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AP Euro
Period C
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Historical Essay Analysis

Title: 'The White Man's Burden'? Imperial Wars in the 1890s

Author's thesis: The Imperial Wars of the 1890s were a social and political phenomenon that was bolstered by the public's perception of a moral imperative to spread Western culture.

Author's evidence:

- a) Westernization was considered superior, inevitable, the moral imperative of Western nations, and beneficial to colonies
- b) The public perceived a war between civilization and brutal barbarism
- c) Most "benevolent" attempts to introduce Western culture were met with resistance; media portrayed this as necessary for trade
- d) Popular culture produced many spirited, fearless commanders & soldiers
- e) On the war front, soldiers did not maintain the super-patriotism of their homelands
- f) Expansion of the media kept the public more informed, up-to-date, and aware of the war than ever before

Author's conclusion of the topic's significance:

The idealism that was prevalent in European culture concerning imperialism in the 1890s consisted mostly of unrealistic propaganda. However, it increased fanatical support for the war effort immensely.

What questions you have about the reading:

1. How soon did it become recognized that imperialism was a destructive and immoral foreign policy?
2. Did the media, overall, increase or decrease public support for imperialism?
3. Without the media, would imperialism have taken on such an important role?

To what extent does your knowledge of the period support or conflict the author's thesis?

My knowledge of the period supports that the publicly accepted motivations for imperialism were based on a misguided belief in the superiority of Western culture, and that it was the moral imperative of Europeans to spread and share this culture with what they deemed as being 'less civilized' nations.

Explain the gist of the article, the nature of the evidence, and the significance of the topic:

The imperialist movement gained momentum in European popular culture not for economic or political reasons, but as a result of an ethnocentric belief that Europeans had a moral imperative to share their culture with lesser developed, uncivilized nations. This belief was perpetuated in popular culture, and while newspapers, for the first time, were able to relay accurate depictions of the war as it was occurring, many people were taken in by the super-patriotism (jingoism) that became mainstream at the time. Even despite this idealistic view of imperialism, the belief did not translate to the war front, where there was much destruction at the hands of rebel forces and soldiers fought only out of allegiance to their homeland, rather than the belief they were really making life better for the people they conquered.