Excerpts from The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783 (1890) by Alfred Thayer Mahan

“First, in peace: The government by its policy can favor the natural growth of a people's industries and its tendencies to seek adventure and gain by way of the sea;”

“Secondly, for war: The influence of the government will be felt in its most legitimate manner in maintaining an armed navy, of a size commensurate with the growth of its shipping and the importance of the interests connected with it. More important even than the size of the navy is the question of its institutions, favoring a healthful spirit and activity, and providing for rapid development in time of war by an adequate reserve of men and of ships and by measures for drawing out that general reserve power which has before been pointed to, when considering the character and pursuits of the people. Undoubtedly under this second head of warlike preparation must come the maintenance of suitable naval stations, in those distant parts of the world to which the armed shipping must follow the peaceful vessels of commerce.”

“Colonies attached to the mother-country afford, therefore, the surest means of supporting abroad the sea power of a country.”

“Having therefore no foreign establishments, either colonial or military, the ships of war of the United States, in war, will be like land birds, unable to fly far from their own shores. To provide resting-places for them, where they can coal and repair, would be one of the first duties of a government proposing to itself the development of the power of the nation at sea.”

“To avoid such blockades there must be a military force afloat that will at all times so endanger a blockading fleet that it can by no means keep its place. Then neutral ships, except those laden with contraband of war, can come and go freely, and maintain the commercial relations of the country with the world outside.”

“The question is eminently one in which the influence of the government should make itself felt, to build up for the nation a navy which, if not capable of reaching distant countries, shall at least be able to keep clear the chief approaches to its own.”

"Naval strategy has for its end to found, support, and increase, as well in peace as in war, the sea power of a country."
"No, but were the American Indians consulted in the early days here, or the natives of Alaska in later times? The natives have proved themselves to be incapable of governing and unfitted for the condition of civilization, as is shown by their rapid decline in numbers and their inability to adapt themselves to changed conditions; and the importance of their supposed opinions on annexation has been greatly exaggerated. Numbering 500,000 in the time of Captain Cook, they are now reduced to about 30,000, and occupy much the same relation to the white population as our Indians do here. Indolent and easy-going, they are perfectly content with any form of government which allows them to sun themselves, bedecked with flowers. This view is borne out by the failure of the recent mass-meeting in Honolulu, organized solely for the purpose of proving that the native Hawaiians are actively opposed to annexation. It is natural that the white man should become the governing power; and in the exercise of this power it is equally natural that he should wish to turn over his territory to a strong civilized nation for protection and advancement, since, if they rely solely on their ability to defend themselves, it is impossible for the islands to maintain their independence for any length of time."

1898 – North American Review

Arthur C. James (Financier and Prominent Businessman)
The Influence of Sea Power on History, Alfred Thayer Mahan

1. What argument does Admiral Mahan give for having a strong peacetime navy?

2. How does Mahan equate a powerful navy with the need for territorial expansion?

3. What warning does Mahan give in having a navy WITHOUT the acquisition of colonies?

4. In what ways does Mahan tie having a strong navy with a nation’s progress?

North American Review; Arthur James

5. What is Mr. James’ opinion on Native American governance?

6. What evidence does he present toward this opinion?

7. How does this document relate to the idea of a “White Man’s Burden?”