

C. The Debate over Imperialism

I. Albert Beveridge Trumpets Imperialism (1898)

Albert J. Beveridge delivered this famous speech, "The March of the Flag," at Indianapolis on September 16, 1898, before McKinley had decided to keep the Philippines. Born to an impoverished family, Beveridge had spent his youth at hard manual labor but ultimately secured a college education with prizes won in oratorical contests. The cadences of his spellbinding oratory were such that "Mr. Dooley" (F. P. Dunne) said you could waltz to them. The year after making this address, Beveridge was elected to the U.S. Senate from Indiana at the remarkably youthful age of thirty-six. How convincing is his reply to the anti-imperialists' warnings against the annexation of noncontiguous territory and to their argument that no more land was needed? What were his powers as a prophet?

Distance and oceans are no arguments. The fact that all the territory our fathers bought and seized is contiguous is no argument. In 1819 Florida was further from New York than Porto Rico is from Chicago today; Texas, further from Washington in 1845 than Hawaii is from Boston in 1898; California, more inaccessible in 1847 than the Philippines are now. . . . The ocean does not separate us from lands of our duty and desire—the oceans join us, a river never to be dredged, a canal never to be repaired.

Steam joins us; electricity joins us—the very elements are in league with our destiny. Cuba not contiguous! Porto Rico not contiguous! Hawaii and the Philippines not contiguous! Our navy will make them contiguous. [Admirals] Dewey and Sampson and Schley have made them contiguous, and American speed, American guns, American heart and brain and nerve will keep them contiguous forever.

But the Opposition is right—there is a difference. We did not need the western Mississippi Valley when we acquired it, nor Florida, nor Texas, nor California, nor the royal provinces of the far Northwest. We had no emigrants to people this imperial wilderness, no money to develop it, even no highways to cover it. No trade awaited us in its savage fastnesses. Our productions were not greater than our trade. There was not one reason for the land-lust of our statesmen from Jefferson to Grant, other than the prophet and the Saxon within them.

But today we are raising more than we can consume. Today we are making more than we can use. Today our industrial society is congested; there are more workers than there is work; there is more capital than there is investment. We do not need more money—we need more circulation, more employment. Therefore we must find new markets for our produce, new occupation for our capital, new work for our labor. And so, while we did not need the territory taken during the past century at the time it was acquired, we do need what we have taken in 1898, and we need it now.

Think of the thousands of Americans who will pour into Hawaii and Porto Rico when the republic's laws cover those islands with justice and safety! Think of the tens of thousands of Americans who will invade mine and field and forest in the

¹C. M. Depew, ed., *The Library of Oratory* (New York: The Globe Publishing Company, 1902), vol. 14, pp. 438-440.

Philippines when a liberal government, protected and controlled by this republic, if not the government of the republic itself, shall establish order and equity there! Think of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who will build a soap-and-water, common-school civilization of energy and industry in Cuba, when a government of law replaces the double reign of anarchy and tyranny!—think of the prosperous millions that Empress of Islands will support when, obedient to the law of political gravitation, her people ask for the highest honor liberty can bestow, the sacred Order of the Stars and Stripes, the citizenship of the Great Republic!

What does all this mean for every one of us? It means opportunity for all the glorious young manhood of the republic—the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen. It means that the resources and the commerce of these immensely rich dominions will be increased as much as American energy is greater than Spanish sloth; for Americans henceforth will monopolize those resources and that commerce.

[The Treaty of Paris, by which the United States acquired the Philippines, received Senate approval by a close vote on February 6, 1899. The imperialists had little to add to the materialistic-humanitarian arguments presented by McKinley and Beveridge. The anti-imperialists stressed the folly of annexing noncontiguous areas in the tropics thickly populated by alien peoples. They also harped on the folly of departing from the principles of freedom and nonintervention as set forth in the Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts assailed the imperialists with these words: "If you ask them what they want, you are answered with a shout: 'Three cheers for the flag! Who will dare to haul it down? Hold on to everything you can get. The United States is strong enough to do what it likes. The Declaration of Independence and the counsel of Washington and the Constitution of the United States have grown rusty and musty. They are for little countries and not for great ones. There is no moral law for strong nations. America has outgrown Americanism.'" (Congressional Record, 55th Cong., 3d sess., [1899], p. 495.)]

2. Professor William Sumner Spurns Empire (1898)

The "magnificently bald" and "iron-voiced" Professor William G. Sumner of Yale was an immensely popular lecturer and a leading anti-imperialist. Fearlessly outspoken, he offended influential alumni by opposing tariff protection and by turning a cynical eye on the United States' "civilizing mission" in the Philippines. The truth is that the more obvious the natural resources of the islands became, the less capable the inhabitants seemed of self-rule. The moral obligation of the "white man's burden," which the British poet Kipling urged the United States to shoulder, had many of the earmarks of the loot sack. The British welcomed Americans as fellow civilizers, no doubt in part because imperialistic misery loved company. Why did Sumner believe that the conquered peoples would be unlikely to accept U.S. rule, and that such rule was a perversion of American principles?

²W. G. Sumner, *War and Other Essays* (1919), pp. 303–305.

There is not a civilized nation which does not talk about its civilizing mission just as grandly as we do. The English, who really have more to boast of it in this respect than anybody else, talk least about it, but the Phariseism with which they correct and instruct other people has made them hated all over the globe. The French believe themselves the guardians of the highest and purest culture, and that the eyes of all mankind are fixed on Paris, whence they expect oracles of thought and taste. The Germans regard themselves as charged with a mission, especially to us Americans, to save us from egoism and materialism. The Russians, in their books and newspapers, talk about the civilizing mission of Russia in language that might be translated from some of the finest paragraphs in our imperialistic newspapers.

The first principle of Mohammedanism is that we Christians are dogs and infidels, fit only to be enslaved or butchered by Moslems. It is a corollary that wherever Mohammedanism extends it carries, in the belief of its votaries, the highest blessings, and that the whole human race would be enormously elevated if Mohammedanism should supplant Christianity everywhere.

To come, last, to Spain, the Spaniards have, for centuries, considered themselves the most zealous and self-sacrificing Christians, especially charged by the Almighty, on this account, to spread true religion and civilization over the globe. They think themselves free and noble, leaders in refinement and the sentiments of personal honor, and they despise us as sordid money-grabbers and heretics. I could bring you passages from peninsular authors of the first rank about the grand rôle of Spain and Portugal in spreading freedom and truth.

Now each nation laughs at all the others when it observes these manifestations of national vanity. You may rely upon it that they are all ridiculous by virtue of these pretensions, including ourselves. The point is that each of them repudiates the standards of the others, and the outlying nations, which are to be civilized, hate all the standards of civilized men.

We assume that what we like and practice, and what we think better, must come as a welcome blessing to Spanish-Americans and Filipinos. This is grossly and obviously untrue. They hate our ways. They are hostile to our ideas. Our religion, language, institutions, and manners offend them. They like their own ways, and if we appear amongst them as rulers, there will be social discord in all the great departments of social interest. The most important thing which we shall inherit from the Spaniards will be the task of suppressing rebellions.

If the United States takes out of the hands of Spain her mission, on the ground that Spain is not executing it well, and if this nation in its turn attempts to be school-mistress to others, it will shrivel up into the same vanity and self-conceit of which Spain now presents an example. To read our current literature one would think that we were already well on the way to it.

Now, the great reason why all these enterprises which begin by saying to somebody else, "We know what is good for you better than you know yourself and we are going to make you do it," are false and wrong is that they violate liberty; or, to turn the same statement into other words, the reason why liberty, of which we Americans talk so much, is a good thing is that it means leaving people to live out their own lives in their own way, while we do the same.

If we believe in liberty, as an American principle, why do we not stand by it? Why are we going to throw it away to enter upon a Spanish policy of dominion and regulation?

3. William Jennings Bryan Vents His Bitterness (1901)

In 1900 the Republican president McKinley, who favored keeping the Philippines, again ran against the Democrat William J. Bryan, who favored giving them independence. Republicans accused Bryan of prolonging the insurrection by holding out false hopes. One popular magazine published a picture of the Filipino leader on its front cover, with the query, "Who is behind Aguinaldo?" The curious reader lifted a flap and saw the hawklike features of Bryan. McKinley triumphed by a handsome margin, and Republicans misleadingly hailed the results as a national mandate to retain the islands. The next year Bryan expressed his bitterness as follows, several months after the United States had captured Aguinaldo. What is his strongest rebuttal to Republican charges that the Democrats were responsible for prolonging the insurrection? How good a prophet was Bryan?

In the campaign of 1900 the Republican leaders denied that their party contemplated a permanent increase in the standing army. They asserted that a large army was only necessary because of the insurrection in the Philippines, and they boldly declared that the insurrection would cease immediately if the Republican ticket was successful. The Democratic platform and Democratic speakers were blamed for the prolongation of the war. "Just re-elect President McKinley," they said, "and let the Filipinos know they are not to have independence, and they will lay down their arms and our soldiers can come home."

Well, the Republican ticket was elected, and the Filipinos were notified that they were not to have independence. But a month after the election the Republicans rushed through Congress a bill authorizing the President to raise the regular army to 100,000, and now, after a year has elapsed, the insurrection is still in progress and the end is not yet. Some of the worst losses of the year have been suffered by our troops within two months. . . .

After the Republican victory made it impossible for the imperialists to blame the anti-imperialists for the continuation of hostilities, the Republican leaders declared that Aguinaldo, actuated by selfish ambition, was compelling his countrymen to continue the war. But even after his capture and imprisonment—yes, even after his captors had secured from him an address advising his comrades to surrender—the insurrection continued.

How long will it take the imperialists to learn that we can never have peace in the Philippine Islands? That we can suppress open resistance is certain, although the cost may be far beyond any gain that can be derived from a colonial government, but that we can ever make the Filipinos love us or trust us while we rule them through a carpetbag government is absurd.

³*Commoner*, November 22, 1901.