

Fifty-Sixth Congress

Dec. 4, 1899 - Mar. 3, 1901

First Administration of William McKinley

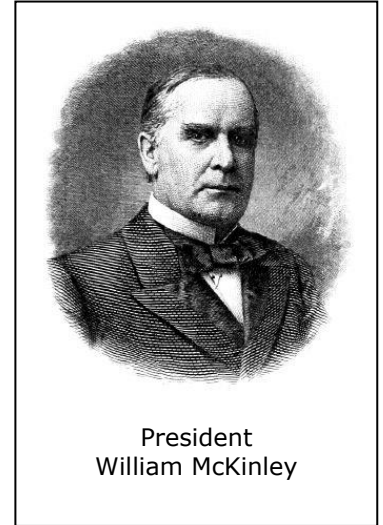
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Historical Background

Though relatively quiet when compared to those immediately preceding and following it, the 56th Congress represented a major turning point in U.S. history which would greatly impact events in the U.S. The quick and decisive victory in the Spanish-American War prosecuted during the 55th Congress suddenly thrust the United States into a new position: an emergent imperial power. However, considering the country's own history, there was great ambivalence among policymakers and the electorate about these developments.

In the immediate, though, Congress had to attend to the business of providing for the new role the U.S. was being called to play on the world stage, including forming civil governments in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Alaska. Congress created the Office of the Resident Commissioner for Puerto Rico, as well as provided a civil government and nonvoting Delegate for Hawaii, where it extended U.S. citizenship to the islands' inhabitants.

Another major question arising from the Spanish-American War was the disposition of Cuba, which had been liberated from Spain over the course of the war. Believing that an immediate and complete withdrawal from Cuba would endanger Cuban political stability and American financial and strategic interests, Secretary of War Elihu Root drafted, and Senator Orville R. Platt of Connecticut introduced, an amendment to the Army Appropriations Bill of 1901 limiting the power of Cuba to make treaties, borrow money, or change certain policies established by American occupying forces, and required the sale or lease of lands for a naval base. A second amendment to the same bill, sponsored by Senator John C. Spooner of Wisconsin, provided a temporary civil government for the Philippine Islands.



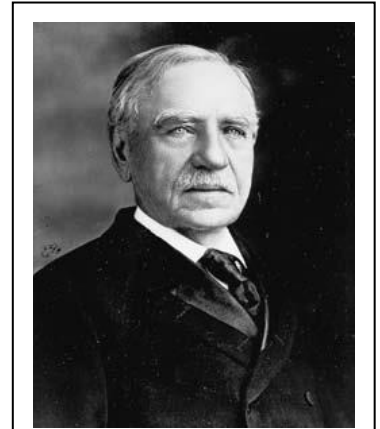
House	Senate
Majority Party: Republican (187 seats)	Majority Party: Republican (53 seats)
Minority Party: Democrat (161 seats)	Minority Party: Democrat (26 seats)
Other Parties: Independent (9 seats)	Other Parties: Independent (10 seats)
Speaker of the House: David B. Henderson	President Pro Tempore: William P. Frye

Throughout much of his first term and the previous congress President McKinley avoided any action which would return the United States to the gold standard until the chronic shortage of gold had been eliminated and the silver sentiment had waned. Finally, in his annual message of December 5, 1899, he called for legislation, and Congress adopted the Gold Standard Act, which he signed on March 14, 1900. The Act officially terminated the policy of bimetallism, in which currency was valued at a specific ratio of both gold and silver and could be exchanged for its value in either metal. Pressure to maintain the silver exchange by western mining interests had led to manipulation and a shortage of gold. The new Act established an exchange rate for the U.S. dollar based on a specific weight and purity of gold.

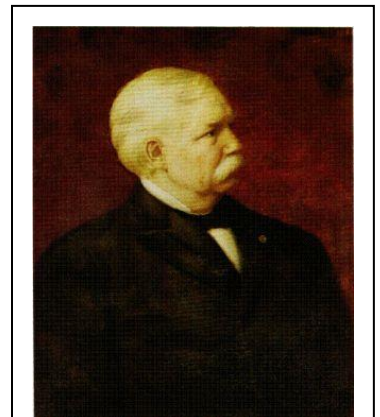
In November 1899, Vice President Garret Hobart died following a heart attack. Hobart's death left an opening on the Republican ticket in the upcoming 1900 Presidential election. Though many influential Republicans, including Henry Cabot Lodge, advocated he accept the nomination, New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt issued a statement indicating that he would not accept the nomination were it offered. At the 1900 Republican National Convention, however, Roosevelt signaled that if the convention were to offer it, he would accept the nomination, despite the opposition of President McKinley and his campaign manager Mark Hanna. In the end, Roosevelt was nominated, and it proved to be a decisive choice. The Democratic nominee, William Jennings Bryan, was a skillful and merciless campaigner who was deeply opposed to what he saw as a creeping American imperialism in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. Roosevelt argued that a continued U.S. presence in the Philippines was needed until such a time as the Filipinos can take responsibility for their own security. His arguments were persuasive and President McKinley was elected to a second term on November 6, 1900, securing 292 electoral votes and 51.6% of the popular vote.

Source:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005



President Pro Tempore
William P. Frye



Speaker of the House
David B. Henderson

War or Peace?

The Philippine-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, and Origins of Internationalist Policy

The Spanish policy of administering their colonial possessions with a combination of brutality and repression, meant that when residents of the Philippine Islands or Cuba called for support in resisting Spanish imperialism, policymakers and voters in the U.S. related their circumstances to the U.S.'s own struggle for independence. However, military and civilian planners also recognized the strategic advantages control of these territories would convey, resulting in the ideological conflict which would be a focal point of debate over the upcoming years. Would it be a betrayal of the founding ideals of the United States to exploit extraterritorial possessions

gained in the prosecution of conflicts with other imperial states for the strategic advantage of the United States? Or, would it be a betrayal of American interests to leave such territorial interests to be exploited by others?

These questions would not be long in being put to the test. Shortly after the end of the Spanish-American War and two days before the Senate ratified the corresponding peace treaty, fighting erupted between occupying U.S. forces and Filipino revolutionaries on February 4, 1899 in the Battle of Manila. The First Philippine Republic officially declared war on the United States on June 2, 1899, seeking independence this time from the United States. While the U.S. had justified its entry into Spanish-American War by invoking the Monroe Doctrine and the plight of the peoples suffering under Spanish repression, holding the Philippines against the desires of the Filipino people proved more difficult to justify. Ultimately, continued U.S. presence in the islands was defended as a means to protect of the interests of the people of the Philippine Islands, specifically against the acquisitive tendencies of other imperial powers.

The U.S. initially experienced difficulty in confronting the rebels, in large part because the relatively small numbers of regular uniformed Philippine soldiers were fortified by far greater numbers of so-called bolomen—Philippine peasants who conducted farm labor in peasant dress during the day and participated in actions against the U.S. military armed only with bolos, a particular Philippine form of machete. The presence of thousands of combatants who were otherwise indistinguishable from ordinary peasants and the well-organized rebel forces led to several early American defeats and significant Filipino victories. However, in May 1900, General Arthur Macarthur, Jr. succeeded Elwell Otis as military governor. That December, Macarthur placed the islands under martial law and announced new policies aimed at mitigating the impact of guerillas and curtailing revolutionary activities among Filipinos. The momentum of the war shifted, though the conflict would continue at a low level until 1902, with the capture of Philippine President Emilio Aguinaldo.

In China, the dramatic changes being wrought by the increasing influence of foreign commercial interests and Christian missionaries began to stir up unrest around the country. In the frequently restive northern province of Shandong, an alliance of Chinese martial arts practitioners was organized, calling themselves the Yihequan, or Righteous and Harmonious Fists, dubbed the “Boxers” by missionaries in the area because of their dedication to martial arts training. In 1898, the Boxers began attacking foreigners and Chinese Christians, hoping to drive what they saw as pernicious foreign influences from China. By May 1900 the violence reached a fever pitch and Boxer fighters—supported by the imperial Chinese government—stormed Beijing seeking to cleanse China of all foreign imperialism. Diplomats, foreign civilians and soldiers, and Chinese Christians took refuge in the Beijing Legation Quarter and were under siege by the Imperial Army of China and the Boxers for 55 days. Alarmed by the situation, the Eight-Nation Alliance was formed, in which approximately 20,000 troops from Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Britain, and the United States,

descended upon China. The Alliance captured Beijing on August 14, 1900 and lifted the siege on the Legation Quarter.

However, not all affairs were punctuated by war during the 56th Congress. These years also saw the First Hague Peace Conference in 1899 and the creation of an international arbitration court at The Hague in 1900. The country participated in the Paris World Exposition and the Second Olympic Games. On January 14, 1900 the U.S. Senate accepted the British-German treaty of 1899, in which the United Kingdom renounced its claim to the American Samoa portion of the Samoan Islands. Furthermore, on February 5, 1900, the United Kingdom and the United States signed a treaty for the building of a Central American shipping canal in Nicaragua.

Sources:

Jones, Francois S. [*Correspondence \[Foreign Relations, 1900 \[following p. xcvi\] \[enclosed with 4069 H.doc.1\]\]*](#). Department of State, Feb. 3, 1900. 56th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.1/2, (S1.1:900). ProQuest Congressional, 4069 H.doc. 1/2

McKinley, William. [*Convention Between the United States and Great Britain to Facilitate the Construction of a Ship Canal, etc.*](#) Senate, Feb. 5, 1900. 56th Congress, 1st Session, S.doc.160 (Y1.3:G79). ProQuest Congressional, 3852 S.doc.160

Economic Trends and Conditions

The 56th Congress started in good economic times. Foreign commerce was on the rise with agricultural and manufactured exports bringing in well over a billion dollars. In his December 5th State of the Union, President McKinley noted 1899 was one of only two years in which manufacturing exports exceeded imports. The increase in manufacturing boosted the need for labor and drove down unemployment. Tax revenue was high and the Treasury held a massive stock of gold coin and bullion. Gold had become a major payment form throughout the country in last several years, putting the U.S. currency in a strong position for placing it on the international gold standard.

The second session of Congress saw similarly good conditions, with the 1900 fiscal year ending with a surplus of a reported \$79.5 million. Previous years between 1894 and 1899 had all contained deficits. The surplus was credited to a considerable reduction in government expenditures. The Treasury continued to have a large supply of gold and the Gold Standard Act saved the government over \$9 million in FY1900 with its new interest rates system. The Act's other effects on the reorganization of banking also strengthened and extended banking services to smaller communities, resulting in higher monetary circulation and greater business development.

The long economic depression that followed the Panic of 1893 made President McKinley wary of pursuing cases under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, though the Justice Department under Attorneys General Joseph McKenna and John W. Griggs would pursue certain antitrust cases during McKinley's Presidency. McKinley was temperamentally allied with a *laissez-faire* approach to commerce and was receptive to arguments that in some cases, the consolidation of an industry could be beneficial for consumers and

the economy at large. This would change, however, when an assassin's bullet brought a premature end to the McKinley Presidency and thrust his progressive reformer Vice President, Theodore Roosevelt, into the White House.

The conclusion of the Spanish-American War during the previous Congress radically altered the map of U.S. interests in Asia. With a foothold in the Philippines, U.S. policymakers and commercial interests set their sights on China as the next major economic playing field for U.S. businesses. At the time, however, the major European imperial powers, including Britain, France, Japan, and Germany, were vying for influence in China and threatening to fracture the country along their respective spheres of influence. Worried that they might be shut out of China before even getting a chance to compete, Secretary of State John Hay sent a communication to the governments of the major European imperial powers, requesting that each formally declare their intention to honor the territorial and governmental integrity of China and not interfere with the free use of Chinese treaty ports within their respective spheres of influence. Though in each case, the governments attempted to put off Hay's request by delaying until all other imperial powers make similar pledges, by early 1900 an informal consensus was beginning to coalesce and Secretary Hay publicly announced the new Open Door policy with respect to trade with China. The policy itself had been articulated by Hay in the course of correspondence with leaders on the issue. In essence, the Open Door policy states that no imperial power will attempt to use its sphere of influence in China to secure preferential treatment in conducting trade and that China would remain equally open to traders from all nations. Though it would be referred to as a point of reference in future treaties, the Open Door policy itself was never enshrined in any treaty or other official document. That said, violations of the policy would be cited in complaints against various imperial powers, including a U.S. government protest of Russian incursions into Manchuria during the Boxer Rebellion.

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [*Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980*](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

McKinley, William. [*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, with the Annual Message of the President Transmitted to Congress December 5, 1899*](#). House, Dec. 5, 1899. 56th Congress, 1st Session, H.doc.1/1 (Pr25.1:899). ProQuest Congressional, 3898 H.doc.1/1

McKinley, William. [*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, with the Annual Message of the President Transmitted to Congress December 3, 1900*](#). House, Dec. 3, 1900. 56th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.1/1 (Pr25.1:900). ProQuest Congressional, 4069 H.doc.1/1

Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company v. Kentucky, upheld a state law requiring racial segregation even on interstate transportation, 179 U.S. 388 (1900)

Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education, a class action suit decided that sanctioned de jure segregation of races in American schools, 175 U.S. 528 (1899)

Smyth v. Ames, revoked a railroad tariff law in Nebraska, known as the “maximum rate law”, stating that the law was unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment in that it allowed for the taking of property of the citizens without due process of law, 169 U.S. 466 (1898)

Source:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1899 Events

- **Jan. 1:** *Spanish-American War* - [Spanish rule ends in Cuba](#)
- **Jan. 23:** British Southern Cross Expedition crosses the Antarctic Circle
- **Feb. 4:** *Philippine-American War* - [begins as hostilities break out in Manila](#)
- **Feb. 6:** *Spanish-American War* - [A peace treaty between the United States and Spain is ratified by the U.S. Senate ending the Spanish-American War](#)
- **Feb. 12-14:** [Great Blizzard of 1899, freezing temperatures and snow extend as far south as southern Florida](#)
- **Feb. 15:** Russia issues the February Manifesto, subjugating the Diet of Finland to Imperial legislation and stripping Finland of its autonomy
- **Mar. 2:** [Mt. Rainier National Park is established](#)
- **Mar. 6:** Felix Hoffmann patents aspirin and Bayer registers its name as a trademark
- **May 18:** [First Hague Peace Conference is opened in The Hague by Willem de Beaufort, Minister of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands](#)
- **June 11 – Sept. 21:** *Boxer Rebellion* – [Emperor Guangxu tries to quickly modernize China in his Hundred Days Reform](#)
- **June 11 – Sept. 21:** Newsboys stage a strike, refusing to sell prominent New York newspapers, until they are better compensated; they settle for being reimbursed for unsold papers
- **July 29:** [First Peace Conference ends with the signing of the first Hague Convention](#)
- **Sept. 21:** *Boxer Rebellion* – [on the verge of handing over sovereignty to Japan, Emperor Guangxu is stopped](#)

- **Oct. 11:** *Second Boer War* - in South Africa fighting between the United Kingdom and the Boers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State erupts
- **Dec. 4:** Webb Hayes, son of President Hayes, receives the Medal of Honor for freeing U.S. soldiers in the Philippines

1900 Events

- **Jan. 2:** [U.S. Secretary of State John Hay announces the Open Door Policy to promote American trade with China](#)
- **Jan. 3:** U.S. Census estimates the country's population to be about 70 million people
- **Jan. 8:** [President McKinley places Alaska under military governance](#)
- **Feb. 6:** [International arbitration court at The Hague is created when the Netherlands' Senate ratifies an 1899 peace conference decree](#)
- **Mar. 14:** [Congress passes the Currency Act, applying the gold standard](#)
- **Apr. 12:** Congress passes the Foraker Act, establishing a limited civilian-run government in Puerto Rico
- **Apr. 30:** Congress passes the Hawaiian Territorial Act
- **May 14:** Second Modern Olympic Games opens in Paris as part of the Paris World Exhibition
- **May 21:** Russia invades Manchuria
- **May 23:** Sergeant William Harvey Carney becomes the first African American awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism in 1863
- **June 14:** *Boxer Rebellion* - [Thousands of angry Boxers storm Beijing](#)
- **July 23-28:** *Robert Charles Riots* - Anti-black riots break out in New Orleans when the itinerant African American civil rights activist Robert Charles killed a white police officer while resisting arrest led to the deaths of 28 and injuries to over 60, mostly African Americans
- **July 29:** King Umberto I of Italy is assassinated by the Italian-born anarchist Gaetano Bresci
- **Aug. 14:** *Boxer Rebellion* - [An international contingent of troops later known as the Eight-Nation Alliance, invades Peking and frees Europeans taken hostage by Boxer rebels in the Boxer Rebellion](#)
- **Sept. 8-9:** [Galveston, Texas endures a Category 4 hurricane and severe flooding](#)
- **Sept. 13:** *Philippine-American War* - Battle of Pulang Lupa: U.S. Navy Captain Devereux Shields led a detachment of infantry into the mountains of Torrijos against the elusive guerilla commander Colonel Maximo Abad but they are repelled, forced to retreat, and captured by Abad
- **Sept. 17:** *Philippine-American War* - [Battle of Mabitac: When elements of the 37th Infantry Regiment and 15th Infantry Regiment advanced on the Phillipine city of Mabitac, they came under intense fire and were ultimately routed by Filipinos led by General Juan Cailles](#)
- **Oct. 11:** *Boxer Rebellion* - [Escorted by Russian troops, Li Hongzhang, the Viceroy of Zhili, arrived in Beijing to negotiate terms of peace, on behalf of China's Imperial Government, with the Eight-Nation Alliance](#)

- **Oct. 16:** ["Yangtze Agreement" signed by Britain and Germany in London, providing that they would oppose the partition of China into spheres of influence as an endorsement of the Open Door Policy proposed by the United States for free trade in China](#)
- **Nov. 2:** William McKinley defeats Democrat William Jennings Bryan in the U.S. presidential election
- **Dec. 13:** Max Planck announces his discovery of the law of black body emission, marking the birth of quantum physics

Sources:

["An Act To define and fix the standard of value, to maintain the parity of all forms of money issued or coined by the United States, to refund the public debt, and for other purposes."](#) (31 Stat. 45; Mar. 14, 1900). ProQuest Congressional

Bennett, Charles Goodwin. [Treaty of peace between the United States and Spain, signed at the City of Paris December 10, 1898, with Senate Joint Resolution No. 240, Fifty-fifth Congress, third session, and the votes upon said treaty and joint resolution and the amendments in the Senate.](#) Secretary of the Senate, Feb. 11, 1902. 57th Congress, 1st Session, S.doc.182. ProQuest Congressional, 4234 S.doc.182

Harden, Edward W. [Report on the financial and industrial conditions of the Philippine Islands.](#) Department of Treasury, Senate, Nov. 30, 1898. 55th Congress, 3rd Session, S.doc.169 (T1.2:P53/3). ProQuest Congressional, 3735 S.doc.169

["International arbitration. Convention between the United States and certain powers for the pacific settlement of international disputes. Signed at The Hague July 29, 1899; ratification advised by the Senate February 5, 1900; ratified by the President of the United States April 7, 1900; ratification deposited with the Netherlands Government September 4, 1900; proclaimed November 1, 1901."](#) (32 Stat. 1779; July 29, 1899). ProQuest Congressional

["Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico."](#) Congressional Record, 55th Congress, 3rd Session (Dec. 21, 1898) Vol 32, p. 363, ProQuest Congressional, CR-1898-1221

Jones, Francois S. [Foreign relations, 1900 \[...\].](#) Department of State, House, Feb. 3, 1900. 56th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.1/2 (S1.1:900). ProQuest Congressional, 4069 H.doc.1/2

Marshall, W. L. [Annual Reports of the War Department for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1899.](#) Department of War, July 12, 1899. 56th Congress, 1st Session, H.doc.2. ProQuest Congressional, 3910 H.doc.2

McKinley, William. [President creates Department of Alaska.](#) War Department General Orders and Bulletins, 1826-1954, Jan. 19, 1900. General Orders, 1900 No. 8. ProQuest Congressional, 1900-54-2

[Our trade with Japan, China, and Hongkong, 1889-1899 \[with data on quantity and value of U.S. bilateral trade in agricultural, mineral, and manufactured commodities\].](#) Department of Agriculture, GPO. Jan. 1, 1900. Foreign Markets Div. Bull. No. 18 (A12.3:18). ProQuest Congressional, A1203-18

[\[Request of Emperor of China for intervention by U.S., and reply of President McKinley: on settlement of Boxer Rebellion\].](#) July 19, 1900. (Pr25.2:C44). ProQuest Congressional, Pr2502-1

'Siege of Pe-Tang, June 20th-Aug. 16th 1900' in [Annual report of Secretary of War, 1901, Vol. 1, pt. 6: Lieutenant-general commanding Army: military operations in Visayas Mindanao and Jolo, and China, June 17, 1901.](#) 4274 H.doc.2/6. ProQuest Congressional, 4274 H.doc.2/6, map 46

'Sketch of Galveston jetties, Texas, showing effects of hurricane of September 8, 1900, on submerged outer ends' in [Effect of storm on jetties and main ship channel at Galveston, Tex.](#)

[Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting, with a letter from the Chief of Engineers, report in regard to effect of storm on jetties and main ship channel at Galveston, Tex.](#), Dec. 3, 1900. 4138 H.doc.134. ProQuest Congressional, 4138 H.doc.134, map 1

'Sketch of Navitac and vicinity' in [Annual Reports of the War Department \[...\]](#), June 30, 1901. 4273 H.doc.2/5. ProQuest Congressional, 4273 H.doc.2/5, map 16

U.S. Senate. 56th Congress, 1st Session. ["56 S. 2016 Introduced in Senate."](#) (Jan. 3, 1900). ProQuest Congressional

[Washington National Park](#). Committee on Public Lands. House, Feb. 24, 1899. 55th Congress, 3rd Session, H.rp.2300. ProQuest Congressional, 3841 H.rp.2300

Major Acts

Gold Standard Act. Declared the gold dollar of 25.8 grains to be the standard unit of monetary value and placed all forms U.S. currency on a parity with gold. Established a separate gold reserve of \$150 million, to be maintained by the sale of bonds, for the redemption of legal tender notes. Also authorized national banks with a capital of not less than \$25,000 in towns of under 3,000 population. Approved Mar. 14, 1900. ([31 Stat. 45, Chap. 41](#))

Foraker Act (Puerto Rico). Provided for the establishment of civil government in Puerto Rico, to take effect May 1, 1900. Made the Island an unorganized territory with its residents made citizens of Puerto Rico (U.S citizenship was granted to them in 1917). The President was empowered to appoint a governor and council. The council was to serve as the upper house of the legislature; the lower house was to be popularly elected. Both the executive and legislature were endowed with the veto power. Approved Apr. 12, 1900. ([31 Stat. 77, Chap. 191](#))

Hawaiian Territorial Act. Accorded Hawaii the political status of an incorporated territory covered by the U.S. Constitution and conferred American citizenship on all who had been citizens of Hawaii at the time of annexation. Approved Apr. 30, 1900. ([31 Stat. 141, Chap. 339](#))

Platt Amendment. Prohibited Cuba from making a treaty with any foreign nation which would impair its independence or contracting a debt beyond the ability of its regular revenues to pay. In addition, it gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuban affairs to preserve its independence and maintain law and order. Also required Cuba to sell or lease land to the United States for coaling and naval stations. Approved Mar. 2, 1901. ([31 Stat. 895, Chap. 803](#))

Spooner Amendment. Authorized the President to establish a temporary civil government in the Philippine Islands. Approved Mar. 2, 1901. ([31 Stat. 895, Chap. 803](#))

Source:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [*Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980*](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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