

Lesson Activities

Activity 1: Debating American “ideals” and “imperialism.”

Activity 2: Does the Platt Amendment make sense?

Activity 1: Debating American “ideals” and “imperialism.”

Looking at the arguments made by each side in the debate over whether American can legitimately become an “imperial” power is a fascinating window into the late nineteenth century. For this reading you can have students select “most revealing” passages that they think illuminate the speaker’s thoughts. Make a list for each, and have them tally the points to see who makes the more convincing argument.

Reading #1: In Support of an American Empire.

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/in-support-of-an-american-empire/>

Readings #2: Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League (1899)

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/platform-of-american-anti-imperialist-league/>

As they read, students should answer the following questions:

1. Why empire? What is to be gained?
2. Why not an empire? What will be lost?
3. Can the US avoid having possessions in the Pacific and the Caribbean and still be strategically secure?
4. Do the altruistic arguments sincere?

Activity 2: Does the Platt Amendment make sense?

Using both the amendment and parts of the actual debate, students can re-enact the debate between the two sides. Break the class into two halves and allow them time to organize their points. Again it’s important to keep track on of the important points made and assess who has the better, or more legal, argument. A US-Caribbean map would help here as well.

Reading #1: Senate Debate on the Platt Amendment

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/senate-debates-on-the-platt-amendment/>

Reading #2: The Platt Amendment

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-platt-amendment/>

As they read, students should answer the following questions:

1. What are the key points to the amendment?
2. Why not have it?
3. Can one state legitimately manage the sovereignty of another?

Assessment

Two assessments are possible. First, the intellectual argument over American imperialism and the acquisition of territories would be ideal for a short paper that compares the major points that each side makes. Where are the arguments idealistic and where are the arguments practical?