, 1904). Ideally, this would mean that American involvement in a conflict would produce a truly lasting peace, not just the superficial “unrighteous peace” that would harm people more than help them. He added a touch of foreign policy realism into the mix by tying American interests to the larger interests of mankind, but his most important arguments from this speech were grounded more in idealism than in military strategy. As such, any future invocation of the “Roosevelt Corollary” would grant Roosevelt the right to defend American intervention using humanitarian language.

Hard power politics played as important a role as idealism in Roosevelt’s consideration of the Monroe Doctrine. Especially in his treatises on naval power, Theodore Roosevelt often invoked and defended the Monroe Doctrine (Burton, 1968). For instance, as Secretary of the Navy, he expressed his desire that American foreign policy be primarily devoted to “driving off this continent every European power” (ibid). Part of his support for the Monroe Doctrine might have been based on his love of the Navy (an interest of his since his childhood), but an underpinning of hard power realism was also at work. To Roosevelt, blind peace was the epitome of foolish and dishonorable foreign policy (Roosevelt, 1913). Roosevelt advocated “preparation for war in order to avert war,” which is the very heart of the Monroe Doctrine; analogous to Ronald Reagan’s notion of “peace through strength” eighty years later (1913). For the “American first” Theodore Roosevelt, the Monroe Doctrine would come in handy during his presidency and serve as the basis for his famous “corollary.”

Roosevelt's flavor of imperialism also made use of the language and logic of Manifest Destiny. This theory, perhaps more than any other, tied together Roosevelt's Racial Darwinism and nationalism. The widespread belief that the land to the west needed to be conquered was an idea that appealed to Roosevelt during his time as both a private citizen and a public servant. As a private citizen, he spent a large portion of his life out west, cultivating his "manly values" and doing his best to "civilize" the natives. Roosevelt believed, as did many Americans, that expanding westward would allow for a uniquely "American" race and identity and that it was America's "manifest destiny to swallow up all the lands of all adjoining nations who were too weak to withstand us" (Roosevelt, 1886). Indeed, Roosevelt termed such sentiments as "ultra-American" when describing Thomas Hart Benson's support for expansionist policies (ibid). The logic behind this belief was that as Americans would push westward, they would constantly experience a return to "barbarism" as they would be forced to defeat the "savage Indians" (although Roosevelt did not believe that all Indian tribes were "savages" or "full barbarians;" some, like the Cherokees, were well on their way down the "path of civilization"), conquer the natural obstacles and conditions of the land they invaded, and then build a democratic and civilized state. By constantly expanding, the pioneers would not have to risk falling into an over-civilized stage and the subsequent decadence, but would rather retain the vigorous, manly virtues of war and hardship. There were, of course, economic advantages to westward expansion (Malthusians were particularly excited by the growing availability of resources for an expanding American population), but Roosevelt focused more on the virtuous benefits of expansion (Pickens, 1981). In particular, Roosevelt wrote that expansion had created "peace" on the continent and had been indisputably beneficial to the fate of the nation (1899). At the end of the day, Theodore Roosevelt considered the "winning of the west" to be the "greatest feat in the

history of the race” (Burton, 1968). Even if he never directly used the phrase as president, Manifest Destiny was a pillar of Roosevelt’s imperialist philosophies.

### **Roosevelt’s Unified Philosophy**

Having considered Roosevelt’s belief in Social Darwinism, racial theories, and American expansion, we can combine them to forge a model of the foundations of Roosevelt’s foreign policy. Ultimately, Roosevelt’s ideals were grounded in racial theories, nationalism, and Darwinian principles. President Roosevelt believed that Darwinian methodology was the most appropriate way to study history and that races constituted the base unit of civilization (Dyer, 1980). The Aryan race, descended from the great Germanic tribes who defeated the Romans, was the most advanced race at the time and had a duty, perhaps sacred, to conquer and civilize the less advanced races spread throughout the world. In doing so, the Aryans needed to be careful to ensure that any interracial breeding resulted in the gradual abolition of the “savage” races, rather than the Aryan blood. Aryan blood would be strengthened by mixing with other races, and this race would take on the distinct “American race” of manliness, intellect, and the ability to self-govern.

This American race was crafted, furthermore, by the constant westward expansion of the American people. By conquering the Frontier, Americans repeatedly returned to the “barbaric stage” of the civilizing process and strenuously worked to upgrade the territory to the ideal stage of “civilized manliness.” When the American boundaries reached the Pacific, and all the land in between had been conquered, the American race needed a new “Frontier,” lest the race descend into complacency, decadence, and eventual death. With the Turner Thesis and Brooks Adams’ modifications to the idea of Manifest Destiny, the idea of overseas imperialism became popular with the public, and especially with Theodore Roosevelt. Finally, armed with the Monroe

Doctrine, Roosevelt had all the justification he needed to ensure the imperial supremacy of the United States in the Americas. He then amended the Monroe Doctrine with the Roosevelt Corollary and asserted America's right to not only defend her own interests in the Western Hemisphere, but also to serve as a "big brother" to all American nations by claiming the right to intervene in cases of internal strife and oppression. One of Roosevelt's quotes from *Biological Analogies in History* succinctly sums up his nuanced racial policies: "In the long run, there can be no justification for one race managing or controlling another *unless the management and control are exercised in the interest and for the benefit of that other race.*" In sum, Theodore Roosevelt used philosophy to advocate for a humanitarian imperialist foreign policy designed to help all races and nations evolve to the stage of the Aryan race, regardless of the pace each race required to reach the ideal stage of "civilization." Once they reached this stage, then America could converse with them on the international stage as "equals" (Roosevelt, 1913).

### **Part III: Roosevelt's Imperial Presidency**

#### **Cuba**

Although Theodore Roosevelt was not president during the Spanish-American War, he inherited the messy aftermath in both Cuba and the Philippines and had to manage the subsequent insurrections. Moreover, having famously participated in the war as a member of the famed "Rough Riders," Roosevelt was in a prime position to witness the effects of America's participation in the war on the Cubans. For his part, Roosevelt enthusiastically supported American involvement in the Spanish-American War, believing the United States had a solemn duty to put an end to the "murderous oppression" of the Spaniards in Cuba (1920). Utilizing his sense of humanitarianism, as well as the Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt proudly rode out to war against the Spaniards (having resigned his position as Secretary of the Navy in order to have a

more concrete role in the war, itself) (ibid). In Roosevelt's view, the war brought out the "best" in him and he was proud of his part in the war effort.

As president, however, Roosevelt discovered that the great liberation of Cuba could not quite deliver the rapid "progress" he might have assumed in 1898. Believing that Leonard Wood, a close friend, had adequately prepared the Cubans for self-governance, Roosevelt optimistically turned power over to a newly-elected Cuban Congress and president in 1902; a mere four years after ousting the Spanish from the island. Boosting Roosevelt's optimism was the economic boom on the island that took place soon after the Cubans were granted self-rule (Burton, 1968). Roosevelt also took pride in the fact that he had "kept his promise" to the Cubans by granting them independence so soon after the conclusion of the war (Roosevelt, 1913). Unfortunately, the fledgling Cuban government was soon bogged down with charges of corruption and inattention to political minorities within the country (Burton, 1968). In 1906, protests and charges from these minority groups escalated into a full-fledged rebellion that angered President Roosevelt and called into question some of the philosophical arguments he used to justify imperialism. Roosevelt proceeded to privately call Cuba an "infernal little republic" full of people "unable to behave themselves" and apply the self-governance lessons of Leonard Wood (ibid).

In response to the crisis, President Roosevelt dispatched a team of diplomats, including William H. Taft, down to Havana to act as "special commissioners" to the government and to determine the necessity of American action in the conflict (Burton, 1968). The trip was not in vain; Roosevelt's team successfully negotiated a settlement between the rebels and the government that avoided American military involvement (ibid). Roosevelt then proceeded to declare the trip a "victory" for the Navy because of the role it played in expediting the travel

arrangements for Taft and his entourage. To ensure that he did not repeat the mistakes of before, Roosevelt made sure to leave a team of advisors in Havana once the Second Cuban Government was officially in power (Burton, 1968). Despite some bumps in the road, American intervention in Cuba was, on the whole, a success story for Roosevelt's imperialist philosophy because this intervention produced a relatively democratic government in a place that had been ruled by a European oppressor only a few years before he ascended to the presidency.

### **The Philippines**

A far greater test of Roosevelt's imperialist philosophy was to be found in the faraway islands of the Philippines. As with Cuba, the Philippines passed into American possession as a result of America's victory in the Spanish-American War. Unfortunately for the Filipinos, despite originally welcoming the American troops as allies against the oppressive Spanish, they would soon be conquered by these American liberators once Dewey crushed the Spanish in Manila Bay (Bradley, 2009). Transferring control of the islands to the Americans proved to be surprisingly easy for the Americans, as they mostly kept intact the existing governmental infrastructure left to them by the defeated Spaniards (Alfonso, 1970). Although the Filipinos had engaged the Spanish believing that independence would be the end result of the war, they merely traded one dying colonial power for a rising colonial power.

It was in the Philippines that the most obvious manifestation of Roosevelt's philosophical imperialism took place. Believing the Filipinos to be a "backwards people" in need of American "tutelage in self-government," (Alfonso, 1970) Roosevelt dispatched the loyal Taft to serve as Governor of the Philippines. To Taft and Roosevelt, talking of concepts like "consent of the governed" made no sense in reference to the Filipinos because, according to Taft, they required "the training of fifty or one hundred years before they could even understand what Anglo-Saxon

liberty is” (Bradley, 2009). Despite the fact that many of the Filipino leaders were western educated, Roosevelt and Taft concluded that the process of learning “self-government” was far too slow to entrust to the natives, as the island had a “density of ignorance and credulity” (Alfonso, 1970). Consequently, Roosevelt and the members of his administration convinced themselves that if they merely left the island and allowed Aguinaldo to rule the islands, they would be leaving the government in the hands of an oligarch, rather than the democratic government they wished to install. In short, Roosevelt and Taft believed (as did Rudyard Kipling) that the United States had a duty to rule the Philippines for as long as it took for the people to progress to a level close to that of the Aryans.

The “wise supervision” that Roosevelt believed America should exercise over the Filipinos did not go quite as planned (Burton, 1968). In general, Governor Taft made cheerful status reports about the conditions on the islands (Bradley, 2009). In reality, the situation was chaotic. The only Filipino ever targeted by Taft in these reports was Aguinaldo, whose government Taft derided as “corrupt,” “oppressive,” “oligarchic,” and “despotic.” Taft’s reports often ignored the guerilla warfare raging on the islands, which led to numerous atrocities on both sides, but especially on the side of the American colonialists. Ironically, Roosevelt had warned in 1899 that if the Americans were to abandon the Philippines, they would be leaving the natives in a state of anarchy and war that would inevitably result in “rapine and bloodshed.” Furthermore, the Filipinos would soon be dominated by a “manlier” power than the United States, and all hope of establishing a “peaceful and orderly government” would be lost. Whether or not Roosevelt’s fears would have been realized can only, of course, be the subject of conjecture, but regardless of how it turned out, Roosevelt truly believed that American dominion of the islands would help to avert the bloodshed it caused.

Roosevelt's optimistic predictions about the future of the Philippines never came to fruition. A combination of warfare and financial expenses began to alarm even Roosevelt's Republican Party, who adopted as part of their 1904 Platform a statement calling for the independence of the Philippines (Alfonso, 1970). Roosevelt, himself, eventually conceded that he no longer believed "America has any special beneficial interest in retaining the Philippines" as the financial and death toll began to mount over the years (Bradley, 2009). Although the United States controlled the Philippines until World War II, Roosevelt's vision of American tutelage liberating and advancing the "savage" Filipinos never came true. Unlike the Cuban experiment, which was at least a partial success for Roosevelt's imperialist philosophy, the Filipino experiment failed across the board.

### **Japan**

One case stands alone as a successful case of Roosevelt's intervention: Roosevelt brokering peace between the Japanese and Russians following the overwhelmingly unexpected victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War. In this particular case, which won Roosevelt a Nobel Peace Prize, Roosevelt treated a non-Aryan race (the Japanese) as more or less of an "equal" with the United States and brought a terrible war to an end (Roosevelt, 1913). Perhaps even more surprising, Roosevelt's sentiments had been on the side of the Japanese from the outbreak of the war, even if the government's official stance was one of neutrality (Dennett, 1925). Some of this support was definitely rooted in American interests; Roosevelt did not want the Russians expanding their influence further eastward. The status quo of Japanese control was preferable to Russian control, as far as Roosevelt was concerned (ibid). Regardless, this tacit expression of support for the Japanese discouraged other European powers from backing the

Russians and strengthened Japanese morale (ibid). In this part of the story, race clearly did not factor in to Roosevelt's decision-making as much as old-fashioned *realpolitik*.

After the cessation of hostilities, Roosevelt volunteered to broker a peace treaty between Russia and Japan at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. Militarily, Japan was the unquestioned winner of the war and became the first eastern power to defeat a European power (Dennett, 1925). Russia, however, enjoyed the support of the traditional European powers (Germany, France, and Britain), which opened up an opportunity for Roosevelt to exercise his skills in diplomacy and foreign policy as a negotiator acceptable to both sides (ibid). Certainly being a Harvard schoolmate of, and on excellent terms with, a top Japanese diplomat, Baron Kentaro Kenko, made Roosevelt more trustworthy in the eyes of the Japanese government. More importantly, however, Roosevelt had shown them more respect than his European counterparts and had been the first to openly declare neutrality among the world powers in the conflict (ibid). Ultimately, Roosevelt was able to appease both sides. The Japanese were able to retain control of Korea (formally annexed a few years later), which had long been a major foreign policy objective, but they did not receive any kind of indemnity payment from the Russians (ibid). This offer did not exactly please the Japanese public, which quickly denounced the treaty as being "disrespectful" towards their people, but it did codify a "peace with righteousness" (at least in a relative sense) that lasted until World War II. Throughout this process, Roosevelt's willingness to deal with the Japanese as "equals" ended the Russo-Japanese War, and earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.

What makes this case particularly interesting, however, is that factors like race and bloodlines *still* factored into Roosevelt's political calculus throughout the peace process and in his later dealings with the Japanese. Roosevelt's shrewd negotiations throughout the Portsmouth

Conference undoubtedly sought to benefit American interests, but racial dimensions still appeared. To make this possible, Roosevelt had to amend the Teutonic Narrative and other theories in order to accommodate his sense that the Japanese were “equals.” Therefore, he proclaimed that unlike the Filipinos, Cubans, or Indians, the Japanese had reached a point of “civilization in some respects higher than our own” (Roosevelt, 1913). He elaborated on this point by expressing his belief that the Japanese race and the Europeans were “as old as the other” but “have been separate and divergent since thousands of years before the Christian era” (ibid). Moreover, the “ancestors of the great majority of both the modern Americans and modern Japanese were barbarians in the remote past which saw the origins of cultured peoples to which the Americans and the Japanese of today severally trace their civilizations” (ibid). In other words, Roosevelt believed that the Japanese and Aryans had followed the same general progression over the course of thousands of years, despite moving in different cardinal directions. His willingness to engage with different races as relative equals showed that Roosevelt believed that the “ideal stage of civilization” is not exclusively available to the Aryan race; any race can reach that point given enough time, education, and training.

Roosevelt’s later actions towards Japan and the Japanese people were also unquestionably rooted in racial belief systems. This time, however, the results were not as rosy as Portsmouth. At least partially out of a desire to prevent the mixing of Japanese and American bloodlines, Roosevelt supported bans on Japanese immigration. According to Roosevelt: “an effort to mix together, out of hand, the peoples representing *the culminating points of two such lines of divergent cultural development* would be fraught with peril; and this, I repeat, because the two are different, not because either is inferior to the other” (1913, emphasis added). These sentiments, of course, seem to contradict his claims that “a great nation rarely belongs to any one

race” (1910). Apparently, intermingling between two civilizations at the peak of “cultural development” would lead to disastrous problems. Roosevelt thus informed the Japanese government, in no uncertain terms, that they were not to allow their people to emigrate to the United States, or else he “would at once pass an exclusion law” similar to the laws passed barring Chinese entry into the country. Thus, even though he was willing to work with the Japanese on the international stage and considered them to be “equals” in terms of their level of civilization, racial narratives still led Roosevelt to support and implement policies that only served a philosophical, rather than pragmatic, purpose. Roosevelt won a well-deserved Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in mediating the end of the Russo-Japanese War, but his decisions involving the Japanese still stemmed from foundations of racial narratives and Darwinism.

### **Conclusion**

Theodore Roosevelt was a man driven by philosophy in his private life and during his time as the President of the United States. Concepts of race and Darwinism contributed to his understanding of human societies and international relations. Although not completely deterministic, Roosevelt accepted that race was a key causal mechanism for understanding human behaviors. As president, Roosevelt undertook some actions reflecting his belief in a Darwinist process of racial development from the “savage” stage to “civilized” stages where a race is capable of both self-governance and expansion. Roosevelt believed that this process was facilitated by exogenous factors, such as environment and education, and most races could eventually reach the stage that the Aryans had already reached, given enough time and direction by the more advanced races. As such, Roosevelt created the “Roosevelt Corollary” to codify humanitarianism on behalf of the less-advanced races as a key part of American foreign policy. President Roosevelt tested these theories in Cuba and the Philippines, to varying degrees of

success. The Cubans did manage to institute a degree of self-rule within a relatively short amount of time, but the Filipinos were never granted the opportunity to try out self-rule until long after Roosevelt's death. Moreover, the Filipinos staunchly resisted American colonial rule and ultimately did not adopt the "Anglo-Saxon liberty" Taft advocated during the period of American colonial rule, despite decades of American dominance. Even his success in negotiating the end of the Russo-Japanese War was marred by racial undertones that manifested in useless immigration restrictions towards the Japanese. In spite of the mixed track record of translating his philosophies into a successful foreign policy, Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policies were greatly influenced by various strands of Social Darwinism, nationalism, and the scientific historical narratives that sought to tie all of these philosophies together.

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