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## Article Title: Above the World: William Jennings Bryan's View of the American Nation in International Affairs

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Article Summary: One of the major elements in Bryan's intellectual and political life has been largely ignored by both critics and admirers of William Jennings Bryan: his vital patriotism and nationalism. By clarifying Bryan's Americanism, the author illuminates an essential element in his political philosophy and the consistent reason behind his foreign policy. Domestically Bryan thought the United States could be a unified monolithic community. Internationally he thought America still dominated her hemisphere and could, by sheer energy and purity of commitment, re-order the world. Bryan failed to understand that his vision of the American national was unrealizable. The America he believed in was totally vulnerable to domestic intolerance and international arrogance.

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ABOVE THE WORLD:  
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S VIEW  
OF THE AMERICAN NATION  
IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

*By Arthur Bud Ogle*

Twenty-nine years and one day after his tumultuous "Cross of Gold" speech, William Jennings Bryan took his place with the counsel for the prosecution in Dayton, Tennessee. There, as on that scorching day in Chicago three presidential candidacies and three long decades earlier, Bryan engaged in an allegorical "duel to the death." The golden-tongued orator did not rise to battle against John T. Scopes or William McKinley but to fight for an America that would stand up and be counted against Britain and the Old World for "national character. . .and national independence" which were being "weakened. . .and threatened by servile submission to foreign dictators"—the gold bugs of finance and Darwinians of evolution, and for local control of schools in a land where "the people" really ruled.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the Populism of 1896 and the anti-evolutionary Puritanism of 1925 was Bryan's belief in the American nation, God's will embodied in and through the common people. His basic premises about the nation had not changed much in those score and a half years. America was not like European nations. It was uniquely Christian and democratic to the degree that "the people" were to have absolute power. Paradoxically, both the hagiology and criticism which have enveloped Bryan—either the "boy orator" or the parvenu from the plains turned "defender of the faith" or mountebank of prohibition and Christendom—have neglected one of the major elements in Bryan's intellectual and political life, his vital patriotism and nationalism. That neglect in turn has obscured the dynamic consistency of Bryan's diplomacy. By clarifying Bryan's Americanism this author hopes to illuminate an essential element in his political philosophy and the consistent *raison d'être* of his foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

If any period of American history was archetypically patriotic and nationalistic it may well have been those years of expansion and hope known as the progressive era. Even the staunchest of anti-evolutionists, William Jennings Bryan, shared the Social Darwinists' enthusiasm for American progress.<sup>3</sup> Democratic Christianity and progressive patriotism were the pillars of Bryan's intellectual heritage and style. Nurtured on missionary revivalism, the *McGuffey Reader*, Bancroftian histories, and the Chautauqua, Bryan shared the Middle Border's "distinctive *volks Glaube*," a folk religion manifest in national patriotism and moral fervor. Consistently throughout his life, as evidenced in the "Cross of Gold" speech in 1896 and the "Last Message" of 1925, Bryan's Americanism emphasized the necessity to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>4</sup> As the promised land, the United States had to be democratic but homogeneous and unified, a unique and exemplary manifestation of idealism and God's will, and leader of the entire world.<sup>5</sup>

Failing to appreciate the scope and coherence of his Americanism, critical historians have projected two predominant images of Bryan. He is portrayed either as a bucolic bungler lost in Populism's panaceas of the past, or an unrealistic and moralistic isolationist preaching paper treaties and pacifism. Cast in these stereotyped roles, Bryan often appears as a prop to highlight an author's point, a stylized characterization or grist for the realists' mill. Therefore, before examining the significance of the Kingdom of God on earth in Bryan's thought and foreign policy, the two distorted images will be brought into focus.

Samuel Eliot Morison suggests Bryan was incapable of making hard decisions and was "the strangest secretary of state (sic) in the history of the Republic."<sup>6</sup> Williams, Current, and Freidel suggest a naive diplomat unaware of the consequences of the decisions he and others had to make.<sup>7</sup> Richard Challener, Oscar Handlin, and Russel B. Nye each depict a pathetic figure of "the old America," "born out of his time," and hopelessly floundering in the complexity and hard realities of the 20th century.<sup>8</sup> In his own inimitable style Richard Hofstadter tries to crucify Bryan with the pen, charging that "intellectually, Bryan was a boy who never left home."<sup>9</sup>

This caricature makes no attempt and cannot explain Bryan's championing of executive intervention in Latin American

political and economic affairs; nationalization of the railroads and other public services; comprehensive and nation-wide tax reform including graduated income tax; federal departments of health, labor and education; government subsidized loans, and health care programs for the needy; redefinition of international law in light of the threats and dangers of new weaponry; a specific working definition of the national interest; and a plethora of other "contemporary" and "realistic" proposals.<sup>10</sup>

The "unrealistic moralist" is sometimes portrayed as capable and well intentioned but so misdirected that he only responds to "drawing up so-called peace treaties."<sup>11</sup> Louis W. Koenig describes his executive career in a chapter entitled "A Pacifist Secretary of State." Fite and Graebner go so far as to suggest that Bryan had "no insight into the nature of international relations."<sup>12</sup> Even Lawrence W. Levine's careful study concludes that in all international and domestic concerns "the basis of Bryan's action was Christian morality."<sup>13</sup>

One major argument to discredit Bryan's "unrealistic" foreign policy emphasizes his opposition to war as a means to secure national objectives. His vision and ardent advocacy of a world at peace was a corollary of America's ideological superiority. But while he sedulously sought to create a world climate in which killings and coercion were no longer necessary, he realized that such a world was not yet a reality. Those who claim Bryan was a pacifist take his yearning for peace out of the context of his enthusiasm for patriotic loyalty and the citizen's duty to sacrifice self for the cause of liberty. "The essence of patriotism," he maintained in a Darwinianism inverted by Christianity, "is a willingness to sacrifice for one's country. . . a la Christ, to give blood for fellows."<sup>14</sup> That strain of militaristic martyrdom was evident throughout his life—from his frenetic efforts to serve in both the Spanish-American War and World War I, through his preference to be called colonel, to his last request for a full regalia military funeral in Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>15</sup>

Although Bryan originally opposed the United States' entry into World War I, he justified his advocacy and implementation of military intervention from Mexico to Mindanao in terms both of national interest and national mission. While secretary of state he approved use of military and naval forces in the Philippines, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the

Dominican Republic.<sup>16</sup> The promoters of the Bryan-as-pacifist image fail to account for his vigorous demands that America intervene militarily in Cuba while President McKinley was still trying to decide what to do in the wake of the *Maine*. They also neglect his support of a Nicaraguan canal as a defense for American Caribbean interests prior to Theodore Roosevelt's vocal enthusiasm for such a canal. Mentioning "the military advantages of such a canal," Bryan introduced a bill in 1894 to finance "the construction of the Nicaragua Canal. . . .of very great military and commercial importance to the United States."<sup>17</sup> Nor do these critics explain Bryan's later insistence on "America First" with special provisions for the United States while Presidents Taft and then Wilson sought to engineer an international league.<sup>18</sup>

Those who see a timid, inward-looking isolationism in Bryan's anti-imperialist crusade against annexation of the Philippines are mistaken. Despite superficial appearance, he was not acting from pacifist or isolationist principles. Demanding American military involvement in the Spanish-American War as a "moral obligation," Bryan volunteered directly to President McKinley. Despite pressure from friends and political colleagues when the President rejected his offer, the alleged pacifist raised his own volunteer regiment and proclaimed "war is. . . .sometimes the only means." He justified American military involvement "for the protection of the honor and welfare of the nation."<sup>19</sup> During and after negotiations with Spain, he strongly advocated maintenance of harbors, coaling stations, and naval bases for protection of United States ships in the Philippines. And he suggested that American "reservations" be maintained on the islands as "centers for the extension of American influence" so that "our nation would increase its importance as a world power."<sup>20</sup>

Although advocating a continuing military presence in the Philippines, Bryan attacked those who suggested that America's destiny required her preordained expansion. A basic tenet of his Americanism was that the nation controlled destiny, not the reverse. "When they [the people] speak," Bryan argued, "and not until then, will destiny be revealed."<sup>21</sup> Bryan's sense of "destiny" was embodied in an Americanism dominated by his concern for "national application of white man's burden."<sup>22</sup>

Another facet of Americanism explained Bryan's fear that the

moral and political fabric of the United States would be rent by accession of the Philippines. He assumed that to remain potent the United States must remain pure—in terms of both ideal and racial composition. Bryan expressed alarm at the “Yellow Peril’s” threat to “white supremacy.” The essential homogeneity of the nation would be destroyed by the inclusion of oriental Filipinos in the citizenry. As he reiterated in *The Commoner*, America must “insist upon the unity and homogeneousness of our nation.” Rather than a return to a mythic past, Bryan’s racism reflected passionate commitment to his concept of a vital nation.<sup>23</sup>

Bryan’s Americanism, not his heraldry of a mythic agrarian past or a pacific unrealistic isolationism, explains his advocacy both of domestic reforms bent on uplifting and unifying the citizenry and a foreign policy designed to assure American leadership. His rhetoric often played to the agrarian, the pacifist, the religious, and idealistic elements of the nation.<sup>24</sup> But persistent pressure for three elements of American nationalism—domestic homogeneity and unity, loyalty to the unique expression of God’s will, and commitment to world leadership—determined the central impact of his life.

The first element of Bryan’s Americanism—his insistence that democracy was only valid if the population was homogeneous and unified—was manifest throughout his career. Part of the magnetism of the “Cross of Gold” was the innocence of the victims. Bryan was not speaking on behalf of the rabble rousers. Nor was he a clarion of class conflict. He believed the bonds uniting Americans were far more significant than the tensions of exploitation or divisions of economic coercion. Thus, he was not against business; he simply wanted to broaden the appreciation thereof. Addressing the “gold men” he pleaded, “We say to you that you have made the definition of a businessman too limited in its application. The man who is employed for wages is as much a businessman as his employer.”<sup>25</sup> Uniting the inclusiveness of his appeal to “gold men” and “silverites” and the exclusiveness required by his fears of racial pollution, Bryan sought a unified and homogeneous nation. The same spirit was the basis of his case against Scopes. The people had the right to exclude “false teaching” because they had a prior obligation as citizens—to be united and to be subordinate to the cause they served.<sup>26</sup>

His vision of democracy was a far cry from the mythical individualistic populism of the agrarian yeoman seeking to avoid big problems, big business, big government, and contact with the outside world.<sup>27</sup> As an astute politician, he utilized the rhetoric most appealing to his constituency. Although Bryan idealized Jefferson's commitment to and confidence in the common people and saluted Jefferson's doctrine of limited government, their views of the American nation were poles apart. Jefferson, following Locke, felt the nation consisted of individuals who, for their own safety and welfare, contracted to form a functional union. The nation was viewed in mechanical imagery, with separate but inter-related working parts (the individuals). For Jefferson the individual people remained independent even after forming a social contract to establish a government. If the national machine broke down—no longer served the functions of the individual contracting parties—it was to be dismantled. Thus Jefferson's admonition for a revolution in every generation if necessary.

Bryan's concept of the nation was formed in circumstances and under influences far different than those in which Jefferson molded the new nation. Bryan did not think in terms of individuals but in terms of "the people."<sup>28</sup> The distinction is crucial. For Bryan the social contract was not made to form a state or government but to join a people or nation. The obligations of membership were therefore more inclusive. "The people" is not a mechanical or contractual relationship of individuals but an organic, all-encompassing whole. A child of the enlightenment, he realized the nation's destiny was not preordained by God or written in the stars. But Bryan went beyond the Enlightenment to a romantic affirmation of the unity of the nation, "people," as an entity in itself, not a conglomerate of individuals, choosing and forging its own destiny. At once closer to Hobbes and Hegel than Locke, Bryan's nation was the Hegelian embodiment of an idea, an essence, without Hegel or Locke's emphasis on freedom. Locke's social contract was designed to protect the interests of the majority from the state or outside forces. Hobbes' social contract justified the strong nation's requirement of total loyalty for the welfare and security of each member. With Hobbs, Bryan affirmed that, once the contract was entered into, the nation formed in a democratic way, each citizen was duty-bound to be loyal.<sup>29</sup>

The significance of this emphasis on the group's interest over against the interests of individual members of the nation is evident in Bryan's debate with Wilson prior to America's entry into World War I. Wilson accepted the traditional view that the nation's interest was the interest of individual nationals working separately or in groups. For Bryan national interest had to be understood as a people united in a cause. The national interest was totally separate from the interests of individual nationals. Because each individual needed to devote himself to the overriding purpose of the nation, private interests of individual Americans were subordinate to national interest rather than definitive of it.<sup>30</sup>

Beginning with several essays he wrote in college and his early speeches, Bryan emphasized duties and obligations to the nation rather than rights protected by the state. He spoke of the "sacred responsibility" to "guard the interests of our nation and to sacrifice our own interests for its good."<sup>31</sup> For Bryan, not individuals but "the people are the source of power." He explained the need for absolute unity in loyalty by emphasizing that "every unit of government, large or small, should have their (sic) power of self-defense or self-preservation, and that power should be absolute and complete."<sup>32</sup> Building from early emphasis on "homogeneousness" Bryan's theory required unquestioning obedience to the will and voice of the people. Dispute was necessary before final decisions were made, but once the people had spoken, absolute loyalty was the order of the day. His militant opposition to American involvement in World War I was based on the hope and expectation that the United States could simultaneously avoid the dangers of war and lead the world beyond them. When Wilson forewent America's exceptional pacific role, Bryan again proclaimed the war-time values of unity and total loyalty.<sup>33</sup> On several different occasions he urged national unity, arguing "whatever the government does it right and I shall support it to the uppermost . . . there should be no division or dissent."<sup>34</sup>

The Commoner felt a legislator's highest duty was to reflect the will of his constituents—with one exception! If the nation made a collective decision requiring loyalty, that loyalty took priority over conscience or constituents. As he wrote in *The Commoner*:

There is no reason why anyone would discuss that which has been done—when final action is taken, acquiescence on the part of the citizen becomes a duty. . .with the citizen the question of duty is sometimes more important than the question of rights. The vital question is not what he can do but what he ought to do.<sup>35</sup>

After America entered World War I Bryan attacked those who continued to resist the nation's participation. In August, 1917, he turned on his supposed colleagues, the pacifists:

This is the best government on earth. . .it is a government of the people—not of one or a few men. If a few men are permitted to resist a law—any law—because they do not like it, government becomes a farce.

War is a last resort—it is a reflection upon civilization that it still reddens the earth—but so long as nations go to war the citizen cannot escape a citizen's duty. If his conscience forbids him to do what his government demands he must submit without complaint, to any punishment inflicted, whether the punishment be imprisonment or death.<sup>36</sup>

Bryan felt freedom of speech and freedom of the press were only instrumental rights, to be limited if necessary for the good of the people. He supported the idea that "the fundamental principle of popular government whether coercive or cooperative" is the same, "that the people have a right to what they want; that the people are the source of power."<sup>37</sup> With that much coercive power invested in the nation it is little wonder Bryan sought to keep the nation free from control by "the interests." Private and selfish interests had no legitimate place in the land of the people. Because the people institutionalized—the nation—was the only legitimate source of power, Bryan insisted that power—economic, media, military, educational, or political—be shared by all. The nation's vitality depended on legitimate expression of the will of the people. America would triumph because there "the voice of the people. . .[is] the voice of God."<sup>38</sup>

Bryan's legal and moral argument at Dayton rested primarily on the belief that the majority must protect its interests and the interest of the nation by educating young people the proper way. By prosecuting Scopes he was not "trying to establish a religion or to teach it," but rather he was supporting the community's right "to protect itself."<sup>39</sup>

But total domestic unity and harmony was only the foundation upon which Bryan built his proud Americanism. Inspired by that ever-newly-created unity, America had to be unique, an exemplary manifestation of idealism and God's will. As God's extraordinary chosen people, "the voice of God" in the midst of an explosive and despotic world, Bryan's "conquering na-

tion" was a splendid dynamo called to regenerate the world. To play her Messianic role, Bryan felt the United States needed to recognize that it was *sui generis*.<sup>40</sup>

To remain genuinely unique America had to be independent from and superior to European nations. During the Scopes trial Bryan jested that Darwin had not even had man descend "from American monkeys but from Old World monkeys."<sup>41</sup> The independence of Washington's enshrined "Farewell Address," an independence merely of "no entangling alliances," was insufficient for Bryan. "The commoner" at home, Bryan's America was in no way to be a commoner in the world.

Tainted with a deep cultural anti-English bias, Bryan argued in support of independence of action for the United States from his first years in public life.<sup>42</sup> Defending bimetallism against the English gold standard, Bryan insisted that Congress must declare "the financial independence of the United States." He was absolutely confident of America's leadership in the world, and from 1888 onward he assured skeptics that if the United States would maintain bimetallism the rest of the world would be required to follow suit. He continually goaded his congressional critics by demanding, "Are we dependent or independent as a nation?" In 1893 he summarized his early position:

One hundred and seventeen years ago the liberty bell gave notice to a waiting and expectant people that independence had been declared. There may be doubting, trembling ones among us now, but sirs, I do not overestimate it when I say that out of twelve million voters, more than ten millions are waiting, anxiously waiting for the signal which shall announce the financial independence of the United States. This Congress cannot more surely win the approval of a grateful people than by declaring that this nation, the grandest which the world has ever seen, has the right and the ability to legislate for its own people on every subject, regardless of the wishes, the entreaties, or the threats of foreign powers.<sup>43</sup>

Literally hundreds of times in speeches across the country during the 1896 "first battle" for the White House, Bryan cajoled, "Let me appeal to your patriotism." Invariably there followed a sharp attack on timid politicians afraid to leave British apron strings.<sup>44</sup>

That baptism by fire helped establish a permanent intransigence on Bryan's part. Issue after issue became a matter of patriotic loyalty. The income tax, for example, was promoted as a patriotic concern.<sup>45</sup> But Bryan's separation of the United States from the Old World was not an isolationist escape. Rather, it was the heady stuff of living in a superior environ-

ment in which America theoretically transcended normal worldly limitations. His opposition to colonialism and vivid attacks on the security treaty with France and the Four-Power treaty stemmed from the raw pride of the heartland frontiersman's insistence on going it alone, not the frightened separateness of isolationism but the triumphant solitude of supremacy. The central role of America's special status was blatant in his opposition to Taft's League to Enforce Peace and several provisions of the League of Nations. The intensity of Bryan's commitment to America's unique role in the world is nowhere better illustrated than in his opposition to these two leagues, which supposedly represented his best thinking on international affairs.

Bryan spent a life-time preaching world cooperation but was unwilling to share sovereignty in order to build an international structure. Bryan's brand of Americanism required that America be involved in the world's affairs only on its own terms. Refusing to broach any encroachment on the Monroe Doctrine or to tolerate determination of US foreign policy by "a council controlled by European nations,"<sup>46</sup> the advocate of international arbitration made it clear that he was willing to spend "millions for defense" but not one cent or one American life for "the settlement of European disputes," unless such disputes furthered American leadership. Bryan capitalized on heartland America's basic mistrust of Britain and the Old World as he translated a negative emotion into a positive commitment. The Old World was transformed from "the enemy" to a semi-retired partner in the world's work. The United States needed to respect, help, and work with all the European nations in order to secure its foremost position in international affairs. "Most important in my mind," Bryan professed, was the preservation of America's position on the lofty pinnacle of righteous world leadership. In *Commoner* editorials he pleaded that the American people not sacrifice the principle of "America first!"<sup>47</sup>

Exposing his own belief in historical evolution and illuminating the consistent role Americanism played in his thought, on several occasions Bryan referred to the "triumphant march" of the American idea. One of his favorite Chautauqua addresses concluded with a ringing call to colors:

Much has been said of late about Anglo-Saxon civilization. . . . A still later type has appeared which is superior to any which has existed heretofore, and with this new type will

come a higher civilization than any which has preceded it. Great has been the Greek, the Latin, the Slav, the Celt, the Teuton and the Anglo-Saxon, but greater than any of these is the American in whom are blended the virtues of them all. . . . Anglo-Saxon civilization has taught the individual to protect his own rights; American civilization will teach him to respect the rights of others. . . .

Anglo-Saxon civilization has carried its flag to every clime and defended it with forts and garrisons; American civilization will imprint its flag upon the hearts of all who long for freedom.

"To American civilization all hail! Time's noblest offspring is the last."<sup>48</sup>

The third element of Bryanesque nationalism—America's responsibility to lead the world—was at once Bryan's favorite and most problematic. The Nebraskan's vision exceeded his grasp of international relations because his definition of the American nation was unrealizable. The United States was supposed to play a unique role in the world, but try though he did, Bryan was unable to develop successful practical methods with which to implement his goals. When he put "uplift" for Latin America into practice it looked like a Bryan corollary to dollar diplomacy. Professed Pan-American cooperation via the Monroe Doctrine looked like an extended Platt Amendment when the secretary applied it in the Caribbean. His carefully orchestrated and much proclaimed arbitration treaties proved to be scraps of paper. War was war. Bryan could not develop strategies to lead the world as long as he thought the United States really did not fit the world.<sup>49</sup>

American leadership of the world was a heavy responsibility. Realizing that there could be no "peace without justice" and that justice required fulfillment of the people's will, Bryan's United States needed to build not only peace but justice and democracy as well.<sup>50</sup> It was America's duty as the archetype of a genuine people's nation to help others realize that "all the peoples of the world are tending to democracy," that "we shall not fulfill our great mission, we shall not live up to our high ideal until justice between all mankind becomes a reality."<sup>51</sup> Kipling's "white man's burden" became Bryan's national honor. He waxed eloquently, "Behold a republic gradually, but surely, becoming a supreme moral factor in the world's progress, and the accepted arbiter of the world's disputes."<sup>52</sup>

Bryan's understanding of strategic and economic interests in the Philippines and China, his verbal and moral support for anti-colonial struggles, his arbitration treaties and participation in international congresses, his efforts to mediate before the United States entered World War I, the struggle for an

American-led league after the war, all exemplify his efforts to establish American world leadership.<sup>53</sup> Bryan's 1916 "The Causeless War and Its Lessons for Us" urged the President and the people to capitalize on another God-given opportunity to lead the world:

In all history no such opportunity has ever come to any other nation as that which is destined to come to the United States. In all history no other peacemaker has ever been in a position to claim so rich a blessing as that which will be pronounced upon our President when the time for mediation comes—and come it must.<sup>54</sup>

But the contradiction between America's exceptional role and its ability to exert unique leadership was nowhere more evident than in Secretary of State Bryan's Latin American policy.

Those who assume Bryan suddenly became an imperialist when he secured power as secretary of state or that his "expansionism" in the Caribbean and Latin America conflicted with his earlier proclivities, misunderstood Bryan's view of the American nation.<sup>55</sup> He vigorously and consistently opposed interference by individual American capitalists or intervention to exploit the native population even while he was secretary of state.<sup>56</sup> But just as vigorously and consistently he entreated the American nation to fulfill its responsibilities to lead the world. "This nation," he exhorted in one of his favorite talks, is "a great nation, a conquering nation, it should conquer the world."<sup>57</sup> From historical association, economic dependency, cultural affinity, and geographical proximity the United States had special responsibilities as civilizing benefactor to Latin America.<sup>58</sup>

Presuming that all Latin Americans ought to learn English, Bryan and Wilson failed to appoint a single Spanish-speaking ambassador to a Latin American nation. Bryan was confident he could communicate in ways which were much more effective than mere words. In fact, he was so persistent that as secretary of state he in effect added a "Bryan corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine. Bryan explained that the 19th century challenge to United States dominance in the Western Hemisphere has been expressed in military and political threats to Latin American nations. In the 20th century, however, the danger was economic penetration, exploitation, and subversion.<sup>59</sup> Early in 1913 the secretary of state tried to persuade a reluctant Senate to approve a treaty virtually turning Nicaragua into an American protectorate. Failing in that endeavor, on July 17 the secretary sought

to assume the mantle of leadership by floating federal government self-liquidating loans to Nicaragua, again to no avail.<sup>60</sup>

Undaunted by these initial setbacks, Bryan was convinced that the United States must "rescue. . . these countries" so that America could have such "an increased influence. . . that we could prevent revolutions, promote education, and advance stable and just government." Again appealing to Wilson he wanted to make "absolutely sure our domination of the situation" continued in Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Santo Domingo, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, virtually the entire Caribbean area, by securing "modified protectorate[s]" and "financial protectorate[s]."<sup>61</sup>

Protectorates, military bases, control of the economies of these unstable nations, all were part of Bryan's larger scheme of things—federal exertion of American leadership over the world, the extension of "the sphere of American influence beyond what we have before exercised."<sup>62</sup> Assumption of full-scale economic and political power in the Dominican Republic and Santo Domingo was accompanied by active use of the naval fleet and efforts to build a huge military complex on Mole St. Nicholas, Haiti. Wars, conquest of native peoples, arbitration treaties, international leagues—all were subordinate to Bryan's vision of Americanism. Whenever Bryan discussed America's role in the world the themes were the same. The United States must remain unique. But even more important, the nation, its citizenry, and its leadership must use whatever means were appropriate and available to promote American leadership in the world.<sup>63</sup>

A *coup d'oeil* of a few highpoints in Bryan's 1922 James Sprunt lectures to Union Theological Seminary entitled "In His Image" perhaps best illustrates his marriage of evangelistic democracy and progressive Americanism. It is no accident that the first example which came to his mind as an illustration of the "mystery" of God was "patriotism" and a celebration of "citizenship in the United States," which called for a willingness to "sacrifice more than any other citizen" to fulfill the nation's unique blessing. Nor was it an accident that in order to explicate "the value of the soul" he eulogized the American spirit and "our nation. . . the greatest in the world and the greatest of all time" which was responsible "to put God's truth to a test." No surprise, either, was his illustration of God's

"priceless gifts." First and foremost were "the priceless gifts that come to us because we live under the Stars and Stripes." While discussing the "peace" of God, Bryan placed responsibility "for the saving of civilization" squarely on the shoulders of the American nation. "Teach the world," he exhorted, by keeping total "freedom of action" on the use of "weapons of warfare." Reiterating once again his 1900 campaign theme of the United States as "the supreme moral factor in the world" whose influence and form of government "is spreading throughout the world," Bryan asked his listeners and readers to think for a moment of the need for faith in daily life. He then thanked God for the opportunity to build on the faith "foundations of a civilization the highest that the world has known." As he fought to prove at the Scopes trial, religion and Americanism were inseparable. Evolution was an atheistic import from the Old World and therefore to be expunged by the people, the authentic source and executor of law. Bryan was aware of some potential dangers in regulating schools according to religious truth and public sentiment. But he was marching on until the moment he died.<sup>64</sup>

It was a fitting burial. William Jennings Bryan's flag-draped casket faced east in Arlington National Cemetery. The Reverend Joseph R. Sizoo intoned appropriately, "We bury our dead with their faces toward the East" not only because "sunrise eternal has broken over his soul" but because "the East" and the Old World just beyond had always been a foe to be faced and fought, an ideational place that never understood heartland America, the real American nation. The rain-soaked casket belonged at Arlington—symbol of the nation's great moments, the total dedication of its finest patriots. Mary Baird was certain the rainbow that flitted through the clouds as the Great Commoner's coffin slipped below the earth was testimony to his faithful service in God's "chosen nation."<sup>65</sup>

To a great degree Bryan's complex combination of idealism and nationalism was obscured by the times in which he lived. In the context of Albert Beveridge's irrepressible "march of the flag," Bryan did seem timid and isolationist. Contrasted with Teddy Roosevelt's exuberant "big stick" diplomacy Bryan appeared gentle and pacific. Next to Henry Demarest Lloyd and Clarence Darrow, he might have appeared bucolic or naive. Opposite the "realism" of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Henry Cabot

Lodge, William Jennings Bryan was idealistic and moralistic. To conclude, however, that opposition to Roosevelt's blatant militarism implied idealistic pacifism misses the mood of the times. In a fundamental sense Bryan, Beveridge, Roosevelt, Mahan, and Lodge were of like mind. Each had a fanatical devotion to his own concept of the American nation. Bryan's idealism was not a vague confidence in morality so much as an absolute idealization of America. While Roosevelt saw a robust United States dealing with nations of the world on their terms, Bryan's America stood *sui generically* above the world.

It is easy to say that Bryan did not keep up with or understand the rapidly changing world in which he lived. But to judge Bryan apart from the context and options in which he operated is inaccurate and misleading. Nationalism was the newest and most volatile mount to charge into the 20th century. The Rough Riders and LaFollettes, Princeton professors, and William Howard Tafts of his time did not appreciate the domestic or international implications of nationalism either. The world was not yet a spaceship, nor a smoothly running machine oiled in Vienna or London. It was an awkward age, when the game of international relations required entirely new goals and methods. Bryan hoped to meet the challenge of a new age with a Messianic nation. Domestically he thought the United States could be a unified monolithic community. Internationally he thought America still dominated her hemisphere and could by sheer energy and purity of commitment re-order the world. That vision was faulty but not because Bryan was tied to an agrarian past or was unwilling to back fuzzily idealistic policies with sufficient force. His dream of Americanism was never realized because Bryan was unaware of the nightmarish potential pregnant within his Americanism. Bryan was so enchanted with the bright glow produced by the flame of American nationalism, so enraptured with the beloved community, so confident not only of American ideas but of American power, that he understood neither the destructive potential in the coercive domestic power of American nationalism nor the limitations that other countries' nationalism and national interests placed on United States foreign policy. The America he believed in was totally vulnerable to domestic intolerance and international arrogance.

## NOTES

1. *New York Times*, July 8, 1925; J.C. Long, *The Great Commoner* (New York, 1928), 94; William Jennings Bryan, *The Last Message of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1925). See also Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* (3 Vols., Lincoln, Nebraska 1964-1969), especially Volume III, Chapters 8 and 9. The author is indebted to Coletta's work for suggesting several sources of information.

2. "Americanism" is a particularly apt word to describe Bryan's patriotic nationalism. It emphasizes the unique nature of the American phenomenon he was swept up by and believed in.

3. William Jennings Bryan, *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan* (2 Vols., New York, 1909), Volume II, 202.

4. For example, Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume I, xxvii, 238, 289; Bryan, *Last Message*, 68-69.

5. For the "Middle Border's 'distinctive volksglaube'" see Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind* (New Haven, 1950), 38; Peter Mode, *The Frontier Spirit in American History* (New York, 1923), 29; Richard D. Mosier, *Making the American Mind: Social and Moral Ideas in the McGuffey Readers* (New York, 1947); Harry P. Harrison and Karl Detzer, *Culture Under Convass* (New York, 1958); Gay MacLaren, *Morally We Roll Along* (Boston, 1938). On "moral imperialism" see William Jennings Bryan, *The Old World and Its Ways* (St. Louis, 1907) Chapters 6, 9, 25; pp. 294, 472-477; William Jennings Bryan, "Letter to a Chinese Official," William Jennings Bryan Papers (Library of Congress); *The Commoner* (Volume II, April 4, 1902); Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume II, 212, 215, 291.

6. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York, 1965), 842, 845.

7. Williams, Current and Freidel, *A History of the United States* (2 Vols., New York, 1960), Volume II, 355.

8. Richard Challener, "William Jennings Bryan," Norman Graebner, ed., *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1961), 100; Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics* (New York, 1965), 113; Oscar Handlin, *The History of the United States* (2 Vols., New York, 1968), 317.

9. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948), 194, 205; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), 127-129. Despite stereotyping Bryan, Hofstadter alludes to the central role nationalism played for Social Darwinists and populists at the turn of the century. He noted the "Populist impulse" that "was nationalist, anti-European, and anti-English," a "collectivism of the nationalist or racist variety." Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955), 273, and *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston, 1944), 202. Merle Curti's early study referred to Bryan's nationalism by noting that "if he (Bryan) must choose between nationalism and pacifism, the choice was clear." *Bryan and World Peace*, (New York, 1969), 183. But neither of these suggestions has been developed and the impact of Bryan's Americanism has remained obscure.

10. See *The Commoner* (Vols. 5, 6, 15-20, March 3, June 9, July 28, and August 18, 1905; September 6 and December 21, 1906; September and November, 1915; February, 1916; January, 1917; January, 1918; January, 1919); *New York Sun* (November 6, 1915); "January 12, 1920, Speech to Nebraska Constitutional Convention," Bryan Papers. See also newspaper clippings in box 64 and "July 17 Speech to Labor Leaders," "June 19, 1915, National Honor Speech," "Statement June 12, 1915," all Bryan Papers.

11. Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1970), 54; Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography* (New York, 1971), Chapter 25.

12. Gilbert C. Fite and Norman A. Graebner, *Recent United States History* (New York, 1972), 77.

13. Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith; William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915-1925* (New York, 1965), 358-359. Levine's analysis is handicapped by his failure to recognize Bryan's Americanism. That Americanism explains "democracy's compromises," which are not justified by Levine's single standard to explain Bryan's actions, "Christian morality."

14. William Jennings Bryan, *The Second Battle* (Chicago, 1900), 80. See also Bryan, "1880 Essay on Vigilance," Bryan to Congressman E. C. Hilliar, April 3, 1917; Bryan to every member of Congress, May 28, 1917, Bryan Papers; Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume I, 76, 224.

15. William and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago, 1925), 119-121; *New York Times* (July 12-17, 1925).

16. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1913* (Washington, DC, 1914); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914* (Washington, DC, 1915); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915* (Washington, DC, 1916).

17. Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume I, 224; Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, May 13, and August 29, 1914, Bryan Papers.

18. William Jennings Bryan, "Negative," *International Conciliation* (New York, 1917), 227-244; *The Commoner* (Volume 16, May, 1916).

19. Grace Bryan Hargreaves, unpublished biography, Chapter I and 145-146, Bryan Papers; Coletta, *Bryan*, Volume I, 220; Bryan to Mary Baird Bryan, September 5, October 12, 26, 1898; Bryan to Mrs. O. S. Wissler, May 3, 1900, and clippings from *Boston Globe* (December 15, 24, 1898), Bryan Papers; *Omaha World-Herald*, March 9, 1898.

20. Bryan, *Old World*, 200-202; Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume II, 27, 46.

21. William Jennings Bryan, "February 22, 1899, speech to Virginia Democratic Association," Bryan Papers; Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume II, Chapters 3 and 4, 47.

22. Bryan, *Old World*, Chapters 6, 9, 25, pp. 294, 472-477; *The Commoner* (Vol. 2, April 4, 1902); Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume II, 8, 26-27, 39-40, 212-215, 29; Hargreaves, unpublished biography, 416; Emilio Aguinaldo and Vincente Abano Pacis, *A Second Look at America* (New York, 1957), 87-89.

23. *The Commoner* (Vols. 1 and 2, June 30 and December 6, 1901, and February 21, 1902); Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume II, 11; Rubin Francis Weston, *Racism in U.S. Imperialism* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1972).

24. Students of rhetoric and history need to work together to delineate the projected, public or persuaded self, the image, from the deciding, acting self, the agent. Bryan was a consummate performer, and his rhetoric must be analyzed in the context of his purposes for using it. It is unwise to judge Bryan's performance entirely on the artfulness of his rhetoric. See here J. J. Auer, ed. *The Rhetoric of Our Times* (New York, 1969); Charles W. Lomas, ed. *The Agitator in American Society* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968).

25. Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume I, 240.

26. Bryan to S. K. Hicks, May 28, 1925, Bryan Papers.

27. Paul Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People* (Philadelphia, 1964), argues that Bryan embodied the myth and could think only in those terms.

28. Bryan, "June 12, 1920, Speech," Bryan Papers.

29. Bryan, "Vigilance," "Lincoln vs. Hamilton: Speech to Women's Bimetallic League, February 12, 1898," Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, February 26, 1913, Bryan Papers.

30. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, July 19, 1913, Bryan Papers; Bryan and Bryan, *Memoirs*, 422, 424.

31. Bryan's college essays, "Vigilance," "Duty," "Justice," and "Character"; "The Value of an Ideal"; "1889 Speech"; all in Bryan Papers. See also Bryan, *Speeches*, Volume I, xxxii, 76, 160, 178-179.

32. Bryan, "June 12, 1920, Speech," Bryan Papers.

33. Bryan, "National Honor Speech, New York City, June 19, 1915," and "Speech at Albany, Georgia, April 7, 1917," Bryan Papers; *Richmond Times*, October 10, 1915; *The Commoner* (Vols. 15-18, July and November, 1915, January and May, 1916, April, July and November, 1917, January and February, 1918).

34. *New York Times*, April 17, 1917; Bryan, "National Honor," Bryan Papers; "Interview," *Chicago Journal*, August 31, 1917.

35. *The Commoner*, Vol. 17, October, 1917.

36. *The Commoner*, Vol. 17, August, 1917.

37. Bryan, "June 12, 1920 Speech," Bryan Papers.

38. Bryan and Bryan, *Memoirs*, 320; Bryan, *Old World*, 498; *Omaha World-Herald*, February 6, 1896.

39. Bryan, *Last Message*, 16.

40. Note Bryan's two favorite chautauqua addresses, "The Prince of Peace," and "A Conquering Nation," Bryan Papers.

41. Quoted in Levine, *Defender*, 343-344.

42. *Omaha World-Herald*, December 4, 5, 18, 21, 23, 28, 1895; January 28, 29, 30, 31; February 8, 13, 23, 1896. Coletta, *Bryan*, Vol. I, 25, 81, 299.

43. Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. I, 106-107, 122-123; Bryan, *First Battle*, 93.

44. William Jennings Bryan, "Foreign Influence in American Politics," *Arena* (Vol. 19, April, 1898), 433-438; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 7, 1900; Bryan, *First Battle*.

45. Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. I, 160-179.

46. The League to Enforce Peace, *World Peace: A Written Debate Between William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1917), 19, 27, 139, 98, 101-102, 138.

47. William Jennings Bryan, "The League to Enforce Peace," Bryan to Count von Bernstorff, December 15, 1916, Bryan to Charles W. Bryan, March 2, 1919, Bryan to US senators, November 24, 1919, all in Bryan Papers; Bryan and Bryan, *Memoirs*, 436; *New York Times*, June 20, July 3, 1915, January 24, 1917, March 12, 1919, January 10, 12, 16, 20, 1920; *The Commoner* (Vols., 16, 19, 20, May, 1916, March, April, October 1919, January, 1920).

48. William Jennings Bryan, "February 22, 1899, Speech," Bryan Papers; William Jennings Bryan, *In His Image* (London, 1922), 246-247; Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. II, Chapter 3, 40.

49. Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. 2, 391.

50. Lake Mohonk Conference Annual Report, *Report of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting* (1910), 166; William Jennings Bryan, "Path to Peace," *Independent* (Vol. 61, August 30, 1906), 487.

51. Bryan, "The Value of an Ideal," Bryan Papers; Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. II, 165.

52. William Jennings Bryan, "Speech Accepting Democratic Nomination" (August 8, 1900), Bryan Papers.

53. Bryan, *Old World*, 200-202; Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. II, 27, 46; William Jennings Bryan, "The Causeless War and Its Lessons for Us," Bryan Papers; *New York Times*, October 5, 1914, and February 19, 1916.

54. Bryan, "The Causeless War."

55. Selig Adler, "Bryan and Wilsonian Caribbean Penetration," *Hispanic American Historical Review* (Vol. II, 1940), 198-226; Challenger, "Bryan," 90-91; Coletta, *Bryan*, Vol. II, viii.

56. William Jennings Bryan, "Memo to Mexican Embassy—October 29, 1913," Bryan Papers. The memo was vetoed by Wilson and never sent. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, October 4, 1913, June 22, 1914, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

57. Bryan, "A Conquering Nation."

58. William Jennings Bryan, "Honorable William Jennings Bryan on the Navy Craze" (n.p. 1910), "Address of William Jennings Bryan to the Porto Rico Association

at San Juan, April 9, 1910," "To Commercial Club of Washington, DC, May 27, 1915," "Speech to the Annual Dinner of the Pan American Society at the Waldorf-Astoria, May 15, 1913," and Bryan to Andrew Carnegie, Jan. 7, 1915, all in Bryan Papers; *New York Tribune*, August 31, 1906; *Congressional Record* (53rd Congress, Second Session, Vol. 26, June 5, 1914), 224; Bryan, *Speeches*, Vol. II, 67; *Foreign Relations, 1913*, 286, 308-310, 315-316; *Foreign Relations, 1914*, 143, 466.

59. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, October 28, 1913; January 15, 1914, Bryan Papers; Bryan and Bryan, *Memoirs*, 359-361.

60. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, June 13, July 17, 31, August 6, November 11, 1913, Bryan Papers; *Foreign Relations, 1913*, 1021-1035, 1040-1042, 1056-1057; Scott Nearing and Joseph Freeman, *Dollar Diplomacy* (New York, 1925), 158-161.

61. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, October 24, 1913, February 21, 1914, Bryan Papers; Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, January 15, 1914, August 6, 1915, and Woodrow Wilson to Bryan, March 20, 1914, Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters* (8 Vols., Garden City, New York, 1927-1939), Volume IV, 433-444; *New York Times*, January 26, 1915.

62. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, January 27, 1914, Bryan Papers; Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, December 1, 1913, February 5, 1914, *Foreign Relations, 1914*, 235-236, 215.

63. Bryan to Woodrow Wilson, June 20, 1915, January 15, February 25, April 2, 1915, Bryan to Benjamin Williams, March 4, 1925, Woodrow Wilson to Bryan, March 25, 1914, all Bryan Papers; Curti, *Bryan*, 4, 175; *Foreign Relations, 1914*, 247-248, 339-340, 347-348, 356-372, 380, 890; *Foreign Relations, 1915*, 284-286, 297-300; Baker, *Wilson*, Vol. VI, 87, 89; Adler, "Bryan," 222-225.

64. Bryan, *In His Image*, 16, 191-195, 197, 241, 206, 212, 247, 262, 259.

65. Joseph R. Sizoo's "Funeral Address" is in Bryan, *Last Message*, 71-80. For Bryan's funeral see Grace Bryan Hargreaves, manuscript notes, Bryan Papers; Bryan and Bryan, *Memoirs*, 491-492; Coletta, *Bryan*, Vol. III, 276.