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## Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet: A Reflection of America's New Foreign Policy

A.J. Perry

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States generally followed President Washington's advice of avoiding entangling alliances. However, involvement in the Cuban independence movement and the development of a formidable industrial complex trapped America into becoming a force in international politics. The territorial gains from the Pacific and Caribbean campaigns during the Spanish-American War left America few choices but to join the global chess match. The aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, the disintegration of Imperial China, the second wave of colonial imperialism, and ethnic tensions in Europe made enduring peace fragile. Against a background of tension and industrial economic change, President Theodore Roosevelt dramatically orchestrated the United States' introduction to global involvement and realpolitik.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically using battleships as ambassadors of goodwill, Roosevelt's carefully staged Great White Fleet tour symbolized a new muscular, interventionist American foreign policy.

Other countries met America's upstart meddling in international politics with reluctance. American exceptionalism, coupled with the Western belief in the White Man's Burden, legitimized colonial territorial acquisitions resulting from the McKinley-Era Spanish-

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 43.

American War.<sup>2</sup> President Roosevelt's successful negotiation of the Treaty of Portsmouth between Russia and Japan (1905) and influence in averting a war in Europe during the Algeciras Conference (1906) further solidified the United States' international role in negotiating foreign disputes.<sup>3</sup> Roosevelt's guidance in foreign politics provided him leeway to flex his diplomatic and imperialist muscles with his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. While the Monroe Doctrine passively asked the European powers to refrain from intervening or re-colonizing the Western Hemisphere, the Roosevelt Corollary defended America's role as policeman in the West.<sup>4</sup> The Roosevelt Corollary asserted America's strong-arm tactics in protecting its political stability and financial propriety in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>5</sup> The Corollary also justified the primary objective of the Navy's Pacific presence. Predating the Civil War, the role of Navy was to maintain military

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<sup>2</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 323; Margaret Werry, "The Greatest Show on Earth: Political Spectacle, Spectacular Politics, and the American Pacific," *Theatre Journal* 57.3, (2005), [http://0-muse.jhu.edu.sculib.scu.edu/journals/theatre\\_journal/v057/57.3werry.html](http://0-muse.jhu.edu.sculib.scu.edu/journals/theatre_journal/v057/57.3werry.html), (4 April 2006), 362-363; Matthew Josephson, *The President Makers: The Culture of Politics and Leadership in an Age of Enlightenment 1896-1919*, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1940), 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 182; Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 37; Bruce Miroff, *Icons of Democracy: American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, & Democrats*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 185; Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 226, 249.



readiness and protect United States commercial interests in the Pacific.<sup>6</sup> The annexation of Hawaii and territorial gains in the Spanish-American War, the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, and Roosevelt's dedication to protecting the United States' maritime interests via the Navy granted Roosevelt the autonomy to commit the United States' naval forces to America's protection as he saw fit.

According to Roosevelt, the growing interests of the United States demanded a Central American canal and a unified American battle fleet.<sup>7</sup> Roosevelt and the High Command agreed it was best to keep the fleet together; however, neither coast accepted reallocation of its naval forces.<sup>8</sup> America's cause for concern lay in geographic obstacles preventing the swift transfer of battleships from coast-to-coast during the Spanish-American War. Illustrating the issue, the record pace of the battleship *USS Oregon* in reunifying with the Atlantic Fleet from the Pacific Coast was overshadowed by its arrival at the war's end.<sup>9</sup> Fortunately, the United States did not require the additional services of West Coast warships to fight in the Caribbean during the Spanish-American War.

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<sup>6</sup> See Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Gunboat Diplomacy and the Old Navy 1887-1889*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 127; Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 226.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*, "Preparing for War: To John Davis Long," ed. Louis Auchincloss, (New York: Library of America, 2004), 331-332.

<sup>8</sup> James W. Hammond Jr., "A Fleet for All Seasons," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 108, no. 12 (Annapolis, MD: December 1982), 71, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon Carpenter O'Gara, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of the Modern Navy*, (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1943), 5.

The Russians faced a similar divided fleet problem during the Russo-Japanese War, where part of their fleet was in the Pacific and the rest in the Baltic Sea. The Japanese High Naval Command made the Russians pay for their naval division and thus easily established naval dominance in the Western Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Roosevelt, as former Assistant Secretary of the Navy and then president, learned from the precedents of the Spanish-American War and Russo-Japanese War: a divided fleet is worse than putting all of one's ships on one coast.<sup>11</sup>

Roosevelt's passion for the Navy and private correspondence with Alfred Thayer Mahan, a progressive naval strategist and author of the popular book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783*, inspired Roosevelt's dedication to a vigorous bicoastal battleship building policy, and the subsequent the abandonment of America's isolationist tradition. The fear of Japanese hegemony, direct attacks in the American Pacific, and a naval arms race between the Germans and British in the Atlantic demanded Roosevelt's direct attention.<sup>12</sup> While the East Coast pos-

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<sup>10</sup> James R. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, (Annapolis, MD: Bluejacket Books, 1988), 12; John D. Alden, *The American Steel Navy: A Photographic History of the U.S. Navy from the Introduction of the Steel Hull in 1883 to the Cruise of the Great White Fleet 1907-1909*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1972), 333.

<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt, *Letters and Speeches*, "The Great White Fleet: To Lawrence Fraser Abbott," 529, 530;" Ibid. "Keeping the Fleet Undivided: To Franklin Delano Roosevelt," 681; "What Is Left of the Navy in Atlantic Waters," *New York Times*, 19 January 1908.

<sup>12</sup> Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*, "Praise for "A Naval Classic: To Alfred Thayer Mahan," 45; Werry, 361, 362, 367.



sessed a majority of the battle fleet, the West Coast, incited by yellow journalism, feared Japanese retribution for the discriminatory regulations against Japanese-Americans in San Francisco and thus demanded significant naval protection.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing that the core of naval superiority rested in battleship fleets, the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs successfully petitioned a now divided Congress to allocate more funding for ships.<sup>14</sup>

The end result of Roosevelt's battleship building policy from 1904 to 1907 was fourteen modern battleships servicing both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets.<sup>15</sup> Adding to the spectacular modern nature of the new warships, Roosevelt requested the Atlantic fleet be painted an uncharacteristic color – white.<sup>16</sup> Warships traditionally had spar (grey) color hulls to camouflage the boat against the ocean, and thus confuse the

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<sup>13</sup> Robert A. Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 31; Brayton Harris, *The Age of the Battleship 1890-1922*, (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1965), 117; Kenneth J. Hagan, *The People's Navy: The Making of American Sea Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 239.

<sup>14</sup> Hepburn, Rep. [IA], "Thirty Reasons Why Our Navy Should Not be Enlarged" *Congressional Record* (22 January 1909), 1308-1309; "\$12,000,000 For Battleships." *New York Times*. 19 February 1907; Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Mike McKinley, "The Cruise of the Great White Fleet," *Navy Department Library*, 19 October 2004, <[http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/gwf\\_cruise.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/gwf_cruise.htm)>, (7 May 2006).

<sup>16</sup> *General Instructions for Painting and Cementing Vessels of the United States Navy: Approved by the Naval Department April 24, 1908*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), 29.

enemy on the vessels' distance and speed.<sup>17</sup> Admiral Sperry, one of the admirals of the repainted Atlantic Fleet, further noted that one of the drawbacks of the white ships was the ease in targeting them, especially during night gunnery practice.<sup>18</sup> The tactical advantage of spar was overlooked for the symbolic significance (goodwill) and theatrical value of painting the fleet white.

Plausible motivations for choosing white include: the constant maintenance required to keep the coal burning ships from darkening would occupy the crew while they were not drilling; the color white suggests peacefulness or goodwill (e.g. raising a white flag during battle or hospital ship); or more realistically, Roosevelt wanted his fleet to stand out among all others for his greatest stunt yet.<sup>19</sup> Officially, the new white Atlantic fleet would undergo a "practice cruise" around the Cape Horn to San Francisco; however, privately Roosevelt sought to parade his new fleet on a global circuit.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mal Wright, "Warship Colour Schemes of World War I," *The World War I Document Archive*, 12 July 1999, <<http://www.gwpda.org/naval/s1200000.htm>> (16 May 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 601-602.

<sup>19</sup> *General Instructions for Painting and Cementing Vessels of the United States Navy: Approved by the Naval Department March 31, 1910*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 592; Kenneth Wimmel, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet: America Sea Power Comes of Age* (Washington: Brassey's Inc. 1998), 223; Harris, *The Age of the Battleship 1890-1922*, 118; Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The True Significance of the Pacific Cruise," *Scientific American* 97, (7 December 1907), 407.



Although Roosevelt states in his 1913 *Autobiography* that his intention of sending what is known as the "Great White Fleet" on a world tour was purely to "impress the American people; and this purpose was fully achieved" scholars suggest Roosevelt really sought to impress an international audience.<sup>21</sup> Scholars recognize that Roosevelt's selfish intention in sending the fleet abroad was to counter growing Japanese hegemony in the Pacific, and to maintain positive relations with other ethnically white nations. While scholars judge the Great White Fleet as Roosevelt's attempt to militarily subdue rising tensions with the Japanese and to improve America's standing abroad, contemporary accounts from the media, Congress, and former naval officers criticized the fleet's structural and geographical distance vulnerabilities.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the older ships attached to the Atlantic fleet still fell under the classification of "coast defense battle-ships" and were ill-suited for a world cruise without constant refueling and renovation to cope with large munitions and waves.<sup>23</sup> Other considerations that should have deterred Roosevelt from committing the Great White Fleet to the 43,000 mile journey include, but are not limited to, the strong chance that the "White Armada" was seen as a hostile and easily targeted threat to foreign vessels; the potential to

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<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 593.

<sup>22</sup> See Wimmel, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet*, xi; Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet* 334; Roosevelt contradicts self: Josephson, 263; Harris, *The Age of the Battleship 1890-1922*, 118; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1908*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), 467.

<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 226.



escalate European military tensions; the lack of non-foreign collier vessels and cost of fueling the fleet; the diminished impression the touring battleships would make with the unveiling of the British *HMS Dreadnought* in 1907; and public reservation if America's prestige was worth sixteen battleships, thousands of seamen, and millions of dollars in investments.<sup>24</sup>

The above arguments did not hinder the popularity of the world cruise because Roosevelt's order to circumnavigate the globe did not occur until after the fleet launched and the propaganda team worked overtime. Any opposition to Roosevelt's Great White Traveling Circus died with its successful and relatively unscathed return home.<sup>25</sup> President Roosevelt's speech upon its return to the States on 22 February 1909 confirmed his rationale for sending the fleet abroad when he stated, "This is the first battle fleet that has ever circumnavigated the globe...As a war machine, the fleet comes back in better shape than it went out. In addition, you...have shown yourself the best of all ambassadors and heralds of peace."<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, the Great White Fleet's cruise successfully culminated Roosevelt's symbolic effort to promote American goodwill with battleships as ambassadors.

Robert A. Hart, a leading authority on the fleet and its travels, uniquely identifies the battleship as "a

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<sup>24</sup> See Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 25, 54, 55; Wimmel, *Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 243; "Lessons and Results of the Battleship Cruise." *Scientific American* 100 (20 February 1909), 146.

<sup>25</sup> See Rufus Fairchild Zogbaum, "A Fleet in Being," *Outlook* 89,1 (2 May 1908), 20; "Fleet's Trip for Peace." *New York Times*. 11 May 1908.

<sup>26</sup> Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 605.

paradox of power and beauty, [it] demanded attention – the pride and affection of people whose flag it flew and the envy and fear of adversaries.<sup>27</sup> Those who controlled and paraded these technologically advanced and awe-inspiring vessels garnered prestige.<sup>28</sup> Thus, to further play up the splendor of the cruise, Roosevelt had the Atlantic Fleet begin their voyage pulling out of Hampton Roads with Roosevelt's presidential yacht, the *USS Mayflower* trailing the battleship flotilla.<sup>29</sup> Both the *Mayflower* and Hampton Roads historically played important roles in the modernization of America's navy. The *Mayflower* participated in the liberation of Havana in the Spanish-American War and alluded to Roosevelt's own heroic persona. The symbolism of the craft, coupled with the owner's cult of personality and commitment to their mission would serve as inspiration to the crews as they embarked on America's diplomatic and training cruise. Adding to the dramatization of the scene, Hampton Roads was the site of the first modern naval battle between the steel-clad *Monitor* and *Merrimack* forty-five years previous. Sixteen glistening white battleships sharply contrasted with memories of the *Monitor* and *Merrimack*'s Civil War stalemate.

Roosevelt masterfully orchestrated their send off from the bay with a presidential review of each craft as

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<sup>27</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, xi.

<sup>28</sup> See Charles E. Jefferson, "Peace at Any Price" Men, *The Independent* 66, 3140 (4 February 1909), 224.

<sup>29</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 60.



the ship's twenty-one gun salute rattled the crowd.<sup>30</sup> The uproar of thousands of battleship aficionados and tearful sweethearts cheered on America's bluejackets as sixteen twenty-one gun salutes and national anthems resounded over Chesapeake Bay.<sup>31</sup> The first-rate pageantry at Hampton Roads set the tone for how the Great White Fleet and its sailors were received worldwide and at home.<sup>32</sup> Rear-Admiral Seaton Schroeder noted that "No selection had been of friendly countries to visit; there had been no picking and choosing of ports where cordiality would be most confidently anticipated."<sup>33</sup> Under Roosevelt's guidance, the High Command mapped the course of the Great White Fleet in regards to distance between coaling stations and returning home to celebrate President Washington's birthday (22 February); otherwise Admiral "Fighting Bob" Evans (on the first leg of the trip between Hampton Roads and San Francisco) and Admiral Charles Sperry (on the second leg between San Francisco and Hampton Roads) held carte blanche on where to visit and train the inexperienced sailors and officers. No matter where the fleet stopped next, periodicals reported the fleet's progress on its unprecedented journey to a worldwide audience.<sup>34</sup> Rand McNally, one of America's leading mapmakers, re-

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<sup>30</sup> Harold J. Howland, "The Return of the Battle Fleet," *Outlook* (6 March 1909), 542.

<sup>31</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 58.

<sup>32</sup> George Palmer Putnam, "San Francisco Welcome to the Fleet," *Outlook* 89, 4, (23 May 1908), 150-151.

<sup>33</sup> Seaton Schroeder, "America's Welcome Abroad," *The Independent* 66, 3144 (4 March 1909), 478.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 478

ported record sales as Americans followed the fleet's progress on maps and bulletins from reporters on the flagship *USS Connecticut* and at ports of call.<sup>35</sup> The positive spin released by the reporters and propaganda teams aboard the fleet made the cruise inspired foreign and domestic confidence.

Despite initial set-backs during the Rio de Janeiro landing, the shore patrol ensured that American sailors acquired a reputation for good manners.<sup>36</sup> Invitations flooded the White House and Navy Department after reports of good behavior and fanfare from the fleet's "victory" stop (also in Rio de Janeiro, 12-29 January 1908).<sup>37</sup> To gain the presence of the fleet was to gain protection or legitimacy under the auspices of the United States. The United States conducted intelligence and defense analyses under the cloak of diplomacy and kinship.<sup>38</sup> While the bluejackets were on restrictive liberty and high officers were entertained by government and military officials, others updated the American strategic plan and repainted the soot-covered vessels.

Competition to host the entire fleet versus a subset was fierce between foreign countries. The competition for American dollars and positive press left many a countries disillusioned to their role in the evolving world order. Rivalries developed between countries hoping to court the fleet's landing. In the Rio de Janeiro versus Buenos Aires example, the Navy used

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 478; Wimmel, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet*, xii.

<sup>36</sup> Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 158.

<sup>38</sup> Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 40.



the excuse that the waters were too shallow to enter the port of Buenos Aires. Diplomatic fallout ensued between Brazil and Argentina. Furthermore, Argentina agitated for a stop and was only slightly pacified by the dispatch of a torpedo boat.<sup>39</sup> While the Argentines felt insulted by not hosting the entire fleet, the presence of a single vessel often meant the difference between sanctions and treaties of friendship. The "Baltimore" incident (at Valparaiso), as it would come to be called, of only receiving a glimpse of the boats offshore became more frequent and disheartened "lesser" nations as time and financial constraints regularly governed the fleet's itinerary.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the most heated debates were between American cities--not internationals--seeking to entertain the sailors. For example, the California towns of Monterey and Santa Cruz fought to gain attention from the fleet. Sperry and the High Command resolved that the fleet would first stop at Monterey, the second day the fleet would be split between the two towns, and the final day the entire fleet was to disembark at Santa Cruz.<sup>41</sup> The prestige associated with receiving the Great White Fleet turned simultaneously inspired national pride and turned formerly amicable adjacent cities against one another.

Since the High Command allocated divisions of the fleet between cities and national governments, the fleet

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<sup>39</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 122.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 142; Steward W. Livermore, "American Strategy Diplomacy in the South Pacific 1890-1914," *The Pacific Historical Review* v. XII (Berkeley, CA: The Pacific Coast Branch, American Historical Association, 1943), 43.

<sup>41</sup> Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 58.

attempted to avoid provoking numerous international disputes. Once Roosevelt confirmed the global trajectory, the Japanese insisted that they host the fleet despite any bad blood garnered by xenophobic actions taken in California.<sup>42</sup> China likewise wanted to gain support from an Anglo power against the further partitioning of Manchuria and as a buffer against Chinese imperial decline.<sup>43</sup>

Although great fear transpired over sending the fleet to the East, Roosevelt ignored skeptics and Hearst's invented "Yellow Peril."<sup>44</sup> Despite Roosevelt's confidence, American naval training for improving efficiency and readiness situated the Japanese as potential adversaries. Throughout the cruise, the sailors underwent grueling "record" training (target practice) where the Japanese were the imagined enemy.<sup>45</sup> If the Japanese proved hostile upon America's arrival, the Great White Fleet would be ready.<sup>46</sup> The successful preparations undertaken through target-practice competitions and military maneuver practice across the Pacific underscored Roosevelt's demands for efficiency.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Harris, *The Age of the Battleship 1890-1922*, 117.

<sup>43</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 237.

<sup>44</sup> Josephson, *The President Makers: The Culture of Politics and Leadership in an Age of Enlightenment 1896-1919*, 262, 263.

<sup>45</sup> Harris, *The Age of the Battleship 1890-1922*, 118.

<sup>46</sup> O'Gara, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of the Modern Navy*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Alden, *The American Steel Navy: A Photographic History of the U.S. Navy from the Introduction of the Steel Hull in 1883 to the Cruise of the Great White Fleet 1907-1909*, 334; Hart, *Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 182; Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 160



A further action to prevent incident included limiting the numbers of sailors who received liberty in Japan. The United States demanded its best behavior from the small percentage of men and guaranteed this with the shore patrol. Consequently, large banquets saw commanding officers sitting at the heads of the tables to ensure the good behavior of his subordinates. Ultimately, the two sides parted with mutual respect and goodwill.<sup>48</sup> Thousands of Japanese schoolchildren flooded the streets singing American patriotic songs in English and waving both American and Japanese flags. The Navy's bluejackets impressed the Japanese through parading cleanly shaven through the roads waiving the Japanese rising-sun flag as well.<sup>49</sup> The respect garnered for the other's culture was apparent on both sides and showmanship proved to be the best temporary solution for assuaging foreign misunderstandings.

America's successful battleship diplomacy had saved face in Japan, but not in China. The United States could not expect to maintain positive relations with Japan if it completely endorsed China's "Open Door" policy; therefore, only half of the Grand Fleet paid China the honor of a visit and in Amoy, not in the capital.<sup>50</sup> Although insulted by the "treachery" of the Japanese and their American counterparts, the Manchu could not pass up on the fleet's visit.

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<sup>48</sup> "Japanese Admiral Gives a Reception." *New York Times*. 19 May 1907.

<sup>49</sup> Alden, *The American Steel Navy: A Photographic History of the U.S. Navy from the Introduction of the Steel Hull in 1883 to the Cruise of the Great White Fleet 1907-1909*, 344; Hart, *Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

Amoy was a backwards area in the southernmost point of China, and the Chinese government converted the town fringes into a \$400,000 "Pleasure City" to entertain the sailors for a week.<sup>51</sup> The United States' expectation that their fleet would be welcomed by Chinese pageantry, despite a southern port stop, fell through. Unlike the previous stops on the journey, the fleet was not welcomed by thousands of excited persons. Nightly displays of fireworks and other culturally significant pastimes, including baseball, failed to meet American standards.<sup>52</sup> Being restricted to the makeshift town, lack of regal ceremonies, and the Chinese mistrust of foreigners culminated in a negative United States response to Chinese pomp.

Unfortunately for the Chinese, American excitement rose to its peak at Chinese shortcomings. In attempts to leave the bluejackets with good feeling their Manchu hosts created the most spectacular and expensive fireworks show in Chinese history. With the American red, white, and blue and Manchu yellow and green as its central color schemes for the show, the Chinese lit up the southern skies. The final fireworks show, however, ignited the pavilions and local YMCA of "Pleasure City."<sup>53</sup> In the heat of the moment, angry Chinese attacked United States citizens and property across the country. An informed American public fully expected a bombardment of Amoy; fortunately, the

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<sup>51</sup> Alden, *The American Steel Navy: A Photographic History of the U.S. Navy from the Introduction of the Steel Hull in 1883 to the Cruise of the Great White Fleet 1907-1909*, 344.

<sup>52</sup> Hart, *Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 252.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.



fleet left without returning fire.<sup>54</sup> The American public saw the Chinese reaction as an insult to United States' global diplomatic goodwill. Chinese stock lessened in value with their "mediocre" and hostile displays to the American presence; and likewise, the Japanese reinforced their position as hegemon of the East.

Roosevelt personally dictated the Great White Fleet's concluding itinerary to deal with the more politically significant and sensitive European nations. The ships passed through the Suez Canal, with stops restricted to the Mediterranean Sea. The shallowness of the Mediterranean, the fear of aftershocks from the Messina earthquake, machinery breakdowns, and a rushed schedule to return back to the States before George Washington's birthday meant that the Grand Fleet was divided into groups of one to four vessels in order to be received in a multitude of courts and maximize their exposure in a limited amount of time.<sup>55</sup>

In what seemed more like tourist cruise through Europe, the divided fleet visited Port Said, Beirut, Smyrna, Athens, Salonika, Tripoli, Messina (where the *Connecticut*, *Illinois*, and *Culgoa* unwelcomingly participated in earthquake assistance), Malta, Algiers, Naples, Villefranche, Marseilles, and Tangier before it rendezvoused at Gibraltar on 1 February 1909.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>56</sup> Alden, *The American Steel Navy: A Photographic History of the U.S. Navy from the Introduction of the Steel Hull in 1883 to the Cruise of the Great White Fleet 1907-1909* 334; "Battleships May Go to Italy's Rescue." *New York Times*. 1 January 1909; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1909*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 29; "Itinerary of the Cruise [of the Great White Fleet]," *Scientific American* 100 (20

Although the men were tired and the hosts' modern navies overshadowed the United States fleet, the Americans were "courted" and encouraged to stay by most of their hosts. The French, for example, demonstrated their largess through exuberant receptions for bluejackets and their wives in villas, while women gave flowers and kisses to unattached sailors on liberty.<sup>57</sup> Despite the declining material value of American battleships, the prestige gained through exuberant receptions for America's armed diplomats outweighed the financial cost on either side.

The final stop found the Great White Fleet at British held Gibraltar. Despite recent gains made by the United States, Alfred Thayer Mahan continued to recognize the British as the global naval hegemon through their world-wide empire and rich naval tradition.<sup>58</sup> England's clear numerical and technological superiority over America's Battle Fleet masked attempts to impress the "Motherland." The British at Gibraltar gallantly acknowledged that the world cruise had been "a triumph of American ships, American men, and American organization." Quarrels over tactical superiority of each others' battleships, strategic command, and targeting records underscored ongoing British naval superiority. The United States would always be, at most, second best to England.<sup>59</sup>

The Great White Fleet returned to Hampton Roads to "The Grandest Naval Pageant in American History." A two-thousand-gun salute, a thousand small craft,

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February 1909), 157.

<sup>57</sup> Hart, *The Great White Fleet*, 284

<sup>58</sup> Harris, *The Age of the Battleship: 1890-1922*, 110.

<sup>59</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The True Significance of the Pacific Cruise," 412.



the four new American battleships, and bands playing "Home, Sweet Home" welcomed the tired, yet now hardened fighting-force.<sup>60</sup> Roosevelt's address to the men before they disembarked reiterated the achievement gained by their global diplomacy and the professionalization of the Navy. The scale of the global coverage and spectacle allotted to men in service to the Atlantic Fleet was unparalleled and unmatched by more advanced European navies. Despite criticisms from the media and Congress, Americans bought prestige and an unscarred battle fleet for a tidy—and criticized—sum of twenty million dollars.<sup>61</sup> Roosevelt's showmanship and command of the Navy and government served his goals to obtain global respect for the United States as a developing world power.<sup>62</sup> Although Roosevelt "show-boated" America's new wealth and global influence by sending the Great White Fleet on a world tour of diplomatic goodwill, it was part of a larger "big-stick" foreign policy that Roosevelt acknowledged as his greatest service to peace.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*, 155; Hart, *Great White Fleet: Its Voyage Around the World 1907-1909*, 295.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 299; "Conditions of the Battleships After the Long Cruise [Around the World]," *Scientific American* 100, (22 May 1909), 386.

<sup>62</sup> Miroff, *Icons of Democracy: American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, & Democrats*, 198-199.

<sup>63</sup> Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 592; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy*, 1909, 29.