Opposing Views of Imperialism: Mark Twain & Theodore Roosevelt

“I left these shores, at Vancouver, a red-hot imperialist. I wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific. It seemed tiresome and tame for it to content itself with the Rockies. Why not spread its wings over the Philippines, I asked myself? And I thought it would be a real good thing to do.

I said to myself, here are a people who have suffered for three centuries. We can make them as free as ourselves, give them a government and country of their own, put a miniature of the American constitution afloat in the Pacific, start a brand new republic to take its place among the free nations of the world. It seemed to me a great task to which we had addressed ourselves.

But I have thought some more, since then, and I have read carefully the treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem.

We have also pledged the power of this country to maintain and protect the abominable system established in the Philippines by the Friars.

It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make those people free, and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way. And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.”

**Mark Twain, *New York Herald* interview, Oct.15, 1900**

1. Why did Mark Twain originally favor the annexation of the Philippines?

2. What caused Twain to change his mind and become an anti-imperialist?

...I most earnestly hope that the bill to provide a lower tariff for or else absolute free trade in Philippine products will become a law. No harm will come to any American industry; and while there will be some small but real material benefit to the Filipinos, the main benefit will come by the showing made as to our purpose to do all in our power for their welfare. So far our action in the Philippines has been abundantly justified, not mainly and indeed not primarily because of the added dignity it has given us as a nation by proving that we are capable honorably and efficiently to bear the international burdens which a mighty people should bear, but even more because of the immense benefit that has come to the people of the Philippine Islands. In these islands we are steadily introducing both liberty and order, to a greater degree than their people have ever before known. We have secured justice. We have provided an efficient police force, and have put down ladronism [thievery].

**President Theodore Roosevelt, On America's Territorial Possessions and Interests State of the Union Address**

3. What reasons does President Roosevelt give in favor of a lower tariff or absolute free trade in the Philippines?

4. How does President Roosevelt say that the action in the Philippines has benefited the nation?

5. In what ways does Roosevelt say the Philippine people have benefitted?

6. Do you tend to agree more with Mark Twain or Theodore Roosevelt? Why?