



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: Imperialism in Nebraska, 1898-1904

Full Citation: J R Johnson, "Imperialism in Nebraska, 1898-1904," *Nebraska History* 44 (1963): 141-166

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1963Imperialism.pdf>

Date: 7/07/2016

Article Summary: Bryan attempted to make American imperialism in the Philippines a political issue. Returning prosperity under McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt led to Republican victories in elections, however. In hindsight Bryan's accusations of imperialism looked like alarmism.

Scroll down for complete article.

Cataloging Information:

Names: William Jennings Bryan (The Commoner), William McKinley, Silas A Holcomb, John M Thurston, Jacob S Schurmann, William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, Arthur MacArthur

Place Names: the Philippines

Newspapers Quoted: *Nebraska Independent*, *Omaha World-Herald*, *Nebraska State Journal*, *Omaha Daily Bee*, *Wayne Herald*

Keywords: William Jennings Bryan (The Commoner), imperialism, manifest destiny, Spanish-American War, Fusion [party], First Nebraska Volunteers, Anti-Imperialist League, Philippine Commission

Photographs / Images: William Jennings Bryan, Bryan family returning home from a trip around the world

IMPERIALISM IN NEBRASKA

1898-1904

BY J. R. JOHNSON

THE term "imperialism" has long been used to suit the convenience of those seeking to categorize their opponents as aggressors. Americans, according to Russian propaganda, are imperialistic capitalists bent on conquering the world. If this be true we missed a great opportunity following World War II when we had a monopoly on atomic power.

We have no doubts, on our part, that the Russians are imperialistic with one consuming purpose, the communizing of the world. They admit it and their actions prove it.

During the nineteenth century, when other countries such as Britain, France and Germany pushed their conquests we labeled it imperialism. Somehow, we argued, our expansion activities were different and we called it manifest destiny.

Professor Johnson, of Wayne State College is well known to members of the Society for reviews and articles in this magazine, for his book, Representative Nebraskans, and as chairman of the Historical Land Mark Council.

During and following the Spanish-American War the term imperialism was applied to any person, group or nation favoring a build-up of armed forces, the acquisition of more territory or government support for foreign investments. It was even directed at the Protestant churches crusading for the conversion of the heathen. Big Business, seeking new channels of trade, was called imperialistic. Since the Republican party was in control of the Federal government, the Democrats and Populists utilized the term for political advantage. This was particularly true in Nebraska, the home of William Jennings Bryan, and more especially when the treaty with Spain was up for consideration. This treaty called for acquisition of more territory.

It has been traditional with Americans to applaud those seeking liberty and independence and they have always given moral and sometimes unofficial material support. In 1898 we went all the way. After a "long train of abuses" by Spain in Cuba we declared war on Spain. The American mind was thoroughly conditioned to lending active military aid to our oppressed "brothers" on our doorstep. "Cuba Libre" and "Remember the Maine" were slogans that stirred the nation. Though unprepared (a usual status with the United States) the crusade was under way. Magnanimously we passed the Teller Resolution disavowing any ulterior motives and pledging ourselves not to annex the island.¹

Once the War was under way the public suddenly became aware of its far-flung implications. Astute timing by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt got us off to a good start at Manila. Dewey's glorious victory, followed by troop movements to the Philippines, stimulated a new interest in geography. The man in the street knew little or nothing about this archipelago but soon had opinions on what to do with the islands. Mr. Dooley sums it up succinctly in his dialogue with Mr. Hennessy:

¹ *Nebraska State Journal*, April 27, 1898; Marcus M. Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War*. (Baton Rouge, 1932); Walter Millis, *The Martial Spirit* (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 1-145; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 23, July 17, 1898.

"I know what I'd do if I was Mac," said Mr. Hennessy. "I'd hist a flag over the Philipeens, an I'd take in th' whole lot iv thim." "And yit," said Mr. Dooley, "'tis not more than two months since ye larnd whether they was islands or canned goods. If your son Packy was to ask ye where th' Philipeens is, cud ye giv him anny good idea whether they was in Rooshia or just west of the thracks?"²

Though the average American did not comprehend the full significance of McKinley's "little war," high-ranking leaders were fully cognizant of its meaning to our future in world affairs. The truce with Spain, August 12, 1898, was followed by weeks of negotiations. During this time the question of what to do with the Philippines was thoroughly aired in the press. Finally, a treaty of annexation was signed in Paris. McKinley was pressured from two sides, those favoring annexation and those urging independence. "During debates on the treaty the Senate very nearly approved two resolutions in favor of Filipino independence." On February 6, 1899, the treaty squeaked through the Senate by a margin of two votes. The entire archipelago, as well as Puerto Rico and Guam, fell into our lap. The President had gone along with the "imperialists." We now had a "sphere" in the Far East to match the spheres of interest of other powers. We also had control of the approaches to a proposed isthmian canal and a stronger position relative to Latin America. The annexation of Hawaii during the war gave us a half-way station in the Pacific. America was emerging as a world power.³

This gave the Democrats and Populists what they considered to be a strong political issue. Their leader, William Jennings Bryan, was unhappy with the treaty but had advised his party colleagues in the Senate to vote for it in order that the war could be officially ended. However, he made it clear that the question of American policy was yet to be settled.⁴

² *Nebraska Independent*, January 5, 1899.

³ Grayson L. Kirk, *Philippine Independence* (New York, 1936), pp. 3-32; Dexter Perkins and Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The United States of America: A History, 1865 to the Present*, II (New York, 1962), pp. 257-261.

⁴ Kirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-32.

Republican spokesmen maintained that their actions were not imperialistic but the opposition refused to accept the disclaimer. The ensuing hassle over imperialism developed into bitter accusations and denials. Nebraska probably reflected the attitude of all the Middle West. This section, most vociferous in demanding war with Spain, now became almost as vocal in opposing the war that followed against the Filipinos. Why, it was asked, did we not grant independence to these people as we had the Cubans? Why must we follow the example of the European powers?

Since William Jennings Bryan was the central figure in the anti-imperialist camp, a survey of his activities is in order. Bryan, at the age of thirty-six, had made a vigorous bid for the Presidency in 1896. Though defeated, he continued to be the accepted leader of both Democrats and Populists, biding his time for the "show-down" in 1900.

He had urged intervention in Cuba and when war came, offered his services to the President. McKinley had nothing to offer one without military experience but Bryan was not content to leave the matter there. With an assist from Fusionist (Democrat-Populist) Governor Silas A. Holcomb he raised a third regiment of Nebraska volunteers.⁵ When the truce was signed he tried to get his regiment mustered out.⁶ Failing in this, the Colonel shed his military raiment and proceeded to head up the forces of anti-imperialism to clean the Augean stables.⁷ Here was a "battle" more to his liking. He could attack the demon imperialism with all his oratorical powers and skills.

But one cannot charge Bryan with inconsistency. In a speech delivered in Omaha, June 14, 1898, (shortly before being mustered into service), he stated his position:

⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, May 29, June 4, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, May 18, 1898.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 23, 1898; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 23, 24, 1898.

⁷ *Ibid.*, December 13, 1898; Interview, Charles F. Scharman, Major, Third Nebraska Volunteer Regiment, January 4, 1933.

History will vindicate the position taken by the United States in the war with Spain . . . but shall we contemplate a scheme for the colonization of the orient merely because our fleet won a remarkable victory in the harbor of Manila? . . . If others turn to thoughts of aggrandizement and yield allegiance to those who clothe covetousness in the attractive garb of "national destiny," the people of Nebraska will, if I mistake not their sentiments, plant themselves upon the disclaimer entered by Congress and expect that good faith shall characterize the making of peace as it did the beginning of war.⁸

The weeks of army life must have indeed been galling ones for Colonel Bryan. Here he must keep a tight lip—something difficult for him to do. On resigning his command he quipped: "I had five months of peace in the army and resigned in order to take part in a fight." And fight he did. He immediately launched an attack on the policies of the administration. Apparently ruffled by McKinley's refusal to muster out his regiment, he could not wait until he arrived home from camp before pouring out invectives. He "popped off" in Washington, New York and all along the way back to Lincoln. A reception was accorded him at the Oliver Theater, where Governor Holcomb and other prominent Fusionists paid him homage. Clad in "civvies", and in his own bailiwick, Bryan spoke at great length outlining his plans for the future. He was ready to accept invitations to speak any time, anywhere on most any subject—tariff, silver, trusts—but imperialism was his favorite.⁹

The Commoner spoke in Cincinnati, January 6, 1899, and in Chicago the following day. "Forcible annexation will not only be criminal aggression, but it will cost more than it is worth," he declared, and "the whole people will pay the cost while a few will reap all the benefits." He labeled those who called themselves "expansionists" as actually imperialists and drew these distinctions:

The word expansion would describe the acquisition of territory to be populated by homogeneous people and to be carved into states like those now in existence. An empire suggests variety in race and diversity in government. The imperialists do not desire to clothe the Filipinos with all the

⁸ *Omaha World-Herald*, January 16, 1899.

⁹ *Ibid.*, December 24, 1898.

rights and privileges of American citizenship; they want to exercise sovereignty over an alien race and they expect to rule subjects upon a theory entirely at variance with constitutional government.¹⁰

The *Nebraska Independent* commented that Bryan's campaign "has had such an effect upon the country that there seems to be a general uprising of the people against the treaty itself, although Bryan is in favor of ratifying it and settling the annexation business afterwards."¹¹

The barnstorming continued even more vigorously after the signing of the treaty. Bryan was the featured speaker at a Democratic banquet in St. Paul, Minnesota, and also addressed the House of Representatives there. Since 90 of the 119 members were Republicans he evaded political questions. "Imperialism" was his topic when he spoke before the student body of the University of Michigan. Moving eastward he arrived in Washington in time to participate, as the honored guest, at a well-attended Washington Birthday banquet sponsored by the Virginia Democratic Association of the District of Columbia. He received a tumultuous reception as he declaimed on "America's Mission." "When all other arguments fail," he said, "the advocates of imperialism fall back in helpless despair upon the assertion it is destiny . . . The people have not voted for imperialism, no congress has passed upon it. To whom, then, has the future been revealed?"¹²

Bryan's pace quickened. In Fort Worth, Texas, he spoke to an enthusiastic audience of 2,000, addressed a joint session of the legislature and a crowd of 3,000 in Austin, and 6,000 came out to hear him in Houston—all within a three-day period. He helped the Hibernians celebrate St. Patrick's Day in Bloomington, Illinois, then swinging south appeared before big gatherings in Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee. In Birmingham, Alabama, he spoke for three hours to 4,000. Speeches followed in Memphis, Ten-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, January 8, 1899.

¹¹ *Nebraska Independent*, January 26, 1899.

¹² *Omaha World-Herald*, February 15-24, 1899.

nessee, and Hot Springs, Arkansas, before he left the southland.¹³ It was about this time that J. Sterling Morton quipped:

This phenomenal lawyer who never had a client, this resonant statesman who never drafted a statute, this skilled financier who never made a dollar, this soldier who never fired a gun or saw a battle, is again in the saddle and hoarsely commanding the south to follow him once more to disaster and defeat.¹⁴

But ridicule only stirred the apostle of anti-imperialism to greater efforts. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he compared "old world imperialism" with "the sort McKinley is introducing into this country." It was reported by one newspaper that "the enthusiastic outpouring of people to hear Hon. William J. Bryan at Music Hall was the largest and most significant in the history of Buffalo." The foregoing are only a few of the many appearances made by the Commoner throughout the nation in 1899.¹⁵

The Democratic state convention in Omaha late in August found Bryan very active. He secured the adoption of anti-imperialist and anti-militarist planks. The Populists and Silver Republicans met in the same city simultaneously and adopted similar planks.¹⁶ Following these conventions Bryan went on a western tour that took him as far as San Francisco. Again and again he raised his voice against imperialism and militarism and championed free silver.¹⁷

The Colonel was not one to neglect his own state. In September he went on the stump for the Fusion ticket. Though an "off year" (one congressman, one judge of the supreme court, two university regents and the district court judges to be elected) the Fusionists were out to show their strength. Bryan campaigned all over the state. Out-of-state speakers included ex-governor John F. Altgeld of Illinois,

¹³ *Ibid.*, March 7-27, 1899.

¹⁴ *McCook (Nebraska) Republican*, May 26, 1899. Quoted from *Morton's Conservative*.

¹⁵ *Nebraska Independent*, May 4, 1899.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1899.

¹⁷ *Omaha World-Herald*, September 13, 1899.

ex-governor William J. Stone of Missouri, ex-congressman Charles A. Towne of Minnesota, noted economist Robert Schilling, W. H. (Coin) Harvey of Illinois, J. H. (Cyclone) Davis of Texas and ex-congressman James B. Weaver from Iowa who headed the Populist ticket for President in 1892. Apparently Nebraska was being made a sounding board for things to come.¹⁸

Following his September campaign in Nebraska Bryan made an extensive flyer that took him through Texas, Kentucky and Ohio. In mid-October he traveled over much of eastern Nebraska.¹⁹ One editor commented:

Bryan in his tours reminds one of Uncle Josh Whitcomb, "by gosh," dressed in his old slouch hat. All he lacks is a pair of red top boots and a pair of overalls stuck therein to make the outfit complete, but he can't work the farmers this year. They are too busy looking for hands to husk corn but owing to the terrible "hard times" they are unable to get corn huskers even at 3½ cents per bushel. There are no Coxeys' armies now, and even a tramp has become a scarce piece of humanity.²⁰

Returning prosperity was wrecking Bryan's crusade on anti-imperialism.

Though the offices to be filled in the election of 1899 were largely non-political, Fusionists won all the places on the ticket. A "victory" celebration followed in Lincoln with much speech-making, parading, and displaying of fireworks. Bryan and Altgeld spoke at Bohanan Hall and the Oliver Theater. The subject of course was "imperialism." The Peerless Leader scoffingly listed three arguments used by the Republicans for imperialism: "There is money in it, God is in it, we are in it and can't get out."²¹

Developments in the Philippines during the following months made Bryan more eager than ever to push imperialism as the top issue in the forthcoming presidential campaign. Our troops now engaged in guerrilla warfare with the natives were not meeting with great successes and the

¹⁸ *Nebraska Independent*, September 14, 16, 1899.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, October 5, 1899.

²⁰ *Wayne (Nebraska) Herald*, October 19, 1899.

²¹ *Nebraska Independent*, November 9, 16, December 21, 1899.

pacification of the islands moved slowly.²² A parody to "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching," with the title of "Damn, Damn, Damn, the Filipinos," illustrates the situation:

In the land of dopey dreams—Happy, peaceful Philippines
Where the bolo man is hiding night and day
Insurrectos steal and lie where Americanos die
There you hear the soldiers sing this evening lay.

Chorus:

Damn, Damn, Damn the Insurrectos
Cross-eyed, kakiack ladrones!
Underneath the starry flag civilize them with a Krag
And return us to our own beloved homes.

Underneath the nipa thatch where the skinny chickens
scratch
Only refuge after hiking all day long
When I lay me down to sleep, slithy lizards o'er me creep
Then you hear the soldiers sing this evening song.

Chorus:

Social customs there are few
All the ladies smoke and chew
All the men do things the padres say are wrong
But the padres cut no ice, for they live on fish and rice
When you hear the soldiers sing this evening song.²³

Chorus:

This was not a "glorious" war like that against Spain. It looked like the big issue the Democrats and Populists were looking for.

The Commoner, as expected, not only received the Convention's nomination but saw to it that imperialism was made the "paramount" issue. "We assert," said the platform, "that no nation can long endure half republic and half empire, and we warn the American people that imperialism abroad will quickly and inevitably lead to despotism at home." Bryan contended that if the government would declare its purpose to be an early recognition of independence for the Philippines the Insurrection would end and the public mind would no longer be agitated. But an agitated mind fitted into Bryan's political plans. How else

²² Kirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-36.

²³ Anonymous.

could he make imperialism the paramount issue? He could hardly deny that he was playing the role of chief agitator.²⁴

While the Peerless Leader of the Democratic party was gallivanting about the country, individuals and groups were echoing his sentiments or defending the administration policies back home.

There were, of course, Nebraskans who were carried away with expansion fever. One of these, John L. Webster, who had served as president of the Constitutional Convention of 1875 and now was an aspirant for a United States Senate seat,²⁵ unloosened himself early in a Fourth of July speech, 1898, in Pawnee City. He declaimed:

The United States . . . has asked admission to the family of ruling states. It has knocked at the door of power, it has swung open. It stands in the vestibule, questioning itself whether it shall enter. It debates with itself whether it shall accept the gifts at its feet . . . It looks at Hawaii which is like the star of old that led the way to Bethlehem, and it is slow to follow to the Philippines. A new risen sun of commerce is shedding its brilliant rays across the Pacific; and its eyes are dazzled by the new light. Conservatism holds it back, while energy and pride, and patriotism urge it forward. In the end destiny and courage will conquer, and the flag of our nation will float over these far-flung islands where American soldier boys have gone, under the leadership of General Merritt, and where Dewey's naval guns have roared the anthem of victory.²⁶

²⁶ *Christian News*, July 6, 1898.

The Omaha *World-Herald* retorted that Webster stood for "aggressive imperialism, the expansion of territory until the United States owns and controls everything joining her or touched by waters that lave her shores."²⁷

Another United States Senate hopeful, David E. Thompson,²⁸ in a later speech, hoped McKinley would be an expansionist. He was pleased that we annexed Hawaii and wanted the Philippines and Ladrones retained. "If we own

²⁴ W. J. Bryan, *The Commoner Condensed* (New York, 1902), pp. 144-146; William J. Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), pp. 121, 122.

²⁵ J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, III, p. 165.

²⁷ *Omaha World-Herald*, November 23, 1898.

²⁸ Morton and Watkins, *op. cit.*, III, p. 272.

all the stepping stones across the Pacific," he said, "the enterprise of our people will utilize them to expand our commerce and the advantage they give us will enable us to control the trade of Asia."²⁹

Republican Senator John M. Thurston in July 1898 opposed annexation of the Philippines "on the same grounds as he opposed the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands." He feared the "spirit of conquest now abroad in the land would spread until we undertook more than we could carry." However, he favored locating naval stations "wherever and whenever it could be done on foreign shores." His conversion to annexation was shortly under way for in September, 1898, he advocated the appropriation of Porto Rico and the smaller West Indian islands but was unequivocally against making the Philippines United States territory. By November his conversion was complete. "If the people of the Philippines were fitted for self-government," he said, "I would favor . . . their independence, but they are not, and I therefore, will endorse the acquisition of the Philippine group."³⁰ The *Nebraska Independent* exploded with both barrels:

John M. Thurston has flopped over to the imperialistic side. In doing so he uses enough cant to nauseate a carrion eating crow. He talks about "God's providence" and says that "God has given us the responsibility," etc., etc. From his speech one would infer that John has just had a private interview with the Almighty and has found out just what God intends to have us do.³¹

On a speaking tour of Nebraska during the 1898 mid-term campaign Assistant Secretary of War Meiklejohn, native of the state, "favored annexing everything in sight" according to the *World-Herald*.³² Judge W. W. Keyser, ardent expansionist of Omaha, in addressing the Commercial Club early in 1899 said he believed in "Providence" and declared "that the principles of our government, if

²⁹ *Omaha World-Herald*, December 7, 1898.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, July 14, September 9, November 29, 1898.

³¹ *Nebraska Independent*, December 1, 1898.

³² *Omaha World-Herald*, October 26, 28, 1898.

good, should not only be extended to the countries of the western hemisphere, but to all countries which need them.”³³

Populist Senator William V. Allen vigorously opposed annexation from the start. He needed no urging from Colonel Bryan. Like Bryan he supported the treaty but in a Senate speech on the day of ratification he made his position clear. He declared that Congress could deal with questions concerning the Philippines later.³⁴

When a truce was made with Spain on August 12, 1898, it was generally believed that the First Nebraska Volunteers would be brought home. This did not happen except for a number of “disabled” men who, upon arrival spread stories of mistreatment which stirred up the home folks. Upon the outbreak of the Insurrection the regiment distinguished itself in the campaign that followed. The Legislature passed a resolution of gratitude for its “gallant conduct on the field of battle,” etc. which was returned by Populist Governor Poynter. He objected to the clause “while defending the principles of our government and adding glory to our flag.” He regretted that the men having enlisted in a “war for humanity” were compelled “to give their lives in a conflict at utter variance to the very fundamental principles of our government.” He was both highly praised and roundly criticized for his action.³⁵

The discussions on annexation, expansion, destiny, imperialism or whatever name might be applied to McKinley’s policies continued over the state wherever people gathered. The University, colleges and high schools debated the question. Church groups, Y. M. C. A.’s, literary societies, commercial clubs and, of course, political organizations took up the theme. Most Republican leaders were inclined to move cautiously for the climate at this time seemed to favor those who favored Philippine independence. Had it not been for

³³ *Ibid.*, February 23, 1899.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, February 8, 1899.

³⁵ *Nebraska Independent*, April 6, 13, 1899; *Wayne* (Nebraska) *Herald*, April 13, 1899; *Omaha World-Herald*, April 3, 4, 12, 1899.

the burst of prosperity, generally attributed to the McKinley administration, imperialism might have gotten off the ground as an issue for the Fusionists. But having a choice between humanitarianism and economic well-being the voter preferred the latter.³⁶

Protestant ministers tended to favor annexation as a step in the advancement of foreign missions.³⁷ The Catholic Church, long entrenched in the Philippines, favored independence. Father Reade of St. Theresa's Church, Lincoln, ridiculed the idea that the Filipinos needed civilization and education. They are, he said "the most civilized people of the far east. They were civilized by the friars, by the monks, and the priests."³⁸ This was an overstatement but it is true that the Roman Catholic Church was far ahead of the Protestant churches in the archipelago.

The Jews were a fraction of Nebraska's population. However, their sympathies went out to the Filipinos. Dr. Leo Franklin, rabbi of Temple Israel in Omaha, in a soldiers' memorial sermon, February 14, 1899, assailed the expansionists:

The battle in which our brave boys fell was undertaken in the name of humanity . . . Let this American nation remember this 'ere they consent to send a standing army to the Philippines at the advice of those who call themselves expansionists. Let not patriotism be degraded into commercialism, . . . let not humanity be besmirched with selfish motive.³⁹

Labor organizations passed resolutions opposing expansion. These were sent to Washington headquarters for presentation to Congress. They were fearful that annexation would bring in cheap labor.⁴⁰ Sugar beet interests had unsuccessfully opposed acquisition of Hawaii and now cen-

³⁶ Bryan and Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 121; *Omaha World-Herald*, November 18, December 12, 1898, January 23, March 4, 5, July 2, 29, 1899.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, December 3, 1898, February 23, 1899; *The Christian News*, June 22, 1899; *Nebraska Independent*, April 6; September 21, October 5, 12, 26, 1899; *Nebraska State Journal*, October 4, 6, 1899.

³⁸ *Omaha World-Herald*, October 16, 1900.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, February 15, 1899.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, February 5, 1899.

tered their attacks against the Administration's plans to acquire the Philippines.⁴¹ Efforts were made by various groups to form a local organization of the Anti-Imperialist League "without regard to politics, religion or any other matter except their American citizenship." Several meetings were held in Omaha and a platform enunciating the principles of anti-imperialism was adopted, but the organization never became a reality.⁴²

Women, at this time, were supposed to be mostly seen and seldom heard. However, their status was changing rapidly and many of them were assuming a vigorous attitude toward public affairs. The *Woman's Weekly*, an official organ of the Federation of Women's Clubs, stated that "it would be a mistake to do forcibly in the Philippines that which we wanted to fight Spain for doing in Cuba." When fighting opened with the Filipinos this same paper branded the conflict as a "war of offense, a war conducted by Mark Hanna back of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, a war against which every lover of freedom and every true American protests." The publication praised Governor Poynter for vetoing the Legislature's resolution, declaring that nine-tenths of the residents of the state agree with him.⁴³

Nebraska residents of foreign extraction—and there were many—strongly opposed annexation of the Philippines. The editors of nine German-language papers addressed a pamphlet to voters of German descent throughout the state. This was a compilation of articles and speeches attacking the policies of the Administration in the Philippines. A speech by "Mr. Karl Schurz, our countryman and one of the greatest statesmen" was included. It was emphasized that "German-Americans do not want any

⁴¹ 55 Cong., 1 Sess., Vol. 30, Parts 1-3, p. 1082; 55 Cong., 2 Sess., Vol. 31, Parts 1-8, pp. 237, 306, 1493, 1569; *Nebraska Farmer*, February 16, 1899.

⁴² *Omaha World-Herald*, February 14, 20, 28, March, April, May, 1899; *Omaha Daily Bee*, March, April, May, 1899.

⁴³ *The Woman's Weekly*, December 10, 24, 1898, March 31, April 14, 1899; *Omaha World-Herald*, March 27, April 16, 1899.



William Jennings Bryan
(From a photo by Merceau, San Francisco, 1905)



Home from Trip Around the World, 1906.

(Mary Baird Bryan, William J. Bryan, Grace Bryan and Mrs. Norman Mack)

militarism nor wars of conquest." Each recipient was directed to be a political missionary for anti-imperialism and prove it in the forthcoming election of 1899. After the election, J. H. Edmisten, chairman of the Populist State Central Committee, stated that most of the eight or nine thousand recruits of the party were of foreign birth. "Naturalized Americans, born in Germany, Bohemia, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway know full well," he said, "the meaning of a great standing army . . . and they are nearly a unit in opposing the republican policy outlined by President McKinley."⁴⁴

The Irish, too, were vociferous in their opposition. They contended that our government was following the pattern set by their arch-enemy England in its fight against the Boers. The Omaha branch of the Irish-American Union denounced the government for "entering upon an unauthorized and unnecessary war of conquest . . . thus subverting the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence." It expressed fear of an alliance with England "the hereditary and implacable enemy of the United States." A meeting, protesting England's action against the Boers, was held early in December, 1899, and was presided over by Governor Poynter. The press reported that "although the night was very bad an immense audience turned out to listen to the speakers and cheer for the plucky little republic."⁴⁵

Farmers, who of course made up the major part of the state's population, generally opposed the administration's Philippine policy. This is reflected in the leading farm publication the *Nebraska Farmer*, editorials in local papers, and letters from subscribers appearing in public pulse columns. However, the farmer did not necessarily put his vote where his mouth was. He liked to talk "politics," and would do so any time, anywhere, on any topic at the drop of a hat.

⁴⁴ *Nebraska Independent*, October 26, November 16, 1899.

⁴⁵ *Omaha World-Herald*, October 28, 1900; *Nebraska Independent*, December 14, 1899; *Lincoln Evening News*, January 1, 1900; *Woman's Weekly*, September 2, 1899.

But "McKinley prosperity" had reached Nebraska and this was a powerful stimulant in a region that had suffered through the lean years of the Cleveland era.⁴⁶

The gloomy prediction by the *Independent* of a "long and desolating war" in the Philippines was well taken. However, its forecast of a "general revolt in the United States against imperialism" never materialized except in a propaganda sense. The declaration that out of the struggle would come "neither glory nor profit" was fairly accurate. Populist and Democrat papers rather consistently opposed the administration policy. A request by the *Independent* to its readers on how they felt toward "McKinley's war in the Philippines" met with a hearty response opposing it. A typical reply: "The McKinley Philippine policy is unauthorized, unnecessary, uncalled for, inhuman and un-American."⁴⁷

The Omaha *World-Herald*, while keeping up an incessant attack on the administration, used less abusive language than the *Independent*. It declared annexation would endanger American institutions, imperialism was "fraught with danger to the business interests of the masses," that is, the small property holders, wage workers and the farmers. It "may be a good thing for men with millions," it said, "but no good could be expected from it for the average citizen." Then, this paper took note of what annexation would do to the beet-sugar producers declaring that this industry which had been striving for ten years to get established was bound to suffer. McKinley was presented as the tool of army officers and speculators, the dupe of Mark Hanna, without a mind of his own to guide him.⁴⁸

Republican papers either gave outright support to the administration or minimized the Philippine issue. Occa-

⁴⁶ *Nebraska Farmer*, February 9, July 13, 1899.

⁴⁷ *Nebraska Independent*, January 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23, April 6, 20, May 11, June 8, 15, 21, 29, July 13, 20, 27, September 28, December 14, 21, 28, 1899.

⁴⁸ *Omaha World-Herald*, July 24, August 7, December 24, 29, 1898, January 14, February 6, 8, 11, March 28, 1899.

sionally an editor would speak out boldly against the government's policy, such as M. M. Warner of Lyons: "We are running a republican paper," he said, "but that does not necessarily indicate that we are to follow certain politicians in this matter and advocate scoundrelism and call it republicanism." He went on to say that a poll taken in Lyons found not one in favor of keeping the Philippines.⁴⁹ The leading Republican papers, the *Nebraska State Journal* and the *Omaha Daily Bee* followed conservative policies in their editorials with denials that the Administration was bent on an imperialistic course.⁵⁰

Strict censorship was never in use, contrary to charges made by Democrat and Populist publications. Letters from homesick or disgruntled soldiers published in the home papers helped stimulate opposition to the war. Even those without special gripes hardly enjoyed their experiences, hence most of the correspondence from overseas was negative. After the return of the First Nebraska the anti-imperialism fever subsided considerably though Bryan and others labored hard to keep the issue alive.

While most of the Republican out-state papers adopted a cautious tone, others, like the *Wayne Herald*, came out boldly for annexation. The editor remarked:

Who is there in Nebraska that will urge the abandonment of the Philippines, the hauling down of the flag and trailing it in the dust, over the bodies of the brave volunteers of Nebraska, and their brave Col. Stotsenburg who gave up their lives for their country? Shall the fruits of their victory be cast aside? No! No! Who is the man that is coward enough to ask it? Let him speak.⁵¹

The general attitude of the Republican press was that retention of the islands did not constitute imperialism since humanitarianism, not exploitation, was the motive. Those who opposed McKinley's Philippine program were branded "obstructionists," "copperheads," "aunties," and "little

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, February 13, 1899.

⁵⁰ *Nebraska State Journal*, 1898-1904; *Omaha Daily Bee*, 1898-1904.

⁵¹ *Wayne (Nebraska) Herald*, June 1, 1899.

Americans." Nevertheless, the Democrats and Populists, fanned by Bryan oratory continued to pin the label on the Elephant.⁵²

Bryan's stumping tour in 1900 was a strenuous one. He traveled 16,000 miles and made approximately 600 speeches playing the same record over and over again. Railways were the chief modes of transportation though boats, carriages, and even automobiles were used as he criss-crossed the country. The day before election he made nineteen speeches in Nebraska, eight of which were in Omaha.⁵³ Though endorsed by both Democrats and Populists, the cards were stacked against him. The Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Theodore Roosevelt, followed the Bryan trail and added color to the campaign. His antics and attire pleased his audiences. His western contacts helped him, and here was a colonel who went to Cuba *with* his regiment.

The Republicans presented probably the greatest party unity of their career. Commercial and industrial prosperity was marked throughout the nation, wages were high and general satisfaction was expressed with McKinley's leadership. The President had carefully maintained extremely cordial relations with party leaders of Congress and had the forces of wealth and conservatism solidly behind him throughout the country.

McKinley's popular and electoral votes were greater than in 1896. Even Bryan's own Nebraska "went Republican." McKinley received 121,835 popular votes, Bryan 114,013.⁵⁴

One political scientist sums up the 1900 campaign as follows:

In vain the Democratic convention formulated its platform demand for Philippine independence under American protection and in vain the Peerless Leader stumped the country denouncing the hypocrisy and double-dealing of his opponents. When the smoke of battle cleared away and the ballots were counted the McKinley-Roosevelt ticket with its

⁵² Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny, A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore, 1935), p. 310.

⁵³ *Omaha World-Herald*, November 4, 5, 1900.

⁵⁴ Harold R. Bruce, *American Parties and Politics*, pp. 139-141.

noncommittal promise to give the Filipinos "the largest measure of self-government consistent with their welfare and our duties" was overwhelmingly victorious.⁵⁵

The Commoner's choice of "imperialism" as the paramount issue, though an unhappy one, probably served as well as any in 1900. The average American, nurtured in evangelical Christianity, apparently was not too averse to carrying the "white man's burden" as long as he could have "McKinley prosperity" with it. He was unwilling to accept the panaceas offered by the Bryan forces. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." The Colonel's attack on the trusts, militarism and the gold standard fell flat in the face of continued prosperity. He could attract large crowds with his silvery oratory but the pay-off was at the polls.⁵⁶

Bryan admitted that the results were a surprise to him but added: "The magnitude of the republican victory was a surprise to our opponents as well as to those who supported our ticket." He thought the "prosperity argument" was probably the most potent one used but that the "stand by the president while the war is on" slogan was likewise damaging to the Democratic cause.⁵⁷ But the Great Crusader was not yet ready to cash in his chips. Crusaders do not give up easily and Bryan was every inch a crusader. He kept the issue of imperialism alive for several years. However, the Philippine question faded rapidly as a major political issue after the election of 1900. Republican leaders stoutly defended McKinley's policies in the Far East. Nebraska Senator Thurston made these remarks at a banquet in New York City on February 16, 1901:

No people ought to be left to the formulation of government among themselves until they show themselves capable of administering a government that means law and order to every man, woman and child in the country. No American ever yet made terms with an enemy while the enemy was firing on the American flag and no American ever will.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Kirk, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Louis M. Hacker and Benjamin B. Kendrick, *The United States Since 1865* (New York, 1932), p. 366.

⁵⁷ *Omaha World-Herald*, November 9, 1900; Bryan and Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ *Wayne* (Nebraska) *Herald*, February 16, 1901.

Republican papers continued to point to the successes of the American forces in putting down the insurrection. "The armed opposition in the Philippines is growing so exceedingly small," commented one of these during the spring of 1901, "that by the next campaign it will be less of an issue than Bryan's free silver fallacy has grown to be. How it must make Wm. J. weep." Later in the same year another stated that "reports from Manila show good progress in the matter of the surrender of small bands of insurgents which had still failed to come in out of the wet."⁵⁹ The return of the Nebraska Volunteers more than two years earlier had, of course, lessened opposition to the Insurrection in Nebraska.

Nebraskans, like other Americans, were enjoying their apparent prosperity. Governor Ezra P. Savage in his Thanksgiving proclamation of 1901 reflected this feeling:

At peace with the world, with our labor employed, our commerce and trade expanding, our nation at the head of the great powers of the world and rapidly expanding our commercial supremacy over the waters of the globe, with good prices for our products and contentment everywhere, certainly we of all people should in prayerful gratitude offer up thanks to Providence, who has given so unsparingly of these material tokens.⁶⁰

Theodore Roosevelt had succeeded to the Presidency and his lengthy message to Congress in December of 1901 was highly praised by the Republican press of Nebraska. One editor commented that the Philippine Islands have been "given assurance of a kindly intention on the part of this government, the early and as complete as possible a participation in governmental affairs vouchsafed. But the islanders . . . are also given to understand that banditism will not be tolerated."⁶¹

During the earlier months of 1902 "the press was filled with sinister and authentic news that the American forces were employing the tactics of torture, civilian con-

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; *Grand Island Daily Independent*, November 1, 11, December 3, 4, 1901.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, November 11, 1901.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, December 3, 4, 1901.

centration which when practiced by the Spaniards in Cuba had aroused the righteous indignation of the American people."⁶² The Anti-Imperialists seized on these accounts to renew their attacks on the Administration. A local Populist editor called attention to a report made by a certain Major Gardner which had allegedly "been hidden and smothered by Secretary Root" with the connivance of the President.

Now when his party demands it, the president says that it shall cease, but so long as they were able to keep it from public knowledge, not a particle of the great power of the executive was exerted to put a stop to it. Every Christian minister should from the pulpit condemn such conduct. Every editor should be brave enough to censure it, along with the suppression of a free press in Manila. Today it may be only the heathen in the isles of the Pacific . . . that are catching it. Tomorrow imperialism and militarism may strike nearer home.⁶³

But the efforts to stir up sentiment against the Administration's policies made little headway. Roosevelt's aggressive leadership was gaining favor daily. Because "some wrong has been done in the Philippines," said the *Omaha Daily Bee*, "because some men having authority there have erred, furnishes no reason, in the judgment of the president, why our government should halt the work it has undertaken."⁶⁴ General Arthur MacArthur, in testifying before a Senate committee in April, 1902, stated that the Filipinos were in a plastic state and could be easily molded within a few years into a "consistent, self-supporting commonwealth," but if left to their own devices would soon be in a struggle among themselves which would ultimately bring interference from some other nation.⁶⁵ MacArthur's testimony carried much weight since he was in closer touch with the situation than perhaps anyone else. The President in a speech in August, 1902, made his position crystal clear.

⁶² Kirk, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁶³ *Hamilton County Register* (Aurora), May 10, 1902.

⁶⁴ *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 24, 1899; *Grand Island Independent*, May 6, 1902.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1902.

We are governing the Filipinos primarily in their own interest and for their great benefit and we have acted in a practical fashion, not trying to lay down rules as to what should be done in the remote and uncertain future, but turning our attention to the instant need of things and meeting that need in the fullest and amplest way.⁶⁶

The political fortunes were unquestionably on the side of the administration in 1902. A Republican editor, following the mid-term election exulted: "How do you like Nebraska anyhow, with her two republican U. S. senators and five out of six congressmen? Isn't she a daisy? Will Democracy ever have another issue?"⁶⁷ The election returns of 1902 demonstrated quite conclusively that the Philippine question could no longer be used to advantage as a political weapon by the Democrats and Populists of the state. One looks in vain for any sustained attacks in the editorials of their publications during the ensuing months. Now and then even a word of praise was given the Administration for what it was doing.

Wherever Americans have free and unchecked control, down goes the death rate. It was reduced in Porto Rico and Cuba. It is going down in the Philippines. Uncle Sam abhors filth, shiftlessness, and pestilence. When he takes hold anywhere, he enlists the services of doctors, adopts improved systems of sewerage and drainage and performs wonders.⁶⁸

Uncle Sam took hold quickly. The Philippine Commission set up in 1899 under Jacob S. Schurmann and reorganized by William Howard Taft in 1900, made an extensive study of conditions in the islands and started programs to improve the lot of our "little brown brothers." Taft at his inaugural as first civil governor, June 21, 1901, announced a "beneficent and liberal policy" toward the Filipinos. He lived up to his promises and by 1904 had succeeded in bringing order out of chaos. Conditions there, when he assumed direction, are described in a report made three years later.

Three years ago, the United States had a large army in the Philippines, and sharp conflicts with the insurgents were of daily occurrence; there was no safety for life outside the

⁶⁶ *Wayne* (Nebraska) *Herald*, August 28, 1902.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Hamilton County Register* (Aurora), July 25, 1902.

garrisoned towns; all government was by military authority, and chiefly by military methods; the great mass of the Filipinos viewed the United States in the light of a selfish aggressor, and all friendly advances and protestations of good faith were met with secret, if not open, distrust and rejection.⁶⁹

The benevolent civil administration took the punch out of the anti-imperialists' heavy artillery. Hopes of again making imperialism the "paramount" issue faded rapidly. "Leading Filipinos," wrote a leading commentator in May, 1904, "are now well aware that they are dealing, not with an imperialist administration at Washington, but rather with a liberty-loving nation" ready to extend every opportunity toward developing capacity for self-government. "The best thought of this country is not so sharply divided," he said, "but concurs in the view that the Filipinos are not to be exploited, but helped by us," therefore, "it will not be possible this year to make any phase of the Philippine situation do major service as a party plank." Explaining Taft's position he made these further comments:

Nobody could be more desirous than Judge Taft of the welfare of the Filipino people, and speaking wholly from the view-point of their well-being, he is of the opinion that the present is not the opportune time for making declarations as to the future. There are individuals who will set up their views against those of Judge Taft, but there is no large body of sentiment behind such individual expressions. The Philippine issue was settled in the election of 1900, and it will not count this year.⁷⁰

Elihu Root, in a speech to the Republican National Convention of 1904 seemed to express the general attitude of his party when he said "it would be the policy . . . to treat the Philippines as it had treated Cuba, i. e., to establish, under the protectorate of the United States, an independent government, as soon as the inhabitants should be prepared for self-rule."⁷¹ Just *when* this would be was not

⁶⁹ Frederick W. Nash, "Governor Taft in the Philippines," *Review of Reviews*, February, 1904.

⁷⁰ Albert Shaw, "Progress of the World," *Review of Reviews*, May, 1904.

⁷¹ "National and State Elections of 1904", *Political Science Quarterly*, XIX (December, 1904), pp. 727-29.

stated but from various statements made by those close to the situation it would be many years in the future.⁷² The Democrats, as was expected, included a plank advocating "early independence." In order to pacify Bryan and perhaps secure his support for candidate Parker, he was allowed "to inject some of his well-known expressions regarding imperialism."⁷³

Looking at the Philippine question realistically in 1904 the Democratic position came close to this observation:

The accepted Democratic view now is merely that we must not hold colonial possessions in perpetuity, and that we should not govern any bodies of people whom we do not expect to bring into our citizenship in the full sense. The Democrats would therefore retain coaling stations and naval stations in the Philippines, safeguard the interests of foreign nations in the archipelago, and at the earliest possible moment set the islands up as an independent republic, under the friendly and protecting auspices of the United States.⁷⁴

It is doubtful if either party, in 1904, held to the view that we should make the Philippines a permanent possession. The Democratic party may have appeared to be unanimous, the platform emphatic, and the candidate agreeable, but the American people could not be excited over the question. Nebraska, home of a somewhat shop-worn leader, did not respond to the challenge. Bryan toured the state, principally in the interest of the state ticket. His support of Parker, who rejected his silver plank, was slight.⁷⁵ Roosevelt easily carried the state. Prosperity again proved to be the ace card with the voter.⁷⁶

Efforts to interpret the public mind in Nebraska on imperialism lead to much speculation. One can speak positively on some questions. Nebraskans were overwhelmingly in favor of the war with Spain. The dramatic events of that brief conflict aroused the pride of an already patriotic and boastful people. Dewey's magnificent victory at

⁷² Shaw, *op. cit.*, August, 1904; Kirk H. Porter, compiler, *National Party Platforms* (New York, 1924), pp. 260, 263, 264.

⁷³ Shaw, *op. cit.*, August, 1904.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Wayne* (Nebraska) *Herald*, October 6, 1904.

⁷⁶ Hacker and Kendrick, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

Manila may have rekindled some of the old Manifest Destiny spirit but failed to deflect our humanitarian objectives. The citizenry wanted no war with the Filipinos. They were hopeful that privileges commensurate with those granted the Cubans would be extended them. Nebraskans felt that their volunteers were involved in a liberation movement and were shocked when independence was denied the natives.

Bryan's continued efforts to make imperialism a political issue aggravated the situation but returning prosperity determined the elections. The vigorous onslaughts made by so-called anti-imperialists made it appear at times that imperialism *was* a paramount issue. Speeches of legislators, actions of the governor, complaints of returning soldiers, letters from disgruntled servicemen, outbursts of women's organizations, resolutions of sugar-beet interests, denunciations of hyphenated Americans, attacks by newsmen, sermons by clergymen, these and many other factors combined to focus attention on the question. Bryan, ever in the vanguard, and his cohorts led the brigade. Actually, "the expense, the severities, and the casualties in the suppression of the Philippine revolt proved to be more damaging to the cause of imperialism than was all the moral indignation of the anti-imperialists."⁷⁷

Nebraska supporters of the administration rejected the imperialistic barbs hurled at their leaders. The charges of economic exploitation, constitution violation, militarism, abandonment of the Monroe Doctrine, increased taxation, "gunpowder" Christianity, renunciation of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and other accusations were passed off as so much Bryan alarmism. They took the position that the President and his advisers were closer to the problem and knew best what the nation's policy should be. By 1904 conditions in the archipelago had improved to the point that their confidence seemed fully justified. The Cubans were not doing too well with their independence

⁷⁷ Weinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 461, 462.

and this example took off some of the heat in our Philippine actions.

It was now well established that the United States had no ulterior motives and was carrying forward a program unique among the western powers, one that could hardly be labeled imperialism. Professor Kirk states it as follows:

The official administration policy was far from oppressive. There was need, when at last the smoldering embers of native revolt had been stamped out, to justify the earlier declarations of motives by an earnest and resolute attack upon the gigantic problems of education, sanitation, and general economic development. The brilliant record achieved in these fields . . . and their success will stand as an enduring testimonial to all, American and Filipino alike.⁷⁸

Nebraskans generally approved. Roosevelt's popularity grew steadily and few now questioned his sincerity of purpose. Democrats continued to toy with the question of imperialism but never again did they try to make it a *paramount* issue.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Kirk, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁷⁹ Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 284, 308, 332, 359, 385, 397, 434, 489; Kirk, *op. cit.*, p. 33.