

The Imperial Press: American Reflections on the Subjugation of the Philippines

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In February 1901, beloved American author Mark Twain published a chilling statement criticizing his country, which he had depicted in so many famous works of literature. Speaking on behalf of the American Anti-Imperialist League, Twain penned his trenchant disapproval of American international affairs. He addressed his article to “the Person Sitting in Darkness”—to the imperialists, blinded by greed and the prospects of power. Twain wrote, “There must be two Americas: one that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive’s new freedom away from him...We have debauched America’s honor and blackened her face before the world.”¹ With these pointed words, Twain addressed an issue that divided the nation: the Philippine question. The fate of the islands led the American public to question the very foundations of American identity and its position in the world. The Philippine question illuminated discussions of morality, race, religion, citizenship, and more. While the country remained divided in 1901, Mark Twain made his sentiment clear—America’s treatment of the Philippines forfeited the nation’s integrity: “And as for a flag for the Philippine Province, it is easily managed. We can have a special one—our States do it: we can have just our usual flag, with the

¹ Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” Mark Twain: The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War, Library of Congress, last modified June 22, 2011, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/twain.html>.

white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and crossbones.”²

The American acquisition of the Philippines in 1898 and the subsequent years of American colonial rule have endured as an important branch of historical study. Many scholars use the subjugation of the Philippines as a case study to discuss American colonization at large or to analyze how American territorial conquest fits into the global narrative of imperialism. Historical accounts of US rule in the Philippines can be separated by four common themes that run through scholars’ analysis of the topic: the internal American political and cultural debates concerning colonial rule over the Philippines, the international factors that promoted American assertion as a colonial power, American colonization of the Philippines in relationship to racial ideology, and the Filipino reaction to and perspective of American rule. Together, these four themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines.

Scholars have revealed how the imperial relationship between the United States and the Philippines brought to life dynamic conversation within the United States concerning citizenship, race, religious duty, and global power. While soldiers and political overseers carried out the institutions of colonization abroad, the American public examined and debated the Philippine question at home. The trajectory of American progress in the Philippines became a feature of the American press. Newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals rapidly covered reports sent back from administrators in the Philippines, accounts from soldiers abroad, and political debates and speeches. Using this material, this article analyzes the discussion of the American people at two critical moments in Philippine American history: directly after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War, which resulted in the Treaty of Paris (1898) and the Philippine-American War (1899–1902), and the

² Ibid.

months of conversation leading up to and immediately after the ratification of the Jones Act of 1916. It compares political debates and press coverage from these two historical moments to address the transformation in the American public's opinion of imperialism, provoked by involvement in the Philippines. I first analyze the arguments made by anti-imperialists and expansionists in 1898 and then discuss the debate between defendants and opponents of the Jones Bill in 1916. Next, I consider the similarities and differences in these positions over time. This article argues that the roughly twenty years of American rule in the Philippines affected the two schools of thought differently. While the anti-imperialists' arguments remained relatively unchanged and focused on moral stances and democratic principles, the expansionists and challengers of the Jones Act reactively altered their claims based on the evolving status of American "success" in the Philippines and the contingencies of the shortcomings of American rule.

When the United States defeated Spanish forces in 1898, concluding the Spanish-American War, they successfully completed an intervention on behalf of the Cuban people. With this victory came the spoils of glory—the possession of Spain's colonial territories and the emergence of the United States as a truly *global* power. On December 21, 1898, President William McKinley delivered a proclamation explaining American duty to the Philippine islands in light of the defeat of Spain, their former protectorate. The president claimed, "With the signature of the treaty of peace between the United States and Spain. . . the *future control, disposition, and government of the Philippine Islands are ceded to the United States*. In the fulfillment of the *rights of sovereignty* thus acquired and the responsible government thus assumed, the actual occupation and administration of the entire group of the

Philippine Islands becomes immediately necessary.”³ For many Americans, this circumstance of the United States’ acquisition of the Philippines motivated their beliefs of how they should be managed. They received news of the president’s call to action, which painted America as Spain’s successor, obligated to protect the Filipinos “in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights.”⁴

The press was quick to adopt this point of view presented by the president and explain American colonization of the Philippines in relationship to victory in the Spanish-American War. Three months after the president’s proclamation, a Topeka newspaper included a feature that aimed to explain American duty to the Philippines in simple terms. To achieve this, the writer presented a fictional conversation between a father and young child asking questions for a school report. The father describes to his son that those in favor of “expansion” desire that the United States keep its claim to the Philippines and other colonial possessions. When the son asks his father why the United States “bought” the Philippines, the father responds, “Oh, I suppose I’ll have to begin at the beginning. You know Spain is a cruel nation and has persecuted her colonies for many years. The people of the United States sympathized with Cubans...so we went to war to free Cuba.” When the child asks what the war had to do with the Philippines, the father goes on to explain that the Filipinos fought Spain for years, and “Spain is a corrupt and dishonest power, while the United States is a progressive and humane nation. We want to do what is best for these people. Of course we can’t turn the islands over to them because they don’t know enough to govern themselves. They

³ William McKinley, “Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation,” 21 December 1898, <http://www.msc.edu.ph/centennial/benevolent.html>. Italics in the original.

⁴ Ibid.

are not sufficiently civilized.”⁵ Mirroring the claims made by President McKinley, this Kansas newspaper defended the purchase of the Philippines as the only suitable plan of action following a victory against a colonial power. In the press, expansionists conceptualized the acquisition of the Philippines as a transfer of rule from a tyrannical power to more benevolent, capable hands rather than as a financial transaction. Other sources reveal, however, that this mindset had as much to do with belief in American preeminence as it did with belief in Filipino inferiority and ineptitude.

President McKinley’s 1898 proclamation set the tone for how the American press depicted the Filipino people for years to come. His speech was referenced repeatedly for its concluding remarks: “the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation...to repress disturbance and to overcome all obstacles to the bestowal of the blessings of good and stable government upon the people of the Philippine Islands under the free flag of the United States.”⁶ McKinley’s words depict a clear difference between the United States and the people of the Philippines; however subtle, it suggested a dichotomy between the civilizers and the uncivilized. This conceptualization of the United States’ duty to the Philippines as a civilizing mission resonated with Americans who took pride in the United States’ dealing with the native population. The conclusion of the Spanish-American War and the postulation of the Philippine question occurred only eleven years after the adoption of the Dawes Act, and many expansionists relied on the same language employed in the struggle to civilize the natives. They pointed to Indian removal as a successful practice of the United States, which served to rationalize taking on the Philippine mission. For example, *The Living Age* featured an article in 1899 that stated

⁵ Mable Diggs, “Reading for the Young Folks: Children Cannot Understand These Things,” *Advocate and News* (Topeka, KS), March 22, 1899, 14.

⁶ McKinley, “Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation.”

“The conquest of the Spanish islands in the East and West Indies, while arousing a world-wide interest, has raised issues of magnitude, and laid responsibilities of a new sort on the United States of America. Hitherto the Great Republic has managed its Red Indians in their reserves with partial success; it has brought the isolated Mormons of Utah under ordinary laws...Past experience of the prompt and decisive actions of the Americas in the field allows the hope that this ordinary phase of administration will soon be reached.”⁷ This article draws a clear parallel between the United States’ call to action as declared in the Treaty of Paris and the previous treatment of Native Americans. In the eyes of expansionists, both Filipinos and Native Americans embodied inferiority compared to Anglo-Saxon Americans; they saw the concessions of the Spanish-American War as a new frontier for the civilizing mission, which had been relatively successful on the mainland of the United States. This dichotomy of the civilized and the uncivilized soon came to dictate many of the opinions expressed by expansionists in regards to the Philippine question.

As reports from soldiers in the Philippines reached the United States, the press and academic publications produced highly racialized accounts of Filipino life. *Scientific American* magazine printed in 1898 a comprehensive exposé of Filipino tribal life. J. B. Steere, a professor of zoology and paleontology, classified distinct tribes of Indians based on their propensity to be civilized, claiming the Tagalogs were the “superior race” among Filipinos. Steere believed that the United States’ development of the islands must be achieved through the most “civilized Indians.”⁸ In 1899, *Forum* magazine took advantage of a rare opportunity. In their September publication, they included an account of Philippine culture as described by Ramon Reyes

⁷ John Jardine, “The Indian Civil Service as a Model for Cuba and the Philippines,” *The Living Age* 222 (1899): 144–54, 144.

⁸ J. B. Steere, “The Civilized Indians of the Philippines,” *Scientific American*, September 17, 1898, 184–87, 184.

Lala, the first ever Filipino to become an American citizen. Although born in Manila, Lala was educated in Europe. Once an American citizen, Lala vocally discussed the phases of the Philippine question, and his descriptions of the Philippines and the Filipino people became widely circulated. *Forum* included Lala's article entitled "The People of the Philippines," which depicted the Philippines as a "meeting-point" for two peoples spread across the East: the Malays and the Negritos. Lala described the Negritos as the "aborigines of the Philippines...mentally they are the lowest, or one of the lowest, of the human races, stupid in mind, degraded in condition, forest wanderers scarcely more settled than the apes." Then, Lala discussed the "Filipinos" (as named by the Spanish) on the islands that come from Malay origin. As a Filipino himself, Lala described this group as mostly "civilized" and "physically well-developed" despite the presence of other savage tribes across the Philippine islands. Lala concluded by saying, "These foregoing must serve as examples of the many wild tribes which inhabit the islands, and some of whom live like savages of the lowest type. One would think they could not be of the same race as the civilized Filipinos."⁹ The circulation of such a report in American magazines and newspapers presented a thought-provoking argument. The highly racialized differences described between the civilized Filipinos and the underdeveloped savages on the island created a justification for expansionist thought. Lala himself represented in particular the possibility of educating these people. Despite their inferiority to American colonizers, Lala showed the propensity of Filipinos to become educated and thus more civilized. Just as a global racial hierarchy existed, there existed one in the Philippines. While supposedly savage tribes inhabited the islands and especially required the hand of civilization, there also existed an entire race of people already

⁹ Ramon Reyes Lala, "The People of the Philippines," *Forum* 28 (1899): 29–34, 29–30, 34.

developing and ready for the hand of American guidance to achieve higher civilization.

While expansionists defended President McKinley's Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation and the early implementation of American institutions in the Philippines, the anti-imperialists did not shy away from expressing their discontent. Written in 1899, the platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League read: "The United States have always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right."¹⁰ Critics of expansion condemned the acquisition of the Philippines on the grounds that American imperialism was in contestation with the Constitution and the principle of liberty. The Anti-Imperialist League repeatedly referenced the words of Abraham Lincoln in its manifestos: "When a 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."¹¹ By using Lincoln's rhetoric, many anti-imperialists created a comparison between the subjugation of the Filipinos and the injustices of slavery. Just as expansionists drew a parallel to American westward expansion and the civilizing forces used against Native Americans to justify expansion, anti-imperialists presented a parallel between the subjugation of the Filipinos and the history of slavery in the United States as an argument *against* the acquisition of the Philippines. An article in *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* explained that just as labeling slavery a "peculiar institution" did not make its practices just, calling the colonization of the

¹⁰ "Platform of the American Antilmperialist League," in *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, vol. 6, ed. Frederick Bancroft (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Philippines “benevolent assimilation” was also a euphemism.¹² An 1899 Washington newspaper similarly called “benevolent assimilation” a “mask worn” to “cover a multitude of heinous ‘national sins.’”¹³

While the league presented these connections in their official documents, newspapers and magazines across the country featured pieces expressing similar anti-imperialist views. In 1901, the *New York Times* reported on the Anti-Imperialist League’s July 4th manifesto. The writer clearly sympathized with the group’s cause and stated that “The idea that this country may acquire territories anywhere upon the earth, by conquest or treaty, and hold them as mere colonies or provinces, and the people inhabiting them to enjoy only such rights as Congress chooses to accord them, this is wholly inconsistent with the spirit and genius as well as with the words of the Constitution.”¹⁴ Especially considering the trajectory of American history and its own former status as a colony of England, asserting imperialistic power seemed hypocritical and blatantly un-American to many US citizens. The same *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* article that compared colonization abroad to slavery at home also made the argument that colonization “barbarianized” the expansionist power and distracted imperialist nations from their own internal developments.¹⁵ These arguments made against colonial expansion in the Philippines all presented imperialism as a threat to American identity and prosperity.

Like their expansionist counterparts, anti-imperialists looked to race ideology as justification for their claims. While anti-imperialists and expansionists disagreed on many principles, people arguing on both sides of the Philippine question seemed

¹² George A. Richardson, “The Subjugation of Inferior Races,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 35, no. 205 (1900): 49–60, 54.

¹³ “Equality,” *Industrial Freedom* (Edison, WA), April 29, 1899, 2.

¹⁴ “Anti-Imperialists’ July 4 Manifesto,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1901, 77.

¹⁵ Richardson, “The Subjugation of Inferior Races,” 57.

to believe in the innate inferiority of the Filipino people. In 1900, George Richardson wrote for *Overly Monthly and Out West Magazine* a description of the anti-imperialist position: “They object to any expansion which adds to this nation large numbers of people greatly inferior to our own civilization and of a different race, or which places such people permanently under our control, compelling this nation to assume the responsibility for their political behavior.”¹⁶ While expansionists comprehended the “civilizing mission” of “inferior” races as the duty of the American people and other developed nations, anti-imperialists argued that racial inferiority made some peoples unassimilable and the task of modernizing such nations too daunting. A story included in a 1902 edition of *Cosmopolitan* represented this same belief. The writer, J. B. Walker, told the story of a young boy from Luzon named Pedrito to illustrate his point. An American took pity on Pedrito, adopted him, and had him educated in Europe. Although Pedrito returned to the Philippines fluent in three languages, the boy nonetheless chose to flee from the position his adopted father set up for him in Manila and was found years later to be living with a mountain tribe of “savages.” J. B. Walker published this story to communicate the impracticability of educating and civilizing an entire population of people like Pedrito. He wrote, “Ten millions of people with this heredity! What an undertaking to assimilate them into our body politic!”¹⁷ This writer’s use of the word *heredity* to explain his anecdote reveals his belief in the natural, scientific inferiority of the Filipino race. It conveys the popular sentiment that some characteristics were fixed traits that could not be altered by any civilizing force, no matter how great.

Many anti-imperialists similarly used such logic to explain the frivolousness in attempting to teach such principles as liberty

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

¹⁷ J. B. Walker, “Heredity in the Philippines,” *Cosmopolitan: A Monthly Illustrated Magazine* (March 1902): 564–65, 565.

and democracy to an uncivilized population. George Richardson's article in *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* also made the claim that "The American people cannot teach any nation the real spirit of democracy or republicanism. Every nation has to slowly evolve its government as a plant develops its buds, its blossoms, and its fruit."¹⁸ This idea assumed the intellectual inferiority of the Filipino people, but unlike arguments made by expansionists, Richardson did not view this as motivation for American intercession. According to his article, even Anglo-Saxons had a more primitive past, but their civilization was born from "free play," not the intervention of any superior power.¹⁹ Richardson proposed that American intervention in the Philippines (not to mention the atrocities committed in the Philippine-American War) prevented rather than secured the spread of justice and liberty in the Philippines. In 1900, Mark Twain likewise described the irony of US forces implementing a military government in the Philippines, thus stripping the Filipinos of their liberty and their own democratic capabilities. He wrote about the discrepancy between the promises of the United States' mission in the Philippines and the reality of the institutions in place: "It was not to be a government according to our ideas, but a government that represented the feeling of the majority of the Filipinos, a government according to Filipino ideas. That would have been a worthy mission for the United States. But now—why, we have got into a mess, a quagmire from which each fresh step renders the difficulty of extrication immensely greater."²⁰ Twain's dismay with American policy in the Philippines once again reveals the tension between American identity as the

¹⁸ Richardson, "The Subjugation of Inferior Races," 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁰ Mark Twain, "Mark Twain, The Greatest American Humorist," in *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*, ed. Jim Zwick (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

protectorate of freedom and the subjugation of the Filipino people.

Despite the grievances of the Anti-Imperialist League and other citizens sympathetic to its cause, the United States continued at full force establishing its rule in the Philippines. American dissatisfaction and protest against the United States' course of action abroad, however, did not disappear over time. By 1915–1916, the voice of the anti-imperialists was rejuvenated, fueled by the international consequences of imperialism. In 1914, World War I erupted in Europe, and the question of US involvement in the conflict loomed over the American people. While the war raged on overseas, the United States represented a nation untarnished by the dissent of imperialism. As the war further unfolded, it was only natural that the United States reconsidered its own imperialistic ventures. Once the Jones Bill, which recommended a declaration of the United States' intention to grant the Philippines independence, was proposed, both US representatives and the public at large more intently considered the available options. Like in 1898, the Philippine question once again presented a conflict that questioned American identity. The United States was faced with the choices of granting the Philippines complete independence, indefinitely delaying withdrawal, or creating a plan for withdrawal within a set number of years—and the press and scholarly journals dissected these options with great zeal.

After the introduction of the Jones Bill, anti-imperialist opinions became increasingly prevalent in newspapers, magazines, and published journals. Just as the anti-imperialists in 1898 opposed the acquisition of the Philippines on the grounds that the process contested with American principles of liberty and democracy, supporters of the Jones Bill used this notion to criticize administrative policies implemented on the islands. In 1915, *The Independent* included an article that explained the Jones Bill in these terms by analyzing the position of President Woodrow Wilson, who defended bill. The article included a

transcript of a speech delivered by Wilson in which he stated, "Please express to the people of the Philippine Islands my deep and abiding interest in their welfare and my purpose to serve them in every way possible." He declared his determination to see the bill passed and reiterated what the bill would achieve: "The bill is one that would enlarge the share of the people in the local government. It empowers them to elect the upper house or Senate, which is now a commission of appointed members, and the preamble carries a promise of ultimate independence."²¹ As Wilson presented it, the Jones Bill would transition the Philippines into its long-overdue independence through completely democratic means. He made it clear that changes would be made in order to finally grant liberty to the Filipinos and uphold the promises made by the United States at the point of acquisition.

Many defendants of the Jones Bill furthermore desired that the United States withdraw from the Philippines as a political rejection of American imperialism at large or as an acknowledgement that American forces had not accomplished their lofty, moralistic goals of protecting the Philippines. *The Youth's Companion* included an article in a 1916 entitled "Give Up the Philippines?" The writer claimed, "The real question is distinctly a moral one. It is our duty to give the Filipinos their political independence almost at once, and to labor for an agreement with the other nations that shall preserve that independence inviolable: or have we taken on ourselves an obligation that we cannot so cavalierly surrender without dishonor?"²² Many advocates for the Jones Bill believed that the United States had no right getting so heavily involved in the Philippines in the first place, let alone staying for almost twenty years. They defended the Jones Bill as the best way for the

²¹ "Mr. Wilson and the Philippines," *Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Political, Social, and Economic Tendencies* 82, no. 34 (1915): 274–75, 274.

²² "Give Up the Philippines?" *Youth's Companion* 90, no. 9 (1916): 118.

United States to honor its original promises to the Philippines and relinquish its duty as soon as possible, despite the corrupted motivations behind the islands' acquisition. In 1916, Professor David Y. Thomas wrote for the *New York Times*, "Possibly a few zealots did sincerely believe that the islands were given to us by Providence eighteen years ago, but the people most active in taking them never did believe anything of the kind. The islands came to us as a prize of war. Once in our hands we decided to keep them because they looked like a rich possession and made us look and feel like a world power."²³ Many of those in support of the Jones Bill by no means commended the initial justifications for purchasing and subduing the Philippines but understood that exposing the American failure to meet even their own expectations and promises would create a moral appeal to accept the Jones Bill proposal. Advocates for the Jones Bill presented the bill as a moralist resolution to reject the United States' imperialist past, while making right the promises made to the Philippine nation.

After roughly twenty years of American rule in the Philippines, and thus an increase in knowledge of the Filipino people, race ideology held a prominent position in discussions for and against the Jones Bill. While many supporters of the bill advocated for withdrawal from the islands because they believed imperialism to be unjust, undemocratic, and demoralizing to the United States, this did not mean they rejected claims of Filipino racial inferiority. In Thomas's article, he claimed, "Ethnically, the people are utter aliens. For us to assimilate them is out of the question. We will not even grant them citizenship as we did the negro. No one dreams of admitting them to State-hood."²⁴ This article contended that in the long-term, possession of the Philippines was unviable; they were never racially and intellectually cut out for a permanent place in the American

²³ David Y. Thomas, "American Conceit in the Philippines," *New York Times*, May 25, 1916, 7.

²⁴ Ibid.

politic and never possessed the traits intrinsic to American identity. In 1916, *Life* magazine included another pointedly sarcastic article titled “Short History of the Philippines: According to the Popular Conception.” It read: “What we are trying to do with the Philippines is to get them to govern themselves eventually as badly as we do, but this is a long way off. In the meantime, we are very good to them, and are teaching their children how to read and write and play politics, which is the chief end of all Americans.”²⁵ The sarcastic tone of this article relays two things: that the author had little faith in American administrators in the Philippines and believed educating Filipinos with American intellect and values was fruitless. The article portrayed American efforts in the Philippines as ridiculous and unproductive; it suggested that educating Filipinos to be like Americans would ultimately never be attainable and was just “play” for the “meantime.” This article reveals the racialized conceptions Americans held of Filipinos and their capabilities, which led many to support the Jones Bill as a way of abandoning an impossible mission.

The Jones Act (also known as the Philippine Autonomy Act) was ratified by Congress in August 1916. It formally declared the United States’ commitment to grant independence to the Philippines once a “stable” government was solidified and made provisions for a more autonomous and representative system of government in the meantime. The bill passed despite overt opposition from the Republican Party. Hostility towards the bill was manifested in not only Congress but also the media and scholarly publications. Despite the success of the bill, it is nevertheless important to analyze its controversy and the arguments made by the bill’s opponents. The act did not include an explicit timetable for granting the Philippines independence but rather provided leeway for US officials to decide *when* the Filipinos were ready for self-rule. (The final act did not include

²⁵ “Short History of the Philippines: According to the Popular Conception,” *Life*, January 1916, 103.

the provisions of the Clarke amendment (1916), which set the framework for Philippine independence to be granted within two to four years.) In many ways, this caveat reflected the disagreement and internal debate within the American public and political institutions that shaped the fate of the Philippine islands.

As the Jones Bill progressed through the American legislature, the press reported the diverse positions taken up by opponents of the bill. Across numerous news sources, magazines, and scholarly journals, denouncers of the bill expressed a common belief that the Jones Bill was unfit because American forces had not yet completed their mission in the Philippines, and Filipinos were not yet prepared for self-rule. Opponents of the bill described American administration in the Philippines as a work-in-progress, which would be wasteful and immoral to abandon mid-project. In May 1916, the *New York Times* featured an article written by Hamilton M. Wright, author of *A Handbook of the Philippines*. The article, entitled “Our Task in the Philippines Not Yet Complete,” claimed, “What kind of self-government would the Filipino people have upon the complete moral and physical withdrawal of the Americans?...It can hardly be expected that in twenty years they will have learned entirely to adopt the American system, and will entirely cast aside practices in local administration that have ruled in the Philippine Islands for centuries.”²⁶ Throughout the article, Wright contended that Filipinos were neither ready for independence, nor did they *desire* it. He relayed that American forces were put in place to guarantee the personal rights and liberties of Filipinos and to withdraw prematurely would be to forfeit the progress made towards those rights and stable Filipino self-rule. Wright concluded by stating, “If we relinquish the Philippines we will be put back 100 years. We would be disregarding the Christian work of almost three and a half centuries. We would be

²⁶ Hamilton M. Wright, “Our Task in the Philippines Not Yet Complete,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1916, 12–13, 12.

abandoning our ideals for the public school system. We could be conferring nothing upon the Filipino people but unhappiness. Can the American people afford to backslide?"²⁷ Wright's article depicted the Philippine mission as an investment that had not yet reached its potential, not only politically but socially. To withdraw from the Philippines would be to destabilize the progress made by such American institutions as schools and churches and waste the time and resources already spent by the US government.

In an article published in *The Independent*, ex-President of the United States Howard Taft warned against the proposals made by the Democratic Party. He claimed, "It is utter folly to suppose that in ten or eleven years all of this could be fully accomplished. Our work is very far from completed. Our duty to the Filipinos is far from done."²⁸ Taft's article emphasized *duty* as the paramount reason for the United States to remain actively involved in the governance of the Philippines. He suggested, "It will be cowardly to lay down the burden until the purpose is accomplished...To confer independence upon them now would be to subject the great mass of the people to the dominance of an oligarchical, very small, and probably exploiting minority. Such a course would be suicidal—as cruel to them as it would be shameful to us."²⁹ As proof of his claims, Taft referenced the fact that at the time roughly only 3 percent of Filipinos voted, and thus representative self-government was not yet viable.³⁰ He believed that it was not only the American mission but the American *duty* to ensure democracy thrived in the Philippines at its fullest potential. Opponents of the Jones Bill such as Taft rejected the proposal to grant the Philippines independence

²⁷ Ibid., 13.

²⁸ William Howard Taft, "Our Duty to the Philippines," *Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Political, Social, and Economic Tendencies* 76 (1913): 116–18, 116.

²⁹ Ibid., 118.

³⁰ Ibid., 116.

because they believed American institutions had not had enough time to run their course and leave a meaningful impact on the Filipino people. Those who denounced the Jones Bill praised the work of US forces that had made notable “improvements” to the Philippine islands by introducing bureaucratic institutions and sanitation programs, eradicating diseases, facilitating trade, spreading Christian teaching, establishing English-speaking schools, and creating infrastructure but believed that the United States had far more to accomplish before removal could be considered.

As previously discussed, many supporters of the Jones Bill claimed that expedited withdrawal from the Philippines was necessary in order for the United States to fulfill its promises to the Philippines, as well as to Spain. Opponents of the Jones Bill, however, cited this same premise as a reason why the United States should remain in the control of the Philippines for the foreseeable future. A 1916 *Outlook* article entitled “American Good Faith in the Philippines” described the Treaty of Paris not only as a contract between the United States and Spain but also as a pledge to the Philippines. The article stated, “If a treaty means anything, this treaty means that the United States cannot escape by any action its responsibility for the promises it has made regarding the Philippine Archipelago...To withdraw the Governmental authority of the United States from the Philippines without making sure, by the firmest and most material guarantees as enforceable as a mortgage...is to be faithless to its trust and to disregard its word and its honor. There is only one reason which would justify the United States in yielding up its sovereignty without fulfilling its obligations, and that reason would be in defeat by a superior force.”³¹ According to *Outlook*, the United States’ obligation to the Philippines was to remain in control until an autonomous Filipino government proved functional, which in 1916 was not

³¹ “American Good Faith in the Philippines,” *Outlook* (1916): 370–72, 370.

the case. An article written in 1916 for *The Independent* made similar claims. The author wrote, “Democracy and independence are not synonymous; they are not even inseparable...It is self-government that we owe to the Philippines...The Democratic proposal, speciously attractive in appearance, is in reality a plan for spurning this duty and violating the trust we assumed when we took over the islands from Spain.”³² Both of these articles suggested that independence was not in the best interest of the Filipinos and thus would be a violation of the Treaty of Paris and the United States’ promises to the Philippines. Not only would “discharging its duty” to the Philippines be detrimental to the progress of the Philippine nation, but it would reflect poorly on American virtue at a time when international approval was becoming increasingly important. Opponents of the Jones Bill suggested that withdrawal from the Philippines threatened the integrity of the United States and would reveal to the world weakness and dishonesty.

Although many of those who spoke out against the Jones Bill declared their desire to uphold the American pledge to the Philippines and expressed concern with the well-being of the Philippine people, they discussed the matter with highly racialized language and assumptions. Evaluations of the progress of the Philippine islands were gauged by a standard of how “Americanized” the islands had become. Many believed, for example, that the Philippine mission was not yet complete because not enough Filipinos were educated to speak fluent English. When discussing the institutions of stable, democratic government, many scholars employed racial ideology to explain why the mission to modernize the Philippines required more time. Hamilton M. Wright wrote, “Nowhere have the Malay people ever enjoyed self-government. This is, of course, no

³² “Independence or Self-Government,” *Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Political, Social, and Economic Tendencies* 85, no. 350 (1916): 217–18, 218.

argument why they should not. It simply shows that self-government is not native to them.” He continued, “Autonomous government as we know it is an Anglo-Saxon institution. It is part of the wool and fabric of the Anglo-Saxon... We have been endeavoring to teach this self-government to the Filipino, with whom it is not native. He has had less than twenty years of our tutelage.”³³ This article described an innate difference between Anglo-Saxons and Filipinos; it explained the natural inferiority of races that were less susceptible to democratic values. Wright argued that it would require more time to implement efficient self-government in the Philippines because the Filipinos were by nature less inclined to the foundational principles of civilization and democracy and thus had to be taught their values. Using arguments that highlighted the inferiority of the Filipino races, many Americans tried to justify the indefinite continuation of the subjugation of the Philippines.

Looking at newspaper articles and periodicals from 1898 and 1916—two turning points of Philippine-American history—one can glean a better understanding of the Philippine question as it was perceived by Americans at home—eight thousand miles removed from physical contact between Americans and Filipinos. Journalists and scholars used the outlets of the press and scholarly publications to question American institutions in the Philippines, the effectiveness of their administrators, congressional debates concerning the matter, and the opinions of the American public. While politicians debated the Jones Bill at the federal level, members of the American public once again took to the press to present their positions on a matter of policy that had occupied the United States for roughly twenty years. By looking comparatively at 1898 and 1916 as two critical moments in Philippine-American relations, one can see how the subjugation of the Philippines changed American perceptions of imperialism, national identity, and the United States’ role in the world.

³³ Wright, “Our Task in the Philippines,” 12.

By comparing the arguments made by anti-imperialists between 1898 and the conclusion of the Philippine-American War with those introduced by advocates of the Jones Bill circa 1916, one can evaluate the transformation of the conceptions of American imperialism by those who stood firmly against it. Both in 1898 and 1916, those in favor of Philippine independence criticized the colonization of the Philippines as a crime against the Constitution and the most intrinsic American principles of democracy and liberty. Before American forces took hold of the Philippines and began to install pieces of “American” government, anti-imperialists warned that the practices of “benevolent assimilation” would breed tyranny and the complete submission of the Filipinos to unchecked American colonizers. In 1916, supporters of the Jones Bill confirmed these suspicions and advocated for the bill as a way to finally grant the Philippines their independence, which was long overdue. The arguments made by anti-imperialists in 1898 and again in 1916 generally dealt with the issue of imperialism holistically; they did not rely heavily on the specific infractions of American action in the Philippines but focused primary on moral and conceptual stances to convey their discontent with overseas colonization. In 1898, anti-imperialists spoke out against the *principle* of subjugating a distant people and the ways this would alter American values. After years of expensive and tiresome work in the Philippines, these opinions remained; defendants of the Jones Bill returned to these arguments in light of more global concerns with the ramifications of American imperialism and with the confirmation that even after almost twenty years, the Filipinos remained fully subjected to American rule. They saw the Jones Bill as a way of abandoning the unjust path the United States had taken while still securing stability for the Filipino people. Between 1898 and 1916, anti-imperialist arguments changed very little because the basis of their concerns still remained an issue: the United States, the world’s model of democracy, was continuing to impose itself on a distant territory whose population did not formally consent to its authority.

Conversely, the twenty years of American occupation in the Philippines drastically altered the arguments made between expansionists in 1898 and denouncers of the Jones Bill in 1916. Opponents of the Jones Bill responded reactively to the status of American institutions in the Philippines in order to defend delaying Philippine independence. Unlike the arguments made by their opponents, those made by expansionists evolved based on the successes and failures of the implementation of American rule. They furthermore focused not on the issue of imperialism at large but solely on the relationship between the Philippines and the United States as its benefactor. In 1898 and as the Philippine-American War unfolded, expansionists discussed the Philippine question as a response to the special circumstances of victory in the Spanish-American War. In 1916, opponents of the Jones Bill once again contingently defended American involvement in the Philippines based on the status of American rule. The evidence provided by the press to denounce the Jones Bill pointed to insufficiencies in Philippine progress over the course of the past twenty years. Those in opposition to the bill commended American efforts to educate and civilize the Filipinos and establish functional democratic institutions but expressed their belief in the incompleteness of these tasks. In the media and academic circles, adversaries of the Jones Bill reflected on expansionist arguments made circa 1898 and referenced them as promises made to the Filipino people. When the United States acquired the Philippines as a territory, the nation pledged to extend democracy and modernization to the Philippines. For those questioning the provisions of the Jones Bill, the Philippine question became the task of measuring the fulfillment of these promises.

While anti-imperialists contended that the United States should withdraw from the Philippines because of moral and abstract reasons (such as the hypocrisy of imperialism), opponents of the bill speculated how such a withdrawal would *practically* and detrimentally impact the Filipino people. They examined closely the extent to which the United States had

achieved its civilizing mission to educate, sanitize, Christianize, modernize, and democratize the Philippines and how much more had to be accomplished for the Filipinos to experience the benefits of the American way of life. Their claims were reactionary in nature and aimed to defend not the principles of American imperialism but the ramifications of the task at hand. Unlike most of the cases made by anti-imperialists, expansionist arguments evolved over the course of American administration in response to tangible measurements of the progress of the Philippine mission.

Despite these differences, one clear similarity persisted in both anti-imperialist and expansionist debates from 1898 through 1916. As seen in the majority of opinions expressed in the press and academic journals, a common racial ideology guided American perspectives of the Philippine question. On both sides of the argument and at both points in time, the assumed racial (and thus intellectual) superiority of Americans as compared to Filipinos dictated American conceptualization of the Philippine question. Even when the contestation of the Jones Bill became clearly divided between the Republican and Democratic parties, racial ideology remained a common ground. In almost every source reviewed for this study, the writers spoke of the United States as the protectorate of the Philippines that knew best its needs, desires, and capabilities. While some questioned the moral and legal authority of the United States' control of the Philippines, there is little evidence that the American public did not wholeheartedly accept the inferiority of Filipinos and their ineptitude to become fully civilized and democratic by their own means. It is important to acknowledge that the standards by which the Filipinos were weighed were completely American constructs of values and ideals. This study serves to assess the distinctly American conceptions of the Philippine question, and as such, it is important to consider the biases that existed and shaped these conceptions of American identity and the identity of those that did not reflect this image. Racial ideology ran as a common thread through the American

confrontation of the Philippine question and greatly influenced the outcomes of US policy decisions.

Comparative analysis of the public discussion of the Philippine question in 1898 and 1916 reveals the distinct ways that American administration of the Philippines influenced the opinions of the American people. While anti-imperialist concerns consistently grounded themselves in moralist claims, expansionist views developed in response to the progress of American programs in the Philippines. While this comparison looks closely at two very specific moments in time, its trends are telling of the overarching narrative of American imperialism. As previously discussed, the imperialist debate over the Philippines highlighted the United States' questioning of American identity, the grounds of citizenship, racial ideology, the parameters of democracy, the implications of the Constitution and the United States' colonial past, American reflections of conflict with Native Americans and the institutions of slavery, the role of the United States in the world, and much more. While the institutions of colonialism were enacted overseas, their development incited *internal* consideration of American values. In essence, imperialism became an international battleground of an American identity crisis. From the vantage point of today, historians know the outcome of the Philippine question: while the Jones Act was ratified in 1916 and a Philippine bicameral legislature was put in place, the United States did not formally recognize the independent Republic of the Philippines until 1946 after regaining the territory from Japan following WWII. This knowledge, however, does not diminish the value of analyzing both 1898 and 1916 as moments in history when the American public reflected upon and contested not only American identity but the United States' role in the world as a developing international power. These two moments of American political debate reveal the consciousness of a nation, whose deliberations decided the fate of another people.