

*The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire* by Stephen Kinzer was published by Henry Holt and Company (2017).

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

## “White and Peaceful Wings”:

### Debating U.S. Imperialism in 1898

STEPHEN KINZER



**Editor’s Introduction:** HJM is proud to select as our Editor’s Choice Award for this issue Stephen Kinzer’s *The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire* (2017), published by Henry Holt & Co. The author of numerous highly acclaimed works, Kinzer is an incisive historian of American foreign policy. In *The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire*, Kinzer offers a gripping and insightful account of the political debates of 1898-1902 surrounding the Spanish-American War and U.S. intervention in Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Kinzer demonstrates that the debates over isolationism and interventionism, so powerful in today’s political discourse, were equally present at the beginning of the “American century.” He argues that too often scholars look to the period after World War II to understand U.S. interventions in other countries when the roots of these phenomena actually lie in the 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

*As engaging as any novel, Kinzer brings to life a fascinating cast of characters. His analysis expands far beyond Mark Twain and Theodore Roosevelt, the*

*figures highlighted in the book's title. Beginning with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, William Randolph Hearst, and Roosevelt as the early architects of U.S. intervention in the Cuban struggle for independence, each chapter deftly layers on new characters in the debate over the righteousness of U.S. foreign intervention. Policymakers who are often overlooked, such as Massachusetts Senator George Frisbie Hoar and Boston lawyer Edward Atkinson, along with many other lesser-known figures, are given significant attention as contributors to the national discussion. Many politicians and civic leaders from Massachusetts played key roles in the national debates over U.S. expansion.*

*On June 15, 1898, the American Anti-Imperialist League was founded at Faneuil Hall in Boston, on the very same day that the U.S. Congress voted to annex Hawaii. The league was the brainchild of retired Massachusetts banker Gamaliel Bradford. On June 2, he published a letter in the Boston Evening Transcript seeking assistance in gaining access to historic Faneuil Hall in order to hold a public meeting. His explicit goal was to organize opponents of American colonial expansion. A vocal opponent of the Spanish-American War, Bradford decried what he saw as an "insane and wicked" colonial ambition which was "driving the country to moral ruin."<sup>2</sup> Bradford's organizing efforts proved successful, and on June 15, the first ever protest meeting against "the adoption of an imperial policy by the United States" was held.*

*The meeting resulted in the formation of a four-member organizing committee known as the Anti-Imperialist Committee of Correspondence, headed by Bradford. This group contacted religious, business, labor, and humanitarian leaders from around the country, along with prominent newspaper editors, and attempted to rouse them to action. On November 19, 1898, the Anti-Imperialist League was formally established. Elder statesman George S. Boutwell (1818-1905) was chosen as the League's first president. Boutwell, a former Massachusetts governor and congressman, was a staunch advocate of independence for the Philippines and served as the League's president until his death in 1905.*

*Massachusetts men continued to play prominent roles. The League's second president was Boston lawyer Moorfield Storey (1845-1929), a civil rights attorney and anti-imperialist activist. Storey had spoken at the first anti-imperialist mass meeting at Faneuil Hall (quoted in this excerpt) and then became the vice president of the New England Anti-Imperialist League. He would serve as president of the national Anti-Imperialist League from 1905 until the League's dissolution in 1921. As a legal counsel for the Philippine Investigating Committee, he co-authored a brief for the Lodge Committee titled "Secretary Root's Record: 'Marked Severities' in Philippine Warfare," summarizing U.S. atrocities and war crimes during the Philippine-American War in 1902. (This war remains almost unknown today among ordinary Americans, despite an outpouring of scholarship*

and books on it over the last two decades .)³ As an unwavering civil rights activist and attorney, Storey understood that “national subjugation overseas and racial persecution at home were related.”⁴ He became a founding member and the first president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), serving from 1909 until his death in 1929.

Drawing upon a wide variety of sources, Kinzer demonstrates that the issues of war crimes in the Philippines, U.S. expansion, and debates over the Spanish-American War were widely covered in the U.S. press. He includes significant excerpts from Senate speeches that were reproduced in newspapers across the country and uses poems, political satire, cartoons, essays, and news articles to recreate the broader political conversation of the era. Given the increasing literacy rate of the American public, Kinzer argues that the average American had access to the various positions being advocated on each side of the debate.

The imperialist/anti-imperialist debates deeply divided both the nation and the Commonwealth. Although the two presidents of the Anti-Imperialist League hailed from Boston, Massachusetts, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (1850-1924) emerged as one of the most powerful proponents of expansion, as he relentlessly worked to maneuver his kindred spirit, Theodore Roosevelt, into the Vice Presidency. The two men shared the belief that overseas colonies were essential for the United States to become a world power. Their expansionism, particularly that of Roosevelt, was a “hyper-masculine nationalism” interwoven with ideas of white superiority. As they saw it, Hawaiians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos were unfit to govern themselves; only the United States could do the “man’s work” of building a civilized society and functioning government.<sup>4</sup>

Stephen Kinzer is an award-winning foreign correspondent, prolific author, and senior fellow at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University. His books include *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (2007), *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (2008), *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America’s Future* (2010), *Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (2014), and *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (2nd ed. 2005). He lives in Boston. This Editor’s Choice selection was reproduced with permission of Henry Holt and Company and is excerpted from Chapter 1: “White and Peaceful Wings,” pages 5-17.

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**FANEUIL HALL (JUNE 15, 1898)**

Where better to launch a patriotic uprising than Faneuil Hall in Boston? Colonists had gathered amid its Doric columns to protest the Boston Massacre and plot the overthrow of British rule. Abolitionists had denounced slavery from its stage. It is a lodestone of American liberty, a cathedral for freedom fighters.

That is why a handful of eminent Bostonians chose Faneuil Hall as the place to begin a new rebellion on the sunny afternoon of June 15, 1898. Like all Americans, they had been dizzied by the astonishing events of recent weeks. Their country had suddenly burst beyond its natural borders. American troops had landed in Cuba. American warships had bombarded Puerto Rico. An American expeditionary force was steaming toward the distant Philippine Islands. Hawaii seemed about to fall to American power. President William McKinley had called for 200,000 volunteers to fight in foreign wars. Fervor for the new idea of overseas expansion gripped the United States.



**President William McKinley**

This appalled the organizers of the Faneuil Hall meeting. They could not bear to see their country setting out to capture foreign nations. That afternoon, they rose in protest.

Several hundred people turned out. “On all sides could be seen the well-known faces of leaders of good causes among us,” one newspaper reported. According to another, “Nearly all the settees on the floor were filled, while the benches in the gallery were well fringed with ladies.”<sup>5</sup>



Faneuil Hall in 1903

At three o'clock, Gamaliel Bradford, a prominent civic leader and proud descendant of the Pilgrim governor William Bradford, called the meeting to order. His speech was both a warning and a cry of pain.

Over the past year, Americans had grown enraged by the harshness of Spanish colonial rule in Cuba. Most cheered when Congress declared war on Spain. They were thrilled when President McKinley sent troops to help Cuban revolutionaries fighting to expel the Spanish. Before long, though, some in Washington suggested that instead of allowing Cuba to become independent, as promised, the United States should take the island and rule it. Then they began talking of seizing Puerto Rico and even the Philippines. Imperial fever had broken out and was spreading. This stirred Bostonians to bitter protest.

"We are not here to oppose the war," Bradford told the Faneuil Hall crowd. "We are here to deal with a far graver issue, to insist that a war begun in the name of humanity shall not be turned into a war for empire, that an attempt to win for Cubans the right to govern themselves shall not be made an excuse for extending our sway of alien peoples without their consent. . . . We are to be a world power, but the question is whether we shall be a power for beneficence or malfeasance. Everything is against the policy of conquest.

The next speaker was another New England patriarch, Charles Ames, a theologian and Unitarian pastor who had traveled the world promoting humanitarian causes. He warned that the moment the United States seized a foreign land, it would "sacrifice the principles on which the Republic was founded."

The policy of imperialism threatens to change the temper of our people, and to put us into a permanent attitude of arrogance, testiness, and defiance towards other nations. . . . Once we enter the field of international conflict as a great military and naval power, we shall be one more bully among bullies. We shall only add one more to the list of oppressors of mankind. . . . Poor Christian as I am, it grieves and shames me to see a generation instructed by the Prince of Peace proposing to set him on a dunce's stool and to crown him with a fool's cap.

At the very moment that these words were shaking Faneuil Hall, debate on the same question—overseas expansion—was reaching a climax in Congress. It is a marvelous coincidence: the first anti-imperialist rally in American history was held on the same day that Congress voted, also

for the first time, on whether the United States should take an overseas colony. That day—June 15, 1898—marked the beginning of a great political and ideological conflict.

The Faneuil Hall meeting was set to end at five o'clock. In Washington, the House of Representatives scheduled its decisive vote for precisely the same hour.

### U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (JUNE 15, 1898)

Every member of Congress understood that history was about to be made. President McKinley had decided that the United States should push its power into the Pacific Ocean and that, as a first step, it must seize the Hawaiian Islands. Some Americans found the idea intoxicating. Others despaired for the future of their country. One of them was the Speaker of the House, Thomas Reed, a figure so powerful that he was known as Czar.

Reed, a blunt-spoken Maine lawyer who had sought the Republican presidential nomination just two years before—and lost in part because of his anti-imperialist views—was repelled by the swaggering nationalism that had taken hold of Congress. Annexing Hawaii seemed to him not simply unwise but absurd. He told a friend that the United States might as well “annex the moon.”<sup>6</sup> So deep was Reed’s anger, or depression, that he could not bring himself to preside over a vote that might lead to annexation. On the morning of June 15, he sent word that he would not appear.

Empire was the traditional way for rising states to expand their power, and in 1898 the American military had the means to make its imperial bid. Yet the United States had been founded through rebellion against a distant sovereign. It was pledged above all to the ideal of self-government. For a country that was once a colony to begin taking colonies of its own would be something new in modern history.

The most potent arguments against imperial expansion were drawn from American scripture. According to the Declaration of Independence, liberty is an inalienable right. The Constitution’s opening phrase is “We the People.” George Washington sounded much like an anti-imperialist when he asked, “Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?”<sup>7</sup> So did Thomas Jefferson when he insisted, “If there be one principle more deeply written than any other in the mind of every American, it is that we should have nothing to do with conquest.”<sup>8</sup> Abraham Lincoln proclaimed at Gettysburg that governments should be “of the people, by the people,

for the people.” Later he declared, “No man is good enough to govern another man without the other’s consent.”<sup>9</sup>

To all of this, the imperialists had a simple answer: times have changed. Past generations, they argued, could not have foreseen the race for colonies that consumed the world at the end of the nineteenth century. Nor could they have known how important it would be for the United States to control foreign markets in order to ensure stability at home. In 1863, Lincoln himself had admitted that “dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.”<sup>10</sup> The same principle, expansionists argued, applied in 1898.

One of Speaker Reed’s deputies gavelled the House of Representatives to order at midday on June 15. The debate began with due gravity.

“Since that fateful shot was fired at Sumter,” Representative Champ Clark of Missouri said as it began, “a greater question has not been debated in the American Congress.”<sup>11</sup>

The first speakers argued that bringing Hawaii into the United States would be a step in the march of human progress. “This annexation is not a conquest or a subjugation of others, but a continuation of our established policy of opening lands to the colonial energy of the great colonizing nation of the century,” argued Richard Parker of New Jersey. To pass up such a chance, he concluded, would be “antediluvian and thorough stupidity.”

Edwin Ridgeley of Kansas agreed. “Civilization has ever moved westward, and we have every reason to believe that it will ever so continue,” he reasoned. “We need not, nor do I believe we will, enter into a conquest of force but, to the contrary, our higher civilization will be carried across the Pacific by the white and peaceful wings of our rapidly increasing commerce.”

Several congressmen asserted that the United States had no choice but to expand overseas because its farms and factories were producing more than Americans could consume and urgently needed foreign markets. “The United States is a great manufacturing nation,” William Alden Smith of Michigan reasoned. “Eventually we must find new markets for our energy and enterprise. Such desirable territory is fast passing under the control of other nations. Our history is filled with unaccepted opportunities. How much longer shall we hesitate?”

Congressmen not only declaimed on that fateful day, but also debated, sometimes with considerable wit. One of their arguments was over the role of American missionaries, who had arrived in Hawaii during the 1820s and set in motion the process that led to this debate. Albert

Berry of Kentucky said Hawaiians had benefited immensely from their “influence and inspiration.”

“When the Americans sent missionaries there for the purpose of civilizing the natives,” he asserted, “they found them in an almost barbarous condition, and set to work to bring about a condition of civilization.”

That was too much for one opponent of annexation, John F. Fitzgerald of Massachusetts—the same “Honey Fitz” who would go on to become mayor of Boston and, more famously, grandfather to John, Robert, and Edward Kennedy. A Boston ditty held that “Honey Fitz can talk you blind / On any subject you can find.” This day, his subject was the role of missionaries.

“My colleague,” Fitzgerald said, “emphasized the pleasure that he felt in voting for annexation because of the fact that the islands had been redeemed from savagery by the devotion of American missionaries. In thinking the matter over, I have come to the conclusion that the native Hawaiian’s view of the Almighty and justice must be a little bit shaken when he sees these men, who pretend to be the exemplars of Christianity and honor, take possession of these islands by force, destroy the government that has existed for years, and set up a sovereignty for themselves.”

The day’s most vivid exchanges were about a delicate but serious matter: the extreme foreignness of native Hawaiians. Both sides used racial arguments. Annexationists said the islanders’ evident savagery made it urgent for a civilizing force to take their country and uplift them. Opponents countered that it would be madness to bring such savages into union with the United States, where they could corrupt white people.

“Hawaiian religion is the embodiment of bestiality and malignity that frequently lapses into crimes of lust and revenge,” reported one opponent of annexation, John Rhea of Kentucky. “The various legends of their gods abound in attributes of the most excessive animalism and cruelty. Lewdness, prostitution, and indecency are exalted into virtues. . . . There exists today upon those islands, Mr. Speaker, a population for the most part a mixture of Chinese with the islanders, thus making a homogenous whole of moral vipers and physical lepers.”

That brought Albert Berry back to his feet. “I want to say to the gentleman,” he retorted, “if he would look about the streets of the capital of Washington, he would see that there is more immorality south of Pennsylvania Avenue than there is in the whole of the Hawaiian Islands.”

“If I knew that to be true, I would blush to herald it on the floor of this House,” Rhea replied. “But I deny it, Mr. Speaker. I deny that here in the capital city of the greatest government in the world, American womanhood has fallen to such a standard. Oh, for shame that you should speak such words!”

“I did not know that the gentleman ever blushed,” Berry shot back.

Expansionists in Congress and beyond were visionaries seized by a radically new idea of what America could and should be. They saw their critics as standing in the way of progress: small-minded, timid, paralyzed by fears, maddeningly unwilling to grasp the prize that history was offering. “A certain conservative class,” Freeman Knowles of South Dakota lamented, “would stand in the way of the glorious future and ultimate destiny of this Republic.”

The eloquence of annexationists was matched by that of their opponents. One after another, these doubters rose to warn against the imperial temptation. Some of their speeches suggest that they realized they were likely to lose that day’s vote on taking Hawaii. They knew, however, that this was only the opening skirmish in what would be a long struggle. They were speaking to Americans far beyond Washington—and far beyond 1898.

Time and again these troubled congressmen returned to their central theme: the American idea prohibits colonizing, annexing foreign lands, taking protectorates, or projecting military power overseas. Setting out to shape the fate of foreign nations, they argued, would not only require great military establishments and inevitably attract enemies, but also betray the essence of America’s commitment to human liberty. “We are treading on dangerous ground,” warned Adolph Meyer of Louisiana.

Meyer had been born into a family of German immigrants and was one of the few Jews in Congress. He had fought in the Confederate army, commanded Louisiana’s uniformed militia, and acquired a reputation as a forceful orator. On the afternoon of June 15, 1898, he lived up to it.

With monarchical governments, or governments only nominally republican but really despotic or monarchical, this system of colonies, however burdensome, however tending to conflict, may be pursued without a shock to their systems of government. But with us the case is different. Our whole system is founded on the right of the people—all the people—to participate in the Government. . . . Take this first fatal step and you cannot recall it. Much error we have corrected. Much that may hereafter be

you can correct. But when this step is taken, you are irrevocably pledged to a system of colonialism and empire. There are no footsteps backward.

### ADVERSARIAL GIANTS: ROOSEVELT VS. TWAIN

This was a debate over the very nature of freedom. Many Americans wished to see its blessings spread around the world. In 1898, they began disagreeing passionately on how to spread those blessings.

Anti-imperialists saw themselves as defenders of freedom because they wanted foreign peoples to rule themselves, not be ruled by Americans. They saw the seizure of faraway lands as blasphemy against what Herman Melville called “the great God absolute! The center and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!”<sup>12</sup>

Expansionists found this preposterous. They believed that concepts like freedom, equality, and self-government had meaning only for developed, responsible nations—that is, nations populated and governed by white people. Others, they asserted, were too primitive to rule themselves and must be ruled by outsiders. By this logic, dusky lands could only be truly free when outsiders governed them. If natives did not realize how much they needed foreign rule, and resisted it, that was further proof of their backwardness.

No one promoted this view more colorfully or to greater effect than Theodore Roosevelt, the assistant secretary of the navy. In a letter to his fellow imperialist Rudyard Kipling, Roosevelt scorned “the jack-fools who seriously think that any group of pirates and head-hunters needs nothing but independence in order that it be turned forthwith into a dark-hued New England town meeting.”<sup>13</sup> As the national debate intensified, he came to embody America’s drive to project power overseas.

Mark Twain believed Roosevelt’s project would destroy the United States.

Roosevelt and Twain (1835-1910) moved in overlapping circles and knew each other, but geography separated them for years. Twain traveled and lived abroad for much of the 1890s. In Fiji, Australia, India, South Africa, and Mozambique, he had been appalled by the way white rulers treated natives. His frame of historical and cultural reference was far broader than Roosevelt’s. He saw nobility in many peoples, and found much to admire abroad—quite unlike Roosevelt, who believed that “the man who loves other countries as much as he does his own is quite as noxious a member of society as a man who loves other women as much as

he loves his wife.”<sup>14</sup> Instead of seeing the United States only from within, Twain compared it to other powers. He saw his own country rushing to repeat the follies he believed had corrupted Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Russia, and the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. That way, he warned, lay war, oligarchy, militarism, and the suppression of freedom at home and abroad.

These adversaries—Roosevelt and Twain—were deliciously matched. Their views of life, freedom, duty, and the nature of human happiness could not have been further apart. World events divided them even before their direct confrontation began. When Germany seized the Chinese port of Kiaochow (later Tsingtao) in 1897, both men were outraged, but for different reasons. Twain opposed all foreign intervention in China; Roosevelt worried only that Germany was pulling ahead of the United States in the race for overseas concessions. Roosevelt considered

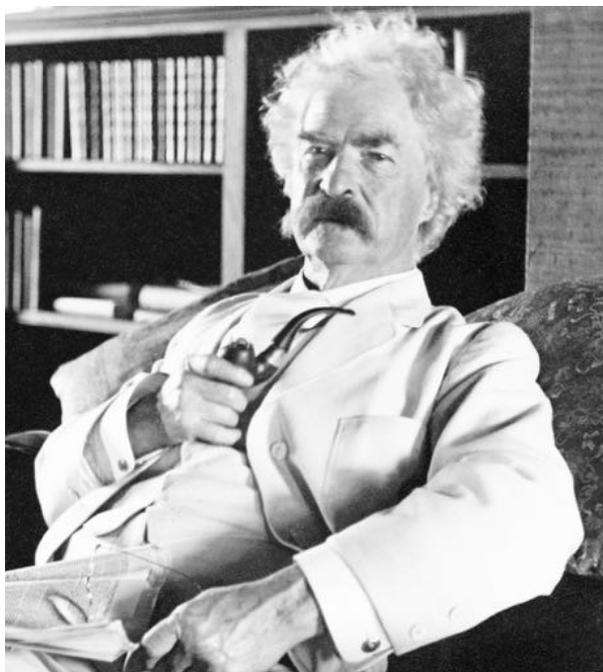


**Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919)**

colonialism a form of “Christian charity.” Twain pictured Christendom as “a majestic matron in flowing robes drenched with blood.”<sup>15</sup>

Even though Twain’s most famous novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, is full of coarse language and portrays a runaway rascal as a hero, Roosevelt acknowledged it as a classic. He did not care for much else that Twain wrote, however, and especially disliked *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. Twain treated the Knights of the Round Table as objects of lusty satire. Roosevelt had revered them since childhood and was appalled.<sup>16</sup>

Yet in intriguing ways, Roosevelt and Twain were remarkably similar. Both were fervent patriots who believed the United States had a sacred mission on earth—though they defined that mission quite differently. Both were writers and thinkers as well as activists. Most important, both were relentless self-promoters, born performers who carefully cultivated their public images. They loved to preach, reveled in the spotlight, and could not turn away from a crowd or a photographer. Acutely aware of each other’s popularity, neither publicly denounced the other. Among friends, though, both were free with their feelings. Roosevelt said he



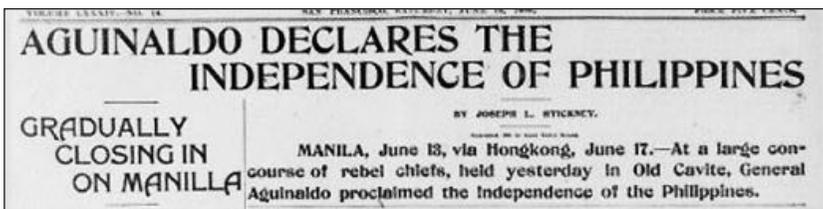
**Mark Twain (1835-1910)**

would like to “skin Mark Twain alive.” Twain considered Roosevelt “clearly insane” and “the most formidable disaster that has befallen the country since the Civil War.”<sup>17</sup>

Roosevelt was not the conceptualizer or organizer or leader of the imperialist movement. Twain filled none of those roles for the anti-imperialists. Nonetheless, they would become the most prominent, most admired, and most reviled spokesmen for their opposing causes. In mid-1898, Roosevelt was waiting impatiently for a chance to leap into history. Twain was planning his return to the United States. The stage was set for their confrontation.

Anti-imperialists enjoyed their country’s light footprint in the world. They hated war and believed liberty was America’s greatest gift to humanity. Imperialists considered war a purifying, invigorating, unifying force. In their imagined future, humanity would be guided by a virtuous United States and disciplined by American military power.

National unity, race, the meaning of liberty, the place of the United States in the world and in history—all of these grand themes shaped the debate that gripped Americans in 1898. At stake was nothing less than what kind of nation the United States would be in the twentieth century and beyond.



## THE FIRST ANTI-IMPERIALIST RESOLUTION

Anti-imperialists who convened at Faneuil Hall on that June 15 were abuzz with two pieces of exciting news. Reports had arrived from the Philippines that three days earlier, at a ceremony outside Manila, the Filipino rebel leader Emilio Aguinaldo had unfurled a new flag, led a chorus in singing a newly composed national anthem, and proclaimed a new nation: the Philippine Republic. Filipinos had declared an end to three and a half centuries of Spanish colonial rule.

This electrified American anti-imperialists. They insisted that as a freedom-loving nation, the United States must immediately recognize

Philippine independence. This development added urgency—and, in their eyes, immense moral weight—to the anti-imperial cause.

The day's morning newspapers also carried reports of another thrilling declaration. The prairie firebrand William Jennings Bryan had delivered a powerful speech in Omaha that seemed certain to bring the debate over imperialism to the center of American life. Until this moment, no major political leader had spoken out against the rush to empire. Bryan had been the Democratic nominee for president in 1896 and was thought likely to run again in 1900. He was one of the most popular figures in the United States and arguably the country's most spellbinding orator.

Anti-imperialists in Boston immediately recognized the value of Bryan's support. Many of them were prosperous businessmen, lawyers, professors, philosophers, and aesthetes. Bryan was the opposite: a barn-storming, rabble-rousing populist beloved by millions of farmers, immigrants, and poor people. His speech in Omaha echoed several that had been given in New England salons, but it was delivered to a huge crowd by one of the nation's leading politicians. That took the anti-imperial cause into the American heartland.

Bryan began not with an exposition of history but with an apocalyptic warning rooted in his Christian fundamentalism: "Jehovah deals with nations as He deals with men—and for both, decrees that the wages of sin is death!"<sup>18</sup>

History will vindicate the position taken by the United States in the war with Spain. . . . If, however, a contest undertaken for the sake of humanity degenerates into a war of conquest, we shall find it difficult to meet the charge of having added hypocrisy to greed.

Is our national character so weak that we cannot withstand the temptation to appropriate the first piece of land that comes within our reach? To inflict upon the enemy all possible harm is legitimate warfare, but shall we contemplate a scheme for the colonization of the Orient merely because our ships won a remarkable victory in the harbor of Manila? Our guns destroyed a Spanish fleet, but can they destroy that self-evident truth, that governments derive their just powers, not from superior force, but from the consent of the governed?<sup>19</sup>

As organizers of the Faneuil Hall meeting took their places on the stage shortly before three o'clock that afternoon, they had reason to believe they were riding the crest of history. They could not imagine that Americans would wish to capture the Philippines after Filipino patriots had proclaimed independence, or that they would sully their national honor by seizing Puerto Rico, subjugating Cuba, or annexing Hawaii. The sudden emergence of Bryan as an ally seemed proof that multitudes were on their side.

When the anti-imperialist meeting was gaveled to order on the afternoon of June 15, the House of Representatives in Washington had been debating the annexation of Hawaii for several hours. By four thirty, both sessions were drawing to a close. The climactic speech in Boston was delivered by one of the city's most eloquent lawyers, Moorfield Storey.

"How can we justify the annexation of Hawaii, whose people—outside the small fraction now kept in power by us—are notoriously opposed to it?" Storey demanded. "Let us once govern any considerable body of men without their consent, and it is but a question of time how soon this Republic shares the fate of Rome!"

After Storey finished, one of his comrades came to the podium and read a four-part resolution. This was a historic moment: the first time an anti-imperialist resolution was presented to a public meeting in the United States. It echoed through air that once carried the defiant words of Samuel Adams and John Hancock, and later those of William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass.

*Resolved*, that a war begun as an unselfish endeavor to fulfill a duty to humanity by ending the unhappy situation in Cuba must not be perverted into a war of conquest.

*Resolved*, that any annexation of territory as a result of this war would be a violation of the national faith pledged in the joint resolution of Congress which declared that the United States disclaimed "any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over Cuba except for the pacification thereof," a disclaimer which was intended to mean that this country had no selfish purpose in making war and which, in spirit, applies to every other possession of Spain.

*Resolved*, that the mission of the United States is to help the world by an example of successful self-government, and that

to abandon the principles and the policy under which we have prospered and embrace the doctrine and practices now called imperial is to enter the path which, with other great republics, has ended in the downfall of free institutions.

*Resolved*, that our first duty is to cure the evils in our own country.<sup>20</sup>

Following a suggestion from the audience, a fifth clause was added, directing organizers of the meeting to name a committee charged with contacting like-minded groups in other cities—echoing the “committees of correspondence” of the revolutionary period, which were also organized at Faneuil Hall. The resolution was adopted by acclamation. This was the first time Americans had joined to oppose the idea of overseas expansion. It marked a portentous beginning.



### **An Imperialist's Menu, *Boston Globe*, May 28, 1898**

Cartoon of Uncle Sam and an imperialist “Bill of Fare.” The waiter is President William McKinley. The menu lists: “Cuba Steak, Porto Rico Pig, Philippine Floating Islands, Sandwich [Hawaiian] Islands.”

## THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTES

As Bostonians approved their anti-imperialist resolution at Faneuil Hall, congressmen were making their fateful choice in Washington. All understood that although the immediate issue was Hawaii, the real question was immensely greater. It was nothing less than the future of the Republic: whether or not the United States should become a global military power and shape the fate of distant lands.

Late in the afternoon, at the same moment Moorfield Storey was speaking in Boston, Representative William Hepburn of Mississippi rose in Congress to deliver a speech that crystalized the pro-annexation position. “We have not a foot of territory that we have not taken from others,” he reminded his colleagues.<sup>21</sup> This uncomfortable truth proved, he said, that expansion is the logical path to national greatness.

“Who dares to say that, even if we should enter into this new policy, the fate which befell the Roman Empire would be ours?” Hepburn asked. “Look at England. What would she be today if confined to her insular domain? What could she be? The mistress of the seas? Ah, no! One of the leading nations of the earth? Ah, no! Giving her laws, her literature, and her civilization to the rest of the world? Ah, no! She would have been powerless for this great end. Had there not been a Frederick the Great, who can say that the little Duchy of Brandenburg would have extended itself into the great German empire of today? This same ‘greed,’ this thirst for annexation, this desire for new territory, this passion for extending civilization, has blessed the earth.”

That brought William Terry of Arkansas to his feet. “A war solemnly declared for the cause of humanity, justice, and the vindication of the national honor and the national flag is being perverted from the plain and proper purposes for which it was authorized by Congress and endorsed by the American people,” Terry declared. “That flag, sir, in all its history, was never unjust in conquest and aggression. It has always been glorious and honored among all the nations of the earth, because wherever it floated, upon the land or upon the sea, it was recognized as the emblem and very symbol of freedom, humanity and justice. . . . Let us stand true to the lofty principles of those who gave it to our keeping.”

At five o’clock, congressmen began casting their votes. The margin was overwhelming. By 209 to 91, the House of Representatives voted, for the first time in its history, to endorse the seizure of an overseas territory. After the Senate acted and President McKinley signed, Hawaii would become American.

That day—June 15, 1898—marked the beginning of a debate that would soon consume the country. The American anti-imperialist movement was born at Faneuil Hall in Boston on the same afternoon Congress set the United States on its imperial path. Battle lines were drawn for an epic clash.

HJM

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## Notes

1. This "Editor's Introduction" was co-authored by editor Dr. Mara Dodge and associate editor Dr. Christin Cleaton-Ruiz. It draws from Cleaton-Ruiz's excellent and in-depth book review published in the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Vol. 47:2 (June 2019), 153-57.
2. Gamaliel Bradford, *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 2, 1898. Quoted in E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 123. The classic study of the Anti-Imperialist League is Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). In *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898-1909* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), historian Michael Patrick Cullinane offers a fresh examination of the anti-imperialist movement that was long overdue. He revises and revives the history of anti-imperialism in the United States. He reveals that anti-imperialism, long considered dead and irrelevant once the Philippines had been annexed, lived on as a powerful opposition movement for another two decades. Another recent work is Fabian Hilfrich's *Debating American Exceptionalism: Empire and Democracy in the Wake of the Spanish American War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
3. The literature on the U.S. war in the Philippines is voluminous. Stanley Karnow's *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1989) won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize. Other key titles in the historiography include: Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1984); H.W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); John P. Langellier, *Uncle Sam's Little Wars: The Spanish-American War,*

*Philippine Insurrection and Boxer Rebellion, 1898-1902* (London: Greenhill, 1999); Onofre D. Corpuz, *Saga and Triumph: The Filipino Revolution Against Spain* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2002); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David J. Silbey, *War of Frontier and Empire* (NY: Hill & Wang, 2008); Susan K. Harris, *God's Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011); Gregg Jones, *Honor in the Dust: Theodore Roosevelt, War in the Philippines, and the Rise and Fall of American's Imperial Dream* (New York: New American Library, 2012); Michael Morey, *Fagen: An African American Renegade in the Philippine-American War* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019).

4. Quoted in Gerard W. Gawalt, "Reviewed Work: Moorfield Storey and the Abolitionist Tradition by William B. Hixson, Jr.," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 3 (September 1972), 451–453. For more on Storey see William B. Hixson, *Moorfield Storey and the Abolitionist Tradition* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1972). Storey is little-known today. He consistently and aggressively championed civil rights, not only for African Americans but also for American Indians and immigrants. He opposed immigration restrictions and was a powerful advocate for racial equality. He declared that, "When the white man governs himself, that is self-government, but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism." According to Hixson, as a lawyer and NAACP president Storey "launched and maintained the effective campaign to achieve the total destruction of the legal embodiment of white supremacy." He guided NAACP legal challenges to discriminatory laws that violated the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, especially related to disenfranchisement and segregation of African Americans in the South, and led several important NAACP legal victories. He opened the American Bar Association to African American lawyers by threatening to resign as president.

5. This account and all quotes in this article from the meeting at Faneuil Hall have been assembled from newspaper reports in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, *Boston Globe*, *Boston Journal*, and the *New York Times*, June 16, 1898.

6. James Grant, *Mr. Speaker!: The Life and Times of Thomas B. Reed, The Man Who Broke the Filibuster* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 360.

7. Carl Cavanaugh Hodges and Cathal J. Nolan, *U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy: From 1789 to the Present* (ABC-CLIO, 2006), 388.

8. Thomas J. Randolph, ed., *Memoirs, Correspondence and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 3 (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 119.

9. Mario M. Cuomo and Harold Holzer, eds., *Lincoln on Democracy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 71.

10. Todd Brewster, *Lincoln's Gamble: The Tumultuous Six Months That Gave America the Emancipation and Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 215.

11. *Congressional Record*, House of Representatives, Wednesday, June 15, 1898, 5967-6019. All Congressional quotes in this article are from this source.
12. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Bantam, 2003), 131.
13. Elting E. Morrison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951-54), 107.
14. Theodore Roosevelt, "The Monroe Doctrine," *Bachelor of Arts*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (March 1896).
15. William E. Phipps, *Mark Twain's Religion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 206.
16. Philip McFarland, *Mark Twain and the Colonel: Samuel L. Clemens, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Arrival of a New Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 13.
17. *Ibid.*, xiii.
18. *Boston Transcript*, June 15, 1898.
19. William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Life and Speeches of Hon. Wm. Jennings Bryan* (Baltimore: R.H. Woodward, 1900), 59.
20. *Boston Journal*, June 20, 1898.
21. *Congressional Record*, House of Representatives, Wednesday, June 15, 1898, 5967-6019. All Congressional quotes in this article are from this source.