

POPULISM AND IMPERIALISM: POLITICS IN THE U.S. WEST, 1890-1900

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Historians have long been fascinated by the last decade of the nineteenth century. It was in these years that one of the great industrial reform movements arose, spearheaded in much of the West and South by the Populists. It was also a decade in which the nation fought its first foreign war in half a century and forcibly took possession of its first major overseas colonial possessions. Scholars have frequently attempted to discuss the two phenomena in conjunction, but their attempts thus far have been shallow and unsatisfactory. This study examines the Populists of the U.S. West in detail, with a special focus upon the years from 1898 to 1900.

Within the first years of the decade, the Populists had developed a substantial following by demanding a reorganization of the national economy for the benefit of small-scale producers and laborers. By 1896, the party formed a vital component of the reform coalition that won most of the elected offices of the region. The Populists and their allies appeared poised to become a substantial force for change, but it was not to be. Wars—the first with Spain over Cuba, the second in the Philippines to quash an independence movement—shifted public attention to other matters. Western Populists and Democrats responded by extending their critique of concentrated wealth to foreign

affairs, and they attributed the drive for empire to the demands of financiers and industrialists. Yet by attacking the American war efforts, they laid themselves open to charges of disloyalty.

President McKinley and the western Republicans who followed him saw the opportunities provided by the conflicts. They declared that colonies would promote trade and promised that the wealth generated by this commerce would trickle down to all classes. To an even greater degree, they skillfully used the wars to rally support around the nation's soldiers and the "flag." And finally, western Republicans successfully labeled the Populists and Democrats who opposed the wars as traitors and "copperheads." In this way conservatives destroyed the most serious challenge to the American industrial order.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historians of the United States have long been fascinated by the convergence of certain events in the 1890s. The first years of the decade saw the development of a large-scale movement organized by farmers and laborers for political and economic reform, culminating in the formation of the Populist Party. The end of the decade saw what had been a rarity, a declared war with a European power, and in its wake came the formal beginning of an American overseas empire. Historians have at times attempted to explain how one has related to another, but somehow they have largely ignored both the Populist response to empire and imperialism's impact upon the movement for reform.

The use of an example may demonstrate at least some of what historians have missed up to this point. On January 26, 1899, California Representative Curtis Castle delivered one of his last addresses in Congress. The Populist was increasingly troubled by the aggressive rhetoric in which his colleagues across the aisle engaged. Hawaii had been annexed the previous summer, American soldiers occupied Cuba—as some suggested they must in perpetuity—and now many had focused their attention across the Pacific at the Philippine archipelago. For Castle, the policy that they proposed was utterly at variance with American principles. Like other anti-imperialists, he decried it as a violation of the principle of self-governance, a bedrock concept upon which all other freedoms rested. But that was not the only reason he opposed the creation of an American empire. Empire was both a distraction from needed change at home and a boon only for the wealthy few, he said. “We have begun the glorious struggle, and I call upon you, my countrymen, to let no paltry bauble divert your energies or turn you from

these radical reforms—this greatest work of all the ages.” Though “Plutocracy beckons you to the feast,” those who held America’s wealth had “provided no seat for you at the banquet board. You are asked to furnish a great army to provide the feast, which will be used, after the banquet is over, to fasten upon your arms the gyves of industrial slavery.” The growth of empire was responsible for the concentration of wealth in ancient Rome, he said, and this trend continued until finally the Roman elite overthrew the Republic. “The wealth of imperial America, drawn from conquered lands, will be distributed as Rome's wealth was. With colonial conquests America's imperial plutocrats will grow richer and more insolent. With one sucker in the Philippines, one in Cuba, one in Porto Rico, and the remaining five in the United States, the wealth-absorbing octopus will grow apace.” Empire encouraged the agglomeration of wealth and power, and these would lead inevitably to the death of American economic and political freedom.¹

Castle’s interpretation of the purpose and consequences of overseas imperialism bears little resemblance to that which has commonly been represented by historians. Academics have made little note of the anti-imperialism of Populists like Jerry Simpson of Kansas, John C. Bell of Colorado, William V. Allen of Nebraska, and many others both inside and outside the halls of Congress, and those few who have pointed it out have not explained it in any substantive way. These western Populists had followed the Democrat William Jennings Bryan in 1896, and most would again in 1900 when he made opposition to empire one of the cornerstones of his campaign, yet that contest and its

¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, App. 90-94. All material taken from the Appendix in this and all sections of this dissertation were read or spoken aloud while Congress was in session unless otherwise stated.

impact has also been largely ignored. There are a variety of reasons why those who have attempted to connect the industrial reform movement with either the War of 1898 or the territorial acquisitions that followed have failed to do so in an accurate or insightful way. Some sought to use history to provide a commentary upon the politics and society of their own eras, and in the process they exaggerated certain facts and left further details out altogether. Other scholars have merely been limited by the assumptions of those who came before. Whatever the methods of the scholar, the true nature of the relationship between Populism and American empire has remained beyond the reach of historians.

Richard Hofstadter was one of the first to associate American entry into the War of 1898 with Populist frustrations. The Populists were some of the loudest jingoists, Hofstadter pointed out, so surely it was the people of the hinterland who most desperately sought the unnecessary war with Spain. As he came to identify it in a later work, the United States was going through a “psychic crisis” in the 1890s, and the Populists simultaneously represented the results of that frustration and were harbingers of what could follow. He certainly understood that only a small portion of the electorate ever joined the party, but Hofstadter also explained that those who loathed the reformers sensed that there were many other Americans who held thoughts like those of the Populists. Many of these middle- and upper-class Americans had frustrations and ambitions of their own that they believed could be resolved through a foreign war, and some among them already believed that such a conflict could smooth over unrest at home. As a consequence, when middle America lashed out against Spain, no substantial group was left to oppose them. The Philippine archipelago was added as a consequence of the war, and after war came it was too late to prevent what had ostensibly been a war

for humanity from evolving into a war of conquest. While he remarkably called the Populist regions the center of “opposition to the fruits of war” after the conflict had ended, in his depiction the Populists held a central place in the great psychic convulsion that led to the creation of an American overseas empire.²

Other historians who have focused instead on the economic causes of American imperialism have likewise attributed some of the drive for empire to the reformers. While they primarily attributed the drive for empire to businessmen and conservative politicians (at least by 1898), the works of Walter LaFeber and William Appleman Williams also included statements on the importance of overseas markets that came from Populists and others who questioned the rising industrial order. The purpose of their works was to demonstrate an American foreign policy consensus, and there was no more direct way to demonstrate uniformity than by using the words of nonconformists. They demonstrated that among those who favored bimetallism were some ardent advocates of trade with Asia, and members of nearly all sectors of society did call for increased foreign trade to offset the effects of “overproduction.” Williams in particular singled out agriculturalists and Populists and contended that they were the source of the search for markets that characterized the policies of America’s foreign policy leaders in the last years of the nineteenth century. Yet for both, any anti-imperialist sentiment expressed after the war with Spain seems either meaningless or something done merely for political effect. The single-mindedness of their works makes imperialism seem the inevitable

² Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Random House, 1955), 88-93; Hofstadter, “Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny,” in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (1952; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 145-187.

consequence of popularly held beliefs and capitalist ambitions. The Populists were as guilty of this as anyone, they claimed.³

More recent works have followed along these lines, casting the Populists and their allies as instigators who helped bring on the war with Spain. Kristin Hoganson recognized that the followers of Bryan were especially keen to argue that greed had come to suppress American manhood—which they did on the campaign trail in 1896 and in the halls of Congress in 1898. She pointed out that manhood and critiques of wealth were deployed simultaneously to demand the protection of the Cubans and an assertion of American power. At the same time, she generally described the Populists as warmongering jingoes, and in her depiction that was the extent of their role in the drama. Paul T. McCartney, while focusing on the influence of American exceptionalist ideology on the national foreign policy discourse, also noted how the campaign rhetoric of 1896 crept into the debates that led up to war in 1898. Populist frustration demanded a war for humanity in 1898. He did note some Populists who opposed the retention of the Philippines, but Populism as a movement of its own had no real place in the narrative and his thorough emphasis on the rhetoric of exceptionalism left all anti-imperialists to be lumped together rather than dissected as constituent groups. Neither Hoganson nor McCartney stated that Populists forced the nation into war, but the way they included a number of the Bryanite reformers in their narratives certainly did not discredit the old

³ For just a few examples of their depiction of Populist involvement, see Walter Lafeber, *New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 201, 205, 414-416; William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969), 34-36, 362-365, 370-375.

arguments.⁴

Clearly, a number of historians have suggested that the Populist movement played a part in the development of America's overseas empire, but they have not painted a clear picture of what that role really was. The motives of the reform politicians are presented so differently in each study that it is impossible to use them to explain the course of events or the motives of Populists. Worse yet, most of them have not expounded upon Populist anti-imperialism, and so the reformers are identified as war-mongers and jingoists without any acknowledgement of the complexity of the views. In fact the vast majority of Populist Party leaders and their closest associates in the Democratic and breakaway Silver Republican parties opposed American possession of the Philippines, and together they made up one of the largest blocs in the Senate. Despite that fact, even historians of the anti-imperialist movement have discounted their significance.

Anti-imperialism has a literature of its own, but the few who have researched the opposition to territorial expansion following the War of 1898 have limited their focus and left the Populists out of the narrative. Historians Richard Beisner, E. Berkeley Tompkins, Daniel B. Schirmer, and recently Michael Cullinane put the greatest emphasis upon the Anti-Imperialist League, an organization led by members of the upper echelons of Northeastern society, including prominent social critics, industrialists, and a smattering of

⁴ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting For American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 28-30, 50, 57, 63, 81, 103-104, 118; Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 122-125, 238, 256.

politicians.⁵ While Bryan and a few Populists were given honorary vice presidential positions, all of the real power lay with mugwumps and conservatives who thought Bryan and his followers were dangerous.

The anti-imperialist literature largely ignores the Populist contribution, and even the brief snippets on the subject outside of that literature are often better.⁶ Of the histories of anti-imperialism, less than a handful have devoted a few paragraphs to the westerners and other radicals they claim made up a substantial part of the movement. These authors then dedicate the rest of their studies to the same conservatives who occupy the core of all the other examinations of the anti-imperialists of this era.⁷ Robert Beisner, the first to develop a book-length study to these opponents of expansion, emphatically attributed the movement to classical liberal mugwumps and regular Republicans who broke ranks with McKinley on this issue alone. As he put it in a later

⁵ Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968); E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing, 1972); Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898-1909* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). On the earlier works on the subject, see Maria C. Lanzar, "The Anti-Imperialist League," *The Philippine Social Science Review* 3, no. 1 (1930): 7-41; Fred H. Harrington, "The Anti-Imperialist Movement in the United States, 1898-1900," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (1935): 211-230.

⁶ Several works have mentioned the anti-imperialism of Populists and their allies without examining it in any detail. One, a work by political scientist Aziz Rana, includes an apt analysis of the Populist view of empire, but because the author used almost exclusively secondary sources he does not effectively prove it. See Aziz Rana, *Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 179, 200-205. For other examples, see Kendrick A. Clements, *William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 30-41; Robert David Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 29-32.

⁷ Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire*, 149-150, 161-169, 175-176, 205-206; Michael Cullinane, *American Anti-Imperialism*, 43-46, 55-56; Jim Zwick, "The Anti-Imperialist Movement, 1898-1921," in *Whose America? The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation*, ed. Virginia M. Bouvier (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 171-192, especially 172, 176.

article, Democrats (and he says nothing of anyone else) were “basically anti-imperialist in 1898 and 1900, but largely out of ritualistic partisanship.”⁸ Conservatives alone were the genuine anti-imperialists. For all practical purposes, his thesis has yet to be disproved. As a consequence, there is no literature on American anti-imperialism that has anything substantial to say about those who questioned the nation’s economic order.

Other scholars have instead attempted to measure the influence of imperialism upon domestic life, and several recent works have suggested that it had a significant impact on culture, conceptions of race and citizenship, and even the scope of American governmentality.⁹ Yet practically no recent works have attempted to explain the political effects of the war and imperialism. The two most important studies are somewhat dated, and both thoroughly discount the importance of imperialism on the election of 1900—the first national contest to follow the annexation of overseas territories. Thomas A. Bailey, in an eleven-page article published in 1937, stated emphatically that the questions that followed the acquisition of the Philippines had a negligible impact upon the election of 1900. There were, he said, too many other issues at stake, all of which seemed more pressing to average voters.¹⁰ His is still the most widely cited secondary source on the

⁸ Robert Beisner, “1898 and 1968: The Anti-Imperialists and the Doves,” *Political Science Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (1970): 192.

⁹ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Thomas A. Bailey, “Was the Presidential Election of 1900 a Mandate on Imperialism?” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (1937): 43-52.

campaign. The second is a book-length study by a Swedish historian, Göran Rystad. While he did believe that imperialism had been a major component of the campaign, other factors decided the election. Both Bailey and Rystad claimed that “prosperity” and opposition to the silver issue left over from 1896 were the truly decisive factors.¹¹

The works of Bailey and Rystad make their claims based on several potentially flawed suppositions. First, they have discussed the situation as though “the nation” was a singular entity, relatively homogeneous throughout. In fact, a look at the electoral map of 1896 reveals the tremendous regionalization of American politics at the end of the century. Rystad devoted a substantial portion of his work to the state of Indiana, which he used as a stand-in for the whole of the United States. Bailey, too, rarely looked any further west than Chicago. Any study that focused on the Midwest or East would have neglected the regions most opposed to the economic orthodoxy of William McKinley and his conservative Republican allies. Such a study would only then be able to detect the impact of McKinley’s imperialist policies if there was widespread opposition to them in those areas because support or tolerance of them would merely involve acceptance of the status quo. Most importantly, any historian with a focus elsewhere would miss the biggest change that took place over last few years of the decade: the collapse of Populism in the West.

¹¹ Göran Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism: American Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics at the Turn of the Century* (Lund, Sweden: Esselte Studium, 1975), especially 294. For works that cite either or both Bailey and Rystad, see Stuart Creighton Miller, *“Benevolent Assimilation”: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement: American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), especially 304-305; Noel Jacob Kent, *America in 1900* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002); Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Random House, 2006).

The area that would be the most appropriate one for such a study would be the trans-Missouri West. There, Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans had united in 1896 to challenge the status quo, and they still held sway in much of the region by 1900. McKinley's supporters had failed to defeat them by supporting the gold standard and business-as-usual in 1896, so if new issues were to appeal to any, it would have been them. But of course, they could just appeal to the "full dinner pail," according to most historians.

While those who have evaluated the election have typically declared that "prosperity" doomed McKinley's opponents, that kind of economic determinism is not an effective tool to examine American politics in the 1890s, especially that of the western states. Grover Cleveland and the Democratic Party had been swept into power in 1892, replacing Republican control of the presidency and both Houses of Congress, all at a time when the economy still appeared strong.¹² As will be demonstrated later, Populists in the West also did well against their Republican adversaries in good times, but suffered one of their worst defeats following the onset of the economic collapse in 1893. Additionally, one of the more prominent authorities on Populism noted that the plight of the farmers, especially in the form of increasing indebtedness and rising levels of tenancy, only became worse in the years after 1896.¹³ Whatever minimal changes westerners had seen regarding the economic situation cannot explain the sudden collapse of Populism and the

¹² J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1-10; R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 4-23.

¹³ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 544.

return of Republican Party dominance at the turn of the century.

Historians of Populism have largely ignored the War of 1898, if for no other reason than a commitment to the claim that the movement had committed suicide through fusion with the Democrats in 1896. This well-worn explanation has been the most common one employed in all the literature of the third party.¹⁴ Yet this thesis has some important weaknesses. First, Populists had already waged numerous “fusion” campaigns in western states without suffering any precipitous decline. Just as vitally, this alliance of parties in 1896 had resulted in more Populist victories than had been recorded in any previous election. Historians who blame fusion for the party’s decline seem to attribute political failure to electoral success. Finally, the histories of western state Populist parties demonstrate that they went through a slow decline, not immediate dissolution.¹⁵ While the national party undoubtedly lost much of its viability following the election of 1896 and the disavowal of the movement by many southerners, it had never been anything more than a collection of state parties anyhow.¹⁶ In 1897, there would not have

¹⁴ Perhaps the strongest advocate of this is Lawrence Goodwyn, in *Democratic Promise*, but even John D. Hicks referred to the Populist view of cooperation with the Democrats as “the holocaust of fusion,” (380-381), and Charles Postel has largely agreed. See Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, 3rd ed. (1931; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Among the studies that describe Populist parties that maintained relevance in the western states for some time after 1896, see: Walter T. K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1969); James Edward Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); Thomas W. Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991); R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers’ Alliance and Populism in South Dakota* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011).

¹⁶ For just a few examples of the difficulties of fusion in the southern context, see Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 96-104; Connie L. Lester, *Up From the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers’ Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in*

appeared any reason to believe that state-level parties could not continue to thrive in the West for some time to come.

Populism maintained some vibrance, but even those studies that have dealt with the period after 1896 have not really examined the sources or extent of the Populist analysis of empire. Many of these works are local studies, and obviously these are limited vehicles for the study of overseas policy. Yet even one of the few works that was capable of dealing with the movement's response to empire—O. Gene Clanton's study of congressional Populism—focuses on the moralistic statements of the anti-imperialists rather than their analysis of empire. Neither he nor anyone else have paid much attention to declarations like those made by Congressman Castle.¹⁷

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the relationship between western Populists and their political allies and imperialism in the last years of the 1890s. The inclusion of Populists into the narrative of intervention in 1898 and anti-imperialism thereafter actually provides a unique perspective that is currently absent from the literature. This study finds that the Populists differed markedly from the typically described portrayals of both eastern interventionists and the conservative opponents of territorial conquest. Core elements of the Populist ideology had a much stronger influence upon their views of the international situation than have hitherto been recognized. Their analysis of global finance and capitalism strongly influenced their

Tennessee, 1870-1915 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 203-205; James L. Hunt, *Marion Butler and American Populism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 107-123 .

¹⁷ For those that have discussed Populism locally, and have included references to the debate over empire, see those works listed in footnote 14 above. For O. Gene Clanton's work on Populism at the national level, see *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); and *Congressional Populism and the Crisis of the 1890s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

interpretation of colonialism, both in Cuba and the Philippines. Their basic republican conceptions of what America should be also shaped their critique of the impact of imperialism at home. It built upon their fears of growing domestic militarism and undemocratic governance, and it was simultaneously rooted in their misgivings about the declining prospects of labor and small capitalists in an exploitative global marketplace.

Because of its place as the home of economic and political dissent, the West was also the most contested political battlefield from 1896 to the opening years of the twentieth century. War and imperialism provided new issues that western conservatives could employ to their advantage. What followed were considerable reverses for the Populists and their western allies. After notable losses in the 1898 off-year election, in 1900 the Populists were driven from statewide office and their Congressional representation nearly disappeared. While it could be suggested that these losses were unrelated to the wider national campaign and cannot be linked to the expansion debate, few politicians acted as though that were true. The political scientist Richard Bense has suggested that national concerns were significant to politics at all levels, and he supported his claim by demonstrating that the most significant planks of the state party platforms of this era usually pertained to national issues.¹⁸ In the years when United States Senators were selected by legislatures, few elections could be considered “just” local. There was no definitive line separating national contests from local elections. While the contests of 1898 and 1900 did not provide a mandate for imperialism, in the West they signaled the death knell of a political movement that provided the most serious political challenge to

¹⁸ Richard Franklin Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization: 1877-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 101-204.

the capitalist order to be seen in nineteenth-century.

Though it is the aim of this work to describe the politics of the West broadly, it would be impossible to conduct a detailed study of the politics of so large a swath of the country. Generalizations always prove to be unfair to the exceptions, and any serious examination requires a close study of the issues and candidates in a local environment. In order to conduct this survey of the West, a small number of states have been selected for close inspection. A set of criteria was used to determine which states would best serve this purpose. First, the state should have gone through some sort of political changes during the 1890s associated with the Populist reform movement. Second, because few states will be incorporated into the study, each state selected should be unlike the others chosen—i.e., only one Plains state. Third, each state should have possessed a large and stable population, relatively speaking. The three states that best fit the above criteria are Colorado, Nebraska, and Washington. Each represents a different subregion of the West, each had been powerfully affected by the political movements of the 1890s, and each held a population of over half a million.

The opening chapters of the study will provide ideological background and political context necessary for the study. The second chapter will describe the basis of Populist thought, primarily by tracing both the republican and liberal foundations of their program. The chapter will also cover the oft-neglected “money power” conspiracy as well as Populist conceptions of civic nationalism and proper manhood. These are core concepts that can help explain Populist interpretations of both domestic politics and, especially later, foreign affairs. The third chapter will cover the political histories of Nebraska, Colorado, and Washington from roughly the beginning of the decade to 1897.

In each state, unique geography and histories of development played significant roles in determining the way individuals and parties reacted to monopolistic capitalism and tight credit. Despite the differences, Populists filled an important niche, and they succeeded in shifting the political discourse from a focus upon cultural issues to an emphasis upon political economy. Additionally, the complexities associated with party “fusion” will be fleshed out to explain the impact it had upon the organizations and politics in each state. This context is necessary to better understand the impact of the War of 1898 and imperialism upon local politics.

The three chapters that follow will examine the contributions of western Populists and allied reformers in Congress in 1898 and the changes in the political situation that occurred that year. The fourth chapter will focus upon the beginning of the Fifty-fifth Congress and western contribution to the debates over entry into the War of 1898 and how it should be paid for. It will be argued that both the plight of the Cubans and the administration’s war funding measure came to be seen through the Populist economic lens. Their suspicion of McKinley’s motives and policies foreshadowed the fight over empire that followed. The fifth chapter covers the debate over Hawaiian annexation and the development of a Populist critique of imperialism. Populists viewed the acquisition and administration of distant territories and diverse peoples a threat to the decentralized, self-governing republic they sought to restore, and for that reason many opposed annexation. The sixth chapter concludes the events of 1898, with a special focus on the state elections of that year. Republicans in many western states succeeded in shifting political debate to the new issues that arose out of the war, and by doing so they were able to hand their opponents some of the worst defeats they would suffer in the 1890s.

The final three chapters examine Populist anti-imperialism and their contests in Congress and at the polls to alter the course of both the nation's foreign policy and its political development. Chapter VII discusses the situation in early 1899. War broke out between the Americans and Filipinos, western reformers in Congress voiced their opposition to colonialism, and even western state politics became partially tied up in the imperial issue. Populists united to stand against empire, and they explained both the cause and results of imperialism in economic terms. As Castle pointed out, wealth and power would become concentrated, and freedom at home would decline. The eighth chapter will cover some of the major issues that appeared in Congress and the media in 1900, at a time when many events nationally and globally were coming to be viewed as related to overseas imperialism. A controversial bill that defined the colonial status of the newly acquired territories and federal military intervention in the Coeur d'Alene's only served to sharpen the western reformers' attack on colonialism and governance by force. The final chapter will deal with the election of 1900, the second consecutive presidential contest waged between William Jennings Bryan and William McKinley. As they had in 1898, Republicans in the West gained the upper hand, and they did so by emphasizing their role in support of the war and the soldiers.

The conclusion will recount the end of both anti-imperialism and Populist-style reform in the West. Though greatly diminished in number, those western reformers who remained in Congress continued the fight. They remained opposed to what they considered the unconstitutional and immoral measures applied to the colonies, but they were too few in number to fundamentally change the situation. Republicans opened the century in firm control of the western states and the federal government. A new epoch of

national reform was about to begin under a party whose leaders never seriously questioned the growing disparities of wealth that accompanied industrialization. Foreign policy would be directed by one of the loudest proponents of American expansion (Theodore Roosevelt), who was then succeeded by the nation's foremost colonial administrator (William Howard Taft). These were the leaders who would set the agenda for the country at the beginning of the new century.

CHAPTER II

WESTERN POPULIST IDEOLOGY AND WORLDVIEW

Amidst the turmoil of the 1890s, increasing numbers of Americans demonstrated a frustration with growing economic inequality and sought new alternatives to the system of unrestrained selfish accumulation that they considered a threat to their wellbeing. In the western United States, the most influential of the movements that responded to this sentiment was the People's Party (Populists)—a coalition of farmers and laborers who provided the most serious challenge to the existing order of American capitalism of any major group during the Gilded Age. These facts are beyond dispute, but historians have long struggled to define the ideology that drove the movement.

There are challenges inherent in any attempt to define a singular vision held by Populists. A quick comparison of two examples can highlight some the difficulties scholars face when they attempt to classify Populist thought. The first of these samples is taken from *The Advocate*, a Populist organ in Topeka, Kansas, a region that some have considered the heart of the political insurgency. One editorial from this paper, from April of 1894, focused on the monopolistic control of labor. "Look at the multitudes who have been but recently thrown out of employment, and whose families have been destitute in consequence," the author demanded. "It is cruel, it is inhuman, to attribute these conditions to laziness, drunkenness, and incompetency. They are the natural product of a false and vicious system by which the few grow rich beyond all need, and the many are doomed to eternal poverty and want." The writer went on to propose that those who were willing should have a right to work and be justly compensated. According to the editors

of *The Advocate*, modern capitalism had made no adjustments for common laborers and there was a social responsibility to change that order to fit these needs.¹

At the other end of the spectrum was John Rankin Rogers. In the years from 1887 to 1889 he was the editor of the *Kansas Commoner*, a Union Laborite paper in Newton, Kansas. In 1890, he moved to Washington state, and there devoted more of his time to the publication of reform pamphlets and, later, building the organization that would become the Pacific Coast's strongest Populist Party. He was elected governor of his new state in 1896, but he continued to write, and he maintained a correspondence with other reformers nationally. In his response to one such activist, he explained his views on the struggling urban laborers. "[T]he destitute poor of the cities can only be helped by what is ordinarily termed 'charity'. They are for the most part incapable of helping themselves. As a matter of fact I do not believe that very much can be done for them. If they were transported to a good farming region and each given a farm it is probable that they would fail as farmers." American laborers had their greatest opportunities in the era when land was cheap and readily available, he said, and he informed his correspondent that only land reform and a return of workers to the countryside would improve the situation for those "who lacked the ability to take the initiative." While he did call for structural changes in the American economic order, he

¹ "Labor and Labor Saving Machinery," *The Advocate* (Topeka, KS), April 11, 1894, p. 4. See also Norman Pollack, *The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 145-147.

embraced Spencerian ideas regarding “survival of the fittest,” and in most cases he considered the urban poor to be the dregs and castoffs of American society.²

The two perspectives could not be more different. One focused on the assumed rights of producers, the other came close to blaming the poor for their own failures. Despite the obvious differences, Rogers was every bit the Populist that the editor of *The Advocate* was. Western Populists were necessarily a diverse bunch. Many had sided with the Union during the Civil War, a few others for the Confederacy, while at least as many had been either too young or not yet residents of the United States. Long-time third party organizers were often important in the development of the first state parties, but the largest share of their supporters at the outset had been Republicans, and over the course of the 1890s ex-Democrats would make up an increasing percentage of the voters and leaders. As a result, they were just as ideologically diverse. Among them were aging Jacksonians and young single-taxers, Bellamyite “nationalists” and Knights of Labor. While few of their views were necessarily incompatible, the result was regular struggle within the many state parties over the limits and meaning of reform.³

² John Rankin Rogers to Anna Goodyear, Oct. 18, 1898, John Rankin Rogers Papers, Washington State Archives, Olympia. On Rogers’s beliefs regarding Spencer and individualism, see Karel Bicha, “Peculiar Populist: An Assessment of John Rankin Rogers,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1974): 110-117.

³ The best study that represents the diversity of participants in the movement is certainly Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). That said, Postel’s intent was to describe some unity or common “modern” purpose behind Populist ideology, rather than emphasize the fullest extent of ideological diversity among those members of the party and affiliated associations. On the composition of the party and changes over the decade, see James Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 126-158; Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 53-73, 89-108; and Peter H. Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 4-6, 23.

Populism, Liberalism, and Republicanism

The historians' debate over Populist ideology reaches back over roughly sixty years now. From the time of Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* in the mid-1950s into the 1970s, the conflict was between those who considered the Populists to the left of center and those who viewed them as backward-looking conservatives. In his widely read book, Hofstadter had classed them as the latter, a conclusion that some eastern intellectuals were increasingly accepting by that time. But the historians of Populism—more commonly academics from the state institutions of the Midwest—quickly attempted to stamp out this heresy.⁴ In the clash that followed, as one historian has put it, “Reactionary Populists chased socialist Populists through the learned journals in a quarrel that generated considerably more heat than light.”⁵ That debate only subsided as overt studies of politics fell from their place of dominance in American history generally. A more recent debate is now taking its place, based on the remnants of the previous struggle.

The contemporary debate centers upon conceptions of “modernity,” and with it capitalism and liberalism. While historians responded to Hofstadter's claims of Populist conservatism in a variety of ways, many came to explain Populist ideology as rooted in traditional “republicanism” and “producerism.” This model provided an alternative, allowing scholars to see in the agrarian and labor movement a set of ideals that ignored

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); see also David S. Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 100-119.

⁵ The quote is from an essay that also effectively describes the conflicts among historians of Populism up to 1980. See James Turner, “Understanding the Populists,” *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 2 (1980): 354-373.

the individualism and self-interest they believed was inherent in liberal thought. Instead, producerist and republican ideology prioritized the collective good over the individual's rights to property and private gain. It contended that economic independence was a prerequisite to political freedom. In the process, some portrayed these farmers and workers as harkening back to pre-industrial ideals of political equality and economic opportunity.⁶

Yet the invocation of republicanism has led to its own controversies. Some have suggested that the Populists were unquestionably following in the republican tradition, but that their dated ideas doomed them to failure as their contemporaries came to accept the liberal emphasis on individual rights and self-interest. By this way of thinking, Populism's collapse was not because of tactical blunders, but instead the movement's demise was due to antiquated ideas and their refusal to join the modern world.⁷

Rather than accept either of these analyses, two historians have attempted to bring Populism back into line with modernity, and with it, liberalism. Norman Pollack, who had previously claimed that the Populists were class-conscious proto-socialists, reversed

⁶ Lawrence Goodwyn developed one of the most impressive of these narratives, in which he described the growth of a cooperative "movement culture" among southern farmers who hoped to break free of the crop-lien system. While not as explicitly anti-modern as Postel has made it appear, it did suggest that the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union had developed a thoroughgoing anti-capitalism that made it impossible to fit them into modern conceptions of liberal or conservative, or even socialist. See *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). For some of the other best known examples of works that discussed Populism as a republican or producerist (or, less commonly, a pre-modern) movement, see also Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Worth Robert Miller, *Oklahoma Populism: A History of the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Thomas Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991).

⁷ Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), 168-225; James Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 67.

course to claim that the agrarian reformers were “modern” capitalists, though they favored serious alterations to the system then in place. He claimed that the Populists only sought to restore “competitive capitalism”—a state in which unnatural monopolies would no longer hold economic power over farmers and laborers and government assured all access to the market. While Pollack claimed to be unsure about whether producer republicanism had any influence on the movement, his refusal to seriously evaluate it suggests he had come to his ultimate conclusion on the subject.⁸

More recently, Charles Postel has joined in this effort to define the Populists as “modern” reformers. As he put it in the introduction of his recent book, Populists were focused on “power and interest,” and they had a tendency to view the world “through a narrow materialist lens.” By the 1890s, he said, all Americans were too thoroughly integrated into national—and increasingly, global—systems of trade and communication to have maintained traditionalist fears of the market. The Farmers’ Alliance was an organization like many others of their era—it was a conglomeration built to increase efficiency and place agrarians on a competitive foundation. Populists supported science and rationality, even to the point that they accepted increasingly popular scientific justifications for segregation. Their references to Jeffersonian or Jacksonian forms of

⁸ Norman Pollack published two books on the subject of Populist modernity: see *Just Polity*, cited above, and *The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism, and Democracy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990). For his earlier work, see Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962). For his remarks on republicanism, see especially *The Just Polity*, 11-13.

freedom represented little more than “rhetorical alchemy,” he said. Postel’s Populists were almost incapable of invoking “traditional” values as they searched for solutions.⁹

While the truth does not always lie in the middle, in this case it would seem difficult to believe either side to the exclusion of the others. Postel is absolutely right that the world that Populists inhabited left them better connected to the world than rural people ever had been, that these connections were not totally new in 1890 or even the decade before, and that Populists certainly were not the deluded followers of an agrarian myth. Populists did believe in capitalism, industrialization, private property, and individualism. However, Postel’s work did not discredit the material other historians had presented so much as he found evidence that, to his readers, would seem to speak of values that contradicted classical republicanism.¹⁰

One problem that arises with these works has to do with the use of the word “modern.” As employed by both Pollack and Postel, it is used in direct contradistinction with the term “traditional,” and also by extension “republican.” Yet neither acknowledges that most individuals in history have not been as intellectually rigorous or coherent in their views as later historians have sought to make them. Just as they connected traditionalism and republicanism, Postel and Pollack conflated liberalism and

⁹ For Postel’s well-received recent work, see Postel, *The Populist Vision*, and for this subject see especially 3-22, 142.

¹⁰ On market connections in the post-bellum period, see William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991); David Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000); and Postel, *Populist Vision*, especially 27-32, 45-54, 103-133. The organization of new trading centers was afoot in the South as well, throwing into doubt any credible discussion of political revolt emanating from “island communities.” On the “island communities,” see Robert H. Weibe *Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). See also Edward Ayers, *Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially 55-80.

capitalism with late-nineteenth-century conceptions of “modernity.” Neither openly addressed the fact that no one in late nineteenth-century America was a strict adherent of “modern” liberalism. As a useful point of comparison, even the classical liberal mugwump reformers maintained a strong connection with traditional republican values. Though they believed the market alone was the best tool for the distribution of resources and that economic self-interest was the primary determinant of human action, these high-minded intellectuals also aspired to find men for elected office who were civic-minded and immune to selfishness. They wanted individuals who were economically independent (thus beyond corruption) and educated—those they simply called the “best men,”—to control the apparatus of state. At the same time, they attempted to promote a harmonious society bereft of class conflict. They were not opposed to progress, and their views of modernity and development were not so different from others of the period, but they detested both the crass excesses of some of the *nouveaux riches* and feared the whims of the unwashed masses. Though they spoke of *laissez-faire*, they dreamed of a paternalistic society that had much in common with the antebellum era and, fundamentally, the era of the nation’s founding. The mugwumps held republican and liberal values simultaneously, just as others of their era certainly did.¹¹

Obviously, the rigid definitions that have been attributed to the concepts of republicanism or liberalism are incongruous with the historically loose application of

¹¹ On the mugwumps, see Leslie Butler, *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); John G. Sproat, “*The Best Men*”: *Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); David M. Tucker, *Mugwumps: Public Moralists of the Gilded Age* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998). See also Kloppenborg, *Virtues of Liberalism*, 66.

elements from both the traditions. Other historians have demonstrated that liberalism and republicanism shared much in common, and that the seminal liberal thinkers still accepted much from the republican tradition.¹² Further, James Kloppenberg has explained how the two concepts should not be seen as mutually exclusive even in the context of the late nineteenth century. Republicanism and liberalism were two streams of thought that “comprised a multitude of arguments developed in different contexts to solve different problems and to articulate different ideals,” he said. As such, they need not be seen as mutually exclusive. Kloppenberg also suggests that this language should be seen as more than just rhetoric. The two streams of thought invoked different values, but both could claim to be the authentic heirs of the founding generation. It must be assumed that speakers and writers would not have invoked the language of either tradition if the words had no special meaning to either themselves or their audiences. If the Populists did employ both liberal and republican concepts in the formulation of their ideology, then they must have had a need to argue for something not easily fitted into either ideological framework.¹³

¹² There is a great deal of literature on this subject regarding politics in early America and the origins of liberalism generally. For just some of the examples available, see Peter Berkowitz, *The Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Richard C. Sinopoli, *The Foundations of American Citizenship: Liberalism, the Constitution, and Civic Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³ Kloppenberg, *Virtues of Liberalism*, 59-70. For an earlier attempt to reconcile Populist republicanism with individualistic liberalism, see Bruce Palmer, “*Man over Money*”: *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). One historian whose work on late-nineteenth century labor republicanism best matches the sort presented here is Andrew Neather. See: Neather, “Labor Republicanism, Race, and Popular Patriotism in the Era of Empire,” in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism*, ed. John Bodnar (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 82-101; also Neather, “Popular Republicanism, Americanism, and the Roots of Anti-Communism, 1890-1925,” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1993).

The reform agenda of the 1890s needs to be seen as the product of this patchwork ideology. Populists were liberal to the extent they believed in the market, property rights (with serious limitations), and individual rights. Part of their frustration did pertain to what they saw as a perversion of the market by capitalists and their allies in government, and they also worked to carve out an economic niche based on the needs of the market sectors they represented. But any liberal emphasis on the individual was incapable of embodying their most serious critiques of the capitalist system and its structures of power. No liberal of the era rejected the principles of virtuous citizenship, and certainly older conceptions of rights lingered on, but Populists more than most employed republican discourse to justify their agenda. In the eyes of many Populists, the unchecked greed of the financiers threatened to turn whole classes of society into economic dependents. Producerist ideals—which, among other things, they invoked to demand greater wealth for those who created value and to question the legal rights of non-human-persons (corporations)—provided a more effective rationalization for things like the total restructuring of the financial system or the nationalization of certain industries.¹⁴ These planks of their platform were not merely adjustments of Smithian or Lockean models, but a different model altogether.¹⁵

¹⁴ One of the best Populist attacks on the concept of corporate personhood is found in James B. Weaver, *A Call to Action: The Great Uprising, Its Source and Causes* (Des Moines: Iowa Printing Company, 1892), 102-110.

¹⁵ Pollack repeatedly tries to describe the Populist adjustment or partial rejection of what he calls “Smithian” economics or, to a lesser extent, “Lockean” principles, as fundamentally liberal. See Pollack, *Just Polity*, especially 28, 89-90, 171-174, 336. However, the adjustments he discusses are of such scope that it is difficult to call it liberal without such qualifications as to make the term, at the least, vague and weak. It is also worth mentioning that what he refers to as the “Smithian” model is not a proper representation of Adam Smith’s views. See Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

While the primary elements of Populist ideology will be explained and demonstrated throughout the following chapters, it is still useful to lay out their basic principles here. For the purposes of simplicity, the bases of Populist ideology can be revealed through an examination of their tracts and commentaries. Among those examined for this brief survey are William Peffer's *The Farmers Side* (1891), James B. Weaver's *A Call to Action* (1892), and John Rankin Rogers's *Politics* (1894), supplemented with articles from selected Populist newspapers such as Davis Waite's *Aspen Union Era*. Obviously such an investigation cannot come close to covering the breadth of western Populist thought. Still, this examination should make one point clear: when they launched into their attacks on the power of monopolies or growing wealth inequality, or when they explained elements of their programs such as financial reform or the nationalization of industries, Populist thinkers—even individually—did not follow what present historians would consider a single ideological tradition. Additionally, this brief examination should clarify certain elements of their agenda and make distinctions between the reforms proposed by Populists and those enacted in the generation that followed them. Populists were most certainly not conservatives who desired to return America to a pre-industrial condition, nor were they a movement that represented entrenched interests. Theirs was instead largely a movement of those at the middle and the bottom who were trying to stake a claim to economic justice in an era of growing wealth disparities. While they did seek to harness the powers of the federal government to transform American capitalism, they did so as a necessary expedient rather than due to any ideological preference for centralization. Furthermore, the notions with which they

proceeded made them quite different from the regulatory progressives of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the single strongest point that united all western Populists was their “anti-monopoly” position. Large capital enterprises held tremendous power in these relatively new states, and incumbent Republicans had encouraged the growth of that power by taking an unabashedly pro-growth stance.¹⁶ When James B. Weaver, a former Republican and Greenback congressman, informed readers that “monstrous combinations” now controlled “the business of every city,” and they “thrust their paid lobbyists within the corridors and onto the floor of every legislative assembly,” he was telling them something that many already knew. The national government was not immune to this phenomenon. Weaver claimed that not even Alexander Hamilton had contemplated that the Senate “should become the stronghold of monopoly, nor that it should hedge up the way to all reform and make impossible the peaceful overthrow of conceded abuses.”¹⁷ In addition to their control of Congress, many argued that great corporations had taken over the courts as well. In the case of the railroads, even if one were willing to face down the “probably not less than one thousand lawyers,” employed by tycoons such as Jay Gould, William Peffer told readers that one would find that “all important avenues to the courts are brought under control of the interested corporation.”¹⁸

¹⁶ On anti-monopolism and Republican policies, see Robert W. Larson, *Populism in the Mountain West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 1-12, 32-52.

¹⁷ Weaver, *A Call to Action*, 248, 29.

¹⁸ William A. Peffer, *The Farmer's Side: His Trouble and Their Remedy* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1891), 176-177. Weaver made an even more thorough attack upon the courts. See *Call to Action*, 132-133.

Furthermore, Populists felt that the industrialists' use of force against labor amounted to a challenge to the sovereign rights of the government. Weaver compared the use of Pinkertons—a force that he believed outnumbered the regular army—to the use of private armies by feudal barons.¹⁹ A writer for the publication *The Coming Crisis*, based in Pueblo, Colorado, turned to a more recent example by comparing the private forces of Carnegie during the Homestead strike to the British use of Hessian mercenaries during the American Revolution. Both the British king and Carnegie, he said, had attempted to quash American freedom.²⁰

As Pollack most clearly defined it, the Populist critique focused most intensely on the development of a “class state.”²¹ Populists wanted to put an end to what they saw as preferential laws—and the interpretation of law—that seemed to only to benefit the few. While their opponents would sometimes claim that it was the Populists who advocated “class legislation,” or legislation for the benefit of certain interests, the reformers pointed out that unfair legislation was already the norm and that they were only attempting to correct the earlier mistake.²² To an extent, they believed that the great concentrations of wealth were a product of laws that created special privilege. In early 1890 a future Populist Congressman from Nebraska, William McKeighan, wrote to the newspaper *Farmers' Alliance* stating that “reference to the history of other nations fails to afford a

¹⁹ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 378-379.

²⁰ Untitled piece from *The Coming Crisis* (Pueblo, Colorado), date unknown, reprinted in *Aspen Union Era*, Jul. 21, 1892, p. 4.

²¹ Pollack, *Just Polity*, 5.

²² Postel, *Populist Vision*, 137, 224.

single instance of the accumulation of so great wealth in the hands of a few individuals.” Some unusual causes “must exist to produce such abnormal results. They are found in the special legislation of the country, extending aid and protection to capital.”²³ Davis Waite’s paper informed readers that, in order to save freedom and have a just distribution of wealth, “monopoly and special privilege, which are created by law, must be destroyed by the repeal of such laws.”²⁴ The partnership of government and big business had to be stopped.

For westerners, the most obvious beneficiary of friendly government policies had been the railroad industry. Weaver pointed to one of the most obvious gifts given to the railroads, the enormous land grants. “In Dakota,” he said, “the Northern Pacific gets as much land as there is in the two States of New Jersey and Connecticut. In Montana the grant to the same company is as large as the whole of Maryland, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.... [A]nd in Washington Territory its grant equals in extent the size of the three states of New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.” Weaver declared these subsidies to be unnecessary, because almost “none of the aided roads...were built until a profit in construction could be seen without the aid of land grants.”²⁵ These were not grants designed to promote progress, but favors given by friends in high places. A writer for the *Aspen Union Era* came to even more serious conclusions in an analysis of the Civil War-era actions of Congress, taken in favor of the transcontinental lines. The huge

²³ William A. McKeighan, “Wealth as a Political Power,” *Farmers Alliance* (Lincoln), Mar. 1, 1890; see also Pollack, *Just Polity*, 179-180.

²⁴ “A Message to the People of Aspen and Vicinity,” *Aspen Union Era*, Jan. 7, 1892, p. 1.

²⁵ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 153-155.

gifts given the railroads in 1862 and 1864 hinted at bribery even greater in scale than that exposed in the Credit Mobilier scandal. As evidence, the writer pointed to the Congressional votes in 1864, in which nearly half the Senators and almost the same proportion of Congressmen had refused to vote at all. It was impossible to dare say “that a large part of the absent, or not voting senators and representatives were not bribe-takers.” That such favoritism had become public policy only encouraged this type of corruption.²⁶

Another of the more obvious targets of the critics was the system of protective tariffs, which were implemented by Republicans in Congress for the support of “infant industries.”²⁷ Populists declared that these combinations were infants no longer. The *Aspen Union Era* stated that organizations like the steel trust were able to become monopolies “by the assistance of the protective duty on steel rails,” and by this “control the markets and fix the prices at which its products are to be sold.”²⁸ Peffer, too, wrote that it appeared “there is a very strong disposition in certain quarters to pervert our tariff legislation from its original design into one for the benefit of a particular class of people, and that class represented by a very small number of persons.”²⁹ This analysis was very much in line with classical liberal ideals, and it was already a familiar idea to mugwump

²⁶ “Corrupt Foot-Prints,” *Aspen Union Era*, Oct. 22, 1891, p. 5.

²⁷ On “infant industries” and tariffs, see Richard F. Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 460, 477. Bense includes some of the most interesting explanations of Gilded Age tariff policies in this work.

²⁸ “The Steel Rail Trust,” *Aspen Union Era*, Nov. 26, 1891, p. 1.

²⁹ Peffer, *The Farmer’s Side*, 133.

reformers and *laissez faire* Democrats.³⁰ While Populists did not believe the tariff was itself a major concern, they were sure that it represented congressional favoritism for those who needed little help.

In comments similar to those of the *Union Era*, other Populists explained how trusts had been consciously built to avoid competition. Weaver wrote that “monopolies organized to destroy competition and restrain trade.” A sound policy for the public interest “favors competition in the present condition of organized society.” Restated just a few paragraphs later, he added that monopolies hated competition “because the people share in the spoils.”³¹ Monopolies were strangling competition; of this all Populists were sure. John Rankin Rogers stated it most simply: “The competitive system, or the war of business, is slowly dying.” An age of monopolies was about to dawn unless serious action was taken against them.³²

There was a general consensus among Populists that large business combinations dominated the American economy and that they threatened all common people. “Once they secure control of a given line of business,” wrote Weaver, “they are masters of the situation and can dictate to the two great classes with which they deal—the producer of the raw material and the consumer of the finished product.”³³ Weaver explained the abstract potential of monopolies, but much of western Populist literature focused on more

³⁰ Tucker, *Public Moralists of the Gilded Age*, 90-91.

³¹ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 390-392.

³² John Rankin Rogers, *Politics: An Argument in Favor of the Inalienable Rights of Man* (Seattle: Allen Printing Co., 1894), 27.

³³ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 391-392.

tangible examples familiar to the people of their region. Peffer pointed to a combination by meat packers and others who he claimed controlled the sale price of all livestock.

“[W]hen cattle from the West reached Chicago there was no competition among buyers. The stock business there was controlled by commission merchants, railroad companies, and packing houses, who divided the profits among themselves.”³⁴ This industrial cartel guaranteed competition was kept to a minimum. Similarly, Waite’s paper told readers to be wary when two major western coal companies merged. Aside from the thousands the editor predicted would be fired from their jobs in the process of consolidation, he warned that another result was sure to be that “coal users would be squeezed.”³⁵

Many of the specific criticisms of trusts levied by Populists focused on concerns that fit well with principles of liberal interest-group politics. Their grievances represented the frustrations of the producers and consumers of certain goods against those who they felt had been abusing the system of exchange. The free market was collapsing they said, and they often stated that their platform called only for a return of equitable competition. However, in the process they also characterized large corporations as something unnatural, delegitimizing their very existence. Populists claimed to represent the small producer who was (by virtue of his independence) the backbone of the republic. While they did make demands for fairness based on their perceived right to a reasonable economic opportunity, their attacks on perceived inequality went farther than liberal arguments would allow. They did not just claim that those with interests similar to their

³⁴ Peffer, *The Farmer’s Side*, 62-63.

³⁵ “Western News Notes,” *Aspen Union Era*, Feb. 4, 1892, p. 4.

own were being treated unfairly, but instead they claimed that the system of predatory wealth that had become an integral part of the economy was fundamentally oppressive to the masses. In such a way, they leveled a producerist critique of late-nineteenth-century American capitalism.

Populists characterized the system of economics in their own era as inherently parasitic. Rogers accused the employers of wage-workers of “stealing from men and women who are placed by our system of slavery in such a deprived and dependent position that they can no more help themselves than could the negroes in chattel slavery.”³⁶ All employers, he said, robbed workers of the fruits of their labor. Weaver made a more complex analogy. Corporations received legislative approval of their charters, which he claimed were the equivalent of letters of marque bestowed on privateers who had targeted enemy shipping in previous eras. These persons had been “little else than licensed pirates,” but at least they had attacked the commerce of an enemy state. In his own time, “The corporation is always authorized by the Sovereign to make its reprisals upon an unoffending people.” Weaver employed the pirate analogy throughout his lengthy work, starting on the first page of the preface.³⁷ One writer for the *Aspen Union Era* likewise flayed the wealthy for their crimes. “One-half the wealth of our nation is now owned by 31,000 people of an entire population of 62,000,000” due to the power of monopolies, the author said. This was no better than “Legalized robbery,” the writer continued, which was fundamentally “the parent and cause of all other forms of

³⁶ Rogers, *Politics*, 18.

³⁷ Weaver, *Call to Action*, quotes from 265-266, 5.

robbery.” The author offered no suggestion that this wealth had been amassed through any form of recognized criminal mischief; instead the collection of such a sum was innately a crime against the community.³⁸ This kind of language demonstrated a hatred for an economic power relationship that Populists understood to be unsuited to the historic foundations of the American system.

Populists responded to this system of economic exclusion with calls for cooperation, or, as Postel sometimes refers to it, combination. According to Postel, Populists were living in an era of growing corporate combinations and trusts and he describes the reaction of farmers as one that followed the business model of the day. Each farmer was merely “a country business person whose commercial self-interest pointed to level-headed business strategies,” he said. Cooperation was simply a tactic to allow individual entrepreneurs to compete in the modern market system.³⁹

Postel is partly right when he attempts to de-mythologize the history of farmer cooperation. Cooperation was not solely based on some traditional community instinct or some sense of class solidarity beyond the desire of people in the same occupation to share in the benefits that pooled resources could provide. For many Populists, cooperation was an option that promised the possibility of leverage against the power of the monopolistic industries and cartels of buyers. “The railroad companies and the cattle dealers united their forces years ago for the purpose of making money,” wrote William Peffer. “So it has been with the ranchmen of the West. So it is with manufacturers. So it

³⁸ “A Message to the People of Aspen and Vicinity,” *Aspen Union Era*, Jan. 7, 1892, p. 1.

³⁹ Postel, *Populist Vision*, especially 103-133.

is with bankers. While their individual and local interests are separate and distinct from one another, yet they have a common interest. Hence they form organizations.” Peffer had his grievances with such associations, but they were not the only ones who could cooperate. “Now, let the farmers and their co-workers learn from the lessons which these things teach; let them organize, not only for social purposes... but for business.”⁴⁰

Time and again, Populist writers informed the rank and file that cooperation was a way of business and must be adopted. It was in this tone that a writer for *The Advocate* told readers that “When farmer competes with farmer for a chance to sell his products, and when wage-worker competes with wage-worker for an opportunity to sell his labor, capital is king.” Cooperative selling could reverse that, for “when capital competes with capital to secure the products of the soil or the services of the wage worker, labor will be king.”⁴¹ One piece in the *Aspen Union Era* explained details regarding a new Kansas cooperative mortgage company in a similar tone. “The scheme of co-operation which is to rid the world of the ruinous system of competition will be applied to the payment of mortgaged indebtedness,” the author claimed.⁴² Cooperative buying and selling was the tactic of the business world, and it was time for farmers and laborers to experience the benefits it could provide.

Cooperation was ultimately described as a modern necessity if farmers or laborers were to maintain any semblance of economic independence. One writer for a newspaper

⁴⁰ Peffer, *The Farmer's Side*, 170.

⁴¹ *The Advocate* (Topeka), Dec. 16, 1891, p. 6.

⁴² “Another Alliance Enterprise,” *Aspen Union Era*, Dec. 31, 1891, p. 3.

used an allegorical tale to explain the simple value of cooperation. The author began with a description of his earlier life, ten years before, when he had been a resident of a town in Kansas. There, roughly a hundred men “were constantly employed dressing stone.” One day a machine salesman came with an offer for the stoneworkers:

If you gentlemen will chip in ten dollars apiece I’ll put up a machine that will do the work you are doing better and faster; so fast that ten of you with the machine will do as much work as all are doing. You will own the machine and can divide up into squads of ten, each squad work one month and lay off nine months and accomplish as much as you are all doing now and get the same pay for it.

The men refused, preferring to work in their own way. Soon, the story went, a capitalist met up with the salesman and made the purchase the artisans had just refused. In little time, he had ten unskilled workers running the machine and producing at full capacity, while “the one hundred men cursed the machine, the inventor, and the capitalist, and struck out to swell the army of the unemployed.”⁴³ The moral of the story was direct enough. Cooperation, in conjunction with the acceptance of technology and modern methods, was necessary if individuals were to compete in the world of modern business.

Cooperation was a theme in the work of all Populist writers, no matter how difficult it was for them to reconcile with their other beliefs. For example, cooperation would not have seemed the most logical topic for the thoroughgoing individualist John Rankin Rogers. He was far more likely to cite Herbert Spencer’s social views or David Ricardo’s iron law of wages—the latter of which he used in *Politics*—rather than something like Laurence Gronlund’s *Cooperative Commonwealth*.⁴⁴ His private letters

⁴³ “Co-operation vs. Capitalism,” *Free Press* (date and location unknown), reprinted in *Aspen Union Era*, Jun. 23, 1892, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Rogers, *Politics*, 21.

demonstrate his tentative views of mutual aid. As governor of Washington, he was in communication with a group that was working to establish a cooperative colony inside the state. Rogers told the group's secretary that he believed the key to their success was individual property rights. Each family must be "owners of their separate homes." Only then would "combining together for active assistance in industries" be possible, he said. Private property and accumulation remained too vital for him to reject. People had to have something to work for, an aspiration to reach for. As he would put in one of his later works, "Man lives to acquire; to gain in some direction.... Some small gain, in one direction or another, must be his."⁴⁵ Cooperation had its merits, but it would not enable participants to transcend the individual's drive to improve their situation.⁴⁶

For those who consider Populist acceptance of the principle of material self-interest proof that they were "modern," these statements seem appropriate enough. They appear absolutely fitting for individuals who were trying to fit into a world in which individual rights were supreme and business practices were adapted to the forces of the market. Yet many of the same individuals who wrote or publicized these statements made remarks that hardly suggest their approval of this new order of things. They mixed in attacks on the rights of property, and several even wrote of the supremacy of community needs over the rights of any individual (or, for that matter, any corporation).

In the case of Rogers, his extreme emphasis on an individual's right to property actually led him to question the entire concept of inheritable property titles. All people

⁴⁵ John Rankin Rogers, *Life* (San Francisco: The Whitaker & Ray Company, 1899), 57.

⁴⁶ John Rankin Rogers to D. C. Ashmun, January 18, 1900, John Rankin Rogers Papers, Washington State Archives.

had a God-given right to the resources of nature—but his natural rights philosophy was quite different from that of the liberal philosophers. Rogers believed that those who claimed sole possession of any naturally-available resource denied the free use of that resource to all other individuals (or, as others would put it, the community). The theory that such substantial rights could belong to one individual—“the principle upon which this deprivation of the masses is based”—necessarily violated the rights of all other persons. It was in this way that monopolies “gain their power and exert their sway by depriving the people, under various alluring and deceptive pretexts of their natural rights.” Perhaps Rogers’s greatest fear was the development of “land monopolies” that would reduce all farmers of the future to the status of mere tenants. “Land and its natural products,” he explained, “form the provision made by nature—of the Creator—for the use and sustenance of men, of all men, during life.... Natural title, right title, comes simply from the nature of man—from his necessities. His need is his warrant.” An individual’s need for the resources of nature was paramount, and any other claim was secondary, created by society to impose a sort of order. Furthermore, that right to use ended with the life of an individual. “When life is done need ceases, and title, natural title, come to an end.” Ultimately, he believed every person was entitled to a grant of land, for free and not subject to any taxation, for the duration of one’s life. Instead of title in perpetuity, “The right to occupy and use could be sold precisely as men now sell government ‘claims.’” This, he said, was the only legitimate system for land tenure; any alternative amounted to robbery.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Rogers, *Politics*, 31-38.

Others, too, leveled their own serious attacks on the recognized rights of property. Like Rogers, Weaver feared the development of a land monopoly, which he considered a violation of natural rights to the soil. The right to “till it unmolested, as soon as he has the strength to do so and to live upon the fruits of his toil without paying tribute to any other creature” was “among the most sacred and essential” rights that all must share. The recently declared “end of the frontier” had convinced him that all of the suitable lands had been claimed. In order to restore the God-given right of common people to property of their own, Weaver predicted a “complete readjustment” in the very near future.⁴⁸ Davis Waite’s partner in the *Aspen Union Era*, G. C. Rohde, came even closer to Rogers’ statements when he wrote that “Private property in land is legalized robbery... The sooner we recognize the fact that the earth belongs to all the people in usufruct, and not to those who have chanced to secure possession thereof, the sooner justice is done to labor.” Like Rogers, he argued for a right to use the land but against inheritable title to a type of property that should be reserved for the benefit of all.⁴⁹

Populist interest in property stemmed from their acceptance of the traditional belief that economic independence and political freedom were complementary. Each, logically, put their own spin on it, but the great majority of Populist writers did not believe that one could work for another and still maintain political autonomy. William Peffer described the dehumanization faced by contemporary wage workers. Of those compelled to work in factories, he said:

⁴⁸ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 136, 282-283, 286-287, 293.

⁴⁹ G. C. Rohde, “Mesa Ditch Problem and the Land Question,” *Aspen Union Era*, Jan. 7, 1892, p. 2.

They are practically as much machines as the unconscious mechanical combinations to which they attend. By this process of absorption in large manufacturing establishments the individuality of the separate workers is virtually lost. The man who was once an individual citizen among the farmers is now a part of a great manufacturing establishment in the city, doing his work with the same precision, the same regularity, the same method that an inanimate implement does.

This also created a power relationship of such imbalance that a worker had little power to resist the demands of a corporate master. This had given the employer “a practical ownership of his work-people,” resulting in the loss of workers’ political freedom.⁵⁰

Others told laborers that economic independence must remain their ultimate goal if they wanted true freedom. A writer for the *Coming Crisis* asked, “You producers of wealth, you workman, do you think you were born to work for wages, and other men born to hire you and make a profit?” Responding to their own question, the writer answered in the negative. “When you study politics more, you will find nature never intended you as a beast of burden.”⁵¹ For John Rankin Rogers, it was as much a character issue as anything. He contended that access to property was a natural right, and economic independence created republican citizens. “Either [man] will be a producer of values or a mere dead weight upon the body politic,” he wrote. Through control of land and their own labor, “liberty and independence can be maintained and the individual freed from that soul debasing dependence which is so destructive of manhood and character.”⁵² Independence, and with it manliness, required access to property of one’s own.

⁵⁰ Peffer, *The Farmer’s Side*, 51-52.

⁵¹ Untitled piece from *The Coming Crisis* (Pueblo, Colorado), date unknown, reprinted in *Aspen Union Era*, Jul. 7, 1892, p. 4.

⁵² Rogers, *Politics*, 37.

In order to facilitate the advancement of political and economic equality, Populists called for federal government control of certain industries, especially the lines of transportation and communication. While their proposal was largely intended to facilitate a more equitable system for use by small producers—and thus enable them to better compete in the capitalist system—it was also designed to destroy private enterprises that had become too powerful to control by any other means. A brief article in the *Topeka Advocate* told those who questioned the propriety of federal ownership of the railroads to cease their hypocrisy: “Those who express so much horror in the paternalism involved in the proposition of government ownership of the means of transportation and communication have no fears of the centralization of power in the hands of a few irresponsible men resulting from corporate control of the same franchises and the absorption of more than one half of the aggregate wealth of the entire country by less than 50,000 people.” This writer did not emphasize the public role of these networks, but instead noted the power they held over the community and the benefits they provided for the few.⁵³ Some Populists adopted the principle of government ownership for other industries, again because they had allegedly abused their overwhelming power. For example, a writer for *The Coming Crisis* called for the nationalization of the iron and steel industry in response to the violence in Homestead. “When Americans have to choose between liberty and the ‘rights’ of private monopoly the latter will have to go. If one man is to have his way, and that way deprives 10,000 citizens of their opportunity to work, then the one man’s interests must give way to the

⁵³ “The Fear of Paternalism,” *The Advocate* (Topeka), no date, reprinted in *Aspen Union Era*, Oct. 8, 1891, p. 3.

many.” Monopolies such as those of Carnegie “must perish from the land or freedom is a mockery.” Nationalization was the only way, the author said, since “there is no other way to run it and not have it oppressive.” Monopolies would only operate humanely if they were under direct control of democratic government.⁵⁴

Despite the attempts of some to link Populist reform with the development of the federal regulatory state, Populists themselves did not believe that the most dangerous capital combinations could be regulated in such a way. While it is certainly true that the Alliances had sought to use local government authority to limit the power of railroads and that the Populist Party did attempt to add new laws for just that purpose, by the beginning of the 1890s most Populist writers argued that these combinations should instead be either destroyed or nationalized.⁵⁵ As their presidential candidate stated in his book, “we have experimented through the lifetime of a whole generation and have demonstrated that avarice is an untrustworthy public servant, and that greed cannot be regulated or made to work in harmony with the public welfare.” Populists had lost faith in regulatory agencies and, more generally, in the government’s willingness to prosecute large combinations. “Laws are made now-a-days to shield men of wealth—not poor men,” claimed one writer for the *The Advocate*. The “interstate commerce law is no exception to the rule,” he continued, and “Neither that or the so-called Sherman anti-trust law were ever designed

⁵⁴ Untitled piece from *The Coming Crisis* (Pueblo, Colorado), date unknown, reprinted in *Aspen Union Era*, Jul. 21, 1892, p. 4.

⁵⁵ In *A Call to Action*, James Weaver contended that state regulation had been the preferred method of controlling railroads and other corporations, although he illustrated the way in which the courts had essentially destroyed that alternative. See *Call to Action*, 82-86, 94-98, 110-135. For an interesting take on legal and political battles over local regulation, see also Gerald Berk, *Alternative Tracks: the Constitution of American Industrial Order, 1865-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

to operate against the interests of organized capital. They were designed solely as covers for legislation by which organized capital should be enabled to make further conquests over labor.” Government ownership was the only way they believed common citizens could be protected from the exploitation of large capital.⁵⁶

Yet it was only with some hesitation that Populists advocated such enlargement of the federal government’s power. Turning to the national government was a last resort. Some, including such leaders as William Peffer, did not even favor government ownership of the railroads.⁵⁷ Federal power was also at stake in regards to the subtreasury plan. This proposal, first laid out by Charles Macune of the Texas-based Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union in 1889, called for the construction of a system of government-owned warehouses for the storage of agricultural produce. Farmers could bring in their harvest, and in exchange they would receive a low-interest loan worth up to eighty percent of the value of crop. This system would have allowed southern farmers to avoid the abuses associated with crop-liens and furnishing merchants, while at the same time it created an outlet for more government-issued greenbacks. Despite its potential benefits, support for the plan was rather limited in areas outside of the former Confederacy.⁵⁸

Unfortunately for proponents of the plan, westerners did not believe that the subtreasury dealt with their own unique problems. Jay Burrows, the leader of the

⁵⁶ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 419; “The Strike,” *The Advocate* (Topeka), Jul. 25, 1894, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Peffer, *The Farmer’s Side*, 172-173.

⁵⁸ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 166-168.

Nebraska Alliance and a founder of the state's Populist Party, called the scheme "too hair-brained [sic] for even patient criticism." One local Kansas Alliance called it "detrimental to the farmers and industrial classes," and rather damningly identified it as "class legislation."⁵⁹ Its reception was no better in Colorado. There, the president of the state Farmers' Alliance felt the need to remind members that the subtreasury was "now one of the most vital and importance principles of our order," and he expressed surprise that "we have members who oppose it on every occasion." He concluded his address by threatening expulsion to any who publicly opposed the measure.⁶⁰

Populists did seek to employ the power of the federal government to reshape the national economy, but they also held a certain distrust of centralized control. They demonstrated elements of this attitude when they attributed the rise of monopolies to the intrigues of congressmen. But as frustrated as Populists were with the regular abuse of power, they were especially alarmed by those conservatives who intended to turn the federal government into a tool for the maintenance of "law and order." They employed language of this sort most frequently at moments of labor unrest. In the weeks after Homestead, a writer for *The Advocate* reminded readers that a growing American aristocracy "is determined to control the policy of our government and debase the masses of our people." The author then cited an article from the "hireling press" which had recently declared "When we reach the point where we are forced to choose between a change in our institutions or a subversion of the rights of individual liberty and

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, an Iowa, 1880-1896* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 102-103, 105.

⁶⁰ "President Smith's Annual Address," *Aspen Union Era*, Oct. 29, 1891, p. 4.

property...we will welcome the rise of centralized government whose arm is long enough to reach and strong enough to hold by the collar all rebels against the government near and far.”⁶¹ At nearly the same time, a remarkably similar piece appeared in the *Aspen Union Era*. The author in this case quoted an article in the “leading plutocrat paper of the western coast” in which the author had expressed confidence that “Slowly but surely this country is drifting toward centralization.” States were to be federal districts, and governors would be appointed by the national administration. “Behind them will be arrayed the Federal government and the army of the United States—that pitiless machine. Bayonets do not think... If they were ordered to shoot down the mass of Huns, Slavs, Croats, Irishmen and the few Americans who make up the mob at Homestead, they would do so without a moment’s hesitation.” According to that “plutocrat paper,” the American economic elite was coming to support such a plan, and “it is the workingmen who are driving them.”⁶²

Two years later, shortly after the federal intervention in Chicago to put down the widespread American Railway Union strike—shortly after Governor John Peter Altgeld of Illinois had explicitly denied the need for the Army—a local Kansas Farmers’ Alliance put its fears on record. “[W]e view with alarm the tendency of the ruling powers of the United States to a strong centralized government,” it declared. Especially menacing was the way in which local authorities had been ignored “and deprived of their lawful rights in controlling [sic] their domestic affairs” so that “United States troops” could be

⁶¹ “The Rise of Plutocracy in America,” *The Advocate* (Topeka), Aug. 31, 1892, p. 6.

⁶² “Prepare to Meet Thy Fate!” *Aspen Union Era*, Aug. 4, 1892, p. 4.

deployed “at the beck and call of monied [sic] corporations.”⁶³ John Rankin Rogers also included a hint of these fears in his tract *Politics*. While producers created “\$10 in wealth monopoly has announced its decision to bring on the army and a ‘stronger government’ unless \$9 out of each \$10 be obsequiously handed over.”⁶⁴ These examples do not suggest that Populists were universally anti-government—the majority of their platform clearly suggests the opposite. Nonetheless, some did fear that local sovereignty would be eroded and increasing power wielded by a (physically and psychically) distant government, something that had thus far only been done for the benefit of the powerful.

For a majority of Populists, the most pressing reform they advocated did pertain directly to the federal government. Financial and currency issues were the foremost concerns of most who joined the new party in the 1890s, and it was the change that Populists predicted would have had the widest effect in their efforts to restructure the national economy. While the struggle of the 1890s has often been stereotyped as the “battle” over silver currency, the majority of Populist leaders and writers were committed, in varying degrees, to greenback theories of money. The primary component of a greenback system would be paper fiat currency printed and controlled solely by the federal government. Instead, the system in place was (to say the least) untidy. Gold, silver, and various paper currencies all circulated simultaneously and, unsurprisingly, different exchange rates developed for each. Silver had been demonetized in 1873, and

⁶³ “Resolution of Condemnation,” *The Advocate* (Topeka), Jul. 25, 1894, p. 10. For the strike, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing At Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (1987; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 123.

⁶⁴ Rogers, *Politics*, 8.

only supplementary acts passed in 1875, 1878, and 1890 had allowed any of the white metal to remain in circulation at all. Greenbacks issued by the federal government had been issued since the Civil War, but as the only currency without an intrinsic value—combined with a legal limitation prohibiting their use for the payment of import tariffs—it is easy to see how they held the lowest exchange rate of all. Gold had become the de facto standard, but its rarity meant that hard currency remained in short supply. Private bank notes filled in the gaps, but the whole system fostered incessant currency speculation. Additionally, the relative inflexibility of a structure based at its heart upon specie had led to chronic deflation by the 1890s.⁶⁵

When Populists demanded an inflated currency, they were fulfilling the needs of the market sector they represented. Farmers almost universally desired currency inflation, but before 1892 these calls had resulted only in useless platform planks by both major parties, and most knew that the leaders of neither the Republican nor Democratic parties intended to enact such proposals.⁶⁶ The new party promised something different. Yet deciphering precisely what that meant or understanding how its members viewed contemporary capitalist finance is no less challenging than it is for any other Populist concern.

⁶⁵ For the impact of greenback ideology on Populism, see Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 14-16, 82-83, 140, 241; Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 78; Charles Postel, *Populist Vision*, 150-153. On the financial situation in the 1890s, see Richard Timberlake, *Monetary Policy in the United States: An Intellectual and Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 84-171; and Marshall Gramm and Phil Gramm, "The Free Silver Movement in America: A Reinterpretation," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 4 (2004): 1108-1129.

⁶⁶ Bensel, *Political Economy*, 355-456

Populists did argue for currency reform so they could better take their place in the market, and most Populist writers described the serious impact of the Treasury's engineered monetary contraction in their works. They attacked the government's policy of currency contraction that had followed the Civil War from the perspective of farmers and small producers. In his book *The Farmer's Side*, William Peffer described the results of these policies in pragmatic terms. As a result of deflation, "values of farm products have fallen 50 per cent since the great war, and farm values have depreciated 25 to 50 per cent during the last ten years." Just as the "population had increased 15 per cent and the volume of business 40 to 50 per cent," and "when the business of the people required more money instead of less money for its proper transaction," Congress reduced the circulating currency by over half. When he stated these facts, Peffer was not harkening back to a simpler time before the coming of a complex market, but instead he said that farmers needed the market. "One of the essential parts of this vast system of trade," he wrote, "absolutely necessary for transacting it, is money. Without money commerce would cease; without money, all movement of trade would stop; without money there would be no business; all exchange would be barter, and that would take us back to barbarism."⁶⁷

At the same time, Peffer suggested that the structures of transaction had been contrived for the benefit of the financial sector and with the intent of crippling farmers. The agriculturalist had been "shorn of his power to help himself in a thousand and one little ways," and he was now "at the mercy of combinations which are in effect

⁶⁷ Peffer, *The Farmer's Side*, 42, 99, 192.

conspiracies against the common rights of the people.” From that point he attacked the futures market and questioned “why it is that money is the only commodity which the law specially protects. There is nothing in our legal codes fixing the prices at which wheat, or corn, or cattle, or cotton...or anything except money shall be sold.” While he had argued that money was necessary for the transaction of business, Peffer eventually came to explain that the financial services sector acted in a way that harmed others *because* it was a business. At the heart of it was the commercial model: “the pecuniary interest of these useful agencies is to maintain the interest business.” The only solution, wrote Peffer, was to “relieve the individual money lender of his present responsibility in that behalf and substitute a disinterested agency”—namely, a nationalized banking sector. Summing up his ideas in this regard, Peffer emphasized that “*The proper function of money is to serve a public use*” (emphasis in original). He compared this government function to control over roadways. Just as other Populists had argued in regard to the railways, he contended that if the public good required the expropriation of a part of the economy then no claim of individual ownership could legitimately stand in opposition.⁶⁸

Leading Populists came to many of the same conclusions regarding the currency issue, and on this matter there was likely greater unanimity than on any other subject. After the government took over banking, Peffer believed Congress should make money by fiat. The Constitution gave Congress the power to “make money for the people; it is duty bound to do so, and it is not limited to any particular article out of which to prepare

⁶⁸ Peffer, *The Farmer's Side*, 196-197, 206-210.

the money.” Certainly paper would work as well as any other material.⁶⁹ While John Rankin Rogers was beginning to put a greater emphasis on land and property reform, when he wrote in 1894 he still believed that all other reforms would be fruitless without proper money. For him, “National paper money...unredeemable in gold” was the “touchstone of industrial freedom; this will protect the manufacturer and protect the laborer.”⁷⁰ The editor of the *Aspen Union Era* called money “a representative or token of value for labor performed, and in order to be honest money must pass from hand to hand without losing this token of value.” The government set and enforced the values by its fiat, the editor explained.⁷¹ While many of these same writers also made brief references to free silver, western Populist editors, authors, and leaders were firmly committed to greenback currency.

The Populist view of banks and financiers was necessarily complicated, and the language they used pertaining to the financial system mixed their own self-interest with the traditional language of reform. Obviously, the party took up economic causes that were thought to benefit the sectors that felt neglected in the existing partisan environment. But there is another side to the Populists’ analysis that cannot be accounted for in histories that depict them as little more than orderly and business-like. One whole strain of Populist thought on the subject has, in fact, been largely neglected by historians on both sides of the modern-versus-traditional debate, and it is tied intimately to their

⁶⁹ Peffer, *The Farmer’s Side*, 224-225.

⁷⁰ Rogers, *Politics*, 40.

⁷¹ “What is Fiat Money,” *Aspen Union Era*, Jul. 21, 1892, p. 1.

views on finance. Convenient as it is to say that Populists self-identified as “rational actors,” their use of conspiratorial language must also be evaluated.

Money Power Conspiracy and Global Finance

Conspiratorial thought is a subject that has practically vanished from recent works on American Populism, despite both ample evidence for its importance and a current environment which strongly warrants its inclusion. For reasons that will be explained, it has been easier to avoid the subject than to exorcise the ghosts that still haunt the historiography of Populist thought. In this study, the money power conspiracy theory will be evaluated as a reflection of Populist ideology and, in particular, an example that demonstrates Populist views of the confrontational relationship that existed between themselves and those who managed the government and financial systems.

The money power conspiracy theory was one of the most powerful and widespread ideas of the late nineteenth century. The term “money power” had originated in the Jacksonian era, and it was based on a fear of the accumulation of economic and political power that many believed would accompany the growth of the Second Bank of the United States.⁷² The growing power of the banking sector continued to fuel persistent fears of financial conspiracy in the years that followed, though by the end of the nineteenth century the precise meaning of the term had changed. In 1890, the year the

⁷² On the Jacksonian use of the term “money power,” see Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 25, 41-42, 53-55; and Gerald Leonard, *The Invention of Party Politics: Federalism, Popular Sovereignty, and Constitutional Development in Jacksonian Illinois* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 54.

first Alliance or independent political tickets ran in states such as Kansas and Nebraska, President Leonidas Polk of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union said that it was time to discard "all the rubbish of the negro question, bloody shirt, tariff and federal control of elections. It is the money power, the rule of plutocracy, that has been keeping people down, and the slogan henceforth is financial reform."⁷³ Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, James R. Sovereign, warned in 1896 that "Whenever the money power becomes stronger than the people, it will apply its arrogant lash with relentless fury, and liberty will be lost until through a reign of terror the oppressors have exhausted their forces in the gloom of another night."⁷⁴ As noted by Richard Hofstadter, the eccentric novelist Ignatius Donnelly included language based on the money power in his preamble to the Populist Party platform in 1892. "A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents," he said, "and it is rapidly taking possession of the world."⁷⁵ Furthermore, the money power conspiracy features prominently in all the Populist books, pamphlets, and newspapers analyzed earlier in this chapter. But if it was so common, why have historians said so little on the subject?

Richard Hofstadter is probably the individual most responsible for delegitimizing academic investigation of the money power conspiracy theory. While others had emphasized the economic stresses faced by rural Americans in the 1890s, Hofstadter was more interested in the psychological needs of people who had felt that their position in

⁷³ "The Farmers' Alliance," *McCook Tribune*, Dec. 5, 1890, p. 7.

⁷⁴ "Mr. Sovereign's Letter," *Cherry County Independent* (Valentine, NE), Mar. 5, 1896, p. 1. Sovereign was also a member of the Populist Party, as he noted in the published piece.

⁷⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 74.

society had been undermined. This “status anxiety,” he believed, pushed them to make frequently irrational statements, including conspiratorial and anti-Semitic ones. He believed progressive historians had ignored the anti-Semitism and conspiratorial rhetoric of Populists—something he defined as important components of the “soft side” of Populist thought. According to Hofstadter, conspiracy theory was attractive for anyone “who lived in isolation from the great world in which his fate was actually decided.” By labeling the farmers—previously depicted by historians as the paragons of virtuous citizenship—as frustrated and deluded, his claims were already sure to stir controversy. But because Hofstadter focused on what he saw as the irrationality and hatred held by Populists—as he wrote in the immediate aftermath of World War II, no less—it could appear that Hofstadter was drawing a parallel between Populists and fascists. Certainly two graduate students working under him at the time, Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, thought such an interpretation was likely: “When one describes evidences of anti-semitism as you do, the modern reader cannot avoid the picture of fascism & the gas chambers.” Hofstadter did not fully heed their advice.⁷⁶

Predictably, the backlash against Hofstadter was fierce. Rarely has one book solicited the kind of response that *Age of Reform* did. The majority of historians of

⁷⁶ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, quote from 72, but see especially 70-81 for Hofstadter’s explanation of the use conspiracy; the Elkins and McKittrick quote is taken from Brown, *Richard Hofstadter*, 106-107, and for more on the context and response to *Age of Reform*, see 100-119. It should be kept in mind that Hofstadter was writing in no small part in reaction to what he perceived as the irrational response of middle America to the Cold War Red Scare. The parallelisms between American Populism and European fascism had already been drawn out by others, and Hofstadter was not breaking new ground in this regard. However, he was likely targeted because his work was imminently more successful than the others. For just one example, see Victor C. Ferkiss, “Populist Influences on American Fascism,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1957): 350-373. For an example of a more recent view of Populism based on a similar interpretation, see David Peal, “The Politics of Populism: Germany and the American South in the 1890s,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (1989): 340-362.

Populism believed Hofstadter had caricatured individuals who they considered the exemplars of rural Jeffersonian democracy. While his use of a psychological tool that could be used indiscriminately sparked the ire of many, others objected specifically to his stereotyped formulation of rural people as especially bigoted and irrational. Perhaps the best example of the rebuttals to *Age of Reform* was Walter Nugent's *The Tolerant Populists*. In this close study of 1890s Kansas, Nugent detected no hint that the Populists were any more racist than their neighbors, and suggested that in fact they may have been a good deal more accepting of some peoples than many in America were at the time. As for the conspiratorial elements of their speech, Nugent dismissed it as the language of discouraged but reasonable rural Americans, and added that if only they had "traveled to New York, Washington, Chicago, and London and seen at first hand what cities, industry, and finance were actually like, they would have realized that dogged competition, not class conspiracy," was responsible for their plight. Anti-Semites—and the conspiracy theorists presumed to go with them—were rare among rural Americans, and outside of the mainstream of Populism in any case.⁷⁷

The historians of Populism had such a strong revulsion toward the perceived slander of their subjects by Hofstadter that few engaged the conspiracy theme seriously. They had effectively refuted Hofstadter's claim that the Populist Party was made up of hateful provincials upset by their declining status, but they largely ignored the strain of conspiratorial language that clearly did pervade Populist literature. In the process, discussion of either anti-Semitism or conspiratorial language among Populists became

⁷⁷ Walter T. K. Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 104.

taboo. One of the few historians after Hofstadter who took the money power conspiracy seriously was Jeffrey Ostler. In his article “The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism,” Ostler put the money power into its place within a long history American political conspiracy. He observed that works published since the late 1960s on the American Revolution as well as on the development of the Republican Party had noted the important place of conspiratorial language in the writings of some of the nation’s most important political leaders. Similarly, Hofstadter had hinted that the Populists were not alone in this, but he had still felt the need to call conspiracy language the stuff of “cranks and political fakirs.” Instead of falling into that trap, Ostler argued that the money power provided the ultimate motivation to take extreme action: it justified the abandonment of the existing political framework and the transformation of the non-partisan Farmers’ Alliance into a viable alternative.⁷⁸

Where Ostler went—a full four decades after the publication of *Age of Reform*—few have followed. In his recently acclaimed book on Populist ideology, Charles Postel devoted fewer than a handful of pages to a discussion of conspiratorial language, and not once did he reference the money power theory specifically. He may have even misread one of the major texts on the subject.⁷⁹ As his goal was to create the image of a rational, “modern” movement, Postel’s lack of attention should not be surprising. The image

⁷⁸ Jeffrey Ostler, “The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism,” *Agricultural History* 69, no. 1 (1995): 1-27; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 72; Ostler, *Prairie*, 77-80, 100-101, 124, 131-132.

⁷⁹ Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 151-152. He claims that Sarah Emery’s *Seven Financial Conspiracies* showed a “preoccupation with the ‘Crime of ‘73’ and the silver question” and offered little for greenback theorists (151). As will be explained later, Emery demonstrated a clear preference for greenback currency, and only one chapter of her book discussed the demonetization of silver. See also Ostler, “Rhetoric of Conspiracy”: 5-9.

created (or played upon) by Hofstadter, of a frustrated and simple hayseed, has lingered on. Few have been willing to characterize Populists as anything that even superficially resembles the stereotype employed in *Age of Reform*, and so historians have found it easier to give the subject a wide berth.⁸⁰

Still, if it was so commonly held a belief then surely it must have represented some thing or things that were important to the Populist view of the world in which they lived. The story was already old by the 1890s. As noted earlier, conspiracies regarding a “money power” had circulated since the Jacksonian era, but the form of these theories changed to fit the growing frustrations of workers and laborers in the post-bellum era. The development of a modernized money power thesis was likely stimulated by the tumult associated with the Panic of 1873. In July of 1878, the official organ of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers printed an article that the author identified as a “Second Declaration of Independence.” The piece listed a series of Congressional acts it identified as responsible for currency contraction and special favors to financiers, beginning with the acts designed to fund the Civil War. Silver was demonetized, the author declared, due to “the lobbying influence of one Ernest Seyd, of London, by the use of \$500,000 furnished for that purpose,” to bribe American Congressmen. Financial hardship was the result. “Farming and other real property has lost its normal value,” the author said, for “the stock of monopolies have taken the front rank.” It called on readers to renounce these travesties, reject the two old parties that had

⁸⁰ For more on the long shadow cast by Hofstadter on this subject, see Robert D. Johnston, “‘The Age of Reform’: A Defense of Richard Hofstadter Fifty Years On,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 6, no. 2 (2007): 127-137.

supported these policies, and join the Greenback-Labor Party. This greenback tradition filtered into the Populist Party through the work of dedicated third-party thinkers and pamphleteers.⁸¹

The money power conspiracy was not left only to those outside of the two main parties. Historian Mark Wahlgren Summers has suggested that conspiratorial language was the norm during the Gilded Age, and in this the Populists should not be viewed as outliers.⁸² In one example, in late 1877 members of Congress incorporated portions of the conspiracy into their speeches—including details about the story of Ernest Seyd—to such an extent that Senator Henry Dawes (Republican, Massachusetts) felt the need to openly refute them and defend the character of a now a deceased colleague (Republican Congressman Samuel Hooper) who had supposedly been implicated in the plot. A similar event occurred in 1893, when Senator George Frisbie Hoar (Republican, Massachusetts) rose in defense of that same dead colleague against the imputations made by those like Democratic Senator Stephen White of California. White had directly quoted a conspiratorial pamphlet in one of his speeches, and yet again the talk of bribery by a British agent proved too much for the men who had been in Washington when it allegedly transpired. Despite the vigorous counterattack by Hoar—later aided by former

⁸¹ “The Glorious Fourth!” *National Labor Tribune* (Pittsburgh), July 6, 1878, p. 2. The description of the influence of Ernest Seyd is almost identical to what would be seen later in the work of Sarah Emery and others.

⁸² Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 260.

Secretary of the Treasury (and supposed co-conspirator) Senator John Sherman—discussion of the money power continued unabated.⁸³

Clearly, some rather sophisticated people came to embrace the money power theory, and to appreciate its importance it must be seen as more than the product of small minds from small towns. To determine its significance and meaning, it is useful to discuss a sample conspiracy tract in some detail. Probably the best known tract that explained the money power conspiracy—and what may have been the most influential in the 1890s—was Sarah E. V. Emery’s *Seven Financial Conspiracies Which Have Enslaved the American People*. Though published half a decade before the national People’s Party would be formed, it was adopted widely by those in the new organization as a statement of the movement’s sentiment regarding currency and finance.⁸⁴

Unlike so many who would become Populists, Emery was a resident of neither the South nor the West, but had lived in Michigan since shortly after the close of the Civil War. She was not, however, an ideological outlier. She was a member of the Greenback Party earlier in her life, and she also maintained some ties to other Gilded Age reform organizations such as the Knights of Labor and Women’s Christian Temperance Union. But in the opening of her best-known work, she suggested that her beliefs had their roots in her early life. On one of the first pages of *Seven Financial Conspiracies* she memorialized her father, “who, foreseeing the results of our Civil War, and the conditions

⁸³ *Congressional Record*, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., Dec. 11, 1877, p. 124-125; *Congressional Record*, 53rd Cong., 1st Sess., Sep. 28, 1893, p. 1870-1873; *Congressional Record*, 53rd Cong., 1st Sess., Oct. 2, 1893, p. 2004-2005.

⁸⁴ Hofstadter considered it one of the more important works on the subject, and Ostler noted that Kansans during the 1890s specifically mentioned Emery’s pamphlet. See Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 75-76; Ostler, “Rhetoric of Conspiracy.”

that must arise from the system adopted in its early stages, gave warning to his children, entreating them ever to remember the cause of the oppressed, and ever to condemn a system of legislation calculated to reduce the laboring classes to abject and hopeless servitude.” It would seem that conspiratorial thought ran in the family.⁸⁵

Emery opened as Henry George had, by pointing to the great contradiction of the age—the existence of great wealth and progress alongside squalor and poverty.⁸⁶ This, she claimed, was the result of an eons-old system of parasitism that people had unnecessarily endured. Emery broke all people down into one of two groups: “the one class who live by honest labor, the other who live off of honest labor.” In old times, the parasites had been “roving bandits,” she said, some of whom might occasionally settle down to become kings. In modern times, contemporary “robber chiefs” did not resort so openly to violence. They had replaced “spoils and plunders” with “interests, dividends, revenues, and rents.” They had become the monopolists and financiers.⁸⁷ Emery’s basic division of society was based on greenback producerist interpretations of value, and it fit well with the ideology of contemporary reform movements that presaged the new party.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Sarah E. V. Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies Which Have Enslaved the American People*, rev. ed. (1887; Lansing Michigan: Robert Smith & Co., 1894), 3.

⁸⁶ Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1879), 3-12.

⁸⁷ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 9-10.

⁸⁸ As a reflection of their own views of society, both the Alliance and the Knights excluded bankers, lawyers, and others they deemed non-productive classes from membership. See Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor’s Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 11; and John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, 2nd ed. (1931; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 112.

Yet according to Emery the “plunderers” were not given much of an opportunity to prey on their fellow citizens in early America. It was her contention that predatory wealth had been deprived of any place by the new nation’s founders. In fact, she tied economic fairness to national independence. “The system of American government as instituted by our fathers afforded little if any opportunity for robbery and oppression,” she said. “Having successfully repelled their enemies across the water their prowess was established... Not a crowned head in Europe aspired to clip the wings of the young American eagle.” But all of that was about to change, for, “in an evil hour, the tempter came, the guardians were betrayed, and the very sanctuary of our liberties became the charnal-house [sic] of American freedom, and the market place of American honor.” Emery contrasted the freedom that existed in an imagined economically egalitarian early Republic with the stratification that followed just a few generations later, a system which she essentially described as the Old World model.⁸⁹

The evil hour that Emery referenced was the American Civil War. While some dreaded the coming of the conflict and others readied themselves to serve, some groups were thrilled by the opportunities that the war would provide. For the “money kings of Wall Street” and certain of the “great political chieftains,” their desire for wealth “had stifled the finer instincts of their nature, and they rejoiced because they saw in the preparation for the war their long-coveted opportunity for plunder.” The national government soon found itself short on money with which to fight the war, and hard currency became scarce (which Emery said had been true of “the history of metallic

⁸⁹ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 10.

money in all ages, in the hour of peril”). She claimed investors had been willing to loan to the government only at between twenty-four and thirty-six percent interest, causing Emery to mock those who later called themselves “*patriotic capitalists*” (emphasis in original). The Union was caught between an enemy—the South—and a supposed friend—“Shylock, clutching his gold and demanding therefor a rate of interest that would drain the life blood of the nation more effectually than the bullets of a Southern foe.” Bankers were depicted as an equal threat to American liberty.⁹⁰

Emery’s use of the word “Shylock” makes it easy to understand how Hofstadter saw a substantial strain of anti-Semitism in the Populist movement. She was hardly alone, and her use of the word was not occasional—“Shylock” essentially replaced the word “banker” in the rest of her tract. That said, the emphasis was clearly much more on the banking aspect of the slur than on the ethnic character of Shylock. Hofstadter himself wrote that Populist anti-Semitism was “entirely verbal,” while Walter Nugent demonstrated that Populists were no more nativist than members of the other parties.⁹¹

Just as Emery depicted a nation plunged into war and at the mercy of greedy financiers, she presented a patriotic hero: Abraham Lincoln. The President, who “loved the people better than Shylock, and justice better than oppression,” decided that Congress had the Constitutional authority to make money. The federal government would print treasury notes, otherwise known as greenbacks, and by statute they would be as good as gold. For Emery, this should have been the great innovation of the war. “With an

⁹⁰ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 13-15.

⁹¹ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 77-81; Nugent, *Tolerant Populists*, 113-115.

abundance of money,” she said, “not even the blight of war could check the prosperity of the country...Commerce, industry, and education received a new impetus, and flourished as never before in the history of the country.” She considered the greenback to be the ideal currency for the egalitarian republic.⁹²

The bankers’ setback would prove temporary, according to Emery. Those who controlled the hard currency were about to be left out of the profits of war-making. Emery claimed that a conference of bankers from major eastern cities was held in Washington, DC, in early 1862. It was at roughly this same period that Congress passed the Legal Tender Act. This act required that import duties and interest on public debt be paid in coin (hard money), devaluing the greenbacks and increasing the market value of gold and silver. Further, because greenbacks could be used to purchase bonds, bankers could exchange their precious metals for cheap greenbacks, and then buy government bonds. This guaranteed huge returns to the financiers and left common people to pay the price. Emery believed that from this time on, Congress essentially handed over the reins of government to “Shylock.”⁹³

In the chapters that followed, Emery outlined case after case in which Congress provided special benefits to the financiers. The National Bank Act of 1863, the retirement of millions of greenbacks by the Treasury after the war, the Credit Strengthening Act of 1869 (which required that the bonds be repaid in “coin”), and the “re-funding” of the debt (postponing final repayment until 1907) all followed. These acts

⁹² Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 15-16.

⁹³ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 17-19, 21.

established a financial system revolving around private bank notes backed by government bonds, increasingly scarce government-issued notes, and what to Emery appeared to be a menacing and perpetual national debt.⁹⁴

It was only in the seventh (of nine chapters) that Emery dealt with the Coinage Act of 1873 and the demonetization of silver—the so-called “Crime of ‘73.” It was this chapter that included the most evocative details, and it was perhaps the one that attracted the most public attention. Throughout most of the pamphlet, Emery had blamed a rather non-specific scheme of “Shylock” for each of the conspiracies, and American (especially New York) bankers were more likely to take the blame than were foreign financiers. This time it was different. Emery claimed that a story in *Banker’s Magazine* told of how, just as silver was being demonetized in Europe, “\$500,000 was raised, and Ernest Seyd was sent to this country with this fund, as agent of the foreign bondholders and capitalists” to bribe American Congressmen into following suit. Seyd was a real man, an employee of the Bank of England, and he was in Washington to advise Congress. In a statement in the *Congressional Globe*, Congressman Samuel Hooper said that “Ernest Seyd of London...has given great attention to the subject of mint and coinage. After having examined the first draft of this bill (for the demonetization of silver) he made various sensible suggestions, which the committee adopted and embodied in the bill” (the remarks in parentheses were added by Emery).⁹⁵ The evidence already seemed conclusive to Emery, but she did not stop there.

⁹⁴ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 25, 33, 38-43, 47-48.

⁹⁵ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 51-52. According to Walter T. K. Nugent, the supposed story in *Banker’s Magazine* does not exist. See Nugent, *Money and American Society, 1865-1880*, (New York:

Emery offered additional proof that this was but part of a long-established plan by the British. She alleged that, as early as 1862, an agent of the British financiers by the name of Hazzard had been disseminating a tract to American bankers which outlined a new plan to control global labor. It was Hazzard's job to encourage Americans to join in the scheme. This "Hazzard Circular," as it came to be called, noted with approval the likely destruction of chattel slavery, "for slavery is but the owning of labor, and carries with it care for the laborer." The European plan, on the other hand, was designed to establish "capital control of labor, by controlling wages. This can be done by controlling the money." The Circular also tied the cost of the war to this new system of control. "The great debt that capitalists will see to it is made out of the war, must be used as a measure to control the volume of money," it said. "To accomplish this the bonds must be used as a banking basis." The only threat to this plan was fiat money. "It will not do to allow the greenback, as it is called, to circulate as money any length of time, for we cannot control that."⁹⁶ And so the currency had come to be limited, controlled by the few, and all the rest were now served them.

It would be impossible to suggest that *Seven Financial Conspiracies* sparked the movement that would become Populism. It was just one of a number of such tracts,

Free Press, 1968), 167; see also Ostler, "Rhetoric of Conspiracy," 8 n19. For Hooper's original remarks, see *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 9, 1872, p. 2304-2305. Hooper's own language on these pages does not suggest much consideration of the demonetization of silver; he spoke of the discoveries of precious metals in the West, including both gold and silver, without remarking that these discoveries had changed the market ratios of exchange between the two.

⁹⁶ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 57-58. Emery was not the first or only one to point to the Hazzard Circular. In fact, there are several Greenback pamphlets or short books that came out in the late 1880s that mentioned it specifically. For just a few examples, see Oscar F. Lumry, *National Suicide and its Prevention* (Chicago: George F. Cram, 1886), 30-31, 51; George W. Bell, *The New Crisis* (Des Moines: Moses Hull & Company, 1887), 171-174.

many of which contained at least hints at conspiracy. As for as Emery's best known work, one contemporary publication claimed that 400,000 copies of *Seven Financial Conspiracies* had been printed by 1896.⁹⁷ As noted above, the money power theory was not new, but by the 1890s there was a powerful demand for publications on the subject. Before, large numbers from the old parties had likely developed a familiarity with the conspiracy, but it had never become an accepted part of either major party's dogma. But in the early 1890s, members of the new political party integrated it into their worldview more thoroughly than had any before.

All three of the major Populist works examined earlier in this chapter contained some discussion of the money power conspiracy, and these three texts were not outliers. Davis Waite's *Aspen Union Era* regularly advertised sale of copies of the Hazzard Circular on the front page, and one writer for the paper was furious when rumors began to circulate that Emery's tract had been banned from circulation through the postal service. "[I]f it is true," the writer declared, "it is an act of tyranny that would shame the acts of the Russian Czar."⁹⁸ Thomas Patterson, the Denver newspaperman and Waite's chief rival for control of the Colorado Populists, worked to obtain a sworn confession from a former confidant of Seyd that was intended to corroborate the conspiracy story.⁹⁹

The appeal of the conspiracy was also not limited to the West. The book *History of the*

⁹⁷ Ostler, "Rhetoric of Conspiracy," 5 n13.

⁹⁸ The advertisement for what they listed as the "Hazard Circular" was in most editions of the weekly paper printed from March 3 through May 26, 1892. Regarding the rumors surrounding Emery's work, see "Despotism," *Aspen Union Era*, Jul. 21, 1892, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Information on Patterson's efforts can be found in Gordon Clark, *Shylock: As Banker, Bondholder, Corruptionist, Conspirator* (Washington, DC: American Bimetallic League, 1894), 89.

Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution, a publication and recruiting tool of the Farmers' Alliance of Arkansas, was littered with references to the money power, Hazzard Circular, and "Shylock."¹⁰⁰

While the conspiracy theory was important as a source of unity for the otherwise diverse group that came to make up the new party, portions of it also spoke to very real elements of the party's ideology. Part of its utility also came from the flexibility with which it could be deployed. It did not necessarily speak only to republican values, nor did it best fit "rational" liberal perspectives. The uses of conspiracy proved to be quite varied indeed.

James Weaver had generally emphasized the natural rights of producers in his work, and the money power conspiracy helped him make his points well enough. Weaver borrowed rather substantially from such tracts as those of Emery when he wrote *A Call to Action*, and he included a specific reference to the account of Seyd's dealings with Congress. But perhaps the most significant idea that he pulled from the theory was a belief that monetary contraction was part of a conscious effort to subjugate farmers and laborers. In order to entrench their power in America, the financial elite had decided to destroy "the spirit of independence and self-reliance among the people," which had been "increasing in the same ratio with the accumulation of property among the masses." Scarce money was designed to eliminate those small producers and kill the republican spirit.¹⁰¹ Like Weaver, John Rankin Rogers saw evidence that the conspirators were

¹⁰⁰ W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (Fort Scott, KS: J. H. Rice & Sons, Printers and Publishers, 1889).

¹⁰¹ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 19-21, 316-321. Weaver may not have directly used a conspiratorial work, or

hoping to break down traditional American society. He believed the modern conflict was one in which “wealth, the power of money, or mammonism... is engaged in the effort and attempt to secure power over labor by deprivation.” It was not merely a clash of groups with divergent interests, but a battle for economic and political supremacy. That was, after all, the mission of “one Hazzard, a London banker to teach our ‘financiers’ how to coin gold from the blood of their countrymen.”¹⁰²

William Peffer, too, wrote of the money power in *The Farmer’s Side*, even though he more typically described the political conflict as one between divergent interests. He did openly state that “since our great war began what is commonly known as the ‘money power’ has had almost exclusive control of our financial legislation.” But while he used conspiratorial terms, and even claimed that the money power had named all the major political candidates in the years since the Civil War, he also described it primarily as a pressure group of bankers who leveraged the government for aid when there was “stringency in the money market.” Still, he agreed with most Populists when he declared that “money power...impoverishes the people. It controls the business of the country, the markets and the values.” With that economic power came political might: “[I]ts managers grow continually richer and more arrogant, while the men who perform the manual labor and produce the commodities grow weaker socially and politically, and poorer and more dependent financially. This condition of things can not long endure and

just as likely he may have attempted to hide the influence of such a tract. In the case of his reference to Seyd, for example, he cites a speech made by Senator John W. Daniel of Virginia, who was himself clearly reading directly from a conspiratorial pamphlet when he claimed to have been referencing the *Bankers’ Magazine* article.

¹⁰² Rogers, *Politics*, 16, 23-24, 40.

the people remain free.” While he minimized the sense that a true plot was afoot, he nonetheless informed readers that their liberty was at stake.¹⁰³

To analyze the utility of the conspiracy theory further, it would be useful to look beyond the story of conspiracy itself and view the broad points in Emery’s work that are integral to the theory and demonstrate its wider significance. First, the conspiracy was depicted as part of a sectional and global scheme. Much of Emery’s pamphlet had placed the blame on New York—or at least northeastern—bankers. However, she did ultimately see the flow of investment capital as a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. She saw this as an attempt by the British to regain their position as colonial overlords, and by the American bankers to share in the spoils. To whatever extent that was a stretch of the basic facts, she was not wrong to see New York and London as the centers of financial power that held so much influence over the lives of ordinary Americans.

Other Populists would put an even greater emphasis upon this supposed connection between Wall and Lombard streets and, ultimately, the producer’s connection to them both. They understood that they lived in a raw material-producing region, and that the profits from their production were siphoned off by a distant financial and industrial elite. In modern parlance, they developed a primitive “world systems” analysis of their situation. As it is discussed today, the world systems interpretation centers upon systems of unequal trade between “core” economic activities—ones in which small numbers of sellers offer products with high profit margins—and peripheral ones—in which there is competition among sellers and profits margins are low. Globally, these

¹⁰³ Peffer, *The Farmer’s Side*, 162-163, 259.

industries tend to be divided by state, with quasi-monopolistic core industries located in strong states and peripheral industries in weaker ones, but these divisions are not necessarily based on national boundaries. Those on the periphery then are often caught in a cycle of unequal trade with those who make up the core, resulting in uneven global economic development.¹⁰⁴

Some academics have previously suggested that the West at this time was such a peripheral region, engaged in unequal trade with the eastern and European economic core, which offered high-profit products (manufactured goods and financial services) in exchange for low-profit ones (foodstuffs, ores, and lumber). Populists understood their unequal position as well, and some have even described their self-perception as a people on the colonial periphery.¹⁰⁵ Peffer expressed his disgust with the way in which “Wealth is accumulating in the large cities, more especially those in the East, and those accumulations are continually fed by drains flowing away from the country people and working forces in the towns.”¹⁰⁶ William V. Allen, the Nebraska Populist elected to the United States Senate in 1893, expressed the same sort of frustration. In a brief article for

¹⁰⁴ For an overview of the major concepts employed in the world systems model, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), especially 1-41.

¹⁰⁵ For just a few examples of the literature that has described the West as a colonial or “peripheral” region, see William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); and Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). In another work, Robbins also hints that the Populist perspective in a piece that provides a brief overview of similar literature. See William G. Robbins, “The ‘Plundered Province’ Thesis and the Recent Historiography of the American West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (1986): 577-597. For an early work on Populism that describes their frustration with their own semi-colonial status, see Leon W. Fuller, “The Populist Regime in Colorado” (Ph.D. diss. University of Wisconsin, 1933).

¹⁰⁶ Peffer, *Farmer’s Side*, 167.

the *North American Review*, he described how westerners felt it “is the purpose of Eastern money loaners and capitalists to drain our industries of their profits by unfriendly legislation.” Contracted currency gave financial interests supremacy over those of western producers, while the tariff forced westerners “to purchase their manufactured goods from the East, with low-priced products of farm and mine, and pay the freight both ways.” Government and business had engineered a system that would perpetuate inequality.¹⁰⁷

Obviously, conspiratorial language was not necessary to make farmers and laborers aware that they were subject to the whims of global commodity and financial markets, but allusion to the money power did suggest the nature of a power relationship that more tangible facts could not express. During the summer of 1893, for example, the same Senator Allen warned audiences in Nebraska that “certain parties in Europe and America” were attempting to demonetize what remained of the circulating American silver just as “the money power of Europe has forced Austria, Hungary, the Argentine, and a number of other countries.” “The truth is that it is the determination of Europe to control the finances and industries of this country,” he said. “England failed during the dark days of the revolution and again in 1812, and now seeks to secure control through the gold question.”¹⁰⁸ One of Weaver’s supporters in Colorado put it similarly when he told all within earshot that “the moneyed power has controlled every national convention for sixteen years.” As a result, “the money changers of Wall street, Threadneedle street,

¹⁰⁷ William V. Allen, “Western Feeling Toward the East,” *North American Review* 162, (1896): 588-593.

¹⁰⁸ “Silver Linings for Clouds,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Jul. 26, 1893, p. 1.

and Lombard street” had “so manipulate[d] the legislation of this country, as actually to defraud the producing classes of this state out of 34 per cent of its total products.”¹⁰⁹ Use of the money power conspiracy did more than demonstrate frustration with uneven economic development; it blamed that development upon eastern and European economic interests, who had thoroughly undermined American democracy and national sovereignty.

This understanding led some among the Populists to make overt comparisons between their situation and that of colonial or semi-colonial states around the world. As one Kansas newspaperman so blatantly put it: “Lombard street controls Wall street, and Wall street the money and produce markets of the United States. English syndicates buy up flouring mills and elevators all along the line at Minneapolis, Chicago, and New York. The farmers of this country are as surely under the heel of English tyranny as though we were an [sic] British province.”¹¹⁰ By 1894, a Chicago paper even went so far as to suggest that a recent issuance of federal bonds was part of a plot by the money power to “place a financial agent of our European creditors over the affairs of this government,” whose decrees would be enforced, “if necessary, by an appeal to arms of the united powers of Europe.” In this regard, America was “simply following in the same path trod by Egypt, Greece, India, Turkey, and Peru.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ “Good Silver Talk,” *Aspen Daily Leader*, Sep. 3, 1892, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ “Supply and Demand,” *The Goodland Republic* (KS), Apr. 8, 1892.

¹¹¹ “A European Receivership,” *Chicago Express*, reprinted in *The Daily Camera* (Boulder, CO), Jul. 13, 1894, p. 3. For more on the *Chicago Express*, see Postel, *Populist Vision*, 73, 97, 144.

The money power conspiracy only added strength to the Populist sense that American democracy was in peril, but as mentioned earlier the threat was not believed to come exclusively from abroad. The conspiratorial analysis also added force to the sense that plotters intended to use oppressive means to maintain their supremacy, especially by coopting the federal government. In her conclusion, Emery foretold of the demise of American democracy through just such means. She noted with horror the attempt of some to add to the power of the American military, which she said was “not to defend ourselves against a foreign foe; the enemy is within our gates, sitting in the high places of our country.” Militarism was only designed to secure “the ill-gotten gain of a moneyed oligarchy.”¹¹² This distrust of governmental authority was further articulated in another of her works, a pamphlet entitled *Imperialism in America: Its Rise and Progress*. In it, she elaborated on her belief that the wealthy were about to overthrow democratic institutions and make America a monarchy or aristocracy. Among the many examples she employed was an article by the Nevada banker and onetime Republican senator, William Sharon, who stated that “We need a stronger Government... The capital of the country demands protection; its rights are as sacred as the rights of paupers, who are continually prating about the encroachments of capital and against centralization.”¹¹³ Populist concern with federal power took many forms, but all were reinforced by the use of conspiracy. To reiterate, this Populist fear of government should not be seen as a

¹¹² Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 66-70.

¹¹³ Sarah E. V. Emery, *Imperialism in America: Its Rise and Progress*, rev. ed. (Lansing, MI: D. A. Reynolds & Co. Publishers, 1893), 69.

ubiquitous fear of “big brother.” It was a fear based upon the callous track-records of those who held high office in their own era.

The omnipresence of the money power conspiracy and its appeal is tied to that analysis. Emery and others resorted to conspiratorial rhetoric because they were trying to explain how American politicians could support policies that, to them, seemed to directly benefit the few at the expense of the many. While some contemporaries had come to see dysfunctional politics as the product of a failed democracy, when Populists adopted conspiratorial language they denied that true democracy had allowed these events to transpire.¹¹⁴ Instead, some great power was at work subverting democracy and disrupting the economic and political systems established by the wise founders. Many individuals and the bosses of both old parties had been corrupted, according to the conspiracy; it was not about American voters simply making bad choices. The talk of such massive corruption should also be viewed in a sympathetic light when one considers the context. In *Age of Reform*, just before railing against them as irrational and reckless, even Richard Hofstadter reminded readers that the Populists had “seen so much bribery and corruption, particularly on the part of railroads, that they had before them a convincing model of the management of affairs through conspiratorial behavior.”¹¹⁵ The stories seemed plausible, and for people who believed that democracy could serve the masses, they were necessary.

¹¹⁴ In particular, certain of the liberal mugwumps had lost some of their faith in democratic government; among them were E. L. Godkin, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., and Francis Parkman. See Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 119-127; and Sproat, *The Best Men*, especially 250-257.

¹¹⁵ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 71.

The money power conspiracy should not be seen as the cornerstone of Populist thought or demonstrative of any defects in the Populist mind. The conspiratorial conception of American politics that they embraced was not the sole or even the primary tool they used to analyze their situation, but it was far more significant than historians have thus far suggested. If it was not at the center of Populist thought, it did at least reflect certain elements of their views, including several that are vital for this dissertation. First, it both illustrated and reinforced their skepticism of the over-powerful in both business and government. It also demonstrated much about how the Populists thought of their region and its place in the world. In a similar way, it would later play some part in shaping their view of colonialism. All of these elements would reappear during the debates over empire at the end of the decade.

Politics, Culture, and Gender

As noted above, the Populists had a profound faith in American democracy. This faith was only reinforced by a civic nationalist vision of what America could become.¹¹⁶ For reformers who hoped to overcome the corruption of the previous generation,

¹¹⁶ On the meaning of Populist use of patriotic or nationalist language, see Pollack, *Just Polity*, 28-29; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 72-73; Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 99-100. While they put far too much emphasis on Populist “xenophobia,” see also Joseph Gerteis and Alyssa Goolsby, “Nationalism in America: The Case of the Populist Movement,” *Theory and Society* 34, no. 2 (2005): 197-225. A very similar form of patriotic republicanism is described in Andrew Neather, “Labor Republicanism, Race, and Popular Patriotism in the Era of Empire,” 82-101. However, Neather may be wrong when he suggests that laborer’s patriotic rhetoric made it impossible for them to level criticism against American imperialist ventures. His statement suggests that labor had not developed a conception of patriotism different from those who called for unquestioned patriotism. Some did try to develop alternative models—though it seems clear that inevitable a majority did not accept them.

identification with traditional American ideals held tremendous importance. Of course, Populists employed the language of patriotism and nationalistic pride to legitimize their agenda, and they did so at least partially out of necessity. At least since the outbreak of the Civil War, discussions of patriotism and loyalty to a cause had become standard political discourse, and the two old parties had already deployed this language to solidify their control of identifiable voter groups. Republicans spoke of the “bloody shirt” and loyalty to the Union. Democrats emphasized white supremacy and non-interference in other cultural concerns, appealing especially to southern whites and new immigrants.¹¹⁷ Both of the older parties could then tell their typical constituencies that to deviate from their organization was to become a traitor to one’s identity and to the values they held most dear. They had both developed a certain vision of the nation and of loyalty, and anyone who hoped to make headway in this environment would have to challenge those definitions directly.

Populists understood the difficulties that came with entering the fold in such an environment, and they were prepared to redefine patriotism in order to serve the needs of reform. One article in the *Topeka Advocate* asked how conservative appeals to patriotism were supposed to function when the national government refused to serve its citizens. “Can you deny a man the common rights of humanity, render him an outcast by laws and customs of his country, and can you *teach* such an [sic] one patriotism?”¹¹⁸ Weaver said that, after having taken control of the reins of government, the economic elite now

¹¹⁷ Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games*, especially 19-53.

¹¹⁸ “The Warrior Becomes Facetious,” *The Advocate* (Topeka), Oct. 30, 1895, p. 6.

“prates about patriotism and places those who plead for redress, or complain of tyranny in the attitude of seditious and disobedient subjects.”¹¹⁹ Perhaps the most effective refutations of Republican claims came from those whose loyalty could not be questioned. In Kansas during the campaign of 1894, Populists used the speech of an old Union veteran in support of the re-election of Confederate veteran William A. Harris to his seat in the House of Representatives. While the Union man admitted that there had been a great deal of talk about “patriotism and loyalty” from the Republican side, and some had even told audiences to “vote as we shot,” he believed there was more than one kind of patriotism. “[O]ne kind is to our homes, our families and our country.” The other kind, the one really being invoked by Republicans, was patriotic loyalty “for the great corporations, trusts, note shavers, combines and men who, when we were fighting to save this nation, were sitting behind bank counters scheming how they could rob our country.” Harris, he said, was full of the former kind of patriotism, and he had none of the latter.¹²⁰

The Populist definitions of patriotism were not only rejections of those of the old parties, and there was a special need for them to appeal to a patriotic foundation in order to justify their entrance onto the political stage. The new party did not exist merely to be a less offensive alternative to the party in power. Instead, it planned to be the party that was to restore American equality from its perilous position. They were the party of new ideas and simultaneously the party of national rejuvenation. As one Populist summed up the goal of their organization, “It seeks to teach the laborer his rights and impress him

¹¹⁹ Weaver, *Call to Action*, 354.

¹²⁰ “Lewelling and Harris,” *The Advocate* (Topeka), Oct. 31, 1894., p. 1.

with the manhood and patriotism to demand them fully.”¹²¹ Populists’ deployment of nationalistic language placed their calls for reform at the same levels as those of Andrew Jackson’s Democrats or Abraham Lincoln’s Republicans, while it concurrently implied the disloyalty of the old parties—those who followed the money power.

In many Populist addresses, patriotic language went hand in hand with the language of manhood.¹²² During the Gilded Age, the type of men who became Populists—just like their much-written-of eastern middle-class counterparts—faced certain challenges to their manly identities, and their movement sought to address some of those challenges. Yet much of what has been written about the views of men like John Hay, Theodore Roosevelt, or others of their ilk does not directly apply to the western farmers or laborers. For certain eastern professionals and members of the “old money” elite, the standard Victorian definitions of self-restraint and independence had come to seem inappropriate in an era of increasing orderliness dominated by giant monopolies. These members of the comfortable classes did not seek to disrupt the political or economic basis of society, and so instead sought to adjust or reimagine conceptions of manhood.¹²³ Precisely the opposite was true for the Populists. By attacking corporate

¹²¹ *Aspen Union Era*, Oct. 15, 1891, p. 6.

¹²² Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 91-110; Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 99. For a similar example, see Neather, “Labor Republicanism,” 86.

¹²³ For just a few examples of the urban middle- and upper-class attempts to refashion manhood or manliness, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), especially 1-44, 170-240; Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), especially 8-12, 143-145, 151-153; Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 95-127; Jocelyn Wills, “Respectable Mediocrity: The Everyday Life of an Ordinary American Striver, 1876-1890,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 2 (2003): 323-349.

dominance and the existing two-party systems, Populists were reimagining what society could be rather than reconceptualizing their place within it.

The traditional version of “manhood” or “manliness” that Populists accepted was defined by economic and personal traits. Self-restraint and integrity were necessary for a man’s personal character, but these and related characteristics were supposed to be demonstrated in the commercial realm as well. Labor organizations and the Farmers’ Alliances had preached sobriety, the Protestant work ethic, and financial responsibility to their members in an attempt to both improve their productivity and inoculate themselves against the charges of sloth and socialism. At the same time, they emphasized the manhood of members who were financially independent and served the role of breadwinner for their families.¹²⁴ This economic role secured their position in the family patriarchy and, these organizations claimed, allowed them to think for themselves. Because, Populist writers continued to equate economic independence with political independence, they also linked manhood and freedom of action in the political field.

Just as they argued that political and economic freedoms were under threat, Populists contended that the principles of patriotism and manhood were being destroyed by the greed of others.¹²⁵ A writer for the *Coming Crisis* told readers that the American aristocracy was threatening their political and economic rights, but they had used the

¹²⁴ Despite the fact that most members of organized labor were no longer financially independent, they continued to use the language of “independence” by putting a new emphasis on a breadwinner role. See Robyn Muncy, “Trustbusting and White Manhood in America, 1898-1914,” *American Studies* 38, no. 3 (1997): 21-42; Weir, *Beyond Labor’s Veil*, 19-69. On farmers and manhood, see Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 148-160.

¹²⁵ Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 94-95.

mainstream press to blind people to the danger. Consequently, the author asked readers if “patriotism” had been “lulled to sleep?” “Awake!” the writer commanded. “Trust no man, no men with your liberties.”¹²⁶ Davis Waite’s paper suggested that American manhood had already been cowed by the “machine system of politics.” The typical (non-Populist) man was now a coward who could only “take the lead in cringing servility and abject negation to all claims to independent manhood.” The only solution was political education, for “Knowledge begets independence.”¹²⁷

Manhood was frequently described as endangered by the “money power,” but simultaneously the exertion of manhood was characterized as the solution. The state chairman of the Colorado People’s Party, Dr. Alexander Coleman, decried the “plundering of all that is sacred, the destruction of manhood and the sale of womanly virtue” that had been brought on by political corruption and financial distress. “In this great struggle, gold stands against manhood,” he said, but manhood could fight back. The chairman went on to call for self-sacrificing manhood to replace the office-seeking of the other parties and rejuvenate American freedom. “Men who fail in strength and cannot keep up with the advancing column must be dropped by the way; strong men who have liberty above personal gain and party must be crowded to the front; and the leader of today may be an almost forgotten follower of tomorrow.” Individualism was a cause of the great troubles of the age, not a solution. In this hour, the “individual man is nothing,

¹²⁶ “The Purple of Royalty,” *The Coming Crisis* (Pueblo, Colorado), date unknown, reprinted in *Aspen Union Era*, Jun. 23, 1892, p. 3.

¹²⁷ “Duty,” *Aspen Union Era*, Oct. 1, 1891, p. 4.

but the principles of American freedom, human rights and civil liberty... must be maintained.”¹²⁸

Other leaders of the new party often equated the abandonment of the old parties or the political *status quo* with manhood. A prominent member of the Knights of Labor in Leadville, Colorado, told his fellow Knights that “we have come to the parting of ways” in regard to the Republicans and Democrats. “We have waited long and waited patiently for the two old parties to reconstruct and regenerate themselves.” To follow them any further “would be false to our individuality of manhood.” Instead, it was time to join a new party, “led by true and noble men whose watchword is patriotism and love of the people, and whose every effort is scored for the meek and lowly and humble of the earth.”¹²⁹ The *Aspen Union Era* echoed those remarks. In 1891, a writer for it stated that there was “not one jot of evidence to prove that the government has not already passed from the control of the people to, and that they are not the menial slaves of prejudices and hatreds and party bosses.” “You can not prove your manhood” unless you have demonstrated “your ability to build up and tear down parties.” Only then could a man claim to have “sloughed off the old sin of plutocracy and all the old ways of political sin.”¹³⁰ To free oneself from the old parties and choose reform was to choose manhood and country over ignorant devotion and greed.

¹²⁸ “A Populist Address,” *Aspen Daily Times*, Jan. 9, 1894, p. 2.

¹²⁹ “Orations of Labor Day,” *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle*, Sep. 5, 1893, p. 1.

¹³⁰ “Old Issues Dead,” *Aspen Union Era*, Oct. 22, 1891, p. 4.

By embracing the traditional expectations of Victorian manhood, Populists were able to claim a place that might not have been open to them otherwise. Because of the radical economic message that many equated to socialism, they were frequently characterized as failures and malcontents. If they had rejected the principles of independence and self-restraint, they could very well have played into the hands of those who accused them of being nothing better than anarchists and thieves. In other cases, opponents tried to de-sex or feminize the Populists. Democrats in North Carolina derisively referred to Populist leader (and later Senator) Marian Butler as “Mary Ann Butler.”¹³¹ In still other circumstances, Populists and third party men generally were identified as “she-men” by their enemies.¹³² The partisan epithets for outliers or potential radicals would only have gained greater potency when applied to those who dismissed traditional conceptions of manhood.

The male Populist appropriation of traditional manhood made perfect sense in view of their economic goals. It was also with these objectives in mind that some of them did re-envision the role of women. Before the new party was even formed, the Knights of Labor and the Farmers’ Alliances had allowed women to become full voting members of their organizations, something quite exceptional for the day. Many of the men and women of these reform associations went even further, arguing that women deserved a new place in society. Agricultural reformers believed women needed access

¹³¹ James M. Beeby, *Revolt of the Tar Heels: The North Carolina Populist Movement, 1890-1901* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 45-46.

¹³² Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, & the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 17. Very similar remarks, used by members of the old parties against non-partisans or others, appear in Summers, *Party Games*, 23, 34.

to better education and relief from the drudgery that came with “women’s work” on the farm. The Knights demanded equal pay for equal work, which could have changed women’s economic positions within the traditional patriarchal family. Notable members of the Alliances and the Knights also made statements in support of women’s suffrage. Certainly, many of the men who went on to form the People’s Party believed that the traditional gendered expectations of womanhood were out of date or incompatible with reform.¹³³

Yet when the national party was formed in 1892, women’s suffrage was left off of the platform. While this may have been for largely pragmatic reasons—namely, a fear of alienating any potentially sympathetic voters—there were other factors that contributed to the new party’s limited support for women’s suffrage. Many of the agrarian reformers who imagined a “new” place for women had actually conceptualized only a modification of that place. Those who emphasized the drudgery of life as a farm woman often argued that women should be freed from such work in order to devote themselves more fully to a properly refined home. Others who had instead focused upon the moral authority of women gave the “fairer sex” a certain supervisory role, but theirs was a necessarily limiting kind of argument. If women were morally superior because of their sheltered position in the home or due to the special requirements that came with being wives and mothers, they could possess that authority only so long as a majority of women continued to play part expected in traditional gender roles.¹³⁴

¹³³ Postel, *Populist Vision*, 72-87, 90. For the contradictory gender views that developed in many of the alliances, see Goldberg, *Army of Women*, 130-148.

¹³⁴ Postel, *Populist Vision*, 86-88, 91. For a description of both the strengths and limits of arguments based

Populists did come to support women's suffrage under the right circumstances. This was demonstrated in Colorado in 1893, when the measure appeared on ballot statewide. Populists promoted it along with state and national women's suffrage leaders (including Carrie Chapman Catt), but they did so using explicitly economic arguments. The vote for women, they said, only added to strength to the votes of farmers and laborers. Even Catt—by no means an economic radical—contended that women would vote for free silver and economic equality. As a result, Colorado became the first state to adopt women's suffrage as the result of popular referendum.¹³⁵ Populist men believed that the people going through economic struggles by their side—their wives—understood the situation as well as they did and could add to their political power. This should not be mistaken for the abandonment of patriarchy, but instead a practical alteration of it.

The Populist willingness, under the right circumstances, to support women's suffrage clearly distinguished them from many of their eastern and middle-class contemporaries. Eastern conservatives attacked women who sought a place in politics because, as many historians have come to suggest, they necessarily viewed politics as a manly battlefield—another field in which they could lay claim to their patriarchal identities.¹³⁶ The exclusivity of politics was something worth preserving for its own sake. But for male farmers and laborers, the threat to their manhood that would come

on women's moral authority, see Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), especially 32-69.

¹³⁵ Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 53-72.

¹³⁶ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 13, 170-171, 175, 186; Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 26-37.

from a declining economic position far outweighed any psychological loss that could accompany women's suffrage. In some circumstances, they chose to protect their roles as breadwinners by enlisting the aid of women.

The term "populist" has, in common usage, almost come to be synonymous with "parochial," but the Populists of the 1890s were neither trapped by old ideas nor by their surroundings. Those who formed the People's Party did look well beyond their own communities when they formulated a response to the increasing power of economic interests. They feared the (further) development of a centralized, militarized, unresponsive government, which they believed would become the ultimate tool of concentrated wealth. They accepted a conspiracy theory that both reflected these fears and demonstrated their perspectives on global capitalism and exploitation. These features of their worldview fueled their reform efforts over the whole span of their existence as a party, but it also came to be more directly tied to foreign affairs as the decade wore on. While their views on international trade or imperialism could be described as little more than embryonic by 1892, the basic premises that many Populists would use to judge American overseas policies were already well formed by that time.

The ideology and policy proposals of the new party changed the political discourse of the 1890s. Though a diverse group, they had united under the banner of reform to launch the most serious challenge to the political and economic systems that was to emerge in the late nineteenth century. It was a movement of self-identified outsiders who hoped to construct a system that could empower a greater number of Americans and help them find their voice. Their distrust of those who had held the reins

of power made them especially eager to widen access to new economic opportunities, but they still had tremendous faith that the egalitarian ideals of the founders could and should be realized, no matter the means. It was that skepticism combined with that vision which eventually led them to champion forms of direct democracy. Their views were not so much “statist” as they were based upon a desire for a “bottom-up” form of governance, something that was less important to the generation of reformers that would follow. The West of the early 1890s was ready for just such a message.

CHAPTER III

THE LOCAL CONTEXT: NEBRASKA, COLORADO, AND WASHINGTON,

1890-1897

When the Populists launched their first national campaign on July 4, 1892, they took the opportunity to declare their own independence with a powerful statement of principles designed to comprehensively repudiate the old parties and the powers that controlled them. Ignatius Donnelly, the reform politician, Minnesota Alliance leader, and apocalyptic novelist, was the author, and it was agreed that his words fit the occasion perfectly. “We meet,” it declared, “in the midst of a nation brought to verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench.” Both of the old parties were blamed for this state of affairs. They had struggled with each other “for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people.” Now Democrats and Republicans alike “propose to sacrifice our homes, lives and children on the altar of Mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure the corruption funds form the millionaires.” The words of the preamble represented a decisive break from the old parties, who were as much the focus of attention as any aspect of the economy.¹

Their rejection of the old parties seemed complete, but just four years later the People’s Party nominated William Jennings Bryan, a Democrat, for president. He was a Democrat unlike those who controlled the state parties in much of the West in 1892.

Like the Populists, he had announced his commitment to the needs of the common people

¹ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (1931; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 231, 439-444; *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 5, 1892, p. 1-2.

over those of the interests, and he had done so with no less passion than had the Populists in their declaration of independence. Like them, he claimed to speak for those out of power and against those who had abused power. If he was not one of them—and in many ways he was not—he shared with them much of their worldview. He saw many of the same problems that they did, and he attributed blame to same groups that they did. Populists knew he was not quite one of their own when they nominated him for president, but they did consider him to be someone they could work with in 1896 and the years that would follow.

The ideas the Populists brought into common public discourse dominated the politics of the West for most of the 1890s. They were not the originators of most of the policies they advocated, and others in the West (and nationally) had favored a number of them at various times, but there were always obstacles within the old parties that prevented their full engagement with such issues. The Populists changed the political landscape by creating a party that appeared to be a legitimate vehicle for reform. When the party sprang up from the various reform organizations that farmers and laborers had assembled to defend their rights, it embraced the kinds of ideas and perspective that were missing or suppressed in the other parties of the day. Its entry into the field changed the political landscape of the West, forcing voters away from old allegiances and creating fractures in the old parties. By 1896, the political debate in the West had shifted to matters of political economy, and by the time of their national conventions western Democratic and Republican delegates alike pushed their parties to take up policies to aid the farmers and laborers of their home states. Though the Populists eventually decided to

cooperate (or “fuse”) with the Democrats in that year, it meant something quite different than what it had back in 1892.

This chapter will discuss the many political transitions that took place in the West during these years, with a special emphasis on the period from 1890 to 1897. These years cover the formation of the Populists as an independent political force and the changes over the course of the decade that led them to develop an alternative strategy. While historians have typically sided with the opponents of fusion and attributed the decline of the movement to that decision, western Populists saw something else quite different. They believed that the changes that had taken place by 1896 would allow them to join a coalition of like-minded reformers, and in this way their battle against concentrated capital would go on. For the Populists, 1896 was not the “first battle” (as Bryan would later dub it) but they believed it was far from the last.²

Politics in the West, 1865-1891

Anglo-Americans and Europeans had been traveling through and occasionally settling in the lands west of the Missouri River for some time before 1860, but the total

² Many historians have attributed the decline of Populism to fusion, and only differ on the extent to which they have viewed it as destructive. Hicks was purportedly referencing the views of contemporaries when he termed it “the holocaust of fusion,” but his own views appear similar enough. See Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 380-402. Most, including Hicks, place the blame jointly upon fusion politics and improved economic conditions. Lawrence Goodwyn, on the other hand, places essentially all of the blame on the demoralization created by fusion. See Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 493-555. Robert C. McMath has done as the rest in largely agreeing with mid-road sentiment; he quotes with approval Tom Watson’s statement that “we play Jonah while they [the Democrats] play the whale.” See Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 199-206. More recently, Postel has pointed out that fusion had always been a tactic of third parties and the Populists particularly, but portions of his conclusion seem to accept the traditional analysis. See Charles Postel, *Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 269-275. See also Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), especially 244-262.

number of white permanent residents remained meager. The Oregon country had been targeted as a place for settlement and missionary work since the 1830s, but because it was distant from the rest of the nation and the United States had not established clear title over the land until the end of the 1840s the population had remained small. California only came under the control of the United States following the Mexican-American War, and while thousands rushed in to the territory in search of gold in 1848 and 1849 the population boom did not extend elsewhere. Colorado had its own gold rush a decade later, but the initial flood of migrants dropped off to a trickle quickly as the limits of the initial find became known. Both California and Oregon gained admission as states before the secession of South Carolina, but the rest of the West was stuck in the territorial phase.³

Some territories did not have long to wait before they were admitted as states. Kansas and Nevada were admitted before the end of the Civil War (1861 and 1864 respectively). Nebraska was admitted two years after the close of the war (1867). Yet even by 1870, the total white population of the West (excluding Texas) numbered roughly 1.5 million, with nearly one third of that number in California alone. Before 1860, the growing sectional crisis had been an impediment to the development of the region. While the conflict had ended, the people and government of the United States were only setting out on a path toward rapid capitalist expansion into the West. While, by decade's end, many things could superficially appear little different than what they

³ For this and the following paragraphs, see Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 125-127, 142-147, 183-210, 246-258, 298-326.

had been at its beginning, the first of the key transformations were already either complete or well underway.⁴

The results of the war were absolutely transformative for the whole of the nation and for the West in particular. The Republican Party reigned supreme during the war years and controlled the national legislative agenda for some time thereafter. The elimination of southern opposition in Congress and the Republicans' own pro-business proclivities led to major federal legislation designed to promote the construction of railroads (of which the bill to subsidize the transcontinental line was only the most noteworthy). The most notable benefit given to the roads were subsidies in the form of massive land grants as a reward for miles of track completed. Initially, there was no stick to accompany the carrot offered by the government; no real attempt was made to create a national regulatory agency until the Supreme Court essentially forced the matter on a reluctant Congress in the late 1880s. Additionally, the war—and Republican measures to finance and supply the effort—had encouraged an unprecedented concentration of domestic capital, and it was eager for new fields of investment. All of these factors combined to contribute to a tremendous boom in the growth of western railroads, and settlers soon followed. In the twenty years from 1870 to 1890, the population of the West grew by approximately four hundred percent.⁵

⁴ The population information listed here is taken from U.S. Department of the Interior, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900*, vol. I, part I (Washington, D.C.: United States Census Office, 1901), 2.

⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (1987; W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 90; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988; New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), 462-475; Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 31-37; 74-76; Gerald Berk, *Alternative Tracks: The Constitution of American Industrial Order, 1865-1917*

As the West was rapidly resettled in these two decades, most of the remaining territories were fully incorporated into the American system of states. Colorado was admitted to the union in 1876, followed by North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Washington in 1889 and Idaho and Wyoming in 1890. The integration of these territories was more than just political. In every case, railroad expansion was the necessary precursor to rapid population growth. Most of these settlers came to these states on the railroads, bought goods manufactured elsewhere and transported over its lines, and, most vitally, expected to make a living by selling or working for those who would sell the products of their labor to markets that could only be reached via the roads.⁶

The form and timing of this population boom had a tremendous influence on the political landscape that would develop in the region. The West of the post-bellum period was thoroughly Republican. The party of Lincoln had used its position to legitimize their dominance in the years during and after, and its candidates had simultaneously cast their rivals as the party of secession and rebellion. Few Republican politicians abstained from waving the “bloody shirt” during campaign season, and this practice continued unabated all the way through the 1870s and 1880s. Those running for office clung to it so doggedly because it worked; the large number of Union veterans that populated states like Kansas, Nebraska, and others seem to have concurred in the assertion that they should vote as they had shot. Along the Plains, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) held posts in

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 27-37; Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 9-16, 26-36, 106-125.

⁶ John D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 1-20; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 97-147; William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 61-142.

almost every sizable community.⁷ Republican dominance was also reinforced by the strong role played by federal patronage during the long territorial phase imposed upon so many of the western states. Before the 1890s, western politicians waved the “bloody shirt” with such frequency (and success) that they seem to have convinced themselves that little else was needed to maintain their grip on power.⁸

Of course, the Republicans offered more than just a reminder of the great sectional conflict. They also launched the program of national development that had made the western migration possible. Whether a voter thought of them more as the party of Lincoln or as the party of progress is almost irrelevant. The party’s support for free labor, union, and promotional subsidies for investors came as a package deal. Republicans viewed the endorsement of any of the above at the ballot box as a popular mandate for them all.⁹

Over the course of the 1870s and 1880s, Americans in every section of the country began to question the form and function of “progress” as it had been explained by leaders in the political mainstream. It certainly was not progress itself that they

⁷ On the GAR, see Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), especially 65; on its social role, see Elizabeth Jameson, *All that Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 92-95 *passim*, 188-189.

⁸ For the political lay of the land in Nebraska, Colorado, and Washington, covered in this and the following paragraphs, see Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 1-31; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 72-77; James E. Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 11-84 *passim*; Thomas W. Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 61-78.

⁹ Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 20-21.

questioned, and few disagreed with the consensus that railroads and the connections they provided to markets were a positive good. Instead, farmers and laborers in the West were among those that organized in an attempt to exercise greater control over the economy and politics. Mining corporations, banks, and the omnipresent railroads had been symbols of western development, but (as discussed in the previous chapter) they were also increasingly viewed as predatory and domineering entities that had to be either destroyed or made subject to the popular will. Most of the early efforts were short-lived, but they did demonstrate a growing frustration with the status quo, and their approach likewise illustrated the perceived inability of the existing political structure to give expression to those who felt exploited.

In Nebraska, it was first Grangers and then Greenbackers that questioned the basis of the state's progress. These early protest movements did not achieve any great success in Nebraska and both collapsed soon enough, but they nonetheless had some impact. The Nebraska Grange had applied pressure in favor of some railroad regulation, and in 1875 this culminated in a new state constitution that gave the legislature the power to regulate the road and set maximum rates. The Grange also ran its own tickets against the Republicans, but the severe defeat it suffered left it in no position to force the legislature to use its new authority. The political energy of the waning Grangers was then transferred to the state Greenback Party, which polled a significant percent of the state's vote in the late 1870s to early 1880s.¹⁰

¹⁰ Stanley B. Parsons, "The Populist Context: Nebraska Farmers and Their Antagonists, 1882-1895" (PhD. diss., University of Iowa, 1964), 196-198. For more on the railroad regulation issue in early Nebraska, see Frank Haigh Dixon, "Railroad Control in Nebraska," *Political Science Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1898): 617-647.

While it was not uncommon for the Grange of other states to be politically active, in many others they either achieved a greater degree of legislative success (as in a state like Illinois).¹¹ The Greenbackers of a number of other states also managed a greater degree of success than did those of Nebraska, usually through cooperative arrangements with the weaker of the two major parties.¹² This was not possible in Nebraska. Not only was the Democratic Party widely reviled as the party of rebellion, but the organization itself was in no position to call for an activist state. Though the Democrats of Nebraska had never managed any degree of statewide success, the votes they did manage to poll in the 1870s and 1880s were based heavily upon those who identified with ethnic immigrant communities. The state party's leader, J. Sterling Morton, was a doctrinaire believer in *laissez faire* principles of governance, and he fit that message to the needs of those who feared attacks upon their culture. While the views of the party's head and its base complemented each other well enough, it was not an organization ready to be turned into a vehicle of reform.¹³

The third-party movement that would become Nebraska's Populist Party did not have its roots directly among the Grangers or the Greenbackers. Instead it was a branch of a new organization, the Farmers' Alliance, that would spark the most serious challenge

¹¹ Arthur E. Paine, *The Granger Movement in Illinois* (Urbana: University Press, 1904); Berk, *Alternative Tracks*, 75-88; White, *Railroaded*, 110-111.

¹² Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, especially 39-45; Summers, *Party Games*, 105-109; Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Famer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens, GA: University Press of Georgia, 2007), 30-38; Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 13-30.

¹³ Burton W. Folsom, Jr., *No More Free Markets or Free Beer: The Progressive Era in Nebraska, 1900-1924* (New York: Lexington Books, 1999), 1-12.

to the state's political order. The Alliance united farmers, helped assemble cooperative purchasing and marketing programs, and also educated members on the political issues of the day. It advocated some fairly radical reforms, including such unorthodox measures as currency inflation, but it initially focused on tangible local adjustments to better allow farmers to compete in the market economy. While in other states the organization became a farmers' lobby of sorts, in Nebraska there was no party receptive to their pleas. Those like Jay Burrows, state secretary of the Alliance, and leading anti-monopoly Republicans such as Edward Rosewater had attempted to pressure the legislature to take some positive steps in favor of reform in 1889, but it had not budged. The House had deliberated railroad regulation and other reforms only to have the Senate inevitably reject them on the advice of conservatives. The Republican establishment only added to the building acrimony by denying re-nomination to those of their candidates who were widely viewed as unfriendly to corporate interests.¹⁴

In late 1889, growing dissatisfaction within the Alliance led to the introduction of a few local independent slates of candidates to oppose the GOP in late. The hard winter that followed made the situation explosive. What followed was a phase of rapid growth for the Alliance in the early months of 1890, clearly a sign that farmers saw an immediate need for change. Sensing the pressure, Republican governor John Thayer begged the railroads to make a meaningful reduction on interstate rates in order to aid farmers selling crops, but they refused. Despite initial hesitance, even Burrows and other Alliance leaders had come to support the creation of a third party the by summer. In late July, a

¹⁴ Ostler, *Prairie Populim*, 87-89, 91-95, 99-103.

joint convention of Alliance delegates and representatives from the Knights of Labor met and agreed on a ticket and platform for the coming campaign. Among their proposals were currency inflation (through both paper and silver), laws to hinder the creation of a “land monopoly,” and government ownership of the railroad. The Nebraska Alliance was among the first to openly reject the existing two-party system.¹⁵

For a party that had been organized just a few months before, the “Independent” candidates did remarkably well that November. Their gubernatorial nominee, Alliance president John Powers, was only 1,000 votes behind the winner in an election with over 200,000 votes cast. The victor, Democrat James Boyd, was largely aided by the presence of a third ticket as well as that year’s referendum on prohibition that pulled together many in the Democratic base. The legislature held Independent majorities in both houses, and they also claimed two of the three United States House seats (a Democrat, William Jennings Bryan, won the other).¹⁶

In Colorado, Republican dominance was nearly as secure as it had been in Nebraska. From the time of admission until 1892, Republicans occupied the governor’s chair for all but four years. The two defeats the party had suffered, in 1882 and 1886, were more a result of internal factional disputes than of any innovation by their opponents or general change in voter sentiment. As elsewhere, the party focused on the maintenance of the state’s reputation as a safe place for outside investment, and few

¹⁵ Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 113-115, 118-125; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 33-35.

¹⁶ Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 32-37; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1861-1911: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 358-359; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 6th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), 1088.

states received as much of that as Colorado. The Republicans struggled to maintain the allegiance of farmers, mine laborers, mine owners, and the railway interests simultaneously, and by the late 1880s the difficulties inherent in such an arrangement were becoming apparent.¹⁷

Before 1890, most of Colorado's history of grassroots political action had its source in the labor movement, but by at least the 1880s the Democratic Party had successfully coopted or thwarted most moves toward a third party. Despite the party leadership's opposition to strikes and ambivalence toward labor organizations, they did oppose the overt acts of corporate favoritism the Republicans were known for, most notable of which were National Guard interventions in labor disputes. The party was also committed to the elimination of alternatives for the labor vote. In 1886, for example, when the Prohibition Party ran Knights of Labor organizer and self-proclaimed socialist Joseph Murray for Congress, Democrats responded by nominating Myron Reed, a well-known pro-labor Congregational minister, for the same position. While Reed nearly won, it may have been more important for the Democrats that Murray managed only six percent of the vote. Hints of radicalism were present among Colorado's laborers, best embodied by editor and labor activist Joseph Buchanan, but those with socialist proclivities were unable to create a sustained movement in the 1880s. The Democrats were both partially responsible for this fact and the prime beneficiaries of it. While the Democrats of Colorado (like those of Nebraska) still relied more heavily upon Catholic and certain immigrant voters than they did upon any other source of support, they had

¹⁷ Leon W. Fuller, "The Populist Regime in Colorado" (Ph.D. diss. University of Wisconsin, 1933), 35-40; Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 52-62.

enough success at casting themselves as the party of labor in Colorado to forestall major third-party efforts from that quarter.¹⁸

Instead of labor, the force behind third-party politics in Colorado came from those engaged in agriculture. Their grievances were not mitigated by Democratic actions, and the Republicans who claimed to represent them also stood for the interests that farmers and ranchers had grown to distrust. Anti-monopoly sentiment had grown perceptibly in the state, and in the 1888 contest for the governorship both candidates advocated greater control over the railroads. The campaign was followed by little in the way of action by a legislature that came to be known as the “Robber Seventh” and, in the eyes of farmers, it appeared that the corporations exercised real control. Another source of frustration was the water companies that had developed substantial power over the practitioners of irrigation agriculture in the dry regions of the state. One management firm that controlled some of the water companies, the Colorado Mortgage and Investment Company of London—known as the “English Company”—represented the kind of distant and impersonal control that many farmers distrusted. The agrarians did use the largest of their organizations in Colorado at the time, the Grange, to call for serious reform, but its leaders still rejected independent politics. It was the Farmers’ Alliance that would be the primary beneficiary of the rising tensions.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 62-74, 79, 108-110; David Brundage, *The Making of Western Labor Radicalism: Denver’s Organized Workers, 1878-1905* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 47-66, 76-81, 88-91; John P. Enyeart, *The Quest for “Just and Pure Law”: Rocky Mountain Workers and American Social Democracy, 1870-1924* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25-28, 41-84 *passim*; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 1078.

¹⁹ Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 39, 119; Robert W. Larson, *Populism in the Mountain West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 17-24.

The Colorado branch of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union had its beginnings in 1888, but it grew quickly. Unlike earlier organizations, its lecturers, including some veteran organizers from out of state, painted a picture of a system dominated by monopolies and concentrated capital. Dissatisfied farmers were receptive, and surely some had a next step in mind. Unlike the more modest reform messages of earlier groups, what the Alliance called for involved a substantial transformation of the national economy, and new adherents may very well have appreciated that such changes were not to come from the old parties. Though Colorado's state Alliance claimed only 5,000 members in 1890, some leaders of the organization decided to test the political waters. On July 4, 1890, they met with representatives of the Knights of Labor and Grangers, and together they called for a convention to name a new ticket the following month.²⁰

The new party formed in August demanded government ownership of the railroads, state ownership and control of the irrigation system, free silver, and the end of the national bank system. Despite its novel platform and public frustration with the Republicans—many of their own papers refused to support the ticket—the Colorado GOP won easily, with the Democrats taking second. The Alliance candidates won just over six percent of the vote. While it would be easy to declare that the campaign was a waste, in reality the independent ticket attracted ever more attention to the cause of

²⁰ For this and the following paragraph, see Fuller, "Populist Regime," 43-44; Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 117-125; Larson, *Populism in the Mountain West*, 25-32.

reform. Just months after the defeat, Alliance membership had jumped from 5,000 to 15,000. Two years later, the new party would be a force in state politics.²¹

As conflicts in states like Nebraska and Colorado led to the creation of third parties, similar events were unfolding in Washington Territory. There, workers first organized politically in the mid-1880s, but the object of their frustration was not a corporation but a racial minority. The Knights of Labor initiated a movement to drive the Chinese out of the Puget Sound area, but from the very beginning it held a class dimension. The Chinese were believed to be the tools of corporate interests, and this view was only reinforced when the “better class” of local residents—including both Republicans and Democrats—began to push back against the exclusionary efforts. Though the “Liberal League” (the anti-Chinese organization) succeeded in driving the Chinese out of Tacoma in November of 1885, when the Seattle chapter attempted to do the same in their city the “Law and Order” leaders convinced them to back down and let the local business leaders handle the matter. When the crowd dispersed, the Law and Order group instead had the governor, Republican Watson Squire, send in the militia and order arrest warrants for forty-three prominent members of the Liberal League. Months later, the Liberal League proceeded with its plans, in no small part due to rumors that the Chinese would be used to break a strike in nearby coal mines. Though they succeeded in expelling the Chinese, Law and Order gunmen had fired on several of their number and then had soldiers again called in to the city.²²

²¹ For the election results, see Michael J. Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 77-78.

²² For this and the paragraph that follows, see Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 74-78; Jonathan Dembo, *Unions and Politics in Washington State, 1885-1935* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983), 3-9; Robert D.

The conflicts of Puget Sound intensified the rough sense of class division in the territory, and though their task was completed the labor movement was soon channeled into a new political organization. Recent events had convinced many that their interests were not the same as those who emphasized economic development over all other priorities. The Liberal League, running under the name “People’s Party”—not to be confused with the later Populists—had its own candidate in the 1886 Seattle mayoral election, and in a close contest beat the nominee of the Law and Order set. Later that year, the party organized itself to compete in the territorial contests as well, and it advocated public control over corporations (especially railroads), government accountability to the people, temperance legislation, and Asian exclusion. It also criticized a national system of currency that was, its members claimed, under the power of “capitalistic syndicates.” While it initially nominated its own candidate for position of territorial delegate to Congress, it eventually withdrew to support a pro-labor Democrat. The Democrats managed a rare victory, but the People’s Party declined rapidly thereafter. Though it lacked longevity, the movement demonstrated both the growing disaffection within the region and labor’s search for political alternatives.²³

There would be no more serious third-party activism in the year before Washington became a state, but the inability of local politicians to control corporations became an undeniable fact. President Grover Cleveland’s appointed governor, Eugene Semple, openly sympathized with labor but refused to take any specific steps to aid them.

Saltvig, “The Progressive Movement in Washington” (PhD. diss., University of Washington, 1966), 1-8.

²³ Robert D. Saltvig, “Progressive Movement in Washington,” 9-17.

In two separate conflicts in 1888 coal mining interests had sparked conflict with labor, and the companies responded to labor protests by bringing in large contingents of armed men. The Knights of Labor appealed to Semple for any kind of assistance, but he refused to take direct action. When he tried to have the territorial legislature to pass measures to outlaw such practices, the Republican majority ignored him.²⁴ In the same year, farmers in eastern Washington began to assemble. Those in the vicinity of Elberton, in Whitman County, formed their own branch of the Farmers' Alliance in the spring. They soon spread the organization throughout the county—then the fourth most populous in the state—and by 1889 into the surrounding counties. While they did arrange some cooperatives, one of their major objectives was the passage of state railroad regulation. The challenge was to find a party that could the secure passage of such laws.²⁵

Washington was admitted as a state in 1889, but it seemed that little had changed from its past. Elisha P. Ferry, a former territorial governor who was known for his emphasis upon development at all costs, won the state's first gubernatorial election, and Republicans nearly swept the legislative elections as well. Ferry also helped former territorial governor Watson Squire to obtain one of the hotly contested United States Senate seats. The Democrats did somewhat better in the 1890 election for United States Representative, and the party polled reasonably well in counties dominated by labor in the west and wheat farmers in the east of the state. Still, they were not the Republicans'

²⁴ Carlos Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 29-31; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 86-87.

²⁵ Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 79-81; Thomas W. Riddle, "Populism in the Palouse: Old Ideals and New Realities," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1974): 97-109.

equal in strength, and even their advances among farmers and wage earners disturbed certain members of their own party. Thomas Burke, Daniel Gilman, and other leading Democrats founded the *Seattle Telegraph* in 1890 as a paper to voice the opinions of the respectable Democracy. Those frustrated with the status quo in Washington did not make their move toward independent politics in 1890, but the necessary elements were already in place.²⁶

Growth and Successes, 1891-1892

In December of 1890, fresh off their recent electoral victories, members of the Farmers Alliance from western states such as Kansas called for a national convention of reform associations. For the westerners, the goal was the creation of a new national party. While many in the southern wing of the largest farmers' organization—the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union (NFAIU)—wanted to delay independent political involvement, it was too late to stop the westerners. The “National Union Conference” that was held in Cincinnati in May of 1891 had somewhat contradictory results. Though it did not officially launch the expected new party, it did establish an executive committee to negotiate with NFAIU at their next convention in 1892. There, it would gauge the Alliance's interest in the endeavor. However, it was also agreed that, no matter the decision of the NFAIU, a convention to name candidates would be called. The new organization would be named the People's Party. The hesitant or uncertain declarations were intended to demonstrate the western intent to seek cooperation with the

²⁶ Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 89-92.

South, but all observers recognized that this opened the contest against the two old parties.²⁷

The reform advocates in the West were ready for this move. As already mentioned, independent tickets had run in Nebraska and Colorado in 1890, with varying degrees of success. Washington state's farm and labor organizations soon followed suit. The events of the opening months of 1891 had already proven a tremendous disappointment for them. Under intense pressure from both the state Alliance and the Knights, the legislature had managed to pass a railroad regulation bill and an anti-Pinkerton law, but Governor Ferry was out of the state for health reasons. Instead, Lieutenant Governor Charles Laughton, a former middle-manager in the railroad industry, vetoed both bills. Both the Knights of Labor and the state Alliance began the move toward a third party in the weeks after the close of the session, and the People's Party of Washington was formally declared in a meeting at Ellensburg in December.²⁸

The legislature of Nebraska under the control of the Independents showed some promise, but it also demonstrated the inexperience of the new members and the naïveté with which they approached the process of governing. More than anything else, their inexperience led to disorganization—a problem that would plague all of the early Populist legislatures. For instance, many Independents had accused the Democrats of fraud in the election, something they believed had resulted in James Boyd's narrow

²⁷ Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 207-215; McMath, *American Populism*, 139-146.

²⁸ Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 93-115; Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*, 52-53; Robert E. Ficken, *Washington State: The Inaugural Decade, 1889-1899* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 2007), 95-96.

victory in the gubernatorial election. Yet both the House and the Senate failed to challenge the results when they had the opportunity; in fact, the leaders may not have known how to do so. Both houses did pass a sweeping railroad legislation bill, but Boyd then vetoed it. They also struggled to maintain party unity on votes over a range of issues.²⁹ Despite these difficulties, their accomplishments were not insignificant. They passed a law limiting “all classes of mechanics, servants, and laborers” to an eight-hour day, enacted legislation for the protection of the union label, and also approved a secret or “Australian” ballot law. Additionally, they placed a constitutional amendment on the next ballot that, if ratified, would replace the members of the ineffective Board of Transportation with an elected commission. Though their accomplishments had been limited, they did establish enough of a record to campaign on the next year.³⁰

Early in 1892, after a last desperate attempt to pull the Democratic Party to their cause, southern members of the Alliance were ready for an independent political party. When members of the NFAIU and other members of the conference of industrial organizations met in St. Louis on February 22, even Alliance president Leonidas Polk had made his preference for a third party known. The convention adopted a platform nearly identical to the one the NFAIU had been pushing for several years—inflated currency, the sub-treasury plan, and government ownership of transportation and communication. To this was added a preamble which served as a kind of statement of

²⁹ Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 37; Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska, from the Earliest*

Explorations to the Present Time, vol. III (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1913), 231-237.

³⁰ *Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, at the Twenty-Second Session*, (Omaha: Festner Printing Company, 1891), 63-64, 214-216, 238-260, 361-362.

purpose for the whole gathering. Written by Ignatius Donnelly, it was nearly identical to the one that would be read in Omaha less than half a year later, but its adoption was a powerful statement of the intentions of those gathered. It accused both “old political parties” of allowing the “dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to restrain or prevent them,” and it asserted that a new “political organization... is necessary to redress the grievances of which we complain.” Just after the convention adjourned, the delegates remained in their seats and declared their intent to work with the representatives of the Cincinnati convention. When their representatives met with those of the People’s Party, it was decided to hold the first convention in Omaha in July.³¹

Events leading up to the convention in July only added power to the Populist assessment of the old parties. Of all the states in the West, none was more affected by the sea-change than Colorado. By 1892, Henry M. Teller—the state’s leading Republican and senior United States senator—had come to be considered the champion of free silver in Congress. He had always favored the return of silver coinage to an equal status with gold, not only because of its importance to the state’s mining interests but because of its importance to farmers as well. He had worked with special vigor to obtain such legislation since his party’s major victory in the election of 1888, but on each occasion members of his own party stood in the way. Speaker Reed in the House was only one obstacle. More frequently, the administration of President Benjamin Harrison applied pressure on those who nominally favored silver but were willing to trade their support of the cause for patronage. By mid-February of 1892, Teller was actively seeking an

³¹ Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 223-230; McMath, *American Populism*, 160-163.

alternative candidate for the upcoming national convention in Minneapolis, and he and his colleague Senator Edward Wolcott had even dared to use the Democratic *Rocky Mountain News* to voice their disapproval when the Arapahoe County delegates were instructed to support Harrison's re-nomination. Then, in March of 1892, with supposed silver backers in the majority in both houses of Congress, a last free coinage bill was snuffed out in what was now a Democrat-controlled House of Representatives. Teller claimed that both parties were merely posturing for the upcoming campaign. "[L]ike our party," he declared, "the Democratic party is in the toils of a power it dare not offend, and the danger is that these two great political parties in their anxiety to secure the State of New York, controlled as it is by a little circle in and about Manhattan Island, will neglect and repudiate the interest of the great masses of the country and act exactly alike on this silver question." Teller had practically made the Populists' argument for them.³²

The Republican and Democratic conventions in June only made the situation more difficult for Colorado's leading partisans. Teller had hoped that James G. Blaine would lead the Republican ticket, but Harrison's supporters won the President's re-nomination on the first ballot. Teller had managed to place a plank in favor of bimetallism on the platform, but it was more sentimental than a policy statement, and just days before Teller had even admitted that the candidate mattered far more than the platform. He was disappointed, but Teller remained with the Republicans for the time being. Thomas Patterson, one of Colorado's leading Democrats and owner and operator

³² *Congressional Record*, 52nd Cong., 1st Sess., Apr. 20, 1892, p. 3846; Elmer Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller: Defender of the West* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1941), 188-208; Sybil Downing and Robert E. Smith, *Tom Patterson: Colorado Crusader for Change* (Niwot, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1995), 68-69.

of the *Rocky Mountain News*, would be unable to do the same. Just as Teller had in in the Senate, Patterson had used his paper to trumpet the cause of free silver leading up to the election year. He led Colorado's delegation to the Democratic convention in Chicago, but his proposal for a silver plank was cast aside and the Democrats again nominated their standard-bearer from 1884 and 1888, Grover Cleveland. Support for the gold standard was a near pre-requisite for Cleveland's nomination, as the ex-president had made a series of declarations against the silver heresy in the run-up to the convention. The free coinage of silver was a "dangerous and reckless experiment," and he warned Democrats not to be tempted by the demands of the disreputable. His selection meant that both old parties had completely rejected the growing calls for change.³³

While the Democrats and Republicans showed no interest in the one reform that was already known to have wide popularity, the People's Party adopted the whole suite of reforms advocated by the Alliance, Knights, and other farmer or labor organizations of the day. The platform was broken into three sets of demands which responded to dangers in three fundamental sectors of the economy: money, transportation, and land. The money plank demanded the abolition of the national bank system, the establishment of the "sub-treasury plan of the Alliance, or a better system," the free coinage of silver, an increase in the circulating currency to \$50 per capita, a graduated income tax, and a federally run postal savings bank. The transportation section called for government ownership of the railroads, and that portion devoted to land condemned speculation and demanded the abolition of alien land ownership. The search for candidates left few

³³ Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller*, 210-211; Downing and Smith, *Tom Patterson*, 70-71; Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 102-106.

viable options of any renown. The president of the NFAIU, Leonidas Polk, had died in June. Federal judge and known advocate of reform Walter Q. Gresham was the favorite of many others, but he had never joined the party, and though he had not quieted the rumors at an earlier date he now sent word to the convention that he would not accept the nomination. A few even tossed about the name of James H. Kyle, an Independent who had been sent to the Senate by the South Dakota legislature in 1891, but he had no particular accomplishments to speak of. The most logical candidate, and the one who did capture the nomination, was the former Greenback presidential candidate James B. Weaver. To join the former Union general, former Confederate general James G. Field was selected to round out the ticket. It was a move designed to show that reform now took precedence over the “bloody shirt.”³⁴

The emergence of a powerful national reform party proved thoroughly disruptive to the political balance in the West. In Colorado, Patterson had walked away from the Democratic convention disgusted, but there was a surprise in store when he arrived back in Denver. His partner at the *Rocky Mountain News*, John Arkins, had used the paper to condemn the nomination of Cleveland and instead support Weaver (several days before the Populists officially nominated him). Patterson had been reluctant to bolt the party, but when he saw the positive response the move had elicited in Denver he accepted it. He was already skeptical that the national Democratic Party would support silver or any other substantial reform in the near term, but he was left in an uncertain position. In spite

³⁴ Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 231-237, 439-444; McMath, *American Populism*, 166-170; Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 99-100; *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 5, 1892, p. 1-2.

of his break with the party he still hoped to retain some influence among the local Democrats, but many openly denounced his actions. The Populists were no more welcoming. While he already accepted most of the major elements of the Populist program—free silver, substantial railroad reform (possibly including government ownership, which he did demand later), and support for organized labor—the leaders of the Populists in Colorado believed he was an opportunist who was hoping to capture their party for the benefit of the state Democrats. This concern appeared to be validated when he called for a coalition of silver forces in the state.³⁵

When Patterson attempted to persuade the Populist state convention to hold off on nominations until it could confer with the Democrats, he was rebuffed. Instead, the convention was dominated by members of the Alliance, former Greenbackers, and others with a history of work in reform organizations. They chose the editor and labor advocate Davis H. Waite for governor. Despite a great deal of hesitancy, Patterson came to support Waite's candidacy by the time the campaign was under way. This influence would soon tell in the Democratic convention. The fusion faction held a majority, and those who favored a straight ticket were forced to withdraw from the hall. As the fusionists took Waite as their nominee, the bolters drew up a platform that claimed to support both free silver and the national Democratic Party. They nominated former state attorney general Joseph H. Maupin for governor and named a slate of Democratic electors (which, at the advice of the national party, was later withdrawn). While Colorado's Democrats were fractured, the state's Republicans attempted to act as though

³⁵ Sybil Downing and Robert E. Smith, *Tom Patterson*, 71-72.

nothing had changed. They endorsed the actions of Teller and Wolcott, then ignored the recent actions of both senators to declare their unqualified support for Harrison. They stressed the national Republicans' silver plank—a dangerous choice considering their opponents, but they must have viewed the Populists as an insignificant factor in the coming contest.³⁶

The entry of the Populists into the field also produced some changes in Nebraska. In 1890, the Republicans had dismissed the Independents as cranks, and they warned their constituents that a vote for them was in reality a vote for the Democrats. It had not worked, and the Republicans gubernatorial candidate's third place finish took some shine off the party's once perfect record in state contests. Likely as a consequence of that defeat, the anti-monopoly editor of the *Omaha Bee*, Edward Rosewater, held a great deal of influence over the state convention. He undoubtedly had a say in the nomination of Lorenzo Crouse to lead the state ticket. Crouse was a railroad reform advocate, though one who had been out of politics for some time. He was also the father-in-law of Gilbert Hitchcock, the editor of the state's largest Democratic paper, the *Omaha World-Herald*, and consequently Hitchcock's press was rather ineffective during the campaign. The platform also emphasized reform, specifically railroad regulation and the establishment of postal savings banks. To oppose them, the Populists named Charles Van Wyck, the former Republican United States senator who had lost a re-election bid due to his perceived anti-railroad views. The party ran largely on the Omaha platform, but Van Wyck and others tried to use the free silver issue to emphasize their difference from the

³⁶ Leon W. Fuller, "Populist Regime," 50-55; James E. Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 139-144; Sybil Downing and Robert E. Smith, *Tom Patterson*, 72-75; Elmer Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller*, 211.

Republicans. The Democrats, perhaps with an eye to federal patronage if Cleveland won, demonstrated their orthodoxy by selecting J. Sterling Morton for governor. Boyd had been rejected for re-nomination because of his veto of the railroad rate law, but Morton's extreme conservatism did not make the transition appear significant. The views that made Morton popular among easterners of like mind made him very much out of place in a state where the debate had shifted to substantial reform.³⁷

In Washington, the dominant party still showed little sense of alarm over the changes that were transforming western politics. The Republicans nominated John McGraw, former King County sheriff and president of the Seattle First National Bank, for governor. They emphasized the state's material progress over the preceding four years, and to secure its future they promised to push for federal funds to construct the Lake Washington canal (which would connect the lake with Seattle's port). The Populists endorsed the work of the Omaha convention, crafted a platform that emphasized the protection of labor, state regulation of railroad rates, and called for public ownership of irrigation canals. For governor, they selected Cyrus W. Young, a wealthy Whitman County farmer. State Democrats took notice. They nominated the legislator and attorney for Kittias County, Henry J. Snively, who was known for his support for labor and railroad reform. Shortly after their convention, the same conservative Democrats who had established the *Seattle Telegraph* abandoned their ticket to support

³⁷ Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 242-243; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 39-40.

McGraw. The promise of development and growth held too much appeal for them to ignore.³⁸

The campaigns differed as much one might have expected. In Colorado, Republicans claimed theirs was the only party that could ever effectively remonetize silver, and they also suggested that investors would not consider their money safe in a state controlled by a radical. In Nebraska, Crouse and Rosewater emphasized their own (if somewhat limited) reform agenda while declaring the monetary policies of Van Wyck and the Populists to be unsound. As if to insure that he would never be mistaken for a radical, Morton focused most of his venom on Van Wyck and Populist policies as well. Washington Republicans focused on development and the threat to progress posed by the Democrats and Populists, while the Democrats' gubernatorial nominee struggled to deny charges that he had stolen money from orphans earlier in this life. As usual, western Republicans stuck to a vision of progress based on the application of outside capital (both federal and private). The economic future of the West was to be secured through investment and subsidies.³⁹

Of course the Populists were not opposed to investment, just as they were not opposed to the existence of railroads, canals, the telegraph, industrial mines, or any of the other accoutrements of a modern market economy. However, they did believe that the system that existed privileged the rights of mortgage lenders, railroad stockholders, and

³⁸ Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 121-126.

³⁹ Fuller, "Populist Regime," 56-57; Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 244; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 40-42; *Omaha Daily Bee*, "Shall We Have Unlimited Silver Coinage?... Part I," January 27, 1892, p. 5, "Shall We Have Unlimited Free Silver Coinage?... Part II," *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 3, 1892, p. 5, "Shall We Have Unlimited Silver Coinage?... Part III," February 11, 1892, p. 5; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 126; Ficken, *Washington State*, 96-97.

mine investors over the rights of farmers and laborers—the producers. Populists expressed their distaste for the kind of top-down capitalism favored by conservatives in a variety of ways. In the most widespread and damning condemnation of this system, the Populists of 1892 deployed conspiracy theories.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the money power conspiracy likely played an important part in the move toward third party politics.⁴⁰ It condemned both of the old parties as the mere pawns of a financial elite, and the theory made either party's redemption seem unlikely. It simultaneously represented an attack on a system that allowed distant financiers to draw wealth from the work of others. While it was used to explain the seemingly irrational or heartless actions of those who controlled the American government and justify the return of silver to an equal place with gold in the national currency, it would have also made the conservative emphasis on the West as a site for investment seem inappropriate.

It should be no surprise that the money power conspiracy would play such a role in the Populists' first national campaign, but the scope of its use suggests just how significant it may have been. In a series of print debates in January between Rosewater and Jay Burrows, former secretary of the Nebraska Alliance and a founder of the state's third party, Burrows declared that silver had only been removed from its proper place due to the plot of the "bondholders." When Rosewater suggested that Populists merely wanted to "scale their obligations" by using inflationary currency to cut their debt in half, Burrows responded that "Every man at all posted on the question knows that the money

⁴⁰ Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 77-80, 100-101, 124, 131-132; Jeffrey Ostler, "The Rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism," *Agricultural History* 69, no. 1 (1995): 1-27.

power of this country and the world performed on two occasions the most gigantic job of scaling the world has ever seen—first when it changed the standard of payment of fifteen hundred millions of bonds [to “coin”], second when it demonetized silver.”⁴¹ The party’s gubernatorial candidate did not discuss the conspiracy in any detail, but he did declare that scarce money had been demanded not by “the toilers or the yeomanry,” but instead blamed the “Shylocks of Europe.”⁴²

Washington state’s leading reformers also used conspiracy theory to justify their move to a new party. Just in time for the campaign season, John Rankin Rogers—then just an Alliance organizer and local candidate—wrote a pamphlet titled *The Irrepressible Conflict, or an American System of Money*. Substantial portions of it were little more than a reiteration of the arguments of Sarah Emery, as he too attributed the nation’s policy of financial contraction to a small group of bankers based in England and New York.⁴³ It is difficult to determine whether Rogers was attempting to spread word of the conspiracy to those who were unaware of it or if his goal was to rehash familiar ideas in time for the campaign. Whatever his purpose or impact, the money power rapidly entered the lexicon of Washington state Populists. In public debate in one of Seattle’s

⁴¹ For the quotes above, see “Shall We Have Unlimited Free Silver Coinage?... Part II,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 3, 1892, p. 5. See also “Shall We Have Unlimited Silver Coinage?... Part III,” February 11, 1892, p. 5

⁴² “Logic of Judge Crouse,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 28, 1892. While the *Bee* appear to have garbled the quote, another reference to it can be found in Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 244. Watkins notes that Edward Rosewater’s *Bee* had previously depicted Van Wyck favorably, but that the editor took offense at the remark. Watkins does not explain the matter further, but it is worth noting that Rosewater was himself a Jewish immigrant.

⁴³ John Rankin Rogers, *The Irrepressible Conflict, or an American System of Money: A Compilation of Facts Leading to a Knowledge of the Money Question* (Puyallup, WA: Rogers and Co., 1892); Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 127-129.

meeting halls in September, the Populist orator accused his opponent of advocating the doctrines of Wall Street before he suggested that the conservative spokesman should “receive compensation from the ‘money power.’”⁴⁴ Dr. O. G. Chase, a Populist candidate for the state House, published a series of articles in western Washington’s small town papers, one of them devoted largely to the story of a senator and former Secretary of the Treasury, John Sherman. Though Chase claimed Sherman had been honest when he came into office, “he went down before the money power, and John Sherman will be remembered by future generations as a tyrant and tool for Wall street [sic.] and England.”⁴⁵ While the Washington reformers were late to the third-party movement, they used the same methods to explain the bankruptcy of the old parties.

The money power conspiracy was certainly a substantial part of the Populist campaign in Colorado. Their gubernatorial candidate, Davis Waite, told crowds that America must have its own economic policy and not follow in the footsteps of those countries already under the control of the Rothschilds.⁴⁶ But Waite was only one of many voices. In May of that year, Thomas Patterson had found a man who claimed to have been an associate of Ernest Seyd—the supposed agent of the English money power—and then printed his corroborating testimony in the *Rocky Mountain News*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “Red Hot Discussion,” *Morning Olympian* (WA), September 17, 1892, p. 4.

⁴⁵ O. G. Chase, “New Idea Income Tax—No. 15,” *Aberdeen Herald* (WA), August 18, 1892, p. 2. On Chase’s candidacy for the Populists, see “People’s Party Convention,” *Aberdeen Herald*, July 28, 1892, p. 2, and *Aberdeen Herald*, August 18, 1892, p. 3.

⁴⁶ “Populists Line Up,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO), October 16, 1892, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Gordon Clark, *Shylock: As Banker, Bondholder, Corruptionist, Conspirator* (Washington, DC: American Bimetallic League, 1894), 88-89.

Later that summer, when he had made his own political move, he explained the impossibility of working within the old parties. “In seeking an expression through a third party organization the people are adopting the only peaceful means of asserting their influence in the government, since the old parties have passed into the control of the money power.” As a result of these policies, “A grievously unjust proportion of the wealth created by the productive population of the country is extorted from its rightful owners and forcibly diverted to the financial centers of the East.”⁴⁸ He argued that the money power that controlled the Democrats and Republicans alike drained the resources of the hinterland’s producers, and only the Populists were free of the corrupting influence.

The results of the election showed tremendous gains for the Populists in much of the West, but it also suggested possible limits to their success. Cleveland triumphed over Harrison and Weaver, but the Populist candidate had won the electoral votes of Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, and Nevada, as well as one of the votes of both North Dakota and Oregon. No other candidate for a new party had managed to win electoral votes since the antebellum period, and he received over a million popular votes. But the single vote he won from Oregon was the only one he captured from a state that had been admitted before 1860, and the one million popular votes he claimed amounted to less than ten percent of the total cast that year. An examination of regional results showed some promise, but it also suggested that a change in strategy would likely be required if Populists were to hold more than a handful of offices. In Washington, for example,

⁴⁸ “The Situation,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 26, 1892, p. 4.

where the party had been formed less than one year earlier, their gubernatorial candidate had received 26% of the vote. This could suggest that, given more time, electoral success was possible. Yet in Nebraska the total Populist vote actually declined from what it had been two years earlier, and Crouse was narrowly elected over Van Wyck. The rare victories were usually a result of fusion. Only eleven Populists were elected to the United States House of Representatives (all from the West), and a majority of those who won had been aided by the Democrats. Where just two years earlier the Independents had struggled to gain more than six percent of the vote, Davis Waite won the governorship of Colorado with just under half of the vote cast. Despite his unwillingness to admit that the silver Democrats had played a role, it is difficult to imagine such a rapid transition without such support. Similar results were recorded in Kansas, where Populists and Democrats had also fused to elect Populist Lorenzo Lewelling as governor. Populists themselves understood this situation, and it influenced their thinking in the years that followed.⁴⁹

Depression Politics, 1893-1895

As 1893 dawned, the situation nationally was, from the Populist viewpoint, unchanged from what it had been the year before. Cleveland would soon be replacing Harrison but, as Populists were keen to point out, the primary difference between them was a few percent on the tariff. On the same note, the Democrats were due to take over the Senate following several victories in state legislative races in the Midwest and West.

⁴⁹ Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 78-79, 199, 359-360, 597; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 1091-1095; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 238-273.

With the national government in the hands of the two old parties, Populists devoted their energies to the reform of state governance in the West. They were still too weak in Washington state to make an impact, and factions in the Republican legislature primarily fought each other for right to select a senator—which they eventually failed to do.⁵⁰ In Washington and Colorado, on the other hand, they held a large portion of the legislatures, and in Colorado also claimed the executive offices. Both would be held accountable for governments of their states.

Populists did not hold a majority of seats in the Nebraska legislature as they had in 1891, and in fact Republicans held pluralities in both houses. No one party held a majority, and the Democrats held the balance of power. Surprisingly, the Populists were still able to pass legislation by working with and applying pressure upon Democrats—some of whom were also interested in industrial reform, while others took note of the disposal of Governor Boyd following his veto of the railroad rate law. The two parties were first brought together during a month-long struggle to name a United States senator. With the approval of the Democrats, the Populists were able to elect a relative unknown, district judge William V. Allen. He would go on to be one of the leading Populists in the Senate over the course of the decade.⁵¹ Following their cooperation in the Senate

⁵⁰ During the early years of statehood, this was a fairly typical outcome in Washington state. See Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 136-137; Ficken, *Washington State*, 85-88.

⁵¹ Several historians have attempted to label Allen as a conservative or a pseudo-Populist, but they have clearly done so without the requisite research. Karel Bicha claimed that Allen had an outdated mindset and was a modest reformer whose only goal was the maintenance of “good government.” Bicha’s own investigation of Allen’s work in Congress is shallow, and Allen’s own tendency to describe proposals that he deemed reasonable as “conservative” allowed Bicha to misrepresent his subject and Populists generally. Lawrence Goodwyn did much the same, if for different reasons. He wanted to paint Allen, and all Nebraska Populists (and nearly all fusionists for that matter), as a false Populist who had no ideological commitment to the program and little interest in third-party politics. For Goodwyn, Allen became a

election, Populists and Democrats worked together to pass the same piece of railroad legislation that the Populists had in 1891, but this time the governor signed it. It was a weighty and complex measure which took up nearly two-hundred pages in the statute book, but its specificity was intended to make enforcement easy and prosecution straightforward. It was a substantial triumph for the state's reformers, but the law was soon challenged by the railroad companies in court, and its enforcement was held up by injunctions. The legislature rounded out the session by adding another pro-labor law to those passed the previous term. This time it was an anti-Pinkerton bill, which would be enacted just months after the dramatic battle between strikers and mercenaries at Homestead, Pennsylvania.⁵²

The Colorado Populists had far less luck in their attempts to pass reform legislation. Like the Nebraskans of the same year they did not hold a majority, but they could control the state senate if they worked with the Democrats. They were also challenged by the difficulty in creating a united party. Their greatest difficulty came

representative of the silverite "shadow movement," and his later aid to the fusion movement in 1896 represented his betrayal of the "real" Populists. Those who have actually examined Allen's career have come to very different conclusions. O. Gene Clanton has probably surveyed more information on the Populists in Congress than anyone, and he not only views Allen as a relatively orthodox Populist but notes that other Populists in Congress, including Peffer, recognized Allen as one of the most capable individuals in their party. See Karel D. Bicha, *Western Populism: Studies in an Ambivalent Conservatism* (Coronado Press, 1976), 43-54; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, especially 392-401, 487-499; O. Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), especially 103; O. Gene Clanton, *Congressional Populism and the Crisis of the 1890s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), especially 11, 26, 35, 43, 52-53. There has also been a very competent thesis written on the subject of Allen's career, and the author effectively refutes the contentions of Bicha and Goodwyn point by point. See David Wayne Hoelscher, "Genuine Populist: William V. Allen in the United States Senate, 1893-1901" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2003).

⁵² Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 244-253; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 42-43; *Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Third Session* (Lincoln: State Journal Company, Printers, 1893), 164-348, 403-404.

regarding the fights over railroad legislation. Substantial regulatory bills were proposed in both houses, including a measure that would have set rates and empowered a commission to enforce and adjust them as needed. These bills stalled, at least in part due to Republican opposition, but Populist disorganization was as much to blame. Then, legislators commenced to dismantle what railroad regulation already existed for the state. Those from the least developed districts believed the law discouraged further investment, and so many Populists joined in the effort. While Waite himself had advocated repeal, he expected that it would be accompanied by a proper replacement. Instead, Republicans, Democrats, and Populists together voted to expunge the law. When Waite rejected the bill, the legislature (again with Populist support) overrode his veto. The impatient governor compared the legislators unfavorably to Judas Iscariot, who, following his transgression, at least “went out and hanged himself.” The one substantial achievement of the Populists in the legislature involved women’s suffrage. Thirty-four (of the thirty-six who participated) voted to put a suffrage amendment on the 1893 ballot, while only twenty of the fifty-three Republicans and Democrats who voted did the same. If not for this, the legislative session would have been universally recognized as a complete fiasco.⁵³

The challenges faced by western Populists were about to become far more intense than they could possibly imagine. By the summer of 1893, just months after Cleveland took office, the economy was melting down. The explanations for the collapse are complex, but most have connected it to both an increase in gold transfers overseas in the

⁵³ Fuller, “Populist Regime,” 96-114; Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 162-166.

year leading up to the crisis and a stock market crash. The crash, which began in the first days of May, led to further stress on the gold supply and fear that banks could not make good on the return of deposits. The Treasury's gold reserve had been greatly affected by this withdrawal of specie, and ultimately depositors, bondholders, and investors seriously questioned the stability of the whole American system of finance.⁵⁴

President Cleveland attributed the calamity to a recent Republican sop to the silver heretics: the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Passed in 1890, it required the monthly purchase of four million ounces of silver by the federal government at the market price and the subsequent issue of silver certificates backed by the white metal. But the certificates were imperfect; they could at any time be exchanged at the Treasury for gold, and at a moment when gold was rapidly leaving the reserve it served as just one more strain upon the system. Cleveland had railed against silver for months, and he had already declared his interest in the repeal of the act. Eastern business leaders and financiers had fed this suspicion of the act, and when the Panic of 1893 struck he wasted little time to assign the blame. On June 30, he sent out the call for Congress to convene in August. The main purpose of the special session was clear to all, but the fight for repeal would be one of the most contentious congressional battles of the late nineteenth century.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 115-117; R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 25-28; Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1963* (1963; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 108-111.

⁵⁵ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 116-118; Williams, *Realigning America*, 29-32. The desirability of repeal is still a matter of debate for some academics. R. Hal Williams, in the section cited, says of repeal that it was "probably a necessary measure," but Williams essentially accepts that the gold standard was the only real option available to the country at the time. That last contention—that

With full knowledge of Cleveland's intent, westerners of all parties aligned to stop him. In Colorado, a large convention of the state's silver currency advocates met on July 11 to respond. They adopted a statement drafted by Thomas Patterson that predicted ruin for the West and the nation if the act was repealed and the place of silver further diminished. It blamed the current crisis on a system "begotten of the greed of Great Britain's remorseless money power." But what would soon be the most infamous statement to be issued at the convention came from Colorado's irascible governor. "The war has begun," he declared, "it is the same war which must always be waged against oppression and tyranny to preserve the liberties of man—that eternal warfare of monarch and monopoly against the right of the people to self-government." The people must fight for their own economic independence through the ballot, but "if the money power shall attempt to sustain its usurpation by the 'strong hand', we will meet that issue when it is forced upon us, for it is better, infinitely better that the blood should flow to the horses' bridles than our national liberties should be destroyed."⁵⁶

acceptance of the gold standard was inevitable—has been called into question by others. Friedman and Schwartz have claimed that some kind of settlement, in favor of either gold or some other sort of currency, had to be made. Gold could be held up as the single standard, but then prices had to fall into line with those of Europe. If prices were to be maintained, it had to be through inflationary currency, but "It should perhaps be noted explicitly that we do not intend to suggest that the alternative involving abandonment of the gold standard was economically undesirable. On the contrary, our own view is that it might well have been highly preferable to the generally depressed conditions of the 1890's." See Friedman and Schwartz, *Monetary History*, 111. Richard Franklin Bensei likewise points out that, while the abandonment of gold monometallism would have "hampered industrial expansion," the government's intervention in the economy would have "increased the availability of credit throughout the South and West... favorably altered the terms of trade between industry and agriculture," and brought about "a redistribution of wealth toward lower classes generally." See Richard Franklin Bensei, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 238.

⁵⁶ Fuller, "Populist Regime," 132-135.

Populists were not the only ones up in arms. The long-time senator and former cabinet member Henry Teller sent his own thoughts to Patterson's *Rocky Mountain News*. They appeared under the headline "Traitorous"—a summation of Teller's thoughts on the repeal of the act. The gold monometallist position that Cleveland hoped to force on the nation would only work for the benefit of the "financiers of England," he said. He did not describe the fight against repeal as one for the benefit of mining interests or the state's concerns, but instead explained that "IT IS A FIGHT FOR COMMERCIAL AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE, FOR PROGRESS, PROSPERITY, FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS OF 99-100 OF THE RACE [emphasis in original]." The whole of his comments depicted the debate over silver as so much more than even a struggle over currency. He defined it in terms similar to that of many Populists (if less dramatically than Davis Waite), as a struggle between those who held wealth and influence and those who merely sought to maintain their financial independence. "It is not a fight against weaklings, it is a fight against organized wealth, against those who control by their wealth administrations, the press, and in some case the pulpit, and the unthinking, ignorant mass of men who will sell their birthright for a present mess of pottage." According to Teller, the consequences of defeat could not be greater.⁵⁷

Populists, especially those in the Senate, joined the chorus of opposition to the repeal. James Kyle of South Dakota denied that the Sherman Act had anything to do with the crisis, but said that an economic crisis had already been felt by farmers for years. Only now was it gaining attention, when the livelihoods of bankers were at stake. The

⁵⁷ Henry M. Teller, "Traitorous," *Rocky Mountain News*, June 9, 1893, p. 1.

newly elected Senator Allen proved his worth early on when he held the floor for fifteen consecutive hours, over which time he refuted the conservative claims regarding intrinsic value, domestic overproduction, and the favorable balance of trade.⁵⁸

The Populists did not fight alone. Representatives and senators from throughout the West made similar expressions. Unsurprisingly, conspiracy talk abounded. A freshman Democratic senator from North Dakota, William Roach, agreed with others that “a conspiracy existed, and that it was known that agents of England were here to force this Government to issue bonds.”⁵⁹ California’s new Democratic senator, Stephen White, made similar insinuations regarding the older members of Congress and Ernest Seyd. Though the stern rebukes of Senators Hoar and Sherman made him publicly disclaim his earlier remark, he then sent a letter to Henry Teller to convince him of the story’s veracity.⁶⁰

Of course, not all proponents of the conspiracy theory or of free silver broadly were committed to the broadest of reforms. Senator William M. Stewart of Nevada accused Cleveland of “obeying the mandate of the money power and seeking to wrench from the people their rights under the constitution.”⁶¹ Stewart would go on to operate the paper *The Silver Knight-Watchman*, which he used as a platform for the remonetization

⁵⁸ Clanton, *Congressional Populism*, 52-53, 60-61.

⁵⁹ *Congressional Record*, 53rd Cong., 1st Sess., Oct. 7, 1893, p. 2260-2270.

⁶⁰ *Congressional Record*, 53rd Cong., 1st Sess., Sep. 28, 1893, p. 1870-1873; *Congressional Record*, 53rd Cong., 1st Sess., Oct. 2, 1893, p. 2004-2005. White sent Teller a letter and a news clipping which purported to demonstrate Seyd’s whereabouts at the time. See Stephen M. White to H. M. Teller, 15 October 1893, Henry M. Teller Papers (henceforth, HMT Papers), Colorado State Historical Society, Denver, Colorado, Box 1, FF 10, and Box 5, FF 68.

⁶¹ “Stewart Continues,” *Omaha World-Herald*, September 7, 1893, p. 1.

of silver. But Stewart was no radical. In Nevada, he had left the Republicans and helped form the Silver Party, but he had done so to save his own career and to subsume the Populist movement that threatened it. The party created a consensus organization that fought for free silver nationally and little else. Stewart came to work closely with Teller and other leaders of the diverse coalition that supported free silver, but he showed little interest in other reforms. He was certainly not the only advocate of silver coinage who maintained their fundamental conservatism, but it would be just as faulty to suggest that those like him were in the majority.⁶²

A Republican senator from South Dakota, Richard F. Pettigrew, had only slowly become engrossed in the effort to reestablish free silver, but his interest grew as he saw prices decline and personal suffering intensify. As he wrote to a friend, his “sympathy goes out to the people who in Dakota are trying to conquer a wilderness and win a home, and I believe the people who are living upon our prairies are entitled to consideration in preference to the interest of the monied [sic.] classes who, as a rule, are not producers of wealth.” Over twenty-five years later, near the end of his life, Pettigrew published self-laudatory accounts of his whole career in politics, in which he depicted himself as always having been a “man of the people” who fought against vested interests. In reality, it was not until Populists shook the political foundations within his own state and the currency debate took center stage nationally that Pettigrew seriously questioned the form of American economic development. He had hoped for the return of silver currency since at

⁶² Russell R. Elliott, *Servant of Power: A Political Biography of Senator William M. Stewart* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), especially 154-176.

least the late 1880s, but in the changing environment of the 1890s the currency question took on a new kind of meaning.⁶³

It was in the midst of the debate over repeal that a new leader emerged. William Jennings Bryan had first entered the House of Representatives in 1891, but in his first term he had focused more on that most traditional of Democratic concerns, the tariff. Before his second term had even begun, he had studied the money question seriously, but it was certain from the beginning which side he would take. Unlike many of the Populists and newly elected Democrats from the West, he devoted little of his speeches to discussion of any global conspiracy. Instead, he won wide respect because he demonstrated a proper understanding of what silver represented.⁶⁴

In what some considered the finest speech during the whole debate, Bryan provided both the material and moral explanation of his position. For those who demanded sound money, he said, there was no such thing. The value of both gold and silver had fluctuated wildly over the course of the last century, both in relation to each other and in their relative worth compared to the commodities they purchased. He noted the strange logic of his opponents who said that, in the midst of a crisis many attributed to the dwindling supply of money, the government should intentionally exacerbate the circumstances by removing silver. As would be his trademark, Bryan's strongest

⁶³ Kenneth Elton Hendrickson, Jr., "The Public Career of Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, 1848-1926" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1962), 167-172; Wayne Fanebust, *Echoes of November: The Life and Times of Senator R. F. Pettigrew of South Dakota* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1997), 249-252.

⁶⁴ For this and the following paragraph, see Paolo A. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 66-68, 72-73, 79-86; Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 72-73, 80-86, 97-100, 117-129; Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 26, 32, 34-40.

contentions focused on the inherent rights of the people. Cleveland had told Congress in 1885 that those who had been elected would be held accountable by the tribunal of voters; Bryan told them they must also remember that “these constituencies include not bankers, brokers, and boards of trade alone.” In reply to a congressman from Massachusetts, who suggested that “the money loaner was entitled to the advantages derived from improved machinery and inventive genius,” Bryan said “he is mistaken. The laboring man and the producer are entitled to these benefits.” American democracy was a pointless exercise if government did not express the popular will, and surely “Free government can not long survive when the thousands enjoy the wealth of the country and the millions share its poverty in common. Even now you hear among the rich an occasionally expressed contempt for popular government.” Bryan concluded by stating that “we have come to the parting of the ways.”

On one side stand the corporate interests of the nation, its money institutions, its aggregations of wealth and capital, imperious, arrogant, compassionless. They demand special legislation, favors, privileges, and immunities.... They demand that the Democratic party shall become their agent to execute their merciless decrees... On the other side stands that unnumbered throng... Work-worn and dust-begrimed, they make their sad appeal. They *hear* of *average* wealth increased on every side and *feel* the *inequality* of its distribution. They see an overproduction of everything desired because of the underproduction of the ability to buy.”⁶⁵

Bryan, like many others of his time, came to view the currency question as an aspect of the conflict between producers and predatory wealth, or between common people and powerful vested interests. While monometallists spoke as though the gold standard was

⁶⁵ *Congressional Record*, 53rd Cong., 1st Sess., Aug. 16, 1893, p. 400-411.

neutral or natural, Bryan understood money to be a creation of humankind and that the question of its form and function had a real-world impact that would not be ignored.

It was for this reason that many Populists came to view him as one of their own. The core of Populist ideology did not stem from their views of the railroad or silver or any other tangible thing. Populist thought began with the premise that the industrial economy must be made responsive to the popular will and the needs of “the people.” The debate over silver and gold hit upon a specific subset of that premise. If the current economic system created gaps in the distribution of wealth, then that system was unjust and must be changed. Though some westerners thought primarily of the boon to regional development that would come with free silver, Bryan and many other western Democrats and Republicans recognized a meaning in the issue akin to the Populist understanding of it, and by making the cause their own they set in motion the chain of events that would lead to Bryan’s nomination by three parties in the 1896 presidential race.

While in a few short years Bryan would lead a movement for reform, in 1893 Cleveland still held the upper hand. As was the case in the last Congress a majority had declared their support for free silver before the session had begun, but that was before the economy had gone into free-fall. Despite his reputation as a champion of civil service, Cleveland was also not above using patronage to get his way. Less than two weeks after Bryan’s speech, the House passed the repeal bill by the overwhelming vote of 239 to 108. Though it was a greater struggle to secure its passage in the Senate, and the President’s supporters had to fend off a free silver amendment in the last days leading up to the vote, it was passed 48 to 37 on October 30. Two-thirds of Republicans supported the bill, while the Democrats were split. Westerners almost unanimously opposed it, and section

was a more significant factor than party in settling the results. Cleveland signed the repeal bill into law on November 1. It was a masterful job of political management by Cleveland, but it also hinted at the troubles that were to come and confirmed the suspicions of those who claimed the American political system failed to represent the voting public.⁶⁶

Cleveland had pressured Congress because of what appeared to be an emergency, and he suggested that normal business could commence again after the repeal was secure. In spite of his optimism, his predictions proved false. He decided that the dwindling gold reserve was another worry, and so, without the consent of Congress, the President ordered huge bond sales—equaling over \$200 million—between early 1894 and the opening months of 1896.⁶⁷ Though the fall in stock prices ceased, economic activity remained stunted for the remainder of the year, and in fact it would not return to normal levels for the next several years. The farm and labor organizations that had grown rapidly or sprung up from the grassroots in the late 1880s and early 1890s suggested that this was already a divisive era, but the situation was only made more complex by the second worst economic crisis in American history.

The depression unleashed the pent-up discontent of the 1890s. Labor clashed with capital in a way that it had not since the 1870s, and sites in the West were not excluded. In the gold mining districts around Cripple Creek, Colorado, the struggle between owners and members of the newly organized (and politically radical) Western

⁶⁶ Williams, *Realigning America*, 33-35; J. Rogers Hillingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 17-18.

⁶⁷ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 125-127.

Federation of Miners began in late 1893 over labor's demand for uniform wages and an eight-hour day. As the confrontation wore on into the spring of 1894, some mine owners gave in to the demands while others considered the use of force. In May, with the financial backing of the owners, the El Paso County sheriff had gathered a force of 1,200 armed men to drive off the strikers. As the outbreak of violence appeared imminent, Davis Waite ordered the strikers to lay down their arms, but he also declared the sheriff's army to illegal and ordered it to be dispersed. The Governor acted for the miners in negotiations with several owners, and eventually he called in the National Guard to hold back and then disarm the deputies. With this act, the Populists gained substantial support among organized labor in the state, but even some of Waite's allies depicted the governor as unreasonably biased in favor of the miners.⁶⁸

Well before the state conventions of 1894, Waite had become quite a controversial figure in the state. His use of the militia in Cripple Creek had been the second time they were called out that year; the first time it was to help him remove from office members of the appointed Denver Fire and Police Board who fortified city hall after he notified them of his intentions. Bloodshed was averted and the board members eventually gave in, but the event made the Populists seem as irrational and dangerous as their worst critics had claimed. Waite had also called a second session of the legislature, but it had proven no more effective than the first was. Worse yet, Waite and members of his administration were again made to seem imbalanced when they tossed out wild

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Jameson, *All that Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 54-60. On the criticism of Waite, see Downing and Smith, *Tom Patterson*, 84-85.

solutions to the currency problem, such as his plan to send Colorado silver to Mexico in order to have it coined and sent back for use as currency within the state. While he also offered some practical proposals to deal with mortgages on homesteads and state operation of irrigation canals, moderates in the state were rapidly turning against a governor they considered unpredictable.⁶⁹

By the time of the state conventions, the type of fusion that Tom Patterson had sought two years earlier was a complete impossibility. Patterson (now officially a Populist) was himself so fed up with Waite that he tried to find an alternative gubernatorial candidate, but to no avail. Some Populists were uncertain about the Governor, but his labor support made him impossible to replace. Patterson and the *News* endorsed the whole of the Populist slate, with the exception of Waite. The Democratic organization had no interest in fusion with Waite at the head of the ticket, a situation that suited the Governor as well. Charles S. Thomas, Patterson's former law partner, was nominated by the Democrats, but he received little attention during the campaign. Republicans selected an obscure judge, A. W. McIntire, for the governorship, and devoted their campaign to the divisive Waite administration. Some among them went so far as to suggest that Waite's irrational behavior was responsible for the depressed local economy, not the national crisis and policies of the federal administration. "Waiteism" was the issue of the day.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ On these events in the administration of Waite, see Fuller, "Populist Regime," 201-219; Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 161-162, 173-177.

⁷⁰ Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 183-194.

In Nebraska, the most substantial development was the first attempt at statewide fusion between the Populists and Democrats. The chain of events which contributed to the union may have been initiated by a Republican. Frustrated by his party's support of the reportedly corrupt (and possible member of the nativist American Protective Association) Thomas J. Majors for governor, Edward Rosewater of the *Omaha Bee* left the convention and temporarily abandoned the GOP. The editor let it be known that he would support a Populist judge, Silas A. Holcomb, and the Populist gave him the nomination on the first ballot when they met just days later. When the Democrat's turn to nominate came, Bryan was the first to add Holcomb to the list of candidates, and he was quickly accepted by the delegates. It was the perfect year for Bryan to pull off the fusion arrangement that he had been contemplating. He had already managed to place younger silver Democrats into the key positions of the party for just such a move, and then the Republicans did him the favor of nominating a candidate who offended both the reformers Bryan sought out and the party's ethnic voters who had long been suspicious of the Populists.⁷¹

Washington state had four year terms for executive officers, and so instead of centering on a gubernatorial election the campaign there focused on legislative races and the two House seats, which were both elected at large. Still, the depression and the policies of the two old parties on the national stage provided an opening for the state's Populists. Though the main contests were for legislative seats, these representatives would have to elect the senator that the 1893 legislature had failed to select. In the 1894

⁷¹ Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 44-45; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 328; Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 256-260.

contests Populists put a greater emphasis on silver than they had in the past, but the state convention in North Yakima attempted to strike a balance between it and other planks, such as that for direct legislation. It also rejected growing talk of fusion, which may have appealed to new converts from Seattle's Western Central Labor Union. The nominations for the congressional seats went to W. P. C. Adams, an American Railway Union organizer (in the midst of that summer's ARU strike) and J. C. Van Patten, a teacher and Presbyterian minister. The anti-fusion statements by the Populists were probably necessary that year, for the state's Democrats talked of little else. For years they had been the minority party in the territory and state, and now Cleveland had destroyed the reputation of Democrats throughout the West. As noted, the Democratic courtship of the Populists was unreciprocated, with the exception of a few local and legislative tickets. In hopes of downplaying Populist advocacy of silver, state Republicans also fought amongst themselves over the silver question in their convention. Spokane lawyer and businessman George C. Turner eventually forced the gathering to accept a free silver plank, but much of the remainder of the platform was little more than a denunciation of Cleveland.⁷²

For all of the suggestions by historians that Populism was a movement born of economic decline and crisis (and thus was doomed by the return of "good times"), the outcome of the election of 1894 suggests otherwise.⁷³ Electoral results proved to be

⁷² Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 160-164; Ficken, *Washington State*, 185.

⁷³ Several authors have suggested the Populists were due to make gains in 1894, but that the Populists' own ideas or voters' logical preferences for Republican policies prevented it. For a few examples, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 100-101; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 90; Williams,

determined more by tactical factors than the general state of the economy. In Colorado, where the economy was in utter ruin, Populists were branded with the image of Waite while Democrats were burdened by the presidency of Cleveland. The Populists did garner a substantial vote from organized labor in the state, but they were defeated throughout its agricultural counties. Republicans won the election for governor and a majority in the state legislature. In Nebraska, where Populists and Democrats had fused, Republicans linked all of them with the increasingly unpopular president. The fusion candidate for governor, Silas Holcomb, did manage a narrow victory over his opponent, but the rest of the ticket fared poorly and the legislature was again in Republican hands. Washington state Populists, on the other hand, had never held power and made no statewide agreements with the other parties. As a consequence, the new party was defeated but actually made substantial gains throughout the state. Populists received over one-third of the vote, and now ranked ahead of Democrats in strength in the state.⁷⁴

The state governments put in place following the election of 1894 looked and acted very much like those that had existed before the 1890s. In Nebraska, the Republican legislature passed (over Holcomb's veto) a subsidy for the manufacture of beet sugar, something the Populists had repealed in 1891, and added a law restricting the coloring of oleomargarine—hardly a thoroughgoing response to the severe depression.⁷⁵

Realigning America, 29, 37-44

⁷⁴ Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 79-80, 361-362; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 1096-1100; Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 195-197; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 46; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 168-169; Ficken, *Washington State*, 185.

⁷⁵ *Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Fourth Session* (Omaha: Omaha Printing Co., 1895), 57-62, 318-324.

Colorado followed suit in its legislature. One of the few laws it managed to pass was one designed to increase the punishment for “train wrecking,” which now became a felony punishable by sentences ranging from ten years to life.⁷⁶ In Washington, most of the legislative session was also dominated by conservatives. A railroad regulation law was voted down, and a pointless resolution in favor of silver was passed. But one notable piece of reform legislation did slip through. John Rankin Rogers, a Populist member of the state House, authored a bill that would redistribute educational funds to districts based on the number of students in the district, essentially apportioning the money based on need rather than the wealth of the community. The bill was opposed by representatives from the wealthier urban counties, but publicity for the bill forced Republicans with rural constituencies to support it.⁷⁷

Republicans in the West showed hesitance to adopt any serious reform measure, and they had defended that action (or inaction) by suggesting that regulation or state interference would drive away capital. That does not mean that western Republicans had not observed the shifts that had taken place in regional politics, but to advocate local reform over development was counter to the doctrines they had carried with them from the beginning, and it was certainly opposed by the interests they represented. However, that did not preclude advocacy of at least one change. By 1894-95, nearly all western Republicans gave at least token support to silver, and one’s availability for high office

⁷⁶ *Laws Passed at the Tenth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1895), 252.

⁷⁷ “Capital Gossip,” *Tacoma Daily News*, January 17, 1895, p. 1; *Session Laws of the State of Washington, Session of 1895* (Olympia, WA: O. C. White, 1895), 122-124; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 174-177.

was directly related to one's advocacy of the cause. John Thurston, a prominent Nebraska Republican and railroad lawyer, had proclaimed the Republicans to be the true silver party during his campaign tour of the state in 1894. He was rewarded months later when the legislature elected him to the state's vacant U.S. Senate seat.⁷⁸ In Colorado, Populists and Democrats called attention to the flaws of one of their sitting senators. They flatly accused Edward Wolcott of being a known gambler and philanderer and, worst of all, a corporation lawyer who had shown too much preference for his friends in business. It was for those reasons that the *Rocky Mountain News* sardonically described him as the "best representative member" of his party. Despite the criticism, Wolcott was chosen by the Republican majority on the first ballot, and they did so with the sole justification that he had always been a staunch advocate of free silver.⁷⁹ Washington's bi-annual fight for the senatorship was not determined by the free silver debate, but those who were known advocates of the gold standard were considered all but hopeless. The man selected, Congressman John L. Wilson, evaded questions on the subject and may have encouraged the circulation of rumors that he favored free coinage.⁸⁰ Western Republicans did not yet appreciate the danger in the creation of a silver consensus.

⁷⁸ "Thrilling Thurston," *McCook Tribune*, October 26, 1894, p. 1; "Thurston's Speech," *Columbus Journal*, October 31, 1894, p. 3; Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 47.

⁷⁹ "Open Insult," *Rocky Mountain News*, January 17, 1895, p. 1, 5; "Senator Wolcott," *Rocky Mountain News*, January 17, 1895, p. 4; Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 78.

⁸⁰ "A Wilson Petition," *Tacoma Daily News*, January 18, 1895, p. 3; "Ankeny Is Ahead," *Tacoma Daily News*, January 23, 1895, p. 1; Ficken, *Washington State*, 185-186.

The “Battle of Standards,”1896-1897

The events of 1896 have frequently been described as leading to the end of the Populist reform movement. This has especially been the case for historians who attributed the death of Populism to fusion. They suggest that Populists—particularly new converts and those who had only a partial understanding of the party’s doctrines—were wooed by Bryan’s dramatic oratory and they fell under his spell, only to be destroyed. But fusion was not new, nor were the fusionists somehow less “Populist” than those who opposed fusion. By creating a party that could legitimately champion silver at the national level, they had changed the political landscape and forced others to incorporate it as well. Though they embraced a wide spectrum of reforms, money had been central to the agenda of the movement from the moment the farm and labor organizations had taken the first steps toward independence. Now, it appeared a majority of voters could be on their side. For the great majority of western Populists, 1896 was a year of opportunity, not a year of cataclysm.⁸¹

The growing sentiment in the West in favor of free silver had become strong enough in 1896 that, well before the party convention, Senator Teller and others began to insinuate that the Republican Party’s refusal to accept the issue that year would lead to their withdrawal from the organization. They would soon be forced to make good on that promise. The eastern wing of the party generally hoped to fight the campaign on terms

⁸¹ For several of those who have attributed the collapse of the movement to fusion, see footnote 2 above. On the importance of the monetary issue to Populism, see Postel, *Populist Vision*, 150-153; Bruce Palmer, *“Man over Money”*: *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 81-82; Robert W. Larson, *Populism in the Mountain West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 147-159 ; Bensel, *Political Economy*, 134-138; Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 7.

similar to what it had over the last decade, which meant economic policy would center upon the tariff. The man that was almost universally favored to receive the nomination, Governor William McKinley of Ohio, had made his career straddling the monetary issue while advocating (and authoring) a strong protective tariff. However, the recent developments had made the currency issue impossible to ignore. By the time of the convention, McKinley and the head of his campaign, Mark Hanna, had decided some statement in favor of gold was necessary.⁸²

The basic presumptions of many—or for most western Republicans, their worst fears—were soon realized at the Republican’s St. Louis convention. The needed majority of delegates were already committed to McKinley, and the single ballot required on the final day of the convention was a mere formality. Earlier that day, a more genuine drama was played out on the convention stage. The monetary plank called for “sound money,” and denounced “free coinage of silver, except by international agreement.” It was as close to an unequivocal statement as anyone in the party cared to offer, and Teller could not stand for it. He offered the minority report as a substitute and begged the delegates to accept it or, “I must, as an honest man, sever my connection” with the party he had helped found in the West. As he stood, tears streaming down his face, his request was rejected by the overwhelming majority. As the westerners walked out of the convention they were hooted and heckled, with Hanna openly leading the worst of it. In expectation of such a bolt, Populist leaders were on hand to consult with Teller and the others. The

⁸² Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 91, 95, 97-98.

two groups quickly decided to cooperate in their arrangements for the remainder of the campaign.⁸³

Notwithstanding the departure of the silver men, the gathering in St. Louis would be the most orderly of the three significant conventions of 1896. That of the Democrats, with the uncertainty that preceded it, conflicts that defined it, and the energy that followed it, is usually the one to receive the most attention. Bryan's status as the dark horse of the convention has only added to mystique of the event. But as the best recent scholars have emphasized, Bryan's selection was no accident and the adoption of a free silver platform was as much an inevitability as McKinley's nomination had been. The overwhelming majority of delegates from the West and South supported silver, as did substantial numbers from the Midwestern states. While the representatives of New York had been allowed to dictate the candidate in years past, their control had already been broken.⁸⁴

The field of candidates that Bryan did beat out was substantial, but most were flawed. The Colorado delegation and the Populist leaders who came to Chicago favored the nomination of Teller, but Teller's support among actual members of the convention was minimal. Former Congressman Richard Bland of Missouri was one of the favorites, but he was considered to be a rather old and uninspiring figure, and those outside of the Democratic Party viewed him as conservative on nearly every other issue. Horace Boies

⁸³ Williams, *Realigning America*, 60-63; Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 161-173.

⁸⁴ On the situation leading up to the convention and the disposition of the delegates, see Richard Franklin Bense, *Passion and Preferences: William Jennings Bryan and the 1896 Democratic National Convention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24-87.

of Iowa was another thought to be a serious contender, but his reputation did not stretch very far beyond the borders of Iowa. Likely candidates also followed tradition and abstained from participation in the convention, but Bryan was under no such obligation. Amidst the disorderliness associated with the western and southern takeover of the party, Bryan saw his opportunity.

The Nebraskan took the last place in a debate over the platform, and it was his task to provide the final response to the arguments of the gold standard delegates. While he denied that he held any sectional animosity, he rebutted the statements of the gold men who asked the delegates to consider the impact silver would have upon business. These same men had already “disturbed our business interests by your course,” and the “business man” who worked for wages or farmed had an equal right to profit from their own labor as any financier or industrialist had. The financial policies of the East had placed their own region’s benefit over that of all others. To the man who said he feared the coming of a Robespierre, he declared that “What we need is an Andrew Jackson, to stand, as Jackson stood, against the encroachments of organized wealth.” He then railed against “their policies,” attributing the previous year’s Supreme Court ruling against the income tax to men of their class and region. He attacked the national banking system and stated that it was time that “the banks ought to go out of the governing business.” He then tore apart the Republican plank that suggested “bimetallism is good, but that we cannot have it until other nations help us.” By the time he laid an imaginary crown of

thorns upon his head, Bryan had explained why the nation must strike out on its own to establish circumstances under which farmers and laborers could prosper.⁸⁵

While the speech brought a thunderous response out of the convention in Chicago and allowed Bryan to secure the Democratic nomination, it also made him the logical candidate of the Populist Party. Populist leaders had already been in communication with top Democrats, and they had let it be known that even silver advocates with a conservative streak would be rejected. Bryan's selection obviated any fear of that. He did not support government ownership of the railroads or the establishment of the subtreasury system, but he did believe that any prosperity was illusory if those in the lowest rungs of society could not profit from their labor. As much as any Populist, he believed in popular control of the economy, and for the Populists that was good enough.

From the beginning of the campaign, James Weaver, North Carolina senator Marion Butler, and other heads of the organization had agreed to a late convention with the intention of working with the disaffected members of the other parties. While some contemplated the possibility that neither party would accept free silver, and thus any fusion with the bolters could occur on Populist terms, the real possibility of a silver Democratic nominee must have occurred to some among them.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ For an interesting analysis of Bryan's use of the speech, see Bensel, *Passion and Preferences*, 222-247. For the speech, see William Jennings Bryan, *The First Battle: A Story of the Campaign of 1896* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1896), 199-206.

⁸⁶ Durden, *Climax of Populism*, 13-20; James L. Hunt, *Marion Butler and American Populism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 95-97.

In the Populist convention, the West and South divided on the best option to take.⁸⁷ Westerners wanted Bryan and held no reservations about how they accepted him. Southerners, on the other hand, were hesitant to fuse with the Democrats unconditionally. In this regard, it is difficult to define many of the key participants as representative of the “middle of the road”—as anti-fusionists had come to be known. Even before the convention, Populist leaders had conferred with Senator James K. Jones of Arkansas, Bryan’s campaign manager, about the availability of the vice-presidential selection. Bryan already had a running mate, the wealthy shipbuilder from Maine Arthur Sewall, and neither Bryan nor Jones would have him withdraw. The fact that Sewall was not popular with any group Bryan sought was apparently insignificant. Eventually, pressure from the southern wing of the party led to Bryan’s nomination and a separate vice-presidential nomination, done regardless of the Nebraskan’s approval. The anti-fusion ex-congressman from Georgia, Tom Watson, was selected as his running mate.⁸⁸

The push for a separate ticket was especially vital to those in the South who believed that fusion with the Democrats was suicidal. While a clear majority at the Populist convention demanded Bryan’s presidential nomination, southerners believed that a separate ticket would allow them to act on their own and maintain their party’s independence. Those like Butler, Weaver, Allen, and Patterson did not believe that their support of Bryan had to destroy the movement. Instead, they argued that if the

⁸⁷ It is worth repeating that the divide in the convention was sectional, not between radicals and conservatives, as some have claimed. See Durden, *Climax of Populism*, 22-31; Hunt, *Marion Butler*, 95, 100; Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 254.

⁸⁸ Durden, *Climax of Populism*, 34-42; Hunt, *Marion Butler*, 102-104, 123.

Democrats were to be treated as allies, the Populists must continue as a separate entity to “keep them honest.” Furthermore, they believed the party’s rejection of Bryan would be deadlier to the movement than fusion was.⁸⁹

It was a strange solution for what would be a unique campaign. Bryan was left with two “vices”—as Republicans liked to joke—and eventually held the nominations of the Democratic, Populist, Silver Republican, and National Silver parties. Despite the support from so many quarters, he was soon abandoned by many members of his own party. Democrats who remained committed to the gold standard (especially in the East and Midwest) formed the National Democratic Party and nominated the aging John M. Palmer for president. Their goal was not victory, but to deprive Bryan of triumph. They claimed to control several hundred thousand votes right up to the time of the election, but if this were so then most of their voters must have supported McKinley in the end.⁹⁰

In the western states Bryan’s nomination was quite popular, and fusion arrangements were made in most to capitalize upon the situation. Bryan and western Populist leaders both favored this move, Bryan tried to use his newfound influence in the West and South to encourage mutually beneficial arrangements. In Nebraska, Democrats and Populists agreed to a division of offices, and Holcomb was re-nominated for governor. Despite their anti-fusion sentiment before 1896, Washington’s Populists

⁸⁹ Durden, *Climax of Populism*, 31, 43; Hunt, *Marion Butler*, 104-106; Downing and Smith, *Tom Patterson*, 90. Allen’s remarks during the convention also showed that he did not favor, as has been commonly suggested, the total abandonment of other issues. Instead, he argued that the election of Bryan would make it more likely that such reforms as the income tax and nationalization of the railroads would eventually be adopted. See “Allen is Chairman,” *Omaha World-Herald*, July 24, 1896 p. 6. For the claim that Allen held “no qualms” about dropping every other element of the platform, see Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 426-427.

⁹⁰ Jones, *Presidential Election of 1896*, 212-229, 244-275.

reluctantly came to accept a division of offices as well. John Rankin Rogers was selected as the gubernatorial candidate, while the two U.S. House seats were divided among the Democrats and Silver Republicans.⁹¹

The situation was more complicated in Colorado, and the Mountain West generally. There, nearly the whole of the Republican Party abandoned McKinley to support free silver and Bryan. Neither Bryan nor silver, then, proved as useful there as they had elsewhere to create a fusion ticket. Though Teller and Patterson advocated unity, and it was agreed that the Silver Republicans, Democrats, and Populists alike would support the same presidential electors, it proved impossible to divide up offices satisfactorily among three parties, each of which would have considered themselves the dominant partner in the arrangement. In the final arrangements, the Democrats and Republicans fused in the state election, nominating former Democratic governor Alva Adams for the same office. Patterson's Populists were left to partner with the weak Silver Party, while Waite led his anti-fusion Populists to their own convention. The "fusion" Populists nominated Morton Bailey, while Waite was chosen by his own backers to run for governor yet again.⁹²

The Republican campaigners in the West were in a difficult position. Many had declared the necessity of free silver in the years leading up to 1896, but outside of the mining states few dared to bolt the party when it renounced the policy. In Washington, a large share of those in the Spokane region did so but they were joined by few others

⁹¹ Durden, *Climax of Populism*, 73-74, 78-81; Watkins, *History of Nebraska*, 263-264; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 205-217.

⁹² Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 209-213.

statewide, while only a smattering of local officials did so in Nebraska. Certain editors decided to follow McKinley's line and reject free silver and inflated currency. They issued statements that silver would destroy wages, drive off international investment, and bring a return to the worst of depression conditions. Businessmen of all sorts would want nothing to do with the "fifty-cent dollars" Bryan and the Populists called for. Some admitted free silver was designed to aid farmers, but declared that it amounted to class legislation and the repudiation of debt—something they characterized as "dishonorable." Others suggested that those who favored silver were really in the employ of mine owners who hoped to boost the value of their product. In this way, they painted Bryan other proponents of silver coinage as the servants of a rather unsympathetic economic interest group. While many of these remarks could be found on editorial pages, even more frequently the anti-silver statements came in the campaign supplements prepared by the national Republican campaign.⁹³

But in the West, some Republicans chose to cling to the only silver options their platform allowed. Some claimed that the problem with free silver was in the ratio of sixteen to one; others said the problem stemmed from the free coinage element, which would allow anyone to have their silver coined at the mint without limit.⁹⁴ But the most common statements focused on the fig leaf of international bimetallism. Most

⁹³ "The McKinley Letter," *Columbus Journal*, September 16, 1896; "Would not Benefit," *Islander*, October 15, 1896, p. 3; "The Mortgaged Farm," *McCook Tribune*, August 28, 1896; "The Mortgaged Farm," *Islander*, September 24, 1896; "The Money Question," *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 1, 1896; "Wheat and Silver," *Pullman Herald*, October 10, 1896, p. 4; "From Bryan's Home," *Columbus Journal*, September 30, 1896; "Playing for a Big Stake," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 17, 1896, p. 11.

⁹⁴ "Queries for Bryan," *Columbus Journal*, September 9, 1896; "Free Silver not Bimetallism," *McCook Tribune*, August 28, 1896.

considerate people would have thought such an agreement impossible, as it had been bandied about for over twenty years with no real signs of change on the horizon. One paper, the *Colorado Springs Gazette*, actually made that very point in one article, but supported Senator Edward Wolcott as he campaigned through the state preaching the necessity of an international agreement.⁹⁵ Senator John L. Wilson of Washington, who as a candidate for office had refused to even state his views of the subject, said that “I am and always have been a bimetallist,” but he had also held “serious doubts as to the ability of the United States to maintain the free coinage of silver without the cooperation of at least two other great European commercial nations.”⁹⁶ Silver proved to be a difficult issue to let go.

The western Republicans’ unwillingness to embrace the gold standard was a product of the political climate in the West. They understood as well as their opponents the appeal of reform, and if not for silver they could offer little to farmers and miners of their region. The Democrats, Populists, and breakaway Republicans, however, did not allow the claims of McKinley’s supporters to stand. Teller noted that, after the platform was unveiled, international bimetallism was “promptly repudiated by the great Republican leaders and Republican newspapers.”⁹⁷ Others noted that no eastern paper (regardless of affiliation) had taken the international bimetallism plank seriously, and

⁹⁵ “A Financial Calendar,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 27, 1896, p. 4; “Mr. Wolcott’s Great Speech,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, October 1, 1896, p. 2. For another piece in favor of international agreement, see “Real vs. Sham Bimetallism,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, August 2, 1896, p. 4.

⁹⁶ “Senator Wilson’s Views,” *Morning Olympian*, July 20, 1896, p. 2. For others on international bimetallism in the same publication, see “Bimetallism in England,” *Morning Olympian*, September 28, 1896, p. 2; “International Bimetallism,” *Morning Olympian*, October 1, 1896, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Speech, undated, HMT Papers, Box 4, FF 54.

McKinley said so little on the subject that there was no reason to believe he wanted it.⁹⁸

With no real alternatives, the straight Republicans of the West were doomed to defeat.

For westerners, the results of the election were remarkable on all counts. Reform coalitions that included the Populists swept all major offices in Nebraska and Washington, as well as Idaho, Kansas, Montana, and South Dakota, and they also won sixteen of those states' United States House seats. In Colorado, the Populist-backed congressmen John Calhoun Bell (Populist) and John Shafroth (Silver Republican) also won easily, but one of the few victories achieved without Populist aid came in the Colorado gubernatorial election. There, Democrat Alva Adams defeated the Populist candidate by over fifteen thousand votes, but only managed that by fusing with the larger half of the state's Republican Party. That the Populists—who had been forced to ally with the weak National Silver Party in the contest—still managed to gain nearly forty percent of the total was telling. As soon as the Republican-Democratic coalition broke down, as it inevitably would, Colorado's labor vote would emerge as the largest voting bloc in the state. Even if reform was stalled there, the general outlook in the West was promising.⁹⁹

Yet the overarching goal they had set out to accomplish was just beyond their reach. Bryan's whirlwind campaign through the Midwest and East is legendary, but ultimately he could not overcome both the wealth arrayed against him and certain

⁹⁸ "Mr. McKinley's Speeches," *Yakima Herald*, August 20, 1896, p. 1, reprinted from the *American* (Philadelphia), no date.

⁹⁹ For the votes, see Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 80-81, 122-123, 201-202, 349, 362-363, 495, 597-598; Edgar Eugene Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932* (1947; New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 46-53; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 1101-1104. The percentages of the vote for Bryan in three states under closer examination were: Colorado, 85%; Nebraska, 51.5%; and Washington, 55.2%.

geographic obstacles. That he did not tour the West after the campaign commenced is a telling fact; he knew he did not need to. Just as he would have expected, Bryan won every western state in which there was still a substantial Populist presence. Of the states that entered the Union after 1860, he lost only North Dakota. To these he added the states of the solid South. Outside of those regions, he had no victories. From Iowa to the Atlantic Ocean, among the heavily-populated agricultural and industrial states of the Midwest and Northeast, Republicans were the victors. The strength of the old parties and their old ideas had gone largely unchallenged there, and though Bryan drew large audiences he not could totally reshape the political balance of these states in a mere matter of weeks.¹⁰⁰

Still, the defeat of Bryan in 1896 would not be the final word on reform. He certainly indicated it was not when he titled his account of the campaign *The First Battle*. Bryan (somewhat arrogantly) viewed the fight for silver in 1896 as the opening engagement in a struggle against centralized wealth. He donated the proceeds of the book to his allies, including leaders of the Populists, in order that they might use the funds to strengthen their organizations. He did not believe that his defeat in 1896, or the fusion arrangement that had brought him so close to victory, would somehow lead to the collapse of the allied movements.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For some of the major works that have dealt with the entrenched politics of these regions, see: Ostler, *Prairie Populism*; Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970); Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Samuel McSeveney, *The Politics of Depression: Political Behavior in the Northeast, 1893-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). On Bryan's tour of the Midwest and East, see Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 161-189; Kazin, *Godly Hero*, 67-78.

¹⁰¹ Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 213-214; Koenig, *Bryan*, 259-260; Kazin, *Godly Hero*, 83-86.

In this regard, his views were shared by many in the West. The Populists did not believe that their party was on the verge of collapse in 1896. Shortly after defeat, even a southern Populist like Marion Butler could predict that in four years' time the Populists would form the core around which the forces of reform would coalesce. In fact, over the next two years western Populists would frequently express their belief that either the Democrats would collapse and a new party would be formed or that the reformers would voluntarily join the Populists. Their predictions were based on a few assumptions. First, they knew the objective of the gold Democrats of 1896 was not to form a new permanent party, but instead the separate gold ticket was designed to allow partisans to maintain their loyalty without voting for Bryan. When these powerful leaders returned to the Democratic Party, Populists believed that Bryan and those like him would be forced to either compromise on reform or abandon the organization. Populists also remembered the strife created by fusion, and a new party would streamline reform without the necessity of awkward multi-party arrangements. Like Bryan, the western Populists believed that the fight was not yet over.¹⁰²

Bryan's hopes and the hopes of other serious proponents of reform in the West rested on the continuation of successful fusion coalitions. Though southern Populists struggled to maintain their independence in the wake of the contest, the movement in the

¹⁰² On Marion Butler, see Robert F. Durden, *Climax of Populism*, 156. For just a few examples of this sentiment, see H.D.C., "Washington Letter," *Frontier County Faber* (NE), November 26, 1896; *Gibbon Reporter* (NE), June 10, 1897; "Voice of the People," *Independent* (Lincoln, NE), September 23, 1897, p. 2; "Plans for a New Party," *Fort Collins Courier* (CO), March 18, 1897, p. 6, reprinted from *Times-Herald* (Chicago), no date; *Dawn* (Ellensburg, WA), November 18, 1898; *Dawn* (Ellensburg, WA), December 23, 1898. In early 1898, former Senator William Peffer was one of those who called for the formation of a new party of Populists, Silver Republicans, and Bryanite Democrats. See "Passing of the Populist Party," *Topeka Weekly Capital*, January 7, 1898, p. 8; "People Must Unite," *Aspen Daily Times*, January 14, 1898, p. 2.

West could continue unabated.¹⁰³ Disgruntled former leaders of the party's western branch did blame their personal defeats upon fusion, but westerners had overwhelmingly favored the coalition in 1896 and showed little evidence that they intended to desert the cause. Many of the Populist parties of the western states had sprung up as independent organizations based upon local reform movements. The national organization had always acted more like a collection of state parties rather than a single group, but that is essentially what they had always been. Local victory could allow them to maintain their place. As long as they could build on their accomplishments, there was no reason that western Populists could not keep up the fight for a number of years.

When the new legislative sessions opened in 1897, pressure was on to follow through on promises. This was especially true in Nebraska and Washington, where Populists held the governorships and were the strongest parties in the legislatures. In Colorado—where Populists held only about one-third of the legislative seats, a Democrat elected without their aid held the governorship, and the laborers they represented had not yet formed an effective lobby—the prospects for reform were bleak.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ For a very brief introduction to the struggle of the southern Populists in 1896 and after, see C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (1938; Galaxy Book, 1963), 302-353; Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 100-108; Connie L. Lester, *Up from the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870-1915* (Athens, GA: University Press of Georgia, 2006), 203-207; Hunt, *Marion Butler*, 107-123.

¹⁰⁴ Nothing closely resembling the reforms advocated by the Populists, Farmers' Alliance, or even organized labor were passed in the 1897 legislature, and there is no indication that much of an attempt was even made. Shortly after its close, it was recalled into a short extra session to pass a general appropriation bill, something they had failed to do in the regular session. See *Laws Passed at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1897), 286-296. For comments on the legislature, see "The Legislative Outlook," *Denver Post*, March 5, 1897, p. 4; "In Special Session," *Colorado Springs Gazette*, April 7, 1897, p. 1.

In Washington, the session began with a divisive fight over the senatorship. Apparently fusionists were not immune to this biennial tradition. Populists had hoped to elect one of their own, but remained divided on the candidate. Governor Rogers acted as though neutral, but there is evidence he had an alternative in mind. The absence of any leader with the power or influence necessary to make a bargain left the less partisan Populists to join with Silver Republicans and Democrats. In late January they agreed to elect George C. Turner, a Silver Republican from Spokane with a solid reform record. He was a former justice of the territorial Supreme Court and one who had not been afraid to rule against railroads. In summer of 1894, during the ARU strike, he publicly advocated government ownership of the railroads and control of all “natural monopolies.” If not a true Populist, his selection was certainly not an unreasonable one. Added to that was his position as the leader of the Silver Republicans, and what appeared to be a growing association between Turner and Rogers could solidify a reform party in Washington for years to come.¹⁰⁵

The bickering and disputes that had characterized all first-term Populist legislatures plagued that of Washington in 1897, but they did actually manage a solid record in spite of themselves. The loudest complaints came from mid-roaders who were frustrated with Rogers due to his willingness to award offices to Democrats and Silver Republicans. This group then alienated the governor and the rest of the fusion coalition by promising to support the creation of a railroad commission, then backing out after

¹⁰⁵ Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 231-238. On Rogers, see “George Turner at Colfax,” *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), July 5, 1894; Claudius O. Johnson, “George Turner, Part I: The Background of a Statesman,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1943): 243-269.

their own legislation had been passed. The defeat of the commission was perceived to be a disaster, as this had been a primary reform demanded by agrarians for most of the decade. Because of his own animosity towards what he considered an unreasonable minority, Rogers ignored the flood of recommendations for a special legislative session.¹⁰⁶ Through all of the infighting, the legislature did still manage some significant accomplishments. They passed a workers' lien law, authorized a system for mine and factory inspections, put restrictions upon wage garnishment, and established a state bureau of labor. They also passed a railroad rate law, but the reductions were modest and without a railroad commission this law could be limited through judicial injunctions. Still, when compared with the paltry record of past legislatures, the 1897 session had accomplished much.¹⁰⁷

Though all parties were far more familiar with the politics of fusion than they were in other states, the twenty-fifth session of the Nebraska legislature also struggled with a signature piece of legislation, namely a bill to outlaw the free passes that railroads offered to politicians. Despite this failure, a working coalition of Populists and Democrats did manage to pass new stockyards regulations, abolish the bounty for the manufacture of beet sugar, and pass a municipal referendum law. To these they added three laws—with rather stiff penalties—designed to outlaw trusts and combinations in

¹⁰⁶ For just a sample of the correspondence pertaining to a possible extra session, see: W. B. Leitch to John R. Rogers, 15 March 1897, A. R. Titlow to John R. Rogers, 3 March 1897, T. N. Wilcox to John R. Rogers, 2 February 1897 John R. Rogers to A. J. Blethen, 19 February 1898, John R. Rogers to James B. Nesbit, 25 March 1898, John R. Rogers to Thomas Winsor, 30 March 1898, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers, Washington State Archives, Olympia.

¹⁰⁷ For an overtly negative interpretation of the legislature, see Carroll H. Woody, "Populism in Washington: A Study of the Legislature of 1897," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1930): 103-119. For better accounts, see Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 234-239; Schwantes, *Radial Heritage*, 64.

restraint of trade. A local company found to be a trust would forfeit its charter of incorporation; a business chartered out of state could find itself completely banned from operations within the borders of Nebraska. If the session of 1897 was not quite a culmination of Populist expectations, it did represent the dramatic transformation that had taken place in the politics of the state from the time of the party's foundation.¹⁰⁸

During the 1890s, the struggle for reform had been a difficult one, but grassroots organizations and a new political party created a substantial movement for change that had altered the political landscape of the region. What was once a bastion of conservative values and unchecked industrial expansion had been transformed by those who desired to make the new economy responsive to the demands of the people. The movement they created had stumbled at times, and even at this moment its long-term future appeared uncertain. But despite all previous challenges, it had continued on.

In early 1897, there were only subtle hints that something new was on the horizon. In the Nebraska legislature, a Populist in the state House named Addison Sheldon introduced a resolution in praise of the people of Cuba, who were “now struggling to free themselves from 400 years of Spanish misrule, oppression, and cruelty.” It also stated that all hoped that “the day may soon dawn when Cuba shall be free and European domination and intrigue shall be banished from American soil.” To

¹⁰⁸ For a general overview of the session, see James F. Pederson and Kenneth D. Wald, *Shall the People Rule: A History of the Democratic Party in Nebraska Politics* (Lincoln: Jacob North, Inc., 1972), 134; and Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 80-81. On the anti-trust laws (which somehow have been largely ignored), see *Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, at the Twenty-Fifth Session* (Lincoln State Journal Company, 1897), 461-462, 347-352, 352-354. The last of these laws also included a provision which explicitly prevented its use against organized labor.

that end, the resolution asked the President and Congress to take action on Cuba's behalf. It was adopted with little debate.¹⁰⁹

Such discussions were taking place throughout legislatures nationwide, just as they were with increasing frequency in the halls of Congress, in the nation's media, and undoubtedly among ordinary citizens as well.¹¹⁰ It was impossible for people like Sheldon to know at the time that the world they lived in and the country they hoped to transform would soon look very different.

¹⁰⁹ *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-fifth Regular Session* (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1897), 165-166. Addison Sheldon would go on to earn a Ph.D. and become one of the state's most prominent early historians.

¹¹⁰ A similar resolution appeared in the Washington state Senate. See *Senate Journal of the Fifth Legislature of the State of Washington* (Olympia, WA: O. C. White, 1897), 235-236.

CHAPTER IV

THE MONEY POWER AND THE WAR OF 1898

By the beginning of 1898, Spain's war to maintain its control over Cuba had been raging for three years. The president's cautious dealings with Spain had left many exasperated. Western Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans were some of the most vocal advocates of Cuban independence, but these enemies of the administration thought they understood the source of McKinley's hesitance. Frank Cannon of Utah, part of the close cohort of Silver Republicans in the U.S. Senate, outlined the western reformers' view of administration policy:

If there be any policy on the part of the United States, it is one of affiliation with this movement, by which Spain shall be enabled to saddle upon Cuba the vast mass of debt incurred in the vain endeavor to conquer that island.... Mr. President, I charge now that the purpose of the Administration in delaying action is in consonance with, if not in direct copartnership [sic] with the will of the Spanish bondholders, who are determined that before Cuba shall be allowed her freedom in the world, and before there shall be recognition of her independence by Spain, there shall be security upon that blood-stained island for the major part of the debt which has been incurred by Spain.¹

As the debate raged on over the recognition of Cuba, the possibility of intervention, or later, over how war would be waged, those opposed to the administration became increasingly certain that greater forces were at work.

Western reformers made their presence felt in the Fifty-fifth Congress. Their numbers were not inconsequential: fourteen total in the Senate and twenty-five in the House.² In the Senate, no one party held the majority and thus the power of such a

¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 9, 1898, p. 1574-1577.

² The totals amounted to four Populists, five Silver Republicans, three Democrats, and two members of Nevada's Silver Party. In the House, they numbered sixteen Populists, three Silver Republicans, five

coalition could be magnified.³ While the cooperative effort among them was certainly new and fragile, administration policies began to drive many of these westerners closer together, as they came to see the president support positions too blatantly favorable to money lenders and large corporations at the expense of the producing classes. The second session most notably began with a proposal by Lyman Gage, the Secretary of the Treasury, to “commit the country more thoroughly to the gold standard,” reigniting the smoldering embers of 1896.⁴ Suspicion of the administration only grew as the session went on, soon encompassing McKinley’s foreign policy as well. It would be inaccurate to suggest that western frustration spilled over into their interpretations of foreign affairs; Populists especially had always believed that the forces behind international finance held sway throughout the world. By 1898, however, increasing numbers of westerners came to argue that a handful of economic elites were the driving force behind American foreign policy.

Prelude to the War Debates

Before Congress became entangled in conflicts over international affairs, the administration stirred controversy with its proposals for economic reform. McKinley came to power in the midst of one of the worst economic disasters in American history,

Democrats, and one member of the Silver Party. Also from the western states, there were twelve senators and ten House members who were Republican. These are taken from *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 6th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

³ J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 120-121.

⁴ *Statement of Hon. Lyman J. Gage, Secretary of the Treasury, Before the Committee on Banking and Currency, in Explanation of the bill H.R. 5181* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1897), 5.

one that had emboldened his opponents to call for a substantive transformation of the national monetary and banking systems. His inaugural address, though touching on monetary policy, demonstrated little tolerance for the inflationary policies desired by the Populists, Democrats, and many who had recently bolted his own party. The closest he came was a reference to “international bimetallism,” the fig leaf that had been attached to his party’s platform and a measure that no serious person believed stood a chance of success. Instead, he spoke of the “embarrassment” caused by the “several forms of paper money,” then stated a desire to withdraw certain notes from circulation.⁵

McKinley hoped that his sober message of modest reorganization would play some part in restoring financial confidence, but his proposal could only have been seen with alarm by many in the West. The president’s selection of a prominent Chicago banker, Lyman Gage, as his Secretary of the Treasury had immediately stirred controversy. He was already a figure of no small infamy to westerners. Well-known enough in his own right, he was also depicted as one of the more intransigent students of the bimetallist instructor in the playful work of fiction by William Harvey, *Coin’s Financial School*—a semi-conspiratorial pamphlet that gained wide circulation in its brief run before the election of 1896.⁶ Gage added to his reputation shortly after his selection when he let his intentions be known. The most notable portions of his plan involved the retirement of the greenbacks and treasury notes as well as increasingly flexible rules pertaining to the amount of backing national banks were required to hold for their bank

⁵ *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1900), 2-16.

⁶ William H. Harvey, *Coin’s Financial School* (Chicago: Coin Publishing Company, 1894).

notes. Newspapers reported the story widely, and reaction in the western states was strongly negative. Even the staunchly Republican *Omaha Bee* called Gage's plan to remove many of the federally issued notes from circulation "unpopular and disappointing," and likely to cause a contraction of the currency.⁷

The short session after McKinley's inauguration provided no time for such proposals, but in the middle of December 1897, Gage presented his plan to members of the House Committee on Banking and Currency. His vision of the national financial system was just what Populists and silverites had dreaded. Despite the criticism heaped on his plans earlier in the year, the bill he brought with him to the House seemed even more extreme. When he outlined his objectives to the committee, Gage opened by stating that he intended to "commit the country more thoroughly to the gold standard...and thus strengthen the credit of the United States both home and abroad." Next, he called for a reduction of the Treasury's "demand liabilities, in which are included greenbacks, Treasury notes, and the incidental obligation to maintain on a parity, through interchangeability with gold...the present large volume of silver certificates and silver dollars." In total, the bill authorized the resumption of \$200,000,000 worth of currency, to be paid for in gold obtained through a massive sale of bonds. In his justification of this most controversial provision, Gage admitted that to "take in \$200,000,000 of the present demand obligations of the Government by bonds...would be, I think, in the general opinion of most men in the United States, a contraction of the currency at this time so

⁷ "Mr. Gage's Financial Views," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Feb. 2, 1897, p. 4. See also: "The Doom of the Greenback," *The Morning Times* (Washington, D.C.), Feb. 2, 1897, p. 4; "What Does He Now Say?" *Seattle Weekly Times*, Feb. 18, 1897, p. 4.

violent that nobody could endure it.” Gage believed national bank notes could be made to take their place.⁸

At nearly the same time, a self-appointed “monetary commission”—the acting representatives of a number of chambers of commerce, boards of trade, and other commercial interests—declared their support for similar measures. In fact, Gage and the commission had been in communication for quite some time, and any similarity was much more than coincidental. The commission’s report, however, also demanded that all repayment of government bonds be in gold and that the Secretary of the Treasury should have the power to issue bonds in return for gold at his own discretion. Despite the attempt to make these “reform” proposals appear as the culmination of a grassroots effort, there was little initial support for Gage’s proposals in Congress. Some congressmen who saw the bills languishing in committee took it upon themselves to make proposals of their own and reenergize the debates, but it still appeared that little could get through the thoroughly divided Fifty-fifth Congress.⁹

Again, the reaction from the West was overwhelmingly negative. While orthodox Republicans looked forward to the entrenchment of hard money, even some among them feared the consequences of these plans. Weighing the merits of Gage’s bill, a writer for the *Omaha Bee* argued that it would “strengthen the treasury in relation to demand

⁸ *Statement of Hon. Lyman J. Gage.*

⁹ *Report of the Monetary Commission of the Indianapolis Convention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1898); James Livingston, *Origins of the Federal Reserve System: Money, Class, and Corporate Capitalism, 1890-1913* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 103-111, 117-118; Murray Rothbard, *A History of Money and Banking in the United States: The Colonial Era to World War II* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2002), 189-202; “Not Unlike Mr. Gage’s Bill,” *Pullman Herald*, Jan. 8, 1898; “It Presents Its Plan,” *Nebraska Advertiser* (Nebraska City, NE), Jan. 7, 1898; “New Currency Reform Bill,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Jan. 7, 1898, p. 2.

liabilities,” but “in regard to contracting the circulation it is by no means certain that this would be avoided.”¹⁰ Of course Populists and silverites were vehemently opposed to the plan, which in their eyes would entrench the gold standard, supplement the power of the national banks—institutions they already listed among their chief enemies—and increase the government debt for the benefit of moneylenders. Suggesting the great issue of 1896 would again determine the contest in 1900, the editor of the *Yakima Herald* reminded readers of the consequences of such legislation: “the single gold standard means contraction of the currency, increase of our interest bearing debt, and yet greater reduction in the price of the products of your labor.... Hold patriotism above party and choose as becomes a free born American citizen.”¹¹

Opposition in Congress was just as fierce. William Allen, Nebraska’s Populist Senator, was certain that—if given the power to do so—the national banks would ruin the economy for their own gain. He was sure “they would be guided solely by the consideration whether they would make money by contraction or expansion, and thus the power would be placed in their hands to contract the volume of money and thereby throw millions out of employment, shrink the value of property to a point where they might buy it for one-half, or less.” All of this, he was sure, would usher in the last days of representative government. “We can not shut our eyes,” he said, “to the fact that the money power dominates every branch of the Government, while the people are deceived into believing that this is a popular government, in which they have a full share. It is a

¹⁰ “Mr. Gage’s Currency Bill,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Dec. 17, 1897, p. 4.

¹¹ “The Issue Now Clear,” *Yakima Herald*, Feb. 10, 1898, p. 2.

government by the few and for the few.” If the president had his way, and private banks were allowed to control the economy, “it would be but a comparatively short time until the masses would be practically deprived of their right to vote or to participate in the Government in any form, and we would pass from the semblance of a Republic into a complete aristocracy.” Rule by the people was under threat.¹²

Though nearly every portion of the proposed monetary reform was offensive to western reformers, they put their greatest focus on the issue of bonds. Bonds were, after all, the lynchpin of Gage’s plan. No government issued currency could be retired without bonds to maintain the federal gold reserve. Gage had also identified the repayment of bonded debt in gold as one of the primary methods that would further commit the nation to the gold standard. The Secretary pointed out that bonds were currently payable in “coin”, but an explicit commitment to repay in gold would “strengthen the United States both at home and abroad.”¹³ Fearing that the Treasury would adopt that policy regardless of legislation, Senator Teller proposed a resolution declaring that any federal bonds were potentially payable in silver, at the option of the government. Western reformers in Congress came out in force to defend Teller’s resolution and attack the system called for by the administration.¹⁴

¹² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 7, 1898, p. 418-423.

¹³ *Statement of Hon. Lyman J. Gage*, 6.

¹⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 5 1898, p. 311. Nebraska’s entire Populist House delegation entered their criticism of the administration’s bond proposal, along with defenses of greenback currency, into the Appendix of the *Congressional Record*. See *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., App. 48-50, 127-128, 130-131, and 131-135. James H. Lewis of Washington also introduced a concurrent resolution against “the retirement of greenbacks and issuance instead of gold-bearing bonds.” See *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 5, 1898, p. 1486.

When he took to the floor of the Senate in support of his own measure, Teller accosted the Republicans for claiming to support international bimetallism during the campaign of 1896 and then immediately abandoning it. True, he admitted, a commission had been sent to Europe to negotiate with the other major financial states, but he was certain that those who really controlled the executive would not allow it to be successful. “We knew that the power which created this Administration would not let it back out if it wanted to; we knew that the power which created it would control it; and we knew it would control it for the gold standard.” The same forces, he argued, were also now in command of American foreign policy. “[T]he money power is the great power that has been felt all over the world.... It is the power that allows the wickedest war that was ever carried on against men to be carried on in sight of our shores, because it is feared that to do otherwise would disturb commerce and trade.” Because of the influence of the greedy few, “the maintenance of a steady market for stocks and bonds render it impossible for the American people to assert their manhood.”¹⁵

Teller voiced a belief that was rapidly gaining favor in among some in Congress: that the president was under the spell of the money power. While the administration’s monetary reforms sputtered and died, those who had already distrusted McKinley made up their minds. Another Silver Republican, Senator Richard Pettigrew of South Dakota, told a close friend that “McKinley has absolutely gone over to the gamblers of Wall Street.” He had even come to despise him more than the previous chief executive. “Cleveland had something of a brutal tenacity and corrupt independence about him that

¹⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 7, 1898, p. 423-427.

stamped him as an individual,” he said, “but this jellyfish of a fellow has none of these qualities, which marks him as possessed of no element of manhood.”¹⁶ The commander-in-chief was seen as little more than a tool for the powerful. Westerners believed he was in no position to stand up for the oppressed, in his own country or any other.

Cuba

When he assumed the presidency, McKinley inherited the unresolved Cuban conflict. The Cuban issue had been troubling American leaders since the inception of the conflict in late 1894. While first Cleveland and then McKinley took their turns working quietly through diplomatic channels, Senators and Congressmen expressed their frustration with what they perceived to be inaction. This began in late 1895 and early 1896, at the middle point of Grover Cleveland’s second term and the beginning of the Fifty-fourth Congress. These opening discussions revealed differences of opinion, not just regarding involvement itself but also the form and purpose of engagement. While many of the resolutions that were proposed—including several within days of the session’s start—were designed to push Cleveland into taking a stand or make an admission of weakness, they are also revealing. A brief examination of two speeches in support of these resolutions hints at the divergent groups that took an interest in Cuba. One of the first resolutions was proposed by William Allen, who justified involvement by appealing to the American belief in freedom. Henry Cabot Lodge (a Massachusetts

¹⁶ Richard F. Pettigrew to F. T. Dubois, 23 January 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition, reel 20.

Republican) joined in several weeks later, but his contribution to the debate carried with it a very different message.

The Populist senator from Nebraska did not use his resolution to call for armed intervention in Cuba; no one in Congress yet expressed that kind of bellicosity. Instead, Allen argued that American foreign policy should be informed by the principles of democracy. He believed that it was “the true policy and the true doctrine of our country that wherever a people show themselves desirous of establishing a republican form of government upon any territory adjacent to us they should receive our encouragement and support.” He did not totally forswear a desire for expansion in the Caribbean, the islands of which he predicted would soon “have established a republican form of government, or they will have become integral parts of this country.” Yet he also stated that the country must not “be possessed of greed for territory, or the glories of conquest.” He believed any expansion should be based on the desires of the people of the islands, not simply the result of American might. As for Cuba, that island was not part of his estimation of American needs. His resolution called for swift recognition of “the revolutionists of Cuba, who are now honestly struggling to secure their independence of the Spanish Government, as composing an independent nation and possessing the rights thereof according to the law of nations.” Recognition would grant the Cubans certain rights, such as the right to purchase arms from a neutral power. For those who said American had no interest in their affairs, he admitted that “It may be said that they are not of our race or tongue,” but added that “these things should be matters of indifference to us. It ought to be sufficient for us to know that they belong to a race of people who are striving for liberty. They have a desire to abandon the galling yoke of the King and establish a

form of government that will be a blessing to them and their posterity through the ages to come, and we should give them such assistance as may be within our power.” For Allen, American foreign policy should mix national interest with the promotion of human liberty.¹⁷

The marked differences between Allen’s speech and that which Lodge would deliver in February, 1896, were quite substantial. For the senator from Massachusetts, America could not be just a dispassionate observer of events in Cuba. While he understood that the Cuban fight for freedom had gained American sympathies, he also reminded listeners that “in the condition of that island and in its future are involved large and most serious interests of the United States.” Referring to the recent investments in Cuban sugar production, he noted that “Our immediate pecuniary interests in the island are very great,” but the plantations and refineries had been destroyed or threatened. Furthermore, a “Free Cuba would mean a great market to the United States.” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, were strategic concerns. “The great island lies there across the Gulf of Mexico. She commands the Gulf... She lies right athwart the line which leads to the Nicaragua Canal. Cuba in our hands or in friendly hands, in the hands of its own people, attached to us by ties of interest and gratitude, is a bulwark to the commerce, to the safety, and to the peace of the United States.”¹⁸

The rest of Lodge’s speech lauded the efforts of the Cuban revolutionaries and—with even greater force—condemned Spanish brutality. While a portion of this attack

¹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 54th Cong., 1st Sess., Dec. 3, 1895, p. 25, Dec. 4, 1895, p. 36-37.

¹⁸ This paragraph and the following are based upon H. Lodge’s speech in *Congressional Record*, 54th Cong., 1st Sess., Feb. 20, 1896, p. 1971-1972.

was leveled at Spanish actions in Cuba, Lodge actually devoted far more of his speech to the long history of confrontation between Spain and various representatives of enlightened Protestant rationalism. In no insubstantial way, Lodge characterized the difference between Spain and the United States as a clash of civilizations. “If that for which the Spanish Empire has stood since the days of Charles V is right,” he said, “then everything for which the United States stands and has always stood is wrong. If the principles that we stand for are right, then the principles of which Spain has been the great exponent in history are utterly wrong.” Digging deeper into the history of conflict, he added that “The great English-speaking people who settled here and who largely outnumber all others are the descendants of the men who stood with Drake and with Hawkins, of that small band of English Protestant seamen who curbed the power of Spain in the days of her greatest authority.” “[S]uch are the races which have done most to settle and build up the United States” as a bulwark of liberty “against the power and bigotry of Spain.” Though like Allen he did not call for war, it would have seemed the logical result of the legacy of conflict that he highlighted.

The Nebraska Populist and Massachusetts Republican were technically on the same side of the issue; both wanted greater action on the part of Cleveland, and neither saw strict neutrality as acceptable. Both also did believe it was time for America to develop a more assertive foreign policy. But beyond such a broad-brush depiction, there remained substantive differences in the two perspectives. Allen’s emphasis was on an American foreign policy that encouraged the spread of democratic values. Lodge stressed the nation’s economic and strategic concerns. Allen noted the supposed cultural and racial differences between (presumably white) Americans and the Cuban

revolutionaries, yet he looked past that and encouraged camaraderie based on the shared value of freedom. Lodge focused on the Spanish and what he saw as a history of cruelty and differences that made them natural enemies of America. For the Populist, America was an example for the rest of the world to emulate. For the Republican, American greatness was tied to its ability to defend its interests and project power.

As they voiced the call to action, both Allen and Lodge were only echoing growing public sentiment. Shortly after the outbreak of war in Cuba, the major media outlets began covering the conflict in Cuba with an unusual ardor, and public speakers and reformers of all stripes soon joined the fray as well.¹⁹ While typical accounts have covered the Pulitzer-Hearst rivalry in New York, newspaper coverage was just as thorough in the West as it was anywhere else in America. Just months after the beginning of the revolution in early 1895, even the papers of small western towns began to cover the drama in the Caribbean. The newspapers of the state of Colorado can be used to provide a ready example. The *Daily Camera* of Boulder first mentioned the Cuban revolution in late February of 1895—just two days after the beginning of hostilities on the island.²⁰ Dailies such as Leadville's *Herald Democrat* and *Evening Chronicle* both began by February 27, and smaller weeklies like the *Castle Rock Journal*

¹⁹ The media has frequently gained a great deal of attention for its role in shaping public sentiment leading up American intervention. For two classic accounts, see: Joseph E. Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press (1895-1898)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); and George W. Auxier, "Middle Western Newspapers and the Spanish American War, 1895-1898," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 26, no. 4 (1940): 523-534.

²⁰ "Revolution Now in Cuba," *The Daily Camera* (Boulder, CO), Feb. 26, 1895, p. 1; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 43.

and *Silver Cliff Rustler* provided their first coverage by March 6.²¹ No one in the West was so provincial that they could have avoided the story for long, even more so in the coming months as the plot became all the more dramatic and tragic.

Even from a very early point, the coverage of the conflict in Cuba thoroughly depicted Spanish savagery. In late 1895, under the headline “The Cruel Spaniard,” the *Herald Democrat* of Leadville, Colorado, reported that one Spanish captain had ordered his company to massacre 100 wounded insurgents. The author added bloody details, informing readers that “He refused to allow them to be shot, but made his soldiers chop up the victims with swords.”²² A similar story in a Nebraska paper, the *Petersburg Index*, reported the Spanish soldiers boasting “that they had sent eighteen rebel sympathizers to meet their fate and showing their bloody arms as proof of their butchery.”²³

Just one year into the conflict, the American press found a new personification of Spanish brutality in the form of the newly assigned military governor of Cuba, General Valeriano Weyler.²⁴ His name was soon attached to every story of atrocities. In its headlines, the *Aspen Daily Times* followed the mode of the day by giving the general the sobriquet “Weyler the Butcher” for his massacre of captured rebels.²⁵ This charge was repeated in a Nebraska weekly, the *Madison Chronicle*, under the title “It Is Weyler’s

²¹ *Herald Democrat*, (Leadville, CO), Feb. 27, 1895, p. 1; *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle* (CO), Feb. 27, 1895, p. 2; *Castle Rock Journal* (CO), Mar. 6, 1895, p. 3; *Silver Cliff Rustler* (CO), Mar. 6, 1895, p. 3.

²² “The Cruel Spaniard,” *Herald Democrat* (Leadville, CO), Aug. 24, 1895, p. 1.

²³ “Butcheries in Cuba,” *Petersburg Index* (NE), Apr. 9, 1896.

²⁴ On Weyler’s appointment, see Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*, 53-54.

²⁵ “Weyler the Butcher,” *Aspen Daily Times* (CO), Sep. 20, 1896.

Way of Discharging Prisoners.”²⁶ By late 1897, bloody outrages of any kind were so easily attributable to Weyler that, when the New York *World* published an article claiming that he was responsible for over 400,000 Cuban deaths (out of a population of 1.5 million), the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* found it creditable enough to reprint it.²⁷

The Spanish, and Weyler in particular, were especially accused of attacking women. One account in a Colorado paper claimed that a girl of fifteen was publicly stripped by an officer and paraded in front of soldiers “at the point of a bayonet.”²⁸ The *Madison Chronicle* used the alliterative headline “Weyler Wars with Women” to disparage the abusive Spanish, who were accused of imprisoning Cuban mothers “with their babies in their arms” before sending them to a “house of ill repute, for degraded women.”²⁹ One Washington state publication added that “Weyler says that women are harder to subdue than men, and that if he had his way would kill them all first and try them afterward.”³⁰ These stories exhibited the increasingly common view of the “barbarous” Spaniards and, as has been suggested elsewhere, served as further justification for intervention.³¹

²⁶ “It Is Weyler’s Way of Discharging Prisoners,” *Madison Chronicle* (NE), Oct. 7, 1897.

²⁷ “Million Lives,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle* (WA), Nov. 29, 1897, p. 7. On the population of Cuba, see *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1900), 72. This report also estimates that perhaps 200,000 Cubans died in the whole of the conflict.

²⁸ “Weyler’s Depravity,” *Herald Democrat* (Leadville, CO), Jun. 15, 1896, p. 2.

²⁹ “Weyler Wars with Women,” *Madison Chronicle*, Mar. 25, 1897.

³⁰ “Events of the Day,” *The Islander* (Friday Harbor, WA), Mar. 18, 1897, p. 1.

³¹ Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), especially 55-61.

Not all called for action, but even those local papers that described the war in Cuba as none of America's concern shared the sense of disgust with Spain's handling of the conflict. As just one example, during the first several years of the war the conservative *Omaha Daily Bee* did not publish editorials supportive of any form of American involvement. Yet the same pages of that very paper contained several condemnations of Weyler's campaign in no uncertain terms. "It would be a wise thing on the part of the Spanish government to recall Weyler," one wrote. "The world knows that he was selected to replace Campos [the previous military governor] because of his possession of qualities that were expected to inspire terror among the insurgents. It was not his superior military ability that caused him to be preferred, but his capacity for prosecuting a savage and brutal warfare."³² In another piece, a writer attacked "Weyler's cruelty and brutality," and claimed that this inhumanity was causing a universal "feeling of resentment toward a civilized government which permits such a state of affairs."³³ Though there was no demand for recognition or intervention, the editor soon found it too difficult to urge restraint.

Of course, the press has often been given a prominent role in histories of the war. Most frequently, the American response to events in Cuba has been classed by academics into one of three categories: as a xenophobic reaction against Catholic, monarchical Spain; as parochial excitement whipped to a frenzy by the yellow press; or as an

³² "General Weyler's Denial," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Mar. 5, 1896, p. 4.

³³ "Spanish Policy to Be Maintained," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Jun. 8, 1897, p. 4.

opportunity taken in order to exert national power.³⁴ The media, even when not depicted as the culprit, has been seen as representative of all of those themes. Yet it should also be kept in mind that real atrocities were happening in Cuba, and there was nearly as much truth in the accounts as exaggeration. One recent historian has pointed out that Spain's reconcentrado policy was responsible for the death of at least 100,000 people, and he considers estimates of 150,000 or more—one-tenth the island's population—to be closest to the full truth.³⁵

One reason historians have likely desired to explain the outpouring of sympathy for the Cubans pertains to the partisan nature of the reaction. These expressions had appeared on a small scale before the contest of 1896, but they accelerated rapidly following the election of McKinley. This was just as apparent in the local as the national media, and a cleavage appeared that divided many along the same lines they had assumed during the "battle of standards." A turn in the war itself may have had something to do with the growing intensity of media commentary. It was only in 1896 that the policy of

³⁴ For those who contend that xenophobia and pent-up frustrations led to war, see: Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Random House, 1955), 88-93; Hofstadter, "Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny," in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (1952; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 145-187. The best-known of the stereotyped accounts of the media is Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis*, as cited above. Among those who argue that the war was to strengthen American economic power or international standing, see Walter LaFeber, *New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1910* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 400-406; William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969), 408-453; Thomas Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003). Ernest May seems to take a position between the first and the last of these categories, or, perhaps more accurately, in partial agreement with both. See Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (1961; New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973).

³⁵ John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 193-224. For an account that describes the media as somewhat more level-headed than it has stereotypically been depicted, see Auxier, "Middle Western Newspapers," 523-534.

“reconcentration” had begun at all, and it intensified in 1897.³⁶ Still, both presidents received blame. Cleveland had taken a measured approach to Cuba and McKinley adopted a similar method when he assumed the presidency, but increasingly in the popular view this now amounted to inaction and callous disregard for the plight of a suffering people. As they sought to explain the apparent indifference of the two administrations, western reformers came to attribute this timidity to vested economic interests.

The most moderate of the Bryanites found fault with those they felt put commerce above all else and simply accused their rivals of possessing improper priorities. The *Aspen Daily Times*, for example, censured the president for refusing to do more to protect Americans whom the Spanish had imprisoned in Cuba. It attributed dithering tendencies of the McKinley administration to “conservative business interests which have dominated bygone administrations” which had “developed an incredible degree of cowardice in the department of state.”³⁷ Editors of the *Omaha-World Herald*, an ideologically temperate Democratic paper run by a close Bryan ally, acted in much the same way. By May of 1897, they began excoriating the Republicans for ignoring the plank of their party’s 1896 platform, which had vowed more forceful action in favor of the Cubans. “Instead of keeping its promises the republican party is prolonging the ‘cruelty and oppression’ of the Spanish government, and its leaders are denouncing as ‘jingoese’ the men who would do for Cuba what France did for the colonies.” This shift toward caution was brought

³⁶ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 193.

³⁷ “A National Disgrace,” *Aspen Daily Times*, Apr. 7, 1897, p. 2.

about by “cowardly leaders who are brave in the face of trembling and cowering humanity and terror stricken in the face of Wall Street influence.”³⁸ In a later piece, the editor attacked a conservative paper for supporting Secretary Gage’s assessment that talk of war “would quickly drain the treasury of its gold” and, worse yet, it could even embolden the supporters of the free coinage of silver. The *World-Herald* writer noted that this was an example of “commercialism once more demanding that it be favored at the expense of justice and humanity.” It was callous to support the “oppression of patriots striving for liberty in order to maintain the gold reserve.”³⁹ While the attribution of inaction to greed was harsh enough, the comments of moderates paled in comparison to the statements of their more radical colleagues.

Some bellicose reformers began pointing to the war in Cuba at a very early date, and they sometimes depicted the rebellion there as a conflict with the same great power that they faced in America. William Hope Harvey laid out the global reach of predatory finance in one speech he delivered in 1895. The man popularly known as “Coin” Harvey opened his speech by telling the audience that a growing awareness of the immoral structure of finance was about to transform the country and the world. “Hope, comfort, and relief are coming. Manhood in this country is again going to be revived. We are going to force this country by the shere [sic] influence of intelligence to cease its worship of property and money as of greater value than humanity.” This movement was not only national, but global. “To-day liberty is appealing to us from all over the world. Cuba is

³⁸ “Cuba and the Republican Platform,” *Omaha World-Herald*, May 21, 1897, p. 4.

³⁹ *Omaha World-Herald*, May 27, 1897, p. 4.

to-day striking for liberty against the oppressor, Spain.... It is to liberate those people, it is to end their oppression that comes with your money power, that the liberty-loving people of Cuba are to-day striking for liberty.” He also believed that the United States should have already recognized the Cuban revolutionaries, and by refusing to do so, “The president of the United States, the willing implement of the money power and tyranny and oppression, has given every assistance to Spain.” According to Harvey’s characterization of the money power, “The tail of that serpent rests in Egypt and India, its body in Europe, and its head is raised in this country.” Essentially, that form of colonialism was a product of the financial and political power wielded by an elite clique and, just as vitally, the United States was in much the same position as other parts of the global periphery. Near his conclusion, he declared that “We need a second declaration of independence in the United States.”⁴⁰ In their attempt to liberate themselves from the political and economic domination of Europe, the Cubans were only doing what America should have already done.

Few others developed such an elaborate picture of how the revolution in Cuba represented the fight against economic domination, but others did see presidential indifference as evidence of the influence of the money power. The editor of Washington state’s *Aberdeen Herald* used it to remind readers of the executive’s real priorities:

Patriots at our very doors may be massacred in cold blood, Liberty and Freedom may plead in vain for recognition, the shrieks of murdered women and children may not move the hearts of the powers at Washington, but all this is being stored up in the memory of the American people who are not wedded to the worship of Mammon and will be brought forth and used in crushing rebuke to those who are,

⁴⁰ “Said by Mr. Harvey,” *Pagosa Springs News* (CO), Sep. 6, 1895, p. 3.

now in the great hour of need, unmoved by the slaughter in the fair island of Cuba, so say nothing of the want and misery in their own land.

Could Americans still recognize right, or “will the next four years more firmly fix their fetters and subjugate them to the money power?”⁴¹ In a later article, the same editor lambasted McKinley for his supposed compassion while he apparently did nothing. “His intentions towards Cuba and its gallant patriots are hidden in doubt and obscurity,” he wrote. “Mr. McKinley is in full sympathy with the Cubans, acknowledges the atrocities committed in the name of war, also the injustice of Spain towards American citizens, depicts the whole thing in a chapter of horrors, and then meekly bows to the money power and says ‘hands off.’”⁴²

The employment of the money power conspiracy to explain American inaction was not limited to Washington state. Colorado newspapers abounded with editorials to that effect throughout 1896 and 1897. The *Aspen Tribune* claimed that “Public sentiment in this country is in favor of recognizing Cuba as an independent republic. This sentiment is strongly represented in congress, but the administration is representing the money power, which isn’t patriotic, and the money power always wins.”⁴³ A few months later, the *Ouray Herald* reminded readers of the broken promises of the Republican president. “The great party platforms declared for Cuba. Bloody deeds indescribable in horrid cruelty have been of daily, hourly occurrence [sic] for two years. McKinley knows it; the money power knows it. The former may be in sympathy with the wishes of the

⁴¹ *Aberdeen Herald*, Feb. 11, 1897, p. 1.

⁴² *Aberdeen Herald*, Dec. 23, 1897, p. 1.

⁴³ *Aspen Tribune*, Dec. 22, 1896, p. 2.

masses but his Cuban policy thus far allies him with the money power which opposes intervention and consequent, perhaps, trouble with Spain.”⁴⁴ Worse yet, suggested the *Silverton Standard*, the tendency of that power to strangle American manhood had forestalled any national action. “The sympathy of American manhood is with her [Cuba] in her struggle, but the hand of that arch enemy of liberty, goldocracy is upon the throat of American manhood, and it is powerless to act.” The author ended by stating that “The Cuban patriots will pass through fire and blood to freedom from Spanish tyranny long before the boasted free American will shake off the degraded manacles doubly riveted upon his limbs by the trusts, combines and aggregated capital of his country.”⁴⁵ The Cubans were men worthy of support because of their struggle for independence, and just as much they served as an example that struggling American men should emulate.

This talk of the money power’s influence on American action spread in ways that may have been unexpected. The general American public was not alone in its growing frustration with their presidents. The Cuban Junta, operating out of New York, helped spread the message of the revolutionaries throughout the United States, but its members may well have been responding to the American media in late 1897, when the American secretary of the Junta issued a letter to McKinley and made the contents available to the press. The Junta’s message presented a series of statements that explained how the United States had thus far acted to thwart the revolution just off the coast of Florida. Among other things, they claimed that “Without the indirect aid given by this

⁴⁴ *Ouray Herald* (CO), May 17, 1897, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Silverton Standard* (CO), Apr. 3, 1897, p. 10, reprinted from *Durango Wage Earner*, date unknown.

government to Spain,” especially through such means as the American Coast Guard’s anti-filibustering patrols, “the patriots would be further advanced in their struggle.” More damningly, the Junta declared that “A majority of the people of this country desire to see a free and independent Cuban republic. An opposing factor of great force is the money power.” The secretary elaborated, stating “that a majority of our people believe that the assistance of our Government till now has been given to Spain and withheld from the republic on account of the influence that emanates from great financial interests.”⁴⁶ When they adopted the language used by those reform advocates who were uniting behind the cause of Cuban freedom, the Junta subsequently reinforced the economic analysis that these reformers were keen to embrace.

By the opening of the second session of the Fifty-fifth Congress, western reformers had become more committed than ever to recognize the Cuban republic. Both before and following the destruction of the *Maine*, nearly all the references to Cuba in Congress expressed horror at the suffering taking place on that island. Allen told those in the Senate “that since the opening of hostilities between the Republic of Cuba and the Spanish forces in that island 300,000 pacificos have died by starvation and disease generated and directly traceable to the lack of sufficient food and sanitary conditions.” He had been informed that “it was the custom of the Spanish Government to herd hundreds of families together in sheds and exposed positions, without any sanitary conditions whatever, starving them until disease as a result of their starvation

⁴⁶ “The President and Cuba,” *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1897. The patrols to stop filibustering expeditions from the U.S. to Cuba had been an ongoing operation since the Cleveland administration. The patrols gained a tremendous amount of negative publicity for the government, but their effectiveness is a matter of some debate. See Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 82-86; Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*, 114-115.

intervenes.”⁴⁷ While there was undoubtedly quite a lot of truth in his statements, it is useful to note the extent to which the speeches of congressional leaders imitated the newspaper headlines of the day. This tendency knew no party. A Republican Senator from Illinois, William Mason, declared in February that “500,000 persons have died in Cuba” in just the last year. When a colleague informed him that such a number amounted to one-third the population of Cuba, Mason stood by it, but did meekly admit that he gleaned the entire story from a newspaper.⁴⁸

One of the primary goals of several of the agitators in Congress was to gain recognition for Cuban belligerency, and thus allow the people of the island to fight for their freedoms with the protections offered by international law. Many noted that Spain was able to purchase war materiel in the United States, but for the Cubans to openly do so was a violation of law. This legal matter caused the Cubans much trouble, and the cost of smuggling and from the loss of impounded contraband had nearly bankrupted the cash-starved rebels. “Every rifle which a Cuban soldier carries has cost the Cuban patriots \$200 before it is put in the field,” claimed Frank Cannon. “A declaration of belligerency at any time since the war began would have brought it to a speedy conclusion, and would now absolutely terminate the attempt of Spain to hold possession of Cuba.”⁴⁹ Curtis Castle was equally frustrated. “Instead of saying to brutal, pagan Spain, ‘This butchery of innocents shall cease; this selling of maidens to satiate Spanish lust is the act of

⁴⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 8, 1898, p. 1533-1534.

⁴⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 9, 1898, p. 1578-1585.

⁴⁹ Cannon’s resolution can be seen in *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 8, 1898, p. 1534; see his remarks in *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 9, 1898, p. 1574-1577.

devils”... instead of taking a noble, manly stand for truth and virtue, and justice, we have fawned at the feet of this medieval devil.” Rather than aiding the rebels, “We have kept our fast cruisers and men-of-war on guard from Marblehead to Key West to seize any chance cargo of arms purchased by the pittances contributed by Cuban exiles.”⁵⁰ Senator William Stewart of Nevada argued that “No one questions but that Cuba would have acquired her freedom if she could have had the same privileges in our ports to purchase supplies that Spain had.”⁵¹ Granting belligerency rights to the Cubans would have been the most minimal form of recognition, but some were sure that even this limited assistance would prove enough to turn the tide of battle.

From the very beginning of the session Allen had wanted to push for more, but the president was hesitant to follow up on earlier Republican promises. In his message to Congress in December of 1897, McKinley stated that “I regard the recognition of the belligerency of the Cuban insurgents as now unwise and therefore inadmissible.” In response, the Populist senator called this “a great disappointment to members of the Republican party throughout the United States,” reminding all present of the assertive proclamations made in their platform of 1896. Allen said he personally “would not be content or satisfied with a simple acknowledgment of the belligerent rights of the people of that island, but I would demand absolute and unconditional political liberty and a recognition of the government they themselves have formed and to whose sovereignty they owe allegiance.” Allen was certain of the justice of the Cuban struggle, and he

⁵⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 19, 1898, p. 763-764.

⁵¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 20, 1898, p. 4102-4104.

needed to explain why the administration would not act. As he stated in a speech in early December:

[U]nfortunately for the advancement and elevation of the human race and for the glory of our country, we have entered an era of cold and merciless commercialism that freezes the blood of patriotism in its veins and that is willing to sacrifice human rights, the honor of women, and the lives of children, if need be, that the course of business may not be checked...If I should be asked what I mean by this expression, I would answer without hesitation that the owners of Spanish bonds in this country...and the carrying trade and the commercial interests of the world ... have joined to prevent Cuban recognition, and their influence is sufficiently powerful in official circles to prevent anything further being done in the interest of those unfortunate people.⁵²

He was now sure that profit seekers had stayed the President's hand. Other westerners would come to adopt similar language.

Allen's talk of Spanish bonds would not have surprised western or southern advocates of reform.⁵³ Even conservative newspapers like the *Omaha Bee* had been reporting on the financial standing of special Spanish bonds that were backed by revenues from Cuba since shortly after the war began on the island.⁵⁴ A report by the *New York Times* in early 1898 confirmed the importance of these bonds to Spain, and further predicted that the war in Cuba would end as long as Spain could guarantee repayment—perhaps with American backing.⁵⁵ It should be pointed out here that when Allen attacked those who he believed were protecting the value of these Cuban bonds, he

⁵² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Dec. 8, 1897, p. 39-40.

⁵³ For one of the few secondary sources that noted the importance of Spain's bonds (if only in passing), see Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1902*, vol. I (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 254-255.

⁵⁴ "Progress of Cuba's Rebellion," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Jul. 2, 1895, p. 1.

⁵⁵ "Prediction of Peace," *New York Times*, Apr. 1, 1898.

avoided any overtly conspiratorial language. Yet when one considers the extent to which bonds played a central role in the conspiratorial writing of Sarah Emery—let alone in Gordon Clark’s *Shylock: As Banker, Bondholder, Corruptionist, Conspirator*—he may not have needed to.⁵⁶ When he suggested that those indifferent to the freedom of Cuba were doing so at the behest of bondholders, many Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans knew that they faced their old enemies on yet another front.

Following Allen’s lead, two Populists in the House attacked the president’s policy, but this time they put a clearer emphasis on a single enemy. Congressman Jerry Simpson of Kansas connected the hesitancy of the current administration with that of its predecessor and, ultimately, to the financiers. Why, he asked, had Cleveland been so unwilling to acknowledge Cuban belligerency? Answering his own query, he stated “Simply because Mr. Cleveland and his Administration and his Cabinet were the agents... of the bond-holding interests of the country, and the \$400,000,000 of bonds that Spain has issued to carry on the Cuban war were the one great factor... It is my opinion then, and is now, that the Republican party will follow the same line of action.”⁵⁷ Curtis Castle of California went so far as to describe the administration as little more than a puppet government: “Rothschild and his American agents, Belmont, Morgan, & Co., hold \$200,000,000 in Spanish bonds.... Rothschild controls Morgan, Morgan controls Hanna, and Hanna controls McKinley, the Supreme Court, the Senate, and the House of

⁵⁶ Sarah E. V. Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies Which Have Enslaved the American People* (1887; Lansing Michigan: Robert Smith & Co., 1894); Gordon Clark, *Shylock: As Banker, Bondholder, Corruptionist, Conspirator* (Washington, DC: American Bimetallic League, 1894).

⁵⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 20, 1898, p. 802-804.

Representatives. Hanna is America and America is Hanna.”⁵⁸ Simpson and Castle honed in on just one element mentioned in Allen’s speech: the Spanish bonds, sold to facilitate the war in Cuba and backed by revenues collected by Spain from that island. It was claimed that Cuban independence would void the bonds, potentially ruining some investors.⁵⁹

The story picked up momentum in the following months. Frank Cannon made his speech on the subject in early February, the day after he proposed a resolution granting belligerency to Cuba (with a rider attached that likely would have led to recognized independence). At the same time, publications sympathetic to the allies of William Jennings Bryan ran articles on the subject with increasing frequency.⁶⁰ While conservatives did not accept the conspiratorial narrative, even some among them questioned the basis of the administration’s hesitancy. One of the most ardent supporters of the administration, Senator John Thurston of Nebraska—the man who had chaired the 1896 Republican Party convention—admitted that he too was sure that “against the intervention of the United States in this holy cause there is but one voice of dissent; that voice is the voice of the money changers.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 19, 1898, p. 763-764.

⁵⁹ Ernest May also noted the bonds and reactions of the bondholders, but they are almost mentioned in passing and little reference to any perceived significance by Americans. See *Imperial Democracy*, 119, 123.

⁶⁰ On the increasing volume of stories on Spanish bonds, see Paul S. Holbo, “The Convergence of Moods and the Cuban-Bond ‘Conspiracy’ of 1898,” *Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (1968): 58-68. Frank Cannon claimed to have read the story in a newspaper that usually had a pro-administration, anti-Cuban position. For the resolution, see *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 8, 1898, p. 1543; for the remarks, see *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 9, 1898, p. 1574-1577.

⁶¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Mar. 24, 1898, p. 3162-3165; H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 210.

A few took the bond conspiracy rumor to an even greater extreme. James Hamilton Lewis, Washington's flamboyant Democratic congressman, decried the "flock of these vultures wheeling around the head of the President." He had heard that a collection of powerful bankers had applied pressure on McKinley, seeking to take advantage of "the weakness of an emergency and now demand that the honorable President of the United States shall sell the liberties of the Island of Cuba to them for \$200,000,000 and allow these men a mortgage upon the tax facilities of Cuba." If he refused, according to Lewis, they would call back their loans from the government and cripple it before it could act against Spain.⁶²

The rumor that bondholders might purchase Cuba maintained some strength right up to America's entry into the war. Senator George Turner of Washington quoted a telegram he received from a number of officials in his home state: "Our people urge recognition [of the] Cuban Republic. No recognition, no intervention. Stand by Democratic resolutions against bondholders' intervention." Allen was likewise suspicious of the involvement of bankers and bondholders. In the last days before the outbreak of war, Allen again proposed a resolution to recognize the independent government of Cuba. "I have myself not the slightest doubt that the Island of Cuba is to pass into the hands of a syndicate of financial cormorants, financial buzzards, financial vultures, unless the United States takes prompt steps to check that conspiracy."⁶³

⁶² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Mar. 31, 1898, p. 3433-3434.

⁶³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 19, 1898, p. 4069.

Allen did not invent such a story out of nothing. Rumors that Cuba's freedom was to be purchased by an independent syndicate had circulated throughout 1897 and into 1898, and evidence suggests that several bankers did propose such a plan.⁶⁴ As far as Cuba was concerned, the speculation surrounding the island's fate was intense over the three years of conflict, and in no way was this limited to Populists. For example, in June of 1897 the *Omaha Bee* reported that the sugar trust was considering the purchase of Cuba, financed through a \$100,000,000 bond scheme to be backed by the American government.⁶⁵ In 1896, the conservative New York Democrat Bourke Cockran recommended that Cubans purchase their own freedom from Spain, again with the United States backing their bonds.⁶⁶ Seemingly wild schemes abounded, and so looking back it is difficult to separate the totally irrational from the simply inaccurate.

Following the destruction of the battleship *Maine* on the night of February 15, the restless voices in Congress only grew louder. Most suggested that the destruction was the work of a Spanish mine, but nearly all concluded that Spain was at fault regardless. Washington's Silver Republican senator, George Turner, declared that it did not matter "whether the hand that exploded the mine was that of a duly accredited and authorized agent of the Government of Spain or whether it was that of a maddened and lawless fanatic.... The hand that intended to explode that mine in some well-understood contingency was the hand of Spain, and it is immaterial whose was the hand that sent the

⁶⁴ Historian Philip Foner stated that members of the Cuban *Junta* really were negotiating with a syndicate of major American bankers to secure the purchase of Cuban independence. See Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 220-222.

⁶⁵ "New Plan of Sugar Trust," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Jun. 22, 1897, p. 5.

⁶⁶ "Cockran for Cuba's Liberty," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Nov. 28, 1896, p. 1.

electric spark on its fateful mission of death and destruction.”⁶⁷ Westerners continued to voice fears that McKinley would not act, and there was fear that even justice for the dead would be overlooked to keep business interests satisfied. In the House, James Hamilton Lewis stated that it was not only “appropriate but most onerous upon us that we do something to instill a patriotism into the youth of this country,” after hearing that a young banker had sent “a letter to the President of the United States... calling upon him for an answer as to ‘why should the mere loss of 250 lives be of consequence enough for him to unsettle all the stable values of this country by irritating Spain to conflict.’”⁶⁸ The fallen dead of the *Maine* had to be avenged, commercialism be damned.

By the time the navy’s official *Maine* inquiry report was released in late March, the patience of Republicans had reached its end as well. The findings of the report suggested that, indeed, the cause of the disaster had been an external mine, though it blamed no parties specifically. Western Republicans joined the rapidly growing number of their fellow partisans in expressing their rage. Senator George Perkins of California was positive that “The Maine was blown up from the outside... The fact is established beyond the possibility of a doubt by the position of the bow and that of the iron from the bottom where the mine first took effect.” The only issue left, then, was the identification of those responsible. “Surely,” he said, this was “not by the act of friends. Neither by accident.” Spain needed to be held to account. While he did also mention Spain’s “officially organized plan for the starvation of more than a million people, and of this

⁶⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 5, 1898, p. 3545-3546.

⁶⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Mar. 31, 1898, p. 3433-3434.

number it saw 600,000 die according to the programme,” these facts had apparently been irrelevant to him not long before.⁶⁹

Wyoming’s Senator Clarence Clark also cast aside his earlier restraint. He called for immediate action, ostensibly for the “men, women, and children” who were “dying of starvation in Cuba, the victims of a warfare the most cruel, inhuman, and barbarous of modern times.” Perhaps more vital to his change of heart was “the evidence accumulated, under careful and honest investigation, that the loss of our sailors was due to the direct criminal action of Spain.” Such an act of treachery “can not be settled by diplomatic correspondence nor treated by any tribunal of arbitration.” The only remedy was “justice, swift, sure, and complete.”⁷⁰ The calls for war became a juggernaut, and finally they did lead the president to respond.

On April 11, President McKinley finally delivered a message to Congress asking for permission to intervene in Cuba. While it had been widely anticipated, the content of the speech only made McKinley’s opponents more convinced that a plot was afoot. McKinley did not ask for a declaration of war against Spain, but called for intervention as an impartial neutral. As it was stated in his message, merely ending the bloodshed appeared to be the goal. Little was said about Cuban liberty, and the President clearly explained that he was opposed to any form of recognition of the rebel government already in place or even the semblance of an alliance with them. For those who had long

⁶⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 4, 1898, p. 3497-3499. On the Republican shift, see John Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 127-128, 150-154.

⁷⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 16, 1898, p. 3966-3968.

demanded a free Cuba, the call to action by the commander-in-chief was a complete disappointment.⁷¹

The reaction was immediate. The reading of McKinley's message in the Senate chamber had no more than ended when William Stewart of Nevada and Marion Butler of North Carolina (the South's lone Populist senator) responded. Stewart declared that intervention without recognition of Cuban independence "looks like a war of conquest. It would be difficult to find a precedent for such intervention outside of the conquest of Egypt or the dividing up of China among the great powers of Europe"—cases of overt imperialism. The international community would never support such an action. Stewart also suggested that there were further ramifications associated with the apparent conquest of Cuba. "What will you do with the island when you take it? There is some talk about responsibility. As I read international law, the responsibility upon us would be very great if we should take the island." Butler more clearly outlined Stewart's interpretation: "If we intervene in Cuba and take possession of the island, we can not liberate it from the lien which the bondholders have upon it.... Our interference will not be paramount to the mortgage under international law"—essentially the conquest of Cuba would not invalidate Spain's bonds—"but the right to liberty and independence, for which the Cubans have fought, is paramount to a mortgage made to obtain money to subdue them." An independent Cuba could not be expected to pay the debts of those who sought to

⁷¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 11, 1898, p. 3699-3702. Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 84-86; David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 52-54.

destroy it, but the acquisition of the island by the United States would make America liable to pay Spain's debt.⁷²

A similar message was delivered by one of their colleagues in the House. The next day, Nebraska Populist William Greene explained all of the many complications associated with the executive's aloof policy: "I say that if we simply intervene we admit that Spain is a friendly power. We say there is no government in Cuba that we can recognize except the Spanish Government." Added to this was Spain's recent announcement (unheeded by the McKinley administration) that it was willing to participate in an armistice, potentially negating any need to pacify the colonial occupation force. "[W]hat is there left for us to do if what I have said should occur, except to turn our guns upon the Cuban patriots and compel them to lay down their arms!" And what was to happen after American troops had pacified the island, he asked? A Democrat from Michigan replied, "Give it a carpet-bag government under quasi-military rule." "I fear that will be the result," responded Greene. Greene was also fearful of the influence of financiers in the international community. "[T]here are held by the people of foreign governments large sums of bonds issued by the Spanish Government and predicated largely upon the revenues which Spain derives from Cuba." If it was decided to make Cuba independent, while simultaneously "admitting Spain to be a friendly power," the international community would be up in arms. "Do you not know that France, Germany, and England would step to the front and say to this country, 'You can not steal the territory of a friendly power unless you make the obligations good'?"

⁷² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 11, 1898, p. 3702-3703.

Critics of the administration agreed that, without prior recognition of the independent government of Cuba, U.S. intervention would only transfer Spain's debt to America.⁷³ The assumptions of Stewart, Butler, and Greene fit the conventional reading of international law at that moment. Historian H. Wayne Morgan has demonstrated that Spain's Cuban debt was a major concern of its regime, and its attempts to saddle the United States with a portion of it actually held up negotiations after the war.⁷⁴ Even common media reports after the ceasefire described the attempts of Spain and France (whose citizens owned a large share of the bonds) to recoup their losses, even by suggesting that the United States had an obligation to pay as the new sovereign power in Cuba.⁷⁵ Whether or not they had correctly judged the goal of McKinley and his allies, these critics of the president were not actually misreading the international situation at the time.

While the aforementioned opponents of McKinley argued that the president's policy was mistaken and that Cuba had to be recognized, they did not suggest that it all was due to the scheming of conspirators; instead, they used it as just another form of justification for immediate recognition. Allen, and soon Butler with him, went further. Allen wanted it to be stated on the record that the course laid out by the president would mean "that we will be called upon hereafter to pay the Spanish-Cuban debt." He also accused some of his fellow Congressmen of playing a part when he suggested "that that

⁷³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 12, 1898, App. 279-281.

⁷⁴ Morgan, *William McKinley*, 408-409.

⁷⁵ "Spain's Impossible Demands," *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1898; "The Question of Spanish Bonds," *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1898.

is the fixed and settled policy in some quarters in this city.”⁷⁶ However, Butler was certain that the Cubans would yet be forced to pay for their freedom. “The great Republic of the United States,” he said, “has turned its back on the brave band of patriots in Cuba...who have already won their liberty. Our Army and Navy is to be used to force them to surrender to a gold and monopoly syndicate...We are to force them to submit to an industrial slavery worse than Spanish rule.”⁷⁷

While they questioned the methods the president had proposed, it must be emphasized that western Populists, Democrats, and their allies had consistently been among the strongest advocates of an independent Cuba. Yet, as noted at the opening of this dissertation, historians have struggled to explain why they did so. One of the few focused works of scholarship that sought to explain their actions through close examination instead concluded that their anti-imperialism was based upon the bond conspiracy itself. Historian Paul Holbo argued that Populists and their allies supported independence for Cuba rather than annexation as a means to strike at European bondholders. In his view, the Populists (led by Allen in his telling of events) had taken the Cuban issue seriously from a relatively early point, shifting their domestic frustrations to troubles overseas by 1898. By that time, they had convinced the Bryanite Democrats and Silver Republicans of the seriousness of the money power threat. Together, they collectively attacked the administration for its idle stance on Cuba, and their irrational

⁷⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 16, 1898, p. 3944-3945.

⁷⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 19, 1898, p. 4069.

embrace of the conspiracy eventually forced them to reject the acquisition of Cuba and thus void the bonds.⁷⁸

Holbo's reading of the situation ignored the fact that the bond conspiracy rumors were new in 1898 but the Populist calls for free Cuba were not. The evidence demonstrates that, when they focused on the bond conspiracy, westerners only used it to explain the puzzling actions of a president whose known primary objective was the maintenance of friendly relations with domestic capitalists. Westerners did not argue that Cuba should be free in order to devastate certain bondholders, but rather they tried to understand why anyone would be opposed to Cuban independence. For someone like Allen, the independence of Cuba was of supreme importance in its own right. Even in a speech in which he acknowledged that the press called him the "the jingo of jingoes," Allen emphasized that "From the time the war broke out between Spain and Cuba I have been the steadfast and uncompromising advocate of independence." "We have no greed for Spanish territory," he continued, "nor for Spanish gold.... We do not want Cuba. We do not even desire to be her guardian. But we are determined she shall be free."⁷⁹ His analysis incorporated his views on the political power of a capitalist elite, though he simply stated his belief that this group was a hindrance to a policy that he considered humanitarian. Just as tellingly, Allen's speech in 1895 had nothing to do with the holders of Spanish debt, but even at that early date he was no less vigorous in his support of

⁷⁸ Holbo, "Convergence of Moods," 54-72.

⁷⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Mar. 31, 1898, p. 3410-3413.

Cuban freedom. His actions in 1898 did not suggest that recognition of Cuban independence should be used as a tool to strike at any class.

Five days after the president had issued his controversial call for intervention, Henry Teller offered his famous amendment. It stated clearly that “the people of the Island of Cuba are, and of right ought to be, free and independent,” and included a disavowal of self-interest by “disclaiming any disposition or intention to exercise jurisdiction or control over said island except for the pacification thereof.” It also demanded that Spain withdraw its military units from the island or face expulsion at the hands of the American armed forces. The amendment significantly changed the complexion of the resolution for intervention. By specifically pointing to Spain as the aggressor, renouncing territorial aggrandizement, and calling for an independent Cuba, it quickly alleviated the fears of those who distrusted the president’s motives. Teller’s amendment was quickly added, and both houses passed the joint resolution on April 19. McKinley signed it the next day. On April 23, Spain replied with a declaration of war, and the Congress responded in kind two days later. The United States was at war, but the battles in Congress only intensified.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 16, 1898, p. 3954; Morgan, *William McKinley*, 378; Trask, *War with Spain*, 55-58. There has been a rather widespread attempt to explain Teller’s motivation for offering the amendment, but many have suggested that his interest was more pragmatic than ideological. Holbo claimed that Teller was attempting to negate any American obligation to pay for Spain’s Cuban bonds, but he certainly never claimed that was his interest, nor was it the primary focus of most of his closest allies in Congress. Louis Pérez and Teller biographer Duane A. Smith have suggested that Teller feared the impact of Cuban sugar imports on Colorado’s beet sugar industry. However, his support for the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines is hardly consistent with that motivation. These analyses have ignored a speech made by Teller later, in December of 1898, when he stated that he believed Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines would all become American states, but that all would do so without American coercion. For the other works, see Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 68-69; Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*, 186; Duane A. Smith, *Henry Teller: Colorado’s Grand Old Man* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 217; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Dec. 20, 1898, p. 325-330.

The War Revenue Bill

When America went to war in 1898, many had hoped that a sense of patriotism would smooth over the conflicts that had divided the nation politically.⁸¹ Despite these desires, conservatives and reform advocates continued to battle with each other throughout the war. Such contests were inevitable, as both sides believed that the war could be a vehicle for their policy objectives. Their greatest fights took place over the course of the first six weeks of war, over what would come to be called the War Revenue Bill.

On April 25, the bill was proposed by Congressman Nelson Dingley, a Republican friend of the administration, best known for his authorship of the most recent tariff regulations. Dingley stated that, after several years of deficits, revenues (largely coming from the tariff) were just at the point in which they would match expenditures. While only \$365,000,000 had been spent in 1897, he said, war expenses had raised costs to a rate that would equal an additional \$300,000,000 per year. To make up for the additional expenses, his new bill provided for two forms of supplemental revenue. The first involved an additional \$100,000,000 of internal taxes, primarily upon the consumption of popular items like beer. The second, and most controversial part, would have empowered the Secretary of the Treasury to sell up to \$500,000,000 of “3 per cent coin bonds, to be disposed of as a popular loan.” The bonds were to be sold in post

⁸¹ There was much talk of reconciliation and cooperation in the media and by politicians at the time, and there seems to have been some conscious effort made by some to heal the wounds of the Civil War—at least between whites of the North and South. See Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 178-185; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 346-354.

offices in multiples of twenty-five dollars, with the stated intent that they would be accessible to the public.⁸²

The Populists and silverites in Congress could not believe what they were hearing. They had no more than defeated the earlier bond measure when another one was thrust upon them. The system of taxation the bill would create was nearly as preposterous. As they came out in opposition to the War Revenue plan, however, their arguments were often divided into attacks that focused upon the “money power” for the bond portion (and its implications for currency) and those that derided Republican subservience to the “plutocracy” based on the tax system they devised.

First and foremost, western Populists and their allies said the bond measure was completely unnecessary for a war that they knew from the beginning would be of short duration. Representative John Kelley, a South Dakota Populist, declared that “even if Spain were a second-class power instead of what she is, there would still be no excuse for this fabulous bond measure.”⁸³ Senators Allen and Teller likewise criticized the size of the bill, and suggested that the administration had an immediate need for the money. When allies of the administration “tell us that the war would cost about three hundred millions annually extra,” Allen said, “and legislating on the supposition that the war is to last a year, we have to raise only \$300,000,000 in addition to the ordinary revenues of the Government, unless the deficit of sixty-odd millions under the Dingley tariff act is to be

⁸² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 27, 1898, p. 4296-4299.

⁸³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, App. 358-360.

covered up by the bill.”⁸⁴ Teller had a similar suspicion. “Mr. President, I am particularly interested in this revenue scheme...because I know it is not to be a temporary scheme...It can be demonstrated that the present system of collecting money under the Dingley bill, so called, and the existing internal revenue taxes will not produce enough money to run the Government in time of peace.”⁸⁵ The administration had been spending more than the tariff was bringing in, they claimed, and this was to cover up its shortfall.

Beyond criticism of the sheer size of the bill, most who attacked the bond portion called it a sham that was to be pushed through in time of war for the profit of the few. Kelley said that his colleagues were now “rudely awakened to a realization of the fact that the spirit of patriotism which is aroused throughout the country has been taken advantage of...while the minds of the people are distracted by the clamor of war, to satisfy the maw of the money changers.”⁸⁶ Lewis of Washington also warned against being “buoyed off upon an imaginary patriotism to wrong the people by deluding them and robbing them.” War, he said, “has ever been the pat time for the pilferers of public confidence and the plunderers of the public Treasury to do their destructive work.”⁸⁷ Later, Lewis would claim that the bill itself had been drawn up at the instruction of Wall Street’s bankers.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 25, 1898, p. 5178-5182.

⁸⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 3, 1898, p. 5449-5450, 5452-5453.

⁸⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, App. 358-360.

⁸⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, p. 4437.

⁸⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 3, 1898, p. 4538-4539.

Though Populists had called for intervention in Cuba, they were distraught by what they perceived as McKinley's abuse of wartime sentiment. William Allen assailed those who took advantage of the "patriotic wave [that] is sweeping over the country." Behind this scheme was "the infamous money power of the United States and Europe," which was "endeavoring to foist upon the people a perpetual national debt." "There is not one of that power," he continued, "who would not see this Government sunk to the bottom of the ocean if he could make a fortune by it. There is not an impulse of patriotism, not a feeling of affection for the Government among them. The Government is to them simply a carcass upon which they are to feed and fatten."⁸⁹ A few of the most radical Populists believed that the money power might have already been in complete control. William Stark of Nebraska told the House of "a belief that there may be a sinister motive in the proposition to issue so large an amount of interest-bearing obligations at this time; that when negotiated the war may suddenly be brought to a close and the remainder of the bond issue utilized to retire the present legal-tender notes..." While he remained skeptical that any party "can properly be charged with such a scheme," he was also distrustful of his colleagues: "the emissaries of Shylock can always be depended upon to do his will."⁹⁰ Jerry Simpson had also heard rumors that the "big banking interests are advised that just as soon as the United States has, by force of arms administered the crushing blow that Spanish honor demands... the great financiers of

⁸⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 25, 1898, p. 5178-5182.

⁹⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, p. 4434-4436.

Europe will take that country by the throat and choke her into pleading for peace.”⁹¹

Though many Populists had been the strongest advocates of Cuban independence, the war was serving the purposes of the money power.

A number of westerners incorporated portions of the classic conspiratorial narratives into their counterattacks against the administration. In most of the apocryphal histories of finance popular in that era—most notably in *Seven Financial Conspiracies*—the Civil War was the pivotal moment in which the money power had used a national crisis to its advantage.⁹² It is not surprising then that some Populists and others came to believe that they were living through a similar moment. Jerry Simpson, for example, was certain that the bill demonstrated the intent “to carry out a programme mapped out some time ago in the interest of the money lords of this and other countries to take advantage of the people, appealing to their patriotism to authorize for war purposes an issue of bonds the authority for which has been sought in vain in times of peace.” The great purpose behind it all, he said, was to bolster the national banks. Aside from the profit they gained from interest, bonds were required as security on the notes that the bank issued. “Bonds are to national banks the blood of life,” he said. If Gage were to initiate his (presumed) plan to privatize the issuance of money, he first required these bonds.⁹³ In his explanation, Representative Charles Barlow (Populist, California) largely agreed that the “policy of the present Administration is to retire the whole noninterest-bearing debt

⁹¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 9, 1898, App. 549-551.

⁹² Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, especially 11-26; Clark, *Shylock*, especially 29-52.

⁹³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, p. 4395-4400.

[greenbacks] and replace it with an interest-bearing debt.” But for Barlow, this was a continuation of a phenomenon that had haunted the country for over thirty years. “This bond craze of to-day is a legacy of the civil war,” he said. “[W]hile the brave men on both sides were sacrificing themselves in a struggle of principle, which resulted in the liberation of 4,000,000 slaves, these shylocks and coupon clippers were completing their nefarious plans.”⁹⁴ After the war, the money power had maintained its position with the aid of those in government.

The Civil War provided a powerful example for those who desired monetary reform. It was the period when they believed the force of the money power had made its greatest impact, but it was also a time of creative experimentation in national finance. In Populist narratives, one of the most important developments was the introduction of greenback currency. As the nation again went to war, many believed the same kind of creativity, and maybe some of the same solutions, could work again. One after another, they made speeches defending the greenback and cursing those who had always tried to destroy it.

When they traced the history of the greenback, a number of Populists in the House remembered that the currency had served the Union’s purposes once before, but had been an imperfect creation because of certain schemers. John Kelley gave one of the more complete descriptions of the Populist view of the matter. He said that the “greenbacks were and are the best money this or any other country has ever known. They saved the nation when no other money would or could save it.” But he still

⁹⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, p. 4407-4409.

remembered how the “Wall Street ravagers” had forced the government to include “a damning exception clause.” The greenbacks could be used to pay public debt, but they could not be used to pay import duties. The circulation of both “hard money”—notes backed by gold and silver—and “soft money”—greenbacks, backed only by the word of the government—worked in combination with the exception clause and resulted in the depreciation of the greenbacks. After the war ended, according to Kelley, “the command of the Wall street vultures” had made its best effort to “destroy the greenbacks.” Kelley believed he was witnessing just the most recent attempt by financiers to destroy the federal currency.⁹⁵

Kelley’s description represented a typical Populist analysis. His fellow South Dakotan Freeman Knowles and Nebraskan William Greene were Populists who held similar views regarding the utility of the greenbacks. Knowles claimed that, during the Civil War, “there never was an hour during the darkest days of that rebellion but what those notes were worth their face in gold.” Like Kelley, he believed that “after the war was all over and the danger past, then it was that the money devils began to cry ‘dishonest money’ and ‘rag baby’ And from that day to this it has been bonds, bonds, bonds.” Greene also blamed “men outside of Congress,” who “have taken advantage of conditions of war to secure legislation in their interests... This was notably so when we issued the greenback currency in 1862, and crippled it at the suggestion of money lenders”—another reference to the exception clause so bemoaned by Sarah Emery.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, App. 358-360.

⁹⁶ Emery, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, 18-24.

Both men developed counter-proposals to the bond plan; Greene called for \$150,000,000 in Treasury notes while Knowles demanded \$250,000,000. Further, both men explained their understanding of the basis of money. “[M]oney is the creation of the law,” said Knowles. “The idea that one kind of money should be redeemed in another kind of money was simply a trick invented by the money changers to make the people believe that one special commodity which the money changers controlled was the only legal money.” Greene likewise told the House that “there is not now, never was, and never will be any other kind of money among civilized men but ‘fiat money,’ money made by decree of law.” Knowles and Greene were just two of the many Populists who advocated fiatist policies as alternatives to the bond measure.⁹⁷

This is not to say that Populists abandoned the free silver issue. They were, after all, living in an era in which paper and specie currency circulated side-by-side with one another. However, rather than arguing for the parity of two metals (as they had in 1896), they suggested that silver, gold, and paper served the same purpose. John Calhoun Bell of Colorado stated that he wanted the silver seigniorage to be coined.⁹⁸ Yet, like the other Populists, he did not do so because of any belief in the inherent value of the metal. “The Supreme Court of the United States says gold is not money; it says silver is not money; it says paper is not money, but that a legal decree of a legislative body makes the money of the realm.” Issuing money, he said, was the only responsible thing to do in this

⁹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 27, 1898, p. 4323-4326.

⁹⁸ The silver seigniorage was made up of the difference between the value of a dollar of silver and the actual amount in a coined dollar. The Treasury had built up large reserves when the price of silver plummeted in the 1890s. See Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 413.

time of war. “You have got to use essentially a national currency. War is a great, new business and requires a new supply of money that will circulate and not be hoarded.”⁹⁹

Their Senate counterparts were eager to coin the seigniorage as well. During one of his attacks on the bond measure, Senator Allen called for the silver seigniorage to be coined. When some of his colleagues claimed that silver had depreciated, he shot back with the claim that “silver has not depreciated in the slightest degree.... Simply by cutting the cord that existed between silver and gold and casting all the money work upon gold alone, gold has risen and silver has stood still.” Primarily, though, Allen expressed his lack of tolerance for “that class of pseudo financiers who argue that the value of money resides in the commercial value of the material employed. We can displace every dollar of silver and gold in the United States and replace them with full legal-tender paper money, and if we limit that volume, every paper dollar will be equivalent in value to a dollar in gold.”¹⁰⁰ Even the relatively conservative Silver Republican Henry Teller had a degree of willingness to listen to the fiatist proposals of his friends. He did flatly say that “I have not been one of those who have been in favor, as a general rule, of issuing paper money,” but added that “I know that the authority of the United States exists to issue paper money.” When he spoke to those who claimed that silver was unacceptable as money, he was able to describe the seigniorage as an alternative to both fiat money and bonds. “No matter what may be the theory of Senators as to the issue of paper money,” said Teller, “they can not defend this proposition here or elsewhere by saying that with

⁹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 27, 1898, p. 4308-4309.

¹⁰⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 25, 1898, p. 5178-5182.

\$42,000,000 of silver in the Treasury, which will make as good money as gold, we are to keep it locked up there and then borrow an equal amount and pay interest upon it.”¹⁰¹

The Senate did succeed in adding an amendment to coin the silver seigniorage, but neither Allen, Teller, nor any of the other reform senators could take credit for it. Instead, that honor went to Senator Edward Wolcott. The junior senator from Colorado had already been rewarded for his loyalty to the McKinley administration with the top position on the fruitless international bi-metallic commission that was sent to Europe in 1897. With a few more feathers in his cap, perhaps the state legislature would forget that he had chosen his party over the silver cause in 1896. While his was one of the few amendments of the bill that westerners supported, for those opposed to the administration it could hardly have felt like a victory.¹⁰²

While western reformers relentlessly attacked the War Revenue Bill for its bond measure, they were nearly as offended by the components covering taxation. The basis of these fights was the widely divergent worldview held by conservative Republicans and those who opposed them. Republicans claimed that broad-based taxation was the only fair system, while Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans retorted that such regressive forms of taxation did not reflect growing disparities in wealth. Some of these debates pertained to seemingly trivial matters, but they effectively demonstrated the sense of class division. One such conflict focused on something as mundane as a tax levied on beer consumption. Congressmen Castle and Maguire, joined by Senator White (all of

¹⁰¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 27, 1898, p. 5272-5278.

¹⁰² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 3, 1898, p. 5454-5458; on his part in the bi-metallic commission, see Morgan, *William McKinley*, 282-285.

California), objected to the provision that taxed something all identified as “the drink of the poor.” Castle further noted that champagne, an item “used only by the rich,” was specifically exempted from taxation. The amount of expected income from the provision on beer—\$33,000,000—was one-third of the total amount to be collected through taxation. To those already suspicious of administration intent, it was further evidence that the entirety of the bill was designed to protect the class that least needed assistance.¹⁰³

Western reformers were most angered by the system of taxation applied in the bill—a levy on consumption—which they said would inevitably take more from the poor than from the rich. The bill was designed to impose a consumption tax on a number of popular items (as in the case of beer), but it contained no personal income or corporate tax provisions. Western reformers asked their partisan rivals how this could be possible. Congressman Newlands of Nevada asked if the “accumulated wealth of the country” was to be excused of its wartime obligations. Senator White of California concurred. “Ought the wealth of this country to bear any of the ills of this war?... If not, what excuse is there for the bill as it came from the House, and what excuse is there for those who are seeking to exempt the rich?”¹⁰⁴ Some explanation was necessary to justify these unequal taxes. Western colleagues provided an obvious answer. They argued the imbalance in taxation was no simple oversight, nor did it emanate from some misguided sense of equity.

¹⁰³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, App. 709-714; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, App. 349-352; White’s remarks are on *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 26, 1898, App. 502-507.

¹⁰⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, App. 416-418; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 26, 1898, App. 502-507.

According to Congressman Knowles, the Republicans who drafted the bill “felt so grateful to [the] great trusts, monopolies, banking institutions, and millionaires for past favors that they have exempted them from all share in the burdens of the war.”¹⁰⁵

Knowles placed blame upon a handful of members of one party, who he suggested were trying to protect their most important supporters.

James Hamilton Lewis, a Democratic representative from Washington, was blunter in his statements. Acknowledging that “it would be ordinarily the purpose of a humane man and a generous government to compel all those who could best afford, with the least loss, the sustaining and bearing of such a conflict,” he asked “Then why not do so?” In response to his own question, he proclaimed that “the answer is, because those who are the wealthiest through the favors and privileges of the Government have likewise become the objects of its exemption.” He blamed the favoritism of the government for the creation of the economic elite. This class then grew so powerful that they “had wielded their influence to such ends and such purposes as to have distorted the Constitution, misled the highest tribunals of the Republic, and obtained for themselves immunity from a just contribution to the Government from which they had derived both their comfort and their riches.”¹⁰⁶

Lewis was drawing attention to a Supreme Court ruling from 1895, in which the justices ruled that a federal tax on personal income was unconstitutional. This ruling overturned a number of precedents, some of which dated back to the early years of the

¹⁰⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 27, 1898, p. 4324-4326.

¹⁰⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 27, 1898, p. 4319-4323.

republic. Another, and perhaps the most notable, was an 1881 decision by that same Court that supported the Civil War era federal income tax laws. Coming in the same year as its rulings against Eugene Debs for his part in the Pullman strike and against the federal government in one of the few anti-trust cases prosecuted in the 1890s (*United States v. E.C. Knight*), it seemed to many that the Court had been corrupted by powerful interests.¹⁰⁷ This frustration was unleashed over the course of the debate.

Western reformers of all stripes attacked the Court and any who argued that the government had such limited authority over wealth or property. More than the rest, it was the Populists who argued that there were few limits upon the federal power to marshal resources. Congressman Simpson mocked Republicans who had claimed “The wealth of this country is something sacred.” “Why, sir,” he said,

do you know that when war exists in this country, the Government can take a man from his home, his fireside, his family, and put him in the front rank of the Army and have him shot for the benefit of his country? Yet the wealth of the country is so sacred that even in time of war we can not invoke an income tax to touch the wealth of the wealthy classes, even to pay the funeral expense of the man who has been shot for the good of his country.

Congressman Castle made a nearly identical comparison. He decried the new “age of commercialism,” saying greed had “dethroned man and enthroned property.” A man “can be taken from the bosom of his family and be shot to death on the field of battle...but when it is proposed to lay the heavy hand of Government on property we are

¹⁰⁷ James MacGregor Burns, *Packing the Court: The Rise of Judicial Power and the Coming Crisis of the Supreme Court* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 109-111.

told that the property of the wealthy classes can not be touched.” No individual’s wealth could be withheld from the government, they argued, especially in time of war.¹⁰⁸

Western Republicans avoided the debate over the revenue bill, with two notable exceptions. The first of these involved Senator Edward Wolcott. In the midst of a discussion by several Republican senators over details of a provision to tax inheritances, William Allen interjected his concerns regarding “the inequities, if I may so express it,” in any proposal that would “tax the estate of a dead man and permits the estate of a live man to escape.” Senator Wolcott responded “that the experience of the last twenty-five years of this country has demonstrated without a doubt that live men with large properties can always evade the tax gatherer so far as their personal estate is concerned. The Senator knows, and I know, of men worth a million dollars of personal property who pay practically no taxes whatever.” And so, he argued that, “If we could reach the living man we would do so, but we can not,” so the government should not even bother. Wolcott, who the year before had led McKinley’s futile international bimetallic commission, apparently did not appreciate the irony when he declared that the impossible should not even be attempted.¹⁰⁹

The only other moment in which a western Republican participated came during debate of a proposed corporate tax, and once again he only acted to oppose the proposal of another westerner. Democrats in the Senate were working to add a tax on the nation’s largest businesses, but they struggled to develop a satisfactory amendment due to

¹⁰⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, p. 4395-4400; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, App. 349-352.

¹⁰⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 20, 1898, p. 5080-5083.

squabbles over its particulars. Following the rejection of yet another, Stephen White offered an alternative. Rather than a tax on all corporations, White proposed a modest levy—amounting to one-quarter of one percent of gross revenues—“upon the business of oil refining and sugar refining, so that the Standard Oil and the sugar trusts will be able to pay taxes under the bill.” As the two most identifiable monopolies in America, the tax was targeted at businesses he believed few were willing to defend.¹¹⁰

John Wilson, Washington’s regular Republican senator, denied that the trusts could really be made to pay. While he agreed with “the honorable Senator from California [Mr. WHITE] that this tax, if imposed, would be a tax upon those who can afford to pay it,” he argued it would provide them an excuse to exponentially raise the price consumers would have to pay. Though he claimed he would have liked to support the amendment, portions of Wilson’s speech also suggested an appreciation of the monopolies. He reminded White that “when he was a boy the consumer of oil paid 50 cents a gallon for it, and to-day it is only 8 cents at retail, and less than 4 1/2 cents at wholesale.” Wilson did acknowledge the near complete control of the market held by these companies, but he did not consider that to be so regrettable.¹¹¹

White did not care for such reasoning. He ridiculed his Republican opponents, who claimed the federal government was too feeble to deal with the great corporations. “[W]e are told,” he said, “Well, it would be a good thing if we could make these great institutions pay something, but we can not; they will lay it upon some one else, and

¹¹⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 1, 1898, p. 5396.

¹¹¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 4, 1898, p. 5518.

therefore while we feel these are the most oppressive monopolies in the world, and while we would like to get at them, we can not get at them, and we refuse to levy a tax upon them.’” He also contrasted Wilson’s sudden sympathy for consumers with the other measures contained in the bill. The “onerousness of taxation” had already been placed directly upon consumers. “We have not shed any tears for the consumer when we have been levying taxes upon tobacco and beer.” White’s amendment was one of the few proposed by the opposition to pass in the Senate, doing so by a vote of 33-26 and with no western reformers in opposition.¹¹²

The class dimensions of the portions of the bill pertaining to taxation were so flagrant that the opponents attempted to counter them any way they could, often with symbolic proposals that held little chance of passing. In the days leading up to the final vote, these propositions only increased in number. In just one example, Senator Allen proposed a 1% tax on all yachts. It was rejected without discussion.¹¹³

On the same day, Senator Richard Pettigrew offered a far more ambitious plan. The first component of his amendment would have defined the word “trust” as any “combination... association or corporation whose effect is to restrict the quantity of production or increase the price of any article,” or as “any conspiracy in restraint of trade.” All organizations found to be trusts would then be subject to a tax of five percent on the total value of their manufactures. His purpose was “not so much to obtain revenue as to destroy trusts. Trusts have grown up covering almost every article of manufacture

¹¹² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 1, 1898, p. 5396-5397; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 4, 1898, p. 5517-5518.

¹¹³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 4, 1898, p. 5531.

in this country...with the object of plundering the consumer.” While some were arguing that White’s amendment would already make the sugar trust pay “about one hundredth of 1 per cent per pound upon sugar, we give them a discriminating duty of more than one-tenth of a cent upon all refined sugar.” He pointed out Republican George Hoar of Massachusetts as just one of the many who defended the trusts by arguing that “this amendment punishes the innocent purchaser of all the sugar or any other article manufactured by a trust in this country.” Pettigrew knew his measure sounded extreme, but he believed the war was already being used for the benefit of the few. The choice, he said, was between “the continuance of plutocracy or absolute socialism. I am in favor of neither, but I am in favor of socialism before I am in favor of plutocracy.” While nearly all western reformers in the Senate voted for his proposal, it went down to defeat. Pettigrew’s effort was a last-ditch attempt to make the conduct of the war fit their agenda. The victory of the administration party was nearly complete.¹¹⁴

After a long fight in both houses of Congress, the conference committee reported back the final version of the War Revenue Bill in early June. In its finished form, the bill was still much like it had been when originally proposed. The vicious debate had only forced the most cosmetic changes.¹¹⁵ The House vote was held on June 9, and the results were as partisan as the debates had been. Not one western reformer voted for the measure, and not one western Republican voted against it. The measure passed 154 to 107, with eighty-seven counted as absent. Only two of those absent were westerners:

¹¹⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 4, 1898, p. 5531-5533.

¹¹⁵ War Revenue Bill of 1898, *United States Statutes at Large XXX* (1899): 448-470.

James Maguire (a California Democrat) and Jesse Strode (a Nebraska Republican). The vote played out in much the same way in the Senate the next day. Western Republicans provided unanimous support for the bill and were joined by only two of the least dependable reformers: the Silver Republican Lee Mantle of Montana, who would soon return to the orthodox branch of his party; and James Kyle of South Dakota, a former Populist who had been drummed out of his state party after consummating a corrupt bargain with state Republicans to secure he re-election in 1897. The bill won by a forty-three to twenty-two margin, with twenty-four senators absent or abstaining. With McKinley's signature, the War Revenue Bill became law on June 13, 1898.¹¹⁶

The success of the bill highlights the diminishing fortunes of the western reformers once the war had commenced. They may have ultimately succeeded in applying pressure on the administration and their conservative rivals when it came to Cuban independence. Their attacks on all who stood by as the Cuban people were brutalized likely helped spur on action by those who would otherwise have chosen to remain indifferent. However, once the war began, they proved unable to rein in the forces they had unleashed. The president they despised was now a commander-in-chief. The bonds they saw as evil had been transformed into a war funding bill that too many others refused to oppose. Their inability to substantially change the War Revenue Bill signaled

¹¹⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 9, 1898, p. 5727; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 10, 1898, p. 5749. Thomas A. Clinch, *Urban Populism and Free Silver in Montana: A Narrative of Ideology in Political Action* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana Press, 1970), 162; R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 139-143.

the utter failure of the western Populists and their allies to use the war to simultaneously liberate Cuba and reform America. Quite to the contrary, it became a war paid for with bonds and consumption taxes, with little administration fervor for ideals such as political freedom or economic justice. McKinley had called for intervention in order to return stability to the region, not to aid revolutionaries. American interests were his primary concern, and this would soon show itself in other fields. The war for humanity that the Populists had hoped for was about to become a war for empire.

CHAPTER V
HAWAIIAN ANNEXATION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE DEBATE
OVER EMPIRE

On May 4, 1898, Congressman Francis G. Newlands, the only member of Nevada's Silver Party in the House, submitted a joint resolution designated H. Res. 259, "to provide for the annexing of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States."¹ The resolution was immediately forwarded to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. While it did not create much of an immediate stir, it did catch the eye of the McKinley administration. They would use their influence in the committee to push Republican support for the measure.² That it had been sponsored by one of the western reformers likely added to its appeal.

Newlands was hardly a logical ally of the administration. His devotion to free silver was as strong as that of any member in Congress, and he had earlier referred to the Republican War Revenue Bill as a scheme to satisfy the "rapacity" of the national banks.³ At the same time, he was a man of no small ambition. He may have been attempting to make a name for himself in order to challenge Senator William Stewart's control of Nevada state politics.⁴ Even more likely, he may simply have believed the time was right to take the islands.

¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 4, 1898, p. 4600.

² Lewis L. Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 98.

³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, App. 416-418.

⁴ Newlands and Stewart were in clear competition with each other by at least 1898, and the rivalry only intensified. See Russell R. Elliot, *Servant of Power: A Political Biography of William M. Stewart* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), especially 195-215.

The reintroduction of Hawaiian annexation, in the midst of the war with Spain, took a politically charged topic and made it explosive. With the chance to take action on an issue they believed had been delayed since the second election of Grover Cleveland in 1892, Republicans almost universally supported it. Western reformers, on the other hand, divided over the measure. Considering the diverse individuals who had been pulled into the free silver cause, it is hardly surprising. A few who had been in Congress earlier in the decade had supported Hawaiian annexation then, and still others—like the widely admired Henry Teller—had a truly expansive vision of what America could become.

Though some western reformers did fall victim to the siren calls of manifest destiny, an equal number did not. Throughout the summer of 1898 they fought their conservative enemies and, not infrequently, their closer friends. They sided with some eastern anti-expansionists, some of whom they had described as their arch rivals. As much as any of their eastern colleagues, they demonstrated their commitment to government based upon consent of the governed and their opposition to colonial systems of rule. Just as vitally, they demonstrated how Populist ideology could be applied to combat imperialism.

The Hawaiian Issue Before the McKinley Presidency

By the first years of the nineteenth century, Hawaii was becoming a frequent stopping point for European and American sailing vessels. At an early point in the century it became the hub of America's Pacific whaling fleet, and some Hawaiians joined the crews of ships as they searched for their quarry in the ocean before heading back

again to New England. These contacts with America led to the first Christian mission sent from the United States to Hawaii in 1819.⁵

The missionaries were arriving at a time when the Hawaiian kingdom was already in disorder. When the islands became a regular stop for Pacific sojourners, they likewise became a receptacle for every disease those ships brought with them. The results of these epidemic diseases were devastating to the people of Hawaii, both demographically and culturally. The people became skeptical of traditions that had been unable to cope with the new maladies, and even some leaders became more willing to listen to outsiders who offered new solutions.

A further complicating factor was the growing threat of European interventions that could destroy native sovereignty on the islands. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, European powers were demonstrating bellicose attitudes toward the peoples of the Pacific islands. France and Britain each contemplated conquest of the islands. Their dealings with foreigners had convinced Hawaiian leaders that, if they were to maintain their power, they needed to take steps demonstrating their “civilization” to the rest of the world. They adopted legal codes that were more comprehensible to foreign observers. Traditional systems of land tenure were replaced by fee simple titles—a policy which later enabled the missionaries and their descendants to develop into a

⁵ This and the following paragraphs are based on material found in Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 24-122; Eric Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and US Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004), 73-114; E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 27-62.

powerful planter class. Finally, to take their place in the community of nations, they initiated diplomatic contact with some of the world's great powers.

America's official relationship with Hawaii began in the 1840s as a direct result of this last policy, when King Kamehameha III sent a diplomatic mission abroad to gain recognition for his government. Daniel Webster, Secretary of State at the time, quickly recognized the important place Hawaii would hold for the future of American commercial pursuits in the Pacific. President John Tyler agreed, giving his name to what would be called by some the Tyler doctrine. Hawaii, they believed, must be within the American sphere of influence. The independence of the local monarchs would be supported, and other powers would be discouraged from attempting to claim sovereignty over the islands. All of this was done without a full recognition of Hawaii's independence.

The sovereignty of Hawaii's rulers faced a number of challenges in the years that followed the American Civil War. The increasingly dominant white sugar planters sought a stable supply of cheap labor—primarily Chinese and Japanese workers—to replace the “disappearing” Hawaiians. The demand for labor quickly made the native Hawaiians a minority in their own homeland. Planters also sought to obtain the benefits of access to the American market. At times United States tariff policy granted Hawaiian sugar special privileges, and during those times the planters reaped enormous profits. Without the benefit of that status, as was the case with the tariff authored by Representative William McKinley in 1890, Hawaiian planters struggled.⁶ Planters knew

⁶ On the tariff and its impact, see Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American*

that the most likely guarantee of special access to the American market would be annexation to the United States.

In 1893, with the assistance of the American representative to the Hawaiian court, John L. Stevens, and marines from an American warship, white planters led a revolt that overthrew the last Hawaiian monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani. The new government of Hawaii immediately sought recognition and, shortly thereafter, annexation to the United States. The Harrison administration, in its last days in office, gladly accepted the opportunity and attempted to push a treaty of annexation through the Senate before the close of the lame duck session. Harrison and Secretary of State John W. Foster underestimated the opposition they faced, which only hardened when President-elect Grover Cleveland announced his disapproval for the hastiness with which such a matter was handled. The treaty did not pass and, when Harrison's term expired, President Cleveland withdrew the treaty altogether and sent his own representative, former Congressman James Blount, to investigate the incident.

After several months of investigation, Blount claimed that Stevens had acted with the conspirators and had used the landing of American troops to support their revolution. He contended that the revolution would not have succeeded without their intervention, and a letter from Lili'uokalani to Grover Cleveland also stated that she would never have stepped down in the face of rebel opposition alone. Blount withdrew the protectorate status that Stevens had proclaimed for the islands shortly after the revolution, and in his report he stated his support for the restoration of the Queen. Later interviews with

Expansion, 1860-1898 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), 120.

Lili'uokalani conducted by another Cleveland representative may have only complicated the matter. When asked how she would deal with the revolutionaries if she were restored, she replied that they would be beheaded and their property confiscated. Whether or not such a response was well within her rights, it was hardly a response that Americans would enthusiastically endorse.⁷

President Cleveland held off until December of 1893 before he made any public statements on the Hawaiian matter. In his annual message to Congress in early December and an additional memorandum sent two weeks later, he essentially relinquished authority over the Hawaiian issue. He condemned Stevens's actions, he denounced the Harrison administration's attempt to hurriedly force a treaty of annexation through the Senate, and he generally stated that Queen Lili'uokalani had been wronged. However, Cleveland was also unwilling to use force to remove the provisional government established by the revolutionaries. And with that, he told the national legislature that he now entrusted the question to the "extended powers and wide discretion of the Congress."⁸

⁷ While many of the details of the revolution were written and rewritten practically verbatim in the many histories that have dealt with the annexation of the islands, portions of these accounts have been questioned in recent years. Noenoe K. Silva, for example, denies that Lili'uokalani ever threatened to behead the revolutionaries—a threat that some authors have said prevented Cleveland from acting to undo the revolution (see *Aloha Betrayed*, 167). However, enough evidence exists to make that claim questionable. Additionally, it has been repeatedly suggested that the revolutionaries were successful only with the aid of American troops, and that the troops were deployed by Stevens with the intent of intimidating the Queen. This too has been questioned in a recent work. See William Michael Morgan, *Pacific Gibraltar: US-Japanese Rivalry over the Annexation of Hawaii, 1885-1898* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011). For examples of other books that lay out the traditional summary of events, see Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 29-31, 54; Love, *Race Over Empire*, 73-74, 110-113. Also, on Stevens and American intervention, the common remarks are repeated in Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 129-130.

⁸ Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 54-55; Love, *Race Over Empire*, 111-113.

Congress had not waited for Cleveland's permission to begin the debate. For more than a year, from February of 1893 until May of 1894, members of Congress debated the proper course for America to take. Several members of the 55th Congress were prominent in these debates, including several who would rethink their positions later. Republicans were especially vocal, and they primarily characterized Cleveland's withdrawal of the treaty as a partisan act. Some even believed he would resubmit the treaty as it was, thus taking the glory for himself. Others demonstrated a sort of jingoistic arrogance in their attacks on the president. Two of the worst of these, perhaps oddly, were Senators George Hoar and Henry Teller. Hoar took so much pleasure in attacking the Cleveland administration on this point that he felt the need to include it in his draft of the 1894 Massachusetts Republican platform, which listed the following planks:

"Americanism everywhere. The flag never lowered or dishonored.... No barbarous Queen beheading men in Hawaii."⁹ Teller's "spread eagle" Americanism was no less than Hoar's. In one speech he declared: "I am in favor of the annexation of those islands. I am in favor of the annexation of Cuba; I am in favor of the annexation of that great country lying to the north of us."¹⁰ He envisioned an era when nearly the whole of the western hemisphere would be in American hands. There was no limit to the territory that he believed could become a part of the American union.

Two western opponents of annexation also voiced their opinions during the debate: Senators Richard Pettigrew of South Dakota and Stephen White of California.

⁹ George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 263-264.

¹⁰ *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 29, 1894, p. 1578-79.

Pettigrew at the time was still a straight Republican, but one who was increasingly showing frustration with his party. Fitting the style he would later be known for, he criticized government policy towards Hawaii as the design of the big businesses, especially the sugar trust.¹¹ Pettigrew hinted at the worldview that many western anti-annexationists would hold by the summer of 1898, but most westerners in Congress were not yet willing to apply their critique of the domestic situation to foreign affairs. At that point, many were not leery of expansion at all, and those that were tended to use the same arguments that conservative opponents of expansion did.

Democrat Stephen White of California was one of this sort. White devoted most of his longest speech on the subject to the impropriety of Minister Steven's action, but he also laid out several basic principles of American governance that would be violated with the annexation of Hawaii. The foremost of these doctrines was "consent of the governed," the basis of the system established by the founding fathers. This was one of the central points that nearly all anti-expansionists turned to, and he certainly was not the first to use it. The vast majority of Hawaiian people had not asked for annexation, he said, and no annexationist was eager to hear their opinions. White cited Blount's report to the administration, which claimed that any referendum on annexation that included all the peoples of the islands "would be defeated by a vote of at least two to one. If the votes of persons claiming allegiance to foreign countries were excluded it would be defeated by

¹¹ *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 2, 1894, p. 7069-7070. For another example of his opposition to actions he saw as precursors to annexation, see Love, *Race Over Empire*, 121-124.

more than five to one.”¹² The values of democracy should not be violated for the sake of expedience.

Though Cleveland handed the issue over to Congress, there were no real avenues open for annexationists to pursue. The President had shown his preference for a return of the native monarchy in Hawaii, and any attempt to claim Hawaii through a joint resolution would surely have met with a veto once it reached his desk. The powers of treaty making and negotiation with foreign states also rested solely with the executive, and so the debates in Congress at the end of 1893 and into the spring of 1894 were little more than bluster. Congressional debate on the matter largely subsided when Senator David Turpie of Indiana submitted a resolution declaring that the domestic politics of the islands were wholly the concern of the people already living there, but simultaneously declaring that any interference by an outside power would be regarded as “unfriendly” by the United States. The resolution was put to an immediate vote and passed easily. The debate died down for a time—without ever completely disappearing—but the ideas articulated by both sides would reappear, in 1898 and after.¹³

The Terms of the Debate

Both expansionists and the more conservative of their opponents had developed the basic elements of their arguments in the first phase of the Hawaiian debate—and in

¹² *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 21, 1894, App. 470-486.

¹³ Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 61.

some cases much earlier.¹⁴ Obviously, a significant share of anti-expansionist statements were devoted to denying that any truth lay in the claims of their rivals, but expansionists rather fluidly adapted their own arguments to changing circumstances. In fact, a great many annexationist arguments focused on the immediate necessity of action and the practical advantages that they believed would follow. Anti-annexationists instead tended to emphasize their values, usually values that were common to traditional American views of their nation and its citizens.

Two of the foremost advocates of Hawaiian annexation during the 1890s were Senators Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican from Massachusetts, and John Tyler Morgan, an Alabama Democrat. Both were remarkably quiet during the debates over annexation in 1898, but they had advocated the cause of annexation for years beforehand. They did not change their minds in 1898, but instead worked quietly (more or less) to attain their goal. An examination of their statements from earlier years can effectively draw out the expansionist argument.

Though it was first discussed seriously during a time of peace, Hawaiian annexation was always described as a measure necessary for defense. In an exercise that would be frequently repeated, expansionists pointed to a map of the world and noted the archipelago's location at the center of the northern Pacific. A naval base in Hawaii, they said, could threaten or protect all the trade routes across the Pacific. "The main thing," said Lodge, "is that those islands lie there in the heart of the Pacific, the controlling point in the commerce of that great ocean." "All the great routes from San Francisco and from

¹⁴ Carl Schurz, for example, had been honing anti-imperialist arguments since the Grant administration. See Love, *Race Over Empire*, 53-55, 57.

Vancouver, all the great routes to the East, to and from the [hypothetical] Nicaraguan Canal, pass those islands,” he added.¹⁵ Morgan’s assessment was of a similar sort, going so far as to suggest that “it would be folly for our citizens of this country to build the Nicaragua Canal, or for our Government to sanction the scheme” if some other power held the islands.¹⁶

Expansionists often demanded immediate action, and they did so by claiming that, if the United States did not act, others would not wait. In the early 1890s, when expansionists spoke of a threat to Hawaiian independence, they usually meant Great Britain. Morgan emphasized that British ownership of Hawaii—combined with their bases in the Caribbean—would give them virtual control of any isthmian canal. Lodge likewise considered the British the greatest threat to American domination of the islands, giving one speech in which he pointed to calls from Dominion countries for the acquisition of Hawaii.¹⁷ But the Senator from Massachusetts did not focus all of his attention on the British threat. He was just as willing to point to Japan.

Japan was, by the 1890s, recognized as a rising power in the Pacific. In their 1894-95 war with China, they won a series of victories that demonstrated their increasingly dominant position in East Asia.¹⁸ Lodge openly fretted about their growing

¹⁵ *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 3rd Sess., Mar. 2, 1895, p. 3082-3084. On Lodge and Hawaii in this and the following paragraphs, see also Morgan, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 172-177.

¹⁶ For this and the following paragraph, Morgan’s statements are taken from: “Senator Morgan’s Views,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1898, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 22, 1895, p. 1210-1211.

¹⁸ For an interpretation that claims the Sino-Japanese War led to widespread recognition of Japan as a great power, see S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

navy, especially their recent order for two huge battleships from Britain—said at a time when many members of the Senate still had passages of Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *Influence of Sea Power* floating in their heads.¹⁹ A Japanese conquest of Hawaii would have made that nation’s strategic advantages in the Pacific impregnable, the expansionists said. Hawaii must be taken before then.

The most publicized opponent of expansion during the 1890s was probably Carl Schurz, a German-American known widely as a former Republican politician, a prominent mugwump, and an editorialist. While certainly no intellectual slouch, his greatest value to the opposition stemmed from the ease with which he could make complex arguments approachable and comprehensible. In 1893, in the midst of the first serious debates over Hawaiian annexation, Schurz penned an article titled simply “Manifest Destiny,” in which he laid out a number of arguments against expansion. While not wholly unique, it was certainly a widely read piece, and many speeches made in Congress by anti-expansionists appear to have been based at least partially on it.

First and foremost, Schurz was opposed to the introduction of people that he considered unfit for incorporation into the American corpus. “It is a matter of universal experience,” he said, “that democratic institutions have never on a large scale prospered in tropical latitudes.” In his view, the Constitution demanded that all lands claimed by the United States must eventually become states, and the inhabitants of these regions must be granted American citizenship. He attributed this to a lack of work ethic in

¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 21, 1895, p. 1172; *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 3rd Sess., Mar. 2, 1895, p. 3107-3108. On a perceived Japanese threat, see: Morgan, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 188-197; Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 48-49; Love, *Race Over Empire*, 114-148.

tropical regions, which the climate encouraged and no degree of management could overcome. While he framed his argument largely around the unsuitability of regions for incorporation rather than of races, he did not totally dismiss any racial component. Certain races were more suited to different environments, he argued. So it was that peoples of mixed Indian and Spanish descent remained “far more apt to flourish” in the American tropics “than people of the Germanic stock.”²⁰

If such people were incorporated into the American body politic, his forecast was grim. “As our fellow-citizens they will not only govern themselves in their own States...but they will, through their Senators and Representatives in Congress, and through their votes in Presidential elections, and through their influence upon our political parties, help in governing the whole Republic, in governing us.” Schurz, the president of the National Civil Service Reform League, already believed that the American government was suffering from unacceptable levels of corruption and inefficiency.²¹ Even worse results could be expected if people incapable of self-government were left to determine the course of elections. Still, he insisted that the Constitution required that anyone who resided under the flag would have citizenship, and that they must have a say in how they were governed.

Finally, he attacked the claim by some that Hawaii would prove a useful base to defend American shipping and the Pacific Coast. Hawaii was over 2,000 miles from the

²⁰ Carl Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, vol. V, Frederic Bancroft, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 191-214.

²¹ Hans L. Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 182-240, *passim*.

West Coast, he observed. Not only would it add little to the defense of western ports, the archipelago could only be defended with “very strong military and naval establishments there, and a fighting fleet as large and efficient as that of the enemy.” He thought this a foolish investment, especially because he thought no country on earth could launch a meaningful attack against the American mainland. “Seeing the impossibility, under existing conditions, of striking against us a quick blow that would have any decisive consequences...all those powers will be naturally disposed to go to the extreme of honorable concession in order to avoid hostilities with the United States.” The advantage of concentrated power would be lost if the military was dispersed among islands dotting a wide ocean. Surely, America’s position was stronger without colonies than it would be with them.

Obviously, neither side actually “won” or “lost” the debate over Hawaiian annexation based on the strength of their arguments alone. Yet by comparing the two, the sharply differing perspectives of each side become clearer. Expansionists were concerned about power and America’s place in the world. Their opponents feared the corruption of American values or, worse yet, the destruction of the American political and racial order. The clash of these priorities came to the forefront again during the early months of William McKinley’s presidency.

New Beginnings

By the time McKinley was inaugurated, the situation was much as it had been in 1893. Hawaii remained independent, but the greater share of those in power continued to seek incorporation as the best avenue to financial security. While the Republican Party

platform in 1896 had called for the annexation of Hawaii, the new president initially tried to keep silent on his own view of the situation, telling representatives of the Hawaiian government in late 1896 that “I have my ideas about Hawaii,” but he considered “that it is best at the present time not to make known what my policy is.” It is, however, likely that he had wanted annexation from the beginning. An incident soon provided McKinley with an opportunity to act. When the Hawaiian government began turning away Japanese immigrants, Japan responded by sending a warship to the islands. McKinley claimed that the rising tensions between Hawaii and Japan demanded a change in the status quo. In June, he sent a message to the Senate informing them that the question of annexation had always just been “merely a question of time,” and that time had finally arrived.²² Though no action could be taken during the short opening session of the 55th Congress, a new fight over it was certain when the second session began in December 1897.

Several westerners played a significant role in the fight against Hawaiian annexation. Senators White and Pettigrew, who had fought against the treaty during the Harrison administration, became leaders of the opposition to the new treaty. In early February 1898, White introduced a simple resolution calling for Hawaiian self-rule, very similar to the one Senator Turpie had introduced in 1894. While he claimed to believe that it would pass with little opposition, when the debate over annexation became more

²² Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 48-49. For more on the increasingly common view of Japan as a threat, see also Morgan, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 188-197.

serious he dropped this course altogether. It seemed annexationists were more determined than they had been in the past.²³

At the same time, Senator Pettigrew worked—almost uncharacteristically—quietly behind the scenes. He wrote a letter to the Japanese minister in Washington, suggesting that it would be useful “for the Japanese Government to propose to join the United States in guaranteeing the independence of Hawaii.” Such an action would surely “prevent the passage of this bill or resolution for the annexation of Hawaii, there is no question about it.”²⁴ The senator from South Dakota also maintained ties to an ex-colleague—former Silver Republican Senator Fred T. Dubois of Idaho—who remained active in his opposition to the acquisition of Hawaii. Pettigrew had two of Dubois’s speeches printed and, perhaps more vitally, sought to use the ex-senator’s influence with other Silver Republicans.

Pettigrew also made contact with Hawaiians who were working to maintain independence. Writing to Joseph Carter, a close personal friend of Queen Lili’uokalani who was working with her to restore the monarchy, he asked for financial aid to support Dubois in Washington. “He has a great deal of influence with Senator Cannon [of Utah] and Senator Mantle [of Montana],” he said, “but he is poor and unable to come to Washington without assistance.”²⁵ Carter may have also provided a link to other

²³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 3, 1898, p. 1394; and *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Feb. 7, 1898, p. 1495-6.

²⁴ Richard Pettigrew to Toru Hoshi, undated (but likely January, 1898), Reel 20 of the Richard F. Pettigrew Collection.

²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Session, p 240, Dec. 17, 1897, and p 908, Jan. 24, 1898; Richard Pettigrew to Fred T. Dubois, Jan. 29, 1898; and Richard Pettigrew to Joseph O. Carter, undated (but likely January, 1898); both from Reel 20 of the Richard F. Pettigrew Collection; Merze Tate, *The United States*

opposition groups from Hawaii. Pettigrew was one of two senators to welcome representatives of native Hawaiian anti-annexation organizations, and he even invited them to the opening ceremonies of the session in early December, 1897. These groups brought with them petitions designed to show native preference for an independent Hawaii. One, with over 17,000 signatures, was given to George F. Hoar, who the Hawaiians believed was now opposed to annexation. Another, which asked for the restoration of the monarchy, was given to Pettigrew.²⁶

Despite the administration's efforts, opposition to the treaty persisted throughout early 1898. Members of Congress were soon too distracted by Spain and Cuba to deal with the treaty, but McKinley would not have long to wait. With Commodore Dewey's victory in the harbor of Manila at the beginning of May, Hawaiian annexation came to the forefront again. Hawaii, claimed the expansionists, was the most logical stopover point for voyages from the West Coast to Asia. Dewey would need to be resupplied if he was to hold the bay. Even more importantly, volunteers from the western states were already being sent to California in preparation for an expedition to the Philippines. The troopships would require a place to stop and resupply. To vote against Hawaiian annexation would jeopardize the American war effort.²⁷ Furthermore, they claimed that

and the Hawaiian Kingdom: A Political History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 322.

²⁶ On the petitions, see Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 145-163. The exact fate of the petition given to Senator Pettigrew remains a mystery. It is impossible to know how effective Pettigrew's efforts were. It is unclear if he was able to obtain money from Carter, or that former Senator Dubois came to Washington, or if the Japanese government proved receptive to his proposal (though, through Hoshi, the government of Japan repeatedly denied any interest in the acquisition of the islands).

²⁷ There is near consensus that the "necessity of war" argument carried some weight in the summer of 1898. Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*; 103-108; Love, *Race Over Empire*, 148-158; Morgan, *Pacific Gibraltar*, 225-230. Thomas Osborne saw the "war necessity" argument as a red herring

in a rapidly changing and dangerous world Hawaii was the key to any defense of the Pacific Coast and a future isthmian canal. In the calculations of others, Hawaii would be necessary if the Philippines were to be held in the long term.

Western Opposition

As debate on Newland's resolution opened up, anti-annexationists from all regions rebutted the arguments of their expansionist rivals. Western reformers raised a number of the same issues and concerns as their colleagues from the South and Northeast, with certain particular portions appearing almost identically in the speeches of all. They were just as eager to refute the validity of imperialist claims, and their statements regarding race and citizenship were largely based on the same assumptions as their counterparts from other regions. This superficial similarity can explain why previous historians have overlooked the western opposition to expansion and imperialism. However, when western reformers discussed the ultimate implications of empire, or they connected domestic structures of power to this renewed push for territory, their language demonstrated an interpretation rooted in Populism's republican ideology. They spoke of traditional fears of centralized authority, militarization, and ultimately the diminished economic opportunities that would bring about the end of free government. The exploitation of distant colonies could break the back of American democracy.

but the simple fact is, regardless of facts, it was repeatedly mentioned by members who said their opinion of annexation had changed. See *"Empire Can Wait": American Opposition to Hawaiian Annexation, 1893-1898* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), 121-126.

The speeches of western anti-annexationists all hinted at a belief that Hawaiian annexation could be just a first act that set the stage for wider expansion. In mid-June of 1898, Congressman John Shafroth attacked New York Democrat William Sulzer for saying that America “should not only annex Hawaii but should extend its power and dominion across the Pacific and forever hold possession of the Philippine Islands.” In fact, Shafroth claimed, “four-fifths of those Representatives who believe in the annexation of Hawaii” also called for the acquisition of the Philippines. Senator White claimed that “If we consummate this scheme, it will be urged that we must have the Philippines because Hawaii is not of great value unless in connection with other possessions,” and the result would be a flood of “Polynesians, Malays, Chinese, Negritas, and semi-orang-outangs [who] will demand our care.” The debate over Hawaii in the summer of 1898 must be considered in that context. These western critics were not merely attacking Hawaiian annexation, also the annexations that they feared would come with it.²⁸

Opponents of Hawaiian annexation took turns ridiculing and dismantling these arguments. Most commonly, they pointed out that Pearl Harbor had already been ceded to the United States via treaty, and the rest of the islands added little of military value.²⁹

Richard Pettigrew went further, and after thoroughly researching the matter he pointed

²⁸ Nearly all westerners who made speeches in opposition to Hawaiian annexation included references to the other colonies their rivals proposed to take next. For Shafroth and White’s comments, see: *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, App. 633-637, and Jul. 6, 1898, App. 603-619, respectively.

²⁹ Among those that pointed to American possession of Pearl Harbor were Senators William V. Allen, Stephen White, and William Roach (a North Dakota Democrat), and John Shafroth in the House. See *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess.; for Allen, Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707; for White: Jul. 6, 1898, App. 603-619; For Roach, Jun. 27, 1898, p. 6357- 6363; for Shafroth, Jun. 14, 1898, App. 633-637.

out that an alternative base was available and that it was already in American hands. “The harbor of Kiska [in Alaska] is a noble bay, perfectly protected from all winds... The entrance is wide enough to enable a sailing vessel to beat in or out at any time. There are no hidden dangers, and the depth of water is sufficient for any vessel.” Others had dismissed Alaska’s harbors as too icy or too far afield. Pettigrew threw these aside as well, using sources that his foes could not reject. Senator George Perkins, the conservative Republican closely tied to the Southern Pacific Railroad, had informed him that “that there never has been ice known in the harbor but once, and his ships have gone there for the last quarter of a century.” Additionally, information he received directly from the Department of the Navy demonstrated the limitations of Hawaii as a coaling station. In a letter he received in January, he said, the respondent from the Navy explained that the new battleship *Massachusetts*, “steaming at the most economical rate, can sail 4,797 miles. She can just get from Honolulu, by the shortest route, to Manila if nothing happens.” But, he continued, “[T]his distance that she can travel is from the official trial. She can not do it in practice. Everybody knows that the official trial is in excess of what these ships can accomplish at sea... She would be 3 miles short with every favorable circumstance, with no adverse winds or storms.” By comparison, the Aleutians were only 3,700 miles from Manila.³⁰

Other western anti-imperialists discredited claims that Hawaii was vital to American security. Senator William Roach delivered one of the most stinging speeches, sarcastically admitting,

³⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 23, 1898, p. 6258-6268.

for argument's sake, that in case we were in trouble with any European power that country would send its ships to Asia and then across the Pacific Ocean in order to attack our western coast. I will even admit that Hawaii is so large and so strong that such European power could not possibly send its ships around Hawaii, but must inevitably have them stopped as soon as they struck our coaling station in Pearl Harbor. I will admit, Mr. President, all of these things, notwithstanding the historical fact that Gibraltar is as strong a fortification as Honolulu, and not much farther distant from the United States coast; and yet we have never had trouble by reason of England's owning Gibraltar.³¹

Roach could not envision how an island thousands of miles from American shores could be essential for national security.

His colleagues continued on in the same vein as Roach, though with less sardonic wit. Senator William Allen noted that “a child capable of locating the Hawaiian Islands on the maps would be convinced at a glance” that the island had no defensive value. “They have no significance whatever and not the slightest value for defensive purposes. They will only add to the burden of our country in defending its coast, as I shall show further along.”³² Stephen White, a Californian, also questioned how a defensive perimeter so far from the mainland could be of any use against a real-world foe. San Francisco and San Diego were already fortified, and there were few powers that were even capable of attacking them. For those who claimed Britain was a threat, he pointed to British fortifications in British Columbia as a greater danger than any that could come from Hawaii. “There she is right in sight of the smoke of our civilization. She is not compelled to go 2,100 miles from anywhere and be dependent upon a precarious supply of coal and provisions.” For those who claimed Japan was the primary threat, White

³¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 27, 1898, p. 6357- 6363.

³² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707.

stated that Japan had only made friendly overtures to the United States. Japan was not even a threat to Hawaiian independence. “If her actions toward Hawaii excite doubt, negotiation—friendly, manly negotiation—will solve all.” His use of the term “manly” demonstrated that, amidst all of the excitement of war, frank discussion could still be used to assert the nation’s prerogative. Besides, only Japan and Britain had been mentioned by expansionists as threats to the West Coast, and he dismissed either as likely enemies in the foreseeable future.³³

While critics were sure that Hawaiian annexation would do little for national defense, they also suggested that distant colonies were a point of strategic weakness. White asked simply “If our coast is not well protected now, will we make its protection easier by obtaining an addition that also must be fortified?”³⁴ Congressman John Shafroth of Colorado pointed to recent examples from the war with Spain: “We have attacked Spain at her weakest points, namely, in her outlying possessions. If we acquire colonies, the first attack upon us will be through them.” As extensive as America already was, he said, it was an integrated state that provided no easy avenues for attack. “There is no way of holding a slice of territory cut from a nation located such as ours. Sooner or later it would be retaken. When nations find that nothing can be gained by war with such a country the idea of conquest vanishes even if they covet our possessions. We should not exchange concentration for diffusion.”³⁵ His fellow Coloradan agreed. “If

³³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, App. 603-619.

³⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, App. 603-619.

³⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, App. 633-637.

you pile up mountains of coal during times of peace from the territory of some of the friendly powers,” said John Calhoun Bell, “that will simply make the island a more inviting object of attack should we become involved in a foreign war.” If Hawaii were annexed, attacks would come “at this vulnerable point, in mid ocean, some six or seven days’ sail from our nearest home port.” The only possible defense would be from a greatly enlarged navy, hardly a solution Bell would endorse.³⁶

Anti-annexationists in Congress also attacked the resolution because of the threat they believed it posed to constitutional restraints on power. Allen argued that only a treaty could be used to annex territory, pointing out that a joint resolution had no more power than any other regular law passed by Congress—and like all other laws, it was only applicable within the sovereign bounds of the United States itself. He went further, emphasizing the strict-constructionist viewpoint that many Populists were committed to. “The Constitution of the United States is a grant of power that does not exist outside of its expressed provisions and necessary implication... [P]owers not expressly granted or not necessarily implied or proper for the execution of granted powers do not exist and can not be constitutionally employed.”³⁷ Senator White agreed that the Newlands Resolution went beyond the constitutionally granted powers, claiming that “there is no precedent for such legislation.” While expansionists reminded him of the example of Texas, he denied that there was a parallel. Texas was admitted as a state, but few of his contemporaries

³⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 13, 1898, p. 5832-5835.

³⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 4, 1898, p. 6634-6637, 6639-6651.

even spoke of a day in the distant future when Hawaii would become a full member of the Union. The result, he was sure, would be something akin to colonialism.³⁸

Beyond their attempts to compare the addition of Hawaiian to expansion in earlier times, annexationists claimed rather broadly that expansion was part of America's fate. Again, opponents of annexation united to refute this suggestion. Richard Pettigrew attacked the conceptual basis of manifest destiny, calling it "the murderer of men. It has committed more crimes, done more to oppress and wrong the inhabitants of the world than any other attribute to which mankind has fallen heir." It was, he said, "simply the cry of the strong in justification of their plunder of the weak."³⁹

Like Pettigrew, Congressman Bell believed manifest destiny ultimately meant the conquest of the weak by the strong. Perhaps "the time has come when manifest destiny shall automatically decree that this exemplary Government shall shed its gabardine of justice, impartiality, and equality, and shall join the Old World in gormandizing its national greed by absorbing all the smaller governments that come within its reach." Bell further castigated any who claimed that the little "republic" could provide legitimate consent for annexation. He noted that the Hawaiian senate practically controlled the affairs of the islands, but that high property qualifications prevented the vast majority from voting for those officers. The land losses of indigenous Hawaiians ensured that few of them could vote, while white planters maintained a monopoly on political power. "The best of evidence has been secured by a personal canvass of the natives and of the

³⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 21, 1898, App. 590- 603.

³⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 23, 1898, p. 6258-6268.

non-American population, and it has been found that at least 90 per cent of the population are praying for an independent government.” Bell argued that this was not, as one expansionist congressman had suggested, “the bold assertion of American manhood,” but was instead a wrongful usurpation of authority. Like other anti-expansionists, he denied that dishonorable actions displayed anything manly.⁴⁰

Legality was also tied to the central issue that nearly all anti-annexationists (and later, anti-imperialists) focused on: consent of the governed. Senator Allen struck just such a chord when, during a heated debate, he asked a colleague “suppose Congress should declare that it was a necessity to annex England and the President should approve it, would that annex England to the United States?” Certainly, he said, Congress had no legal authority to do that without some kind of popular referendum, and even Parliament lacked the authority to approve such a proposal. His opposite number declared yes, in fact, Congress did have such authority, as long as their government approved it. Allen asked how it could be possible to “bind the people of England, though the Parliament lacked authority to consent?” If this was legal, “[t]hen we can annex the world.”⁴¹

Anti-annexationists were most upset that, in every facet, expansion and colonialism would violate the basic principles of republican government. They were sure that Hawaii would not be made a state, largely due to the racial makeup of the islands. Congressman John Shafroth reminded members that the people of Hawaii “belong to an

⁴⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 13, 1898, p. 5832-5835. On anti-expansionists and their alternative deployment of masculine language, see Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 167-172, 193-196.

⁴¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 27, 1898, p. 6369-6370.

entirely different civilization, to an entirely different race. They know nothing of republican institutions.”⁴² Race was tied to democracy, and in this view most members of the opposition agreed with expansionists.

Hawaii, they were confident, would never have the right population to suit it for full partnership in the American political system. This assumption was based on both the racial demographics of the islands and commonly held beliefs that tied together mental acuity, health, and the environment. Underlying it all was a confidence that whites—living in lands to which they were well suited—had attained the highest level of civilization. In his speech in mid-June, Congressman Bell integrated both the racial and environmental elements into his argument against expansion. At one point in his speech he broke down the population of Hawaii into racial categories: “There are 40,000 Hawaiians and mixed bloods, and probably 8,000 of these are over the age of 21 years; 24,000 Japanese, mostly all males, and probably 16,000 of them above the age of 21 years; 15,000 Chinese; 8,000 Portuguese,” and so on. His focus on demographics was just part of his greater argument about politics—namely, that the islands were, due to their population, unfit for incorporation into the American political body. American freedom was based upon equal right to the ballot box. “If we annex Hawaii, we must treat all of the citizens thereof as political equals and give them the privilege of the ballot, or must make another radical change in the policy of our Government.” Just over 3,000 of the population had been identified as “Americans” in the last census of Hawaii, and this tiny fraction of the population would have no control if democracy followed the flag.

⁴² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, App. 633-637.

It was not just that whites would be outnumbered. In Bell's view, American civilization could not survive in the tropics, and products of that environment were unfit for citizenship in a democracy. "[T]here is not a case in history where this civilization has thrived under a tropical sun." In Africa, he said, the "torrid sun has never allowed the front brain to develop." These rules were immutable, he explained. "Take the extreme north; the government that has always controlled best is force. Take the temperate climate...and they tell us that reason is the controlling force there; but take the case of those within 30 degrees of the equator, and nothing else has ever governed them so well as superstition." Bell could not envision democracy existing in a place so different from the United States.⁴³

Others chimed in with similar comments. Senator Allen asked "what will this country do with 15,000,000 people such as are to be found in the Hawaiian Islands, in the Philippines, in Puerto Rico, and in Cuba, every one of them of an alien race; none of them used to the forms and solemnities of self-government; turbulent, vicious, savage?"⁴⁴ Likewise, Senator Roach said it was a "notorious fact that out of the 90,000 inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands there is not to exceed 5 per cent of them capable of taking any part in government. A government of that kind of people and by that kind of people would be irrepressible conflict, while a government for that kind of people would of necessity have

⁴³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 13, 1898, p. 5832-5835. Bell was not the only one to list the specific demographic situation on the islands; in fact, it was almost a required part of anti-annexationist speeches for a time.

⁴⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707.

to be a very strong one.”⁴⁵ Certainly, the anti-annexationists said, these were not people who could be incorporated into the American body politic.

The opponents of Hawaiian annexation feared the incorporation of distant lands and their peoples, but they had no desire for less democratic alternatives either. Regardless of region or political affiliation, all of the anti-annexationists—as well as the anti-imperialists that would follow them—believed it was impossible to reconcile a colonial system of rule with the American political tradition. Those like John Shafroth asked, “[A]re we going to violate the very principle for which our fathers fought the Revolutionary war? Are we now going to deny the principle that ‘taxation without representation is tyranny?’” Shafroth also mentioned the “monster petition against annexation, signed by more than a majority of the Hawaiians” presented by Pettigrew earlier in the session. Bell, Pettigrew, and Roach also denied that Hawaiians had consented to annexation. Roach went on to point out that Texas had been required to hold a referendum when it was annexed. If that was the example used by expansionists, that model should be followed again.⁴⁶

William Allen went farther, demanding that Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico should be granted freedom on the same basis as Cuba. “On all those islands that dot the sea I would erect and sustain an independent republican form of government,” he said, “giving them moral aid and support, as we have other islands in the past, and I would demonstrate to the world in time that all the Western Hemisphere was dedicated in

⁴⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 27, 1898, p. 6357- 6363.

⁴⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, App. 633-637; *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 27, 1898, p. 6357- 6363, Jun. 13, 1898, p. 5832-5835, Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6693-6702.

different sections and in different republics to the cause of a government by the people and for the people.”⁴⁷ Allen was every bit the American exceptionalist that his opponents were, but he thought that American influence should remain persuasive rather than coercive.

Usually, anti-annexationists also claimed that undemocratic systems under the American flag were a threat to democracy at home. However, it was on this point that the arguments of conservative opponents of expansion seemed to fall flat. They suddenly claimed that this one change would endanger the entire system upon which American freedom was based, while few among them questioned the economic or political structures of power that had taken hold domestically. For Populists and their allies, on the other hand, government by the people was already under threat. The growth of huge economic empires at home and an apparent alliance between political and corporate America had convinced many of them to leave the two-party system earlier in the 1890s. These western opponents of annexation most clearly differentiated themselves from their eastern counterparts when they discussed the far-reaching consequences they saw as the likely results of a colonial policy.

For all anti-expansionists, the proposed “new possessions” were a threat to the American racial, political, and industrial order. But because westerners viewed the existing governmental and economic systems as hugely flawed, they were particularly sensitive to the ways in which an unequal colonial system would accentuate those flaws. An examination of several of the more complete speeches, delivered by Senators Richard

⁴⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707.

Pettigrew and William Allen and Congressman John Calhoun Bell, provides clear examples of the Populist view of annexation.

Though still nominally a Silver Republican, Richard Pettigrew had informed his associates in South Dakota that he was already a Populist in every practical sense.⁴⁸ Pettigrew may have also been one of the least racist members of the Senate. In one of his speeches he gave an unfavorable comparison of aggressive Americans with their counterparts across the Pacific, the Japanese, who he called the “the most civilized people upon the globe,” who were now “adopting everything that is good and rejecting everything that is bad in modern civilization.”⁴⁹ He was upset that native Hawaiians were not consulted regarding the possible annexation of their homeland, and in defense of their intelligence he even pointed out that “The natives of Hawaii can read and write the English language. A greater percentage of the people can read and write than in nearly a majority of the American States.”⁵⁰ Still, he could not believe that the islands’ Asian majority could become proper republican citizens. Worse yet, he considered them a threat to the livelihoods of present citizens. Pettigrew believed that the founders had envisioned a government supported by independent property owners, but he contended that Asian labor posed a danger to the American yeoman. He considered “the Asiatic races” to be “people with a low vitality and great tenacity of life, human machines who could subsist upon the least of food and perform the most of work.”⁵¹ They would

⁴⁸ Richard Pettigrew to L. C. Campbell, Jan. 31, 1898, RFP Papers (Reel 20).

⁴⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 22, 1898, p. 6229-6232

⁵⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6693-6702.

⁵¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 22, 1898, p. 6229-6232.

destroy the freedom of the white laborer who was the backbone of American democracy; he left it unsaid that only whites were capable of the requisite independence to maintain such a government.

Even without the competition of Asian labor, Pettigrew also thought it unlikely that whites would ever permanently inhabit the tropics, as he believed “our race does not live in that climate; it can not.”⁵² Hawaii and its people were not suitable for incorporation, but to acquire lands that could never become states was a violation of the vision of the founders. “[I]f we adopt a policy of acquiring tropical countries, where republics can not live, and where free, self-governing people have never lived since the world had a history, we overturn the theory upon which this Government is established and we do violence to our Constitution.”⁵³

Because Pettigrew believed that “No one for one moment pretends that we intend to admit the Asiatic people of Hawaii or of the Philippines into full citizenship under the Government of this country,” the consequence would be colonial rule and government by decree. He claimed that it was the intent of the founders themselves “that no area should be brought within the bounds of the Republic which did not and could not sustain a race equipped in all essentials for the maintenance of free civilization,” but that rule was to be violated with the proposed additions. For Pettigrew, the only safeguard of freedom had been the “government of limited powers,” established by the Tenth Amendment.

⁵² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 23, 1898, p. 6258-6268.

⁵³ The following paragraphs covering Pettigrew’s speech are based on *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 22, 1898, p. 6229-6232.

Pettigrew was sure that colonialism would destroy that barrier as well. Already the accumulation of power in America had become too great. “Centralization has gone on so rapidly since the war of the rebellion,” he said, “that already our people are looking to the Government of the United States as the source of all power through which all relief must come.” Growing inequality was the consequence: “the wealth of the United States, which was once fairly distributed, has been accumulated in the hands of a few; so that, according to the last census, 250,000 men own \$44,000,000,000, or over three-fourths of the wealth of this country, while 52 per cent of our population practically have no property at all and do not own their homes.” By using their leverage to control the votes of those in the most desperate of circumstances, this tiny elite had “usurped the functions of government and established a plutocracy.”

Imperialism had been the scheme of all plutocracies, he argued. While he believed that such policies were, in part, directly for the commercial benefit of the elites, he also saw how they could use imperialism as a diversion and a justification for militarization. “[W]henver all power and all property have been gathered into the hands of the few and discontent appears among the masses, it has been the policy to acquire foreign possessions, to enlarge the army and the navy, to employ discontent and distract its attention.” Colonies would be a white elephant, and their needs would be used as a rhetorical support for an even greater extension of central government power.

Senator Allen had a similarly negative view of the threat posed by annexation, but he focused on different perils that would come with it. In a speech on July 4, he put his greatest emphasis on the threat posed by immigration. Speaking of Hawaii, the Philippines, and all other lands the most aggressive expansionists now dreamed of

acquiring, he said he could not “incorporate in our population, as citizens of the United States, 15,000,000 people belonging to alien races, the most of them ignorant, brutal, hostile, and savage,” who would “reduce the standard of our home civilization to that of a low and brutal Asiatic population.” He would not have them as citizens, but he did not believe anything else was possible under the constitution. “Once annex those islands to the United States and there is no power in Congress by legislation to prohibit the Malay of the Philippine Islands from coming to South Dakota or Nebraska or New York; and, sir, they will come by the million,” he said. Once here, they would compete with:

the farmers and laborers of your State and of my State. They will come to reduce the standard of civilization in all the occupations in this country among our legitimate population. The Japanese cooly [sic] and his son will become farmers in your State and in Nebraska, and they will lower the prices of farm products there... So, sir, the Japanese cooly's [sic] wife and daughter will become competitors with the wife and daughter of the American citizen.

Allen framed the threat as a direct attack upon American manhood and the role of men as providers and protectors of their families. But that economic threat would prove destructive to the entire American way of life. “[O]ur society can not carry the load; civilization will stagger under it,” he said. The struggle to maintain American freedom would be lost, and he forecast that “out of it all will grow a landed peasantry with a few thousand landlords, who will own millions of acres of our country.” Ultimately, the demise of free labor in America portended the failure of democracy. The nation “will pass from a Republic, which was framed by the founders, into an oligarchy, if not into

absolute monarchy itself.” Allen contended that this deadly competition with Asian labor was inevitable if America should acquire the Pacific archipelagoes.⁵⁴

In another speech, made just two days later, Allen shifted his focus to two of the other major concerns held by western reformers. First, he pointed out that the addition of new territories would require a military buildup in order to defend the islands—both from external threats and the need “to keep the natives in subjection.” “[W]e must add to the taxes of our people from \$350,000,000 to \$500,000,000 a year,” he said, essentially doubling the federal budget. “Our Navy must be increased; our standing Army must be increased to at least 200,000 soldiers, and all the burdens of taxation are to rest upon the people of this country, for we can expect nothing from the Hawaiian Islands or the other islands that we shall annex.” The taxes to pay for this would have to be wrung from American farmers and laborers, as “We can not impose an income tax because that rests upon the rich, and the Supreme Court has declared that the rich shall not be taxed.” Allen was no lover of the professional military in its own right, but the costs associated with this kind of expansion would be ruinous.⁵⁵

Worse yet, Allen was sure the yearly expenses associated with such a military would certainly exceed revenues in many years. The addition of overseas colonies was “one step, and an important step, in the interest of the perpetuation of a national debt. I have no doubt in my own mind that every man who has the money and desires to own Government bonds and draw interest from the people in the form of taxation is in favor of

⁵⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 4, 1898, p. 6634-6637, 6639-6651.

⁵⁵ This and the paragraph that follows are based on *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707.

this scheme of annexation.” The national debt had begun to increase again in recent years, and parasitic financiers had done nothing to discourage it, he was sure. With these new expenses, soon the government would be called upon by “these interest-eating patriots calling for the issuance of bonds, the borrowing of money.” Then, with colonial debt dragging down the government, control “will pass from the masses of the people, from the debtor class to the creditor class, and the Republic, if it exists, will exist in name only. It has almost reached that point now. Every one of these men is in favor of annexation.” While he limited his overtly conspiratorial language, he did claim that financiers and bondholders would make representative government irrelevant.

Allen believed that the cost of militarism would drain the resources of common people. Congressman John Calhoun Bell, on the other hand, saw even more direct links between the military establishment and the economic elite. He ridiculed the arguments made by those “high in the Army and Navy ranks” that the acquisition of Hawaii would extend the American defensive perimeter. For Bell, the military sought expansion simply for its own aggrandizement. These leaders knew the military would need to be expanded in order to defend the islands and control its population, and rule by the bayonet in these possessions would only encourage further growth of “the dominating spirit of militarism” among the citizenry. “The soldier is ever endeavoring to build up and enlarge the Army and Navy, and to obtain opportunities to display his skill in warfare,” so it was no surprise that military chieftains claimed that Hawaii was vital. Worse yet, if present conditions were any sign of things to come then he expected the military to become more closely tied to a select elite. “Every year we draw nearer and nearer to the caste system of the Old World. No man can look over the military appointments recently made

because of the social, political, or financial standing of young men... without being convinced that an invidious distinction was made against the efficient trained soldier from the ordinary ranks of society.” He even claimed, perhaps facetiously, that many now believed “that applicants for office in the Army or Navy must now present their pedigrees, strains of blood, or social standing rather than their qualifications.” Militarism was to be a tool used to establish an American aristocracy.⁵⁶

For those at the bottom of American society, the annexation of Hawaii would only lead to greater deprivations. Unlike expansion during earlier times that had provided land and resources for the use of all Americans, now Bell believed only a “few wealthy Americans and European whites will own all the valuable possessions of these islands.” Just like Pettigrew and Allen, Bell was confident that, rather than hiring white Americans (who were, according to Bell, unfit for the climate), these great property holders “will inevitably employ the natives or the poorly paid labor of like climates, and will produce untold quantities of the necessaries of life, and will pour them into our channels of trade in competition with our laboring classes.” Saying annexation brought with it “the return of slavery to this country,” Bell stated that “this menial labor will certainly be completely controlled and used by their more fortunate brethren there and here.” The support he saw in Congress for expansion of this sort provided every indication to Bell that “the United States will unfold itself in the early morning of the twentieth century into the greatest military and naval power and into the most regal and resplendent aristocracy that the

⁵⁶ This and the paragraph that follows are based on *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 13, 1898, p. 5832-5835.

world ever beheld.” While in earlier times expansion had been a guarantor of freedom for Americans, annexation in the era of unrestrained capitalism would certainly destroy it.

The examples above by Pettigrew, Allen, and Bell demonstrate how a worldview based largely on Populist ideology could be translated into a foreign policy position. While much of their content differed, certain themes appeared in all of them, and these same themes were also commonly discussed by other western opponents of annexation.

All three demonstrated a fear that expansion was a threat to American producers. Each also explicitly tied this threat to competition with Asian labor. They agreed that workers from the Pacific would depress the American standard of living, and either that they would be exploited in place or they would immigrate to the mainland to deprive Americans of employment. This view of Asian labor as malleable and unfree was hardly new, and it had especially predominated in much of the West.⁵⁷ Certainly, many of their colleagues agreed with their assessment. Senator White of California reminded all that his state had faced such a problem before, but that they had quickly learned that “there could be no intelligence or competent American citizenship in an element struggling for 10 cents per day.”⁵⁸ Congressman Shafroth pointed out that the West’s fledgling sugar beet industry could not compete with sugar “raised by contract Chinese and Japanese labor that is paid \$3 a month and board, or 30 cents a day without board.” “In the

⁵⁷ For opinions on Asian laborers in America, see Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), especially pages 153-204; Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 27-74; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 74-88; Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 3-26.

⁵⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, App. 603-619.

Philippine Islands,” he warned, “the labor conditions are still worse.” On this point, he said such labor leaders as Samuel Gompers were in agreement with his own views, and surely a majority of workers would be opposed to the addition of such people.⁵⁹

It is useful as well to note that Pettigrew and Allen pointed to more than just a fear of lower wages. When they spoke of the economic damage that could result, they frequently couched it in terms of the destruction of a proper republican citizenry. Though whiteness was a prerequisite for citizenship in their eyes, this was hardly exceptional. Nearly all, on both sides of the argument, accepted this as established fact. Populists differed from their contemporaries in the way they continued to define republican citizenship in traditional terms and believed that the economic basis of that citizenship was under threat. Populists viewed small property holders and (and often breadwinning laborers as well) as the core component of representative government, but industrialization and combinations were squeezing the independent yeoman and laborer in ways they could not combat. Asian workers would prove to be the tools of industrialists and landlords, and their ability to produce the same goods for less compensation would drive out the last of the economically self-sufficient producers. As wealth and property ownership were concentrated in the hands of fewer individuals, Populists feared that American men would lose the independence of thought and action that had been the foundation of mass participation since the early republic.

These speeches also demonstrated the extent of Populist fear of such concentrations of wealth. Allen spoke of an oligarchy, Bell of aristocracy, and Pettigrew,

⁵⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, App. 633-637.

using a word that had become a staple of his lexicon, of plutocracy. They all suggested that the acquisition of colonies would work for the benefit of a capitalist elite, who would soon become entrenched both economically and politically. However, Populists and their allies did not simply argue that the trusts would profit from annexation but instead claimed they had come to actively seek it and now pushed it among their allies in Congress. Foremost among their targets was the sugar trust. Pettigrew claimed that “the chief champions of the sugar trust in this body array themselves” on the side of annexation.⁶⁰ Allen agreed, and, brushing aside claims that the trust was actually opposed to annexation, he asserted that “Every Senator and Representative in Congress who has heretofore been considered as occupying anything like close or friendly relations with the sugar trust...is found arrayed in solid phalanx in favor of annexation.” But Allen was not done, for “other influences [are] behind this question.” Tobacco interests were no less keen on acquiring Hawaii than the sugar trust. “If the tobacco of these islands can escape taxation, as it will by annexation, it will be a saving of at least fifteen or twenty million dollars annually to the tobacco trust. Their influence is arrayed in favor of annexation.” Additionally, he suspected that “Every organization or every institution that is making armor plate is in favor of annexation; every company or individual engaged in the construction of naval vessels is in favor of annexation; all those engaged in furnishing supplies to the Army and Navy, and making tremendous profits out of it, are

⁶⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 23, 1898, p. 6258-6268.

in favor of annexation.” And all, he was sure, were using their influence in Washington at that very moment.⁶¹

The contribution of another western reform congressman should not be ignored, even though his speech was never even read aloud in the halls of Congress. Representative Charles Hartman, a Silver Republican from Montana, was not given the opportunity to address the House on the subject of Hawaiian annexation, probably due to time constraints. Instead, Hartman had his prepared comments inserted into the Appendix of the *Congressional Record*. In his remarks, Hartman said that the wealthy and powerful supporters of McKinley were finally coming to appreciate “the rapidly growing sentiment adverse to the financial policies of the Administration and to its close friendship to trusts and monopolies.” Their aim now was to “turn the attention of the people into another direction. By this new policy of imperialism which is proposed to be adopted, public investigation of questions of domestic concern may be supplanted by proposals for extending the national domain.” Better yet, “Should such extension result in complications with foreign nations,” these conflicts would provide even greater distractions and novel opportunities for profit. It was a similar mode of thinking that had allowed the passage of the War Revenue bill, he said. These interests had waited until the patriotic sentiment of the nation had blinded the public to the dangers of such propositions. “The proposed annexation of Hawaii...is but another part of the same plan.” The expenses associated with gaining and defending colonies and competing with the other great powers would compel the government “to use its credit further and to

⁶¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707.

issue still more bonds to sustain the foundation of the great bank-issuing system to be created and to add power to the present strong grasp of the money power of the world upon the industries of our people.”⁶²

Hartman’s message contained a stronger conspiratorial tone than any other one presented in opposition to Hawaiian annexation. He claimed that a grand plot was afoot, emanating from the great capitalists and sanctioned by the McKinley administration and its friends in Congress. Hartman was not the only one to call the acquisition of colonies an intentional distraction.⁶³ He was also not the only one to suggest that the debts associated with colonialism would benefit parasitic financiers. Hartman’s real innovation was his directness. His remarks lacked subtlety or innuendo, and for that reason his message was clear when he invoked the name of the money power.

It is perhaps strange that Hartman’s speech was one of the very few to mention the money power by name. Western reformers of all stripes had freely brought up the conspiracy at other times during the session. The early portions of the debate over Hawaii actually overlapped with the last discussions of the War Revenue bill, and no small number had been willing to attribute the most onerous measures of that bill to the money power. Despite their hints that powerful interests were pushing certain congressmen for annexation, western opponents of expansion were less willing to characterize all of their opponents as sinister tools of the ever-grasping financial powers.

⁶² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 11, 1898, App. 540-545.

⁶³ This claim—that overseas expansion was consciously planned as a distraction to encourage loyalty and quell dissatisfaction at home—was also the thesis of a book by Walter Karp. See Karp, *The Politics of War: The Story of Two Wars which Altered Forever the Political Life of the American Republic, 1890-1920* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

One explanation may have to do with their increasing awareness that imperialism was not merely in the interests of financiers. Manufacturers, mining and land speculators, shipping magnates—a far more diverse lot—could find value in overseas expansion. The battle of 1896 had been waged almost solely against banking interests and monetary speculators. By 1898, on the other hand, “aristocracy” and “plutocracy” were increasingly becoming the Populist watchwords.

Another possible explanation relates to divisions among the western reformers themselves. While many of their most important leaders in Congress opposed annexation, there were notable exceptions. Henry Teller and William Stewart—a regular promoter of the money power conspiracy himself—were among those who suddenly supported the administration’s initiative. Stewart was beginning his shift back into the Republican Party, a more fitting place for the mine operator and friend of big business. By comparison, Teller’s political journey would continue its convoluted path for the remainder of the debate over expansion.

Western Annexationists

Western annexationists were more politically diverse than their opponents. Nearly all regular Republicans from western states supported the annexation of Hawaii, and they were joined by a smattering of Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans. Despite the evidence to the contrary presented by the anti-expansionists, most western annexationists cited wartime necessity as their primary motivation. Many also pointed to the strategic and economic value that the island could bring. But while several

Republicans suggested that this was only a beginning, western reformers more frequently stated that Hawaii represented their limit.

House Republicans demonstrated little hesitancy on the matter. John Barham of California saw only opportunity. The islands, he said, were quite valuable in and of themselves. The United States already had a greater trade with them than it did with most other nations. Barham was also sure that the islands could not maintain their independence. Those who opposed annexation preferred “quietly sitting by [to] see England, Japan, Germany, or some other nation take the islands and their trade and military advantages.” Furthermore, “The islands are of great importance from a military point of view. The strategic importance of Hawaii has been demonstrated by facts developed during the pending war with Spain.” He brushed aside the claims that the islands were unnecessary, saying that he preferred the arguments presented by military men. Just as one went to a doctor for medical problems, “So it seems to me, in military and naval affairs, that we should be largely guided by the opinions of men learned and trained upon these subjects.” To refuse annexation would threaten all that had been won, and thus “sacrifice the unparalleled achievement of our arms upon the seas, so heroically won by Admiral Dewey and his men at Manila, and endanger him, his men, and our soldiers who so recently left the port of San Francisco to aid in holding the fruits of that victory.”⁶⁴

Barham followed the typical expansionist script in his speech, but his speech remained focused on the value of Hawaii itself. Another California, Samuel Hilborn,

⁶⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 14, 1898, p. 5910-5913.

believed that annexation was about much more. Dewey's victory had changed the world, and America's place in it. Before then, "We took no heed of the contentions of nations striving for territorial aggrandizement. We were content to build up and develop this continent." Now, he said, "The world looks upon us now as a martial nation, ready to participate in the struggles which change the map of the world." The spot on the map that most concerned Hilborn on this day was an archipelago just off the coast of Asia. Americans were heading to the Philippines already, and many would certainly meet their ends there. "Miles of headstones will mark the burial place of soldiers from every State of the American Union....No foreign flag will ever wave over an American burial ground where rest America's brave defenders. To whom shall we surrender these islands?" Before the American flag had even been hauled up in Manila, he denied the right of anyone to take it down. Hawaii was needed as a stepping stone to "reach our more distant possessions in the Orient."⁶⁵

Barham and Hilborn were quite typical of Congressional Republicans during the debate. Barham spoke of an immediate need due to the war. Hilborn spoke of new responsibilities that Americans understood only as a consequence of the war. Anti-expansionist fears of colonialism and militarism were brushed aside. Barham obviously believed that the military leadership should be followed, not instructed. Hilborn said a larger military establishment was "already necessary." As America took its place in the world, "we have been irresistibly swept into a position where we must become a warlike nation." Barham mocked those who claimed that a new foreign policy would change

⁶⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 14, 1898, p. 5927.

immigration, especially those who claimed “the Chinese will literally overrun the country.” Chinese exclusion, he reminded his audience, was expressly maintained in the resolution of annexation. As for the Japanese, “All the Japanese in the world can now come into the United States without the lightest obstruction.” Hilborn, too, said that America’s racial problems would remain unchanged. Neither even made reference to spreading democracy, or the concept of consent of the governed.⁶⁶

Few reformers in the House shared their unwavering confidence. Those that favored expansion believed in limits, and for many Hawaii itself represented that limit. The author of the controversial resolution, Congressman Newlands, gave a lengthy speech on annexation in which he laid out many of the same arguments that certain Republicans had. He spoke of the need to secure access to and from an isthmian canal, just as Senators Lodge and Morgan had throughout the 1890s. The islands also had strategic utility, for either offensive or defensive operations. However, he argued that possession of them would be such a deterrent to American enemies that annexation would “minimize the necessity of militarism.” He also wished that the issue would not be “considered in the public mind in connection with the Philippine question.” Hawaii had a small population, but in the case of the Philippines, the “acquisition of such a population may entirely break down and destroy our industrial system.” Annexing those islands would only complicate American systems of “individual liberty, individual

⁶⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 14, 1898, p. 5911-5913, June 14, 1898, p. 5927.

representation, and industrial and commercial laws.” True colonialism was to be avoided at all costs.⁶⁷

In the Senate, Republicans from all regions spoke rather sparingly, frequently leaving Democrats, Populists, and Silver Republicans to fight amongst themselves. In these fights, Nevada’s William Stewart and the venerable Henry Teller were two of the chief antagonists of the anti-expansionists. The West’s two elder statesmen specialized in tearing down the Constitutional arguments made against annexation.

Stewart did not lay out any ideological basis for his support of expansion. His longest speech essentially declared that the United States Congress could do as it wished, annexing or ruling lands without constitutional restrictions. When Allen pressed him, sure that he must believe in some limits to the power of Congress, Stewart assured him that they were few. “There is no lack of power to pass an act,” he said, and very little that could not be done through one. Congress could even “pass an act tomorrow extending our boundaries 300 miles down into Mexico, our courts would have to follow it.” In such a case, even Mexico’s consent would be legally superfluous. “The only remedy Mexico would have would be war.” And once land was annexed, Congress could dispose of it as it chose. The question of ultimate statehood rested with the “sound discretion of Congress. It may take a century or two....The decision holds that Congress

⁶⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 13, 1898, p. 5828-5831. Congressman Marion De Vries, a California Democrat, demonstrated a similar perspective in his entry in the Appendix to the *Congressional Record*. See *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, App. 655-666.

must also exercise a sound discretion when it will cease to treat it as a colony or Territory. That is a question we may not live to see disposed of.”⁶⁸

While Stewart’s precise motivation for supporting expansion remains unclear, Henry Teller’s views are less murky. Teller was, in no uncertain terms, a fervent expansionist. His desire to add new land to the American republic had in no way diminished, and his statements in 1898 were little different than those he had made in 1894. Most of his speeches focused on historical examples of expansion—and opposition to expansion—from the earliest days of the republic. He especially liked to speak of Thomas Jefferson’s experience, and he seemed to be speaking to his anti-annexationist friends when he did so. He liked telling the story of Jefferson’s doubts concerning the constitutionality of annexing the Louisiana country. Though troubled by right up to the last, “he solved that doubt, Mr. President, in favor of bringing it in.” Teller considered it Jefferson’s greatest contribution as president, an act which ensured American greatness.⁶⁹

The senator from Colorado did not speak only of the past. Teller was sure that America’s future lay in the Pacific. America’s population would only grow, he said, and trade would be necessary for continued prosperity. Trade with Asia would become “the great trade of the world and a great boon to this great population when it shall be

⁶⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 27, 1898, p. 6366-6370.

⁶⁹ For this and the following paragraphs, see: *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 25, 1898, p. 6346-6348. For more of his talk of the history of expansion, and Jefferson in particular, see: *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 27, 1898, p. 6367, 6372; and Jul. 1, 1898, p. 6586-6587.

overflowing and filling the land with just such people as we have to-day, only, I trust, a little better.” Hawaii was a part of that link across the Pacific.

But Teller’s ambition did not stop there. Some had said that to take land in a war that was fought for humanity’s sake would seem ignoble. But Teller believed the nation had entered this war “in the interests of freedom,” and nothing “you will do anything to debase them. I do not believe that will be possible, though we may take in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Hawaiian Islands, and the Philippine Island.” He was confident that it would never become sordid because he was sure they would be governed, “not only [in] the interest of the American people, but every one of the people whom we invite or bring under the influence of our flag.”

Teller’s reference to an “invitation” to join America hinted at a principle that he had emphasized in his 1894 speech in favor of Hawaiian annexation. While back then he had even said that he was “in favor of the annexation of the great country lying north of us,” there was a condition. “If the Canadians will never choose to come to us we shall never get them,” he had said. The United States should “so manage affairs that they can see ultimately that it is their interest to become a part of the United States,” and then Canada would voluntarily join the Union.⁷⁰ Canada was his example, but he made it clear in 1894 that the principle was the same for any country. Perhaps Teller forgot about his earlier remarks, because by 1898 he no longer spoke of consent. Yet he still believed that America would rule these lands with justice, and that soon they would be shown the benefits of connection to the United States. If it was indeed a memory lapse, it was one

⁷⁰ *Congressional Record*, 53th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 29, 1894, p. 1578-79.

that would last into 1899. But even if it took him longer than many of his friends, Teller too would eventually remember his devotion to liberty.

The joint resolution for annexation came up for a vote in the House of Representatives on June 15. It passed by a vote of 209 to 91, six members counted as “present,” and an additional forty-nine not voting. Among the supporters of the resolution were twenty-two westerners, ten of whom were Republicans and the rest reformers. No Republicans from the western states voted in opposition to annexation, while six Populists, Democrats and Silver Republicans did. It is interesting that no Republicans were absent, while six Populists were. Others spoke up for them, claiming that several of them would have voted for the resolution had they been there. Yet it would seem no mistake that they were absent.⁷¹

The Senate vote was scheduled for July 6, but the day before the conclusion Senator Hoar announced his reversal on the subject. He noted the points made by opponents of annexation—that military enlargement would become necessary, that the country would be swept into competition with the great powers, or that expansion would continue because of it—and then claimed that it was all “needless alarm.” Hawaii was small, it would be added as a wartime measure, and while he had no desire for colonial adventure, there was nothing of the sort to worry about in the case of Hawaii.⁷²

Pettigrew was furious. He and Hoar were the two men seen by the Hawaiian delegates who sought to maintain the independence of their homeland, and now Hoar

⁷¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 15, 1898, p. 6019.

⁷² Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 148-150.

chose to maintain party loyalty over their interests. “The Senator from Massachusetts says that this is wrong,” declared Pettigrew in the minutes before the vote, “that it is a sin; that it is wicked; but the islands are so little that if we will forgive him for taking that country, he will sin no more; he will be virtuous and resist a like crime if it involves a larger acquisition of territory.” He scolded Hoar for forgetting that “the first step in wrongdoing is the dangerous step. If we set the example, regardless of honor, of acquiring title to a territory from puppets that we have set up, what will we not do?” Hoar’s earlier talk of moral action rang hollow in the South Dakotan’s ears now.⁷³

The vote in the Senate was much the same as it had been in the House. There, the aggregate vote was 42 to 21, with a remarkable twenty-six members not voting. Ten western Republicans were joined by two Silver Republicans (Teller and Cannon of Utah) and one former Populist (Kyle of South Dakota, who Pettigrew believed was trading votes for patronage). Five western members—Allen, Pettigrew, Roach, White, and the Silver Party man from Nevada, John Jones—all voted against the measure. Seven more westerners did not vote at all. Only one of these—John Thurston of Nebraska—was a Republican. Thurston was likely also the only one of their number who was there that day to state his opinion on the subject. He declared that he was against annexation, but he was paired with a member who was likely to vote for it but not present, and so he sat out the voting. Again, six western reformers absented themselves for vote.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6693-6702.

⁷⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6712.

It is almost certain that these non-voting members sensed the importance of the issue to their allies, men they intended to work with again. It was just as likely that they did not want to be on record voting against a measure that some believed to be quite popular. These members sensed the powerful emotions stirred up by expansion and the war, but there must have been ambivalence. The remarks of Newlands, author of the resolution, had demonstrated this ambivalence. Pettigrew, Allen, and other reformers felt no hesitation in their opposition. They acted with a sense of moral certitude, and they believed they were defending the foundations of independence in republican America. By fleshing out the anti-expansionist elements that already existed within the Populist analysis, they set the stage for their fight against empire.

Whether or not they were prepared for their next contest in the halls of Congress, another moment of decision was approaching. The reformers had fought the administration all spring and into the summer, but they had helped make McKinley's a wartime presidency. In their defeats, they had challenged the policies and initiatives of the President, and conservatives wanted them held to account for it. Late summer marked the beginning of a another campaign season, and the winner would hold the upper hand in the next series of debates.

CHAPTER VI

PATRIOTISM AND THE ELECTION OF 1898

Western reformers had begun the year 1898 with high hopes. They successfully stifled the administration's new banking act and instead demanded a financial system that was directly accountable to the people. They were confident that, at least in their home states, popular support was on their side. Just as they had in 1896, many of them believed they would campaign in the fall on a platform that demanded economic justice. But then the war—which they had helped bring about—complicated the situation. The war was fought on the terms chosen by the commander-in-chief, and the reformers were unable to stop the War Revenue Bill or the annexation of Hawaii. Could their old agenda still take precedence over the new issues?

For politicians in the western states these were especially difficult times, and no western reformer knew more of these challenges than Richard Pettigrew. Aside from being one of the fiercest opponents of the “vested interests” in the nation's capital, the South Dakota senator was also the most well-connected politician in his state. In early 1898, as Congress was debating Gage's monetary restructuring and the discussion of Cuba intensified, Pettigrew was simultaneously working to cement another fusion coalition in South Dakota for the 1898 campaign. He tried (and failed) to keep South Dakota Alliance founder Henry Loucks from bolting the Populists.¹ While he informed his friends he was now a Populist, he told them that he was not “going to make any

¹ Richard F. Pettigrew to H. L. Loucks, 29 January, 16 February, 1 March 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition (hereafter, RFP Papers), reel 20. On Louks's return to Republican Party, see Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 154.

particular fuss about it, or get into the newspapers.”² He believed the Silver Republican organization he had helped form would soon be dead, but in the short term he thought it could be used “as a half-way station” for those not yet ready to move directly into the Populist Party.³ He also demanded that members of all parties be given places on the ticket and hoped to create a proper partnership that would permanently bind the parties together. The goal was to eventually bring all—including Democrats—into the Populist ranks or, failing that, to form a new party for all reform forces.⁴

Pettigrew believed that the key to success lay in holding firm to the message of economic justice and grass-roots democracy. As he explained to one confidante, the object was to “rally the people who protest against government by injunction, government by trusts, government by the banks—in fact, against the domination of plutocracy.”⁵ In early April, before the war, he told one of his associates that the coming campaign must focus on national issues: free silver, government control of the currency, and opposition to the trusts. The McKinley administration made sure that these issues remained alive, and Pettigrew was sure that the president’s subservience to the economically powerful would be at the heart of the fall campaign.⁶

² Richard F. Pettigrew to U. S. G. Cherry, 28 January 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 20.

³ Richard F. Pettigrew to L. C. Campbell, 31 January 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 20.

⁴ Richard F. Pettigrew to Thomas H. Ayres, 21 January 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 20; Pettigrew to S. A. Cochran, 2 June 1898, and Pettigrew to C. B. Kennedy, 8 June 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 21. The last two of these letters suggest that Pettigrew’s goal was not just to create a single state party dedicated to reform, but in fact he believed that the same situation was playing out nationally.

⁵ Richard F. Pettigrew to Everitt Smith, 20 January 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 20.

⁶ Richard F. Pettigrew to U. S. G. Cherry, 2 April and 11 April 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 20.

The senator's tone began to change just two months later. While he had initially believed that the war would be over so quickly that it would not affect the elections in the fall, he sensed a growing possibility that it could interfere.⁷ On June 20, he wrote Governor Andrew Lee and told him it was now necessary to "make State issues prominent" in the coming fusion campaign, especially by emphasizing the initiative and referendum. While he hoped his Populist colleagues in the House would win their elections, "I am a thousand times more anxious for your election." Pettigrew told Lee rather bluntly that all future success required continued control of state offices.⁸ No longer was the election to be a referendum on McKinley.

Never did Pettigrew state why it was necessary to change course, but it seems apparent that he wanted to avoid any discussion of the war and its consequences. A week later he wrote Lee again and provided a brief glimpse of his thoughts. "The Anglo-Saxon has an inherent greed for land," he said, and the desire "to reach out and conquer the world is bred in his blood and bone." Americans did not realize, however, that conquest did not provide the benefits it had in past generations. Imperialism would allow the "plutocracy" to be "thoroughly enthroned in this country." If that should happen, "of course we will follow in the wake of all Republics, and in fact all nations of the past and a speedy decay of patriotism and free institutions will set in."⁹ Yet he sensed that most

⁷ While he tried to remain confident about the state campaign, he told a confidant that he expected victory "unless the war upsets our calculations." See Richard F. Pettigrew to Alfred N. Coe, 8 June 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 21.

⁸ He gave a similar message to a regular correspondent, U. S. G. Cherry, on the same day. See Richard F. Pettigrew to U. S. Cherry, and Pettigrew to Andrew E. Lee, 20 June 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 21.

⁹ Richard F. Pettigrew to Andrew E. Lee, 27 June 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 21.

Americans were not ready to reject the temptations of imperialism. The excitement of war had captured the public mind, and it was too soon to begin that fight on the campaign trail. That same excitement had transformed what Pettigrew thought was going to be an easy contest in the fall into a totally uncertain quantity.

The difficulties that Pettigrew faced were the same as those that challenged the other reform coalitions throughout the West. In places like Nebraska, Colorado, and Washington, they struggled to show a unified front as they entered what was, due to circumstances beyond their control, already guaranteed to be a confusing campaign. Their message, one that emphasized the regeneration of American economic opportunity and political freedom, had an uncertain place in this changing environment. Worse yet, the civic nationalism that the reform parties had channeled for support was in danger of being replaced by the kind of militaristic patriotism advocated by their conservative opponents. All told, the events of that year caused a dramatic shift in the political discourse that had characterized the debates of the 1890s.

Politics and Patriotism in 1898

Over the course of 1898, “patriotism” and its myriad definitions became a substantive topic of discussion. One of the most notable contributions to this discussion was Carl Schurz’s article, titled plainly enough “About Patriotism,” in which he questioned whether the aggressive jingoism that many displayed was really behavior fitting of the citizens of a republic. “Indeed,” he wrote, “it is difficult to imagine a wantonness of spirit more reckless, more wicked, more repugnant to true patriotism, than the use of whatever influence one may possess to bring on war, with all its horrors and

miseries, so long as the possibility of preserving an honorable peace has not utterly vanished.” He despised the talk of war for its own sake, and he tried to shift definitions of patriotism away from those tied to martial traditions. Love of one’s country should be a concept reserved for higher purposes than that.¹⁰

Schurz was not the only one who believed that patriotism had deeper meanings, even if many of those who agreed with him on that point had differed with him in April of 1898. Populists and their allies had attempted all year long to appropriate the concept of patriotism to bolster the cause of reform. By the summer, that objective was slipping away from them. When war came, militarized valor and unquestioned loyalty again became the synonyms of patriotism, and opponents of the commander-in-chief found themselves having to defend their right to object.

Early in the year, this language was deployed to unify the coalition of parties that had come together in 1896. In February, representatives of the Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans in Congress issued separate statements to their members, calling for united opposition to the Republican Party and the financiers who backed them. All three invoked patriotism as the motive which would animate the people in their support of reform. Most emphatic of all were the Populists, who proclaimed that “Patriotism and manhood are not dead,” for the American people were awakening to the threats to their freedom. “The spirit of ’76 is abroad in the land and the friends of liberty everywhere are awaiting the patriotic call to fight a common battle against a common foe. Let this be done, and we can crush every traitor as did the men of the American revolution.” The

¹⁰ Carl Schurz, “About Patriotism,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 16, 1898, p. 363.

Populists also flayed the foreign “gold syndicate”—clearly just the money power sanitized for broader consumption. Any man who opposed them was little more than a “tory,” they said.¹¹

One of the biggest congressional battles at the beginning of the year had been over Secretary Gage’s proposal to restructure the nation’s financial system, a move that involved the selling of a great many government bonds and the replacement of greenbacks with national bank currency. The response from westerners had been overwhelmingly negative, and again they frequently claimed that their opposition was the patriotic position. When the writer for the *Yakima Herald* asked Republicans to “Hold patriotism above party and choose as becomes a free born American citizen,” they were certainly not alone.¹² William Allen had said much the same in Congress. “We should not imperil the interests of present and future generations by farming out this right [to print money] to associations,” he said. “I hold that man to be an enemy of his country, whether consciously or not I do not pretend to say, who would turn over the power to make and issue money to private institutions.” While he would not “decry a man because he deals in money if he is honest and patriotic,” but generally “the rule is that such men know no nation, no patriotism, and but few have knowledge of any God save the gold they horde and worship.” Handing over this power to such individuals would be more than just dangerous, but nearly disloyal.¹³

¹¹ “Appeal for a Silver Union,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 16, 1898, p. 7.

¹² “The Issue Now Clear,” *Yakima Herald*, Feb. 10, 1898, p. 2.

¹³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 7, 1898, p. 418-423.

Patriotism—along with “manhood”—was utilized by the western reformers as they called for intervention in Cuba. Yet in this context, when love for country ran afoul of the wishes of the money power, critics of the administration claimed that greed was triumphant. As a writer for the *Denver Times* put it, “Justice may be outraged, our president may be traduced and villified [sic], our national honor may be impugned,” but the country remained bound “to the interests of the Spanish bondholders.”¹⁴ When fifty of the leading residents of Colorado Springs (who self-identified as “patriotic citizens”) called for peace in the wake of the destruction of the *Maine*, local newspapers attacked them mercilessly. One sarcastically stated that, while their patriotism was not “the sort that enabled this country, in 1776, to declare its independence and establish a free and independent republic... they are still patriots; they are patriotic to the vast interests of wealth at home and abroad.”¹⁵ Populists and Democrats were not so much equating patriotism with violent action as they were defining it to be unfettered by greed.

When war did come, the position of the administration’s opponents became much more complicated. To fight McKinley now was to question the decisions of a war-time commander-in-chief. Conservatives sensed the opportunities this presented and leapt at them, and the first such opportunity arose with western opposition to the War Revenue Bill. Eastern congressmen and newspapers attacked those attempting to stop the bill, suggesting that they had ignored all of the calls for wartime unity.

¹⁴ “Republican Mockery,” *New Castle Nonpareil* (CO), Feb. 24, 1898, p. 4, reprinted from *Denver Times*, date unknown.

¹⁵ “Colorado Springs Patriots,” *Durango Wage Earner*, March 31, 1898, p. 1.

Western reformers proved remarkably sensitive to these slights, and they began to include defenses of their patriotism in nearly every speech they made. Henry Teller lashed out after seeing newspapers in which “Senators who do not believe in a bonded debt [were] characterized the other day as the ‘assistant Spaniards.’” Certainly, the once quiet friends of the administration did not have a monopoly on patriotism, he said.¹⁶ A Populist congressman from Kansas, Nelson McCormick, likewise claimed that while all “Populists, Silver Republicans, Democrats, and Republicans are willing and ready to assist our President in this war with Spain,” he also feared Republicans would “charge disloyalty because we exercise our judgment as well as our rights as Representatives.”¹⁷ His fellow Kansan, Jerry Simpson, claimed to be entering “the discussion of this bill with a great deal of fear and trembling, for there is still ringing in my ears the accusation of the chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means to the effect that all those who may not on this occasion support this bill without any opposition will be guilty of demagoguery, pettifoggery, or a lack of patriotism.”¹⁸

Other westerners counterattacked, claiming that patriotism was being used as a shield to pass outrageous measures, such as huge bond sales and new regressive taxes. John Kelley said that he had been “rudely awakened to a realization of the fact that the spirit of patriotism which is aroused throughout the country has been taken advantage of, and an attempt is being made, while the minds of the people are distracted by the clamor

¹⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 26, 1898, p. 5210-5215.

¹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, p. 4375.

¹⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 28, 1898, p. 4395-4400.

of war, to satisfy the maw of the money changers.”¹⁹ James Hamilton Lewis warned against being “buoyed off upon an imaginary patriotism to wrong the people by deluding them and robbing them,” and he reminded his audience that “war has ever been the pat time for the pilferers of public confidence and the plunderers of the public Treasury to do their destructive work.”²⁰

Western newspapers printed similarly skeptical analyses of the War Revenue bill. The editor of the *Yakima Herald* wrote that “The republican party thinks it has at last found an opportunity to silence all opposition to their policies.” Indeed, the Republicans had “issued their ultimatum that to criticise [sic] republicanism is treason, and that the definition of the word patriotism shall for three years, or during the war, be changed from that given by Webster to read: ‘Love of the republican party; devotion to the welfare of the republican party; the passion which inspires one to serve the republican party.’” Those who refused to accept such a definition were “traitors and copperheads.”²¹ Others leveled charges that the interests which were protected by Republicans were not doing their part. The oil trust and the sugar trust—the monopolies that were subject to special taxation—were certain to use the courts to “evade this tax, same as the income tax was evaded a few years ago.” The common people showed “their patriotism by uncomplaining compliance” with the new taxes laid upon consumer goods, but “with the powerful corporations generally there is no patriotism at all.”²²

¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, App. 358-360.

²⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 29, 1898, p. 4437.

²¹ “Criticism,” *Yakima Herald*, April 28, 1898, p. 4.

²² *Aspen Daily Times*, June 25, 1898, p. 2.

Some continued to fight for definitions of patriotism tied to independence and character rather than simply strict loyalty to a party or political figure. One writer declared that any “senators who surrender their principles, betray their constituents and abjectly surrender to the money sharks should be branded with the scorn and contempt of every patriotic citizen.”²³ Another stated that “Patriotism does not consist of falling in with every nefarious financial or taxing scheme that is put forward by designing politicians under the guise of patriotism. The truest patriot is the one who forgets self in his desire to stand up for the common good.”²⁴ As part of the national discourse, their attempts to define patriotism as something separate from unquestioned loyalty may have been unsuccessful. Now they were set to face the fierce opposition in their own states.

Republican congressmen and papers from the western states were slow to attach additional partisan meaning to the term “patriotism,” and it demonstrates how the appropriation of nationalist sentiment was influenced by regional political trends. Western Republicans suffered major setbacks in the election of 1896 when they went to the polls as the standard-bearers of gold money and the national banking system generally. Their newspapers had clung to the forlorn hope of international bimetallism as long as they could. When Secretary Gage proposed strengthening the gold standard and national banks at the beginning of the Fifty-fifth Congress, both groups had either remained silent or cautioned against such a move. They still considered themselves as

²³ *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, May 9, 1898, p. 5.

²⁴ *Omaha World-Herald*, May 5, 1898, p. 4.

the representatives of the party, but they felt could not win with that party's economic platform. The War Revenue Bill looked no more promising.

Western Republicans in Congress had supported the revenue measure without exception, but they had barely spoken a word in its favor. Their friends in the newspaper business were also surprisingly quiet on the issue. They certainly wanted to join the partisan chorus, but they were left wondering how to go about it. The *Omaha Daily Bee*, for instance, dropped hints that the administration's opponents were disloyal, but refused to say why they should be classified as such. One two-sentence piece sardonically noted that Spain had an advantage, because in that country "obstructionist" politicians "have no newspaper organs through which they can make attacks on the government and incidentally help the enemy."²⁵ A similarly brief and non-specific piece criticized the "popocratic yellow kids" who are "constantly snarling" at the heels of the president when they should have been praising him. Even what he should have been praised for, the author did not say.²⁶ This was relatively mild stuff for the frequently unrestrained writers for the *Bee*, but they had few alternatives available at that time. They, like many other western Republican journals, had nothing positive to say about the War Revenue Bill. In a series of articles, they attacked the bond issue as totally unnecessary and undesirable. Though it was to be a "popular loan," bankers and financiers were certain to end up with the majority of them. They denied that anyone "assails the patriotism of the bankers" (apparently the author was not reading anything coming out of the nation's capital), but

²⁵ *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 28, 1898, p. 4.

²⁶ *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 18, 1898, p. 4.

added that the interests of financiers were opposed to those of nearly all other classes. Put simply, they were in no position to make support of the bill a litmus test for patriotism. Theirs was not the only publication in such a position. The response of Republican papers ranged from damning with faint praise to modest condemnation of the bill, but their coverage of it overall was substantially less than that provided by Democratic or Populist publications. Western Republicans remained fearful of the economic issues that had brought about their decline throughout the region.²⁷

Congress soon moved from the debate over finance to the first wartime discussions of expansion, and new opportunities arose. While not yet ready to fight over bonds and taxes, western conservatives soon grabbed onto the Hawaiian annexation fight as a tool to be used against their enemies. Many claimed that the addition of the island was somehow necessary to aid and honor the nation's brave combatants. California Congressman John Barham said that Hawaii could serve as an adequate base only after it was annexed. Those who opposed such a measure wanted to "sacrifice the unparalleled achievement of our arms upon the seas, so heroically won by Admiral Dewey and his men at Manila," and in the meantime "endanger him, his men, and our soldiers who so recently left the port of San Francisco to aid in holding the fruits of that victory."²⁸ As

²⁷ From the *Omaha Daily Bee*, see "No Call for a Bond Issue," April 29, 1898, p. 4; "Not a Popular Loan," May 4, 1898, p. 4; "The Plea for a Bond Issue," May 8, 1898, p. 12. The *Bee* was, on certain but rare occasions, an unorthodox Republican paper. A more strictly partisan paper, the *Red Cloud Chief*, presented the bill in much the same way. Their editor wrote that, "Although these bonds will only pay three per cent interest, the big financiers are so certain that they will soon command a premium that they will gladly take them all." See *Red Cloud Chief* (NE), June 17, 1898, p. 1. Another thoroughly partisan paper, the *Spokane Chronicle*, made no reference to the War Revenue Bill on its opinion pages at all, and its overall coverage was minimal.

²⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, p. 5910-5913.

noted in the previous chapter, another Californian, Samuel Hilborn, tied Hawaiian annexation to the acquisition of the Philippines. Because American blood would be shed to raise the flag in that distant Spanish colony, it was inappropriate for it to be every lowered again. According to Hilborn, to abandon any of these Pacific islands dishonor America's war dead.²⁹

Western reformers denied that their policies were disloyal or unpatriotic, and they accused their adversaries of taking advantage of the war craze. Senator White attempted to remind those who said that the flag must never be lowered that "we revere and honor [it] because it is not only the flag of our country, but because we believe that the Government which it represents is based and acts upon principles of honor, upon maxims and policies which will stand the scrutiny of ages and remain untarnished and unquestioned when the strongest of us shall be summoned hence, when tyranny shall be driven from the earth."³⁰ Pettigrew refuted the claim that only unquestioned loyalty was acceptable in wartime, and argued that the attempts to make America a more militarized society should "alarm patriotic citizens and lead to an anxious inquiry as to whither we are drifting."³¹ The war had not changed the reformers' definitions of patriotic behavior.

Yet it is impossible to suggest that they were impervious to the conservatives' attacks. In fact, anti-expansionists had continued to support their own definition of patriotism as a defense against the claims that they were disloyal. William Allen sensed

²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 14, 1898, p. 5927.

³⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 21, 1898, App. 590-603.

³¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 22, 1898, p. 6229-6232.

that this intimidation was having its desired effect, for late in the session he said it was a true shame that “more moral backbone can not be found in Congress to stop this hasty legislation [the annexation resolution].”³² Several of his colleagues all but admitted that they were cowed by the pressure. James H. Lewis of Washington was late to take sides, but in his remarks in the *Congressional Record*’s appendix he stated that he was compelled to act contrary his own desires. “Whatever my personal sentiments may have been previous to the Spanish American war,” he now had to ignore his “personal fears” in order to support expansion. “My state, her citizens, my constituents, have in various ways expressed their desires, wishes, and preferences upon the issue.”³³ Freeman Knowles of South Dakota openly admitted that he felt compelled to support Hawaiian annexation—despite his previous opposition to it—because of the war. Surely, he succumbed as much to annexationist attacks as he did to any of their arguments.³⁴

The western press demonstrated these trends clearly. In some places, especially the Pacific Coast states, nearly all the media supported the acquisition of Hawaii. That fact offered no special protection for those who did oppose it. The editor of the *Oregonian*, one of the Pacific Northwest’s most prominent conservative papers, demonstrated his impatience with the opponents of the measure. “The privilege of unlimited talk in the senate is one of the abuses flagrant in that body. The country will not forever endure it. Meantime, while this obstructive talk is going on, there is no way

³² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, p. 6702-6707.

³³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 11, 1898, App. p. 535-537 (There is no evidence that it was read aloud).

³⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 15, 1898, p. 5989-5990.

to supply our sailors and soldiers...” Despite little evidence to support the claim, they declared that opponents of the president were jeopardizing American lives.³⁵ But some in the fusion press accepted similar visions of wartime patriotism, further weakening the position of the opposition. The editor of the *Yakima Herald* called the acquisition of Hawaii a “war measure” that was “of more importance than a fleet of battleships.” The same paper even reprinted an article from an eastern paper titled “Stand by the President,” which equated opposition to annexation with the defiance of the orders of the commander-in-chief.³⁶ With little thought for its greater political meaning, the *Herald* portrayed some of its allies as traitors. Certainly, the war brought with it certain challenges for anyone who dissented.

The War and Politics in the States

The war necessarily had an impact on state politics and the discussion of issues at the local level. Western people and their state governments ended up playing a significant role in what would come to be a global event. Dewey’s victory guaranteed that the military campaigns would not be confined to the Caribbean but would extend into the Pacific as well. All of a sudden, geography, expediency, and politics would come together to put the people of the western states in a complicated position.

In April of 1898, the regular army of the United States was in no way prepared to take on any foreign power. Instead, National Guard units from the states would be called

³⁵ *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR), June 24, 1898, p. 4.

³⁶ Both can be found in *Yakima Herald* (WA), June 16, 1898, p. 4. “Stand by the President” was taken from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* (no date).

upon to carry the load. While some men had belonged to these militia units for years, they were not exactly ready to be part of a well-drilled military machine. Additionally, though some of these nationalized volunteer units had existed in some form before the war, a number were hastily raised to fulfill federal requests. Even many of the older units went through rather dramatic transitions, as unfit officers were replaced (frequently with men from the regular army) and unhealthy men dismissed. The politics of a unit's home state continued to matter as well. Governors were given considerable discretion in the commissioning of officers, and among some of the newly formed units the troops themselves selected their officers in elections which often resembled peacetime contests. This latter method helps explain how William Jennings Bryan—a man with neither experience nor inclination—could find himself in command of the Third Nebraska Volunteers.³⁷ Most of the regiments called into federal service, such as Bryan's Third Nebraska, would never leave the United States. His was recruited after McKinley made a second call for volunteers, and so was not mustered in until July. Shortly after it joined the federal service, his regiment was sent to wallow in the miasmatic swamp that was Camp Cuba Libre, just north of Jacksonville, Florida. There it would remain until well after the end of combat operations.³⁸

Yet the fate of a great many units from the western states would prove different. The first battle of the war proved that this would be a conflict that played out nearly as

³⁷ Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 223-224; Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 60-64.

³⁸ Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 226.

much in the Pacific as in the Atlantic. To follow up Dewey's victory, McKinley ordered a force to be prepared for the purpose of capturing Manila. Despite the protests of the top officer of this new command (General Wesley Merritt), the force assigned to the task was made up primarily of volunteer units that came from nearly every state of the trans-Missouri West. Before Dewey even requested army support, preparations were underway to organize an army in San Francisco, to be shipped off from there to the Philippines. Hawaii, despite its position as an independent "neutral," served as the primary stopover along the trans-Pacific journey. Volunteers from the West would get a first-hand look at the lands that would cause a major political debate for the next several years.³⁹

The composition of volunteers from the western states was also noteworthy. Because of their prominence as local leaders, and also because so many of them had come to advocate intervention on behalf of Cuba, a great many Populist, Democrat, and Silver Republican public figures felt the need to participate in the war. Still, as opponents of the administration, this did put many of them in awkward positions. Shortly after the war broke out, Bryan sent a letter to President McKinley tendering his services. When news of this broke, letters from his friends poured in warning him of the dangers. As William Allen put it, "You minimize you[r] position in the political world and place yourself in the grasp of Hanna and McKinley whom I do not doubt would be glad to expose you to every conceivable danger, get you out of the country if possible, and have

³⁹ David F. Trask, *The War With Spain in 1898* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 382-387; Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 6-15; Stuart Creighton Miller, "*Benevolent Assimilation*": *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 42-44.

superior officers involve you in difficulty and possibly disgrace.” Kansas Congressman Jeremiah Botkin was also keen to remind him that “the war in which we are engaged with a certain Jew and his cohorts is a much more important war than that we are fighting with Spain.” Bryan was the only man that Democrats, Populists, and Silver Republicans would unite behind, the Kansan said, and as a servant of the people the Commoner had “no right to hazard yourself personally or politically at this most important and critical time.”⁴⁰ Prominent Silver Republican Charles Towne nearly followed in Bryan’s footsteps. “You must be crazy, and if you were near enough I would call a commission of lunacy and send you to the asylum at once,” wrote Richard Pettigrew to his close friend and political ally. “What do you think the Goldbugs would do with you if they got you down in Cuba? They would see that you made no more silver speeches, or troubled further the political waters of plutocracy.”⁴¹

While Towne followed Pettigrew’s advice rather than Bryan’s example, others close to the reform leaders did enthusiastically enlist for the fight to free Cuba. A friend of Pettigrew named Jonas Lien, a recent college graduate who had left his studies to campaign for Bryan in 1896, joined the First South Dakota Volunteers when the war began. He remained in contact with the anti-imperialist senator throughout his service.⁴²

⁴⁰ William V. Allen to William Jennings Bryan, 18 May 1898, and Jeremiah Botkin to William Jennings Bryan, 18 May 1898, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 21. These warnings and others like them have also been mentioned in Bryan’s biographies. See Paolo Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 223; Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 273-274; Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 87.

⁴¹ Richard F. Pettigrew to Charles A. Towne, 26 April 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 21.

⁴² For one of the first of these letters, see Richard F. Pettigrew to Jonas Lien, 20 May 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition, Reel 21. For more on Lien, see Dana R.

Arthur C. Johnson, nephew of Colorado Populist leader and newspaperman Thomas Patterson, joined the First Colorado and acted as an embedded reporter for his uncle's paper over the months that followed.⁴³ John Rankin Rogers's private secretary, John Ballaine, was also a prominent Silver Republican and the adjutant general of the state's National Guard. He resigned his post in order to take a lieutenancy in the First Washington Volunteers.⁴⁴ Frank Eager, editor of Nebraska's most important Populist publication, the *Independent*, had been in the state's National Guard for years and became a captain in the First Nebraska.⁴⁵ Their regiments, along with the Twentieth Kansas, First North Dakota, First Idaho, First California, First Montana, First Wyoming, and a scattering of other volunteer units made up the bulk of the Eighth Corps, the force assigned to capture Manila.⁴⁶

It would be weeks before the regiments that made up the Eighth Corps were ready to be mustered in, let alone ready for their trans-oceanic voyage. In the meantime, the question of expansion was already gaining attention in the West, especially in the press. The Hawaiian annexation debate had played a part in this discussion but, after May 1, the

Bailey, *History of Mennehaha County, South Dakota* (Sioux Falls: Brown & Saenger, 1899), 602-605.

⁴³ Geoffrey R. Hunt, *Colorado's Volunteer Infantry in the Philippine Wars, 1898-1899* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 49. Johnson also authored the regiment's official history. See Arthur C. Johnson, *Official History of the Operation of the First Colorado Infantry, U. S. V., in the Campaign in the Philippine Islands* (San Francisco: Hicks-Judd Publishing Co., 1899).

⁴⁴ For a description of Ballaine and his involvement with the regiment, see William L. Luhn, *Official History of the Operations of the First Washington Infantry, U. S. V., in the Campaign in the Philippine Islands* (San Francisco: Hicks-Judd Publishing Co., 1899), 4, 114.

⁴⁵ *Independent* (Lincoln, NE), May 19, 1898, p. 3. Eager was also the author of the official regimental history, which additionally contains a brief biographical section. See *History of the Operations of the First Nebraska Infantry, U. S. V., in the Campaign in the Philippine Islands* (San Francisco: Hicks-Judd Publishing Co., 1899), 49.

⁴⁶ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 6-15; Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 42-44.

Philippines took center stage. Still, it is difficult to identify public opinion on the subject. Most Americans had spent little time considering the implications of expansion, and in early May of 1898, the opinions they voiced demonstrated a kind of haphazard or imprudent thought. Put simply, people did not know what to think of a place that was so distant, and they were even more uncertain about the islands' inhabitants.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Manila Bay, Several newspapers attempted to investigate popular opinion. On May 6, the *Denver Post* asked forty-five local lawyers, politicians, and businessmen, primarily Democrats, to comment on what they believed to be America's proper future relationship to the Philippines. The results were, to say the least, mixed. Sixteen of the respondents said that the United States should take control of the islands on a permanent basis, three were unsure, and the rest were opposed to long-term occupation. That said, those who had no interest in permanent acquisition were thoroughly divided on what to do with the islands. Fifteen of them actually said that either the Philippines should be captured and sold to the highest bidder or held to pressure Spain into the payment of an indemnity. Others favored a short-term protectorate. Only eight laid out an unequivocally anti-imperialist position. Just as interesting, though, were the justifications used to support these various positions. The sixteen expansionists said nothing about "duty" or "obligation" to the Filipinos, but instead focused on the need for trade in Asia or bases for a robust American Pacific fleet. "The islands might be used as a commercial point and assist us in opening up our commerce more extensively in the Eastern hemisphere," said one. Additionally, they tended to speak as though the conquest of the islands was already an accomplished fact. The thought of giving the islands back to Spain "is ridiculous when we consider that we

already have the islands,” said a former member of the legislature. Certainly, most of the remarks were made with an extremely limited knowledge of the situation in the islands.⁴⁷

In this confused moment in May, those involved in local politics were left grasping for the right position. The national debate over Hawaiian annexation had been fairly quiet to that point, and certainly the issue of imperialism did not have the same partisan history that characterized the tariff or revenue fights. Local newspapermen were left to their own devices, and they attempted as best they could to develop a coherent response to the rising question of the day.

One result of this scramble was a short-term incoherence, as some papers changed their position by the day. For example, the *Oregonian* of Portland, one of the most important Republican newspapers in the Pacific Northwest, vacillated wildly in its opinions over a surprisingly short time. On May 9, the paper informed its readers that, though the United States may need to control the islands for a time, any long-term possession “would be in every way to be regretted.” Though the author admitted the people there were incapable of self-government, and a coaling station might be of use, “The best thing that could happen to us concerning the Philippines is that we release them to Spain upon payment of a war indemnity.” Three days later, at least some of these reservations were set aside. A new column was printed that largely supported the conclusion that a base was needed in the Philippines, and it also emphasized that it was America’s time to control the “avenues of commerce” to Asia. By May 14, with this new

⁴⁷ “What Shall We Do with the Philippines?” *Denver Post*, May 6, 1898, p. 5. Another paper later mentioned the piece, and noted that nearly all those questioned were Democrats. See “The Imperial Idea in Colorado,” *Greely Tribune* (CO), July 14, 1898, p. 4.

commercial focus in mind, the paper fixed heavily upon the masses of wealth that flowed out of the islands and now suggested that “An infusion of American blood and the introduction of the liberal principles of American law” was needed to improve the islands. Then, “In the course of 50 or 100 years the 8,000,000 or 10,000,000 simple-minded inhabitants of the Philippines may become fitted for the responsibilities of American citizenship.” In less than a week, the Philippines had been transformed from an undesirable land into a future state.⁴⁸

Partisan though the press was, editors frequently did not fall into line with what would eventually become the party positions until quite late—and even more frequently, they did not at all until after 1898. Of course, for the first several months after the naval battle, the president himself did not have a definitive opinion on what to do.⁴⁹ This allowed some newspapers that generally followed the president to develop anti-imperialist positions. The *Omaha Bee* was one of them, and it frequently contained remarks suggesting that the addition of the Philippines would be more of a burden than a blessing.⁵⁰ Still, just as many Republicans in Congress did, Republican editors typically supported aggressive, imperialist policies. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, for example,

⁴⁸ “What of the Philippines?” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), May 9, 1898, p. 4; “Out of the Rut,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), May 12, 1898, p. 4; “Our Permanent Advantage,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), May 14, 1898, p. 4.

⁴⁹ H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 387-389, 402-411; Lewis Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 113-119, 131-135.

⁵⁰ For two of the most important fusion papers, see “Lest We Forget,” *Independent*, May 5, 1898, p. 4; “Cost of Killing,” *Independent*, May 26, 1898, p. 4; “Empire can Wait,” *Omaha World-Herald*, June 12, 1898, p. 4. For the *Bee*, see “Occupation of Philippines,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 4, 1898, p. 4; “Threatening Conditions in Europe,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 12, 1898, p. 4; “World Power a Costly Luxury,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 18, 1898, p. 4.

proclaimed that George Washington's call for isolation was totally unsuited to the present moment. The writer went on to suggest that even Washington himself would have believed that to be true, so that now the acquisition of the Philippines—"or even of Cuba for that matter"—was no longer "incompatible with the general principles advocated by the Father of this Country."⁵¹

While most western Republican editors suspected that McKinley had foreign ambitions and came to support expansion rather quickly, among the Democratic and Populist newspapers of the West the sorting out took a while longer. Most seriously for those who wanted to maintain party order, a great many of their papers initially expressed interest in expansion—and among them were many of those with the widest circulations. A majority of the smaller publications of Colorado declared in favor of taking the Philippines in the opening weeks of the war. Most suggested that the Philippines made America a player in Asian politics and trade, and so was too valuable to give up. "Our existence as a commercial power in Asia depends upon our retention of the Philippines," claimed the editor of the *Durango Wage Earner*.⁵² Another paper told readers that the islands would become a naval base "that has long been needed by this country, and one which would be looked upon with envy by all the nations of the world."⁵³ These smaller publications were joined by Thomas Patterson's *Rocky Mountain News*, which expressed rather aggressive views throughout 1898 and into 1899. "The sentiment for a new

⁵¹ "George Washinton's Advice," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 5, 1898, p. 4.

⁵² "We May Need Them," *Durango Wage Earner*, June 9, 1898, p. 2.

⁵³ "The Philippine Islands," *Aspen Daily Times*, July 16, 1898, p. 3.

international life by the United States is fast taking root in the American mind,” one of its writers contended. The tradition of isolation was now obsolete. “If to advance American commerce into countries from which armed alliances would bar or expel it, we should make alliances, and we should choose our allies and acquire them upon terms safe and lasting.”⁵⁴ They claimed that trade with Asia required an American presence.

A similar situation arose in Washington, where some of the largest fusion papers initially favored imperialism. The editor of the *Seattle Times* was sure that trade which “has been confined to the Atlantic Ocean between Europe and America will shift to the Pacific between America and the Orient.” Acquisition of the Philippines was to be the cornerstone of American power in the Pacific, and Seattle was to be the primary beneficiary. “If ever there was a time when the finger of destiny pointed unerringly and persistently at a mark, now is the time, and Seattle is that mark.”⁵⁵ Spokane’s *Spokesman-Review* was initially more ambivalent. A piece published on May 9 suggested that “every consideration of prudence and interest would keep us out of the Philippines.”⁵⁶ A mere ten days later, however, the editor hinted that holding the archipelago and gaining the trade of Asia “may solve the perplexing problem of

⁵⁴ “The Future of America,” *Rocky Mountain News*, May 16, 1898, p. 4. A previous article in the *News* had suggested that the nation would not “attempt to retain the islands by force of arms in opposition to the wishes of the population,” but this kind of language actually disappeared from the paper in the weeks that followed, and even the rest of the article that contained that sentiment was primarily about the need to acquire overseas bases. See “New National Policy,” *Rocky Mountain News*, May 6, 1898, p. 4.

⁵⁵ “Seattle’s Ascendant Star,” *Seattle Daily Times*, July 27, 1898, p. 4.

⁵⁶ “In the Philippines,” *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), May 9, 1898, p. 4.

providing work for the unemployed, and markets for the surplus goods of American factories.”⁵⁷

That so many newspapers in the far west—regardless of political allegiance—supported expansion into the Pacific should not be a surprise. Newspapers were necessarily commercial and promotional enterprises, and western newspapers had a tendency to act the part of the booster and predict a future of fame and wealth for the town or city or state they resided in.⁵⁸ This was only accentuated by the political discourse of the West in the 1890s. While the actual greenback theorists and the more prominent minds in the Populist Party had denied that overproduction was the source of American economic difficulties, they had still precipitated the shift of political discourse from recent history and cultural issues to one based upon economics. Now, when advocates of expansion promised that the nation’s attention would be fixed on the Pacific and trade with Asia, the boosterism of many western editors overcame any hesitance they may have held.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “Shadow of Coming Events,” *Spokesman-Review*, May 19, 1898, p. 4.

⁵⁸ On Populism and boosterism, see Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25-44.

⁵⁹ It is impossible to cover the agrarian or Populist discussion of overseas trade and imperialism without mentioning William Appleman Williams. Williams suggested that farmers (and among them, many western Populists) were long the leading advocates of foreign trade because they wanted new markets for their surplus products. While the backing of western Populist and Democratic newspapermen for trade with Asia would seem to support this claim, Williams did not fully differentiate between discussions of trade and either colonialism or militarism. While some local Populists and their allies initially favored expansion as something that would encourage trade, most soon concluded that any profits would not be accrued by farmers or laborers. For his discussion of Populists, see *The Roots of Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969), 34-40, 45, 161, 218, 299, 319-381, 406, 416, 426, 442-444.

Yet there is also a great deal of evidence that these voices did not represent the majority of Bryan's followers. Though some of the largest Populist and Democratic publications of the West initially supported expansion in 1898, that should not be misunderstood as representative of the party. Weeks after the excitement of the war's first battle, the editor of Nebraska's leading Populist paper, the *Independent*, sent fifty letters to friendly members of the legislature and editors of the "reform newspapers" of the state. The purpose of the questionnaire was to test sentiments regarding the state party's platform for the coming campaign, but the second questions asked respondents to explain how the party convention should respond to "consequences growing out of" the war. While the other responses that the editor received showed little uniformity or single interest that could unite them, the greatest agreement came in response to the war question. Thirty-one of the fifty unequivocally stated their opposition to new acquisitions or conquests; only three argued that the conventions should support expansion. As one newspaperman put it, "All populists should be too enlightened to doubt for a moment their duty to oppose land-grabbing, militarism, or any other appurtenance of royalty." Certainly not all were so "enlightened," but clearly a great many were.⁶⁰

Nebraska's largest Populist and Democratic papers were also more uniformly opposed to imperialism than those of the other two states. Just days after the Battle of Manila Bay, the *Independent* reminded readers that "we are fighting for peace and peace alone," not for military glory or conquests.⁶¹ Just weeks later, the same paper warned

⁶⁰ "Platform and Policy," *Independent*, July 14, 1898, p. 3; "True Populist Policy," *Independent*, July 21, 1898, p. 3.

⁶¹ "Lest We Forget," *Independent*, May 5, 1898, p. 4.

that “There is a danger in the time, in the glory of foreign conquest, in the opening up of colonial empire, in the measured tramp of men away from walks of production to the tented camp of idleness and destruction.” Debt, death, and a growing desire for war and conquest were the consequences of the glorification of battle, and all were inimical to American ideals.⁶² The *Omaha World Herald* also refuted the arguments of those who claimed that a colonial policy was the only way for the United States to bestow the blessings of liberty on others. “It will suffice to plant in those places free institutions similar to those of the United States.... To enter upon a colonial policy now would be to overturn the basic principle of our government, that ‘governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.’”⁶³

In Washington state, opposition to expansion required many newspapers to go through a transition. Most local papers, including the *Yakima Herald*, had come out in support of Hawaiian annexation. Hawaii had a friendly government, and the country “peaceably offered” to join the United States, the paper had claimed. On the other hand, the Philippines and the other Spanish islands had been ruled by an oppressive government, and they sought the right to control their own affairs. “Their right to govern themselves is as sacred as was that of the thirteen American colonies in 1776.”⁶⁴ Another Washington paper, the *Aberdeen Herald*, attacked the administration for taking lands but doing nothing for the Cubans. While the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the Cuban port of

⁶² “Cost of Killing,” *Independent*, May 26, 1898, p. 4.

⁶³ “Misrepresenting the Facts,” *Omaha World-Herald*, June 17, 1898, p. 4; see also “Empire can Wait,” *Omaha World-Herald*, June 12, 1898, p. 4.

⁶⁴ “Acquisition of Territory,” *Yakima Herald*, July 14, 1898, p. 4.

Santiago had been attacked, “the poor, starving reconcentrado [sic] have seemingly been forgotten.” America had turned to conquest, so that “those who bought and paid for the administration at the last election may have new fields for exploitation.”⁶⁵ As had their counterparts in Congress, these local newspapers attacked colonial and imperial policies based on both humanitarian and economic grounds.

In a similar fashion, several of the smaller publications of Colorado laid out their own critique of imperialism. A writer for the *Rocky Mountain Sun* claimed that “Eastern capital in large quantities is being withheld from investment awaiting new and more profitable channels which the results of the war will open.” Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines were the “present splendid possibilities.” Because of imperialism, “the great and undeveloped west [must] suffer for lack of capital to develop her matchless resources.”⁶⁶ Another local journalist critiqued the American record of dealing with conquered peoples. “Think of the shining success we have had in dealing with the three hundred thousand Indians in the native tribes of America, who had undisputed possession of this country until discovered by Columbus, and then let us ask ourselves if we are justified in repeating the experiment with fifty times that number of people.”⁶⁷ The humanitarian purpose of the war would then be lost.

The debate had barely even begun when the soldiers of the western volunteer regiments were on their way to the Philippines. The first western regiments had departed

⁶⁵ “The Reconcentrados,” *Aberdeen Herald*, June 16, 1898, p. 4.

⁶⁶ *Rocky Mountain Sun* (Aspen, CO), July 23, 1898, p. 2.

⁶⁷ “A New Policy,” *Greely Tribune*, June 23, 1898, p. 4.

for Manila in the last days of May. A second contingent left San Francisco on June 15, and a third followed near the end of the month. Ten thousand American soldiers were on their way to the Philippines, where they took up a position alongside the insurgent army that was already besieging the colony's capital city.⁶⁸

A day before the second wave of these troops were at sea—and just weeks before his regiment would be mustered in—William Jennings Bryan took the opportunity to address the subject of imperialism. More than a month had passed since the Battle of Manila Bay, and interest in the Philippine question had grown rapidly. In Bryan's eyes the subject had become too important of a topic to ignore, but he knew that it would be improper to speak out after he became an officer in the American army. He opened his speech by declaring that “Nebraska is ready to do her part in time of war,” but that did not “indicate that the state is inhabited by a contentious or warlike people.” Instead, it merely demonstrated that “they do not shrink from any consequences which may follow the performance of a national duty.” Their duty was to protect the United States in a time of war and liberate Cuba, and there had never been a more honorable justification to serve, he said. But he believed there was no justice, and certainly no “duty,” in the acquisition of far-off islands. That would transform the humanitarian struggle into a war of conquest, and “we shall meet the charge of having added hypocrisy with greed.” Dewey's victory had a purpose, and the defeat of Spain in the Pacific was a legitimate goal, but it should not be claimed that one triumph in battle must determine the course of American policy. “Our guns destroyed a Spanish fleet, but can they destroy the self-

⁶⁸ Linn, *The Philippine War*, 13-15; Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 40-42.

evident truth, that governments derive their just powers, not from superior force, but from the consent of the governed.” Those who “clothe land-covetousness in the attractive garb of ‘national destiny’” would gain no support in Nebraska, he said.⁶⁹

At nearly the same time that Bryan was speaking, organizers in Boston led the first explicitly anti-imperialist meeting. Bryan had no contact with its organizers at this time—as both probably preferred—but the basic sentiment was the same. The old mugwump Gamaliel Bradford led the gathering and, like Bryan, he and the speakers who followed condemned the wild dreams of empire that they feared had gained a new foothold in the American psyche. While support for conquest had developed almost impulsively, opponents were preparing to make Americans consider the consequences for both their own nation and a nation that was fighting for existence.⁷⁰

The war with Spain would last only two months more. On August 12, a peace protocol that suspended fighting was signed by the United and Spain, with a formal peace treaty to be negotiated thereafter in Paris. On the other side of the world, Americans in the Philippines were totally unaware that the war had ended. The telegraph cable connecting Manila to the outside world had been cut at the beginning of the conflict, and information was slow to arrive. In the meantime, the American commanders in the archipelago, General Wesley Merritt and (recently promoted) Admiral Dewey, had negotiated with their Spanish counterpart for a peaceful surrender of Manila. A sham

⁶⁹ William Jennings Bryan, “First Speech Against Imperialism,” in *Republic or Empire? The Philippine Question*, ed. William Jennings Bryan (Chicago: The Independence Company, 1899), 10-13.

⁷⁰ Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898-1909* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 18-20; E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 120-126.

battle was arranged, for the purpose of preserving Spanish honor and guaranteeing sole American possession of the city. When the “attack” began on August 13, it was apparent that not everyone was informed regarding the arrangements. Some casualties were suffered, and the Americans did not rush to occupy the Spanish positions quickly enough to prevent their former allies from entering the suburbs of Manila. Worse still was what followed. American officers were rather lamely forced to explain to Emilio Aguinaldo—leader of the Filipino revolutionaries—that their sole occupation of the city was merely to preserve public order, hinting that this was something Filipinos could not manage for themselves. Aguinaldo and his army did not disperse, but continued to hold their position surrounding Manila. The public debate over imperialism was no longer academic.⁷¹

The Campaign of 1898

While the war was still the primary object of public attention by the summer of 1898, by July at least some conversation had turned to the upcoming state political conventions and the elections that would follow. It was the first major election to come after the upheaval of 1896, and it proved pivotal for the western states. In the eyes of Bryan and his allies, it was supposed to be the election that Democrats, Populists, and Silver Republicans used to perfect the fusion coalition, something that would greatly ease their favored candidate’s road to the presidency in 1900. Every House seat was at stake, along with the Senatorial positions held by William Allen, Stephen White, William Roach, and several other prominent westerners. Additionally, the large number of state

⁷¹ Trask, *War with Spain*, 411-422; Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 43-46; Linn, *Philippine War*, 23-25.

positions at stake—vital to the continued existence of each state party—made this contest crucial for determining the political future of the entire region.

Both sides looked forward to the next campaign, and the contours of that contest shaped their plans for 1898. Populists and Democrats in the West hoped to continue their crusade for economic justice, and they intended to change little from the previous election. Some Republicans hoped to co-opt the message of their opponents by taking up reform of their own, but soon reality forced them back into the uncomfortable positions they had held two years earlier. Of course the war would have an impact, but early in the campaign its significance remained unclear. Questions surrounding expansion were present throughout the campaign, but even where the acquisition of Hawaii had been popular the expansion issue was not yet the exclusive property of one side or the other. It was not until the last month of the campaign that the decisive issue became clear, and it marks the election of 1898 as unique from both the campaign that preceded it and the one that would follow.

In order to best explain the forces at work, the campaign will be examined at the state level. In each of the three states, local factors and developments made the campaigns there unique, and what follows will seek to describe these differences as much as it will attempt to identify their similarities. The contests of 1898 could be described as transitional. Populists and their allies hoped to focus on the issues of political economy they had brought to the forefront earlier in decade, but the campaign soon veered off into the new issues produced by the war. Throughout the West, the result was a series of distinctive campaigns that were not fought upon any fixed set of issues, but that collectively had a decisive impact on the regional and national political landscape.

Certainly, western reformers had not expended the full extent of their energies in 1896. In both Washington and Nebraska, where Populists held the governorships and many of the legislative seats, they had compiled solid records in the sessions of 1897. Washington's Democrats and Populists had also succeeded in placing women's suffrage and single tax amendments on the ballot for that November.⁷² In Colorado, Democrats, conservative Republicans, and the breakaway Silver Republicans made up most of the legislature, and reform subsequently stalled. However, new organizational efforts on the part of Colorado's laborers soon shifted the balance in favor of change. Unions such as the Western Federation of Miners (formed in 1893) were greatly influenced by the Populists, and by 1896 several of them came together to establish the Colorado State Federation of Labor. At its 1897 convention, a majority of delegates came out in favor of political advocacy, and by 1898 its leaders had agreed that they must unite their members for political purposes. Secretary of the State Federation David C. Coates was a Populist, but he also developed a program to vet the perspectives of local candidates so affiliates of the organization could then endorse an appropriate slate. By this means, they intended to secure a legislature to pass an eight-hour law for miners.⁷³

Conservatives soon provided further justification for continuation of the reform coalition. In late 1897 and early 1898, Gage's monetary reform proposals had caused

⁷² *Session Laws of the State of Washington: Session of 1897* (Olympia, WA: O. C. White, 1897), 92, 225-226.

⁷³ Melvyn Dubovsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905," *Labor History* 7, no. 2 (1966): 139-144; David Brundage, *The Making of Western Labor Radicalism: Denver's Organized Workers, 1878-1905* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 122-123; John P. Enyeart, *The Quest for "Just and Pure Law": Rocky Mountain Workers and American Social Democracy, 1870-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 112-113.

frustration even among the editors of western Republican newspapers. Wolcott's international commission had already proven a colossal failure, in no small part as the result of Gage's public statements since assuming office.⁷⁴ Any thought that western Republicans could hide behind the fig leaf of international bimetallism was erased thereafter. Only adding power to the arguments of reformers, in March of 1898 the Supreme Court made its ruling in the case of *Smyth v. Ames*, which threw out the state of Nebraska's maximum railroad rates and threatened similar laws enacted in other states (such as Washington's recently passed rate regulations). Its passage in 1893 had represented the greatest victory achieved by the Nebraska Populists, but now the court ruled that the rates did not offer a fair return to the railroads and represented confiscation without due process of law—a violation of the corporate person's Fourteenth Amendment rights.⁷⁵

This last attack on one of the few gains made by the Populists appeared that it would only further bolster the resolve of western economic reformers. Just the week before, Allen had lambasted those who called for federal regulation. "We have Interstate Commerce Commissioners. We are paying them large salaries.... Pray, what are they doing for the country and for the shipper? Absolutely nothing." The battle between regulators and regulated had already been fought, and the winner was clear. "They do not make an order that is obeyed by a railroad company unless the railroad company sees

⁷⁴ Morgan, *William McKinley*, 285.

⁷⁵ For an interesting discussion of the decision and its impact, see Gerald Berk, *Alternative Tracks: The Constitution of American Industrial Order, 1865-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 156-158.

fit to obey it. They are as powerless and impotent as a babe in its cradle to control these corporations, which run riot over the people and over the commissioners.”⁷⁶ But now the only other means of reining in the power of the railway lines was practically nullified. Any rate that a conservative court deemed unfair could be thrown out. Nebraska’s state Populist organ, the *Independent*, lashed out at the court in the weeks that followed. While the editor stated that this was the opinion that had been expected for at least the last nine months, they were primarily upset that the “power of injunction” and “the evident bias of the supreme court towards corporate interests” now made it “practically impossible to enforce any regulation of the railway rates except such as the roads themselves will agree to.”⁷⁷ In several articles, the paper emphasized the court’s application of the Fourteenth Amendment and its identification of the railway corporation as a person. When the ICC issued a report in early April which admitted that court rulings had crippled it as well, the *Independent* simply ran the headline “Regulation a Failure.”⁷⁸ Populists had a more thorough solution.

Before the coming of the war with Spain, Populists and other members of the reform coalition continued to hammer home the need for change. Whatever the future of their party, they still offered alternatives that no one else did, and they promised a kind of economic equality that many Americans still dreamed of. Populism, they contended, was every bit as necessary now as it had been at the beginning of the decade.

⁷⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Mar. 4, 1898, p. 2460-2463.

⁷⁷ “The Maximum Rate Decision,” *Independent*, March 10, 1898, p. 4.

⁷⁸ See “Maximum Rate Case,” *Independent*, March 10, 1898, p. 1; “Beaten by the Board,” *Independent*, March 17, 1898, p. 1; “Regulation a Failure,” *Independent*, April 7, 1898, p. 1.

While the Populists and their allies demanded substantive reform, Republicans had not remained static. Western newspapers of all stripes had long been critical of corporations deemed to be monopolistic, and those like the *Omaha Daily Bee* developed a lengthy record of doing so. Others provided occasional hints that they believed the party could be made a vehicle for reform. For example, when the newly elected Republican governor of Michigan, Hazen Pingree, began to lash out against trusts in public addresses, a number of western Republican editors responded enthusiastically.⁷⁹ Fewer of the region's prominent politicians followed suit, but a few tested the waters. In a February speech to the Baltimore Union League, Senator John Thurston told easterners about the situation in his part of the country. There, he said, the "allied force of free silver, socialism, lawlessness, and anarchy" had continued to proselytize with great success, all in an attempt to "array every man without a dollar against every man with a dollar." There was only one way to put an end to the threats to national development posed by the extremists from the West. It was time for the Republican Party to "stand eternally against all unlawful combination and unjust exaction of aggregated capital and corporate power; it must smite with the mailed hand of law every combination formed to artificially decrease the wages of labor or increase the prices of necessities of life." Certainly this would seem to be strange talk from a railroad lawyer and arch-conservative, but he felt there was no choice. He believed that he must either take up the call for reform or the more radical reformers of the West would replace men like him. In

⁷⁹ "Gov. Pingree's Effort," *Grand Forks Daily Herald* (ND), July 16, 1897, p. 2; *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 23, 1897, p. 2; "Pingree Pleased," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise, ID), March 1, 1898, p. 2; *Aberdeen Daily News* (SD), March 11, 1898, p. 2.

early 1898, he predicted that another campaign based upon support of the economic status quo would lead to disaster.⁸⁰

Thurston's prediction proved wrong on nearly all fronts. While western Republicans were hesitant to emphasize their conservatism, they did not yet embrace reform in any substantial way. As the party in power at the national level, to call for reform at this moment would not only provide support for any partisan critiques, but it would seem to be an admission that the political, industrial, and financial systems were in need of substantial readjustment. Thurston believed that his party could not survive if it did not accept change, but as it turned out Republicans would not have to change just yet. Though public frustrations had in no way abated, the war soon provided a distraction. Eventually, conservatives would also see that it provided opportunity.

The campaign officially launched in August. The Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans of Nebraska met at their separate conventions in Lincoln on from August 2-4. As usual, there was plenty of squabbling that accompanied the cooperation, but the great struggle over fusion in Nebraska was not fought over ideas so much as it was over candidates. Some Democrats believed they deserved the governorship, while the Populists stood firm behind William A. Poynter, who was an early Alliance leader, senate majority leader for the 1891 legislature, and, most unfortunately in this case, a teetotaler. Democrats hesitated at the thought of accepting a prohibitionist, and night nearly passed into morning before they accepted the Populist candidate—and even then,

⁸⁰ "Republican Party's Peril," *New York Times*, February 3, 1898.

only after a reassurance from Poynter himself that he did not mix his personal beliefs with his politics.⁸¹

The platforms of each party remained separate, but were largely focused on the same issues. Despite the near unanimity present in the responses to the *Independent's* inquiries, none of the parties approved an anti-imperialist plank on their platform. Instead of a declaration of policy regarding the Spanish islands, the Populist platform admitted that the “policy pursued by the United States respecting foreign nations and peoples of the islands of the sea is one of great moment and far reaching in its consequences,” but ultimately stated that the wise course for this government was to “postpone consideration until the conclusion of the war, to be taken up for mature deliberation by the people when no public excitement exists.” All parties included planks that praised the bravery of those fighting the war, attacked the bond issue used to finance it, and expressed their disgust at attempts to bolster the gold standard or destroy silver and paper currency. The Populists added another demand for government ownership of the railroads and pointed directly at the *Smyth v. Ames* decision as proof of that necessity. All of the fusion parties agreed on one thing, however: economic reform would remain at the center of their campaign. It was, after all, what had brought them together to begin with.⁸²

⁸¹ “Poynter for Governor,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 3, p. 1, 4; Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 77-80.

⁸² U.S. Works Progress Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1940), 232-237, 239-241.

The fusion forces of Washington did not convene until a month later, meeting as they had in 1896 at the town of Ellensburg. The three parties of Washington had less to fight over than most other western fusionists did in 1898 because of their state's four year gubernatorial terms. James Hamilton Lewis and William C. Jones, the first non-Republicans to win congressional seats since statehood had been achieved, were also due to be re-nominated. That meant the squabble over positions was largely confined to two candidacies for the state supreme court. While the Populists and Democrats eventually decided to split the judgeships, another skirmish erupted over the single platform that all of the involved parties had pledged to support. The platform that was eventually agreed to included planks that demanded free coinage of silver and federal control over the issuance of currency, opposed any further sale of interest bearing bonds, praised the present governor and legislature for the first balanced budget in state history, and called for direct legislation. The general platform contained nothing controversial, but the Populist convention also passed a separate platform of its own. This platform differed from the other in that it pledged Populist support for a women's suffrage amendment that was to appear on the ballot, but it also contained several statements related to the recent war. While it applauded the "patriotism, bravery and heroism manifested by the American soldiers and sailors, from the commander-in-chief to the rank and file," it also condemned the actions of the administration before and during the war. Intervention had been delayed and thousands of Cubans died as a consequence, and when war did come the president and cabinet had turned "the unavoidable hardships of war" into "horrors" through their incompetence. Near its conclusion, the platform stated that "While we do not favor an aggressive policy of territorial expansion," they were unalterably opposed to

“the surrender to Spain of any of the territory that has been acquired...and we do not favor the surrender to Spain’s domination of the people of any Spanish colonies who cooperated with our forces against our enemy in the late war.”⁸³

Colorado’s conventions were underway simultaneous to their Washington state counterparts. The organization of a fusion coalition in Colorado fared better than it had in 1896, but the situation had become much more complicated. The state Silver Republicans divided into three parties: those who favored fusion with the Populists and Democrats (usually described as followers of Teller); those who wanted to return to the regular party but could not abandon silver (Wolcott’s followers); and those led by mine owner Simon Guggenheim and state Silver Republican Party chairman Richard Broad who claimed to be independent of both. Wolcott’s faction could have just returned directly to the Republican fold, but they believed that the only route to victory in Colorado was by claiming the mantle of free silver. When the conventions came, the Colorado Springs opera house where the Teller faction planned to meet was stormed by some of Wolcott’s followers in the early morning hours, and one of them was shot and killed in the process. Despite the loss of life, Wolcott’s backers did manage to take the building, and Teller’s supporters moved off to another site.⁸⁴

⁸³ Thomas Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 251-253; Winston B. Thorson, “Washington State Nominating Conventions,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1944): 106-107; “Agreement Reached,” *Tacoma Daily News*, September 8, 1898, p. 1; “Populists Give Way,” *Tacoma Daily News*, September 9, 1898, p. 1; John C. Putnam, *Class and Gender Politics in Progressive-Era Seattle* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2008), 89-90.

⁸⁴ “Political Fight at Colorado Springs Begins in a Tragedy,” *Denver Times*, September 7, 1898, p. 1; “There is Blood on the Wolcott Banner,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 8, 1898, p. 1; “Teller Seems to Be On Top,” *Denver Post*, September 1, 1898, p. 3; “Broad Shows His Hand Against Teller,” *Denver Post*, September 6, 1898, p. 1.

Teller, Thomas Patterson's Populists, and the Democrats then proceeded to cement their alliance. The Democrat Charles S. Thomas—a Southerner by birth with a mixed record on questions surrounding organized labor—was given the nod for the governorship, but only after a fierce protest from the Populist camp. All other state offices and the two House seats were split among the Populists and Silver Republicans. Each convention also developed its own platform. The most prominent feature in all pertained to the money question: all three called for the free coinage of silver, and the Populists proclaimed that it was again “the paramount question of the present campaign.” The Populists alone called for direct legislation, while the Democrats condemned Wolcott's amendment to the War Revenue Bill as a sham and lambasted the issuance of bonds. Of course, all went on to praise the heroism of the state and nation's soldiers, but the Democrats and Populists differed substantially on the consequences of the war. The Democrats claimed that the soldiers' efforts had added to the “glory and power of the nation, and to the limits of our domain,” and now believed that these new possessions represented the nation's “enlarged duties and responsibilities” which required the construction of “the best navy in the world.” The Populists, on the other hand, said the islands should not be given back to Spain, but said that the flag should wave over them only “until such time as a majority of the people of these respective countries shall express a desire to establish a government of their own.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ “A Trinity of Conventions,” *Denver Post*, September 9, 1898, p. 1; *Rocky Mountain News*, September 11, p. 1, 3-6, 12; James Edward Wright, *Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 216-218. On Charles S. Thomas's complicated views of labor, see Wright, 217, and Brundage, *Western Labor Radicalism*, 102, 140-141.

The greatest commonality among the combined reform parties of the three states was their desire to continue the economic fight above all else. Imperialism was not yet a clear issue, and certainly not a unifying one. In Nebraska, even though Allen condemned “land-grabbing” in the biggest speech of the fusion conventions, there would have seemed little need to make the campaign one of anti-imperialism.⁸⁶ Their greatest opponents, such as Edward Rosewater of the *Omaha Bee* and Senator John Thurston, also opposed expansionist policies.⁸⁷ While at least one Republican congressional candidate tried to challenge an incumbent Populist by supporting imperialism, the issue did not become an integral part of the Republican statewide campaign.⁸⁸ If Nebraska’s fusionists took a stand against imperialism it could have potentially alienated some voters but would almost certainly have provided little political benefit. In the case of Washington, the situation was more ambiguous. The state’s Silver Republican senator, George Turner, had absented himself from voting during the Hawaiian annexation vote, and Congressman James Hamilton Lewis had put his own serious reservations on record before he did vote for the Newlands Resolution. On the other hand, the state press seemed to favor the acquisition of Spain’s colonies, and Governor Rogers directly stated his own preference for holding all lands taken.⁸⁹ Though the Populists made a brief

⁸⁶ “Populists Called to Order,” *Omaha World-Herald*, August 3, 1898, p. 2.

⁸⁷ “Thurston on War Issues,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 9, 1898, p. 1. Just a week after the fusion conventions, the Republican convention also chose to make no statement regarding the acquisition of territories. See *Nebraska Party Platforms*, 238-239.

⁸⁸ See William L. Greene’s comments in *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1006-1012.

⁸⁹ On Rogers’s views, see John Rankin Rogers to W. R. Hearst, June 20, 1898, “A Proclamation by the Governor,” August 27, 1898, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 250.

statement regarding retention of captured islands, none of Washington's party leaders thought expansion—either for or against—was an issue for the campaign. In Colorado, the newspapers supported acquisition of the islands, and so did the Democrats in their platform. Despite that, Charles S. Thomas—the candidate the Democrats had forced on their allies—was the one of the most solidly anti-imperialist politicians in the state.⁹⁰ Certainly, none of the fusion parties were ready to put issues of foreign policy ahead of reform.

Despite the extent to which it was de-emphasized in their official party proclamations, it is curious that so many Colorado and Washington fusionists supported expansion even though it was becoming clear that national leaders such as William Jennings Bryan and prominent members of Congress were opposed. Their motivation likely had to do with a hesitance to reject traditional American enthusiasm for territorial acquisition combined with a great deal of political pragmatism. It appears that a great many of these Democratic and Populist expansionists feared the consequences that accompanied the alternative position. John Rankin Rogers declared that “Past American history shows us clearly that neither public men nor political parties can successfully oppose the advance of our country in territorial extent or national authority.”⁹¹ Denver lawyer and state Democratic Party insider T. J. O'Donnell also feared “We will lose the congressional elections unless we take an advanced stand in order to obtain our full share

⁹⁰ “Denver Democrats on the So-Called Policy of Imperialism,” *Denver Post*, July 7, 1898, p. 3; “The Imperial Idea in Colorado,” *Greely Tribune*, July 14, 1898, p. 4.

⁹¹ John Rankin Rogers to W. R. Hearst, June 20, 1898, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers; Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 250.

of the benefits of the patriotic impulses now aroused in our people.” Bell and Shafroth, who had opposed Hawaiian annexation, “did not represent 5 per cent of the people of Colorado” he said.⁹² In both states, the situation was quite different from that of Nebraska. In Washington, the near unanimity of expansionist sentiment voiced by Republican papers suggested that the backers of McKinley could seek to make it a campaign issue. In Colorado, Davis Waite led mid-road Populist opposition to the leadership of Thomas Patterson, and at an early date the ex-governor had proclaimed his own preference for an aggressive policy overseas.⁹³ By supporting expansion, Democrats and Populists could neutralize it as a political controversy and refocus the campaign on domestic political economy. Or so they thought.

In fact, the war had stirred up too much sentiment and had created too many issues of its own for any of the reform parties to ignore. In some instances, Republicans were trumpeting the military victories won over the summer as the triumphs of Republican governance. The reformers were forced to respond by pointing out that all had joined the war effort, regardless of party, all the while reminding audiences that the administration had practically been pushed into the war against its will. In this way, they were attempting to deny that the war was a campaign issue at all. At the same time, they frequently criticized the administration—especially Secretary of War Alger—for its inept management of army’s supplies and the disorder and disease that infested the military

⁹² “Denver Democrats on the So-Called Policy of Imperialism,” *Denver Post*, July 7, 1898, p. 3; “The Imperial Idea in Colorado,” *Greely Tribune*, July 14, 1898, p. 4. Similar comments were made by the editor of the *Gunnison Tribune*, who said that, though both Bell and Shafroth were “good silver men,” their opinions regarding Hawaii “do not represent one-tenth of the sentiment of Colorado.” *Gunnison Tribune*, August 5, 1898, from Shafroth Family Papers, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO, Series 1, Box 6.

⁹³ Davis Waite, “Extension of Our National Boundaries,” *Aspen Daily Times*, July 2, 1898, p. 2.

camps. Nearly all papers reported the struggles of the War Department over the summer and fall, but as it came to overlap with the campaign season it was increasingly seen as partisan. In Washington state, Congressman Lewis and Senator Turner made administration incompetence part of their political campaign. Lewis, who had accepted a position as a military inspector (with rank of colonel) late in war, was especially harsh in his criticism of profiteering and negligence. This aggressive attempt to turn a popular war into a scandalous campaign issue would bring with it as many difficulties as it had advantages.⁹⁴

The War Revenue Bill also had a part to play in the campaign. It had struck too close to their core concerns for the fusion forces to ignore it. Again and again, Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans on the campaign trail waylaid the “issue of bonds for the sole benefit of the financial syndicates.” Of course, by emphasizing the bill and the bonds that came with it, reform candidates and editors could easily segue into the continued need for drastic changes in the financial system. The *Independent* informed readers that the \$300,000,000 of bonds issued before the close of the war required taxpayers to pay back the principal plus “\$20,000,000 a year in interest to get the money back into the channels of trade again.” On many of the reform party platforms, references to the war bonds had been followed by declarations against national banks and for direct federal control of all currency in circulation. But while criticism of the war

⁹⁴ For just a few examples, see: “Not a Campaign Issue,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 20, 1898, p. 4; “Col. Lewis’ Arraignment of the Men in Authority,” *Seattle Daily Times*, Sept. 3, 1898, p. 4; “Success! Success!” *Seattle Daily Times*, September 8, 1898, p. 2; “The Campaign is Opened,” *Yakima Herald*, October 6, 1898, p. 1; “Issues of the Day,” *Spokesman-Review*, October 18, 1898, p. 5; “Against a Vicious Policy,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 22, 1898, p. 1; “Murder of Soldiers,” *Independent* (Lincoln, NE), September 1, 1898, p. 4; “Democrats for Congress,” *Western News-Democrat* (Valentine, NE), October 27, 1898, p. 3; “Inside Story of a Military Wrong,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 20, 1898, p. 8.

bonds and proposals for public control of money dovetailed nicely, the reformers were yet again putting the conduct of the war front and center.⁹⁵

In fact, the reformers came to fear that the campaign was being redirected away from economic issues to the war, and some made efforts to steer it back to the course that was followed in 1896. “Republican managers in this state are trying desperately hard in this campaign, so far as national issues are concerned, to ignore the currency question and make an issue of the war with Spain,” wrote one such editor.⁹⁶ Another pointed out that when the reformers had attempted to remonetize silver, they had once been called “‘cranks,’ ‘anarchists’ and ‘repudiationists,’” until those old epithets had lost their power. Now, Republicans were using “promises of military glory,” and talk of the opportunity to “join English Tories in schemes of oppressing and robbing the helpless of the earth” to distract attention away from domestic reform.⁹⁷ As much as campaigners like Senator Turner attempted to paint it as another contest of “money against manhood, and gold against the teachings of Almighty God,” both sides either allowed or encouraged the war issue to affect the campaign.⁹⁸

Whatever the difficulties faced by the fusionists, western Republicans had at least as great a challenge at hand. Because nearly all of these state parties—including those of

⁹⁵ The quotes are taken from “The Campaign is Opened,” *Yakima Herald*, October 6, 1898; and “A Colossal Crime,” *Independent*, October 20, 1898, p. 4. For similar attacks on the bonds, see *Aberdeen Herald*, October 20, 1898, p. 4; “Stop the Accumulations,” *Denver Post*, October 11, 1898, p. 4; “Sources and Causes of the Surplus,” *Seattle Daily Times*, September 10, 1898, p. 4. For the platforms, see *Nebraska Party Platforms*, 233-235.

⁹⁶ “Currency the Issue,” *Aberdeen Herald*, October 6, 1898, p. 4.

⁹⁷ “Rothschild and Hanna,” *Western News-Democrat* (Valentine, NE), October 6, 1898, p. 2.

⁹⁸ “Senator Turner Speaks to an Enthusiastic Audience,” *Spokesman-Review*, November 8, 1898, p. 1.

Nebraska, Colorado, and Washington—had flirted with free silver at some point in the 1890s, they had been in a weak position to assail the Bryan campaign in 1896. The other hallmark of Republican campaigns in the 1890s was the claim that prosperity was only possible under their guidance, and a vote for any radical party would demonstrate the region or state’s unsuitability for investment. Two years after their defeat all agreed that economic circumstances had improved throughout the West, but that hardly validated their previous assertion.

Each state party had to adapt to this changed environment or their struggles would continue. In Colorado, change failed to happen. Wolcott—who still remained as publicly committed to bimetallism as ever—was the leader of the McKinley Republicans. As if to put even greater emphasis on his centrality to the party, Wolcott’s brother was nominated for governor by the regular Republicans and Guggenheim’s independent Silver Republican ticket was eventually forced out of the race. Almost no Republican newspapers in the state admitted that the party accepted the single gold standard, and several chose to continue on as if the 1896 election had never happened. The Wolcott group’s haphazard campaign gained nearly no newspaper support, and only lured the *Denver Times* away from the Teller camp by the middle of October. With few issues to differentiate between the two sides it was necessarily a campaign that focused on personalities as much as anything, but for that reason the Republicans were also doomed to failure.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ “Will He Stay in the Race?” *Denver Post*, September 23, 1898, p. 1, 3; “Guggenheim Quits,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, October 8, 1898, p. 1; “No More Pretense,” *Greely Tribune*, October 27, 1898, p. 4. For those who argued that McKinley and silver could be reconciled, see “Charles A. Wilkin’s Friendship for Silver,” *Fairplay Flume*, October 28, 1898, p. 2; *Fort Collins Courier*, November 3, 1898, p. 4; “An

In Washington and Nebraska, the state organizations were led by those closer to the national mainstream of the party, many of whom seemed better prepared to run a winning campaign. But even in these states, some Republicans struggled to accept the new message. Elmer Burkett, a candidate for Nebraska's first district House seat, gained notoriety among his opponents for first suggesting he supported international bimetallism, then later refusing to discuss the "money question" with any clarity on the campaign trail.¹⁰⁰

Of course, there was always "prosperity." Improved economic conditions have frequently been used to explain the rapid decline of Populism in the West, but that may largely be the result of claims of the victors after the fact.¹⁰¹ While all parties admitted that times were better in 1898 than they had been two years earlier, they were all apt to fight over the credit for it. While Republicans were much more willing to boast about national prosperity and the value of "100 cent dollars" in October than they had been even in April, they tended to identify economic growth as an adjunct to their party—with no essential explanation of its source.¹⁰² Washington's Senator John L. Wilson simply

Honest Campaign," *Colorado Springs Gazette*, October 24, 1898, p. 4. See also James Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 216-217.

¹⁰⁰ "Like Days of Ninety-Six," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 4, 1898, p. 5; "Burkett Continues to Dodge," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 19, 1898, p. 4; "Where Mr. Burkett Stands," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 23, 1898, p. 7; "Jump, Mr. Burkett, Jump!" *Omaha World-Herald*, October 29, 1898, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ The historians of Washington state have been particularly wedded to the idea that "prosperity" destroyed Populism. See Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 231-232; Robert E. Ficken, *Washington State: The Inaugural Decade, 1889-1899* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 2007), 215-230; Putnam, *Progressive-Era Seattle*, 25. For others, see John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, 2nd ed. (1931; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 388-389; Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 163.

¹⁰² For one very good example of this, see the Republican campaign speeches presented in "Rousing

told audiences that, throughout the “history of the republican party,” good times “always attended it when in power.” In a similar vein, one of the state’s Republican House candidates Wesley L. Jones noted that his opponent said that any economic improvement was an “accident,” not a result of Republican policies. “I tell you,” he exclaimed to his audience, “I am going to stand by the party that is struck by this sort of accident.”¹⁰³ The talk was much the same among Nebraska Republicans. “No man of candor and honesty will deny that the United States is very much more prosperous now than it was two years ago,” claimed a writer for the *Omaha Daily Bee*. “It is not necessary to discuss the causes of this fortunate condition. It is sufficient to know that it exists and inquire as to what is essential to its continuance.” Republican control of Congress was the predictable answer supplied.¹⁰⁴ Of course, the exact state of the economy may not have been of importance. One candidate on the state ticket attempted to perform some verbal sleight of hand to aid the party’s chances. While he claimed that prosperity had returned, he simultaneously informed his audience that “Capital has no confidence in populist rule and so long as that party remains the dominant one in this state so long will capital be slow to invest in Nebraska.”¹⁰⁵ The speaker made no attempt to reconcile the two statements.

Republican Rally,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 3, 1898, p. 1.

¹⁰³ *Pullman Herald*, November 5, 1898, p. 10. In a similar speech, a Republican legislative candidate said that, although the party may not have directly had a hand in creating better prices of crops, “There’s a just God who rules in high Heaven. He created a famine in India, and figure it any way you want to, there’s always good times when the Republican Party is in power.” See “Mayor Humes’ Speech,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 23, 1898, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ “Vote for Prosperity,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 27, 1898, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ “Rally in the Third Ward,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 5, 1898, p. 4.

Something else was needed to bring a Republican victory. The war proved to be a powerful issue of its own, and soon the victorious commander-in-chief joined the campaign. In early October, President McKinley embarked on a speaking tour of the Midwest that culminated in his arrival at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha on October 12. While ostensibly not a campaign tour, McKinley knew he could make voters see the connection between a triumphant war president and local Republican candidates. His speeches have been characterized as broadly imperialist, and according to his biographers he received warm welcomes throughout his tour—especially at the points in which he made reference to America’s new “duty” across the Pacific. Yet the President was not outlining his vision in any great detail. In signature McKinley style, his tone was inoffensive and his references to policy would have generally remained opaque for casual listeners. At the Omaha exposition, where local reports claimed 100,000 people had timed their visit to coincide with that of the president, his speech may have appealed to patriotic elements, but hardly defined any policy regarding occupied territories. In his Omaha address, he pointed out that “Hitherto, in peace and in war, with additions to our territory and slight changes in our laws, we have steadily enforced the spirit of the constitution... We have avoided the temptations of conquest in the spirit of gain.” While he also pointed out that “new and grave problems” faced the nation, he did not suggest it was the time to ignore the anti-imperial precedent. Indeed, he later reaffirmed their sentiments by stating that “We must avoid the temptation of undue aggression, and aim to secure only such results as will promote our own and the general good.” Though his discussion of duty demonstrated his preference for a more robust foreign policy, he never

clarified whether that meant a tiny coaling station or an expansive island group of between 7-10,000,000 inhabitants.¹⁰⁶

The most important portions of the president's remarks did not pertain so directly to foreign affairs as they did domestic politics. After praising the achievements of the soldiers who fought the war, he asked the audience "Who will dim the splendor of their achievements?... Who will intrude detraction at this time to belittle the manly spirit of the American youth and impair the usefulness of the American army?" Worse still, "Who will embarrass the government by sowing seeds of disaffection among the brave men who stand ready to serve and die, if need be, for their country? Who will darken the counsels of the republic at this hour, requiring the united wisdom of all?" All at once, he united the objectives of his administration with the service of the soldiers, and in so doing made it seem craven to criticize either. Then, he claimed that America was still in a challenging moment and unity was needed instead of partisanship. This last component had already become a significant element in the speeches he had delivered on his tour. Just the day before, he had told the residents of Boone, Iowa, that "This is a solemn hour demanding the highest wisdom and the best statesmanship of every section of our

¹⁰⁶ *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From March 1, 1897 to May 30, 1900* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1900), 100-106; Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 134-137; Morgan, *William McKinley*, 406-408. Eric Love agrees that McKinley's speeches on the tour were far too vague and non-specific to be read as statements of policy; see Eric Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 176-177. One of the traditional accounts of William McKinley's tour comes from the autobiography of George Hoar, who suggests that the audiences' reactions when he mentioned "doing our duty" in the Philippines and Puerto Rico convinced McKinley to demand the whole of the Philippines. McKinley's biographers generally reject this contention. See Morgan, *William McKinley*, 397-399. For the alternative view, see also George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 309-311. For a work that largely accepts Hoar's account, see Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 171-172. For one that likewise suggests McKinley was merely hoping to follow public opinion, see Ernest R. May *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (1961; New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 254-262.

country.” He concluded by asking them to “remember at this critical hour in the nation’s history we must not be divided. The triumphs of war are yet to be written in the articles of peace.”¹⁰⁷ As the campaign was coming to a conclusion, the emergency of war was not yet over.

McKinley told audiences that there was still a crisis, and partisanship (or at least the kind that emanated from his rivals) was inappropriate. Again he was nonspecific, refusing to identify which emergency in particular concerned him. At that moment, there were two situations the press had identified as “crises” which may have been on McKinley’s mind. One pertained to the commitment of the Filipino revolutionaries under Emilio Aguinaldo to an independent Philippines, a major story in the news for much of the summer. The other, which received much more press attention at the time, was based upon a rumor that the negotiations with Spain could break down at any time and war could resume. The great fear was that this time Spain would not be acting alone. It was claimed that the European powers—led by either Russia or Germany—were considering intervention on behalf of Spain. Some said this was based directly on jealousy over the American claims to the Philippines, while others emphasized a fear that the introduction of Americans to the region might upset the fragile East Asian balance of power.¹⁰⁸ Rumors of European intervention had preceded the war and never really ceased.¹⁰⁹ In July, Populist editor and captain in the First Nebraska Volunteers Frank

¹⁰⁷ *Speeches and Addresses*, 100-106, 94-95.

¹⁰⁸ “Opening Peace Negotiations,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 1, 1898, p. 6; “Peace Negotiations,” *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), October 21, 1898, p. 1; “The Powers May Object,” *Times* (Washington, D.C.), November 3, 1898, p. 1; “Would Help Spain,” *San Francisco Call*, November 8, 1898, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ May, *Imperial Democracy*, 169-172.

Eager wrote a letter to his brother from an encampment just outside Manila in which he said that the rumors of a European intervention were spreading fast.¹¹⁰ From September through the end of the political campaign these rumors reached a new peak. Spanish negotiators were one potential source of these reports, and some in the press even acknowledged as much.¹¹¹ It is difficult to state for certain how believable these stories appeared to the American public, though suspicion of European intrigue was as old as the republic and obviously still significant by the 1890s. There was also just enough recent history to make the stories hold a degree of plausibility. A mere three years earlier, the unlikely coalition of Germany, Russia, and France had intervened at the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War to prevent Japan from taking possession of certain Chinese territories. It was feared that the incorporation of these possessions into the Japanese domain would tip the regional balance of power too strongly in Japan's favor.¹¹² To many, it may have appeared that a similar scenario could play out again, but the administration should have known better. Spain had been attempting to gain allies at every point, from the months before war right up to the negotiations. McKinley's lieutenants had kept in contact with the diplomats of the great powers throughout the process, and even as negotiations were

¹¹⁰ Frank D. Eager, "From Far Away Manila," *Independent*, August 25, 1898, p. 3. For a similar message from roughly the same time, see "Washington Letter," *Aberdeen Herald*, July 14, 1898, p. 8.

¹¹¹ "Sagasta's Little Bluff," *Evening Times* (Washington, D.C.), September 22, 1898, p. 1.

¹¹² Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 54-60; S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 247-294.

underway they received confirmation that no interventions were contemplated.¹¹³ But that did not mean that the rumors could not play a part in the campaign.

Republican campaigners soon painted the situation as a national emergency, and one that could only be prevented by following the lead of McKinley. Especially in the Nebraska campaign, Republicans emphasized the dangers of the moment. The *Columbus Journal*, for example, advertised that all patriotic Americans should vote for the local legislative candidate because he believed in the protective tariff and, even more importantly, “he has been an earnest supporter and is in sympathy on all points with the administration, especially in the late Spanish war, and will, if elected, act in hearty cooperation with the President in the peace negotiations now pending. That the present is a critical period in our history, all thoughtful Americans admit, and realize the necessity of electing a congress in full sympathy with the administration.” To abandon the president now was unpatriotic, because “The statesmen of Europe are eagerly awaiting political events in this country.”¹¹⁴ In the same vein, the editor of the *McCook Tribune* told readers it was their duty to “Endorse the administration” by voting for Republicans for their respective seats in the state legislature. “They are all worthy and able men and believe that President McKinley should be upheld in the present crisis.”¹¹⁵ Still another

¹¹³ Trask, *The War with Spain*, 426, 442-443, 445-446; McCormick, *China Market*, 110. On Spain’s attempts to gain allies and European reaction to the display of American power, see May, *Imperial Democracy*, 196-239. Additionally, intervention by either Britain or France would have seemed incredibly unlikely at the time as, from September until mid-November, those two countries were on the verge of war over possession of the small trading fort at Fashoda, in what is now South Sudan. For more on the Fashoda incident, see John A. Corry, *1898: Prelude to a Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 262-285.

¹¹⁴ *Columbus Journal*, October 26, 1898, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *McCook Tribune*, November 4, 1898, p. 4. Similar, if vague, comments—that emphasized the need to

paper went even farther, and claimed that the Populists and Democrats were acting on behalf of Spanish interests. They were working to “embarrass the National administration as much as possible in the settlement of the questions growing out of the war, so that some or all of the advantages gained by this country in the war with Spain will have to be thrown away.” Aiding them were “Speakers from the east” who had been sent into the state, and whose “utterances would indicate that they are in the direct employ of Spain.” Traitors were trying to halt their own nation’s progress for the sake of another, the author claimed. The nation and its president must be defended. “Patriotism demands this course without regard to previous political opinions.”¹¹⁶

The suggestion that Populists and Democrats wanted to throw away “all of the advantages gained by this country in the war” hinted at the expansionist subtext that was present throughout the campaign. Rarely did any of the Nebraska editors directly express opinions regarding the American situation in the Caribbean or Pacific. Instead local Republican papers reprinted stories from the national media that discussed the inability of the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, or Filipinos to manage their own affairs and which then described how American troops were keeping the peace. Then, on their political and opinion pages they wrote that patriotism required support for the president’s policies. As one of these editors put it, if you were “a good patriotic American citizen, you indorse the policy of the president with reference to the Cuban, Porto Rico, and Philippine

rally around the president at the present time of crisis—were also made on the stump. One speaker said that to “desert Mr. McKinley now” was like deserting a general on “on the field of battle.” See “Rally in the Third Ward,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 5, 1898, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ “The Duty of Patriots,” *Nebraska Advertiser* (Nemaha, NE), October 28, 1898, p. 8.

questions,” without ever explaining what that meant. This patriotic duty required voters to put Republicans in Congress.¹¹⁷ But it should not be assumed that all Republicans equated patriotism with expansion. Throughout the campaign, Edward Rosewater’s *Omaha Daily Bee* continued to oppose what it regarded as imperialism. Just as the rest of the state’s conservative media did, the *Bee* declared that “patriotism should rise above partisanship.” “The main issue before the people at this time is whether the national administration under William McKinley shall be endorsed and upheld and the policy under which this country is enjoying exceptional prosperity shall be continued”¹¹⁸

In Washington state, the newspapers and campaigners used much the same material to support an identical conclusion: to vote against a Republican would weaken the president at a critical juncture. It “could be in interpreted in no other way and would have no other meaning than as a vote of national censure upon William McKinley.” This issue was “First and foremost above all other issues,” they claimed.¹¹⁹ But in Washington, it was rarely viewed or described as an issue unto its own. While loyalty to the president was a patriotic duty, it was also a prerequisite to territorial expansion. Consistently, the state’s newspapers expressed the desire that the state’s voters would “favor upholding the hands of the noble administration at Washington in arranging the terms of peace to the permanent advantage of America, instead of neutralizing the grand

¹¹⁷ Untitled article, *McCook Tribune*, October 21, 1898, p. 4, reprinted from *Red Cloud Argus*, date unknown.

¹¹⁸ “Let Every Citizen Do His Duty,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 8, 1898, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ “Support the Administration,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, October 11, 1898, p. 4.

victories of the magnificent war.”¹²⁰ While some fusionists tried to claim that all parties in Washington supported the acquisition of Spain’s islands, the records of their congressmen called that into question.¹²¹

Local Republicans were not done tying patriotic sentiment to the actions of their party. They criticized their rivals for their untoward attacks upon the War Department—and indirectly, upon McKinley—denying that a Democrat or Populist could do so and still possess any patriotic feeling of their own. Nowhere was this more true than in Washington state, where Turner and Lewis had continued to accost Secretary Alger for incompetence throughout the campaign. When Lewis attacked those managing the war as “tasseled society sapheads,” the Tacoma *Daily Ledger* declared that these “are words intended to be expressive of the fusionist estimate of the brave men who scaled the heights of El Caney and others, many of whom now rest in their graves of heroes at Santiago.”¹²² Turner was said to have criticized “**without mercy the course of President McKinley during the late war, accusing him of weakness, cowardice and collusion with money kings** [emphasis in original].”¹²³ Speaking before a large

¹²⁰ “Today the Verdict,” *Morning Olympian*, November 8, 1898, p. 2. For similar statements, see also: “Spain’s Interest in Our Election,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, October 31, 1898, p. 4; “It is National,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, November 7, 1898, p. 4; “Stand By Him!” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 2, 1898, p. 4.

¹²¹ “Not a Campaign Issue,” *Seattle Daily Times*, October 6, 1898, p. 4; “Has Become a Degenerate,” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 3, 1898, p. 4.

¹²² “Lewis Calls Soldiers ‘Tasseled Sapheads,’” *Daily Ledger* (Tacoma, WA), October 24, 1898, p. 4.

¹²³ “Turner Repeating His Abuse,” *Daily Ledger*, October 29, 1898, p. 5.

Republican crowd, Senator Wilson responded by labeling Turner's language "unpatriotic and treasonable."¹²⁴

The method was much the same in Nebraska, though Republican terminology there was more directly borrowed from the era of the "bloody shirt." Just weeks after the close of the state conventions, Republican gubernatorial candidate Monroe Hayward ended one of his biggest speeches by reading a campaign bill from 1864 that called for the "Brave men who hate the rebellion of Abraham Lincoln and are determined to destroy it" to join the Democrats. Hayward proclaimed that such language was "gotten out for the same purpose that the opposition are getting out their slanders today."¹²⁵ This type of rhetoric was only amplified when it was discovered that the Populist state Commissioner of Public Lands had been a "copperhead" member of the Indiana legislature during the Civil War. Newspapers of a certain stripe soon used it as further evidence of fusionist disloyalty.¹²⁶ This was the kind of language that had dominated Nebraska politics in the years before the Populist uprising, but it was reincorporated into the political lexicon as if nothing had changed.¹²⁷ While Senator Thurston declared "patriotism" to be the true

¹²⁴ "Lieu Landers Win the Fight," *Pullman Herald*, November 5, 1898, p. 10. For similar comments about Lewis and Turner, see "In Poor Business," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 30, 1898, p. 4.

¹²⁵ "The Keynote of the Campaign," *McCook Tribune*, September 30, 1898, p. 10.

¹²⁶ "Uncle Jake in the Civil War," *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 13, 1898, p. 3; "Uncle Jake's Great Record," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 18, 1898, p. 3; "100 Questions for the Popocratic Speakers to Answer," *Nebraska Advertiser* (Nemaha City, NE), October 21, 1898, p. 8.

¹²⁷ Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 123, 125, 134; Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 35.

issue during his late campaign swing through the West, other Republicans had already made that point clear enough to voters.¹²⁸

Western reformers thought they could defuse the contentions of their opponents and demonstrate their own loyalty by emphasizing their military service. James Hamilton Lewis made it clear that he had seen abuses when he had served in the inspector general's office. Yet opponents claimed that he had never formally been accepted to the position, and as evidence they claimed that if he had made such slanderous comments while in uniform he would have been court martialed. Though Lewis eventually provided proof from the War Department that he had been in uniform, Republican papers continued to accuse him of being a fake colonel right up to election day.¹²⁹ In Nebraska, the supporters of Senator Allen likewise reminded voters of his military service. A front-page article in the *Independent* recounted Allen's brave service during Civil War, as told by the Iowa veterans with whom he had served. The headline of the article, "W. V. Allen as Private," even accentuated his appeal as a common soldier. While it made no reference to Allen's recent attacks on the administration, the timing made it clear that Allen's loyalty was beyond question.¹³⁰ Yet such defenses inherently accepted their opponent's emphasis upon service to country. Allen had endured personal hardship and risks at least as great as that faced by most American soldiers during the

¹²⁸ "Cheyenne Cheers Thurston," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 25, 1898, p. 1.

¹²⁹ On the claim that Lewis was never in the military, see: "The Same Old Sixpence," *Spokane Daily Chronicle* (WA), November 3, 1898, p. 4; "Lewis is Caught in His Own Trap," *Pullman Herald*, November 5, 1898, p. 9. A copy of the official dispatch confirming his position was printed in *Seattle Daily Times*, November 3, 1898, p. 1.

¹³⁰ "W. V. Allen as Private," *Independent*, September 1, 1898, p. 1.

War of 1898, but he had remained the dutiful soldier. When Lewis tacitly accepted that only those in the military could critique the civilian-led War Department, he acknowledged that only those under the employ of the administration could criticize it. At a moment when patriotic sentiment was at fever pitch, western reformers did not seek to challenge the growing tide of militaristic nationalism.

The results of the 1898 contest were far more decisive than most historians have realized. Looking at the national perspective, analysts have pointed out that Democrats gained several seats in the House but remained in the minority while the Republicans picked up a few seats in the Senate. For what some feared would be an off-year decline, it has been called a minor victory for the McKinley administration.¹³¹ But if examined from a regional perspective, it was a disaster for the western reformers. In Washington, Republicans captured the state legislature, killing any chance of further reform. Additionally, William C. Jones and James Hamilton Lewis were turned out of Congress, as their 13,000 vote majorities from 1896 were turned into defeats by over 2,000 votes. Similar results were recorded along the Pacific Coast. Of the six Populist and Democratic House members from those states, only Marion De Vries of California won reelection. In Nebraska, there was some reason for celebration. Poynter won the governorship by less than 3,000 votes and the fusionists held all of the Congressional districts they already controlled. Yet they too had lost the legislature, and Senator Allen

¹³¹ J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 141-143; Robert Saldin, *War, The American State, and Politics Since 1898* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54-58.

had no chance of winning over the state Republicans.¹³² Throughout the West, the defeats piled up. Governor Andrew Lee of South Dakota barely managed to be reelected but was left to face a hostile legislature, and Kelley and Knowles were not returned to Congress. Even in Kansas, that classic bastion of Populism, fusion forces were swept out of the state offices and lost five of their six House seats.¹³³

Only in the mountain states did similar political groups have a measure of success, but in those states issues surrounding the war had largely been pushed aside during the campaign. Two years earlier, the regular Republican parties there had all but ceased to exist, and the locally significant Silver Republican organizations were torn. Despite that, fusion had been arranged in Colorado and as a result Thomas was elected governor, Bell and Shafroth were sent back to Congress, and a more reform-minded group took charge of the legislature—a sweep unmatched even in the other mining states. Populist infighting in Idaho led to a successful Democratic and Silver Republican fusion ticket that excluded them altogether. In Montana, too, the fragile silver alliance broke down, as William A. Clark of the Anaconda mine pushed the state’s Democrats to nominate a straight party ticket. The Silver Republican Charles Hartman was deemed too “populistic” to receive nomination, and the Populists and Silver Republicans who attempted a separate fusion ticket went down to defeat and the hands of the Democrats. Even in Nevada, single-party politics prevailed as the Silver Party remained dominant at

¹³² For the gubernatorial results, see *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1900), 104-107.

¹³³ For Congressional election results, in this paragraph and what follows, see *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 6th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), 1104, 1106-1109. For state results, see Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 251-266; Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 90-94; O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 213-215; Lee, *Principle Over Party*, 153-160.

all levels, but the victory just briefly masked emerging divisions that loyalty to a metal alone could not smooth over. Fights over the spoils threatened to tear apart the remaining reform coalitions in the states most opposed to administration policy.¹³⁴

Elsewhere, as they tried to explain the results of the contests, many on both sides contended that the war had played a significant part. In a letter to Jonas Lien in Manila, Richard Pettigrew attributed defeats in South Dakota to the difficulties that came with local fusion arrangements, the “unlimited supply of money” held by their opponents, and added in conclusion that, “the war sentiment is strong, and that had a good deal to do with our defeat.”¹³⁵ In Washington, the Republican state committee chairman attributed the stunning reversal to two issues. He first pointed to his opponent’s support for the single tax (which had more to do with Republican branding of the amendment than fusion espousal of the doctrine). The second factor related to the ongoing negotiations with Spain, and realization by voters that “the administration needed the undivided support of all parties.” The attacks of Lewis and Turner upon the conduct of the war only highlighted the President’s call for unity.¹³⁶ Almost remarkably, their opponents agreed. One commentator declared that Lewis overshadowed the accomplishments of fusionists

¹³⁴ Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 217-218; Russell R. Elliot, *Servant of Power: A Political Biography of Senator William M. Stewart* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), 191-215; William Joseph Gaboury, *Dissension in the Rockies: A History of Idaho Populism* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 308-323; Thomas A. Clinch, *Urban Populism and Free Silver in Montana: A Narrative of Ideology in Political Action* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana Press, 1970), 156-159.

¹³⁵ Richard F. Pettigrew to Jonas Lien, 30 November 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 22. For a similar analysis of the election, see also Richard F. Pettigrew to Victoria Connor, no date (but likely November, 1898), RFP Papers, Reel 22.

¹³⁶ “Chairman J. H. Schively Comments on the Great Republican Victory,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 10, 1898, p. 5. Similar comments can be seen in the *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, November 9, 1898, p. 4.

in the state and national government by his “reprehensible attack on the war administration of President McKinley,” and the editor of the *Seattle Daily Times* agreed wholeheartedly with the assessment.¹³⁷

In Nebraska, there was greater difficulty to explain the mixed results. Despite the election of Poynter, state Republicans believed the election marked a dramatic shift. In 1896, Holcomb was elected by a majority of over 20,000. Poynter’s victory was by less than 3,000. While the total number of voters who participated was substantially lower, the Republican candidate had run less than 2,000 votes behind the party’s showing in 1896. The losses were nearly all on the fusionist side. Their interpretation of the election’s implications went much farther. According to the *Bee*, “The election of a republican house of representatives was a blow, perhaps a decisive blow, to free silver.” They declared with no small amount of satisfaction that Republican victories in the West had killed silver as an issue. “There has been a wonderful change in sentiment in Nebraska,” crowed another paper, “and Bryanism is doomed.”¹³⁸

Despite their limited victory, Nebraska Populists appeared to suffer the loss of Senator Allen, and some drew connections between this defeat and what they saw as the coming contest for the soul of America. Jay Burrows, an Alliance organizer and one of the founders of the state party, wrote a letter to the *Independent* on these very subjects. He described the loss of Allen—“the greatest United States senator the state ever had”—

¹³⁷ C. R. Tuttle, “What Did It?” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 12, 1898, p. 4; *Seattle Times*, November 14, 1898, p. 4.

¹³⁸ *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 11, 1898, p. 6; “The Legislature is Republican,” *Nebraska Advertiser* (Nemaha), November 11, 1898; “A Lesson for Democrats,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 14, 1898, p. 4.

as an incalculable disaster for the people because of the “new situations that confront the nation.” The territory that America was likely to take from Spain amounted to a sizable overseas empire, and citizens must decide what role the nation would play in the Philippines. Colonial occupation would mean “our complication in European politics” and the militarism that came with such associations. A more inclusive form of expansion “must necessarily and unavoidably place the ten or fifteen millions of this half civilized Asiatic population upon absolute equality with our own people,” and essentially destroy American labor. The third option, he said, was to tell the Filipinos “establish a free constitutional government for your own people... and you shall have our moral support, our advice, and our armed assistance if you need it.” According to Burrows, the ultimate decision would determine the fate of not only the Filipinos but the Americans themselves. Americans must choose between the course of “rapacity and greed and thirst for dominion” or “national honesty, integrity and devotion to a God-given mission.” While Nebraska’s Populists and Democrats had avoided discussion of imperialism during the campaign, their fear of its consequences remained. For Burrows and other Populists imperialism remained a serious question, no matter the logic of the campaign. If it was not confronted soon, they feared its legacy could haunt the nation for generations to come.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ “The Coming Issue,” *Independent*, November 17, 1898, p. 1. The *Independent* had practically ceased to cover the question of imperialism throughout the campaign, but the policy reversed immediately following the election. See also “Imperialism,” *Independent*, November 10, 1898, p. 4.

While the election of 1898 was far too confused an affair to create the clear divisions and evoke the moral senses that the contest of 1896 had, the rhetoric adopted in the campaign was in many ways a precursor to the discourse that followed over the next two years. Finally, western conservatives could change the terms of a debate that they had been losing for most of the decade. This was the greatest change from the last presidential race, and the one that promised to give conservative Republicans the kind of national mandate they had lacked. Though the discussion of “realignment” has rightfully passed from the lexicon of most current historians, it is undeniable that Republicans won dominant victories in much of the Midwest and Northeast. The South remained solidly Democratic, and that seemed unlikely to change anytime soon. In 1896 and immediately thereafter, the West was the largest political battlefield left, and suddenly it too was shifting into the Republican camp.¹⁴⁰

As a consequence of the many defeats suffered by Populists and their allies in 1898, McKinley would have a solid majority of regular Republicans in both houses of the Fifty-sixth Congress. It was this Congress that determined the form of control that the United States would exercise over its “new possessions.” While he preferred to push it through as quickly as possible, McKinley always knew that if the lame-duck Senate of the Fifty-fifth Congress did not ratify the peace treaty with Spain—which was still in

¹⁴⁰ On the somewhat dated historical literature of realignment, see V. O. Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections,” *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1 (1955): 3-18; Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970); Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Samuel McSeveney, *The Politics of Depression: Political Behavior in the Northeast, 1893-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

being negotiated—the next one would. His campaign ploy had worked as well as anyone could have expected, and now he merely had to collect the rewards.

CHAPTER VII

IMPERIALISM COMES TO THE FOREFRONT

“There is mourning in Nebraska to-day,” said Senator William Allen on February 6, 1899. “[T]here will be weeping at the hearthstone of many a Nebraska home to-night.” The first reports of fighting around Manila had arrived. The initial rumors claimed that the army led by Emilio Aguinaldo had attacked American positions, most of which were held by volunteer regiments from the western states. Allen said that he had been informed that ten of the first twenty dead were from the Nebraska regiment. “I can not condemn too severely the assault, the treacherous assault, made on our troops,” he continued. He went on to call the individuals responsible for the attack “savages as bloodthirsty and incapable of being reconciled as the Ogallala Sioux.” Despite the anger he felt towards those he believed had attacked his friends and neighbors, he told the audience that “this ought to be a warning to us.” At the close of his speech, he told all there that he looked forward to “the day when the Filipinos and the inhabitants of Porto Rico and Cuba may rise to a true conception of the duties and obligations of citizenship; when they too, with the encouragement of this great and powerful Republic, shall take their station among the civilized republics and peoples of the earth.”¹

The outbreak of the conflict had put Allen in a difficult position. He favored ratification of the peace treaty that would end the war with Spain. However, he had rejected the notion that the United States had inherited some obligation to conquer and hold people without their consent. Now he acceded to the use of force to put down what

¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 6, 1899, p. 1480-1484.

he believed was a wanton attack upon those who had helped break the chains of Spanish oppression. But he still had serious doubts about the administration's policy. Overseas conquests, colonialism, and militarism were, in Allen's mind, totally without precedent in American history and unacceptable behavior for a republic. The last lines of his speech defined his view of the correct form of relations between the United States and the rest of the world: America should be an example for others to emulate.

By early 1899, the battle lines that divided imperialists and their opponents were still incredibly convoluted. There were Republicans who had misgivings about the acquisition of some overseas territories, especially the Philippines. At the same time, two former Republicans—Henry Teller and William Stewart—unreservedly supported the acquisition of all the lands American forces then occupied. There were also Populists such as Allen, who distrusted McKinley but wanted to put an official end to the war with Spain before determining the fate of the islands. And of course there were many others who declared that the treaty must be stopped in order to safeguard liberty and the Constitution.

Despite the diversity of positions, harder ideological lines were appearing. Increasingly, Populists and Democrats demonstrated their firm opposition to imperialism. While western reformers had divided over Hawaiian annexation, nearly all opposed the permanent occupation of the Philippines. Some had considered Hawaii to be necessary for the war effort, while others simply saw it as too small to meaningfully alter American ideals or institutions. Such could not be said of the Philippines. To control and defend a distant archipelago containing between 7-10,000,000 inhabitants would require a larger army and navy, a greater administrative bureaucracy, and—most ominously—a

willingness to disregard republican principles.² All of this, the western critics were sure, was to be done for the benefit of financiers and industrialists. The whole push of their crusade had been one designed to put the interests of humanity before business. In 1899, as they tried to prevent territorial acquisition, their struggle expanded into a new field.

Interregnum

Following the election of 1898, much remained undetermined. The president's campaign tour had provided little insight into his foreign policy ambitions, and the final negotiated form of the treaty was not signed and made public until December 10. While the treaty did fulfill the main purpose of the war—Cuba was recognized as under American tutelage, pending the organization of a new government—it also included provisions for the acquisition of Puerto Rico and the Philippines. The latter was to be exchanged for the sum of \$20 million.³ The treaty was much as the anti-imperialists had feared, but even it did not provide a substantially clearer outline of America's policy. While it differentiated between Cuba and the other islands, it did not state whether American intended to control Puerto Rico and the Philippines as colonies in perpetuity, as territories to be admitted for statehood in the future, or as short-term protectorates that

² Regarding the population of the Philippines circa 1898, both the literature from the era and modern secondary works utilize rather widely differing numbers. The figure 7,000,000 is close to the number of "civilized" Filipinos identified in the 1903 census, but such a figure undoubtedly excluded many of the islands' inhabitants and only accounts for population size in the aftermath of a destructive war. For more, see Ken De Bevoise, who studied the demographics of the 1890s and early 1900s in great detail in *Agents of Apocalypse: Epidemic Disease in the Colonial Philippines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), especially 6-13.

³ David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 445-466.

would soon become independent countries. McKinley chose not to clarify his plans, only adding to the controversy.

The closest that the President provided to a statement of policy was a document directed at the Filipinos and American military on the islands, not Congress or the American public. It declared that Dewey's victory "practically effected the conquest of the Philippine Islands and the suspension of Spanish sovereignty therein." As a result of America's military victories, "the future control, disposition, and government of the Philippine Islands are ceded to the United States." McKinley framed the military occupation as a kindly paternal act, suggesting that this was necessary only "for the security of the persons and property of the people of the islands and for the confirmation of all their private rights and relations," and that the Americans came "not as invaders or conquerors, but as friends, to protect the natives in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights." Much of his message invoked the kind of "hearts and minds" language similar to what would be used in the coming century. Commanders were to guarantee the "full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of free peoples, and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule." Yet every suggestion of benign intent was followed by a warning. For those who did not submit to the newly established authority, he vowed to bring them "within the lawful rule we have assumed, with firmness if need be." He added in his closing that, to that end, "the strong arm of authority" must be maintained, in order to "repress disturbance and to overcome all obstacles to the bestowal of the blessings of good and stable government upon the people of the Philippine Islands under the free flag

of the United States.” He saw no irony in declaring the need for brute force under such a “free flag.”⁴

Others did see through the doubletalk, and foremost among them were the Filipinos themselves. McKinley issued his proclamation in mid-December of 1898, and shortly thereafter General Elwell Otis, new head of the American army in Manila and titular military governor of the Philippines, provided a sanitized version of it to Emilio Aguinaldo. Otis apparently held the belief—quite incorrect, in fact—that the Filipino commander had no means of obtaining the original. The form Otis provided de-emphasized the American claim to sovereignty but still claimed that America was there for the benefit of the inhabitants, suggesting little likelihood of an American withdrawal. Aguinaldo would not have been satisfied with the content of the sanitized version, but the Filipino general was furious when he learned that McKinley claimed that the right of conquest entitled the United States to absolute control over the whole of the Philippines. The army under his command maintained its position surrounding Manila, but took no action that would provoke a response. No matter his course, the likelihood of a peaceful conclusion grew increasingly slim.⁵

As tensions were building in the archipelago, other opponents of empire were taking action in the United States. By November of 1898, those who had organized the

⁴ A reprint of his message appears in *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 11, 1899, p. 572-573.

⁵ Lewis L. Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 148; Stuart Creighton Miller, “Benevolent Assimilation”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 52. For Aguinaldo’s formal response to the proclamation, see *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain, Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 912-913.

anti-imperialist meeting at Boston's Faneuil Hall had succeeded in attracting large numbers of prominent northeasterners (and a few others) to help them form a new organization. The Anti-Imperialist League was officially formed on November 19, with former Massachusetts governor and Secretary of the Treasury George S. Boutwell selected as the first president. That a regular Republican was chosen by the heavily mugwump organizing committee was no accident, but was instead designed to demonstrate their non-partisan approach to the issue. The first of many honorary vice presidencies given out went to men such as businessman, economist, and gold-advocate Edward Atkinson, former president Grover Cleveland, steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, leading mugwump and editor Carl Schurz, and former senator—and most recently, McKinley's Secretary of State—John Sherman. Though they were joined by labor leader Samuel Gompers, for the most part the views of these men ran the (rather short) ideological gamut from classical liberal to conservative.⁶

Of course, there were plenty of others who saw the menace of imperialism as a serious problem. Richard Pettigrew was thoroughly opposed to the acquisition of the Philippines, just as he had opposed Hawaiian annexation in 1893 and the summer of 1898. In late 1898, he was in contact with a number of soldiers of the First South Dakota in the Philippines in an attempt to gain a thorough and unfiltered assessment of the situation there. The most important of these correspondents was Jonas Lien, a twenty-five-year-old reform speaker and editor who was now a lieutenant in South Dakota's

⁶ E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 126-127; Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898-1909* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 22-25.

regiment in Manila. It was Lien who informed him in October that “the much heralded battle of Manila [the capture of the city by the Americans in August] was a farce—cut and dried and prearranged.” Lien also told the senator that if the Americans attempted to claim the islands for themselves, Aguinaldo and his army would fight. Worse still, “If they determine to fight it will be a prolonged struggle, ending either in the withdrawal in disgust of the United States forces or in the extermination of the native population.” The best solution was for “you gentlemen who occupy seats in Congress” to “devise some scheme to get rid of it.”⁷

Pettigrew was hoping to do just that. He responded to Lien by stating his views on the subject, namely that militarism and “the conquest and government of unwilling people” were un-American doctrines that must be defeated. In a remarkable statement of his commitment to the cause, he even declared to his friend in Manila that “If we try to occupy the Philippines I hope the native inhabitants will fight us, and then I hope they will whip our army, for I believe all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and we have no right to forcibly occupy that country.” They possessed every right to control their own affairs, and they should be allowed to “set up a government of their own and run it in their own way, without interference on our part in any particular.”⁸

⁷ Jonas Lien to Richard F. Pettigrew, 8 October 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition, reel 31.

⁸ Richard F. Pettigrew to Jonas Lien, 30 November 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition, reel 22.

Pettigrew believed the best way to halt American ambitions in the Philippines was by defeating the Treaty of Paris. He was joined in this view by many members of the League and senators such as the Democrat Arthur Pue Gorman and the Republican George Frisbie Hoar. The required two-thirds majority for the ratification of a treaty was a high hurdle, and even a relatively small number could prevent its passage in the Fifty-fifth Congress. Those who fought against the treaty did so because they attributed much of the popular expansionist sentiment to the emotional nationalism sparked by the war. With the passage of time, passions would calm and popular sentiment would again favor more traditional American policies, they argued.⁹

The opponents of ratification have often been depicted as the only real hope for American anti-imperialism, yet the possibility of “success” by this route was, at best, a highly questionable proposition. First, if McKinley was committed to ratifying the treaty as it was, there was nothing they could have done to stop it. The President could always call a special session of the newly elected Fifty-sixth Congress just a matter of days after the sitting Congress adjourned, and it was due to be more solidly pro-administration than its predecessor.¹⁰ While a number of anti-imperialists believed that the American public had become temporarily irrational and that the basic logic of their policy would become

⁹ See Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists of 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), 153; Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1972), 114.

¹⁰ Robert Beisner notes that George Hoar realized that McKinley was aware of this option, but that Hoar believed that if the treaty could be rejected the opposition would have “sufficient momentum to defeat the pact a second time.” See Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 153. The possibilities of either holding it to the next session or resubmitting it should it fail the first time are also presented in: H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 408; Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 143; Miller, “*Benevolent Assimilation*”, 27.

clearer in the matter of a few months, it is surprising that historians have largely accepted their claim well after the fact. Popular opinion regarding the Philippines was due to become more emotionally charged, not less so.

One anti-imperialist outside of the Senate has been given considerable attention for his controversial role in ratification debate. In mid-December, William Jennings Bryan requested and received an honorable discharge from the army. While he had contended that all of the regiments that had volunteered for the war should be mustered out, his Second Nebraska Volunteer regiment was, like so many others, bound for garrison duty in the islands now under American control. Freed from the obligation to follow the commander-in-chief, he could continue the anti-imperialist campaign he had begun in June.¹¹

Bryan disagreed with those anti-imperialists who favored rejection of the treaty, contending instead that America could deal with the situation more directly through legislation than by diplomacy. Peace with the Filipinos could be established just by declaring that America's aim was to help them set up independent government. Even such a simple declaration of policy would be hollow until Spanish sovereignty was erased.¹²

¹¹ William Jennings Bryan to Adjutant General, 10 December 1898, and Adjutant General to William Jennings Bryan, 12 December 1898, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter, WJB Papers), Box 22; Paolo E. Colletta, *William Jennings Bryan: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 232; Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 287-288.

¹² For a description of Bryan's views, see "Bryan Says Ratify Treaty," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), January 9, 1899, p. 5; Paolo E. Colletta, "Bryan, McKinley, and the Treaty of Paris," *Pacific Historical Review* 26, no. 2 (1957): 131-146; Colletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 233-237; Koenig, *Bryan*, 290-294.

Both contemporaries and historians have described Bryan's position as complicated, contradictory, and incongruous with his stated goal. But those who left behind the most widely referenced accounts—men such as George F. Hoar and Andrew Carnegie—were men who were opposed to the Commoner on nearly every other issue.¹³ Of course, these were individuals who had no reason to see any high motive in Bryan's actions, and both of the aforementioned individuals went on to claim that the Nebraskan was only seeking political advantage. In his autobiography, Hoar claimed that Democratic senators informed him that their party “could not hope to win a victory on the financial questions at stake after they had been beaten on them in a time of adversity; and that they must have this issue for the coming campaign.” Bryan was the leading force that encouraged this line of thinking in Hoar's telling of the story, and he claimed the Commoner encouraged seventeen of his “followers” to vote for the treaty.¹⁴

To suggest that politics played no part in Bryan's thinking would be inaccurate, but to alternatively say that the war had been conducted and portrayed in a non-partisan manner up to that point would be equally erroneous. Additionally, he told Carnegie himself that his desire was to downplay imperialism as a political issue if at all possible. Shortly after the two began correspondence in December of 1898, and in direct response

¹³ For just a few of the historians with skeptical views of Bryan's motives, see Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, vi; Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 179-180, 188-190; Schirmer, *Republic or Empire*, 108, 110; Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898-1909* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 42-43. On Carnegie's views of the treaty and Bryan's involvement, see Andrew Carnegie, *Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 364-365.

¹⁴ George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 322-323. See also, Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 155-158; 180-181; E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 188-191; Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism*, 42-43.

to the steel magnate's suggestion that anti-imperialism could make Bryan a strong candidate in next presidential contest, Bryan informed him that he did not see it primarily as a political conflict. Not only was he not yet a candidate for any office, but it was his hope "to see the question disposed of before 1900, so that the fight for silver and against trusts and bank notes may be continued."¹⁵

Whether or not Bryan did believe the issue of imperialism could be taken care of before the election of 1900, there is reasonable evidence that he did suspect that rejection of the treaty would have dire consequences for those who opposed it. His letters to Carnegie reveal that he feared a backlash against the anti-imperialist movement that would halt their efforts permanently. "Sentiment is turning our way," he said, so "why risk the annihilation of our forces by rejecting the treaty?" In any event, "To reject it would throw the subject back into the hands of the administration," which obviously could not be trusted on the matter. At the same time, those who stopped the treaty "would be held responsible for anything that might happen" in the interim. A much briefer letter sent to Carnegie just two days before had expressed a similar view of the situation: "Your plan is dangerous," wrote Bryan, "my plan is safe."¹⁶

The historians who have all-too-frequently accepted the criticisms leveled by Hoar, Carnegie, and other conservatives have completely ignored the context of the moment.¹⁷ As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the President himself had

¹⁵ William Jennings Bryan to Andrew Carnegie, 24 December 1898, WJB Papers, Box 22.

¹⁶ William Jennings Bryan to Andrew Carnegie, 13 January 1899 and 11 January 1899, WJB Papers, Box 22.

¹⁷ For example, Robert Beisner questioned if Bryan could be considered an anti-imperialist at all because of his support for the treaty, which is basically an acceptance of the arguments leveled by Bryan's

campaign in 1898 by telling audiences that the nation was in a “crisis,” and that they needed to put “patriotism” above all else until the war was officially concluded. This rhetoric continued on after the campaign as well, only compounded by rising tensions in the Philippines.¹⁸ By January, Republican newspapers were occasionally running stories that declared Aguinaldo and his representatives in Washington were “getting encouragement from the anti-expansionists in Congress.”¹⁹ Another claimed that, “By delaying ratification of the peace treaty senators hope to see trouble in the Philippines.”²⁰ Even some Democratic papers ran stories which included suggestions that delayed passage of the treaty provided inspiration not only to “Aguinaldo and his followers, but to foreign nations to encourage opposition to the United States.”²¹ An appreciation for this context necessitates a reappraisal of Bryan’s position. Bryan’s actions and private statements suggest he considered the risk to be plausible.

It should also be kept in mind that the stakes for Bryan and for those who opposed the treaty were quite different. Bryan’s western allies had just taken a severe beating in

conservative detractors. See Robert Beisner, “1898 and 1968: The Anti-Imperialists and the Doves,” *Political Science Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (1970): 193. Nearly the only work that actually accepts that Bryan feared the renewal of war is a well-won if thoroughly researched study by Merle Curti. See Merle Eugene Curti, *Bryan and World Peace* (1931; New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 131-132. The subject is also addressed—rather dismissively—in Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 188-189.

¹⁸ For evidence of the continuation of such rhetoric after the campaign, see: *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, November 14, 1898, p. 1; “Will Not Please Europe,” *Pullman Herald* (WA), December 3, 1898, p. 3; “It Pains the Continent,” *Red Cloud Chief* (NE), December 2, 1898, p. 2.

¹⁹ “At the National Capital,” *Red Cloud Chief*, January 13, 1899, p. 1. For similar statements, see “Anti-American Prejudice,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, January 28, 1899, p. 4.

²⁰ *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), January 27, 1899, p. 4; also, see *Morning Oregonian*, January 26, 1899, p. 4, and February 3, 1899, p. 4.

²¹ “Senate Expected to Ratify Peace Treaty,” *Denver Post*, January 1, 1899, p. 2. See also: “Hand of Germany Again Showing,” *Denver Post*, November 17, 1898, p. 1;

the recent elections by virtue of Republican entreaties to put patriotism above politics. Those most critical of his decision were a Republican senator who would not likely face such repercussions, a Republican businessman who was beyond caring about his own popularity, and mugwumps who had either never held office or who had not come close to positions of power since shortly after the end of Reconstruction. What Bryan had done, in reality, was provide those who loathed him a convenient excuse when they chose to abandon him later.

Historians have been no kinder to Bryan, and in their search for further incriminating evidence they have turned to one of his allies: Richard Pettigrew. Over twenty years after the fact, the former South Dakota senator wrote a semi-autobiographical account of his years in and around the national centers of power, and he included in it an indictment of the Commoner based upon his response to the treaty. Pettigrew claimed that when Bryan came to Washington to lobby in favor of the treaty, he told the senator that the islands could be granted independence shortly after the treaty was ratified, and if the administration “should undertake to conquer the islands and annex them to the United States, such a course would and ought to drive the Republican party from power.” Pettigrew—and the historians who have accepted his claims since—stated that Bryan had “made the ratification of the Spanish Treaty an act of political expediency.” By doing so he tarnished the cause of anti-imperialism, they claim.²²

²² Richard F. Pettigrew, *Triumphant Plutocracy: The Story of American Public Life from 1870s to 1920* (New York: Academy Press, 1921), 273-274. For references to Pettigrew’s account (and its general acceptance in the secondary literature), see: E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 189-190; Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire*, 108-110.

It makes little sense to discredit Bryan based on the record left by Pettigrew. What Bryan did was recognize that the whole process was political, and that the threat of retaliation by the electorate is one of the few motivators that exist in the American political system. Additionally, other portions of Pettigrew's account have been called into question, while his arraignment of none other than George Frisbie Hoar himself has somehow been ignored.²³ Hoar, he claimed, tried to convince him to vote for the treaty and then fight for Philippine independence afterward. He concluded by suggesting that the senator from Massachusetts only registered his protest by voting against the treaty when it was certain that enough votes had been mustered to ratify it.²⁴

Regardless of the validity of Pettigrew's account, anti-imperialism manifested itself in many forms during the last political battles of the Fifty-fifth Congress. While western reformers in Congress remained divided over the methods to employ, by this point there was nearly complete agreement that the new overseas policies advocated by expansionists posed real threats to freedom at home and abroad. After stinging defeats in the elections of 1898 this was the last chance many of them had to put their opposition to empire on record in the national legislature, and many decided to make the most of it.

²³ Pettigrew's account of a later anti-imperialist meeting has been characterized by Göran Rystad as seriously flawed—something one might expect with an account written twenty years after the fact. See Göran Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism: American Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics at the Turn of the Century* (Lund, Sweden: Esselte Studium, 1975), 169.

²⁴ Richard F. Pettigrew, *Triumphant Plutocracy*, 206-207.

The Opening of the Debate and Imperialist Arguments

Before the President sent his proclamation of “benevolent assimilation” to the Philippines, and even before the Treaty of Paris was signed, opposition to annexation was forming in Congress. Senator George Vest, a Missouri Democrat, introduced a resolution stating that “under the Constitution of the United States no power is given to the Federal Government to acquire territory to be held and governed permanently as colonies.”

While it went on to clarify that small quantities of land could be acquired as coaling stations, it specifically defined colonialism as a European institution and not one suited for the great republic.²⁵ His resolution was only the first of many designed to force the administration and its allies in Congress to declare their intentions toward the Philippines, and these (not the treaty vote) became the clearest point of contention between supporters and opponents of the McKinley administration.

Republicans were forced into a tentative position, largely by the silence of the administration, and Populists and Democrats sensed the opportunity this presented. The most well-known Senate resolutions on policy, and the ones that were most seriously debated, were those by Vest, presented at the opening of the session, one by Augustus Bacon of Georgia, first offered as debate began in earnest on January 11, and one by Senator Samuel McEnery of Louisiana, proposed just before the final vote on ratification.²⁶ Despite the prominence of the proposals by southerners, Western senators

²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Dec. 6, 1898, p. 20.

²⁶ Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 178-179, 194; Eric Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 186-188, 190, 194.

were no less active. Between January 11 and February 11, William Allen alone offered three different resolutions that were designed to put either the Senate or both houses of Congress on record in opposition to colonialism. The last of these was framed merely as a reaffirmation of the principles of the Declaration of Independence, but in reality it was a thinly veiled criticism of those who believed that Puerto Rico or the Philippines (or, according to many Republicans, even Cuba) needed to be ruled by Americans.²⁷ Allen claimed to be surprised at the opposition that arose due to the resolution's statement that the doctrine of the Declaration "is not, in its application, to be confined to the people of the United States, but is universal and extends to all peoples, wherever found, having a distinct and well-organized society and territory of their own."²⁸ He was not the only westerner who used resolutions in an attempt to force some statement of policy out of McKinley's backers, but all proved ineffective.²⁹

Western reformers had no lack of opportunity to voice their opposition to imperialism. The Senate devoted much time to debating the pending treaty and, even more commonly, the resolutions designed to set American policy regarding the "new possessions." House members would normally have had less opportunity to state their opinion, and they had no chance to vote on or even debate the merits of the treaty. But in

²⁷ On the desire of certain imperialists to acquire Cuba, despite the Teller amendment, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), especially 270-281.

²⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 11, 1899, p. 562, Feb. 4, 1899, p. 1445, Feb. 11, 1899, p. 1731-1732.

²⁹ As just one example, Populist Senator William Harris of Kansas offered a resolution disavowing any claim to permanent sovereignty over the Philippines and guaranteeing their independence in the near-term. See *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 3, 1899, p. 1416. Like all of the others, his was unsuccessful.

this case, the administration handed them a gift. Secretary of War Russell Alger, Adjutant General Henry Corbin, and their ally in the House, Representative John A. T. Hull of Iowa, fashioned a bill designed to expand the regular army from roughly 25,000 men to 100,000 on a permanent basis, ostensibly to police the colonies. In fact, there was still more resistance to an enlarged American army than the administration supposed, and it soon became clear that the bill had little chance of passing. Some feared that conservatives wanted an expanded army to put down internal disturbances, but for western reformers in the House neither its use at home nor in the colonies would have been acceptable. As they attacked the Hull bill, anti-imperialist Congressman used the opportunity to reflect on the problems that accompanied expansion.³⁰

The President's western supporters were somewhat slow to organize a response, perhaps because of lingering ambivalence regarding imperialism and its consequences. In one case, Senator George C. Perkins of California asked his state legislature to instruct him how to vote on the Treaty of Paris. In his request, he clearly indicated that he considered the dangers associated with the annexation of the Philippines to be great, suggesting that he preferred to vote against the treaty. Perkins was a former governor of the state and a man one historian claimed was known "notoriously as a servant of the railroad" and big business generally, but in the last lines of his letter he awkwardly referred to himself as a mere "representative of the people of California" and

³⁰ For some explanation of the basis of this assumption, see Jerry M. Cooper, *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 217-218; Clayton D. Laurie and Ronald H. Cole, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1877-1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1997), 152. On the Hull Bill as proposed in 1899, see Graham A. Cosmas, "Military Reform After the Spanish-American War: The Army Reorganization Fight of 1898-1899," *Military Affairs* 35, no. 1 (1971): 12-18.

acknowledged it was his duty to “obey.” In this circumstance, he thought it wiser to abdicate the responsibility that went with being senator rather than support a risky policy of his own volition.³¹

Eventually western supporters of the administration did organize a response, but when it came to policy statements they largely followed the lead of their eastern counterparts. Most commonly, they declared that it was the wrong moment to state their intentions towards the “new possessions.” Many were likely trying to follow the President’s lead, but the chief executive proved too nimble for even his allies to pin down on the subject. And so they were left to argue that no one should yet declare America’s policy. Senator Thomas Carter of Montana simply questioned the utility of an early declaration of policy. “It must be conceded by those who seek to determine the momentous questions presented by the resolutions, not questions of constitutionality, but questions of policy, that our information is of the most meager character.” Greater knowledge would allow the Congress and President to better chart the nation’s course. As for now, “Even the number of islands in the archipelago seems to be a matter of controversy and doubt. The number of dialects or languages spoken by the people is merely conjectural, so far as our information at present extends.”³² Representative Thomas Tongue of Oregon argued along very similar lines that “We know too little of existing conditions, the capacities or will of the people, to determine upon a plan of

³¹ *The Journal of the Senate During the Thirty-Third Session of the Legislature of the State of California, 1899* (Sacramento: A. J. Johnston, 1899), 9-11; George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963), 16.

³² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 30, 1899, p. 1242-1243.

future government for the people of the islands.” Worse yet, “the people of the Philippine Islands know less of us; less of our institutions than we do of theirs.” Questions surrounding the future of the Philippines “will be better solved next year than now; better in two years than in one; better in three years than in two.”³³ Such a timeframe was much to the liking of Senator William Stewart. Nevada’s grey-bearded senator thought any declaration was “entirely premature.” “Six months or a year or two or three years hence will develop the facts, and the American Government will be better able to deal with it when they have a full knowledge of the facts than they are now, with the limited knowledge they have.”³⁴ Of course, this was tantamount to handing the subject over to the President’s care, but it allowed expansionists to claim that their solution was the cautious, responsible one.

The expansionist refusal to define the terms of expansion—such as whether it was to be temporary or perpetual, or whether the peoples were to be considered citizens or subjects—only led to greater criticism by their opponents. Jerry Simpson mocked a Pennsylvania Republican for what he branded a “new kind of statesmanship.” “He did not tell us and he did not know what course the President is going to pursue with reference to expansion or the annexation of the Philippine Islands,” said Simpson, “but he finally said that he was willing at all times, in season and out of season, to stand by whatever his party wanted him to stand by.” The Kansan imagined a circumstance in which a member of Congress could have no thoughts of their own on a matter “until he

³³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1108-1113.

³⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 11, 1899, p. 1735-1736.

read his paper and found what the President stood for.”³⁵ The laughter his comments invoked could not mask the seriousness of the issue.

Imperialists were able to argue that the issue could be put off for a future date because America had always been a country of freedom and justice, and so there was no reason to believe it would behave differently now. Colorado Senator Edward Wolcott was sure that America would not “put our hands upon that people [the Filipinos] except to bless them. American institutions mean liberty and not despotism, and our dealings with those islanders, be they brief or be they for all time, can only serve to lift them up nearer into the light of civilization and of Christianity.” The free government and a free press would guarantee their safety, he said, and American treatment of them would be always be “honorable and fair and just.”³⁶ Congressman Tongue assured the House that “it is safe to trust the representatives of the American people to establish a government in the Philippine Islands, not only much better than the people have ever known, but one that will give the fullest share of personal liberty and political privileges that the people are capable of receiving consistent with their own welfare.” For Tongue, this was guaranteed because Anglo-Saxons were a just race. For those who claimed the United States would act as Spain had, he asked how anyone could “compare America to Spain, Americans to Spaniards? The difference between these two races was demonstrated by Dewey at Manila... Why not rather point us to our own race, to the example of our own history?” Along with America’s own history of expansion was “the success of English

³⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 30, 1899, p. 1278-1279.

³⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 4, 1899, p. 1450-1451.

colonial government,” which proved affirmatively, he said, that Anglo-Americans were morally (and racially) fit to rule.³⁷

The imperialists then took their arguments further as they emphasized an American obligation to “protect” and govern those who they believed could not yet govern themselves. Teller did not believe that “we should shrink from our duty because there may be difficulties attending it.” The country went to war to free Cuba from tyranny, he said, and “when eight or ten millions more of men under like circumstances fall under our control, we can not avoid our duty by saying. ‘We went to war to help Cuba. We will help nobody else.’ That is cowardly. We can not do it.” In his view, the Philippines needed to be freed from Spain and protected from outside enemies.³⁸ His fellow Coloradan, Wolcott, agreed, but he laid out the other possibilities in grimmer detail. “The course of events, unexpected and necessarily unforeseen, leave us at the conclusion of this war charged with a duty toward 9,000,000 people in far-off, distant seas,” he said. “We found them cruelly oppressed by Spain. No man with bowels of compassion would want to turn them back to that country.” To abandon them now would be to leave the diverse people of the islands open to “internecine strife, perhaps extending over a generation, with its accompaniment of bloodshed and murder and rapine.” Surely it was clear that “the people there are as yet apparently unfitted for self-government.” The only alternative to that, he suggested, was to take them under the American wing or leave them vulnerable to “the land-hunger and the greed of the countries of Europe that

³⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1108-1113.

³⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Dec. 20, 1898, p. 325-330.

are now seeking to colonize land the wide world over,” several of whom may fight for the islands and “plunge the world in[to] war.”³⁹ Teller and Wolcott’s description of obligation to an oppressed people and the international tumult that could be caused by uncertainty in Asia essentially replicated the concerns that McKinley’s biographers have considered the most vital to the president’s decision making.⁴⁰

While the talk of America’s benign mission was not totally new by late 1898 and early 1899, it had been less apparent in earlier manifestations of expansionist sentiment. The language imperialists now adopted bore a closer resemblance to that used to justify intervention on behalf of Cuba than it did to even that applied to Hawaiian annexation just months earlier. While certainly this was an appeal to a widely-held faith in America’s exceptional role in the world, that such a shift occurred at all may be telling. Its use in this case suggests—as many scholars have explained—that the rhetoric of civilizing mission and paternalistic tutelage relied upon a common vision of America as a powerful force for good. The nation’s inherent “morality” then provided justification for intervention and colonialism.⁴¹

Of course, the language of benevolence and protection was mixed with other less compassionate talk. While nearly all did try to claim that the acquisition of new territory

³⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 4, 1899, p. 1450-1451

⁴⁰ Morgan, *William McKinley*, 404-412; Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 140-142.

⁴¹ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 30-45; Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), especially 199-223. On the use of paternalism in a separate instance, see Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), especially 13-29.

would benefit the inhabitants, several imperialists added that profit and strategic advantage were real objects. William Stewart was rather exceptional because he was one of the very few imperialist senators to overtly reject the supposition that the United States had any special responsibility toward the Filipinos. “When and where did the idea originate that it was the duty of the United States to go into the Philippine Islands to establish a government for those people and to prepare them for self-government?” he asked. While his query was in response to an anti-imperialist resolution, it had been a rather moderate one which suggested that there could be a moral objective behind American colonialism. Stewart rejected such concepts outright. “If it is our duty to give the people of the Philippine Islands good government, to educate them, and to establish a government suitable for them, is it not our duty to do so to every country in the world where they do not have a government suitable to our ideas?” Instead, he reminded listeners that “There are many people who think they are valuable acquisitions.” He believed that possessions in the tropics could provide goods that could not be produced in the United States, and thus reduce the flow of hard currency overseas. The senior senator from Nevada was also certain that America could capture a larger share of the trade of Asia. “[T]here is in the Orient an import trade which in round numbers amounts to a billion dollars a year. We have only 5 per cent of the trade of Asia and Oceania. If we had these islands, and were engaged in the trade there, we would have a nucleus for trade and have a chance to compete with England.” He was confident the Philippines would facilitate trade for the United States just as Hong Kong did for Britain.⁴²

⁴² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 14, 1899, p. 1830-1832.

Tongue was even more emphatic about the need to develop trade with Asia. The future of industrial America required it. “The productions of the United States are increasing year by year with tremendous rapidity and are assuming unheard-of proportions,” he said. But, he asked, “when the people of the West have attained full growth, developed all their resources, extended and expanded their industries, what is to become of our surplus productions?” Europe—especially Britain—and their colonies had provided the largest markets for American exports up to the present, but that demand would soon be outstripped by the supply of American goods. “The only remaining field is in Asiatic countries.” Anti-imperialists agreed with much of this argument, but refused to believe that colonialism would create trade. To one such “gentleman from Indiana” who had recently declared that “commerce is the child of peace,” Tongue responded curtly, “Not in the Orient.” “We can preserve and increase our trade and commerce in the Orient if we are prepared to defend them.... With a chain of naval stations in Hawaii, the Ladrones, and the Philippine Islands, the Pacific Ocean will become an American lake, and will bear American commerce, not only now, but in the future.” The Congressman from Oregon went on to tell the House that the opportunity had presented itself but may not be there at a later time. America needed to secure its place while it could.⁴³

Tongue’s talk of opportunity and American self-interest fit well with his belief that those who were to be governed need not have any say in how they were governed. He pointed out that “The pilgrim fathers did not wait upon Plymouth Rock for the

⁴³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1108-1113.

‘consent of the governed’ before taking possession of this continent. The framers of the Declaration of Independence organized a government in the Northwest Territory without consulting a single inhabitant.” In fact, consent had only occasionally been tied to the right to govern, he said. Certainly it was still true in his own time. “Mississippi and other States are disfranchising large numbers, if not a majority, of their male citizens without their consent.” Almost shockingly, he even described the Civil War as proof that the government often ruled *without* consent: “Within the memory of this generation, we expended billions of treasures and sacrificed hundreds of thousands of valuable lives to force upon the people of a part of this country a government to which they did not consent.” While he half-heartedly did mention it as an ideal that all governments should aspire to, he essentially described “consent of the governed” as a fiction.⁴⁴

Other westerners described the ways in which democracy had been limited during the history of American expansion. Henry Teller, far more of an idealist than Tongue, admitted that consent had never mattered in previous instances. “We have never put that limitation upon it [expansion] in legislative affairs,” he said. In the case of the territories seized from Mexico, “if we had elected so to do, we might have held them by conquest, for we had wrested them by force from Mexico,” though the United States included in the treaty provisions for the eventual inclusion of the land as states. Even now, portions had been excluded from full admission. He reminded his colleagues that, “in the case of the Territories of New Mexico and Arizona,” the United States had ruled territories without

⁴⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1108-1113.

consent for fifty years.⁴⁵ These same remarks were echoed by Nevada's William Stewart later in the session.⁴⁶ Westerners knew well about government without consent.

Yet when Teller suggested that the United States could acquire colonies and govern other people without consent, he was explaining what the government could legally do, not what it should do. No doubt, he remained a spread-eagle expansionist. He included in his speech hints that American control of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and even Cuba were necessary, and made it clear he believed that all would soon be part of the American empire. However, his was ultimately a kind of anti-colonial expansionism. In his view, these lands were either to be fully incorporated into the American body politic or set free. “[W]e ought to keep in view all the time that some day these people are to be self-reliant and self-governing, as we are, or they are to become a part and parcel of this Republic, entitled to all the rights and subject to all the duties of citizenship of States.” He, almost naively, believed that Americans would not tolerate colonialism. He called talk of colonialism “idle,” for he did “not think that any considerable number of the American people or any considerable number of men in public life propose to adopt the system which Great Britain adopted with reference to her early colonies.” Nor did he think that “the American people will believe in holding these islands for the purpose of making money out of them, as the French are holding some portions of China and some portions of Africa.” He added that the United States must give the peoples of the new possessions good and accountable government—not because of constitutional

⁴⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Dec. 20, 1898, p. 325-330.

⁴⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 14, 1899, p. 1830-1832.

requirements, but because it was necessary for peace and the maintenance of order. The government would “make a mistake by refusing to do justice” to the Filipinos, he warned. “[W]e can have great tribulations brought upon us by so doing. We shall make a mistake if we make up our minds that we are going to govern those people from here.” The result of that would be government by force, and even that he thought unlikely to work. “You will need your 50,000 soldiers, and in a little while you will need more, for they are a great people. They are a people who know something of their rights. They are a people who are willing to contend for them, and I believe it to be almost an axiom that a people who will fight for their liberty, and who are willing to die for it, are capable of maintaining it when they get it.” While in his last remarks Teller proved prophetic, he was too charitable in his view of American intentions. Many did contemplate a colonial policy, and his faith that the empire for liberty would be extended would prove misplaced.⁴⁷

Teller rarely broke from his hopeful message to criticize those who differed with him. Many who he had worked with closely in 1896 were opposed to annexation, and though he believed their fears were unfounded, he did consider their beliefs laudable. The imperialist Republicans were not as generous. Most suggested (just as they had throughout much of 1898) that their opponents were essentially traitors. Frequently, McKinley’s supporters claimed that any disagreement over the treaty emboldened the Filipinos to attack the Americans in Manila. Tongue claimed that “their ignorance and passions are being inflamed by fraud, by falsehood, by deceit, and by slanderers of

⁴⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Dec. 20, 1899, p. 325-330.

Americans and American institutions, in the Philippine Islands, in the press there and here, and in both ends of this Capitol.” Tongue went further still, accusing the anti-imperialists of “shotting guns to be fired into the ranks of American soldiers. They are whetting knives to be plunged into American bosoms. They are preparing to make American wives widows, American mothers childless, and to slaughter the flower of American manhood in Manila.”⁴⁸

Senator Edward Wolcott of Colorado agreed. Those who wanted to debate policy were holding up the treaty vote and complicating the international situation. He complained that the Senate was left “wrangling day after day before the gaze of the whole world,” for the benefit of those who were “seeking to belittle the action of these commissioners, and by resolutions in open Senate... to strip the treaty of much of its force and effect.” Those who fought the treaty or questioned American policy were guilty of giving “counsel and aid” to “those people in the Philippines who might be inclined to question our authority.” Furthermore, the war needed to be put to an end before European nations decided to intervene on the behalf of Spain. “Bar England, there is not a country in Europe that is not hostile to us,” he said. “During all this war they stood in sullen hate, hoping for our defeat and that disaster might come to us; and to-day they wait with eager and rapacious gaze, hoping that some event may yet prevent our reaping the fruits of the treaty which has been agreed upon by the commissioners of the two countries.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1108-1113.

⁴⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 4, 1899, p. 1450-1451.

Wolcott continued his counterattack by suggesting that those who opposed annexation were hoping to use imperialism as “a new issue [that] should be brought before the American people to be determined at the next Presidential election. They intend that the American people shall be called to pass on the questions arising out of the war, and that this shall be the issue of the next campaign.”⁵⁰ Those unwilling to follow the president were playing politics at a sensitive moment, he said.

Imperialism and the Western Reform Response

Despite the attacks of those like Wolcott, the opposition did continue to contest what increasingly appeared to be an imperialist administration policy. Their fight was not confined to any single topic, as western reformers leveled attacks against the undemocratic rule, economic exploitation, and militarism they saw as the consequences of McKinley’s vision. Populists and their allies charged their opponents with quashing democracy abroad while strangling it into submission at home. The republican independence they cherished could not survive alongside the machinery of a warlike imperial power. Conquest, they declared, offered no new freedoms, but only served to extend the reach of the industrial and financial elite.⁵¹

An examination of that moment, as nearly all Populists and reform Democrats and other united to oppose expansion, reveals key elements of the imperialist/anti-imperialist

⁵⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 4, 1899, p. 1450-1451.

⁵¹ On a brief history of American settler colonialism and republican freedoms, see Aziz Rana, *Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). For his discussion of Populist anti-imperialism, see Rana 205.

debate that have hitherto been ignored by scholars. For example, some historians have claimed that the conflict between anti-imperialists and their counterparts was a “narrow and limited debate on the question of which tactical means the nation should use to obtain commonly desired objectives”—i.e., the expansion of American overseas trade. This analysis is most notable among historians who have claimed that imperialism was largely the result of economic motives. William Appleman Williams and Walter LaFeber described the process by which Americans came to contemplate their place in the international scene through market economics. Nearly all Americans came to view overseas markets as a solution to the problem of “overproduction,” Williams and LaFeber have claimed, and so the only real difference between imperialists and anti-imperialists was the extent to which they believed overseas colonies would facilitate trade. The imperialist willingness to annex distant territories separated them from their rivals, but all believed trade—and even the use of force to secure it—was necessary to encourage American economic stability.⁵²

Perhaps it would be most useful to first emphasize what Williams and LaFeber got right. While they devoted a large portion of their works to Americans’ increasing desire to find new markets, they most usefully described the conception—finally embodied by many of McKinley’s policies—of an empire based upon trade and backed up with a nearby military presence when required. Whereas European imperialism of the

⁵² The subject is most thoroughly explained in Walter Lafeber, *New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), especially 412-417 (quote taken from 416); and William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969), especially 432-445.

era had come to be based on the control of large populations in order to monopolize colonial resources and markets, McKinley and his forebears had envisioned a smaller footprint, and certainly one without the trappings of colonialism. Though the situation in the Philippines had altered the equation in the short term, this was to become the model for America's twentieth-century empire.⁵³

Both historians had little difficulty finding evidence that the anti-imperialists of 1899 were part of a growing consensus in favor of greater international trade. Democrats had emphasized low-tariff policies designed to improve trade prospects since the inception of their party, and the issue was brought back to the forefront in the 1880s by Grover Cleveland. Their classical-liberal mugwump allies were all the more committed to free trade. While Populists had officially labeled the tariff fights of the old parties a sham issue, many among them had called for open trade policies that would create new markets for American goods. Furthermore, several Populists had supported the development of coaling bases in the Pacific and Caribbean during their congressional careers as way to promote greater American influence and trade.⁵⁴

⁵³ LaFeber, *New Empire*, 47, 105, 408-417; Williams, *Modern American Empire*, 246-248, 254-263. On this interpretation of the American empire of the 1890s and early 1900s, see also Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967); Lloyd C. Gardner, *Imperial America: American Foreign Policy Since 1898* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1976); Thomas Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003).

⁵⁴ LaFeber and Williams both used Democrats, mugwumps, and Populists as examples frequently in their works to demonstrate the growth of a consensus on the issues of trade. For just a few examples, see LaFeber, *New Empire*, 201, 205, 414-416; Williams, *Modern American Empire*, 34, 36, 362-365, 370-375; See also William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, rev. ed. (1959; New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), 22-26, 37-39. In a later work, Lafeber did not lump Populists and Democrats in with their imperialist counterparts, but did suggest that they rejected the new industrial order—for which there was a growing consensus—and thus they were left out of place in the modern era. This led to the destruction of the Populists and the loss of power by Democrats. See Walter Lafeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, vol. 2, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* (New

Despite their suggestions, it is only possible to label the western Populists and Democrats as essentially imperialist based on a misunderstanding of the most vital elements of their worldviews. Their opposition to the excesses of domestic capitalists and their fears of militarism guaranteed that they would relentlessly fight against the policies McKinley was already beginning to implement.

First, it should be noted that while some western anti-imperialists had supported the acquisition of overseas naval bases, others among them had always seen them as unnecessary. In a speech in 1898, Senator Stephen White declared his opposition to any form of “territorial aggrandizement which would require maintenance by a naval force in excess of any yet provided for our national uses... Even as simple coaling stations, such territorial acquisitions would involve responsibility beyond their utility.”⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Richard Pettigrew wrote a letter to his brother informing him of his views on Cuba, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. “I would not put a protectorate over any of them,” he wrote, “neither would I have a coaling station at any of these points.... Plutocracy wishes us to enter upon the acquisition of distant countries to govern, and thus furnish food for discontent.”⁵⁶

Many westerners understood Pettigrew’s point well—namely that an increasing global presence would likely lead to increasing numbers of American interventions and

York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23. On the politics of the tariff and trade, see Richard F. Bense, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 457-509.

⁵⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jun. 21, 1898, App. 599-600.

⁵⁶ Richard F. Pettigrew to H. P. Pettigrew, 8 June 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition, reel 21.

competition with the other industrialized powers. While they despised the thought of a colonial government under the American flag, they were just as opposed to the kind of armed entanglements that were likely to follow. Jerry Simpson pointed out that his recent opponent in the election had said that the Pacific islands were “but a stepping-stone, that that was but the first step in the policy to be laid out, that later on, when China was to be divided up amongst the foreign nations, we were to be on hand with a big army and a big navy to see that we got our part of it.”⁵⁷ Nebraska Populist William Greene believed that Britain was encouraging the American takeover of the Philippines as a counter to the influence of other imperial powers in East Asia. Ultimately, Britain “wants us to form an alliance with her. Why? When the great struggle comes, England wants the United States to help her in her plan to steal the biggest portion of the Chinese Empire.”⁵⁸ Stephen White considered his earlier suspicions confirmed. These bases, combined with the proposed expansion of the military, were preparations “for not merely a war, but for wars.” In the future, was it not likely that “our growth along the lines of conquest will enlist the opposition of other peoples; may it not be that other nations, seeing that we are attempting to interfere with them, will here-after, however friendly they may be to-day, challenge our superiority?”⁵⁹ Western anti-imperialists did not merely oppose the extension of the nation’s territorial boundaries, but instead they fought imperialism

⁵⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1001-1006.

⁵⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1006-1012.

⁵⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 23, 1899, p. 921-928, 930-931.

because they perceived the acquisition of distant stations as the beginning of a new policy that would lead to perpetual conflicts and the growth of militarism.

While certain westerners had spoken of their desire for America to become more engaged in affairs overseas earlier in the decade, most opposed the military buildups that would have been required for the maintenance of a “new empire.” Though western reformers had a mixed record when it came to military modernization proposals in Congress early in the decade, by the latter half of the 1890s they consistently opposed any substantial expansion of the nation’s armed forces. In early 1898—as war with Spain seemed imminent—Jerry Simpson declared that he favored certain limited naval construction, but feared what others intended to do with it. “I hope and trust that our policy will be in the future as it has been in the past, one of self-defense. If it is, we do not need a large number of seagoing battle ships.” Instead of what naval men now refer to as a “blue water” navy, Simpson hoped that the American fleet would primarily be constructed with coastal defense in mind.⁶⁰ At around the same time, colleagues such as the Coloradans John Shafroth and John Calhoun Bell (the former a Silver Republican, the latter a Populist) dismissed permanent expansion of the regular army as unnecessary and undesirable. In 1899, Populists and their western allies were even more emphatic in their opposition to any military enlargement.⁶¹ No form of imperialism would have been possible without a larger and modernized military establishment, but (as will be

⁶⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 1, 1898, p. 3465-3467. One recent author noted Simpson’s talk of a more powerful navy, but totally ignored the limits that the Populist wanted to put upon it. See Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress*, 112.

⁶¹ For Shafroth and Bell, *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 6, 1898, p. 3636-3637, Apr. 7, 1898, 3689. Examples from 1899 will be cited on the pages to follow.

explained in greater detail shortly), western reformers detested everything that militarism brought with it.

By early 1899, western anti-imperialists had become all the more committed in their opposition to the unnecessary use of force overseas. Sensing that enforcement of McKinley's "benevolent assimilation" proclamation could lead to a new war, William Allen proposed a resolution stating that "That any aggressive action by Army or Navy on the part of the United States against the Filipinos would be an act of war unwarranted on the part of the President and the exercise of constitutional power vested exclusively in Congress."⁶²

Others vented their frustration with a military occupation even closer to home: Cuba. Western calls for action in Cuba had not been based on a belief that the island should be forcibly pulled into the American orbit; it was Allen, after all, who had declared that "We do not want Cuba. We do not even desire to be her guardian. But we are determined she shall be free."⁶³ When it appeared that American soldiers began settling in for a long occupation of the Caribbean island, these same members were furious. Representative Curtis Castle (Populist, California) stated that "The solemn proclamation of the President that Cuba should have a free and independent government is violated both in letter and in spirit." While independence was delayed, ostensibly so certain "internal improvements" could be made, "Cuba will be ruled by an American

⁶² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 11, 1899, p. 562.

⁶³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Mar. 31, 1898, p. 3410-3413.

captain-general.”⁶⁴ South Dakota Populist Freeman Knowles noted that “It is now six months since hostilities ceased, and no move has been made by the Administration to give the people of Cuba the independence and self-government promised them in the declaration of war.” While Cubans were “begging of the President to be permitted to call a convention of the Cuban people to form a government,” the South Dakotan said the administration was deaf to their cries.⁶⁵ John Shafroth pointed out that some supporters of the administration were claiming that the regular army needed to be permanently increased in order to police Cuba. To those who favored a long-term occupation, he informed them that they should abandon such a notion because “Public sentiment will not long countenance a standing army there.”⁶⁶ Though some imperialists were even reconsidering the pledge they had given to guarantee a free Cuba, most western Populists and their allies called for an immediate end to American interference in the island’s affairs.

Furthermore, opponents of the administration did not accept the argument that profits from trade would follow in the wake of militarization and expansion and ultimately trickle-down to farmers and laborers. Representative Curtis Castle asked the expansionists, “since the vast majority of our citizens are to have no share in the rich treasures of the Orient, I wish to inquire what portion of our population is to be permanently enriched?”⁶⁷ Traders, speculators, and manufacturers could hypothetically

⁶⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, App. 90-94.

⁶⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 25, 1899, p. 1054-1056.

⁶⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, App. 229-230.

⁶⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, App. 90-94.

make a profit from imperialism, but it was hardly logical to argue that ownership of the Philippines would equate to control of Asian trade. William Greene said that the imperialist talk of “cargoes of American produce sailing past Honolulu, down by Manila, and over to Hongkong” were “only dreams.” Despite the supposed advantage that they claimed came with being “on the ground,” as some Republicans said, Greene was sure that it was impossible to undercut the advantages others had. “Do you think the Chinaman is going to buy American wheat unless he can get it cheaper than he can get wheat from India? Do you think he is going to buy American beef unless he can buy it cheaper than he can buy the Australian beef?” The best proof of that principle had already been made by the War Department. “Where did the Government go to buy the beef and the sheep and the flour and the vegetables to feed our army at Manila?” he asked. “Why, we went to Sydney, Australia, and there our Government bought the sheep and the cattle, the flour and the vegetables, loaded them on British bottoms, and took them over to feed our own army in the Philippine Islands.” Surely, it was difficult to argue that Asia was a ready market for American agricultural products.⁶⁸

The Populist critique of imperialism was based largely on their earlier attack upon industrial monopoly and its reliance upon a corrupted centralized authority. Western reformers believed they were witnessing the continued evolution of a widening infrastructure of political, economic, and military control. Imperialism represented the extension of that system for the benefit of economic elites. One of the best articulated examples of this critique could be found in a speech by the Curtis Castle. The

⁶⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1006-1012.

Californian claimed that imperialists planned not only to “deny the Filipinos their well-earned liberty,” but also to

send over a horde of hungry exploiters, who, protected by the strong arm of the military despotism to be given those unhappy people in lieu of their own government, will seize all the natural resources of the islands, and under the guise of law, through charters granted by the Government, all kinds and descriptions of monopolies are to be farmed out to these ravening harpies. With the land sequestered and the instruments of production monopolized, the natives must ever remain a subject people, whose cry for liberty will be answered with the lash.

The administration was working to complete the current global system of exploitation.

“Nowhere upon the earth does labor secure the results of its efforts,” and this would soon be as true in the Philippines as it was in America. Economic opportunity, the hallmark of American freedom, was being eliminated through a process that concentrated wealth and power. “The monopolization of the natural resources of all countries and the monopolization of the instruments of production, together with the monopolization of the means of distribution, forever bar the poor from any portion, however small, of the stolen wealth wrung from the unrequited toil of subject nations.”⁶⁹

Castle described this monopolization of power in international terms, but his description of America’s place in the system was complicated. He would have characterized America as part of that global periphery of “subject nations,” but he also was sure that the nation’s elite were part of the scheme: “The American plutocracy, not content with eating out the heart of our democracy, not content with enslaving American labor, now comes before Congress with an effrontery born of contempt and demands that we plunge into the vortex of war and debt, that thereby they may be enabled to rob and

⁶⁹ The quotes for this paragraph and the following are taken from *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, App. 90-94.

despoil the workers of a foreign land.” But obviously the elite could not manage this alone. They had solicited the national government to do their bidding, while the “wealth producers of America are insolently commanded by their despoilers to furnish mighty armies to subdue the wealth producers of other lands, that plutocracy may have other fields to devastate.” Imperialism was not so much the extension of national control as it was the expansion of economic interests into new fields under the umbrella of government protection.

Castle’s speech characterizing commercial imperialism was one of the most complete delivered by any western anti-imperialist, but he was certainly not the only one to hold such views. Congressman Jeremiah Botkin of Kansas explained that the present case of expansion was quite different from that which had come earlier in American history. “Climatic conditions are such” in the Philippines that a white American would “dare not undertake a permanent residence and ordinary labor” there. While the common American could not go, “a wealthy syndicate can secure large tracts of land on which to grow the products that constitute our chief imports from those islands, viz., sugar, tobacco, and hemp. Unfortunately the climate can not affect these syndicates. They are immune.” The military conquest of the archipelago was being plotted so that “the organized capital of this country and of Europe” could “exploit great enterprises in the Philippines, monopolize the valuable franchises, and lay under perpetual tribute to ‘the bloodless spirit of wealth’ the resources of that splendid archipelago.” The large army

some proposed was designed to “enforce commercialism and imperialism” in the island possessions.⁷⁰

Another western Populist, Freeman Knowles, questioned the justice of exporting the system of exploitation and conflict that Americans had come to know. “[W]hat kind of ‘blessings of law and liberty’ is it that we are going to extend to the people of these islands?” he asked. “Is it the same kind which these same ‘expansionists’ are now extending to our own laboring classes in this country?” And if the Filipinos “claim enough of the products of their own labor to keep their families from starvation, will they be shot to death as our own laboring men were” in America’s coal mining towns? “You talk of ‘extending the blessings of law and liberty’ to people 10,000 miles away, while our own laboring classes are reduced to absolute serfdom. Under Philippine native government, I wonder if men would be imprisoned for six months without trial for advising their co-laborers to demand a fair share of the products of their own toil?” Was this “the kind of ‘law and liberty’ we are going to extend to the Filipinos?”⁷¹ Knowles was not merely critiquing the American system of political economy, but his remarks were made with the assumption that that system was to be forcibly pushed across the whole of the new imperial domain.

Western reformers had no desire to extend the reach of financiers and industrialists at the point of a gun, but they also believed that the proposed program of militarization would have dire consequences on the home front. Since at least the mid-

⁷⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 30, 1899, p. 1263-1266.

⁷¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan.25, 1899, p. 1054-1056.

1890s, the top generals had called for a larger army, and the argument that they increasingly employed pertained to domestic order. Though the Indian wars were, for all practical purposes, over, the army needed to be expanded and redeployed to bases near major urban centers.⁷² The proponents of military reorganization were consistently thwarted in the years before 1899, but then the argument changed. The new claim was that soldiers were needed to garrison the “new possessions.”

Many western Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans had been in Congress long enough to have seen the previous iterations of the Hull Bill, and they certainly had not forgotten. Jerry Simpson had spent most of the 1890s in the House, and he reminded his colleagues of it. In the history of all nations in which “there is much concentrated wealth there comes an anxiety on the part of those who own the wealth of the country for a strong centralized government.” For that reason, certain members of Congress had said for years “that our standing Army is too small; that we ought to have at least 100,000 men; that we ought to have a force sufficient to suppress domestic violence in this country.” But now, he said, “here comes a new pretext, under cover, of course—the pretext that we want a large standing army now because we have got to hold the Philippine Islands.” Simpson refused to consider this a legitimate excuse. Even a brief colonial conflict or short-term policing would not require a permanent expansion of the army he said.⁷³

⁷² Jerry M. Cooper, *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 217-218; Clayton D. Laurie and Ronald H. Cole, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1877-1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1997), 152.

⁷³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1001-1006.

Such sentiments were all but ubiquitous among western Populists and Democrats in the House. “It is a significant fact,” said Representative William Vincent, “that since the era of corporation rule set in and since our beneficent social system developed the tramp, the lock-out, and the strike, the Army has never been called out to suppress or hold in check the corporation, but always to suppress the striker.” While he described his distaste for colonialism as well, he also believed “that the great corporate interests of the country have been and are now demanding a large standing army” for use at home.⁷⁴ William Greene agreed. They wanted an expanded army “because the great corporations of the country, the accumulated wealth of the country, the capitalists, demand it to maintain order. Not order in the Philippines, but order here at home.”⁷⁵ The Democrat James Hamilton Lewis of Washington was every bit as sure that militarists had the same purpose in 1899 as they had with a nearly identical bill proposed in March of 1898: “that it is to preserve order in this country.” “The use of the military force, drawn from portions of the country wholly foreign to the community in which they may be serving,” would be employed against labor, “to ‘preserve order’ by Winchesters and hush protests by bayonets!”⁷⁶ This was but one way in which they believed that war abroad would be used to destroy liberty in America.

Western reformers believed that the centralization and militarization that came with imperialism necessarily posed an immense threat to American democracy, but the

⁷⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1126-1128.

⁷⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1006-1012.

⁷⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 31, 1899, App. 122-128.

colonized people posed yet another kind of risk. Their imperialist counterparts were already well aware that their support for the annexation of Pacific islands could leave them open to attack. It was primarily with that fear in mind that Senator Perkins had written to the California legislature. While he was asking for their advice, he certainly believed that annexation brought many dangers with it. He informed them that it:

seems to me to be contrary to the spirit of our Constitution to acquire a territory on the Asiatic coast nine times as densely populated as California, whose inhabitants equal in numbers one seventh of the present population of the United States, and who are, moreover, a mixed people, consisting of Malays, Tagals, Chinese, Visayens, Sulus, and Negritos, that have no conception of a government by the people, and can only be controlled by force of arms.

The Filipinos, he argued, were an uncivilized lot who could never become Americans. As though that were not enough, he went on to remind Californians of an old threat they knew too well. “Our farmers cannot compete... against the cheap peon labor of these islands, where Chinese and Malays work for fifteen cents per day in silver. We labored for many years to pass the Chinese Restriction Act, and remove the blight of cheap servile contract labor from our land.” Territorial expansion would undo all of that, he feared.⁷⁷

Perkins did not get his way—the legislature informed him that, if he was a true servant of the state, he would ratify the treaty and make sure the Philippines would be American.⁷⁸ But there would be obvious consequences of such a policy, and the western reformers were all too willing exploit the apparent weakness. The Democratic senator

⁷⁷ California, *The Journal of the Senate During the Thirty-Third Session of the Legislature of the State of California, 1899* (Sacramento: A. J. Johnston, 1899), 9-11.

⁷⁸ California, *Journal of the Senate*, 24-25, 30, 126; California, *The Journal of the Assembly During the Thirty-Third Session of the Legislature of the State of California, 1899* (Sacramento: A. J. Johnston, 1899), 9, 43; “Mr. Nelson on Expansion,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1899, p. 4.

from Utah, Joseph Rawlins, crudely asked if Philippines were desired in order to “add a wholesome element to our population, that our sons may find wives and our daughters husbands?” He responded to his own query by stating that “The blighting curse of the Almighty would rest upon such miscegenation.”⁷⁹ More commonly, the Filipinos were categorized as a threat to American labor. Senator Allen suggested that this may have been the “sinister motive” behind the annexation scheme: “it may be that there are those who contemplate the rapid approach of the time when this debased population can be brought here and thrown in deadly contact with the laboring men of our country.” That would put an end to Republican talk of tariff protection for the betterment of labor.⁸⁰

The racial concerns expressed by westerners were closely linked to questions of constitutionality. Anti-imperialists saw no benefits in granting the “new possessions” statehood, but they simultaneously derided talk of colonial governance as un-American and unconstitutional. On the other hand, imperialists pointed out that the Treaty of Paris left governance of the Philippines solely to the discretion of Congress, and some were eager to employ this plenary power to establish absolute dominion over the archipelago. Especially in the Senate, western opponents of expansion joined conservatives like George Hoar of Massachusetts and Donelson Caffery of Louisiana in attacking this claim to absolute power. While historian Michael Cullinane has recently emphasized the constitutional elements of this debate, the legal arguments made by both sides should be seen as a product of their positions on expansion and race rather than the other way

⁷⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 1, 1899, p. 1343-1348.

⁸⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 6, 1899, p. 1480-1484.

around.⁸¹ For example, while Senator Hoar largely emphasized questions of constitutional limits and congressional power in his speeches, he too felt the need to ask “what rights of citizenship these people are to get by this treaty and the acquisition under it. The question whether those Malays and Mohammedans and others can go anywhere in the United States to compete with American laborers, which I think they can, is an important practical question.” In this way, Hoar could use racial and legal arguments in conjunction to make imperialism seem undesirable.⁸²

According to western anti-imperialists (and most of their eastern counterparts for that matter), race determined the proper boundaries of the American state. It was an argument as old as the republic, and it had most notably reared its head during the nation’s last bout with “manifest destiny” in the late 1840s.⁸³ As Washington Senator George Turner put it, the founders had made provision for the addition of new states, “but the people who were to be protected by the great charter of our liberties at all times and any and every where beneath our flag were to be the American people—the great offshoot of the Anglo-Saxon race which had peopled the temperate zone of North America.” Only these people were capable of self-government according to Turner. The founding generation believed that “the greatest menace to the liberty of that people that could be introduced would be to permit indiscriminate political connection with other

⁸¹ Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism*, 29-50.

⁸² *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 20, 1899, p. 837-838. See also Eric Love, *Race Over Empire*, 191-192.

⁸³ On the history of these views, see Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 46-101 *passim*; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), especially 72-73, 154-155, 242-243, 262-263.

peoples, different in blood, in religion, in habits and modes of thought, and sufficiently strong in numbers and in climatic protection to leave no hope of their perfect or even approximate assimilation by our own people.”⁸⁴ Like Turner, Senator Allen feared what would happen if the country was “overrun by a horde of alien peoples in no manner capable of using or enjoying the blessings and privileges of self-government, or of maintaining them when won by others, whose presence and influence would deteriorate or injure the nation, ultimately wrecking the Constitution and destroying our political institutions.” Still, the Constitution would be ruined in any case if the people of the Philippines were denied government based upon their consent. “We have no power, in my judgment, to hold the Filipinos as vassals,” he said. “We have no right to deprive them, whatever they may be, of the right of self-government if they desire it.”⁸⁵

It is difficult for the modern reader to reconcile some western anti-imperialist’s views of racial inequality with their statements that democracy was the birthright of all, but such declarations were indeed plentiful. During the debate over Hawaiian annexation, Senator Stephen White had referred to the peoples of Asia as “semi-orang-outangs,” and he was no more generous in 1899.⁸⁶ He now claimed that “the Philippines are tenanted by a very peculiar mass, a heterogeneous compound of inefficient oriental humanity.” He did not care “whether these islanders are fit for free government... If they are so fitted, they should be permitted to establish a free government; if they are not so

⁸⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 19, 1899, p. 783-789.

⁸⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 6, 1899, p. 1480-1484.

⁸⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jul. 6, 1898, App. 603-619.

fitted, they should not be brought into an alliance with us; we do not in that event want them.” Despite this, his tendency to describe the Filipinos as undesirable citizens did not prevent him from arguing that some among them were intelligent and capable, or further state that they deserved the right to determine their own style of government. While “there may be a difference in this clime and that as to the method of the exercise of liberty” the “sensible American, deeply schooled in the walks of independence,” understood that freedom was best for all of mankind.⁸⁷

William Allen had done nearly as much as White to paint the Filipinos as unfit for participation in American democracy, but he too claimed that they were due their freedom. Responding to Ohio’s Senator Joseph Foraker’s statement that the Declaration of Independence was nothing but a letter of complaint to Great Britain, Allen retorted that “it is as much the right of a Filipino to govern himself, if he is capable of doing so, as it is the right of an American citizen to do so. This doctrine is not confined to the people of the United States. It extends, according to the language, to all men, wherever found.”⁸⁸

If these statements seem contradictory, they should at least be thought of as part of America’s own contradictory traditions on the subject. The individual who put the phrase “all men are created equal” into writing—and, unlike some who followed, actually believed it—was the same as the one who held hundreds of men and women in bondage. Lincoln’s particular fondness for the statement that governments derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed” did not speed his acceptance of universal manhood

⁸⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 23, 1899, p. 921-928; Feb. 27, 1899, p. 2445-2446.

⁸⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 6, 1899, p. 1480-1484.

suffrage. There has not infrequently been a disparity between an individual's conception of justice and their belief in human equality, and the anti-imperialists were just another iteration of this seeming contradiction.⁸⁹

Despite the ambiguities in their statements on race, the legal and governmental implications were clear. But, as noted earlier, their rivals had effective counters. For those who pointed to the history of American expansion, Henry Teller responded by pointing out that the previous treaties had contained specific provisions which called for the eventual statehood of the annexed regions and citizenship for the inhabitants. Not only did the Constitution have nothing to say on the matter but the Treaty of Paris was silent on these issues, clearly suggesting that the Philippines and its peoples were not viewed in the same light.⁹⁰ Furthermore, anti-imperialists admitted that—even if unconstitutional—annexation and whatever followed would not be rejected by the courts.⁹¹ Imperialism could not be stopped except through political action.

As the final ratification vote approached, the situation in the Philippines changed dramatically. On the night of February 4-5, shots fired by a sentry with the First Nebraska on the outskirts of Manila erupted into a full-scale battle. Aguinaldo and a number of his officers were absent at the time of the engagement—clearly indicating that they had not planned an attack for that evening. While the American commanders had no

⁸⁹ Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 133, 140; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., editor, *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), especially 177-180, 279-280.

⁹⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Dec. 20, 1898, p. 325-330.

⁹¹ Senator George Turner noted this, and he specifically cited a speech by George Vest in which Missouri senator admitted the same. See *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 19, 1899, p. 783-789.

specific intent to open the fighting that evening, they did have a coordinated plan of attack they followed as soon as it did commence. While Aguinaldo sought a truce with Otis in the aftermath of the battle, the American general responded that the fighting, “having begun must go on to the grim end.” A new war had commenced in the Philippines.⁹²

War in the Philippines

The American media’s accounts of the fighting bore little resemblance to the facts, but then again neither did the reports from Otis or Dewey to Washington. The first substantial report from Otis—the one which was reprinted on the front page of nearly every newspaper by February 6—stated: “Insurgents in large force opened attack on our outer lines at 8.45 last evening. Renewed attack several times during night. At 4 o’clock this morning entire line engaged. All attacks repulsed.” In later Congressional hearings, nearly the whole of those remarks would be proven false. For the time being, Otis’s report was the most extensive official statement members of the media could their hands on and they ran with it, embellishing as they went. Most papers described a fierce all-out assault by Aguinaldo’s army. Among the ludicrous statements that made it into the press reports—with near ubiquity, regardless of affiliation—was the claim that the Filipino force had charged the Americans armed with bows and arrows.⁹³

⁹² Miller, “*Benevolent Assimilation*”, 60-63; Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 46-49.

⁹³ *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain, Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 893-894; “Filipinos Attack the Americans,” *Omaha World-Herald*, February 6, 1899, p. 1; “Troops Fighting at

The day of treaty vote had already been set as February 6. It is difficult to state with any degree of certainty how the beginning of war influenced the vote. Allen claimed it had no impact at all on his decision, and most senators concurred. Most historians have been fond of pinning the outcome of the vote on either the President's use of spoils or Bryan's impact on his allies in the Senate. Of the two, Bryan was certainly in the weaker position to provide incentives, and Pettigrew suggested that the Nebraskan's support for the treaty did nothing more than allow Democrats who already favored ratification to vote for it and accept the administration's favors to boot.⁹⁴

The final breakdown of the vote was 57-27—just one vote beyond the required two-thirds majority. Heitfeld (Populist, Idaho), Pettigrew, Rawlins (Democrat, Utah), Roach (Democrat, North Dakota), and Turner were the only westerners to vote against the treaty. Those who voted with them were largely southern Democrats, along with two Republicans, George Hoar of Massachusetts and Eugene Hale of Maine. Allen and seven other western reformers voted for the treaty. Its ratification technically gave Congress greater authority over matters in the Philippines, but the outbreak of war left the initiative with McKinley.⁹⁵

Manila," *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 6, 1899, p. 1; "Aguinaldo's Troops Attack Americans Defending Manila," *San Francisco Call*, February 5, 1899, p. 1; "Aguinaldo's Horde Repulsed with Great Slaughter," *Salt Lake Herald*, February 6, 1899, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 6, 1899, p. 1480-1484; Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 155-158; E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 188-195; Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire*, 108-120, 134-135; Stuart Creighton Miller, "Benevolent Assimilation", 27-30; Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism*, 41-49; Richard F. Pettigrew, *Triumphant Plutocracy*, 272-274.

⁹⁵ *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate*, 55th Cong., Feb. 6, 1899, p. 1284. Senators Cannon (Silver Republican, Utah) and White (Democrat, California) were paired and did not vote on the treaty. Cannon was on record supporting the treaty, while White was opposed.

The treaty had passed, but the initiation of a second war changed the tone of political combat. As noted above, the conservatives had linked patriotism with unquestioned loyalty to the administration, and such rhetoric had been prominent in both the previous year and in the first month of 1899. To bring up just one case involving a western reformer, during a speech by Nebraska Congressman William Green a Republican yelled out “Did you live here in 1860?” He claimed that no true American who had witnessed the Civil War would question the executive in a time of crisis. Westerners responded by saying that the term “patriotism” was being misused by their opponents. Greene himself fired back at his challengers, declaring that “Republicans, conscious of the weakness of your position and of the great wrongs being committed by your party, are now seeking to distract public attention from your evil deeds by pulling around you the flag, and shouting ‘Patriotism!’”⁹⁶ Congressman William Vincent also mocked the imperialist definition of the term by suggesting that “Patriotism under the old order of things, before the Declaration of Independence was expunged from the record, meant love of one's country.” Now Republicans had changed it to mean “love for the other fellow's country.”⁹⁷

In the same way, western anti-imperialist talk of “duty” or “obligation” had challenged the claims their opponents made regarding a colonial duty or the “White Man’s Burden.” Instead, they emphasized their duty to the American people, the Constitution, and to universal freedom. They also had no great difficulty in unsettling the

⁹⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 24, 1899, p. 1006-1012.

⁹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, p. 1126-1128.

definitions their rivals had employed as they advocated expansion. Senator White, for example, openly harangued those who claimed “that it is our duty to encircle the earth.”⁹⁸ His colleague Joseph Rawlins admitted that imperialists always spoke of “some humane duty or moral obligation,” but what did that really mean? The Filipinos had so recently been allies, and both sides had rendered each other aid in their respective wars against Spain. “Suppose we set off our obligations against theirs, balance the account, and let it go at that?”⁹⁹

In the immediate aftermath of the battle over ratification, the defiant attitudes displayed by a number of westerners became more reserved. The tone of Republican attacks did not substantially change, but western Populists and their allies were measured in their responses. Less than a week after news of the fighting reached Washington, Senator Allen nearly sounded like one of McKinley’s apologists. Whereas he had previously spoken only of the speediest possible withdrawal from the islands, he now said that “a duty is imposed upon us by our occupancy of the Philippine Islands that we can not escape.” He did affirm the position that colonialism was wrong, but he also stated that he had come to agree with “what I understand to be the policy of the President of the United States, to hold them for such reasonable time that the influences and education of this Government may prepare them in some slight degree for the duties of an independent republican form of government.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 23, 1899, p. 926.

⁹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 1, 1899, p. 1347.

¹⁰⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 11, 1899, p. 1737-1738.

Earlier in the session, western Populists and their friends had attacked not only expansion but also the regular army. Several members had opposed expansion of the military because they claimed that the regular army consisted of people who were essentially failures, and the professional military only transformed them further into unthinking automatons. Jerry Simpson believed that a man “who enlists in the standing Army is generally a person who can not get anything to do in any other way or in any other walk of life. He goes into it as an occupation because he is excluded from other avenues of life. He is a hired fighter.” It was for this reason that Curtis Castle considered them inherently unreliable citizens. “They are not anxious to fight at all; but if they must fight, they would as soon fight the citizens of the United States as anyone else. They become a part of the fighting machine and no longer think or act as individuals.”¹⁰¹

These statements were actually typical of western reformers, not merely bluster. Richard Pettigrew used similar language in a private letter that expressed his displeasure with the colonel of the First South Dakota Regiment—a man originally from the regular army—whom he considered unsuited to command the unit. Volunteers had “too much manhood and individuality” for a man used to the discipline of the professional military, he said.¹⁰² John Shafroth and John Calhoun Bell had likewise derided the regulars a year earlier, calling them unmotivated men who lacked self-reliance.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Jan. 26, 1899, App. 90-94.

¹⁰² Richard Pettigrew to Lee Stover, January 28, 1899, Reel 22 of the Richard F. Pettigrew Collection.

¹⁰³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 6, 1898, p. 3636-3637; Apr. 7, 1898, p. 3689-3690.

Suddenly, the derision and scorn heaped upon the army was transformed into sympathy and support. It should be kept in mind that the first reports suggested that the Americans forces had suffered a large-scale and unprovoked attack, and additionally many of the units in the Philippines were volunteers from the western states. Nevertheless, while the details that contributed to the shift are important, the transition is itself quite noteworthy. Western anti-imperialists began to talk as though it was everyone's duty to rally behind the military establishment. For example, James Hamilton Lewis of Washington said that "we can only view the matter... in one light. These men who are there are American citizens; they are the sons of our brother men." For that reason, their actions were beyond question: "If they are wrong, they are innocently so; if they are right, they are justly so. There is no other position for the American House to take but to stand unanimously by the children of its own country."¹⁰⁴ While delivering a rather weak criticism of McKinley's policies, William Greene was nonetheless effusive in his praise for the obedient soldiers. "[T]he American soldier must do what his officer commands him to do... God bless the soldiers! They are doing their duty as brave, noble men, in obedience to the commands of their superiors. And I say that nobody on this side of the Chamber, or in this country, has anything to say against the men who are wearing the uniform of our country."¹⁰⁵

Only weeks later, near the end of the session, did a few step forward and challenge those prosecuting the war. One of the strongest of these was by Freeman

¹⁰⁴ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 14, 1899, p. 1863.

¹⁰⁵ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 25, 1899, p. 2408.

Knowles, the South Dakota Populist and—as he felt the need to state—veteran of “every battle in which the Army of the Potomac was engaged from '62 to '65.” In what would be his last major speech in Congress, he lashed out at those who celebrated the deaths of thousands of Filipinos, “whose only crime is a desire to govern themselves. What American citizen with a spark of self-respect, to say nothing of national pride or patriotism, can look upon this spectacle without hiding his head in shame?” he asked. “The Philippine people are struggling in the same cause and for the self-same rights that actuated our forefathers in the Revolution. Every denunciation... against Aguinaldo and his followers were simply echoes from the debates in the British Parliament against Washington and his army.” Of course conservatives now argued that the Declaration of Independence was “an old-fashioned document, not applicable to any people whom our robber classes desire to exploit.” He predicted that the victory in the present conflict was already a lost cause. “Ten millions of people, with courage and manhood enough to fight for their freedom, in a tropical climate unendurable to the Caucasian race, are invincible to any and all force you can send against them.” Knowles depicted Aguinaldo and his people as the embodiments of a freedom that Americans had once been proud to represent. “I am glad the Filipinos have the courage and manhood to fight for their liberty. If it was right for our forefathers to fight for their independence, it is right for the Filipinos to do the same.” He concluded by suggesting that “The American people are not oppressors, but organized greed has the Administration by the throat.” Despite the conservative command to worship the flag or follow leaders in silent obedience, Knowles praised classic American republican values—including those he saw among the Filipinos.

Unfortunately, at present he believed the American faith in human freedom had been set aside to satisfy the needs of the economic elite.¹⁰⁶

The Fifty-fifth Congress adjourned on March 4, one month after the fighting in the Philippines commenced. The debate over imperialism did not cease but only intensified. The end of the treaty fight allowed anti-imperialists to set aside their disagreements over methods and focus on their opposition to what they saw as McKinley's war of conquest. Of course, there was also another complexion to the debate over empire. Outside of Congress, in the states, Governors, legislators, and members of organized labor were weighing in on the expansion issue.

Local Politics, 1899

National political debates had always existed alongside many dozens of local ones, in which regional context often added new or additional meanings to the broader discussion. This is how it had been with the silver issue, and so it was again. In each of the three states that comprise this study, regional history, geography, and economics would play a part in shaping interpretations of the "expansion" question.

Colorado's new governor, Charles S. Thomas, was certainly no Populist. Quite to the contrary, he likely saw Populists as his chief political rivals. Shortly after coming into office, he wrote with some degree of satisfaction that "populism has run its course," but he did claim that it had a purpose. "It has compelled the recognition of by the

¹⁰⁶ *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., Feb. 27, 1899, p. 2474.

democracy of its ancient principles,” and he would know as well as anyone.¹⁰⁷ While a few years after leaving office he would return to his position as a successful corporate lawyer, including a stint as the attorney for the Anaconda mine in 1904, he was in no position to show such inclinations as governor.¹⁰⁸ During the campaign, he had sworn his support for a new eight-hour restriction for mining industry workers and used it to gain the support of the Colorado State Federation of Labor.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, an examination of his vote totals demonstrated the extent to which he was counting on Populist support. Comparing the elections of 1898 and 1894—when Thomas had also been the Democratic candidate for governor—historian James Wright demonstrated that the Thomas vote in 1898 corresponded more closely to the votes for the radical Davis Waite in 1894 than to his own totals from that contest.¹¹⁰ The correlation was so strong that no advanced metrics would have been needed to see it; Thomas surely knew he had been elected by Populist votes. As a man who was looking ahead to the senatorial election in 1901, he could not afford to alienate any of Colorado’s reformers.

Thomas did not even mention the growing sentiment in favor of the eight-hour law in his inaugural address, instead focusing on the need to streamline administration and collect revenue more efficiently. Several weeks later, he sent an additional message

¹⁰⁷ Charles S. Thomas to T. F. O’Mahoney, 9 April 1899, Governor Charles S. Thomas Papers, Colorado State Archives. Denver, CO.

¹⁰⁸ Sewell Thomas, *Silhouettes of Charles S. Thomas: Colorado Governor and United States Senator* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1959), 75.

¹⁰⁹ John P. Enyeart, *The Quest for “Just and Pure Law”: Rocky Mountain Workers and American Social Democracy, 1870-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 113-114; D. C. Coates, “Thomas Is With Us,” *Rocky Mountain Sun* (Aspen, CO), October 8, 1898, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ James E. Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent In Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 217.

to the legislature that did cover a different pressing subject that would come to be intertwined with the proposal for workday restrictions. In his inaugural, he had mentioned the need for legislation to deal with “the rapid concentration of leading industries into general systems, popularly known as ‘trusts,’” and he considered the need for action to be even more serious than it was when he first mentioned it. Rumors were circulating that several combinations of local industries and utilities were about to be effected, including one combination that was believed to include the majority of metallic smelting facilities of the nation. His greatest concerns were that the new industries would close facilities, lay off workers, and that control of and the profits from these facilities would flow to “distant communities.” He admitted that the courts might object to state anti-trust action, but he contended that inaction was the greater sin.¹¹¹

Thomas’s concern was not without cause. By 1898, Henry Rogers—a former Standard Oil executive—joined with New York stock brokers to approach owners of smelting and refining firms with a proposition. He suggested that they form a single combination, cut administrative costs, and control the market for unrefined ores and the supply of refined metals. The arrangements were essentially complete by early 1899, and the creation of the firm that would call itself the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) was announced in March. The greater share of Colorado’s smelters were under the control of this new giant just in time for a labor struggle.¹¹²

¹¹¹ *Senate Journal of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado, Twelfth Session* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1899), 124, 516-523.

¹¹² Debi Unger and Irwin Unger, *The Guggenheims: A Family History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 71-73; Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and David McComb, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1994), 134-135.

Just as they had with the gubernatorial candidates, local labor organizations had vetted and endorsed potential legislators during the campaign of 1898.¹¹³ The legislature they elected was firmly committed to an eight-hour law. Roughly 90% of state house and senate members identified themselves as a Populist, Democrat, or “Teller Silver Republican,” with representation divided equally among each of the three parties. Whether Thomas forgot to mention the eight-hour law in his message or consciously hoped to de-emphasize it cannot be determined, but after it passed the legislature he followed up on his earlier promise and signed the bill into law.¹¹⁴

The bill actually provided little direct benefit for those engaged in hard-rock mining, as most of these heavily-unionized workers had already succeeded in obtaining eight-hour work days. The biggest beneficiaries were the smelter workers included in the act, who were largely non-union and typically worked shifts of either ten or twelve hours a day. The law was scheduled to take effect on June 15, but ASARCO challenged it in court almost immediately upon its formation. Just weeks before the law was to take effect, the company announced that the daily pay rates were to be replaced by hourly ones. For workers to maintain their wages on the new scale, twelve-hour days would have been required.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Enyeart, “*Just and Pure Law*”, 113-114; William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 46-47.

¹¹⁴ On the composition of the legislature and the provisions of the law, see *Laws Passed at the Twelfth Session of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado* (Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1899), 15-20, 232.

¹¹⁵ David Brundage, *The Making of Western Labor Radicalism: Denver’s Organized Workers, 1878-1905* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 140-141; Duane A. Smith, *Rocky Mountain Boom Town: A History of Durango, Colorado* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1992), 78-79.

By June 15, ASARCO's smelters were shut down by strikes. While the Colorado Supreme Court ruled the law unconstitutional in July, and the strike collapsed in mid-August, the state government's approach to the strike was important. Governor Thomas appointed a citizen's committee to resolve the strike, and when it failed called in the state Board of Arbitration. The workers declared their willingness to submit to the binding arbitration offered, but the company refused. In the short term, while worker frustration with the state continued, labor maintained some confidence that political solutions could ultimately be found. If Thomas and state Democrats did not offer a radical alternative to capitalist industrialization, they could at least offer protection.¹¹⁶

While disputes between labor and capital were at the forefront of politics in Colorado, the issue of imperialism had a significant presence in the background. While the state Senate approved a resolution that called for Teller and Wolcott to vote for the Treaty of Paris, Populists and Democrats in the Colorado House initiated a two-hour debate over a resolution that demanded the opposite. In a speech that one paper called (with a slight degree of condescension) one of the finest speeches any woman had ever delivered in the legislature, Arapahoe Populist Mrs. H. G. R. Wright decried any policy that involved the acquisition of the Philippines without the consent of the Filipinos. Others Populists and Democrats less charitably stated that the islands offered "no commerce, no trade, no manufactures, no nothing, except heathens and strife." Despite their efforts, the measure was voted down.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 233-235; William E. Forbath, *Shaping of the American Labor Movement*, 46-48.

¹¹⁷ *Senate Journal of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado, Twelfth Session*, 190, 202-203, 216,

The state executive also joined the fray. Governor Thomas, as perhaps the foremost anti-imperialist among state Democrats, was making speeches in opposition to the administration's presumed policies by at least February, despite the annexationist plank in his state party's platform. He also focused a great deal of attention on the return of the Colorado regiment from the Philippines, which he declared to be an illegal and unconstitutional use of the state militia. The men had enlisted for the duration of the war with Spain, he said, and in any case they were constitutionally bound to be used only against foreign invasions or domestic rebellions.¹¹⁸

Thomas did not expect a local rival to use his statements against him. Populist leader, newspaperman, and a former law partner of the Governor, Thomas Patterson, had not yet renounced "expansion" and hoped to embarrass the state's top Democrat by depicting him as a traitor. In an interview published in Patterson's *Rocky Mountain News*, it was made to appear that Governor Thomas hoped the men would lay down their arms in the middle of the army's campaign. Thomas soon denied that the content of his remarks bore any resemblance to those printed in the *News*, and he even sought aid from Secretary of War Alger to prove he had not incited mutiny among the troops. Of course, this was only one of many ways in which Patterson attempted to bring down his most likely challenger for the next available Senate seat.¹¹⁹

246; "Hangings and the Philippines," *Denver Post*, January 30, 1899, p. 3; "No Emblems on Ballots," *Rocky Mountain News*, January 31, 1899, p. 5; "Their Minds Wandered," *Aspen Tribune*, January 31, 1899, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ "Tribute to Washington," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 20, 1899, p. 3; "Volunteers Illegally Detained in Philippines," *Rocky Mountain News*, April 18, 1899, p. 8; "Work Done for Three Years," *Rocky Mountain News*, April 20, 1899, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 7, 10, 1899; Charles S. Thomas to Secretary of War Alger, 9 May 1899,

The discussion of imperialism within the state should not just be dismissed as the simple responses of petty local politicians. He and Patterson were considered the primary competitors for the U.S. Senate seat sure to be vacated by Edward Wolcott in 1900. As noted above, his position as governor also brought him a degree of connection to the events overseas that other state officials simply did not have. His remarks demonstrated that he had considered the situation and that he followed the national debate closely. In some of his statements, Governor Thomas attempted to draw connections between America's new overseas policies and the growing concentration of economic power. In response to a questionnaire he received regarding the platform for the next national election, he stated that "Imperialism, both national and industrial, should be opposed, and the principle that the government exists by the consent of the governed should be applied to, and warfare waged against, the commercial and political oligarchy which is centralizing all industries, and repeating the policies and practices of despotisms abroad." Furthermore, in his anti-trust message he suggested that the war had drawn attention away from concerns at home. While most remembered 1898 as "the year of glory," even more so it was "also the year of the trusts. The people have been diverted by the pomp and circumstances of war, during which period trusts, representing \$950,000,000 of capital, real and fictitious, have been organized." In one case, imperialism was described as an extension of the systems of domination which were growing in America; in the other, war and nationalism prevented desperately needed reforms. These interpretations seem much like those that western reformers in Congress had developed over the last

and Charles S. Thomas to Adjutant General Corbin, 9 May 1899, Governor Charles S. Thomas Papers, Colorado State Archives.

year, and their use by a state politician demonstrates that either these ideas were being readily adopted or that the basis for such conclusions already existed among western Populists and Democrats.¹²⁰

In Nebraska, there were no strikes or industrial combinations that could dominate the headlines like they did in Colorado. Governor William A. Poynter had to deal with a Republican legislature, and there was no real hope for major reform legislation. A few Republican-sponsored “reform” measures did pass and were signed into law, namely a law to regulate the use of money in politics and another that limited the hours of railroad workers. In reality, both were weak measures. The penalty for committing bribery or exceeding campaign limitations was set as “not less than fifty dollars,” while the other law merely limited employees of the railroads to a maximum of eighteen consecutive hours of work. The new laws were so non-controversial that they passed the Nebraska Senate without a dissenting vote.¹²¹ Fate seemed to have ordained that the legislature would collect no great accomplishment. Even though they were able to quickly select the defeated gubernatorial candidate Monroe Hayward to replace Allen in the Senate, Hayward died before ever taking office and Poynter appointed Allen to take back his old seat.¹²²

¹²⁰ Charles S. Thomas to W. S. McComas, 13 April 1899, Governor Charles S. Thomas Papers, Colorado State Archives; *Senate Journal of the General Assembly of the State of Colorado, Twelfth Session*, 520.

¹²¹ For the votes and provisions of laws, see *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1900), 645, 819; *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1900), 985, 988; *Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Session* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1900), 147-161, 330-331.

¹²² Paolo E. Coletta, “A Tempest in a Teapot? Governor Poynter’s Appointment of William V. Allen to the United States Senate,” *Nebraska History* 38 (June 1957): 155-163.

Instead of focusing on reform measures, the legislature devoted a great deal of time to discussion of events overseas, particularly those involving the state's regiment in the Philippines. One of these debates centered upon Colonel John Stotsenburg, commander of the First Nebraska. In the months preceding the opening of the conflagration, members of both houses had received letters from concerned parents and friends of the men in the regiment who condemned the colonel for his harsh treatment of those under his command. Because of these reports of "unjust and unsoldierly treatment of the men in the First Nebraska Regiment," on January 11, Representative Fisher, a Republican from Dawes County, demanded that the legislature call for Stotsenburg's immediate removal from command.¹²³ Debate of the resolution was held on the following day.

After an abortive attempt by one fellow Republican to kill the proposal, a series of chaotic, non-partisan, yet rather divisive engagements took place on the floor. A fusionist from Buffalo County, J. M. Easterling, offered to have the resolution referred to committee in order to formally "investigate and report to this House."¹²⁴ Easterling argued that the legislature was stepping outside of their mandate, and the War Department could handle this issue on their own. Before a vote could be taken on the two main options, yet another Republican offered up an amendment designed to gut the original resolution.¹²⁵

¹²³ *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session, 267-268.*

¹²⁴ *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session, 275.* It should be pointed out that the exact party affiliation of reform members is difficult to identify because all official records list them as "fusionist."

¹²⁵ *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session, 276.*

First the amendment was voted down, fifty-four to forty-four. Twenty-five fusionists and nineteen Republicans worked together to defeat it, with one member from each side abstaining. When Easterling's alternative was defeated in its own turn by forty Republicans and nineteen fusionists, the representative from Buffalo County felt the need to explain his intentions. He declared that Fisher's resolution was a “criticism of the national administration,” and he justified his rejection of such an act: “Owing to the critical situation in the Philippines, and the criticism of an officer without his having been heard, and a desire to support our president at this critical moment, and as a mark of my confidence in his prudence and loyalty, I vote ‘No.’”¹²⁶ This reform legislator believed that to question the authority of the War Department or the commander-in-chief was unacceptable at that time. These statements were made over three weeks before the beginning of fighting in the Philippines, at a time of peace.

The debate reflected the extent to which state Republicans had attempted—and succeeded—in cultivating a narrative of national unity amid crisis. They had claimed in the campaign of 1898 that any form of criticism directed at the president or his administration was a shameful and traitorous act, and it was for that reason the members of Fisher’s own party attempted to stifle his proposal. Easterling was no Republican, but he accepted the narrative without question.

The original version of Fisher’s resolution did pass with support from all parties, but its opponents were all but vindicated in the days that followed. When fighting commenced, Stotsenburg led the regiment quite successfully, and was often noted as a

¹²⁶ *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session, 276-278.*

commander who led from the front (a characteristic that likely led to his death in battle in late April). On the last full day of the session, both House and Senate sought to make amends. The legislature expunged the record of what came to be called the Stotsenburg affair, with the House admitting they were guilty of “severely criticizing and censuring” the Colonel without just cause.¹²⁷

Remarkably, the legislature was not done discussing military matters. In late March of 1899, nearly two months after the outbreak of war in the Philippines, both houses of the Nebraska legislature passed a resolution in support of the actions of the state’s regiment. In its entirety, this resolution declared that the soldiers were “defending in the far-off Philippines the principles of our government and adding new glory to the flag.” Remarkably, not a single member voted in opposition to the resolution.¹²⁸

Populist governor William Poynter could not bring himself to condone such a blanket approval. While his veto message did not question the bravery of the volunteers, he did “regret that circumstances have compelled them to give their services and sacrifice their lives in a conflict at utter variance to the very fundamental principles of our government and contrary to the established policy of the nation for more than a century.” The soldiers had enlisted in a fight for human liberty, but now they were compelled to “engage in a conflict against a people who have been battling against the oppression of

¹²⁷ *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session*, 1198-1199; the Senate struggled in their initial attempts to expunge the record, see *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session* 820, 836-837, 989.

¹²⁸ U.S. Works Progress Administration, *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Nebraska, 1854-1941*, vol. 2, 1887-1909 (Sponsored by the University of Nebraska, 1942), 437; *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session*, 618; *House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Twenty-Sixth Regular Session*, 1091.

another nation for nearly 400 years.” In conclusion, Poynter stated “I cannot stultify myself and the calm judgment of the thinking people of this commonwealth by giving official approval to the statement that the war of conquest now carried on in the far away Philippines is in defense of the principles of our government and is adding new glory to our flag.”¹²⁹

Poynter’s treatment of the resolution received mixed reviews. On several occasions, he had asked the legislature to make appropriations for aid to be sent to the troops, but they had refused. A writer for the *Omaha World-Herald* claimed that the legislature had refused to help the troops, but was full of the worthless sentiment. Worse yet, the original version of the resolution required that it be telegraphed to the regiment in the Philippines, which it was claimed would cost \$850. Several private citizens also wrote to the governor in support. One of these was a mother whose son was still serving in the Philippines and who felt that the veto was a powerful message and inspiration to others. Since his public repudiation of the conflict, “other men and women have entered their protest against this unholy war. I hope and expect a storm to sweep across the land condemning the administration and make the powers that be call a halt and listen to the voice of the people.”¹³⁰

Republican newspapermen, by contrast, quickly attacked Poynter for opposing the will of the president. Republican journals tended not to print the governor’s reasoning, instead claiming that the veto “was purely on political grounds, and indicates that our

¹²⁹ U.S. Works Progress Administration, *Messages and Proclamations*, 437.

¹³⁰ “A Good Veto,” *Omaha World-Herald*, April 3, 1899, p. 4; Almira Scott to William A. Poynter, undated, William A. Poynter Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

governor is more a politician than [sic] a statesman.”¹³¹ Others were less restrained in their attacks. According to one paper, the governor “placed himself on the side of Aguinaldo and his band of bandits, who wished to walk over the American army and pillage the city of Manila.” Claimed yet another, “As between a Filipino and our brave Nebraska boys the governor goes on record as in favor of the dirty Filipino.... It may be all right for a popocrat campaign argument, but as sure as there is a God in heaven the insult to our brave boys at Manila will be remembered by a good many people in the state at the ballot box in the coming election.”¹³² Members of the Grand Old Party of Nebraska now had an issue they felt they could win with.

In Washington, the legislature was no more productive, and even less controversial. Nearly the whole of the session was devoted to a fight for the U.S. Senate seat. The incumbent, Republican John L. Wilson had believed that he would easily win reelection. He, like recently elected Silver Republican George Turner, was from Spokane, and western Washington legislators demanded their share of representation in the Senate. Working with the few Populists and Democrats left in the legislature, the coastal legislators blocked Wilson’s victory. They eventually forced his withdrawal from the race in favor of Addison Foster, who one author has described as a “deservedly

¹³¹ *Albion Weekly News* (NE), April 7, 1899.

¹³² “Poynter and His Two Vetoes,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, April 10, 1899, p. 4, reprinted from the *Pierce Call* and the *Aurora Republican*, no dates. The listed page from the *Bee* included twelve reprinted responses by Nebraska’s Republican papers, despite the fact that the *Bee* itself was still attempting to advocate an anti-imperialist position. Considering it was only the veto of a resolution of sentiment and not an actual law, Poynter’s action gained some national attention. See: “Holding Nebraska in Check,” *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), April 3, 1899, p. 6; “A Bad ‘Poynter,’” *Times* (Washington, D.C.), April 4, 1899, p. 4; “Governor Poynter and Our Soldiers,” *Sun* (New York, NY), April 4, 1899, p. 6; “Practical Rebuke to Imperialism,” *Watchman and Southron* (Sumter, SC), April 5, 1899, p. 6. It also remained significant in Nebraska’s papers for weeks afterward. For one example, see “Who Was Patriotic,” *Custer County Republican* (Broken Bow, NE), June 15, 1898, p. 4.

obscure partner in the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company.” The move essentially replaced an experienced political manipulator with a novice, but it represented a desire for ever-greater patronage rather than an ideological shift.¹³³

The legislature took no position on the growing debate over imperialism, but others did. The Western Central Labor Union of Seattle devoted the entirety of their February 1 meeting to the matter, and a week later (just days after the treaty was ratified) passed resolutions in opposition to “the so-called ‘expansion’ theory of the National Administration.” It should be noted that, while the union had long been hostile to the idea of Asian immigration, its protest was not framed in such a manner. Instead, they stated that they were opposed to “the United States setting the example of abrogating the right of self government [sic].” While they may have had their own interests in mind, they chose to emphasize what they said was a universal right.¹³⁴

Governor Rogers—who, oddly enough, was about to print a pamphlet titled *The Inalienable Rights of Man*—had a rather different perspective on the subject.¹³⁵ When asked to explain his position, the governor declared that “I believe in progress and the manifest destiny of the American people to leave the impress of their directing force upon the political economy of the future.” Rogers described the prospect of trade with Asia in remarkably rosy terms, and in another message even suggested that “Our flour is even

¹³³ Robert E. Ficken, *Washington State: The Inaugural Decade, 1889-1899* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2007), 259-260; Don Brazier, *History of the Washington Legislature, 1854-1963* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Senate, 2000), 54-55.

¹³⁴ Minutebook of the Western Central Labor Union, 1, 8 February 1899, King County Central Labor Council of Washington, Box 35, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle. For just one example of their discussion of Asian exclusion, see *ibid.*, 2 November 1898.

¹³⁵ John Rankin Rogers, *The Inalienable Rights of Man* (Olympia, WA: 1900).

now replacing rice in China.” For Washington, and the Puget Sound region in particular, an empire in Asia provided benefits that could not be ignored. His discussion of imperialism never touched upon the rights of the Filipinos, merely the American right to do as they would. His writing had so frequently emphasized universal rights and freedoms, and because of that contradiction it may have been easier for him to describe the inhabitants of Asia as a faceless mass rather than deal with very real issues he normally confronted directly. On this subject, he ultimately chose the pragmatic solution.¹³⁶

Of course, the alternative was not an easy course. In April, one of the more prominent Democrats in the state, F. A. McDonald, gave a speech in which he sought to convince members of the reform coalition to oppose the policy of imperialism. The war in the Philippines represented an attempt to “put us into the Eastern struggle to wrangle over territory like dogs over a bone.” He would gladly take back the life of one of the state’s dead in exchange for “all the niggers in the Philippines.” His audience of Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans was impressed. The editor of a Republican journal, on the other hand, called it a blunt expression of “the copperhead doctrine of the democracy of this state—the platform upon which it will go before the people in 1900.” Certainly, there were risks that came with opposition to imperialism.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ John Rankin Rogers to William H. Snell, March 8, 1899, John Rankin Rogers to New York *Journal*, April 11, 1899, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers, Washington State Archives, Olympia.

¹³⁷ “The Jeffersonians,” and “Should Get Together,” *Morning Olympian*, April 15, 1899, p. 2, 3.

The debate over the future of the Philippines had entered its own as a subject of political debate. By the end of 1898, opinions on expansion had not conformed closely to party lines, in part because the final fight over Hawaiian annexation had taken place in wartime but also because of America's history of influence in the archipelago. As it became increasingly clear in the last weeks of 1898 that the administration had taken aim at the Philippines, more serious opposition developed. Rogers was the most prominent of the few western state politicians to argue for an imperial policy, while among those left in Congress who had followed Bryan in 1896 only Teller and Stewart advocated the retention of the Philippines. The rest united to oppose what they deemed rule by force. These western anti-imperialists developed a complex critique of the military, political, and economic policies employed or supported by conservatives, one that fit perfectly with their broad attack on the capitalist threat to American democracy. They did not merely dissent regarding the methods of imperialism, but instead they totally refuted the doctrines that accompanied such a system of domination.

At the same time, there were complicating factors that had the power to substantively hinder the success of the anti-imperialist cause. The divergent philosophies held by anti-imperialists of different regions and parties were—and would consistently prove to be—real obstacles to the formation of a unified opposition. Local factors made the cause less attractive to others, and their partisan enemies were once again able to draw on wartime nationalism to disparage their efforts. Furthermore, western reformers were losing power in much of the region and they were in no position to push the wholesale transformations they had once promised. If they could not convince voters to

support their vision of freedom at home and abroad in the contest of 1900 the whole purpose of their crusade would be defeated, likely forever.

CHAPTER VIII

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE CAMPAIGN

Senator Henry Moore Teller of Colorado was running short of allies in the nation's capital. Since his dramatic break with the Republicans in the summer of 1896, he had continued to lambaste McKinley and his old party for their subservience to financial interests. His western friends were fond of him, but since the outbreak of the war with Spain he had differed with them on the question of expansion. To be plain, it was not merely that he disagreed with them, but in fact he had become one of the most consistent defenders of the administration's policy. Early in 1900 he continued this course, at one point attacking the anti-imperialist Senator Bacon of Georgia. The problem with the senator's most recent speech, according to Teller, was that it was based on the assumption that "when the war is terminated, we propose to do something which is contrary to the Declaration of Independence." All of the anti-imperialists had declared that expansion in the Pacific would be accompanied by colonial rule, meaning government without consent of the governed. Neither McKinley nor the majority of his expansionist supporters had declared any intent to rule in such a way—in part because the President made no policy declaration at all—but Teller wanted to believe the administration would act in accordance with American principles. The so-called anti-imperialists were fighting against a hypothetical evil, he said. "They set up a condition which we hope will never exist, and then denounce that condition." He denied that either

Republicans or the American people would tolerate such a foreign concept as colonialism.¹

Of course, his support for expansion was perceived to be a boon to the President. Among westerners, Teller had the longest and most distinguished record of any in public life, and when he rejected claims that America was acting the part of an imperial power he bolstered the position of McKinley and his backers. As Richard Pettigrew lamented to a former colleague, “Teller is an Expansionist, and of course will be of no value to us in this campaign.... He is a dear splendid old fellow, but he does not agree with us on anything but silver.”²

In that regard, Pettigrew was wrong. Teller had always argued that expansion could take place without colonial oppression. While he did believe that the nation had the legal power to hold colonies, he simultaneously contended that “we have no right to use it. There are plenty of powers given to a government that it is not required to use and would not be justified in using.” At no point did he suggest that the people of the “new possessions” lacked basic rights.³

By the summer of 1900, the evidence was finally clear that the anti-imperialists had been right all along. In the preceding months, Republicans had passed an organic act for Puerto Rico, proposed resolutions declaring the Philippines to be a perpetual dependency, and even defended the right of other empires to enforce their will around the

¹ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 30, 1900, 1314-1316.

² Richard F. Pettigrew to F. T. Dubois, no date (but likely 8 March 1900), Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition (hereafter, RFP Papers), Reel 23.

³ For this and the following paragraph, see *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jun. 4, 1900, 6510-6515.

globe. The senior senator from Colorado turned away in disgust. “[T]he way to govern a people is to give them the right to govern themselves,” he declared. “It will not do to say that the people of the Philippine Islands are incapable of self-government. They are capable of it. The people of Cuba are capable of it. The people of Porto Rico are capable of self-government.” While he admitted that “They may not escape some trouble” as they developed democratic societies, he noted that American democracy was far from perfect in its own right. “In our early history we had a whisky revolution in Pennsylvania... and only a few years ago you had an army standing guard over the property of a railroad company for months in the city of Pittsburg.... You have now armed forces standing guard over property in the State of Idaho.” Such examples did not prove that Americans were incapable of ruling themselves. “No nation in the world ever escaped these difficulties, and none ever will.” Whatever the challenges, he denied that America could promote the cause of freedom by governing others without their consent.

From the close of the Fifty-fifth Congress in March of 1899 until the national conventions of 1900, events unfolded that kept the issues of imperialism, militarism, and economic centralization at the forefront of public attention. Both anti-imperialists and their rivals used the events of the year preceding the campaign to frame the terms of the contest. Imperialists pointed to strife, both overseas and closer to home, to justify the formation of a paternalist federal government and its deployment of force. While western reformers no longer held the balance of power in Congress, those who remained in the House and Senate were no less determined to voice their opposition to the war and what they perceived to be the forces that drove conquest. In these efforts, western Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans in Congress were aided by local activists and

organized labor. In the run-up to the election of 1900, these dissidents contended that global events and local conflicts were the harbingers of a new age. As they presented it, the worldwide struggle for freedom was being waged against tremendous odds, but it could still be won if enough American voters were ready to join the fight.

Boers, Boxers, and Miners

When war began in the Philippines in February of 1899, Congress was already debating a military expansion bill. While many decried the dangers of militarism, McKinley wasted little time in making their warnings appear justified. In the last days of April, 1899, a dispute over pay at the Bunker Hill mine in Coeur d'Alene region of Idaho turned violent. Frustrated by obstinate managers who refused to pay the district's going wages, several hundred miners from throughout the county organized themselves to attack the mill at Wardner. After an exchange of gunfire with company guards (which left two men dead) the miners dynamited the ore concentrator, a facility valued at \$250,000. The violence proved to be a sudden spasm, and there was no further escalation or threat of a further impending conflict. Still, Governor Frank Steunenberg decided that the outbreak required a massive response. While labor clashes in the Coeur d'Alenes had been dealt with by federal troops before—in both 1892 and 1894—this time the governor could further rationalize their use to McKinley by pointing out that Idaho's National Guard regiment was currently in the Philippines. With little hesitation, the President complied with the request. The first trainload of regulars arrived in northern Idaho on

May 2, and Steunenberg officially proclaimed martial law for Shoshone County on May 3.⁴

As had been the case in 1892, the soldiers were used as the mine owners' police force, and they began rounding up suspected participants and placing them in boxcars or "bull pens"—open warehouses that were used as mass holding facilities. Added to the suspects in the case, large numbers of union men and possible labor sympathizers were also arrested. The estimated total taken into custody ranges between 700 and 1,000, roughly half of whom would be held for months in the inadequate shelters that served as their prisons. Furthermore, the state (with direct support from the army under General Henry C. Merriam) instituted a mandatory work permit system. In order to obtain a permit, laborers had to openly renounce any allegiance to organized labor and forswear any interest in doing so into the future. Unlike previous federal interventions, which had lasted between two and four months, this time martial law remained in effect for Shoshone County for nearly two years. The Democrat Steunenberg all but openly declared his intent to use the obedient regulars to destroy both the Shoshone County Populists and the local union, an affiliate of the radical Western Federation of Miners.

Republicans celebrated the actions of McKinley, Merriam, and even Steunenberg. The only dissenting voices among them suggested that not enough had been done. One editor gleefully celebrated news that that the "anarchists and murderers"

⁴ For the conflict in the Coeur d'Alenes and their context, as described in this and the following paragraph, see Jerry M. Cooper, *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 165-209; Clayton D. Laurie and Ronald H. Cole, *The Role of Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1877-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1997), 153-178; Katherine G. Aiken, *Idaho's Bunker Hill: The Rise and Fall of a Great Mining Company, 1885-1981* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 10-14, 21-37.

were now where they belonged after it was announced that the entire male population of Burke, Idaho, had been arrested.⁵ A writer for one of Colorado's Republican papers suggested that their own state should learn from the troubles in the Coeur d'Alenes. The miners were fooled by outside agitators, and the Colorado legislature should pass a law "making it a criminal offense for any of these outsiders... to come here and by their council and advice as 'organizers' or officers of organizations to egg on ignorant or inflammable men in our state."⁶ Still others sought to directly associate the violence in Wardner with their political opponents. "The republican party is the party of law and order in Idaho and everywhere," said Bartlet Sinclair, a former aid of Steunenberg, when he declared his return to the regular Republican Party. Those who took part were "either populists or democrats.... The dynamite methods are distinctively populist." With no apparent sense of irony, he added that "Republicans, by training and belief, oppose violence."⁷

Western Populists, Democrats, and labor leaders countered that, while they did not condone violence, the real "anarchists" were those who imposed martial law, discarded *habeas corpus*, and replaced democratic rule for rule at the point of a gun.⁸ Gilbert Hitchcock, editor of the *Omaha World-Herald*, delivered biting commentaries and speeches in opposition to military rule in Idaho. In the fall of 1899, he told

⁵ *Adams County News* (Ritzville, WA), May 10, 1899, p. 3.

⁶ *Aspen Daily Times*, June 24, 1899, p. 3.

⁷ "Who the Rioters Were," *Colfax Gazette* (WA), July 20, 1900, p. 3.

⁸ In June of 1899, the Colorado Federation of Labor declared General Merriam to be "an anarchist for his action in the Coeur d'Alenes." See "Call for Winchesters," *Longmont Ledger* (CO), June 9, 1899, p. 1.

Nebraskans not to forget that men were “imprisoned because they belonged to the miners’ union,” and—citing a popular but inaccurate rumor regarding the controlling interests of the Bunker Hill mine—that they were held captive “because the Standard Oil company wants that sort of thing done.” Hitchcock considered this to be more than corporate favoritism, instead describing it as an overt display of military force designed to cow organized labor wherever it was active.⁹ Jason Lewis, an Omaha labor organizer, shared this analysis. “[T]his man Merriam would make it a crime for laboring men to organize and ask for better wages,” he declared to a Labor Day gathering. “This is a military man’s idea of justice. The military, blinded by pomp and power, care nothing for liberty or justice.”¹⁰

Those in the mining regions went even further in their categorization of the Army’s rule in Idaho. To a surprising extent, they directly tied the plight of the miners under arrest with that of the Filipinos still fighting American control across the Pacific. One Aspen resident (to state it generously) attempted to use poetry to draw parallels between the two cases, and in the process indict those who claimed these acts were necessary to preserve safety and freedom.

Take down the Statue of Liberty
And build one in its place
With a tyrant on its pinnacle
And a slave bound at its base.

⁹ “Holcomb and Harvey Speak,” October 25, 1899, p. 3, “Lest We Forget,” October 29, 1899, p. 4, “Why an Increased Standing Army?” November 19, 1899, p. 4, *Omaha World-Herald*. The United States Industrial Commission must have heard of the common rumors, because it specifically reported that the Bunker Hill mine was not controlled by Standard Oil. See *Report of the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor Employed in the Mining Industry*, vol. XII (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), lxxxv.

¹⁰ “Labor Day Incidents in Omaha,” *Omaha World-Herald*, September 10, 1899, p. 32.

Erase your declaration
That all the world may know
We endorse the foul, despotic laws
Of ill-famed Idaho

Take down the Stars and Stripes,
It should no longer wave
As an emblem of liberty
O'er despot, serf or slave:
Transform your constitution,
Suppress the eagle's scream
'Till the spirit of Glorious '76
Prevails at Coeur d'Alenes.

Since you have learned from cruel
Spain
The wisdom of stockades
That relate more agony, woe,
Than Weyler's bloody raids.
Siberia blushed at our shame,
Her victims sigh to know
Their tyranny is mild compared
To that in Idaho.

You sowed the seeds of liberty
On Cuban soil, 'tis true,
But does that justify you in
The course you now pursue?
Well may Old Glory be despised
In the far-off Philippines,
While barbarity in the name of law
Exists in Coeur d'Alenes.¹¹

However crude it was, the author did draw an interesting parallel between oppression overseas and that at home, and he would not be the only one to do so. America had ostensibly gone to war in 1898 to aid human freedom—at least in the popular imagination. Many Americans had wanted to believe that their country was an example

¹¹ John E. Sullivan, "Labor's Appeal to Uncle Sam," *Aspen Daily Times*, August 19, 1899, p. 4.

of liberty that people the world over envied and wished to follow.¹² The author stated that this confidence was misplaced, for America had set aside its own guarantees of liberty in order to pursue policies of subjugation, both at home and abroad.

The sharpest critics of military rule in the Coeur d'Alenes came, expectedly, from inside the Western Federation of Miners. The organization had been born out of the often violent labor confrontations of the Rocky Mountain region (and the Coeur d'Alenes in particular), and its initial growth during the period of Davis Waite's administration in Colorado had demonstrated the potential utility of political action. By the end of the decade it had become a substantial force in labor and politics throughout the region, and in many ways had come to act as the representative of Populist labor.¹³

Leaders of the WFM railed against the use of the permit system, mass arrests, and coercion used against the laborers of the region, but they joined with others in framing the campaign of intimidation as an act of militarism. Article after article in *Miners' Magazine*—the WFM's official publication which began circulation in 1900—declared that “The Krag-Jorgensen [rifle] is the law of the land, it is superior to all petitions, protests, legislatures, courts, and constitution; its report sounds the enslavement of the people, for it is forever trained upon them by the military men who are the servants of the

¹² On the vision of American freedom as an example for others and the internal conflict between liberty and power, see Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), especially 19-45; Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), especially 25-44.

¹³ Melvyn Dubovsky, “The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905,” *Labor History* 7, no. 2 (1966): 139-144; John P. Enyeart, *The Quest for “Just and Pure Law”: Rocky Mountain Workers and American Social Democracy, 1870-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 112-113.

privileged few who rule without mercy.” Those who desired to strangle organized labor need only apply for aid from “Emperor McKinley,” they claimed.¹⁴

While the conflict in Idaho dominated the pages of *Miners' Magazine* for its first year of existence, there was also substantial coverage of overseas imperialism and its impact.¹⁵ The first issue of the magazine included a satirical article by the “Sultan of Sulu” that declared the Filipino leader’s admiration for American efforts to protect the sanctity of the home, then added “My neighbors here in some of the other Philippine Islands had firesides and homes, but the American soldiers set them on fire, and burnt them to the ground.” The concluding remarks by the “Sultan” stated his intent to remain a Muslim because, while the government had given him money for his promise of peace, “they don’t do it with the Christian Filipinos and just kill them off.”¹⁶ The next month, when reports began to circulate that the popular General Henry Lawton had been killed in action in the Philippines, a writer for the magazine wryly responded that if instead he had “imitated Merriam and arrested the Filipinos and imprisoned them in a ‘bull pen,’ and then fought their wives,” the Lawton “would now be a live coward instead of a dead hero.”¹⁷

¹⁴ See *Miners' Magazine*, “Another Outrage,” vol. 1, February 1900, p. 2-3, “Congressional Investigation,” vol. 1, March 1900, p. 7-8, “Fired From Ambush,” vol. 1, June 1900, p. 14-15.

¹⁵ For just a small sampling of articles on imperialism, see *Miners' Magazine*, “General Lawton’s Death,” vol. 1, January 1900, p. 1, vol. 1, February 1900, p. 35-36, vol. 1, April 1900, p. 36, “The Philippine Problem,” vol. 1, July 1900, p. 20-23, “The Philippine Problem,” vol. 1, August 1900, p. 27-28, “Altgeld’s Speech,” vol. 1, August 1900, p. 28-33, “Dangers of Militarism,” vol. 1, September 1900, p. 9-10, “The Philippine Problem,” vol. 1, September 1900, p. 23-27.

¹⁶ *Miners' Magazine*, vol. 1, December 1899, p. 40-41.

¹⁷ *Miners' Magazine*, “Lawton’s Death,” vol. 1, January 1900, p. 1.

While they rarely linked the two directly, leaders and advocates of the miners often simultaneously attacked overseas imperialism and military rule in Idaho. By the time of the WFM convention in May of 1900, there was near unanimity among members that both should be opposed. In his address to the delegates, James R. Sovereign—a supporter of the union, former Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, and Populist leader—warned of both “the alarming tendency toward militarism in the United States” and the “increasing tendency by corporations to flood the country with Oriental labor to the ultimate annihilation of the American workman.” It was suggested that both were methods by which labor could be made servile to the demands of capital.¹⁸

The declaration of principles adopted by the convention was an interesting amalgam of anti-imperialist and anti-militarist declarations fastened onto the Omaha Platform. It called for government ownership of the railroads, direct federal control of the currency, the “rehabilitation of silver as money,” and the enactment of direct legislation laws. As familiar as these appear, much of the platform had a very different emphasis. The second plank opposed the annexation of territories “populated by other than the Caucasian race,” and the eleventh supported the exclusion of all Asian immigrants. These clearly reflected a traditional fear among western laborers. While these provisions seemed exclusionary, the third demanded that “civil government under our constitution be extended” to all the “insular possessions of the United States,” which would have meant the complete incorporation of the people (and laborers) of the islands—presumably after the Philippines had been given up. The fourth and fifth planks

¹⁸ “Grievances Go to the Poles [sic],” *Rocky Mountain News*, May 19, 1900, p. 10.

attacked “arbitrary interference by the federal authorities in local affairs” and condemned proposals for an expanded national army. Their placement immediately after two anti-imperialist statements suggests some desire to link the condemnations of conquests overseas with domestic government without consent.¹⁹

The conflict in the Coeur d’Alenes was not the only one that placed imperialism and militarism at the forefront of public debate. When in the fall of 1899 war broke out between Great Britain and two small settler-colonial republics in southern Africa, public attention was drawn to the conflict. By that time the American war in the Philippines was beginning to bog down, and soon Aguinaldo would order his units to disperse to conduct guerrilla operations.²⁰ By comparison, in late 1899 and for much of 1900 the South African War (or Boer War) provided the media with epic battles waged between two very unevenly matched foes. Popular sentiment in America largely favored the underdog Boers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and their early victories in the war only added to their popularity. Anti-imperialists—from both the East and West—soon declared their sympathy with the Boer cause. If Americans could sympathize with one anti-colonial movement, it was rationalized that they could do so for another.²¹

¹⁹ *Miners’ Magazine*, “Declaration of Principles Adopted by the Western Federation of Miners May 18, 1900,” vol. 1, May 1900, p. 16.

²⁰ For information on the conventional campaign and its end, see Stuart Creighton Miller, “*Benevolent Assimilation*”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 70-99; Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 88-159.

²¹ On the popularity of the Boers and the anti-imperialist use of the South African War, see Richard Mulanax, *The Boer War in American Politics and Diplomacy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 108-111, 117-118; William N. Tilchin, “The United States and the Boer War,” in *The International Impact of the Boer War*, ed. Keith Wilson (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 113-114.

For modern historians, the descendants of the Dutch settlers are hardly the archetypal heroes for an anti-imperialist narrative. The Boers were themselves imperialists who had conquered or displaced African peoples as they attempted to claim sovereign possession of lands to which they were relative newcomers. Yet the typical accounts of the conflict or the descriptions of the Boers that wound up in the American press ignored these facts. When black Africans were mentioned at all—and it was always very brief in the mainstream media—it was claimed that they had worked out amicable relations with the Boers by this time. For most Americans, it was a white man’s fight that had been complicated by economic factors, not race. The diamond and gold mines of the Boer states had encouraged British immigration to the region, and the demographic threat that such an influx posed had been partially responsible for increased tensions in the months before open hostilities. The war, then, was portrayed as a fight between the greed of the world’s greatest colonial power and the freedom of two small states made up of white farmers and ranchers.²²

Western reformers quickly joined the new cause. In early December, Governor Poynter of Nebraska presided over a packed pro-Boer gathering in Omaha. In his keynote address, he declared his own lack of sympathy for “the sickly sentimentalism being fostered in favor of the mother country, on account of Anglo-Saxon kinship.” There was no special relationship between Britain and America, and he suggested that recent indications of British friendship had only followed “indication[s] on the part of

²² Mulanax, *Boer War in American Politics*, 126. For a brief analysis of the causation theories, both from the time of the conflict and by later historians, see Bill Nasson, *The South African War, 1899-1902* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19-42.

this government to depart from those great principles upon which this republic was founded.” Others speakers discussed Britain’s motives for war. Senator Allen, though not able to attend, had a letter read in which he claimed that “because of the discovery of diamond and gold mines of almost limitless value they [the Boer republics] are, under one pretext or another, through a spirit of greed, assailed by Great Britain.” Allen’s analysis seemed to typify those presented at the meeting. Among the resolutions adopted was one which condemned England for its recent history of land grabbing. “As England sought to claim the gold fields of Venezuela by a dispute over a boundary line... so it does by a pretense against the laws of the Dutch republic seek to wrest from that people their liberty and independence, if necessary, in order to reach the gold fields of South Africa.” After the meeting, some participants stayed behind to discuss the possibility of forming an anti-imperial organization that could oppose the both the war in South Africa and that ongoing in the Philippines.²³

In many ways, westerners described the fight of the Boers as much like their own. In the *Miners’ Magazine*, one article explained how this association was based upon more than emotion. In part, the story followed the career of John Hayes Hammond, a mining engineer and manager. According to the piece, in 1892 Hammond served as an operative for the Mine Owners Association of the Coeur d’Alenes, and in that year he played a key role in the confrontation that led to the suppression of organized labor and, for that purpose, the first intervention of federal troops into the region. By 1895, Hammond had

²³ “Long Live the Republic,” *Omaha World-Herald*, December 12, 1899, p. 1; “Bombard Governor Poynter,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 12, 1899, p. 1, 3; William V. Allen to William A. Poynter, December 11, 1899, Govenor William A. Poynter Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

relocated to South Africa where he was in the employ of the arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes. Following the defeat of the Jameson Raid—Rhodes’s privately orchestrated and premature attempt to open hostilities between the British and Boers—Hammond was arrested by the authorities in Transvaal for his role in the conspiracy. Though he was the focus of the article, the author suggested that Hammond was only one example. “[T]he same stockholders in the South African Goldfields Company are stockholders in the mines of the United States and Canada.” Their greed, and that of those like them, was at the core of all imperialism. Whether speaking of the miners of Idaho, the Boers of South Africa, or “the poor Filipinos who wrested their island homes from Spanish tyranny to find that a still greater tyrant had paid \$20,000,000 for the privilege of shooting them down,” it mattered not at all. All suffered so that “a few designing millionaires might increase their dividends.” Global capitalism was the source of all these conflicts, and only its defeat could resolve them.²⁴

Though they did so less dramatically, western congressmen were no less willing to link their own struggle with that of the Boers. In the House of Representatives, John Shafroth of Colorado claimed that the world’s powers should be interested in stopping a conflict that was “shutting off more than one-third of the world’s supply of gold.”²⁵ While he suggested that this clearly caused damage to world markets, his description of the struggle in South Africa actually bore a close resemblance to the local fight for regulation in America. The Boers had looked forward “to the building of a great

²⁴ *Miners’ Magazine*, “War the Handmaid of Monopoly,” vol. 1, February 1900, p. 5-10.

²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Feb. 1, 1900, 1401-1404.

commonwealth,” but they knew that “in order to do so, it is necessary that great institutions should be founded, requiring immense revenue, that fine public buildings and vast internal improvements must be constructed, at enormous cost.” Unfortunately, the Boers saw “that most of these diamond fields and gold mines have passed into the hands of a few corporations, whose directors and officers nearly all are citizens of, or reside in other countries, and have no common interest, with him, in building up a great republic in Africa. He sees the only wealth the country possesses, being daily exhausted and shipped to foreign lands.” While he did not make an overt comparison between the Boer republics and his own region, he seemed to understand their frustration that “this vast wealth is used in building magnificent structures in foreign cities and gorgeous palaces on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea,” while the common Boer farmer “still lives in poverty, in his unpretentious cottage.” The vivid imagery employed by Shafroth may have been more akin to the plight of the western homesteader than it was to any reality in South Africa, but in that way it suggests his willingness to associate the struggle he took part in with that of the Boers.²⁶

Another westerner viewed British colonialism in a different light, but essentially agreed that their goal was economic oppression. Senator Richard Pettigrew contended that the British goal was to destroy the independence of labor in South Africa. He cited as evidence the latest speeches by the British economist (recently turned anti-imperialist) J. A. Hobson, who claimed that “the mine owners in the Transvaal desired to overthrow the Republic so they could enact the same slave-labor laws in force at Kimberley [in

²⁶ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Feb. 7, 1900, 1622-1625.

British South Africa]; so that they could repeal the eight-hour law and compel the black laborers, at least, to work twelve hours a day; so that they could repeal the Sunday laws and run the mines seven days each week, as they do at Kimberley.” Pettigrew argued that the brutal contract labor system was employed in British colonies, and it necessarily degraded both those held to service and those who still struggled to maintain their independence. The South Dakotan said British imperialism was rooted in the defense of corporate profits, and so was its American counterpart.²⁷

While American popular opinion favored the Boers, the national administration showed no interest in challenging the British. Many Boer supporters criticized McKinley for his unwillingness to make even the slightest display of sympathy for the South African republics, but most suggested that the United States was in no position to do so. Pettigrew rhetorically asked why the president said not a word “in behalf of liberty and humanity,” before he answered: “Simply because he is engaged in the same wretched business as that which is drenching the soil of Africa with the blood of martyrs. He is busy with an effort to rob the people of the Philippine Islands, and is slaughtering those who resist robbery because, forsooth, it will pay, because they are rich and are worth robbing, and because their island possessions will furnish a foothold for other robberies.” Furthermore, at least since the opening of the war with Spain, rumors had circulated that Britain and the United States had established an informal alliance. To what extent such an agreement was formally recognized, Pettigrew was not sure. “Even if there is not a verbal understanding between Mr. Hay, our Secretary of State, and the English

²⁷ For Pettigrew’s quotes in this and the following paragraph, see April 12 and 14, p. 4095-4096, 4159-4166 .

Government, approved by the President, it is evident that as long as Mr. McKinley is in power England will have at least the moral support of the United States in whatsoever she may do.” This constituted nothing less than an agreement on the division of global spoils between the two powers.²⁸

Whatever his policy objectives, McKinley could not prevent others from taking sides. Western reformers conspicuously flocked to the Boer cause, and certainly many did so with the political situation in mind. When Boer representatives in America attempted to mobilize public support for their cause, western reformers became some of their strongest allies. By May of 1900, the most prominent members of the National Boer Relief Fund Association were senators, congressmen, and governors of western states. At that time, two of the six senators they listed as members of the general committee were from the West (Pettigrew and Allen), as were three of the five governors (Thomas of Colorado, Poynter of Nebraska, and Rogers of Washington). Of course all but Rogers were anti-imperialists, and eventually the out-of-place governor of Washington seemed to regret his decision to support them at all. But for other westerners this organizational effort could be used to further their own campaign against imperialism. When several Boer envoys toured a number of states to drum up public interest in the summer of 1900, they added Omaha to their list of stops. The rally held in their honor was attended by William Jennings Bryan, refocused attention on matters closer to home by declaring that there must never be a day “when those fighting for liberty will look to the American nation in vain for sympathy and aid in their struggle.”

²⁸ On Anglo-American diplomacy during the conflict, see Mulanax, *Boer War in American Politics and Diplomacy*, Chapter 5; Tilchin, “United States and the Boer War,” 107-122.

At a time when overt displays of admiration for Filipino insurgents were deemed traitorous, the Boers could be used as valuable proxies.²⁹

As much as western reformers used the South African War for their own purposes, it should not be suggested that they were interested only in political gain. Many of them had taken up anti-imperialism at an early point in the public discussion of expansion, and so any extension of that viewpoint should not be considered disingenuous. In fact, for some among them it was fundamental to their vision of human freedom. Franklin Pettigrew, the twenty-something son of the senator, was so deeply impressed by his father's anti-imperialism that he took up the cause as his own. In May of 1900, Senator Pettigrew drafted a letter that his son Franklin was to carry with him to the Transvaal, where he was to join the Boers in their fight. To Paul Kruger, president of the South African Republic, the senator wrote that his son "is prompted by a sentiment of devotion to the principles for which you contend." He concluded by asking the Boer leader, "Will you look after him as you would your own son?" For the senator from South Dakota, the fight against empire—wherever it was—was far more than just rhetorical.³⁰

²⁹ "Western Hearts Cheer for the Boer," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 10, 1900, p. 3; For information on the contact between the Boer representatives and western governors, see: George W. Van Siclen to William A. Poynter, 20 February 1900, May 10, 1900, Governor William A. Poynter Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society; George W. Van Siclen to John R. Rogers, 10 March 1900, 14 May 1900, Charles D. Pierce to John R. Rogers, 28 July 1900, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers, Washington State Archives, Olympia. On Roger's apparent regret, see John R. Rogers to George W. Van Siclen, 7 June 1900, *ibid.*

³⁰ Richard F. Pettigrew to George w. Van Sicklen [sic.], 16 May 1900, and to Paul Kruger, 19 May 1900, RFP Papers, reel 24.

By the summer of 1900, troubles in another region had become an international crisis. McKinley's policy in Asia, while never clearly outlined to the public, had always put a great deal of emphasis on the China. Of all the states of East Asia, none offered the resources or, most vitally, the markets that China could. It was for that reason that the European powers, soon joined by Japan, had coerced the old empire into unequal treaties. It was widely known that the great powers all contemplated the day when an independent China would be no more, and each sought to position themselves for such an eventuality. McKinley's new Secretary of State, John Hay, considered the partition of China to be contrary to American interests. In the closing months of 1899, much aided by the knowledge and pen of American diplomat William Rockhill, the administration first formally expressed to the other powers its desire to maintain the "Open Door" to China. While hardly a new idea, and in fact it had generally been the established policy of Britain for most of the last century, it did lay out America's policy objectives. The avenues of trade must be kept open and the territorial integrity of China should remain intact.³¹

In the Open Door notes China was described more like a passive object than an active participant in the affairs of East Asia. The great powers were to come to an understanding, and their collective will would then be projected onto the Chinese state. This evaluation held little concern for the desires of China's government or its people,

³¹ For a discussion of the Open Door and the administration's policy toward China in 1899-1900, in this paragraph and the following, see: Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 127-175; Marilyn Blatt Young, *The Rhetoric of Empire: American China Policy, 1895-1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 115-197; H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 466-473; Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 220-224.

but these factors still had the power to thoroughly upset American plans. As the people of China felt foreign powers gaining increasing influence over their government and their lives, a movement had formed that channeled these frustrations into an anti-foreign and anti-Christian organization. Known to English speakers as the Boxers, their influence grew rapidly in the last years of the 1890s. By 1899 in some parts of China, they had already begun their attacks on native Christians, though by abstaining from assaults on foreign missionaries they had aroused little concern overseas. That too would change in the spring of 1900. In March, open rebellion broke out in the coastal province of Shandong, and within weeks it had spread to the provinces surrounding Beijing. By the middle of June, the foreign legations in the capitol found themselves besieged, and soon the Dowager Empress ordered China's armies to aid the Boxers.³²

If the American minister to China was to survive—along with the legation staff and the missionaries who had crowded in for protection—some kind of intervention was required. Japan and the European powers began hastily assembling forces for an intervention, and with intervention came the danger of partition. If the United States was going to demand maintenance of the Open Door, it could not dictate from the sidelines. On June 16, shortly after Congress had adjourned, McKinley ordered a regiment (soon supplemented by additional units) to be sent from the Philippines to the coast of China.

³² For a narrative account based largely upon the perspective of Europeans and Americans in China, see David J. Siley, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012). For a discussion of the events from the Chinese perspective, see Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

There, they would work in an informal alliance with the forces of the other imperial powers and battle their way inland to Beijing.³³

From mid-June until at least mid-August of 1900, the conflict in China captured the headlines of the nation's press. Without exaggeration, one contemporary claimed that "Even the presidential campaign... occupies a subordinate place in the estimation of the American public." Whether this was true of the American public, it was an accurate reflection of the media's account. The threat posed to American lives—including both government officials and those in large the missionary community—made the stories all the more compelling. It also necessarily had implications for the upcoming electoral campaign.³⁴

Those opposed to imperialism were suddenly in an awkward position. Despite generally negative descriptions of the Boxers as xenophobic and barbarous, some western anti-imperialists did understand the source of Chinese anger, and many underscored the fact that the Europeans, Japanese, and Americans themselves had long held ill intentions toward the Middle Kingdom. While industrialized nations claimed to possess "no motive but that of the most unselfish philanthropy," one writer suggested that, "in reality we cared nothing at all as governments about Christianizing and civilizing the Chinese, but everything about the riches of spoliation which lay in the mysterious interior of their mighty empire."³⁵ Another writer agreed that China's wealth was the cause of foreign

³³ *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain, Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 412.

³⁴ Allen S. Will, *World Crisis in China, 1900* (John Murphy Company, 1900), vii.

³⁵ "The Bitter Fruit of International Rapacity," *Denver Post*, July 15, 1900, p. 4.

interest, and for that reason “The partitioning of China is apparently close at hand.” This author did not ascribe the collapse of China to any weakness on its part. Instead, the Boxer turmoil merely represented the “breach” of Chinese insularity “created by the entering wedge of commercialism.” China was in turmoil because of the disruptions created when it was forcibly integrated into the global economy, and that chaos now provided the opportunity for “Greed and intrigue combined with military might” to “bring the numerically greatest nation in the world under the foot of the trader.”³⁶

The anti-imperialists made their most favorable statements regarding the Boxers in the days before McKinley’s decision to intervene. Shortly after that, as the media came to see the Boxer crisis as serious issue with global implications, few depicted the Boxers as anything other than irrational and violent. Even anti-imperialists made few declarations in opposition to intervention altogether. To support the Boxers or oppose a response was seen as essentially traitorous.

Whether or not Populists and Democrats supported the Boxers was a fact of little consequence to their rivals. Republicans were eager to associate Bryan and his allies with murderous hordes from Asia. Surely, one argued, “The matter of killing a few missionaries ought not to count” when compared to savage plans of Aguinaldo, and Bryan’s followers had already declared that attacks upon the Filipino leader “and his brother cutthroats was an unspeakable crime.” The same author further asked “how much worse is it in Tien Tsin [a city on the road to Beijing where a foreign cession was besieged] than it was in northern Idaho some months ago,” when the anarchist miners

³⁶ *Yakima Herald* (WA), June 14, 1900, p. 2.

ruled the Coeur d'Alenes? The Populists and Democrats always sympathized with those who represented disorder.³⁷

Other Republicans chose to emphasize the opportunity presented by the outbreak of violence in China. The old civilization of the Chinese had become moribund, and while the people had thus far “resisted improvements and fought those who in a spirit of friendliness sought to aid her,” they would now be commanded to change. The imperial powers, especially the United States, could guide the “almond-eyed and swarthy-skinned celestials,” and suddenly “400,000,000 souls” would be awakened to the opportunities of the modern world.³⁸

The Debate over Colonialism

While domestic conflicts and global affairs were used to shape political discourse, both sides geared up for the fight in Congress that would determine America’s relationship with its “new possessions.” McKinley had still made no declaration of policy regarding the islands taken from Spain, but that could not continue for long. There were pressing and intertwined issues pertaining to constitutionality, free governance, and trade that could not be perpetually postponed.

The President and his allies in Congress—such as Senators Albert Beveridge and Henry Cabot Lodge—were still actively making their case that the war in the Philippines

³⁷ “The Democratic Chinese Plank,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, date unknown, reprinted in *Aspen Weekly Times*, June 30, 1900, p. 3. For similar perspectives, see “A Glorious Issue for the Democrats,” *Ourray Herald*, June 14, 1900, p. 4; *Colfax Gazette* (WA), June 22, 1900, p. 4.

³⁸ “To Awaken China,” *Adams County News* (Ritzville, WA), June 27, 1900, p. 2.

was necessary. In his annual message to Congress in December of 1899, McKinley continued to stress that Aguinaldo and the other insurgent leaders had carefully plotted the attack of February 4. The insurgents represented a small minority, and it was now up to the military to secure order. No proper civilian government could be installed “until order is restored,” so all authority in the islands rested with the commander-in-chief and his subordinates.³⁹

McKinley still made no declaration of long-term policy. Instead, freshman senator Albert Beveridge took it upon himself to declare what America’s attitude should be. The trade possibilities with Asia were too vital to simply abandon, and he saw the Philippines as a gateway to those markets. “Our largest trade henceforth must be with Asia. The Pacific is our ocean. More and more Europe will manufacture the most it needs, secure from its colonies the most it consumes. Where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus? Geography answers the question. China is our natural customer.” For Beveridge, American profits and power were foremost, and he contended that “The power that rules the Pacific... is the power that rules the world. And, with the Philippines, that power is and will forever be the American Republic.” For that reason, the United States must “hold it [the Philippines] fast and hold it forever.”⁴⁰

While Beveridge suggested that the United States was to retain possession of the Philippines in perpetuity, and no mainstream Republican suggested otherwise at this time, the question of status remained. Though neither the President nor his supporters

³⁹ James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, vol. X (Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 166-174.

⁴⁰ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 9, 1900, p. 704-712.

initially presented a clear solution, Beveridge and Lodge considered the Filipinos totally unfit for American institutions. Beveridge claimed that “It is barely possible that 1,000 men in all the archipelago are capable of self-government in the Anglo-Saxon sense.” According to the Indiana Senator, this was a result of their racial qualities. In the same breath with which he called them mere “children,” he again stated “They are not capable of self-government. How could they be? They are not of a self-governing race. They are Orientals, Malays.” He did also declare that their education had only been inhibited by years of Spanish misrule, but he primarily attributed their incapacity to racial attributes. Henry Cabot Lodge saw the situation in much the same light. “There never has been... the slightest indication of any desire for what we call freedom or representative government east of Constantinople,” he said. “The form of government natural to the Asiatic has always been a despotism.” This was the mandate of biology. The “theory, that you could make a Hottentot into a European if you only took possession of him in infancy and gave him a European education among suitable surroundings, has been abandoned alike by science and history as grotesquely false.” Somehow, he did suggest that the Filipinos could better their race under American guidance, but he also made it sound as though this process would be so imperceptibly slow that it would require permanent American occupation of the islands. The claim that Filipinos, as a race, lacked the “capacity” to govern themselves would be used as one of the primary justifications of American occupation for the whole of the colonial period.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 9, 1900, p. 704-712, Mar. 7, 1900, p. 2617-2627. For historical works that have dealt with perceptions of Filipino “capacity,” see Glenn Anthony May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines: The Aims, Execution, and Impact of American Colonial Policy, 1900-1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 9-12, 76-126 *passim*; Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government:*

Proponents of expansion were eager to legitimize conquest and colonial rule, and their explanations of national intentions designed to fit imperial ambitions with American ideals. The defensiveness of McKinley's message to Congress suggested that the president intended to cling to the narrative of self-defense even as evidence to the contrary began to mount. In particular, information from western volunteers made it clear that the Filipinos did not launch an all-out assault on the American positions surrounding Manila. The correspondence between Otis and the War Department also made it clear that Aguinaldo had sought peace immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, but that his request was rejected by Otis. Despite renunciations of Henry Cabot Lodge, who joined the President in declaring that "They attacked us; we did not attack them," senators like Richard Pettigrew, George Turner, and John L. Rawlins (Democrat, Utah) questioned the account and presented proof that Aguinaldo had been treated as an ally and then betrayed, that Otis had provoked the war, and that the soldiers in the Philippines had committed atrocities against civilians.⁴²

Western anti-imperialists were just as willing as Lodge or Beveridge had been to frame the debate for the coming national campaign. While several expressed frustration with elements of the Republican program (or lack thereof), Senator George Turner provided one of the most extensive and complete critiques rather early in the session, in late January of 1900. As had so many anti-imperialists in 1899, he proposed a resolution

Race, Empire, the United States & the Philippines (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), especially 159-227; Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴² For just a few examples of this, see *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Dec. 14, 1899, p. 378-379, Jan. 8, 1900, p. 669-670, Jan. 22, 1900, p. 1038-1043, Mar. 12, 1900, p. 2763-2772.

designed to declare the status of the archipelago. It renounced permanent possession of the islands and declared that the objective of the United States was to offer protection to the independent Philippine nation that would be formed following the end of the current conflict. As he defended his proposal, he did agree with others that the Filipinos had no capacity “for Anglo-Saxon government, and never will have,” so statehood was not possible. But that did not mean that they should be governed by the kind of despotism advocated by those who supported the President. Though “their ideas of free representative government are crude,” and “they are unfitted to administer government based on an Anglo-Saxon model,” he considered it “an absurdity, if I may be pardoned the expression, to say that they are barbarians.” Too many Filipinos were educated for them to considered savages, and their society showed tremendous respect for peace and orderliness. They could not be integrated into the American system, but surely such people were entitled to self-government.⁴³

Turner also depicted a fear held by many from the West. If the Philippines were not to be set free, its people would have to be integrated into the American system. Even if the archipelago did not become a state or states in the union, Filipinos could not be legally excluded. Under the Constitution, “these people and their descendants would become citizens of the United States, although not citizens of any particular State.” The Filipinos would become citizens, he predicted, and they would have “perfect right and title to flow into any of the already organized States and to there assist in controlling their destinies, and, through them, the destinies of the American Republic.” Even beyond the

⁴³ For this paragraph and the following, see *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 22, 1900, p. 1038-1043, Jan. 23, 1900, p. 1053-1056.

threat of immigration there were dangers. Whether they came or not could prove trivial, for he presumed there could be no constitutional method of prohibiting or taxing the shipment of goods from the islands. This would effectively “debauch the labor of the country,” and “pit the 10,000,000 underpaid and underfed Filipinos against the mechanic, the artisan, and the laboring man of the land.”

Turner hit on the great conundrum that imperialists faced. The most idealistic expansionists in 1898 and 1899, such as Henry Teller, had argued that the United States would bring freedom and democracy to the “new possessions.” Yet if that great legal guarantee of American freedom—the Constitution—was extended over the islands, then their inhabitants would be free to immigrate wherever they pleased or ship their goods to the mainland. The threat of the latter proved too daunting for the administration to face, especially in an election year. The next political confrontation would take place as the President and his allies announced their rejection of the idealist position in favor of pragmatic colonialism.

While the Philippines remained foremost in everyone’s minds, soon a debate over something as seemingly trivial as a tariff for Puerto Rico would force the administration to reveal its intentions. Of all the islands the United States had recently claimed, Americans may have already been most sympathetic to the inhabitants of Puerto Rico. They had not rebelled against American rule but instead were remembered for welcoming the invasion force under General Nelson Miles. Then, in August of 1899, one of the most powerful hurricanes ever recorded in the Atlantic barreled through the island of Puerto Rico, killing at least 2,500 and causing \$20 million in damage. Clearly the people of the island needed assistance, but no act had yet established the nature of relations between

Puerto Rico and the United States, and the Treaty of Paris had left the power to define the relationship solely with Congress. In his annual message to Congress in December, the President called for a direct aid bill, but then added that it was “Our plain duty” to establish free trade between the island and the mainland. He clearly did not foresee the fight that would ensue.⁴⁴

The great oddity about the fight over the Puerto Rican tariff (also known as the Organic Act of 1900 and the Foraker bill, for the Ohio Senator who managed it in Congress) was that the debate was not in actuality about the tariff itself or for that matter just about Puerto Rico. Though President McKinley had been opposed to the customs duties with the hope that favorable legislation would encourage economic recovery on the island, he quickly reconsidered when anti-imperialists declared that Puerto Rico was an integral part of the United States and they denied that Congress had the power to erect such boundaries. Anti-imperialists argued that the Constitution followed the flag, and so the same legal freedoms that existed in territories like New Mexico also existed in the island possessions. McKinley, and the vast majority who understood the logic of American overseas imperialism, contended that the colonies were not part of the U.S., and Congress should hold plenary power over customs, governance, and even citizenship status. This principle needed to be demonstrated, especially before such an issue would arise for the more controversial Philippines. As if to prove that this was merely

⁴⁴ Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico During U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 55-56, 142; Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 75-77 ; Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 208-209; Morgan, *William McKinley*, 463-464; Göran Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism: American Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics at the Turn of the Century* (Lund, Sweden: Esselte Studium, 1975), 69-70.

symbolic, the tariff rate was set eighty-five percent below the standard rate. Though some did try to claim that it still constituted a protective tariff, the debate itself was really about colonialism and the limits of Congressional power. For supporters and opponents alike, the tariff fight was about what could be done to the colonies, especially the ever-troubling Philippines.⁴⁵

The greatest question of the debate pertained to the legal classification of the Puerto Ricans. The original bill presented by Foraker was somewhat contradictory in that it included the low tariff, and thus made clear that Puerto Rico was not integrated into the American body, yet it also granted citizenship to the inhabitants of the island. It simultaneously established a civilian government, but allowed few openings for Puerto Rican self-government. Henry Teller especially pointed out the juxtaposition in which the people were integrated into the American system but the island and its government were not. Foraker explained that this was his intention, but he stated that when “we adopted the word ‘citizens’ we did not understand... that we were giving to those people an rights that the American people do not want them to have.” He did not believe that the grant of citizenship would have limited the plenary power of Congress to rule Puerto Rico as it wished. In response, Teller asked aloud if the Puerto Ricans were made citizens, then “are we not bound to extend to them all the rights and privileges of the people of the United States? Are we going to have a section of country where there are citizens, where they take the oath to obey the Constitution every time they hold office, and yet treat them as foreigners?” Soon enough Foraker amended the bill, and the

⁴⁵ Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 208-212; Morgan, *William McKinley*, 464-465.

residents of the island were labeled as “citizens of Puerto Rico” who were “as such entitled to the protection of the United States.” This new construction, though no less awkward than the previous version, did further establish the line of division between the colony and metropole.⁴⁶

By drawing legal distinctions between American territory and the insular possessions, the Foraker bill was designed to create the legal basis for a system of colonialism. While Teller had consistently argued that even a democracy like the United States could possess colonies, he also reiterated his claim that there was a difference between authority and propriety. In this case, he did agree that Puerto Rico could be governed differently than territories had been previously. Still, he wanted to “extend to them all the privileges which are consistent with their relations to this Government save that of citizenship.” Unlike the statements of Beveridge or Lodge regarding the Filipinos, Teller had “no doubt of their [the Puerto Ricans’] ability to manage their own internal and domestic affairs practically without our super vision.” Teller’s vision differed markedly from that of the most aggressive expansionists, and for that reason he was soon forced to admit that his association with them had been a mistake.⁴⁷

Teller accepted the underlying legal contention of the imperialists, namely that Congress held plenary power of the acquired islands. Most western anti-imperialists argued otherwise. Foremost among them was William V. Allen. He challenged Foraker

⁴⁶ José A. Cabranes, “Citizenship and the American Empire: Notes on the Legislative History of the United States Citizenship of Puerto Ricans,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 127, no. 2 (1978): 427-433; *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 2, 1900, p. 2471-2473.

⁴⁷ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 14, 1900, p. 2873-2876.

in a number of exchanges on the floor of the Senate, forcing the friend of McKinley to repeatedly admit that—in his view—the Puerto Ricans had no guaranteed legal rights. Allen instead claimed that “When we ratified the treaty of Paris, Puerto Rico became as much a part of the territory of the United States as New Mexico or Arizona.” Rather than colonies, he viewed the insular possessions as no different than territories. The Constitution made no allowance for anything else. Furthermore, he did not consider the people of Puerto Rico to be so exceptionally different from others who had been integrated into the American body, and so there was no basis in necessity for unrestrained colonial authority. The people of Florida and Louisiana were of much the same stock when they were annexed, he said. The people of Puerto Rico were also “substantially the same people who dwell in South America. There is much of the Mexican in their nature; much of the blood of all the people who dwell in Central and South America, in Venezuela, for instance... Everyone of these South American countries has a republic.” Even if they were not suited to American forms of self-rule, they were undoubtedly capable of governing themselves. Whether the island would be independent or integrated into the American system, the people must have free government. Race did play some part in Allen’s analysis, just as it had for most anti-imperialists, but like others in Congress he attacked the proposed bill as both unwarranted and unconstitutional.⁴⁸

Western Republicans in Congress were virtually silent during the debate, as they frequently had during all the controversies of the McKinley administration. During the Puerto Rico debate, one of the rare exceptions was Senator George Perkins of California.

⁴⁸ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 2, 1900, p. 2474, Mar. 15, 1900, p. 2924-2926, Mar. 30, 1900, p. 3517-3521.

He had always been a skeptic of expansion, and it was for that reason he had asked for the recommendation of his state legislature before the vote on the Treaty of Paris.

Despite his own fears that it could provide the people of the Philippines easy entry into the U.S., he had voted for the treaty as the legislature advised. Still, he had only succeeded in briefly setting aside his anxieties.

Certainly, Perkins was not the only supporter of the administration who must have sensed the danger of expansion. His vocal support for the Foraker bill demonstrates the priorities of some western Republicans, and those from the Pacific Coast especially.

While others remained silent, Perkins was proud of the fact that he was on the committee that assembled it in its final form. Despite the low rate of tax it imposed, he suggested the tariff was necessary for protective purposes, because “More than one-third of the entire population [of Puerto Rico] is of the negro or mixed race,” and perhaps as many as half of the population qualified as “poor.” In particular, the nation’s sugar production was endangered by this cheap labor. While some idealists wanted to claim “the Constitution follows the flag,” all such language was “merely claptrap and untrue.”⁴⁹

Perkins primarily focused on Puerto Rico in his discussion, but when the proposal was challenged, he made its real intent clear. South Carolina’s anti-imperialist senator, Ben Tillman, attacked the bill on grounds much like those presented by Senator Allen, and he claimed that it was both unnecessary and unconstitutional. The Californian responded with a query: since Tillman supported free trade with a region where labor was valued at “15 to 20 cents a day,” was he also “in favor of free trade with the

⁴⁹ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Apr. 2, 1900, p. 3636-3639.

Philippine Islands?” When the Tillman said he was, Perkins was aghast. “Is it right for that cheap labor, that peon, contract labor, to come into competition with American labor?” he asked rhetorically.⁵⁰ Perkins understood they were legislating to establish the principle. Even if the tariff rate between the U.S. and Puerto Rico was nominal, there was nothing to say the rate could not be higher when it was time to legislate for the Philippines. While the Philippine Organic Act was two years away, it was vital for western Republicans to set the precedent before the election.

By this time, Senator George Turner of Washington was one of only two non-Republicans representing the Pacific Coast in either house of Congress. Though in many ways he agreed with Perkins that the immigration and labor threats posed by the people of the Philippines posed serious risks to American industries and white workers, he also thought the bill made a mockery of American law. He had already attacked those who had been in favor of “admitting the labor and the products of the labor of the underpaid and underfed people of the Philippine Islands,” but he thought the problem could not be counterbalanced by another violation of the Constitution. Republicans had “apparently awakened” to the danger, “which they are now trying to guard against.” Imperialists were covering their weak spot, but it seemed to Turner that they were simultaneously discarding the foundations of American law and justice.⁵¹

While the debate was heated, the results were little in doubt. The final version of the bill was passed in the Senate on April 3, by a vote of forty to thirty-one. Of the

⁵⁰ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 23, 1900, p. 3209-3213.

⁵¹ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 13, 1900, p. 2812-2820, 2176-2882.

westerners who had supported Bryan in 1896, only John P. Jones and William Stewart of Nevada voted in favor of the bill.⁵² The House decision a week later was much the same. There, the bill passed 161-153, with no western Populist, Democrat, or Silver Republican support.⁵³ No western Republicans in either house of Congress voted against it. Members of the reform coalition, now all united behind the cause of anti-imperialism, understood that to vote in favor would have provided sanction for a system of colonial rule. It was impossible to oppose such a policy and support the legal framework that the system would be based upon. Western Republicans pulled together with the same understanding. Unequal colonialism—which would provide benefits to Americans without altering their definitions of citizenship or posing risks to interests within their domestic economy—required such a law, and they happily approved it in a campaign year.

The passage of the bill could not heal all of the wounds created in the fight. Nationally, the bill became an object of scorn among Democrats and Republicans alike. While westerners in Congress divided clearly along party lines, it was not so for the rest of the House or Senate. Samuel McCall of Massachusetts and Charles Littlefield of Maine joined twenty other House Republicans in harsh criticism of the original bill; all but six eventually voted in favor of it. In the Senate, even the imperialist Albert Beveridge initially opposed the tariff in favor of free trade, but he too found it to be a fight he could not win. Republicans directed their vitriol at the bill in part because of

⁵² *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Apr. 3, 1900, p. 3697-3698.

⁵³ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Apr. 11, 1900, p. 4071.

growing clamor for free trade with the island. In this regard, free trade was deemed a moral imperative in no small part because the President had promised it and pronounced it to be a humanitarian measure. When McKinley changed course later, he did so in silence. He had also never made a statement regarding the legal status of the Puerto Ricans. When Congress proposed the erection of tariff boundaries, even the nation's Republican press charged that they were either defying the will of McKinley or mistreating the nation's new citizens. Papers throughout the East and Midwest were particularly vociferous in their attacks upon the bill, including portions of the Republican press in Boston, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and Chicago.⁵⁴

Surprisingly, these eastern and Midwestern critics of the policy were joined by some of the most emphatic imperialists on the Pacific Coast. The editor of the *Evening Tribune* of San Diego, California, for example, consistently denied that McKinley had rethought his position, and went on to call the tariff bill "The most radical measure of change in the policy of the United States since Abraham Lincoln's proclamation of emancipation." While they admitted that southern California fruit producers might approve of a tariff to protect their own interests, "nine out of ten of our fruit growers will raise the thought... that we are unfairly handicapping these new citizens of our nation."⁵⁵ The otherwise pro-McKinley *Oregonian* of Portland also detested the measure and even suggested it was for the "Protected Interests." These interest groups hoped to deny the basic right of free trade with Puerto Rico that should exist between all states and

⁵⁴ Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism*, 73-81.

⁵⁵ "The Puerto Rico Tariff," *Evening Tribune* (San Diego, CA), March 1, 1900, p. 2; *Evening Tribune*, March 7, 1900, p. 2; "Puerto Rico's Tariff," *Evening Tribune*, March 16, 1900, p. 2.

territories; undoubtedly “they will give the Philippines the same treatment.”⁵⁶ The *Oregonian*’s writers had contended that American culture and institutions would civilize and invigorate Asia: “in confidence and reliance we can indulge the hope to bring the Asiatics up to our level of ambition and comfort.”⁵⁷ Tariffs and other boundaries created resentment rather than a sense of common interest or identity, and it was no way to cement the American position in any of the islands. In a similar tone, the editor of the staunchly Republican *San Francisco Chronicle*, argued that the “general laws and the Constitution of the United States must cover the islands.” Though the paper also noted the importance of trade, it suggested that the purpose of this trade was to extend both the nation’s “commercial identity” and the “spirit of American nationality,” and both traits would mutually reinforce each other.⁵⁸ After the bill passed, the paper printed two complete pages of an angry attack on the tariff, and its overall argument was hard to miss. Though again it gave a nod to economic self-interest, nearly every paragraph that discussed the Filipinos or Puerto Ricans was littered with the word “citizen.” As soon as possible, the author demanded, it was Congress’s duty to “pass laws which will give such of the inhabitants of the Philippines as we have made citizens of the United States by annexation all the benefits and immunities of the Constitution.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “A Discouraging Beginning,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), April 9, 1900, p. 4.

⁵⁷ “Two Views of Oriental Development,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), April 7, 1900.

⁵⁸ “Nationalizing Our Islands,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 9, 1900, p. 4.

⁵⁹ “The Duty of Congress Toward the Inhabitants of the Philippine and Porto Rico Islands,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 1900, p. 6-7.

Republicans were reaping the whirlwind they had sewn over the course of nearly two years. They had claimed that democracy and freedom followed the flag, and that their policy was one of “benevolent assimilation.” They had never mentioned whether citizenship accompanied the flag, nor did they devote many words to the limits of their benevolence. Only the most bellicose among them had openly called for a genuinely colonial policy, and much of that language had only been employed quite recently. Ultimately, members of the Republican press were only guilty of taking the administration at its word. Yet the attacks on the administration were far from universal, and in fact the Republican press in most of the western states rarely criticized the tariff or any other provision of the bill. The examples from Oregon and California stand as representatives from the only two far western states that had voted for McKinley in 1896, and there was little threat that the party would be dethroned in either in 1900. There, Republicans could demand free trade to benefit their industries and the full, permanent integration of all the islands to guarantee long-term connections while also fulfilling the moral imperative many expansionists employed to justify the policy. In other places in the West, Republican papers expressed few opinions on the subject, but when they did they were nearly all supportive of the bill.

In Nebraska and Colorado, the Republican press was largely dismissive of the attacks upon the proposal. Generally speaking, they did not discuss the issues of citizenship or governance for the people of Puerto Rico. Instead, they characterized the bill as merely a tariff measure. The whole fight was overblown and partisan, they said, and there was no need for the public to take it seriously. The *McCook Tribune*, for instance, declared that an analysis of the tariff “shows that it will be vastly more

advantageous to Puerto Rico as well as to the United States than that which formerly existed in the island.”⁶⁰ The formerly anti-imperialist *Omaha Daily Bee* also adopted this view. “The popocratic press must be very hard up for political capital when it has to fall back upon the Porto Rican muddle,” claimed one writer for the paper. A tariff of just fifteen percent of the normal rate was hardly worth protest.⁶¹ Colorado’s Republican press likewise categorized all opposition protests as a sign of the “desperate straits” the Democrats were in as they sought to “make a mountain out of this molehill” for the coming campaign.⁶²

Further to the west the emphasis was different. Writers for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* understood full well that the tariff was never about taxation. In a series of pieces over weeks leading up to the vote, they attacked Democrats who argued that the Constitution “follows the flag” to any acquired territory, “no matter what the circumstances or the character of its people.”⁶³ The purpose of this bill was to emphatically reject “the plea that our new possessions come immediately within the constitution, with explicit rights to statehood.” The Democrats were trying to “put us in a dilemma where we should have had to confess that statehood must go ultimately to the Philippines or else that we must turn them over to Aguinaldo.”⁶⁴ Analysis in the *Morning*

⁶⁰ *McCook Tribune* (NE), March 2, 1900, p. 4.

⁶¹ “Puerto Rican Twaddle,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 26, 1900, p. 4.

⁶² “Where the Puerto Rico Bill is At,” *Ouray Herald*, April 12, 1900, p. 2; “The Law for Puerto Rico,” *Wray Rattler*, April 14, 1900, p. 2; *Akron Weekly Pioneer Press* (Akron, CO), April 20, 1900, p. 1.

⁶³ “Republicans Fall Into Line,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 22, 1900, p. 4. See also “Relapse and Recovery,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 31, 1900, p. 4.

⁶⁴ “Puerto Rico Bill a Law,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 12, 1900, p. 4.

Olympian was much the same. While the paper initially supported a more inclusive relationship with Puerto Rico, the opinions presented soon shifted. Even Britain's free trade policies did not extend to its colonies, one writer explained. A month after the bill had passed, another stated that "Wages paid in Puerto Rico should more closely approximate those paid on the mainland before the average islander should be permitted to come here in competition with the American wage-earner."⁶⁵

Any differences between the reactions in western states should not be overstated. Of course, there was no shortage of Washington papers that were just as dismissive as those of Nebraska or Colorado.⁶⁶ But it was more than coincidental that Washington Republicans saw the Foraker Act's significance in terms of citizenship and immigration. Local papers had confidently described their state's location as a logical gateway to Asia, but the implications of that depiction were not lost on them. Interestingly, the act had not actually prohibited immigration from Puerto Rico, but because it denied the people of the island American citizenship it was presumed to de-incentivize the movement of people to the mainland. It also hypothetically allowed for future immigration restriction, something that the Washington Republicans would play up in the coming campaign.

⁶⁵ *Morning Olympian*, February 17, 1900, p. 2, April 14, 1900, p. 2, May 15, 1900, p. 2. It should also be noted that even those papers that did not explicitly link the tariff and immigration issues emphasize the need to establish the constitutional principle. See "Kindness for Puerto Rico," April 4, 1900, and "Puerto Rico and Alaska," April 10, 1900, p. 4, *Spokane Daily Chronicle*; *San Juan Islander*, March 15, 1900, p. 2.

⁶⁶ "A Partisan Howl," *Morning Olympian*, March 22, 1900, p. 2; "Must Have a New Issue," *Colfax Gazette* (WA), March 30, 1900, p. 4; "Where is the Bad Faith?" *Colfax Gazette*, April 13, 1900, p. 4.

The Gold Standard Act

At the same time that Congress debated the Puerto Rican tariff, the McKinley administration made one more effort to secure new banking and monetary legislation. Their efforts in 1898 had led to humiliating defeat, but by the Fifty-sixth Congress opponents in the Senate could no longer block their way. As had been the case with the Foraker Act, it was deemed especially desirable to pass such legislation before the upcoming election. Both demonstrated the position of the administration on key issues, and both would be presented as “safe” in that they recognized and legalized the established order as it was.⁶⁷

The proposed “reform” measures, presented in a single bill, would make gold the currency of ultimate redemption, take \$150,000,000 of greenbacks out of circulation, authorize the Secretary of the Treasury to issue bonds if the greenback redemption fund dropped below a certain level, re-fund the national debt and postpone its final repayment, and allow national banks to issue bank notes equal to the value of federal bonds they owned. While not a wholesale overhaul of the existing currency system, the changes contained in the bill were nonetheless substantial.⁶⁸

The reaction of the western reformers was—of course—overwhelmingly negative. They had waged the last national campaign against the gold standard, and they remained opposed to every element of the new bill. Allen, Turner, Teller, and others

⁶⁷ H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America*, 482-484; Lewis L. Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 169-171.

⁶⁸ Gold Standard Act of 1900, *United States Statutes at Large XXXI* (1900): 45-50; James Livingston, *Origins of the Federal Reserve: Money, Class, and Corporate Capitalism, 1890-1913* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 122-125.

took turns accosting the sponsors of the bill, especially senators Nelson W. Aldrich of Rhode Island and William B. Allison of Iowa. There was not enough gold in the world to function as the global medium of exchange, they declared yet again. The destruction of the greenbacks and the further marginalization of silver would contract the currency supply and leave producers at the mercy of creditors. Such a proposal was sure to produce national calamities, they predicted. Senator Teller even suggested that a recent famine in India was a direct result of Britain's attempt to impose the gold standard on her colony.⁶⁹

While they denigrated the gold standard, the bill's opponents in Congress actually focused more of their ire upon the proposed entrenchment of a money and banking system that would be even further removed from democratic influence. All remembered the bond issue of the Cleveland administration—done without Congressional approval—and none looked forward to a repetition of it. Turner called it a “most remarkable means to the accomplishment of the ends sought,” as it essentially gave the Secretary of the Treasury policy-making power. Allen took the same principle even further, suggesting that it was tantamount to handing “over the power of taxation to the Secretary of the Treasury. By it we abdicate that power, for when we say that the Secretary of the Treasury may issue Government bonds ad libitum, as he sees fit, as this bill provides, then the question of taxation to meet the interest upon those bonds is merely perfunctory,

⁶⁹ See especially *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 18, 1900, p. 941-950, Mar. 3, 1900, 2509-2514.

because the foundation for the taxation has been laid by the mere caprice of an executive officer, and the taxation can not be escaped.”⁷⁰

That kind of authority in the hands of a lone bureaucrat was too much for them to accept. Teller pointed out that such a centralization of power was especially dangerous because of the pressure likely to be applied upon anyone in that position. A congressional investigation had just exposed letters sent by A. B. Hepburn (vice president of National City Bank of New York, the predecessor of modern Citibank) to Secretary Gage in which the banker expressed hope that his institution could retain its position as a national depository, and then emphasized the political contributions of its director as evidence that it should. Obviously, said the senior senator from Colorado, such examples only made clearer the dangers of investing such power to a person in an appointed position. Allen likewise stated that the Republicans were “debtors” to those he called “the gold gamblers and the money sharks,” and for that reason control of the national purse strings must never be taken from the national legislature.⁷¹

The greatest danger posed by the bill pertained to the position it gave to national banks. Teller believed “that 75 per cent of all the loans made in New York City by those banks are made to speculators and to operators, and that it is a very common thing for the banks themselves to engage in such operations. If they do not do so, their officers do.” This gave the banks a direct interest in the outcomes of certain markets (especially for commodities, according to Teller). Such institutions were too deeply involved in profit-

⁷⁰ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Feb. 7, 1900, p. 1603-1610, 1616-1621.

⁷¹ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 18, 1900, p. 941-950, Feb. 7, 1900, p. 1616-1621; “Secretary Gage and National City Bank,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1900.

making activities to simultaneously be given power over the money in circulation. At any moment they could disperse or withdraw their bank notes and inflate or deflate the currency as they wished. These concerns were at the heart of the issue. As Representative Edwin Ridgely (a Kansas Populist) put it, “the real issue involved in this whole money question is not between gold and silver alone; it is, in fact, a question of who shall issue and control our money supply. Shall we by this legislation make a gift of this great power and profit to the bank syndicate?” Properly, this was a power that must be held by the people and those chosen by them. “All money is the creation of law. In a republic all laws emanate from the people; hence the power to create and issue money is inherent and belongs to all the people.” Money, as Peffer had insisted at the beginning of the 1890s, was a tool to be used for public benefit. Instead, the proposed bill would give control of something as fundamental as currency to private enterprises, and there were few controls to determine how they employed that power.⁷²

In their analysis of the bill, Populists predicted it would only accelerate the destruction of traditional American freedom. Allen considered it a harbinger of the near future, in which the nation would “raise up a great army of industrial and agricultural serfs” to take their place of independent farmers and laborers.⁷³ Ridgely declared that “We are approaching the rapid culmination of the most tyrannical forms of capitalism.” He believed that world events were demonstrating the guiding influence of capitalists,

⁷² *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Dec. 14, 1899, p. 423-425, Jan. 31, 1900, p. 1341-1344.

⁷³ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Feb. 8, 1900, p. 1639-1641.

and this bill only represented one form of this power. In the same speech, he noted that armies were being

directed in their operations to support and extend the rights and interests of capital, even in the present wars waged under its orders against the Filipinos and the Boers; we hear the bold demand of capital claiming its right to conquer those people in order that it may appropriate nature's rich resources, using our armies to hold the people there in subjection, while capital works them at a few pennies per day, throwing their product of rice, tobacco, sugar, cotton, etc., on the market to force down wages of our home people.

The American people would not long tolerate the continuous degradation of their lifestyles. The next step, and one that Ridgely seemed to look forward to, was socialism.⁷⁴

All western reformers agreed about the source of the bill. The financiers, bankers, and bondholders were the driving force that demanded it. Interestingly, while this was an old enemy for all of them, their rhetoric was different than what it had been for much of the last ten years. While Allen made a single reference to the “money power,” he spoke just as much of the “plutocrats” and “aristocrats.” Ridgely attacked the gold trust—presumably made up of those who had successfully hoarded gold and had gained wealth through its appreciation in value. Turner claimed that the purpose of the bill was to “establish in favor of the national banks of the country a monopoly in the issue and control of all money save gold, and thereby to establish the great trust of trusts, around which all others shall revolve.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Dec. 14, 1899, p. 423-425.

⁷⁵ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Dec. 14, 1899, p. 423-425, Feb. 7, 1900, p. 1603-1610, 1616-1621, Mar. 3, 1900, p. 2513.

The transition was not unimportant, but the meaning was also not totally novel. They now spoke of trusts, syndicates, and combinations and the plutocrats or aristocrats who owned them, but hints of conspiracy remained. Even the moderate Teller claimed that the banks could not be trusted because “We saw in 1893 a panic in this country created by the banks.” He claimed they had intentionally caused the market crash in order to provide the “object lesson which the President of the United States declared the American people had to receive in order that he might secure the repeal of the purchasing clause of the Sherman Act.”⁷⁶

The new language served as a substitute, and one that had a certain utility. The great mergers that took place in the last years of the 1890s and first of the 1900s had reaffirmed the importance of the Populist “anti-monopoly” stance. The discussion of financial conspiracy had at times overshadowed their broader critique of concentrated wealth and centralized power, but the alternative rhetoric that they turned to made the financial “trust” just one of many—and all posed their own threats. Simultaneously, this shift marked a difference between the most serious reformers and those who had adopted silver as an issue but remained conservative in all other regards. As the silver-only conservatives soon gravitated to McKinley (often dropping the money issue along the way), the differences between the parties only became clearer.

McKinley and his managers in Congress had been more careful than they were two years ago. They had secured the necessary votes well before the final determination was to be made, and both sides understood the inevitability of its passage just as soon as

⁷⁶ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Jan. 31, 1900, p. 1341-1344.

the dates were set. On March 6, the Senate passed the bill by a vote of forty-four to twenty-six. Seventeen took no part in the vote, including Edward Wolcott, James Kyle of South Dakota, and William Stewart of Nevada—the former owner of the *Silver Knight-Watchman*. One week later, it was the House’s turn to do the same. The vote was somewhat closer—166 to 120, with sixty-six House members either absent or voting “present”—but still never in doubt.⁷⁷ McKinley had secured a substantial legislative victory.

The two sides had effectively laid the groundwork for the campaign of 1900 well before it was officially underway. Republicans went into the campaign by declaring their devotion to trickle-down prosperity within a united nation, one in which the divisions of class and race were perpetually muted by the acceptance of orderly hierarchy. Empire secured the markets while gold provided the monetary foundation for economic stability based upon capital investment. In many ways, the events of the preceding four years had led to the recent culmination of their party’s domestic and foreign policy initiatives. Over the course of 1899 and early 1900 challenges had emerged in opposition to their novel system, but in each case they had responded by reinforcing its structure rather than abandoning it. These challenges provided opportunities to demonstrate and clarify their vision of American wealth and power.

The western reformers maintained a starkly different dream of what America should be. As the administration had bolstered the gold standard, implemented a colonial

⁷⁷ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Mar. 6, 1900, p. 2589-2590, Mar. 13, 1900, p. 2863.

policy, and informally allied the nation with America's oldest enemy, Democrats and Populists classified these developments as boons for special interests and threats to republican institutions. If political and economic freedom were to be saved—in America and around the world—the grip of powerful corporations and authoritarian government had to be loosened. They looked forward to the coming campaign as a chance to reverse the present course of the nation, and they looked for Bryan to lead them in the contest against militaristic empire and arrogant wealth.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONTEST OF 1900 AND THE DEFEAT OF REFORM

In the summer of 1900, William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan campaigned against each other for the presidency of the United States for the second time in four years. The nominations of the two parties had been mere formalities, and in many ways the previous campaign had never actually ended. Bryan had only strengthened his position as party leader since 1896, and McKinley had justified every action taken during his term of office as though he was running against that same opponent of economic orthodoxy. In July and early August it remained only for the two contenders to make their acceptance speeches, which would serve as the keynotes of the campaign.

McKinley acknowledged his party's nomination in a speech on July 12, just a week after the Democratic convention. In it he boasted of the successes of the administration, especially the recent passage of the Gold Standard Act. The second half of this address discussed the liberation of Cuba, the "beneficent government" which had recently been established over Puerto Rico, and the "obligations imposed by the triumph of our arms" in the Philippines. In those islands, those who had been "misled into rebellion" were dispersed, and conditions were improving. There were no longer any obstacles to the restoration of "peace and stable government" in the islands, but the real "obstructionists are here, not elsewhere." In his conclusion, the President had the audacity to declare that the same party that "broke the shackles of 4,000,000 slaves" was, under his own guidance, responsible for the "liberation of 10,000,000 of the human

family from the yoke of imperialism.” With no apparent sense of irony, McKinley chose to emphasize the anti-colonial legacy of the war with Spain.¹

The President had attempted to summarize his term, and he did so by underscoring the security Americans could feel and power their nation now held. While he had suggested that his policies had created prosperity and safety in the new American empire, his opponent chose to highlight the terrible consequences of those policies. Bryan would do so by focusing on the one issue he considered the most dangerous and meaningful of them all: imperialism.

While imperialism and militarism were the chosen focus of his address, Bryan integrated his view of domestic ills into his critique of American foreign policy. On August 8, a crowd of 40,000 people gathered in Military Park in Indianapolis to hear Bryan open with the declaration that “the contest of 1900 is a contest between democracy on one hand and plutocracy on the other.” Through their actions in the last four years, Republicans had shown themselves to be “dominated by those influences which constantly substitute the worship of mammon for the protection of the rights of man.” McKinley had dared to suggest that the war in the Philippines was for the benefit of the Filipinos; Bryan called it a war for corporate profit.²

From there, Bryan went on to describe the incongruence of imperialist policies with American principles. The war in the Philippines did not stem from a misunderstanding or the encouragement of disloyal Americans as McKinley had

¹ Walter LaFeber, “Election of 1900,” in *History of American Presidential Elections*, vol. 3, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971), 1939-1942.

² For Bryan’s speech, see LaFeber, “Election of 1900,” 1943-1956.

suggested, but it emanated from the principle of self-government that had been espoused by the founders of the American nation. The right to govern oneself was not bound to any one group of people, and while he believed that there may be differing “degrees of proficiency,” he added that it was a poor “reflection upon the Creator to say he denied to any people the capacity for self-government.” The nature of colonialism also gave lie to the talk of uplift, for education would make the subject peoples all the more aware of their oppression and could only intensify their desire for freedom.

Bryan then laid out his own vision of what was possible. The Philippines should be guaranteed their freedom and then protected from outside interference, just as Cuba had been. This would set the stage for America’s future greatness, in which its moral authority would extend far beyond the influence it could ever attain as a colonial power. The United States could seize the opportunity to put its own house in order and be a republic in which “every citizen is a sovereign, but in which no one cares to wear a crown.” At the same time, it could be “a republic, increasing in population, in wealth, in strength, and in universal brotherhood—a republic which shakes thrones and dissolves aristocracies by its silent example and gives light and inspiration to those who sit in darkness.”

In the campaign of 1900, Bryan and his allies offered voters an alternative path for American development, one based upon policies of moral influence abroad and the restraint of corporate power at home. Comparatively speaking, the differences between the two sides had not been as dramatic in the “battle of standards” of 1896. The previous contest had been based upon contrasting economic policies, the likes of which were rare in the Gilded Age. While the campaign rhetoric had spoken to certain concerns regarding

egalitarianism in the republic, the Bryan campaign did not confront many of the key facets of industrial power. Conversely, the Democratic and Populist campaign at the dawn of the twentieth century was focused squarely on the rights and freedoms of people in a world that they believed was dominated by aggregated wealth.

The stark contrast between the two sides did not make the campaign any easier for Bryan or his western allies. McKinley was thoroughly entrenched after four years in office, and it would take a monumental effort to unseat him. In no small part due to his involvement, the westerners had taken a rather severe thrashing in the mid-terms, and now they faced the challenges associated with once again working out the differences between the parties involved in their coalitions. Bryan's bid for the presidency was also threatened by fractures in the national Democratic Party and, even more ominously, the hesitance with which eastern anti-imperialists embraced him as the candidate of the movement.

Despite the many reasons to consider their defeat likely due to those reasons alone, the evidence suggests that the western reformers did not beat themselves. The outbreak of a new war (and their opponents opposition to it) allowed western Republicans to focus on foreign policy, as they had in 1898. They successfully shifted the terms of debate from economic reform and equal rights to a discussion of power, profit, and patriotism. They rarely refuted the claims that corporations grew in power by the day, and they blandly denied that there would be any downside associated with the new global market order they were establishing.

The debate between imperialists and anti-imperialists necessarily took center stage in the campaign. No other single issue could so fully embody the opposing visions

each side presented. No other issue could simultaneously evoke the kind of emotions that it could. For western anti-imperialists, the cause related to all those they had worked for over the course of the decade. For all anti-imperialists, it represented the cause of self-government and the maintenance of American traditions.

Anti-Imperialism in the East

The tendency to downplay the political importance of American anti-imperialism began with the earliest historians of the movement.³ While some have attempted to argue that its greater significance has been downplayed, that same general trend continues up to the present time.⁴ This interpretation is understandable due to the consistent focus of historians upon eastern conservative anti-imperialists.⁵ The fact remains that the anti-imperialists who have been studied previously had a rather pessimistic view of the political situation, and after 1900 they moved on quickly—perhaps even with a degree of relief at their own failure. While the purpose of this dissertation has been to focus upon those who have formerly been neglected, a description of the circumstances facing

³ Fred H. Harrington, “The Anti-Imperialist Movement in the United States, 1898-1900,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (1935): 211-230.

⁴ While Michael Patrick Cullinane argues that the League and the movement were substantial forces in American society, he also contends that their real significance came outside of the realm of high politics. See Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism: 1898-1909* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), especially 1-10.

⁵ For one of the few works that attempts to defy that stereotype, see Erin Leigh Murphy, “Anti-Imperialism During the Philippine-American War: Protesting ‘Criminal Aggression’ and ‘Benevolent Assimilation’” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2009). This work is probably most valuable for its account of women’s anti-imperialism and the difficult relationship between women in the movement and those men who dominated the League.

eastern anti-imperialists provides a more complete picture of the national situation leading up to the campaign.

Though there was much they all shared, there were substantial divisions among the anti-imperialists. All agreed on the same basic principles—that the United States should not possess overseas colonies; that American government required the consent of the governed; and that the spirit of militarism that had followed the War of 1898 was contrary to the nation’s values—other elements of their analysis differed markedly. Of course differences were bound to exist among any group of people and, as Robert Beisner has shown, even conservative individuals found their own reasons to oppose empire. Still, whatever divergence existed between the views of George Hoar and Andrew Carnegie or Carl Schurz and E. L. Godkin, these differences seemed insignificant when compared with their own intellectual distance from Bryan and his allies. But it is patently false to suggest—as at least one historian has—that there was one group of “real” anti-imperialists whose ideas were the basis for the arguments of all others.⁶

As should be plain by this point, the ideological differences that separated the two groups were indeed substantial. They differed on the importance of the tariff, on currency and banking matters, and, most fundamentally, on the state’s role in the management of the economy and the equalization of wealth. It should then only be expected that they would view imperialism in different lights. Based upon the material presented in the preceding chapters, it is clear that Populists and their western allies often

⁶ Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), vi. On the set of common values that united anti-imperialists, see Fred H. Harrington, “The Anti-Imperialist Movement.”

described industrial and financial capitalists as the source of the new aggressive policy and additionally that accumulated wealth would ceaselessly seek new fields to exploit. Because of these views, they saw the fight against imperialism as a logical extension of their battle against “monopoly” at home, and further that the first of these contests could not be won while the other was ignored. The eastern conservatives they attempted to cooperate with in 1900 were, at best, ambivalent about such reform, while at worst they were openly hostile to it.

While it would be equally wrong to suggest that the conservatives did not believe that economic factors played a role in overseas imperialism, it held a different kind of relevance for them. The eastern conservatives who dominated the League downplayed economic factors generally, but when they did make such statements they largely treated the subject in the same kind of disjointed way that they discussed the other consequences of inequality in industrial America. Though the conservatives were aware that changes had taken place, they rejected the claim that there were insurmountable structures of power that had arisen in the years after the Civil War.

Instead of examining the whole of the American economic system, eastern anti-imperialists frequently attributed the conquest of the Philippines to “greed.” This attack on greed was usually vague and not infrequently rooted in the same kind of issues which most interested them. When he described the likelihood of future wars that an imperial America would have to face, Carl Schurz claimed that the “greed of speculators working upon our Government will push us from one point to another.” As a man who was devoted to the elimination of corruption and to the development of civil service reform, this was a reasonable statement for him to make. It was not, however, a condemnation of

wealth so much as it was an extension of his arguments in favor of a minimalized state. Schurz went further in other statements, and in one instance he even suggested that the only ones who desired to keep the islands were “Jingoes bent upon wild adventure, and some syndicates of speculators unscrupulous in their greed of gain.” Certainly, like all the classical liberal reformers of the era he readily agreed that the excesses of certain capitalists were repugnant. Interestingly, many of his remarks also focused upon “speculators,” like those who he believed had profited from the “dishonest” money of Civil War era. Despite these misgivings, there was a clear difference between the claim that greedy capitalists would try to exploit the Philippines and the suggestion that capitalists (including industrialists and proper financiers) were behind it all and that the inequality created by capitalism was inherently at fault.⁷

This conservative discussion of “greed” is instructive as it demonstrates the limits of their analysis. While western reformers used the term, it was used just as widely—if more vaguely—by conservatives. For members of the eastern elite, greed was a quality that an individual possessed, one suggestive of a personality flaw or a moral lapse. Greedy or corrupt persons were aberrations, not the norm; industrialist and writer Edward Atkinson actually claimed that greed and commerce were antithetically opposed to each other. Markets did not create greed, at least in the sense that they did not force people to covet wealth at the expense of others. By placing the emphasis on morality and the

⁷ Carl Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, vol. VI, ed. Frederic Bancroft (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 17, 93; David M. Tucker, *Mugwumps: Public Moralists of the Gilded Age* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 15-25.

failure of individuals, they avoided any attack on the system that allowed the attribute to flourish.⁸

In rare instances conservatives appropriated the language of radicals, and historians have often used these to suggest that all anti-imperialists blamed economic factors. One biographer of prominent League member Moorfield Storey felt the need to include a statement in which the old mugwump attributed imperialism to “the alliance between financial and political powers,” despite the author’s admission that such declarations were rare for him. The historian who examined Mark Twain’s attack on imperialism claimed that the great writer feared an “alliance between the trusts, the politicians and the military,” but in the example he provides Twain is merely critiquing those “money changers” who had “bought up half the country with soldier pensions”—not so much capitalists as politicians who used the corrupting influence of money for their own advantage. Another historian attributed similar attacks on corporate power to both Erving Winslow, the wealthy merchant who served as secretary of the original Anti-imperialist League (based in Boston), and George Boutwell, a conservative Republican who was president of both the Boston League and later the American Anti-Imperialist League (based out of Chicago). The same writer willingly admitted that Winslow’s economic critiques were uncommon and ill-defined. In the case of Boutwell, he was known to occasionally attack imperialism as the tool of the wealthy, but these should be

⁸ Judy Arlene Hilkey, *Character is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 88; Tucker, *Mugwumps*, 24. For more on the Mugwumps and their views of industrialization, see Tucker, 15-25, 121-122; John G. Sproat, *The Best Men: Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 205-242.; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 137-141.

seen as exceptions. It was never a developed point in any of Boutwell's works, and more frequently he tried to distance himself from any serious critiques of capitalism. In an earlier speech that seems more in line with his general views, he told an audience that "I have no hostility to wealth, I have no great fear of trusts." He emphasized that he was no radical, even if he was forced to work with some who were.⁹

The real source of anti-imperialism among the eastern conservatives was their belief that perpetual subjugation ran against historic American practices and beliefs and was contrary to the demands of a republic. Schurz, Atkinson, Hoar, Carnegie, Boutwell, Edwin Burritt Smith, and undoubtedly others used the writings of the founders and America's greatest statesmen to describe national anti-colonial, anti-militarist traditions. Washington's farewell address—in which the first president warned against involvement in foreign entanglements—was one particular favorite. All their references to "consent of the governed" were also self-consciously borrowed from a famous statement by Abraham Lincoln.¹⁰

The new course was not only unappealing because it was novel, but because it seemed great peril would accompany it. Edwin Burritt Smith, secretary of American

⁹ Ann L. Leger, "Moorfield Storey: An Intellectual Biography," (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1968), 281; Jim Zwick, ed., *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 74-80; Richard E. Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 44-47; George S. Boutwell, *Bryan or Imperialism: Address by the Hon. George S. Boutwell* (New England Anti-Imperialist League, 1900), 11.

¹⁰ For just a few examples, see Carl Schurz, *American Imperialism: The Convocation Address Delivered on the Occasion of the Twenty-Seventh Convocation of the University of Chicago* (1899), 4, 11, 29-30; Edwin Burritt Smith, *Essays and Addresses* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1909), 191, 207, 248-249, 255-256, 261, 284; George S. Boutwell, *The Crisis of the Republic* (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1900), 73, 122-124, 133; Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (New York: The Century Co. 1901), 179, 205.

Anti-Imperialist League (based out of his home city of Chicago), only added to the anti-imperialists' indebtedness to the martyred president when he used Lincoln's statement that "this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free." If the United States was to become "the military base of the new despotism," then no one should be surprised if "the present ill-concealed impatience of constitutional restraints will grow until only the forms of representative government remain."¹¹ Carl Schurz agreed that it was a violation of American principles to rule others without consent and that to do so set a dangerous precedent, but to incorporate new lands as they had been in the past posed dangers all its own. Even if the United States was only interested in acquiring territories closer to home, was it safe to grant citizenship to those with "the mixture of Spanish, French and negro blood on the West India Islands," he asked. Tropical peoples could not be integrated into the body politic, and despotic rule was equally impossible. According to Schurz, the only option was to leave all of these peoples to govern themselves.¹²

Conservatives relied heavily on arguments of just this sort, and to these they added attacks upon the moral basis for imperialism. Public morality already was, according to their historians, a specialty of the mugwumps, but in 1899 and 1900 it was the common language employed by all anti-imperialists. Edward Atkinson and others repeatedly brought up an earlier message of the President in which the commander-in-chief declared that the forced annexation of Cuba would amount of "criminal

¹¹ Edwin Burritt Smith, *Essays and Addresses*, 257-258.

¹² Carl Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers*, 13-14. These arguments were the same as those Schurz had continuously employed since the 1870s, when as a member of the Senate he opposed the annexation of Santo Domingo. See Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 22-34.

aggression.” Surely, they suggested, the forced annexation of Philippines was no less criminal.¹³ Others noted that the most vigorous defenders of imperialism spoke more of economic and strategic benefits of expansion rather than the morality of the action. George Hoar responded to the most bombastic declarations of fellow Republican Albert Beveridge with the observation that “the words Right, Justice, Duty, Freedom were absent, my friend must permit me to say, from that eloquent speech.”¹⁴ The industrialist Andrew Carnegie joined in as well, and he denounced the kind of militarism and rule by force which was certain to accompany an imperial policy. “Moral force, education, civilization, are not the backbone of Imperialism,” he said. “The foundation for Imperialism is brutal physical strength, fighting men with material forces, war-ships and artillery.”¹⁵

Discussion of morality was bound to come up in any debate that centered upon the conquest of a distant country, and in this regard there was little difference between the eastern conservative view of imperialism and that of the western reformers. All considered the conquest of the Philippines abhorrent, and all were troubled by the concentration of power around an imperial government. Most of the arguments of the mugwumps and conservatives were also used by Populists and Democrats, and it is for that reason that some have incorrectly claimed that one derived their interpretation from the other. But the distinctions between them remained large. The critique of the

¹³ Edward Atkinson, *Criminal Aggression: By Whom Committed?* (Brookline, MA: 1899); Carl Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers*, 24; Edwin Burritt Smith, *Essays and Addresses*, 243-253.

¹⁴ Richard E. Welch, *George Frisbie Hoar and the Half-Breed Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 260.

¹⁵ Carnegie, *Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*, 176.

conservatives stuck close to the causes that already drove them: minimal government, an informed electorate, and a moral code based upon restraint. The mugwump solution to these ills involved a combination of public instruction and electoral influence. If politicians could not be convinced to conduct affairs professionally, then they would have to be replaced. Put simply, they called for personal accountability, not structural change. It was in this regard that the perspective of Populists and Democrats contrasted most sharply with that of the prestigious easterners.

While their differing views of imperialism were insignificant obstacles to cooperation in their own time, other dissimilarities combined with a general distrust to make an effective coalition impossible. Even among conservatives, Republicans like George Hoar kept many members of the League at arm's length, sure their motive was nothing less than the destruction of his party.¹⁶ Hoar was even less capable of viewing the westerners as allies, as he had long ago established himself as one of the fiercest opponents of the Populists and western Democrats in Congress. He had consistently ridiculed westerners for any talk of the existence of a money power, and on the whole he thought the Populists no better than a mob of malcontents, led by demagogues, who wished to take from those who had done better than themselves. During a relatively brief debate over the arrest of Jacob Coxey in 1894, he stared down senators Allen and William Stewart as he delivered the conservative rebuttal to their defenses of the "general." His low opinion of the westerners was largely reciprocated. In a letter to a friend, Richard Pettigrew lumped together Hoar and Lodge as examples that proved that

¹⁶ Welch, *George Frisbie Hoar*, 225-226, 229, 242.

“there is no independence in the East,” and he further accused the two senators of having “abandoned their convictions on the great economical and national questions at the beck and nod of the money-lenders of their States [sic].”¹⁷ While it is fascinating that Pettigrew and Hoar were soon defending each other from charges of treason on the floor of the Senate, Hoar also demonstrated the limitations of such a limited partnership. When he was not attacking the administration for its war of aggression in the Philippines, the senator from Massachusetts devoted an inordinate amount of time in his speeches to the defense of William McKinley, support for the gold standard, and the benefits provided by “good” trusts. As if to explain his position further, in May of 1900 he sent a letter to William Jennings Bryan in which he assigned the blame for the passage of the Treaty of Paris to both the President as well as to the nation’s leading Democrat equally. But while he said “President McKinley has been honestly misled” by his advisors, Hoar intimated that Bryan was not so innocent. In his conclusion, he reaffirmed his loyalty to the Republicans even suggested that Bryan’s followers were the real supporters of imperialism. The small degree of cooperation in the Senate did not signify Hoar’s conversion to any new beliefs; he was still the partisan hack he had been throughout his career.¹⁸

The suspicion or partisanship of the eastern anti-imperialists was not responsible for all of the obstacles to coalition. Both sides viewed each other with an intense distrust

¹⁷ Richard F. Pettigrew to Garrett Droppers, 26 April 1898, Richard F. Pettigrew Collection, Pettigrew Museum, Microfilm edition (hereafter, RFP Papers), (Reel 21).

¹⁸ George F. Hoar to William Jennings Bryan, 15 May 1900, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter, WJB Papers), Box 24; Welch, *George Frisbie Hoar*, 262, 267-268.

born of both substantial ideological differences and a history of clashes in Congress and on the stump. A quick review of some of the top names of the Anti-Imperialist League can further illustrate this point. Some were guilty of old transgressions. George S. Boutwell, president of the League from its formation until his death in 1905, had been out of the political limelight for twenty years by the time he took that post. Despite that fact, forty years earlier he had been Treasury Secretary under Grant, and it was at his urging that Congress had passed the Coinage Act of 1873 (the “Crime of ‘73” to many in the West). Former senator and Secretary of State John Sherman was one of the capitol’s arch-conservatives for over a generation, and it was he who had helped Boutwell formulate that same currency bill and then manage it as it was swiftly adopted by both houses of Congress. Most of the mugwumps had earned their ill-repute among westerners more recently. In the 1896 campaign, the editor and civil service reformer Carl Schurz had been more active in his opposition to Bryan than he had been in any contest since he led the mugwump revolt in 1884. In the same campaign, E. L. Godkin informed readers of *The Nation* that it was perfectly acceptable for businessmen to coerce labor into opposition of the Democratic candidate. The industrialist and free-trade economist Edward Atkinson, one of the chief pamphleteers of the League, was so well-known for his anti-silver articles that in 1899 one Populist paper still identified him as “the great juggler of figures for the Republican party.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Walter T. K. Nugent, *Money and American Society, 1865-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 158-171; Paolo Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 185; Hans L. Trefousse, *Carl Schurz: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 277-279; *The Dawn* (Ellensburg, WA), May 12, 1899, p. 2.

This distrust manifested itself in clear ways. Eastern anti-imperialists were hesitant to contact western leaders, and western politicians likewise feared the consequences that would come with a close relationship to those so different than themselves. The case of Andrew Carnegie and William Jennings Bryan best illustrates this latter point. Carnegie was one of the few eastern anti-imperialists of consequence who was in direct correspondence with Bryan, but while the Nebraskan tried to keep the dialogue between the two open he simultaneously sought to keep it out of the public eye. In December of 1898, the two had held a private meeting in New York which left the industrialist so impressed he decided to publish an article endorsing Bryan's presumed presidential run in 1900. Bryan was warned of Carnegie's intentions by a friend in the press who strongly advised "against permitting public endorsement of you by promoter of homestead riots [sic]." Bryan hesitated, then took the safest course available. "I have not discussed [the] interview publicly," he told Carnegie, "and prefer that you do not." He denied that he was as yet a candidate for any office, and then pointed to the necessary limits of their relationship. "You and I agree in opposing militarism and imperialism, but when these questions are settled we may find ourselves upon opposite sides as heretofore." He understood he had little to gain and much to lose from an alliance with the world's leading steel magnate. After the ratification of the Treaty of Paris, their correspondence withered away to practically nothing.²⁰

²⁰ A. Brisbane to William Jennings Bryan, 23 December 1898, William Jennings Bryan to A. Brisbane, no date, William Jennings Bryan to Andrew Carnegie, 24 December 1898, WJB Papers, Box 22; Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 289.

Few conservative anti-imperialists even tried to do what Carnegie had done. As 1900 commenced, it was apparent that the Nebraskan would again take the Democratic nomination. Their denunciations of McKinley should have made anti-imperialists of all stripes eager to support the most viable alternative, but most from the East could not even bring themselves to initiate correspondence with Bryan. Instead, someone was forced to take the position of intermediary. Elwood Corser, a Minneapolis banker and Silver Republican, took on this role. It may have been through his banking connections that Corser found himself in correspondence with Smith, the Chicago reformer and banker who was secretary of the American Anti-Imperialist League. Corser hoped to open up the lines of communication between easterners and westerners, but his efforts were largely in vain. In February, Smith informed the Silver Republican that the best course Bryan could follow would be to make the next campaign about imperialism and civil service reform—one of the other great concerns of many mugwumps. In fact, Smith even suggested that such a platform “will be especially effective if this is coupled with the charge that the controlling motive for the acquisition of the Spanish islands is spoils.” Perhaps most importantly, for Bryan to win over the “many conservative men who opposed his candidacy in 1896” who were now “coming to regard him more favorably,” the Democrat’s Kansas City platform had to be “as free from objection as possible.”²¹

Smith’s letter was a portent of the kind of relationship many of the conservative anti-imperialists envisioned: they would instruct and the Bryanites would have to follow

²¹ Edwin Burritt Smith to Elwood S. Corser, 26 February 1900, WJB Papers, Box 24; Göran Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism: American Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics at the Turn of the Century* (Lund, Sweden: Esselte Studium, 1975), 174.

along or suffer the electoral consequences.²² What they demanded was the abandonment of the issues which had so effectively won the West four years earlier. They would be replaced by sound liberal issues, the kind that would have been perfectly acceptable to any supporter of Grover Cleveland. When it came to this, Bryan was not in a mood to listen. The conservatives—influential though they may be—were only one of many groups who demanded his attention, and all claimed the right to dictate his agenda. If he was going to follow anyone, it was not going to be his erstwhile enemies.

With their own conflicted feelings toward Bryan and no reason to believe he would take what they considered the prudent course, many anti-imperialists wanted to explore the possibility of a third party. A new party thrown together at the last minute would have had no chance of victory, but some believed it could do to McKinley as the Gold Democrats had done to Bryan in 1896: provide an outlet for those unwilling to commit political apostasy. At a meeting held on January 6, 1900, anti-imperialists interested in the third party option—including Senator Richard Pettigrew—met at the Plaza Hotel in New York. According to Pettigrew's unreliable account, written well after the fact, it was decided then and there to form a new party and that Carnegie himself would provide the funding. This plan was abandoned when those who would soon form

²² Nearly all of the letters from conservative anti-imperialists presumed their author's right to set the Democratic platform. Smith (and vicariously Schurz) called for civil service reform, while he and all others demanded that currency planks must be either de-emphasized or left out entirely. See David Starr Jordan to William Jennings Bryan, 7 February 1900, Edwin Burritt Smith to William Jennings Bryan, 30 June 1900, W. A. Croffut to William Jennings Bryan, 7 July, 1900, WJB Papers, Box 24. It should be pointed out that Corser recommended that Bryan follow the course prescribed by Smith and Schurz. See Elwood S. Corser to James K. Jones, 27 February 1900, Elwood S. Corser to William Jennings Bryan, 6 March 1900, 12 April 1900, WJB Papers, Box 24.

U.S. Steel forced Carnegie to reconsider.²³ In reality, there was no such agreement at the meeting, and evidence suggests that Pettigrew was himself too deeply committed to Bryan to have been contemplating other candidates at the time. Instead of calling for the formation of a new party, it was agreed to postpone that decision while maintaining a non-partisan approach. This did not kill interest in the third party initiative, and talk of it continued to drift about while such a step became increasingly unlikely.²⁴

Proponents of the third party option continued to organize behind the scenes. Carl Schurz began serious discussions on the subject with Moorfield Storey and Edwin Burritt Smith in March. Though Smith showed little initial enthusiasm for the plan, all three remained too keenly interested to ignore the possibility. Bryan was too repugnant to all of them for the option to be discounted without proper exploration. They played a part in organizing a “Liberty Congress,” a gathering of anti-imperialists to be held in Indianapolis after the two major party conventions. If the Democrats did not make themselves an attractive alternative to the rule of McKinley, the meeting could either be

²³ Richard F. Pettigrew, *Triumphant Plutocracy: The Story of American Public Life from 1870s to 1920* (New York: Academy Press, 1921), 275-276, 323-328. This account is largely accepted in the following: E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 217; Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1972), 188-189.

²⁴ The best account is provided by Göran Rystad in *Ambiguous Imperialism*, 168-169. There is absolutely no corroborating evidence for Pettigrew’s statements in *Triumphant Plutocracy*, and his own manuscript collection provides ample counter evidence. He may have had a more extensive—if not deeper—correspondence with many eastern anti-imperialist leaders than William Jennings Bryan did, but nowhere in these letters was there any discussion of third-party activity. See Richard F. Pettigrew to Carl Schurz, 1 February 1900, Richard F. Pettigrew to Edwin Burritt Smith, 23 January 1900, 29 January 1900, 6 February 1900, Richard F. Pettigrew to Irving [sic.] Winslow, 7 March 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 23; Richard F. Pettigrew to Edwin Burritt Smith, 25 April 1900, Richard F. Pettigrew to Irving [sic.] Winslow, 4 May 1900, Carl Schurz, 22 May 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 24. As will be demonstrated later, Pettigrew was committed to putting Charles A. Towne on the ticket with Bryan and was desirous that the campaign should be waged against both empire and aggregated wealth. This seems unlikely for someone who was seriously considering the abandonment of the whole reform ticket.

transformed into a nominating convention or it could set the stage for a separate convention. Up to the very last moment, the conservative anti-imperialists continued to seek a way out of what they saw as a Faustian bargain.²⁵

Populism and the Fusion Campaign

Whatever the eastern conservatives thought of Bryan, it seems to have concerned him little. He seemed much more concerned about securing the West as he had in 1896 and laying out the guiding principles of the campaign—both of which were done with little reference to the eastern conservatives who were all too willing to provide him with advice. Bryan had some reason for concern. In many of the western states in 1898, the fusion of Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans had either failed to materialize or they it had suffered defeats. There had always been those among the Populists those who opposed fusion agreements unless the Populists themselves could dictate the terms of cooperation. The alliance of parties had been difficult to pull off when victory seemed certain. Now that the prospects had dimmed, Populists who favored fusion would have to either unify their parties or find a new way to win.

The anti-fusion “middle-of-the-road” faction had already made loud demonstrations in 1898. Davis Waite in Colorado and Henry Loucks of South Dakota

²⁵ For a sampling of the the discussion of a third party among Schurz, Story, and Smith, see: Carl Schurz to Edwin Burritt Smith, 11 March 1900, 19 March 1900, 26 March 1900, Moorfield Storey to Carl Schurz, 14 March 1900, Carl Schurz to Moorfield Storey, 20 March 1900, Edwin Burritt Smith to Carl Schurz, 17 March 1900, 24 March 1900, Carl Schurz Papers, Microfilm edition, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter CS Papers), Reel 67. Schurz was also (somewhat reluctantly) was in correspondence with Erving Winslow, who persistently warned against the third-party option. Winslow believed that separate ticket would either succeed in electing McKinley or alienate Bryan if he was elected. See Erving Winslow to Carl Schurz, 21 March 1900, 22 March 1900, 27 March 1900, Carl Schurz to Erving Winslow, 28 March 1900, CS Papers, Reel 67.

had both openly supported the Republicans that year, and both had decried what they saw as the domination of their organizations by the Democrats. The latter kind of response could be seen with increasing frequency in many places, even among those who maintained their Populist loyalties. In 1898, one Populist legislator had complained that the party's candidates did not represent the wishes of the party rank-and-file. "These matters are already fixed from the primaries up.... [N]o matter whether straight pop, fusion, or straight democratic, it is all the same outfit nominated by the democratic club in Omaha."²⁶ The remainder of the Nebraska Farmers' Alliance also sounded the call for mid-roaders. Twice in 1898 it had called for those "who are opposed to fusion with either wing of plutocracy" to meet and organize.²⁷ The story was much the same in Washington. Governor Rogers had fought with the mid-roaders over appointments in 1897, and his willingness to appoint Democrats to key posts had led many of this wing of the party to denounce their titular leader. By 1898, Rogers was forced to turn to Democrats for support during the fusion conventions.²⁸

There were, however, indications that the mid-roaders may not have been particularly strong. Also in 1898, the mid-roaders had held a lightly attended convention in Cincinnati. There, they renounced free silver and nominated Wharton Barker for president for the campaign of 1900, with Ignatius Donnelly (author of the preamble to the Omaha Platform) the vice-presidential candidate. The small number of attendees—well

²⁶ "Platform and Policy," *Independent*, July 14, 1898, p. 3.

²⁷ Jane Taylor Nelsen, ed., *A Prairie Populist: The Memoirs of Luna Kellie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 175.

²⁸ Thomas W. Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 237-242, 250-253.

under one hundred—and the peculiarity of nominations two years in advance of an election suggest a sense of desperation on the part of mid-roaders.²⁹ It had been much the same in Nebraska, where the Alliance’s calls for conventions had largely gone unanswered—despite the fact that in the same year the Populist state convention had over one thousand delegates in attendance.³⁰ Elsewhere, there is little evidence that the defection of Waite hurt the fusion ticket in Colorado in 1898. Even in South Dakota, after Loucks returned to the Republican fold, Populist Governor Andrew Lee managed to win re-election. This is not to say that the mid-roaders were insignificant, but instead that the destruction of the state Populist parties cannot be attributed to that one factor alone.

Those Populist leaders who supported fusion treated the middle-of-the-road faction as a real threat to stability, and it may have been one reason why some discussed the possibility of organizing yet another new party. Many western Populists had believed that the election of 1896 had so changed the political landscape that the existing party structures would prove inadequate in the future. While most claimed that it was the Democratic Party that was most likely to disintegrate, the reorganized party that they believed would emerge from it all would make the discomfort of fusion politics a thing of the past. In 1898, Richard Pettigrew—a relatively late convert to Populism—told several South Dakota political leaders that it was only a matter of time before a collection of Populists and Democrats came “to an agreement upon a new name for a new party which

²⁹ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, 2nd ed. (1931; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 383-387.

³⁰ The vote totals for temporary chair and, later, for governor indicate that just over one thousand were there as delegates. See “Poynter for Governor,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 3, 1898, p. 1; “Populists Called to Order,” *Omaha World-Herald*, August 3, 1898, p. 2.

will combine all the elements of reform into one solid mass.” The imperialist debate provided just one more cleavage that served to divide the old parties, and again provided evidence that a reshuffling was necessary. As the editor of the *Ellensburg Dawn* pointed out in 1899, “There are Bryan Democrats and Anti-Bryan Democrats, Expansion and Anti-Expansion Democrats, Silver Democrats and Gold Democrats.” Such divisions need not exist under the roof of a single party, and the writer called for “all of the different reform parties to drop their present names and all unite into one new grand party.” While the hopes of these Populists may have been overly optimistic, any other scenario was too hard to imagine. “I have little faith or confidence in the old Democratic leaders,” wrote the ever direct Pettigrew. “In fact, the Democratic party have not advocated a principle to fight for for twenty years, and when they happened to stumble upon a principle at Chicago, they hardly knew what to do with it.” Even among the fusion wing of the Populists, much skepticism of the Democrats remained. It was not until 1899 and 1900 that this talk died down in preparation for the coming campaign.³¹

Washington’s leading Populist, Governor John Rankin Rogers, took a very different approach to party reorganization. While in some of his correspondence in 1898 he had suggested that a new party could be formed in the future and the mid-roader frustrations overcome, he was less sanguine in other letters. He told Senator George Turner in their private correspondence that while “We in Washington are engaged in the

³¹ The two quotes from Pettigrew are from Richard F. Pettigrew to H. L. Loucks, 29 January 1898, 1 March 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 20. See also Richard F. Pettigrew to S. A. Cochran, 2 June 1898, RFP Papers, Reel 21. For the quote from *The Dawn* (Ellensburg, WA) and similar sentiments, see *The Dawn*, May 12, 1899; “Washington Letter,” *Frontier County Faber*, November 26, 1896; J. M. Snyder, “Voice of the People,” *Independent* (Lincoln, NE), September 23, 1897, p. 1.

formation of a new party,” at the national level, “the battle of 1900 will largely be fought under the democratic name.” At the convention in 1898, he had aided the single-tax faction of the Democrats—likely with the hope that he could gain their support against future rivals from inside the coalition. His frustration with the mid-roaders (which he referred to as the “irreconcilable element”) and his projection that the Democrats would become the dominant party in Washington led him to officially join their ranks in April of 1900.³²

Few who still held office followed the example of Rogers. Instead, most Populist leaders sought an alternative means of securing the vote of the mid-roaders. In Pettigrew’s correspondence, he revealed his own preference for an early Populist convention in 1900. With “these new and aggressive issues” he declared that the Populists “should come bravely to the front, add to the Chicago platform those things which time has made necessary, re-assert the doctrines then asserted, and begin the fight, waiting for nobody.” He informed his associates in South Dakota that Marion Butler, the North Carolina senator and chair of the party’s central committee, held a similar belief. They needed to embark on an educational campaign, and the earlier it was commenced the better. The Democrats, on the other hand, did not want an early campaign, largely because they did not have the money available to fund one.³³ Fusion Populists could hold an early convention, name Bryan and their own choice for vice president (Pettigrew’s

³² John R. Rogers to W. H. Plummer, 29 March 1898, John R. Rogers to Maurice A. Langhorne, 20 March 1899, John R. Rogers to George Turner, 16 February 1898, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers; Riddle, *The Old Radicalism*, 252-253, 270.

³³ Richard F. Pettigrew to Thomas Ayres, no date (but likely December 1900), Richard F. Pettigrew to Howard Taylor, 13 December 1899, Richard F. Pettigrew to Charles A. Towne, 1 January 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 22.

favorite was the Silver Republican Charles A. Towne), and push the Democrats to accept their choice. As Pettigrew would tell Bryan in April, any mistake “will recruit the ranks of the Cincinnati [middle-of-the-road] wing of the Populist party,” and if the Democrats refused to follow the Populist lead, “serious consequence might follow.”³⁴

Bryan was unsure about a Populist candidate for vice president, but he had already made moves to shore up his support among the Populists. Perhaps the most important of these was the broad platform that he came to openly advocate before the year even began. To take a step back, it is important to emphasize how both contemporaries of Bryan and modern historians frequently labeled Bryan’s campaign of 1896 as simple or myopic.³⁵ Despite the loaded meanings and deeper reforms many people of the era associated with free silver, the movement for free silver has been described as a narrow and shallow emasculation of the Populist vision. But as mentioned in an earlier chapter, a coordinated drive for more sophisticated reform was simply not possible at that early date. The Democrats and Silver Republicans that made up so much of Bryan’s base of support remained divided on tariff and tax concerns, and few among them were willing to go as far as many radical Populists in their attacks upon monopoly and wealth. Bryan emerged as a leader who could pull these groups together, and he consciously understood that to do so required a simple platform.

³⁴ Richard F. Pettigrew to William J. Bryan, 9 April 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 23.

³⁵ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 106-108; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 202-206; Lawrence Goodwin, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 426-555.

The year 1900 would prove quite different than 1896. After his defeat in 1896, Bryan had continued to give speeches in favor of free silver, but he added a more sophisticated view of wealth and power along the way.³⁶ The increasing rapidity of mergers had forced those who supported silver in 1896 to take notice, so that Bryan soon joined Populists in their attack upon the “trusts.” Many from the western reform coalition attended a major conference in Chicago on the trust problem in September of 1899. Bryan delivered one of the featured addresses, in which he declared that “a monopoly in private hands is indefensible from any standpoint.” Unlike certain conservatives, “I do not divide monopolies in private hands into good monopolies and bad monopolies. There is no good monopoly in private hands.” To those who claimed that efficient monopolies provided goods and lower prices, he stated his opposition to “settling every question upon the dollar argument. I protest against the attempt to drag every question down to the level of dollars and cents.”³⁷ Bryan argued that it was the right of the people to control the market, and it was they who must have the ultimate decision. This fit well with the argument of the anti-monopoly Populists, and it dovetailed well with his interpretation of imperialism.

Added to anti-imperialism and anti-trust was the issue of 1896, free silver. Easterners had repeatedly called for silver to be kept out of the coming campaign, and in all likelihood even Bryan had hoped to de-emphasize it. Even at the beginning of the year, before he was regularly bombarded with letters from easterners, Bryan had

³⁶ Koenig, *Bryan*, 296-298.

³⁷ On the conference, see *Chicago Conference on Trusts: Speeches, Debates, Resolutions, List of the Delegates, Committees, etc.* (Chicago: Civic Foundation of Chicago, 1900), especially 496-514.

expressed to Pettigrew fear that the nomination of Towne for the vice presidency would “intensify the silver issue a little too much.”³⁸ Despite that, it was not to the advantage of Bryan to discard the old issue altogether. He had so thoroughly associated his leadership with the cause of currency and banking reform that to suggest that it could be dropped would only have left the door open for easterners to challenge his leadership.³⁹ Bryan also wanted to use silver to demonstrate his commitment to Populist-style reform. When one supporter asked him if he would abandon silver for the new issues, Bryan responded negatively. He denied that it was beneficial to support one (or two) issues when all three represented critiques of the policies pursued by the present administration. Furthermore, “The people who oppose the gold standard also oppose the trusts and imperialism and there are nine who oppose all three to one who favors the gold standard and yet opposes the trusts or imperialism [emphasis in original].” He then castigated the gold Democrats who had “left the party and did what they could to defeat the ticket.... Now they want to drive away the Populists and silver republicans who came to us when the gold democrats deserted.”⁴⁰ Bryan’s continued support for free silver was supposed to represent his loyalty to the other members of the fusion coalition.

Bryan and his closest allies set the fusion platform well in advance of the campaign’s official commencement. In May of 1899, Bryan had hinted that the three

³⁸ Richard F. Pettigrew to Charles A. Towne, 23 January 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 23.

³⁹ Even if this had not already occurred to Bryan, his friends and supporters throughout the country were telling him that they viewed it as likely. For a few examples, see Blanton Duncan to William Jennings Bryan, 21 April 1899, WJB Papers, Box 22; Charles A. Towne to William Jennings Bryan, 15 December 1899, WJB Papers, Box 23.

⁴⁰ William Jennings Bryan to Merrill, 26 April 1900, WJB Papers, Box 24.

issues were the most pressing and would hopefully be addressed in the next campaign.⁴¹ Charles Hartman, a Silver Republican and former member of congress from Montana, likewise told audiences that Democratic platform of the next year would focus upon the money question, trusts, and anti-imperialism.⁴² In late 1899, William “Coin” Harvey produced a new pamphlet entitled *Coin on Money, Trusts, and Imperialism*, in which his youthful protagonist debated all three subjects with major figures of the day.⁴³ And so it was with a great deal of satisfaction that Richard Pettigrew informed a friend in early January that the platform was set. “The issue will be the question of Imperialism and Militaryism [sic.], (as opposed to the doctrines of the Declaration of Independence,) this wretched currency bill [the Gold Standard Act], and the trusts.”⁴⁴ The emphasis upon all three issues had not been imposed by Bryan or any other leader, but had it come about more or less organically. Those westerners who remained committed to reform largely accepted that change on all fronts was necessary for the continuation of American institutions and ideals. Bryan did not lead them to reform, but he viewed the unfolding of events in the same light as had many of the Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans from the West. While he had not fully adopted the ideology of the Populists, his actions and words led many to see him as one of their own. “I think he is as good a Populist as

⁴¹ William Jennings Bryan, “The Next Democratic Platform,” *Aberdeen Herald*, May 4, 1899, p. 1, reprinted from *National Watchman*, date unknown.

⁴² “Washington Letter,” *Aberdeen Herald*, May 25, 1899, p. 4.

⁴³ William H. Harvey, *Coin on Money, Trusts, and Imperialism* (Chicago: Thomas Knapp Printing & Binding Co., 1899).

⁴⁴ Richard Pettigrew to James Conzett, 5 January 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 22.

any of us,” wrote Pettigrew to a friend.⁴⁵ While the most dedicated of the mid-roaders may have disagreed, Bryan and other members of the reform coalition had effectively developed a national platform with their western political base in mind.

Conventions and Campaign

By the spring, the convention season approached. The head of the national tickets were never in doubt, and generally speaking the planks of the platforms had already been determined. Despite the few significant surprises, the conventions offered another opportunity to demonstrate each party’s priorities. In particular, the vice-presidential nominations received a great deal of attention, and each clearly demonstrated a desire to emphasize a particular issue or shore up a needed base of support.

As Butler had hoped, the Populists did get their early convention. The fusionists began the meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on May 9—the same day Wharton Barker and the mid-roaders held theirs in Cincinnati. The platform that was adopted was a lengthy indictment of the ills that still challenged American producers, but it focused largely on the issues that all of the western reformers had already come to emphasize. The first section was devoted to finance, and it denounced the recently passed Gold Standard Act and pledged the party to ceaseless “agitation until this great financial conspiracy is blotted from the statute-books,” called for silver and greenbacks to replace national bank notes. The second section attacked land monopoly and trusts, and in response to this “overshadowing evil of the age,” it stated that “The one remedy for the

⁴⁵ Richard Pettigrew to Walter Price, 29 January 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 23.

trusts is that the ownership and control be assumed and exercised by the people.” The third major section was devoted to the evils of imperialism and militarism, which were policies “at war with the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the plain precepts of humanity,” and the platform demanded that the war in the Philippines be halted and the people guaranteed their independence. While the Populist platform would in many ways resemble that adopted by the Democrats nearly two months later, this was due to the transformation of the Democrats, not the collapse of Populist reform.⁴⁶

The only disagreement in Sioux Falls existed between those like Senator Allen, who favored a conference committee with the Democrats to select a nominee for vice president, and leaders such as Butler and Pettigrew, who preferred to name their own vice-presidential candidate. Those who favored naming the complete ticket were clearly hoping to deprive mid-roaders of the claim that they merely followed the orders of Bryan and the Democrats. In a brief but heated contest, one delegate shouted that easterners wanted to control the nomination, and that the real opponents of a Populist nomination came from “the Tory end of the country” who wanted “a moderate man—a veneered man.” Those who wanted to nominate won out, and Charles Towne of Minnesota was named to the ticket alongside Bryan. His selection demonstrated the importance of silver and the West to the Populists, and it was also clear that their delegates had no desire to cede the last of the national organization’s authority to the Democrats.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ LaFeber, “Election of 1900,” 1928-1931.

⁴⁷ Koenig, *Bryan*, 313-314; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 398-399; for more on the convention, and especially the nomination, see “Trouble Ahead for Populists,” *San Francisco Call*, May 9, 1900, p. 3; “Populists at Sioux Falls Cheer the Name of Bryan,” *San Francisco Call*, May 10, 1900, p. 2; “Standard Bearers Chosen by the Two Populist Conventions,” *San Francisco Call*, May 11, 1900, p. 1. Pettigrew was deeply involved in the

The Democrats held their convention in Kansas City, and the opening session began on July 4. Both the location and the date were intentionally loaded with symbolism. Though Bryan was not in attendance (following the tradition for favored candidates), the selection of a city so close to his home was a gesture at his certain nomination. Obviously, the anniversary of the nation's independence held a special meaning, especially for a campaign that would place anti-imperialism at the center of the debate. But July 4 was also the eighth anniversary of the Populist's Omaha convention, a day in which that body had proclaimed a "Second Declaration of Independence"—what some quite consciously considered to be the beginning of a new campaign to throw off the financial domination of Europe and the East.⁴⁸

It was easy for Populists or other western reformers to view the timing of the convention in this light, and some made this reading plainly clear. The portrayal of the convention in the *Rocky Mountain News* was based upon full recognition of the connotations that Bryan and his allies invoked. The opening page included a large split image, with Jefferson on one side holding up the Declaration of Independence and Bryan on the other holding up a paper titled "The New Declaration of Independence"—the presumed planks that would be adopted by the Democratic convention.⁴⁹ One writer

nomination process, and he demanded an independent nomination specifically to forestall the growth of the mid-roads. See Richard F. Pettigrew to Charles A. Towne, 18 April 1900, 24 April 1900, 27 April 1900, 1 May 1900, 16 May 1900, Richard F. Pettigrew to George H. Shibley, 25 April 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 24.

⁴⁸ Material on the convention in this and the following paragraphs comes from Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 257-261; Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan*, 320-324; Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 99-100.

⁴⁹ *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO), July 4, 1900, p. 1.

made clear that Bryan was the true follower of the Jeffersonian tradition. When he assumed the presidency, the author of the Declaration had “rescued the youthful nation from the centralizing tendencies of the Federal party, and gave to the republic a system of governmental principles which have ever been the light of the people in their contests against the aggression of organized and concentrated wealth and power.” At the dawn of a new century, a

power more insidious, more dangerous, more arrogant even than the despotism against which the men of 1776 rebelled, has gained a foothold in the republic, and it seeking to enthrone itself in the national government. It is the power of plutocracy that is seeking to elevate the dollar above the man, to create an empire within the forms of a republic, and to fasten upon the people a system of finance that will forever enslave the industrial classes and condemn the laboring poor to a life of continuous servitude.

Just as the founders had fought against the British plan to enslave the colonists, those who met in Kansas City opposed the “schemes of plutocracy and the money power,” and Bryan was “the Jefferson of 1900.”⁵⁰

Unlike the Populist platform, the Democratic version opened with a flourish—a reaffirmation of “our faith in that immortal proclamation of the inalienable rights of man.” Nearly half of the document covered the issues of imperialism and militarism, and specifically attacked colonial rule in Puerto Rico, the American military occupation of Cuba, and the “unnecessary war” in the Philippines. Because they further claimed that the “Filipinos cannot be citizens without endangering our civilizations,” and they “cannot be subjects without imperiling our form of government,” the platform favored an immediate declaration of policy by which the Philippines would be guaranteed

⁵⁰ The Day and Its Suggestions,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1900, p. 4.

independence. It also condemned the “greedy commercialism” that Republicans used to justify overseas conquest. While it did proclaim support for the extension of “the Republic’s influence among the nations,” that influence “should not be extended by force and violence, but through the persuasive power of a high and honorable example.” The second section of the platform pledged the party to “an unceasing warfare in nation, State, and city against private monopoly in every form.” After several paragraphs devoted to the potential for legal action against monopolistic combinations, a mere two paragraphs were devoted to the currency dispute. It fully reiterated the demand for free silver at the ratio of sixteen to one, and condemned the recently passed law for ceding federal authority over the currency to private corporations. Additional planks supported direct election of senators, opposed “government by injunction” and favored arbitration of labor disputes, and called for the creation of a federal Department of Labor.⁵¹

The Democratic platform offered much that could appeal to Populists, but the convention also snubbed Bryan’s western allies. Though Bryan thought very highly of Charles Towne, the Populist selection for vice president, Democrats at the convention had no interest in nominating a member of another party. Instead, they selected Adlai Stevenson, the Illinois bimetallist who had already served in that position in the second Cleveland administration. Stevenson was sound enough on the issues that mattered to Bryan, and his loyalty to the Democratic Party in both 1892 and 1896 made him acceptable to eastern and western wings of the party. If the nomination of Stevenson represented an olive branch to the eastern wing of the Democratic Party, it was a slap in

⁵¹ LaFeber, “Election of 1900,” 1919-1924.

the face to the Populists. No one wanted to replicate the confusion of 1896, in which Bryan had two vice-presidential candidates. But Bryan would not ask Stevenson to quit the race, and Towne's involvement in the election was important for the legitimacy of fusion. For those who hoped that either a new party would emerge or that Populists and Democrats would amicably come together, the withdrawal of Towne would represent the subservience of their party to the Democrats. Both before and after the Democratic convention, Populists fretted over such a possibility. Governor Poynter received a report from one concerned party member who feared the state's Populists would abandon the party if Towne withdrew. Pettigrew had warned Bryan repeatedly that he foresaw such a scenario if Towne were forced out. Despite the warnings, Towne had no desire to be a spare running mate. Unlike Watson, he knew Bryan well and had no desire to cause any further embarrassment for the campaign. He formally withdrew his candidacy shortly after Bryan's acceptance speech in August.⁵²

The Bryan campaign was constantly hamstrung by the delicate balancing act that it was forced into. Even so, the addition of anti-imperialism to an otherwise Populist platform forced anti-imperialists conservatives to take Bryan seriously. Not only did it encourage many eastern Democrats to return to the party, but Bryan's effective acceptance speech may also have killed the movement for a third party. Carl Schurz, one of the leading advocates of a separate ticket, attempted to tamp down some of the enthusiasm it had created, but even he was forced to admit that, "As to Imperialism, he

⁵² W. J. Waite to William A. Poynter, 17 July 1900, William A. Poynter Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society; Richard F. Pettigrew to William Jennings Bryan, 1 May 1900, 9 June 1900, RFP Papers, Reel 24; Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 266-268.

cannot do better than he has done in his speech.”⁵³ Bryan’s speech was delivered just days before the opening of the Liberty Congress, and it would prove difficult to rally support for a second anti-imperialist ticket in the field after Bryan had demonstrated his commitment to the issue.⁵⁴

When the congress met, the results were uninspiring for third-party advocates. Attendance was poor, and almost none fought against endorsing the Bryan campaign. Edwin Burritt Smith wrote to Schurz that this was representative of the whole movement, but he, Schurz, and Moorfield Storey continued to entertain the notion of an independent ticket up until nearly a month before the election. All three lined up behind Bryan in the end, but a large minority of those like them still found they could not stomach him and the ideas for which he stood. Conservatives were left to either accept Bryan as their candidate or they would abandon political anti-imperialism.⁵⁵

The Republican gathering in Philadelphia on June 19 bore little resemblance to the affairs that bookended the national convention season. While the presidential

⁵³ Moorfield Storey to Carl Schurz, 10 August 1900, Carl Schurz to Moorfield Storey, 11 August, 1900, CS Papers, Reel 68.

⁵⁴ Additionally, Schurz was in no position to assemble the organization his plan required. He had just received a personal blow a few weeks before when he had been notified of the sudden death of his youngest son, Herbert. He was shaken by the loss, and he ultimately decided not to attend the Liberty Congress. See Trefousse, *Carl Schurz*, 285-288; Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, 229-232. Many of the letters Schurz received in early August made reference both to his recent loss and included questions about his own condition. One of these, by Edwin Burritt Smith, also mentions this as the reason that Schurz will be unable to attend the congress. See Edwin Burritt Smith to Carl Schurz, 11 August 1900, CS Papers, Reel 68.

⁵⁵ On the Liberty Congress, see Edwin Burritt Smith to Carl Schurz, 18 August 1900, Moorfield Storey to Carl Schurz, 18 August 1900, CS Papers, Reel 68. On their lingering hopes for a third ticket, see Carl Schurz to Moorfield Storey, 20 August 1900, 25 August 1900, Moorfield Storey to Carl Schurz, 27 August 1900, CS Papers, Reel 68; Carl Schurz to Moorfield Storey, 1 September 1900, CS Papers, Reel 69. See also Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 127-130, 182; Schirmer, *Republic or Empire*, 200-203; Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism*, 251-255.

nominations had already been determined well beforehand in all cases, at least some controversy had stirred the Populist and Democratic assemblies. There would be none among the Republicans. Senator Edward Wolcott of Colorado acted as temporary chair, a reward for this loyalty in 1896 and thereafter. Henry Cabot Lodge, the avid imperialist, was then named permanent chair. Despite mild protests from McKinley and Hanna in the weeks leading up to the convention—not to mention his own public denials—Governor Theodore Roosevelt of New York had made himself the all-but-presumptive favorite for the vice-presidential nomination, taking the place of the deceased Garret Hobart. The eagerness which accompanied the selection of that self-proclaimed war hero and siren of imperialism suggested the mood of the delegates far more than any formal declaration could.⁵⁶

The party's platform opened with some revisionist history. It stated that four years earlier, when the Democrats offered no solution to the economic crisis other than "to coin silver at the ratio of sixteen to one," the Republican Party had promised to save the nation's economy with "a protective tariff and a law making gold the standard of value." Next, it congratulated the administration for leading the nation to victory in "a war for liberty and human rights." Ten million were "given 'a new birth of freedom,'" while the American people inherited a new global responsibility. These were the words that would be echoed in McKinley's acceptance speech a month later. The planks included vague anti-trust and pro-labor planks and warnings that business could only be

⁵⁶ For this and the paragraphs that follow, see H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 489-498; Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 213-219.

conducted if the public confidence in its government was maintained. A few additional words were used to praise the policy of the President regarding Cuba, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines without any explanation of that policy or that to be pursued in the future. On the whole, the document was as self-laudatory as possible without making any substantial statement about future policies, domestic or otherwise. All controversies, including the ongoing war in the Philippines, were avoided altogether.⁵⁷

The Republicans were playing a double-game. The anti-trust plank seemed out of place for a party with Mark Hanna as chair of its national committee. Weeks later, when he went on the campaign trail personally, Hanna would declare “There is not a trust in the United States.”⁵⁸ They also downplayed imperialism while making conspicuous use of the policy’s most vociferous advocates. McKinley had undoubtedly wanted to downplay these issues and viewed them as weak spots. He had instead hoped to emphasize conservative economic values and the safety that would be guaranteed by the maintenance of his own administration. But if he could not get those most interested in his success to follow that script, it is hardly surprising that local campaigns took on a complexion all their own.

The State Conventions and Fusion

The campaign in each western state contained certain unique features, though unlike two years earlier there was a national campaign that made certain issues central to

⁵⁷ LaFeber, “Election of 1900,” 1924-1928.

⁵⁸ Gould, *Presidency of William McKinley*, 225.

the debates throughout the region. As it had been all decade long, the shape of “development” was once again a topic of political discussion. Unlike national elections in the recent past, there was a foreign policy component present as well. At some moments it overshadowed the discourse of progress and prosperity, but in others it became part of that debate.

Fusion arrangements were once again made in Nebraska, Colorado, Washington, and elsewhere in the West, though the usual difficulties accompanied the arrangements. Because it was a national campaign year, there were actually two rounds of conventions. In Nebraska, the first set of fusion conventions took place in March to select delegates to their national conventions and also create party platforms. It may have been Bryan’s intent to use these platforms to reiterate his points of emphasis in advance of the meeting in Kansas City. The state Democrats used theirs to attack trusts and the gold standard, but well over half emphasized the injustice of colonialism. The Populists had even less to say regarding either money or trusts, and instead devoted nearly the whole of their platform to imperialism and militarism.⁵⁹

The conventions reconvened in Lincoln just days after the conclusion of the Kansas City convention. Bryan, Towne, and even James B. Weaver were in attendance, encouraging unity at every step. Such efforts were necessary. The large Populist convention held over 1,200 delegates, and even the widely respected Senator Allen had a difficult time maintaining order. The Governor’s vocal stands on the issues of imperialism and trusts put Poynter in a strong position, and this time he won the

⁵⁹ U.S. Works Progress Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1940), 254-259.

gubernatorial nomination of the fusion parties with little opposition. The Democrats were disappointed that they only able to obtain the position of state attorney general, but their representatives informed them that the Populists would give up no more. With little disagreement, the ticket was agreed to on July 12.⁶⁰

The relative harmony in Nebraska was absent in its neighbor to the west. In Colorado, the silver consensus appeared to be in jeopardy. Many Silver Republicans rejoined the party of McKinley and Hanna. Some Populists, including former Democrat Thomas Patterson, had hoped to bring members of the party into the Democratic camp, but this proved to be a long and more delicate process. The state's Democratic leaders themselves were increasingly opposed to sharing offices with the other parties, and there was a chance they would abandon the coalition altogether. There was reason for skepticism on the part of reformers as the planned conventions approached in mid-September.⁶¹

The greatest obstacle to fusion appeared to be the heads of the Democratic Party. At the first sign of difficulty, Governor Thomas declared fusion to be dead. Both Henry Teller and the writers for the *Denver Post* attested that the majority of delegates felt differently. In an unprecedented move, Teller and Patterson were given the opportunity to address the convention and plead for the renewal of the coalition. Before the delegates

⁶⁰ Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 78; "Convention Advance Guard," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 10, 1900, p. 1; "Fusion Conventions Today," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 11, 1900, p. 7; "Complete Fusion Effected at Lincoln," "Three Meetings Work for Fusion," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 12, 1900, p. 1, 5; "Poynter Named by Acclamation," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 13, 1900, p. 1-2.

⁶¹ Thomas M. Patterson to William Jennings Bryan, 9 June 1899, WJB Papers, Box 23; Charles S. Thomas to William Jennings Bryan, 16 May 1900, WJB Papers, Box 24; Alva Adams to William Jennings Bryan, 17 July 1900, WJB Papers, Box 25.

could vote fusion up or down, the Democratic conference committee took the opportunity to reconsider. Shortly thereafter, a fusion agreement was reached.⁶²

Through the arrangement, most state offices went to the Populists and Silver Republicans while the two House members, John Shafroth and John C. Bell, were re-nominated for their congressional seats. Democrats claimed the nomination for governor, and they selected James Orman, former mayor of Pueblo. Though they had acted arrogantly, the Democrats still desperately needed fusion. Their state platform was far milder than that made by the national party at Kansas City, and Orman's record of moderation hardly added to their appeal. Their bland candidate and platform illustrated their own anomalous position. Only fusion made the Colorado Democrats something more than the old party of laissez faire. The state convention of the Populists made statements against both overseas imperialism and the "Wardner [Idaho] outrages," and they also supported an amendment to the state constitution that would allow for eight-hour law. To this platform they added candidates with known records of labor advocacy. Their first selection for lieutenant governor was rejected by their fusion partners due to claims that he was a proponent of violence; their alternative selection, President David C. Coates of the Colorado State Federation of Labor, was accepted. While Democrats were

⁶² For this and the following paragraph, see Elmer Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller: Defender of the West* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1941), 331-332; Henry M. Teller to Tom Dawson, 13 September 1900, Henry M. Teller Papers, Colorado State Historical Society, Denver, Box 3, ff. 37; "The Greatest Silver Orators in Colorado Swayed the Democratic Convention," *Denver Post*, September 12, 1900, p. 1, 3; "Fusion Ticket Completed but Must be Changed," *Denver Post*, September 13, 1900, p. 1, 3.

to receive the highest state office, they had no chance of victory on their own in a state where the votes of militant organized workers were decisive.⁶³

Perhaps the strangest situation of all was in Washington. There, Governor John Rankin Rogers had succeeded in alienating at least some portion of both major fusion parties, but he maintained high political ambitions. He had fought mid-roaders among the Populists shortly after his election. Since then he had blamed the single-taxers among the Democrats for the fusion defeats of 1898 and delivered speeches against them in the months that followed. He had announced his conversion to the Democrats in the spring of 1900, distancing himself from support within the Populist organization. While most of Rogers's disputes had been factional and not due to differences in ideology, he was also out of place in this regard. Unlike most other Washington fusionists, he favored retention of the Philippines and argued that it would provide new markets in Asia, and so make Seattle one of the greatest ports of the country. He also felt that popular support for the war with Spain and anger over the deaths of Americans in the Philippines made anti-imperialism a risky proposition. As was the case with many western governors, he was widely regarded as a senatorial aspirant, and so the foreign policy statements of the governor should not be seen as just the offhand comments of a local politician.⁶⁴

⁶³ For the platforms, see "Platforms of Silver Voters," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO), September 12, 1900, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Thomas W. Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 231-269. For Rogers's views on expansion see "Rogers on Expansion," *Morning Olympian* (WA), July 6, 1899, p. 3; John Rankin Rogers to William H. Snell, March 8, 1899, John Rankin Rogers to New York *Journal*, April 11, 1899, Governor John Rankin Rogers Papers, Washington State Archives, Olympia.

All parties had agreed to participate in a single convention to make nominations, with a two-thirds majority vote required for a winning candidate. The delegates were apportioned so that the Populists and Democrats were evenly represented, while the Silver Republicans received a number roughly a third the size of the other two parties. These arrangements were agreed to well in advance of the convention, and some assumed the amalgamated convention would provide an opportunity for the anti-Rogers forces to unite. The exact opposite proved to be true. The alternatives to Rogers were, one after another, discredited or outmaneuvered. Rogers's friends at the *Seattle Times* dredged up lurid and personal stories on one rival in the weeks before the convention, practically removing him from consideration. Turner's deft maneuvering in the convention also made Rogers the only likely candidate for the nomination. While the anti-Rogers delegates were left divided and still looking for alternatives, the pro-Rogers Populists and Democrats came together without hesitation. Following the first rounds of balloting, votes began to shift to Rogers. Rogers emerged victorious after eight contentious rounds, but his victory did not heal any wounds.⁶⁵

The Governor had survived the convention, but divisions were obvious. The platform that was adopted was a blatantly anti-expansionist document which condemned "the twin relics of barbarism—imperialism and militarism—whether in the form of trusts

⁶⁵ For this and the following paragraphs, see Thomas W. Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 274-279; Richard Evans Fisch, "A History of the Democratic Party in the State of Washington, 1854-1956" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1975), 100-103; Winston B. Thorson, "Washington State Nominating Conventions," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1944): 108-111; "Rogers is the Nominee," *Morning Olympian*, August 30, 1900, p. 1; "Gov. John R. Rogers is Renominated," *Seattle Daily Times*, August 30, 1900, p. 1, 7. Early reports from one Republican paper are especially demonstrative of expectations heading into the convention. See "Rogers Defeated," *Morning Olympian*, August 28, 1900, p. 3; "Fusionists Are at Sea," *Morning Olympian*, August 29, 1900, p. 1, 4.

at home or greed of conquest abroad.” Rogers remained an outlier. To further emphasize their own hostility to Rogers, his opponents left the convention with a declaration that Senator Turner and Governor Rogers had bribed delegates and promised offices in exchange for votes. They publicly condemned the “cajoling and bull-doizing” of delegates by the pair and their representatives. It was hardly the image of unity that the fusion parties had hoped to project going into the campaign.⁶⁶

The Republicans in each state came together as if following a script. While there had been conflicts between silver or reform factions and dedicated conservatives at times earlier in the decade, now was not the time for that. The sweeping victories that many western Republican parties had won in 1898 gave them confidence that now was a time for banal unity rather than strife. All followed the script laid out by the Republican convention in Philadelphia. In Washington state, the Republican platform praised prosperity, which it claimed resulted directly from Democratic defeat. It added praise for the gold standard and American rule in the Philippines, where the inhabitants were “rapidly learning to appreciate and accept that kind of liberty which is known and understood only by the American people.” They then named a ticket of arch-conservatives led by gubernatorial candidate John M. Frink, one of the wealthiest men in King County. The Nebraska Republicans openly mocked fusionist fears of “imaginary evils threatening our country” and openly endorsed the gold standard for the first time in recent memory. Imperialism and militarism were described as un-American, but the platform denied that McKinley’s policies qualified. For governor, they nominated a

⁶⁶ On the platform, see “The Fusion Platform,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 30, 1900, p. 7.

German-American banker from Hastings, Charles Dietrich. In Colorado, Wolcott again was the dominant figure, but he understood that the party was in an especially vulnerable position. As late as 1898, he had tried to argue that Republican Party was the only one that could every reintroduce the bimetallic standard. He was hardly alone in this regard; the head of their state ticket, Frank Goudy, had been one of the bolters in 1896. Now, the national convention had declared that silver would destroy the economy. Instead of dealing with the change, Colorado's Republicans simply ignored the currency question altogether. Even more so than other Republicans in the West, they chose to ride the coattails of McKinley and Roosevelt back into office.⁶⁷

The “Full Dinner Pail” and the Economic Debate

The typical descriptions of the campaign of 1900 have emphasized the return of prosperity rather than the impact of imperialism or foreign policy—essentially the same narrative that McKinley and Hanna had employed in their bid to secure the President's re-election. While some of these histories have also mentioned the difficulty inherent in disambiguating between votes for prosperity and foreign policy votes, most of these works still essentially accept that the economy made McKinley invincible.⁶⁸ This typical

⁶⁷ Richard Evans Fisch, “Democratic Party,” 104; “Wilson and M’Graw Smash the Old Southwest Combination,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 15, 1900, p. 1-2; “The State Platform,” *Morning Olympian*, September 2, 1900, p. 4; Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 169; *Nebraska Party Platforms*, 262-264; “The M’Kinley Republican State Ticket,” *Denver Post*, September 18, 1900, p. 1; “Old Gang Whoops It Up for Wolcott,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 18, 1900, p. 12; “Silver Is Ignored,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 19, 1900, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Thomas A. Bailey, “Was the Presidential Election of 1900 a Mandate on Imperialism?” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (1937): 43-52; Rystad, *Ambiguous Imperialism*, especially 294; Richard E. Welch, Jr., *Response to Imperialism*, 70-71; Stuart Creighton Miller, “Benevolent Assimilation”: *The*

view misses some key points, especially in regard to the situation in the West. First, the argument that “prosperity” made all other factors moot is based upon the belief that those who opposed McKinley in 1896 abandoned their cause rapidly after economic conditions improved. According to this version of events, Bryan’s support in the West dried up because farmers (in particular) had more interest in the value of their crops in the short term than they had in the structural changes that would have guaranteed them security in long term. Additionally, perhaps the most notable weakness of such economic determinism pertains to its inability to explain the motives of historical actors. Finally, it should be pointed out that the political studies of the campaign have tended to discuss the issues of wealth and prosperity as separate from those that accompanied the formation of overseas empire. As will be explained in a subsequent section, the debates over political economy and imperialism overlapped to a much greater degree than those studies have suggested.

The economic debate of the campaign was not a mere rerun of that of 1896. In a reversal of that situation, Republicans held the highest national office but fewer state and local offices throughout the West. They also now claimed that the prosperity had returned, and they sought to take credit for it by any means possible. While it has frequently been stated by historians and others who have looked back at the period that an increase in global gold production helped bring about the resurgence of the American economy, Republicans (and especially those in the West) were hesitant to make the same

American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 148; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Involvement: American Economic Expansion across the Pacific, 1784-1900* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), especially 304-305.

argument.⁶⁹ Bryan and the reformers of 1896 had argued that the money supply was inadequate. To essentially agree with their contention would have been heretical for any good partisan.

Instead, Republicans argued that their party's success was itself the harbinger of economic growth. The "policy" they advocated, then, involved a defense of the existing corporate order and the administration that effectively symbolized prosperity. Anything else would spark fear in the business community, they said. It was in this line of argument that a writer for the *Omaha Daily Bee* suggested that the cause of the last economic calamity had been the threat of silver itself, and prosperity was a product of Bryan's defeat.⁷⁰ The state secretary of Washington's Republican Party likewise declared that "When President McKinley was elected the whole country was immediately revived from the effect of democratic maladministration," and prosperity was the inevitable result.⁷¹ Remarks of this kind came from Republicans throughout the West.⁷²

The Republican focus on the impact of the electoral victory obviously fit with the needs of a campaign, but there are additional reasons for it. First, except a slight revision of the tariff and War Revenue measure, McKinley had not succeeded in pushing through any economic legislation until the third month of 1900. Clearly, if prosperity reigned,

⁶⁹ On the contention that gold production improved economic conditions, see: John D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 388-389; Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960* (1963; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 8, 137.

⁷⁰ "Is there Gold Enough," *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 3, 1900, p. 6.

⁷¹ "Arrasmith at Seattle," *Colfax Gazette* (WA), September 28, 1900, p. 6.

⁷² For other examples, see: *Montezuma Journal* (Cortez, CO), October 12, 1900, p. 2; "The Prosperity Issue," *Aspen Daily Times*, October 20, 1900, p. 2, reprinted from *Colorado Springs Gazette*, no date.

that could not have been the source. Of far greater significance, few western Republicans had the stomach to discuss the past—in which a great many of them had supported silver or other broad economic reforms—or the future—for which McKinley had made no promises. The western Republicans who in 1896 had scrambled to find articles from gold advocates did not even bother to make ideological justifications four years later. While they attempted to dismiss the arguments for silver, free coinage was essentially set aside as unnecessary when the nation was under Republican guidance. In the local press, the gold standard was not described as the positive good or exemplar of economic morality to the extent that it had been in 1896, but it was instead just an element of the status quo that should not be upset if good times were to continue.⁷³

Following this model, the partisan press consistently delivered the plainest possible argument against change. “If the Republican policy has brought prosperity, which it surely has, how could an opposite policy, intended to upset the Republican policy, bring other than the reverse?” asked one Nebraska paper. Security could be maintained if only fusionists would “Lay aside partisanship for a moment and give these facts and figures sober and dispassionate thought.”⁷⁴ At times, they even suggested that the party could be trusted when an individual thought they were in error. Another paper

⁷³ In one example, an editor opened an article with a critical reference to Bryan’s calls for sixteen-to-one, then quickly transitioned into the story of a banker who was beset by those seeking loans during the Cleveland administration but whose business suffered with McKinley as president, presumably because the people were too prosperous to need loans. No attempt was made to explain the weaknesses of free silver or the benefits of gold, merely to point out that the depression was over and no one need worry. See *Norfolk Weekly News* (NE), August 30, 1900, p. 6. For similar pieces, see also *Red Cloud Chief* (NE), August 24, 1900, p. 4; “The Matter of Chief Interest,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 16, 1900, p. 6; “Financial Element in Bryanism,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 19, 1900, p. 6; “False Prophet Bryan,” *Colfax Gazette*, August 10, 1900, p. 4; “Open Mills, Not Open Mints,” *San Juan Islander* (Friday Harbor, WA), October 25, 1900, p. 2; *Glenwood Post* (CO), September 1, 1900, p. 4.

⁷⁴ “Bright Outlook,” *Nebraska Advertiser* (Nemaha, NE), August 24, 1900, p. 4.

claimed that, while many in 1896 had believed silver would bring prosperity, “the majority, remembering the history of the republican party, were willing to trust it with the duty and they have not been disappointed.”⁷⁵

The partisan claim of widespread prosperity must be thought of relative to the context of the 1890s. The grievances of the Populists and the reformers who followed in their footsteps did not merely pertain to the quantity of money in their pockets. What they demanded was democratic control of the economy, and they believed that only that could provide long-term security for farmers and laborers. They also sought this power to counteract the ever-growing influence of corporate power in the political sphere. McKinley and his backers provided no current or future domestic policy that responded to these demands. Bryan and the rest of the western reform coalition advocated an alternative form of development, and the need for that program would have remained as apparent as ever. This was further reinforced by the new emphasis upon the trust issue.

The public had developed a keen awareness of the growing tendency toward combination among corporations, just as they had never forgotten about their ability to control the agents of government. One event in Nebraska highlighted the extent of their influence. Over the course of his brief tenure as Nebraska Attorney General, Constantine J. Smyth had made good use of his state’s anti-trust laws in cases against a combination of grain dealers and against the “starch trust,” which was believed to have purchased a Nebraska factory just to shut it down.⁷⁶ But before he tackled these foes, in late 1899

⁷⁵ *Norfolk Weekly News*, July 19, 1900, p. 6.

⁷⁶ “Arrests the Grain Trust,” *Omaha World-Herald*, August 7, 1900, p. 3; “Smyth Sues Starch Company,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 20, 1900, p. 3.

Smyth also brought suit against one of the largest corporations in America, Standard Oil.⁷⁷ The case initially brought little controversy, at least until February of 1900 when Senator John Thurston raced back from his duties in Congress to take part in the case as the representative of the Rockefellers. Thurston was immediately attacked by the state's Populists and Democrats, and the story even gained some coverage in neighboring states. When the *Denver Post* ran a front-page cartoon of Thurston, with bags of money from both of his employers under his arms, even the conservative *Omaha Daily Bee* borrowed the image to lampoon the Senator.⁷⁸ It was a moment that thoroughly demonstrated the influence of the one corporation that all parties acknowledged was indeed a trust, and Thurston was soon forced to declare he was not a candidate for re-election.⁷⁹

Remarkably, even after such a moment, Republicans throughout the West denied that the trusts were a serious issue at all. Edward Rosewater, owner and editor of the *Omaha Bee*, was one of the few to declare that they needed to be regulated, but he simultaneously declared that "You cannot destroy these corporate concerns" without damaging the overall economy.⁸⁰ Most others denied that trusts were a serious problem; more than a few agreed with Hanna that they did not exist at all. Shortly after Hanna made his remarks, the editor of the *Colorado Springs Gazette* agreed with him and called Bryan's attacks hollow, because "there is no such thing in the United States as a private

⁷⁷ "Fight Is on Now," *Omaha World-Herald*, August 12, 1899, p. 1.

⁷⁸ *Omaha Dailey Bee*, April 25, 1900, p. 7, reprinted from *Denver Post*, February 9, 1900, p. 1.

⁷⁹ For other pieces on Thurston's participation in the case, see: "Will Defend Standard Oil," *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 7, 1900, p. 1; "Standard Oil Case Continued," *Columbus Journal*, February 14, 1900, p. 1; "To Argue for the Trust," *Western News Democrat* (Valentine, NE), February 15, 1900, p. 3.

⁸⁰ "Report of the Rosewater-Hitchcock Debate," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 21, 1900, p. 19-20.

monopoly.”⁸¹ The paper had already run articles that praised the benefits of massive corporate combinations, and continued to do so for the remainder of the campaign.⁸² In the same tone, the editor of the *Morning Olympian* asked “What does Mr. Bryan mean by trusts?” If he meant a monopoly which “destroys all competition,” then “how many such trusts are there, what are they and where are the evidences of their appalling [sic.] growth?” Surely, their number was “insignificant compared with the combination of capital that are perfectly legitimate,” and they had brought none of the “evidences of calamity” that could interrupt Republican prosperity.⁸³ Still another paper claimed that even “suspicion that a corporation is obtaining exorbitant [sic.] profits at once brings competition into the field” and destroys any chance for true monopolies to arise.⁸⁴

This was the fundamental problem with the Republican argument in 1900. In their most basic descriptions of the American economy, western Republicans still offered little of appeal. They had no real explanation of the improvement in the national economy. Their plans for future prosperity were tied to an unquestioned allegiance to the status quo, and they proposed no plans for a future restructuring of the economy or any substantial restriction of the powers of concentrated wealth. It had even become the standard line of the party to suggest that monopolies and trusts existed only in fiction. All of their statements regarding domestic economic policy—whether it was that of the

⁸¹ “What Is a Trust?” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 27, 1900, p. 4.

⁸² For just a few examples, see “The Trusts and the People,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, July 20, 1900, p. 9; “Pennsylvanian Says Trusts Will Remain,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 1, 1900, p. 5.

⁸³ “Rubbish About Trusts,” *Morning Olympian*, September 29, 1900, p. 2.

⁸⁴ “Competing with the Trusts,” *San Juan Islander*, September 20, 1900, p. 2.

last four years or that proposed for the next term—totally ignored the discussion of political economy that had reshaped the electoral landscape of the West over the last ten years. While it is reasonable enough to assume that their refusal to engage with domestic reform in any serious way was due to confidence, such certainty would have seemed unwarranted due to the electoral precedents of the last generation.⁸⁵

Western Republicans were forced to campaign upon the full suite of issues, in no small part because Democrats and Populists questioned the form of “prosperity” their rivals had claimed to have ushered in. While Republicans downplayed the role gold discoveries and inflated currency had upon economic growth, western reformers suggested that any economic improvement was due to the increase in the supply of money. Charles Towne, vice-presidential pick of the Populists, reminded one audience that “McKinley’s own letter of acceptance four years ago declares that we had money enough,” but by now “we have in the country not far from five hundred millions of dollars more, six dollars a head more, than we had four years ago.”⁸⁶ Fusion newspapers of all sizes also mocked Republicans for downplaying this fact while they instead suggested that McKinley “gave this country ‘immediate prosperity’ from the day he entered office.”⁸⁷ Better times are the result of the “higher prices of farm products resulting from more money in circulation,” and what the people really wanted was

⁸⁵ Since the re-election of Grant in 1872, no sitting president had successfully held on to office for a second term. While in many cases the incumbents had not been re-nominated, in both 1888 and 1892, the reelection bids of sitting presidents had come up short.

⁸⁶ “Address of Charles A. Towne to the Voters of Seattle,” *Seattle Daily Times*, September 17, 1900, 11-12.

⁸⁷ “Political Hypocrisy Will Fail this Time,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 14, 1900, p. 6.

“prosperity that will stay with them during years of peace at home and plenty abroad.”⁸⁸

The Republicans offered no domestic reform that would limit the ravaging effects of global market swings, and western reformers brought that point home.

There was also plenty of reason to doubt the rosy picture that Republicans were trying to paint. One writer noted the reported 947 business failures in May—the largest ever on record for the month—“as compared with 581 last year and 917 in the ‘calamitous’ year of 1896.”⁸⁹ Critics of the administration also noted the reports in circulation that bankers and industrialists had become pessimistic about the short-term prospects of the economy.⁹⁰ This was not just campaign rhetoric. There is evidence of a real economic slowdown that had begun by the summer of 1899 and continued through the end of 1900.⁹¹ While it was not nearly as severe as the Panic of 1893, nor would it have substantially altered the prices of the West’s commodities, it did suggest that perhaps not all was well. There were other indicators to that effect as well. Republicans were fond of saying that huge quantities of farm mortgages had been paid off in the preceding four year, but Bryan noted that statistics from Nebraska showed that many of those had been “paid” through foreclosure.⁹² Information on farm mortgages and tenancy published by the Census Bureau in 1910 (the Bureau dramatically scaled back its work on those subjects in 1900) demonstrate that Bryan was not exaggerating. In 1890, when the

⁸⁸ “The ‘Prosperity Argument,’” *Omaha World-Herald*, September 15, 1900, p. 4.

⁸⁹ *Aberdeen Herald*, August 16, 1900, p. 4.

⁹⁰ “The Bubble of Trust Prosperity,” *Denver Post*, August 21, 1900, p. 4.

⁹¹ Friedman and Schwartz, *Monetary History*, 136, 148.

⁹² “From Sunrise to Sunset Bryan Talked to Farmers,” *Rocky Mountain News*, November 6, 1900, p. 5.

Populist movement made its first foray into politics, 39% of Nebraska farmers held mortgages, nearly 25% were tenants, and the remainder owned their land outright. By 1900, the rate with farm mortgages had dropped to less than 29%, but now 37% of the state's farmers worked lands owned by someone else.⁹³ This trend was even more significant in central Nebraska, which had been the heart of Populist power in the state.⁹⁴

Of course, the figures some cited did not really encompass the main thrust of the reformers' economic argument. For them, the real question was not merely full employment or industrial productivity, but it was instead about popular control of the economy and the distribution of wealth. The growing imbalance in wealth—and the power that came with it—made all of the Republican talk of a “full dinner pail” seem hollow. Senator Allen went into the countryside and reminded farmers that those of their avocation had held nearly half the nation's wealth in 1860, whereas today they held eighteen percent.⁹⁵ A writer for a rural Washington paper told readers that “The modicum of prosperity we have is artificial... [T]he only prosperity there is goes to the syndicates, carpetbaggers and subsidy hunters.”⁹⁶

The editor of Nebraska's most prominent Populist paper, the *Independent*, used a recent personal example to summarize the real purpose of their movement. Just the

⁹³ These percentages have been mathematically derived from information found in U.S. Department of the Interior, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910*, vol. VII, *Agriculture 1909 and 1910, Reports by States with Statistics for Counties* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 19-20.

⁹⁴ For a comparison of 1890 and 1900, see: U.S. Department of the Interior, *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 162-163; and U.S. Department of the Interior, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900*, vol. V, *Agriculture Part I: Farms, Livestock, and Animal Products* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902), 102-103.

⁹⁵ “Evils of Republican Rule,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 18, 1900, p. 5.

⁹⁶ *Yakima Herald*, November 1, 1900, p. 2.

previous Sunday, he had heard a local minister declare that “I would rather trust the one per cent who own one-half of the property of the United States than the fifty percent of the poorest classes.” This kind of sentiment, the principle which McKinley and his supporters embodied, represented “plutocracy pure and simple... It is the most dangerous sentiment ever expressed on American soil.” It was incomprehensible that those like Rockefeller, who had “stolen the hard earned wealth of hundreds of men by the vilest means ever employed by man,” had earned anyone’s trust over the “thirty-five or forty millions” who had actually created the wealth. The fight was not just about whether farmers or laborers had enough for themselves now, but instead it was about who would hold the reins of government and shape the nation’s economic future.⁹⁷

Conspiratorial rumors only made it easier for reformers to further emphasize the extent of power held by industrialists and financiers. There was still frequent circulation of the usual stories of an English plot to drive down prices, and there were many suggestions that the recently passed currency bill would create a perpetual debt for the benefit of bankers, but others went far beyond the old emphasis on money.⁹⁸ Some papers also reported that “as a last desperate expedient the trusts and the money power, controlling the industries of the country, propose to adopt again the methods used before for the coercion of the people by bringing on, just prior to the election, a panic.” It was the same method used to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, they claimed, but this time it would be claimed that “the panic is wholly due to apprehension of the success of

⁹⁷ “That One Per Cent,” *Independent*, October 25, 1900, p. 4.

⁹⁸ See *Independent* (NE), June 14, 1900, p. 4; “Bryan and Finance,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 12, 1900, p. 4; “Evils of Republican Rule,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 18, 1900, p. 5.

the Democratic party at the polls and that only by McKinley's re-election can prosperity be regained."⁹⁹ These stories came at the same time as rumors that several major industrialists (particularly those engaged in the steel industry) faced a sudden diminished demand for their products, but they were holding off work stoppages or layoffs until after the election in order to aid McKinley.¹⁰⁰ These claims underscored the perceived influence of the great business entities of the age, and also the need for reform if republican freedom was to be maintained.

The debate over domestic economics made up only one portion of the broader debate, and perhaps not even the most important part. Republicans in the West had followed the national script and beaten the drum of "prosperity," but it did not go without a challenge. The question of trusts and monopolies—one that had become increasingly dominant in the political discourse of the region—was essentially shunted aside by McKinley's supporters. In many regards their statements were the most honest assessments of the party's economic philosophy in years, but certainly western Republicans could not count on honesty alone to win over voters. Reformers continued to shift the emphasis to popular control and the kind of restraint of power necessary in a democratic country, and they refuted the suggestion that any temporary improvement in the economy should be allowed to forestall that kind of change. Still, their claims carried

⁹⁹ The quotes are from "A Word to Fusionists," *Valentine Democrat*, September 27, 1900, p. 4. See also "Is Our Boasted Prosperity a Sham?" *Omaha World-Herald*, October 12, 1900, p. 4, reprinted from *Washington Post*, September 9, 1900.

¹⁰⁰ "The Bubble of Trust Prosperity," *Denver Post*, August 21, 1900, p. 4.

more weight when accompanied by examples that demonstrated the anti-republican tendencies of the administration.

Imperialism, Militarism, and the Campaign of 1900

The debate over the use of American power overseas was a central point of contention between the two sides. Additionally, both Republicans and reformers used the issues that accompanied the war and the acquisition of empire to appeal to differing aspects of American identity. Western reformers used imperialism to further reinforce their points about concentrated wealth and power. They had always declared that government was too distant from its people, that it ruled for the benefit of the few, and that it helped the great business combinations crush resistance to their power. The reformers described an imperial America as the antithesis of the republican ideal, and they focused their campaign upon the identity of free white laborers whose positions could be threatened in a militarized, aristocratic, and racially diverse society. Western Republicans, too, sought an adjunct to their domestic platform, but while their rivals sought to use the imperial policy to demonstrate the need for domestic reform, Republicans saw the conflict as a means of smoothing over domestic strife. Patriotism and nationalism were the keys to their campaign.

Shortly after Dewey's victory over two years ago, politicians and members of the media had made great projections about the great wealth that would come to America in the future through Pacific trade. As imperialism emerged as a subject of debate, the tone of these forecasts took a progressively partisan tone. By 1900, Republicans were attempting to turn all evidence of increased foreign trade into propaganda devices, and

their opinion columns were increasingly laced with figures designed to demonstrate that this trade was of central importance to future economic growth. Nowhere was this more true than in Washington state. There, even the smallest local papers reported that “our exports to Asia and Oceanica are gaining with greater proportionate rapidity than to any other part of the world,” and claimed that such growth was likely to continue. An eastern Washington weekly added that “If we can place three ounces of flour a day in each Hong Kong and Shanghai, it will raise the price of Washington wheat to seventy-five cents per bushel.”¹⁰¹ In the last weeks before the election, several Nebraska papers began printing identical campaign supplements that were designed to convey the same message. One showed a grinning Uncle Sam holding a piece of paper with the words “Agricultural Exports,” at the top. It listed a nearly 50% increase in exports over that of 1895, which caused Uncle Sam to remark, “It sort o’ looks as if I’d have to expand.”¹⁰² Another included a number of small articles surrounding a map which showed the historical expansion of the United States. Most of the information was designed to impart the importance of foreign trade, and in particular the importance of the Philippines to foreign trade. One of these articles suggested that the “commerce of half of the world’s population, of which Manila may be made the great commercial center, now amounts to more than \$2,000,000,000 per annum,” and that nearly all of that quantity of money “is

¹⁰¹ “Oriental Trade Growing,” *San Juan Islander*, September 27, 1900, p. 4. For similar reports, see *Adams County News*, August 8, 1900, p. 2; “News of the States,” *Colfax Gazette*, October 12, 1900, p. 1; “Growth of Commerce,” *Morning Olympian*, October 16, 1900, p. 4; *Pullman Herald*, November 3, 1900, p. 4.

¹⁰²This supplement, which also included a statement on trade expansion from California Senator George Perkins, was printed in a large number of the state’s small-town Republican newspapers. See *McCook Tribune*, October 12, 1900; *Columbus Journal*, October 3, 1900; *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, October 23, 1900; *Custer County Republican*, October 18, 1900; *Red Cloud Chief*, October 19, 1900.

expended for the class of goods for which the people of this country are now seeking a market.”¹⁰³

It was obviously useful for the Republicans, who were attempting to portray their organization as the party of prosperity, to suggest that they were working to secure markets to absorb American overproduction. However, this kind of talk was much less frequent by the time of the campaign than it had been a year, or even two years, earlier. Perhaps the strongest explanation for that change has to do with the arguments of Bryan and his followers. The Democratic platform had, after all, condemned the Republicans for justifying their war of conquest in the name of “greedy commercialism.” While this charge had always been thrown at the imperialists, it became increasingly effective in the wake of the Puerto Rican tariff bill. The controversy over the bill had made many in the public doubt that American rule could be simultaneously benevolent and profit-seeking.¹⁰⁴

Whether Republicans continued to deploy the argument or not, western reformers continued to attack them for ever having made it. On the stump and throughout their press, the reformers ridiculed their rivals for emphasizing wealth over human rights. This took many forms. In one case, a Colorado editor simply tacked the headline “McKinley Prosperity in Province of Luzon” onto an article about bloody battle that had just taken

¹⁰³ “Our Commercial and Territorial Expansion,” *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, November 2, 1900; see the same in *Custer County Republican*, November 1, 1900.

¹⁰⁴ For an example, the editor of the *Daily Ledger* (Tacoma, WA) wrote a substantial number of opinion pieces in March and early April that were very optimistic about the prospects of trade with Asia. By the time of the campaign, these had nearly disappeared. See “Pacific States Should be Represented,” March 4, 1900, p. 4; “Our Markets Are in the Orient,” March 7, 1900, p. 4; “Study Trade Conditions in the Orient,” March 21, 1900, p. 4; “Developing Oriental Trade,” March 26, 1900, p. 4; “Senator Foster and the Chinese Trade,” April 10, 1900, p. 4; “To Increase Oriental Trade,” April 12, 1900, p. 4.

place in the Philippines.¹⁰⁵ Another simply pointed to what seemed to be the most unfortunate contrast of all: “While our soldier boys, though poor, are bleeding for their country, the wealthy monopolists are bleeding their country.”¹⁰⁶

These simple swipes at imperialism dotted the pages of reform papers, but many drew direct links between aggregated capital and imperial policies. In a letter to the editor, one supporter of reform noted that “Nearly all imperialists are trust defenders, and all trust defenders are single gold standard advocates.” Was this “merely coincidental, or does it not denote a well defined plan of co-operation?” they asked rhetorically. Certainly, “Imperialism cannot long endure without substantial financial backing and wealth cannot long be concentrated without imperialistic support.”¹⁰⁷ By “imperialistic support,” the author was referring to the force that had been used to protect capital in the post-bellum era. Many believed that such militarism posed a serious threat to industrial independence. When coal strikes broke out in the Appalachians, the editor of the *Yakima Herald* claimed that “The next move, and the republican leaders are now demanding it, is to have a standing army of 100,000 soldiers to force the miners, and other laborers working at starvation wages, to submit to the dictates of these great combinations of capital which will not permit competition.”¹⁰⁸ The methods by which people were denied freedom was much the same in the colonies as it would prove to be in America. Populists pointed out that it already have been proven so in Idaho. “Having denied the right of

¹⁰⁵ “McKinley Prosperity in the Province of Luzon,” *Daily Journal* (Telluride, CO), October 26, 1900, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Valentine Democrat* (NE), July 19, 1900, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ S. Arion Lewis, “Imperialism and the Money Question,” *Omaha World-Herald*, August 24, 1900, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Yakima Herald*, October 11, 1900, p. 2.

self-government to millions in the Philippines and Porto Rico and even the right to labor in one of the states of the union,” what would prevent a re-elected McKinley from extending “his imperial power over larger sections of these states?”¹⁰⁹ Western reformers argued that this power, employed for the benefit of concentrated wealth, would destroy the basis of republican democracy.

While some of the most powerful anti-imperialist arguments brought the imperial threat home for readers, the most sophisticated developed more complex critiques of global capitalism. In one of the more interesting examples, the editor of the *Independent* explained the limited utility of the new emphasis on foreign trade. If the quantity theory of money was correct, and those who advocated foreign trade justified it with the hope of increasing the gold and silver currency of America, the unequal trade necessitated by this policy would bankrupt the other nations. Such trade could only be profitable into the future if America succeeding in getting its trading partners into a cycle of perpetual debt, though this too would lead to “the impoverishment of foreign nations after a while.” Fundamentally, the author declared that the talk of “overproduction,” which imperialist had employed to explain both economic decline and the sudden need for overseas markets, was bogus. The solution to America’s economic problems would be found at home, not abroad.¹¹⁰

Still others considered overseas colonialism to be a policy designed to exploit the poor of both the United States and the world. Thomas Patterson’s *Rocky Mountain News*

¹⁰⁹ “Shall Liberty Endure,” *Independent* (NE), October 18, 1900, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ “Imperialist Argument,” *Independent* (NE), October 18, 1900, p. 4.

pointed out that the war in the Philippines was costing \$10,000,000 per month. If the country had been willing to devote that much money to internal improvements, such as irrigation of the arid western lands, domestic producers could reap the benefits. Within just a few years, the improved land from such a project could provide new homes for 5-10,000,000 people in the West. This would never happen, of course, because the “financial influences represented by the present national administration do not want the far West to grow too fast.” They were to remain economically and politically dependent, just like those new subjects who were in the process of being subjugated on the other side of the world.¹¹¹

It was no accident that the remarks of some sounded conspiratorial. The Populists and other western reformers had long ago developed a repertoire of theories that involved the nefarious plots of America’s “aristocracy” to destroy free institutions and the independent men who maintained them. The entire discussion of domestic militarism had hinted at these, but still others left nothing (or perhaps everything) to the imagination. In Denver, the local Old Soldiers’ National Bryan Club warned members that “The money power of the country holds his [McKinley’s] administration at home in all the fields of industry; and abroad in colonizing lands which will be used to give capital opportunities for aggrandizement and introduce a system of peonage at home and abroad. Wealth is the spouse of imperialism and militarism is the offspring of both.”¹¹² The editor of a German-American paper in Nebraska stated that, “The great trusts, capitalists,

¹¹¹ “The West and Imperialism,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 10, 1900, p. 4.

¹¹² “To the Veterans of the War,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 10, 1900, p. 5.

and oppressors of the poor want a king for the reason that a king, not owing his position to the people, will dare to favor the money power and do many things in their interest that a president would not do.” Since the ascension of McKinley, “America has been drifting into a monarchical form of government.” Common Americans could unite now to defend their rights or they would lose all that they held dear.¹¹³

The reformers also perceived another more tangible threat to the freedom of white American breadwinners. In September, McKinley’s newly appointed judge to the District Court of the Territory of Hawaii handed down rulings with far-reaching implications. In the first instance, he presided over the naturalization of Reymond Reyes, a resident of Guam. After the proceedings, he stated that he believed that naturalization was unnecessary, and that by virtue of annexation the people of Guam were already American. Just over two weeks later, Judge Estee made a second pronouncement that caught attention on the mainland. This time, he overruled the actions of a local customs agent who had denied entry to Ah Sing, a Chinese sailor aboard an American ship. Hawaii was an America port, Estee stated, and could not be treated as legally different from any point along the mainland.¹¹⁴

When the news of these decisions began to circulate in the American press, they created a storm of controversy that both campaigns were forced to address. For the record, both sides wantonly misinterpreted Estee’s words. He had spoken with a degree

¹¹³ “Join Bryan Hosts,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 26, 1900, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ For the best accounts of the actual court decisions that were presented in any newspapers, see “Guam Men Americans?” *Hawaiian Star*, September 7, 1900, p. 5; “A Chinese Sailor Not an Immigrant,” *Honolulu Republican*, September 20, 1900, p. 3. The latter article includes the full text of Estee’s ruling.

of uncertainty regarding the question of citizenship for the people of Guam. In the case of the Chinese sailor Ah Sing, his ruling was made specific to the case of sailors. Despite the limits of his statements, organized labor and anti-imperialists jumped on his pronouncements. The *Seattle Times* issued a notice in late October that “A grand anti-Asiatic mass meeting will be held tonight in the armory.” The notice specifically attributed the motivation for the meeting to “The recent decision of Federal Judge Estee, in which he holds that the Chinese exclusion act and the alien contract law cannot be enforced as against Chinamen and contract laborers coming into the United States from the new island possessions.”¹¹⁵

Few papers more fully embodied the reaction of the Democratic press than a small-town publication in Washington, the *Aberdeen Herald*. In late October, it attributed a large anti-Asian rally held in Everett, Washington, to the last ruling by Estee that “holds that a Chinaman living in Hawaii has a perfect right to come to any portion of the United States and take up residence.” The editor added that “If we pursue the policy as laid down by McKinley, subjugate and retain the Philippines, there can and will be absolutely no way by which we can prevent the millions of cheap laborers of those islands from coming to the United States.” The immigration of a mere ten percent of the poor labor of the Philippines “would crush out every white laborer on the Pacific coast.”¹¹⁶ Less than a week before the election, the paper ran a prominent article on the front page under the headline “Filipinos Are Citizens.” The same edition included an

¹¹⁵ “Mass Meeting at Armory,” *Seattle Daily Times*, October 26, 1900, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ “A Sign of the Times,” *Aberdeen Herald*, October 25, 1900, p. 4. It was reprinted in the *Omaha World-Herald* as “Cheap Labor Threatens America,” November 4, 1900, p. 4.

editorial column that warned of the approaching expiration of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Several prominent Republicans had suggested it should be allowed to expire, and the policies of the administration “in the past two years indicates that it wants this cheap labor in our country. It seeks to retain islands 7,000 miles distant that our country may be flooded with coolie labor. The homes of the American workingmen are endangered.”¹¹⁷

Democrats and Populists throughout the West made the threat of Asian immigration a larger issue in the last month of the campaign. Just previous to the decisions by Estee, several western railroads had hired large numbers of Asian (primarily Japanese) men to work on their lines, only increasing the sense of urgency connected with the issue.¹¹⁸ McKinley had remained relatively silent on matter. Bryan, on the other hand, had made it clear that Asian immigration would be used by employers as a wedge to destroy labor solidarity and lower the standard of living. The Democratic platform had also explicitly declared that “The Filipinos cannot be citizens without endangering our civilizations,” but also suggested that “they cannot be subjects without imperiling our form of government.” Western reformers told attentive audiences that their only choices were between wage slavery and bankruptcy on one side and an independent Philippines on the other.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ “Filipinos Are Citizens,” and “Here Is the Danger,” *Aberdeen Herald*, November 1, 1900, p. 1, 4.

¹¹⁸ *San Juan Islander*, September 6, 1900, p. 2; “Excluding Asiatic Labor,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 30, 1900, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ LaFeber, “Presidential Election of 1900,” 1920. For other examples of reaction and anti-Asian sentiment on the campaign trail, see “Yakima’s Yellow Peril,” *Yakima Herald*, October 25, p. 1; “Estee Hits them Again,” *Seattle Daily Times*, October 29, 1900, p. 1-2; “Turner at Ballard,” *Seattle Daily Times*, October 13, 1900, p. 5; “Favor Letting Chinese In,” *Omaha World-Herald*, September 12, 1900, p. 8; “Labor Faces Grave Issue,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 12, 1900, p. 5; “Threatens Labor,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 15, 1900, p. 1.

Republicans responded to the claims in a variety of ways. Some claimed that Estee's statements regarding citizenship had nothing to do with the Philippines. Others (incorrectly) argued that, "of the Philippines, Chinese, Malays or what not, not a mother's son of them can immigrate to this country unless specifically permitted to by congress." Still others suggested that it mattered not at all, because Filipinos "could no more reach the United States and become a factor in its economic life than he could go to Mars." They could "become the servant of a white man venturing there, but there is nothing about him that would make a sane person think of him as a possible rival." They provided enough of a response to tamp down some of the public excitement. But it was also rather late in the campaign for it to become a dominant issue. Estee's decisions were not widely reported on the mainland for some time, and the election was only weeks away by the time anyone in the West took much notice. Imperialists could also present such measures as the Foraker Act, which denied citizenship (if not admission) to the people of Puerto Rico. The issue was not yet thoroughly defused, but it never had the chance to really alter the outcome of the campaign.¹²⁰

While they did have to fend off the talk of any "Yellow Peril," Republican discussion of race and empire was necessarily complicated. During the campaign, the bombastic rhetoric of racial greatness or the "white man's burden" was largely set aside by the supporters of McKinley. They never emphasized the propriety of racial

¹²⁰ For articles by imperialists that were designed to allay fears of Asian immigration, see "Japanese Immigration," *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, October 29, 1900, p. 4; "A Criminal Cunard," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 24, 1900, p. 4; "Sharp, but Scurvy Trickery," *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, November 3, 1900, p. 4; "Dred Scott Decision Revived," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, November 6, 1900, p. 4. See also "A Decision by Estee," *Morning Olympian*, November 4, 1900, p. 1.

domination *per se*, and outright denied that their enterprise was a truly a colonial project. Instead, they had steered a course that led to the liberation of millions, they claimed, and in the aftermath of liberation it was the nation's duty to protect the people of the new insular possessions.¹²¹

As McKinley had in his July oration, Republicans defined the War of 1898 and the ongoing conflict in the Philippines as part of a great anti-colonial effort. Because of the efforts of the administration, they said, “millions of men have been freed from a cruel tyranny.” They also sought to enhance their image as benevolent protectors of the downtrodden by changing perceptions of the Filipinos. In both editorials and supplemental materials (the latter certainly provided the national Republican campaign committee), they cast Aguinaldo as an ambitious potential dictator who was interested only in plundering the islands for his own benefit. The people, too, were described as tribal and diverse, and this diversity itself was described as an obstacle to national unity. In most cases, the conflict in the Philippines was described by its supporters as a war to protect the many peoples of the archipelago against the Tagalogs—the ethnic group to which Aguinaldo belonged. According to this view, Bryan was calling for the end of

¹²¹ The racial component of imperialism has increasingly gained greater attention, but it has not infrequently been described in a fairly one-dimensional form. See Rubin Francis Weston, *Racism in U.S. Imperialism: The Influence of Racial Assumptions on American Foreign Policy, 1893-1946* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972); Eric T. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). For more sophisticated works on the subject, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Spanish (and American) domination, but the next “imperial” rulers of the Philippines would be Aguinaldo and his cronies.¹²²

The interpretation provided the administration and its backers was both misleading and portentous. The war raged throughout much of the islands, not merely in the regions populated by the Tagalog ethnic group.¹²³ But the statement that the Filipinos could not govern themselves because of their diversity—an idea taken directly from the reports of “experts” sent by McKinley to investigate the situation in the islands—suggested that American control was to be of long duration.

Just as white supremacy provided no direct enhancement to the arguments of western imperialists, neither did Rooseveltian conceptions of “rugged” manhood. The Republican vice-presidential candidate actually toured the West as McKinley’s surrogate in September and October, but his reception was somewhat mixed. His speech in the

¹²² For the supplements, see “American Occupation of the Philippines,” in *Adams County News* (Ritzville, WA), August 22, 1900; *San Juan Islander*, August 23, 1900; “Issues Discussed by Men of All Parties,” in *Columbus Journal* (NE), September 26, 1900; *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, September 28, 1900; *Colfax Gazette*, October 12, 1900. Much of the material used in these supplements came from sections of the reports of the First Philippine Commission. On the use of their findings, see Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 112-124; Miller, “*Benevolent Assimilation*”, 132-133. For similar statements elsewhere in newspapers of the time, see “Cost of the War,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, October 17, 1900, p. 4; “Turner’s Campaign Speech,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, October 23, 1900, p. 4.

¹²³ For a book that covers the war in a region well away from the island of Luzon (where most Tagalog speakers lived), see Resil B. Mojares, *The War Against the Americans: Resistance and Collaboration in Cebu, 1899-1906* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999). A number of other works describe the motivations of Filipino participants in a way quite different from that presented by the Commission or in the American imperialist press of the day. While there is a tremendous amount of disagreement among these works, they do suggest how little the reality of the situation was reflected in common American accounts. See Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines, 1960); Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979); Glenn Anthony May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

mining town of Victor, Colorado, was followed by a small riot which had Roosevelt as its clear target. He had attempted to follow a fairly regular script, but when he derided the Democrats for their corruption he was met with the cry, “What about the rotten beef?”—a reference to the “embalmed beef” requisitioned by the corrupt or incompetent officials of the War Department in 1898, a story that Roosevelt had first brought to national attention. The New York governor then responded that the men of the audience had nothing to fear from the meat, for they “will never get near enough to be hit with a bullet” to ever be served the product. When the men then cheered for Bryan, he branded them traitors to the nation. He had placed his own “manly” experience over that of the miners, and soon enough the remaining order left in the gathering completely dissolved. Roosevelt and his entourage of faux “Rough Riders” were forced to fight their way back to the train. If the miners of Victor did not reject the concept of aggressive manhood, they did at least reject its apostle.¹²⁴

Perhaps the miners of Victor knew that Roosevelt’s version of militarized manhood left them only a minimal place. Several western newspapers noted that in some of his early writings he had noted with some disdain the habit of western cowboys to drink alcohol and participate in needless gunfights. But, he said, no matter their defects “they are much better fellows and pleasanter companions than the small farmers or agricultural laborers, nor are the mechanics of a great city to be mentioned in the same

¹²⁴ The analyses offered by the newspapers of Colorado usually attributed the outbreak to the presence of the controversial Senator Edward Wolcott on the stage with Roosevelt. The actual accounts, on the other hand, make it appear that Roosevelt was himself the target of the rioters. For the account that most closely fits the one above, see “Inflamed by Wolcott,” *Denver Post*, September 27, 1900, p. 1. For other versions of the events at Victor, see “Wolcott Incites a Riot at Victor,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 27, 1900, p. 1; “Afraid of Free Speech,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 27, 1900, p. 1.

breath.”¹²⁵ Roosevelt had come to advocate a kind of rugged manhood, but he intended his message for the increasingly refined upper and professional classes. These men were to lead the industrial masses, and so their own fitness was paramount. While he did not believe in a rigid class society, he nonetheless accepted hierarchy and order part of the natural order of things led him to favor paternalism over genuine equality.¹²⁶

In just this way, what discussion there was of “manhood” in the western campaign was not what Roosevelt or Lodge may have desired. The basic fact was that neither was the presidential candidate of the Republican Party, but the fifty-seven-year-old William McKinley was. While their own candidate was known for his caution and maturity and had waged his campaign as close to his home as possible, their rival was a forty-year-old who was known for his frenetic campaigns and energetic style. Republicans were in no position to demand votes for the active, athletic nominee. This also fit with the narrative that McKinley had demanded. America was to be portrayed as a kindly protector rather than an aggressive conqueror.

Democrats and Populists continued to emphasize a very different kind of manhood. They argued that free men and concentrated wealth could not coexist, and that the battle against trusts was the battle to save American manhood.¹²⁷ The campaign

¹²⁵ “Roosevelt Versus Roosevelt,” *Omaha World-Herald*, September 29, 1900, p. 12; “Teddy’s Late Discovery,” *Valentine Democrat*, October 25, 1900, p. 4.

¹²⁶ The best description of Roosevelt’s views of race, class, and mastery appear in Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170-216. See also Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 26-28, 121-124, 153-154.

¹²⁷ For a number of examples, see “Women Declare for William J. Bryan,” *Castle Rock Journal* (CO), October 19, 1900, p. 5; “McKinley Republicanism Severely Arraigned,” *Silverite-Plaindealer* (Ouray, CO),

against militarism and imperialism also affected the reformers' arguments. At the heart of their critique of militarism was a fear that an army of unthinking drones could be unleashed upon workers or political opponents. The regulars, they had frequently said, were not independent men but instead those who had failed at all other avocations. After induction, what remained of their independence was driven out of them through the usual rigors of a life that was submerged into a rigidly hierarchal order. As one critic put it, "the worst part about making a soldier of a man is not that a soldier kills brown men or white men, [but] that that the soldier loses his own soul."¹²⁸ Nebraska's governor soon found himself in an awkward position due to comments of the same sort.

As the campaign activities reached their peak in early October, the worst of the mudslinging began. Throughout September and October, Governor Poynter toured the state of Nebraska, emphasizing the dangers associated with militarism and imperialism. But as the campaign entered its last month, Republicans began to declare that he had made slanderous remarks regarding the American soldiery. Some claimed that he had called members of the regular army "hired butchers," while others said that the Governor referred to them as "\$15-a-month hirelings." Poynter attempted to refute the story, but it proved too difficult to stop. As he continued to denounce militarism, his remarks were frequently construed to be of the same sort as those he had denied making. The actual evidence provided by his rivals was of dubious quality—the party's gubernatorial nominee, Charles Dietrich, was also the primary witness who attested to the story's

September 21, 1900, p. 1; "Intellectual Lackeys," *Valentine Democrat*, September 13, 1900, p. 4; "Where Do I Come In?" *Valentine Democrat*, November 1, 1900, p. 4.

¹²⁸ "Imperial Government and Its Logical Results," *Littleton Independent* (CO), October 26, 1900, p. 4.

veracity—but articles on Poynter’s slur were soon printed by those in regional and national media with little hesitation. Roosevelt toured the state just as the rumors began to take off, and he repeated the story at nearly every stop. In Omaha he suggested there was no difference between regular soldiers and the volunteers who had signed up for the war with Spain, and then declared that “The mould [sic.] is fresh on the graves of these ‘hirelings’ who lay in the Philippines”—where many of the First Nebraska Volunteers had died.¹²⁹

Poynter’s statement did not introduce the issue of “patriotism” into campaign; the loyalty of those opposed to the wartime president had been questioned ever since 1898, and the attacks had only escalated after the outbreak of the second war. Western Republicans were more than happy to substitute the debate over political economy with the language of patriotic nationalism. While they continued to play lip service to “prosperity” just as McKinley had wanted, they eagerly shifted the focus of the campaign. Though they adopted this rhetoric in all of its guises, the easiest to use and simultaneously the most powerful allowed them to represent themselves as the true friends of the soldiers. The reformers were often walking a fine line in their own speeches and remarks, and they were sometimes forced to transition between making statements in praise of the soldiers’ bravery and lambasting the ongoing operations as an affront to humanity. Republicans were all too happy to take advantage of the situation.

¹²⁹ The remarks from Roosevelt are in “Hands Poynter Hot Shot,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 5, 1900, p. 1, 7. See also “Roosevelt Accusation Denounced by Poynter,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 3, 1900, p. 1; “Savage Denies ‘Teddy’s’ Story,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 6, 1900, p. 1; “Poynter and the Hired Soldiers,” *Norfolk Weekly News*, October 18, 1900, p. 4; “Citizens Tell of Speech,” *Omaha World-Herald*, October 17, 1900, p. 5; “Enthusiasm Grows Daily,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 24, 1900, p. 7; “Answers Governor Poynter,” *Minneapolis Journal*, October 5, 1900, p. 1; *Aberdeen News* (SD), October 8, 1900, p. 2; Miller, “*Benevolent Assimilation*”, 141.

A writer for the *Omaha Daily Bee* suggested that “There are two sides to the question of assaulting the soldiers who are in the Philippines,” and the “fathers, brothers, and friends of those in the army and those who have died fighting against the insurgents do not take kindly to having them called murderers and supporters through force of bayonets of an unholy cause.”¹³⁰ A reporter in eastern Washington also gleefully pointed out “how quickly Mr. Heifner [secretary of the State Single Tax League] lost prestige with his audience when he referred to the brave boys in the Philippines as being there on ‘a mission of murder and looting, and insulting men, women, and children.’”¹³¹ The soldiers were in the Philippines “defending the American flag, American honor and American prestige,” said a Colorado editor. “They have the right to demand that we shall rally to their support.”¹³² Their depiction of the situation suggested that individuals could choose to either support the policy of the president or their actions would serve as an insult to the nation’s soldiers.

Republicans argued that support for the anti-imperialists actually kept the war going. While the administration was merely trying to secure the peace, “In the Philippines this is retarded by the position of the democratic party.”¹³³ In many parts of the West, this was the point emphasized in the supplemental material that was especially distributed to the small-town party newspapers. One titled “Bryan’s Avowed Aid and Comfort to Aguinaldo” was distributed by several Nebraska newspapers, and its content

¹³⁰ *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 24, 1900, p. 6.

¹³¹ *Pullman Herald*, October 27, 1900, p. 5.

¹³² “The Flag as a Campaign Issue,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 30, 1900, p. 12.

¹³³ *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 24, 1900, p. 6.

was just as damning as the name suggested.¹³⁴ Once again, in claiming they wrote in defense of the soldiers, supporters of the President said that the men in combat “have a right to denounce as traitors those who for the advancement of selfish party and personal interests are making their task harder, who are encouraging their enemies, and are helping the attack upon that flag which they are all bound as loyal Americans ever to defend.”¹³⁵ They remorselessly attacked “the Bryanism that still encourages the Tagal to ply the bolo or lurk in the swamps to ambush American soldiers, who, according to Bryan, are loafers walking about in idleness.”¹³⁶

To the charge of treason, the Republicans added historical context. In Washington, Congressman Cushman told audiences that “There was a certain party 40 years ago that maligned and attacked Abraham Lincoln, just as there is a certain party today which is attacking and maligning William McKinley. Then it was the southern half of our own continent that was in insurrection, now it is the Philippines.”¹³⁷ The Democrats had been the party of treason in 1861, they contended, and that legacy had continued to the present time. When the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* ran a piece that compared Bryan to the infamous copperhead Democrat Clement Vallandigham, it was picked up

¹³⁴ *Columbus Journal*, September 12, 1900; *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, September 14, 1900.

¹³⁵ “The Flag as a Campaign Issue,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, September 30, 1900, p. 12.

¹³⁶ “Democracy’s Borrowed Livery,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, October 12, 1900, p. 4. For a few others with similar statements, see “As to the American Flag,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, November 1, 1900, p. 4; Alma L. Parker, “Simon Grey’s Family,” *Columbus Journal*, October 24, 1900; same in *Custer County Republican*, October 25, 1900; *Pullman Herald*, October 27, 1900, p. 5; “An Old Soldier Pleased,” *San Juan Prospector* (Del Norte, CO), September 22, 1900.

¹³⁷ “The Campaign Opened,” *Pullman Herald*, September 29, 1900, p. 1.

throughout the West.¹³⁸ The editor of the *Morning Olympian* liked the piece so much he provided his own commentary on the parallels. It was no surprise that the “notorious copperhead’s thoughts are echoed in all of Mr. Bryan’s recent speeches.... for Mr. Bryan now, like Vallandigham in 1863, advocates surrender to rebels.” In the meantime, Bryan was “now encouraging rebels, just as Vallandigham and his party did then.”¹³⁹

Accusations of “copperheadism” and other reminders of the Civil War era were especially prominent in the Nebraska campaign, where that war’s veterans and their descendants made up a large portion of the population. Of course, Poynter’s words were used to recall the memories of the great conflict. “In 1861-5 the Knights of the Golden Circle and their copperhead allies called the union soldiers ‘Lincoln hirelings,’” recounted one editor, “but it is now left to Governor Poynter to refer to the soldier boys in the Philippines in his speeches as ‘\$15-a-month hirelings.’”¹⁴⁰ It was in the same vein that Roosevelt targeted veterans and their descendants in the speeches he gave as he toured the state. “You, my comrades, remember when you were called Lincoln’s hirelings—for the sake of the memory of the deeds done by those who preceded you, for the sake of the men who now wear the uniform of the American republic who are inspired by the memory of what our fathers did.”¹⁴¹ Others propagated the notion that

¹³⁸ “The New Copperheadism,” *Fort Collins Weekly Courier*, September 20, 1900; same in *Longmont Ledger* (CO), September 21, 1900, p. 3.

¹³⁹ “Bryan and Vallandigham,” *Morning Olympian*, September 7, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ *St. Edward Sun* (NE), September 28, 1900. For similar remarks, see “Poynter and the ‘Hired Soldiers,’” *Norfolk Weekly News*, October 18, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ “Hands Poynter a Hot Shot,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 5, 1900, p. 7. Similar remarks can be seen in “Roosevelt,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, October 2, 1900, p. 2.

both wars were products of partisan discord. One former Confederate told a local paper that the war in the Philippines would have ended quickly if not for the anti-imperialists, just as the Civil War “would not have lasted three months but for the northern Democratic encouragement.”¹⁴² An Omaha minister—and a former Bryan supporter—put it more powerfully when he wrote that the Democrats had “lied as they always have about our presidents from Lincoln to McKinley, then when the outbursts of war came, ran to their holes as they did in 1861 and left the republican party to clear up the mess while they stood around and found fault. If Aguinaldo had not been encouraged, just as Jeff Davis was, the war would have been settled.”¹⁴³

Articles and speeches that charged the Democrats with treason or appealed to the nationalism of the audience were often aimed directly at disgruntled Populists or Silver Republicans. In the weeks leading up to the campaign, Republican papers rather suspiciously published accounts of the glowing reputation Populists had developed in the days before they were contaminated by fusion, and some even reported on mid-road meetings.¹⁴⁴ They added to these articles and speeches by western reformers who had decided to renounce Bryan and fusion. In many cases, to explain their actions they focused upon the new issue. The former Silver Republican senator from Montana, Lee Mantle, stated that “the paramount issue today is the issue of maintain the honor and dignity of the nation and the supremacy of its flag.” The alternative presented by the

¹⁴² “Caused the Rebellion,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, September 24, 1900.

¹⁴³ *Norfolk Weekly News*, October 18, 1900, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ *Custer County Republican*, July 19, 1900, p. 4, and August 16, 1900, p. 4; “The Mid-Roaders Meet,” *McCook Tribune* (NE), October 12, 1900, p. 4; “Treachery of Rogers,” *Colfax Gazette*, November 2, 1900, p. 6.

Bryanites required the country to “abandon our advanced position, throw down our arms, cravenly hoist the white flag and admit to the world that we are incapable of solving the problems which confront us.” Mantle’s charge of cowardice was mild compared to the words of other one-time reformers. In a speech he delivered in Denver, Senator William Stewart of Nevada declared that “This campaign had a parallel in the campaign of ’64,” though he branded the contemporary Democrats worse than those of the previous generation. “Mr. McClellan was not as treasonable as Mr. Bryan is,” he added for good measure. Even the former Populists William Peffer considered the platform of the reformers to be a “brazen assault on the honor of the republic,” which amounted to “little less than treason.”¹⁴⁵

While the Republicans frequently talked of the soldiers, the real focus was on unquestioned obedience. Opposition to the President was both damaging and disloyal, and the death of soldiers represented the collateral damage. By contrast, one could represent their loyalty and love of country by following the course laid out by McKinley. Of all the campaign literature used in the western states, there were few pieces that exemplified this attitude more than a bit of serial fiction titled the “Dear Boy Letters.” These letters were supposed to represent the words of a respectable Republican father to a young, emotional son who was occasionally infatuated with the words of Bryan. In one, the father pointed out how much respect America had gained around the world because of its defeat of Spain and responsible dealings in Asia. While he hinted at the power that the

¹⁴⁵ From the *Colorado Springs Gazette*: “Mantle Returns,” August 10, 1900, p. 1; “Mr. Mantle’s Enlightenment,” August 11, 1900, p. 4; “Mr. Stewart on Bryan,” September 30, 1900, p. 1; “Is It Patriotism or Treason?” August 18, 1900, p. 4.

nation had demonstrated, the father claimed it was most important that the world had learned that Americans always “fight, not merely for money, but for ideas, for liberty, and for the deliverance of the oppressed of other lands and races.” The father ended by telling his son to “Be honest, be true, be Christian, and BE AN AMERICAN.”¹⁴⁶ In a later edition of the serial, the father informed the son that, even though he had not been allowed to enlist due to poor health in 1898, “I want you to realize that you can serve your country as truly when you cast an honest ballot as if you were a soldier in the field.” While “Your country did not seem to need you as a soldier,” he could still serve his country by following the Republican Party. After the ballots were cast, he could “sleep sweetly that night, with a sense of duty faithfully done.”¹⁴⁷

The goal of the Republicans was to project a need for nationalist unity in a time of war. As they did so, they simultaneously understood that their opponents were casting them as dangerous militarists and aggressive expansionists. Even when they appealed to a milder form of nationalism, there was fear that it could potentially drive off immigrants or others disinterested in a nationalist project. German immigrants and German-Americans, for example, were widely believed to have a distaste for overseas expansion, and there is considerable evidence that supports this suspicion. In the case of Nebraska,

¹⁴⁶ “Dear Boy Letters—No. 4,” *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, September 14, 1900; same in *Columbus Journal*, September 12, 1900.

¹⁴⁷ “Dear Boy Letters—No. 9,” *Columbus Journal*, October 17, 1900; same in *Custer County Republican*, October 18, 1900; *Red Cloud Chief*, October 19, 1900; *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, October 23, 1900. Some of the “Dear Boy Letters” appear in Washington state and Colorado papers and in some other locations as well, but it appears that in most places the campaign supplements were not consistently preserved. See “Dear Boy Letters—No. 5,” *Colfax Gazette* (WA), September 28, 1900; “‘Dear Boy’ Letter,” *Wet Mountain Tribune* (Westcliffe, CO), September 22, 1900; “Dear Boy Letters—No. 10,” *American Citizen* (Kansas City, KS), October 26, 1900.

Germans were the largest immigrant group, and most German-language papers in the state openly opposed imperialism or policies they viewed as militaristic.¹⁴⁸ While some western Republicans attempted to dismiss these claims by declaring that the “Germans who have the ballot in this country are American citizens, and they will vote as they please,” the large number of articles directed specifically at German voters suggests a fear of alienation.¹⁴⁹ Many of these statements came from campaign supplements, and most told Germans not to be fooled by Bryan’s anti-imperialism—free silver was his real object.¹⁵⁰ Still, Republican apprehensions were not easily assuaged.

In Nebraska, the party decided the solution could be found by granting the gubernatorial nomination to Charles Dietrich, a banker from Hastings who they chose to label as German-American.¹⁵¹ While Dietrich would prove to be an awful choice—in part because of a past that was best left forgotten, but also because of his “beer and sauerkraut” campaign that repelled both prohibitionists and those Germans who considered him a phony—his selection represented a deployment of nationalism that was designed to attract members of the state’s ethnic communities.¹⁵² By identifying himself

¹⁴⁸ Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 170-171.

¹⁴⁹ For the quote, see *Adams County News*, October 3, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ “More German Opinion,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 11, 1900, p. 6; “German-American for Gold Standard,” *Columbus Journal*, October 17, 1900; same in *Custer County Republican*, October 18, 1900; and *North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune*, October 23, 1900; “Prominent German Hopes for Bryan’s Defeat,” *Columbus Journal*, October 24, 1900; same in *Custer County Republican*, October 25, 1900; “The Expert Patriot and Statesman,” *Colfax Gazette*, August 24, 1900, p. 4; “Germans Standing Firm,” *San Juan Islander*, September 27, 1900, p. 4; “The German Vote,” *Aspen Daily Times*, September 22, 1900, p. 2; *Fort Collins Weekly Courier*, August 30, 1900, p. 2; *Daily Journal* (Telluride, CO), July 24, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ See especially Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 173.

¹⁵² Dietrich was accused of such a wide range of crimes and misdeeds—the most sordid of which from his early days in Deadwood, South Dakota—it is impossible to address them all. Frederick Luebke noted some

as both German-American and the defender of the nation's soldiers, he showed how one could retain an ethnic identity and still act as a "proper" American.¹⁵³ While campaigning in the state, Theodore Roosevelt had made a similar argument. "In the big war we had Sherman and Sheridan. Who cared that one was of New England and the other of Irish stock? Or Siegel, who was of German stock; or Farrugut, whose father came from Majorca?" Neither place of birth nor ethnicity mattered to those men, as long as "he was an American in heart and purpose."¹⁵⁴ By Roosevelt's reckoning, "Americanism" was a quality that any (European) immigrant could attain, so long as they were willing to serve the nation or follow its leaders obediently.

The Republicans were quite successful at emphasizing a militarized version of patriotic nationalism. While Populists and other reformers did still occasionally make reference to the kind of civic nationalism or republican patriotism that they had appealed to for much of the decade, it appeared with much less frequency. Now when they compared their struggle to that of the nation's founders it was often defensive. A writer for the *Aspen Democrat* opened a column with a reminder that, "Now that we who oppose the taking of the Philippines and Puerto Rico and the annexation of Cuba are being denounced as 'traitors' by the imperialistic advocates of such a policy... it is well

of the accusations in *Immigrants and Politics*, 173-176. For Republican refutations of the charges (which often explained the rumors better than the innuendo published in fusion papers), see "Resorting to Falsehood," *McCook Tribune*, October 19, 1900, p. 5; same in *Custer County Republican*, October 25, 1900, p. 4; "Slanders are Rebuked," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 31, 1900, p. 3. Several stories focused on the efforts to refute rumors that Dietrich had a business partner killed during his days in Deadwood. See "Campaign Lies Disproved," *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 10, 1900, p. 7; "Free Speech Plenty," *Custer County Republican*, October 11, 1900, p. 7.

¹⁵³ For Dietrich's defense of soldiers, see "Poynter and the 'Hired Soldiers,'" *Norfolk Weekly News*, October 18, 1900, p. 4; "Enthusiasm Grows Daily," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 24, 1900, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ "Hands Poynter a Hot Shot," *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 5, 1900, p. 1, 7.

to bear in mind the life of Patrick Henry.”¹⁵⁵ Their frequent responses to the epithets of “copperhead” and “traitor” also suggest these remarks were taken seriously.

A Colorado editor lamented that the Republicans could not explain their foreign policy “without going into a frenzy and howling ‘Copperhead,’ ‘traitor,’ and similar ‘argument’ [sic.] which constitutes most of their campaign stock-in-trade this year.”¹⁵⁶ A

Washington Democrat explained the wonderful logic used by the administration’s defenders: “All persons who oppose the McKinley policy in the Philippines are guilty of giving aid and comfort to the enemy, and are therefore traitors. No traitor should be allowed to vote. Consequently, the right to vote should be limited to persons who intend to vote for Mr. McKinley.”¹⁵⁷

Conscious of the power of such labels, some Democrats and Populists threw them back at their opponents. In Colorado, the word “traitor” was as likely to be attached to Republican Senator Wolcott as it was to Bryan. In a front-page cartoon ran by the *Rocky Mountain News*, Bryan was depicted as a gladiator who defended silver (here shown as a woman in distress) against a semi-human figure labeled “Money Trust.” But lurking behind Bryan was Wolcott, knife in hand, ready to betray the defender of silver when the moment was right.¹⁵⁸ The editor of Nebraska’s leading Populist paper took a different

¹⁵⁵ “Patrick Henry,” *Aspen Democrat*, September 26, 1900, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Basalt Journal*, (Basalt, CO), August 4, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Aberdeen Herald*, September 20, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ This cartoon, titled “Assassin in the Rear,” also depicted Wolcott in a way that greatly resembled cartoons of anti-imperialists in much of the Republican press. See *Rocky Mountain News*, October 17, 1900, p. 1; Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*. For other examples of this attack on Wolcott, see “Gov. Thomas Roasts Wolcott,” *Aspen Democrat*, September 13, 1900, p. 1; “Named Candidates for Legislature,” *Denver Post*, September 30, p. 3; *Durango Wage Earner*, October 18, 1900, p. 1.

tack. Under the headline “High Treason,” the author consciously replicated the language of the Republicans and accused them of statements worse than “Vallandigham [sic.] ever made during the civil war.” Many of the old leaders of the Republican Party were working with conspirators who planned “to overthrow this government and establish a monarchy in its place.” “These republican leaders are traitors,” claimed the editor. “They are committing high treason every day of their lives. They are in collusion with the hereditary enemy of this country and the enemy of all republics. They have made a secret alliance by which the upholders of monarchy in the old world shall assist the believers in that form of government in this country.”¹⁵⁹ The editor had hit upon a key point that had been central to the debates of the 1890s. When Populists and allied reformers accused their opponents of cooperation with the money power or the aristocracy or plutocracy, they had in fact accused them of being treasonous or un-American. But now that Americans were fighting a war overseas against a—comparatively speaking—more tangible opponent, one could question the extent to which such definitions of “traitor” still held mass appeal.¹⁶⁰

Individual politicians had other means of defending themselves. Governor Poynter’s defenders liked to note his work to provide aid for the returning members of the First Nebraska. When the state legislature refused to appropriate funds for the purpose, Poynter led efforts that took in charitable contributions designed for the same

¹⁵⁹ “High Treason,” *Independent* (NE), August 30, 1900, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Another interesting conspiratorial piece that examined the recent use of traitor can be found in “Grand Democratic Party,” *Aberdeen Herald*, August 30, 1900, p. 1.

use. As his opponents attempted to demonstrate the Governor's disdain for America's soldiers, he could try to hold up a record that said otherwise.¹⁶¹

John R. Rogers chose a different path. Rather than follow the national party's line, he continued to endorse "expansion." By midsummer, he toned down his statements on the issue, which Republicans universally declared to mean that he had been forced to change due to pressure from the Bryan campaign.¹⁶² Rogers had not totally renounced his earlier position, but he had decided to split the difference. In his speech at the largest fusion rally in Washington during the campaign, he stated that he would emphasize local matters. "I will say, however, that I believe in commercial expansion in the fullest sense." Puget Sound was to be "the future commercial emporium of the world," and Washingtonians could not deny that destiny. At the same time, he denied that expansion required "imperialism," or rule by force of arms. He made no reference to the Philippines or any present conflict, and his statements could be read as support for whatever the listener chose to believe. McKinley himself had denied that his policies were imperialistic, and if Rogers even refused to explain whether or not he defined them as such there was little reason to believe the Governor specifically condemned the ongoing war. Undoubtedly, that is exactly how he wanted it.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ "Poynter and the Soldiers," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 6, 1900, p. 4; "Gov. Poynter's Administration," *Valentine Democrat*, October 25, 1900.

¹⁶² For just a few examples of these suggestions, see *Pullman Herald*, October 13, p. 4; *Colfax Gazette*, October 26, 1900, p. 4; "As to the American Flag," *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, November 1, 1900, p. 4.

¹⁶³ "The Rally at the Armory," *Seattle Daily Times*, September 13, 1900, p. 8.

Results of the Contest

Bryan's defeat in the election of 1900 was no real surprise for many. In 1896, he had failed to win any state in the Midwest or Northeast, and many sensed that was likely to continue. The addition of anti-imperialism and anti-trust planks to the platform could sway some voters, and most have suggested that they did account for his improved showing in several eastern states. However, the electoral map in the East looked very much like it had four years earlier, and that fact alone made his victory in the presidential contest impossible.¹⁶⁴

Far more devastating than his defeat was the decimation of his base of support in the West. Among the states he had carried in 1896, Bryan lost Kansas, the Dakotas, and his home state of Nebraska, as well as Wyoming, Utah, and Washington. The Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans who had been swept into office in the West in 1896 had been nearly swept out altogether in 1900. The results in Nebraska, Colorado, and Washington are especially telling. In Nebraska, Bryan's majority of nearly twelve thousand votes had been turned into a defeat by nearly eight thousand. The gubernatorial contest was closer, but Dietrich's narrow victory—by roughly eight hundred ballots—was certainly due to a local campaign that repulsed traditional Republican voters. He ran roughly eight thousand votes behind McKinley's tally. The reformers fared better in

¹⁶⁴ Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 277-279; Koenig, *Bryan*, 344-345; Kazin, *Godly Hero*, 107-108. For presidential vote totals described here and in the following paragraphs, see Edgar Eugene Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932* (1947; New York: Octagon Books, 1970), especially 46-53.

Colorado, where Bryan won by over thirty thousand and Orman secured the governorship with a somewhat smaller total.¹⁶⁵

Strangest of all were the results in Washington state. Bryan had claimed a twelve thousand vote majority in 1896; four years later, he was defeated by the same margin. Despite defeat in the national contest, Governor Rogers was almost miraculously reelected. Over his four years in office, Rogers had alienated mid-road Populists, single-tax Democrats, and finally even mainstream Populists when he abandoned their party altogether. Compared to his Republican rival, he also had rather little organizational support. With all of those factors running against him, he outpaced Bryan's totals by over seven thousand votes (out of 107,000 cast). When one considers how rare ticket splitting was at this time, the difference is even more impressive.¹⁶⁶

The defeat of reform in the West was nearly complete. All along the Plains states, from the Dakotas down to Kansas, the results were much as they were in Nebraska. The three Pacific Coast states also elected Republican governors and legislatures. Among the congressional delegations from the Plains and Coast, remarkably four Nebraska fusion candidates won and so did one from Kansas, but all other districts went Republican. Only in the states of the mining West were the results different. Much as they had in Colorado, Democrats won victories in states like Montana and Idaho with the aid of Populists. Organized labor also applied pressure through the Populists, so that in Idaho

¹⁶⁵ Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 77-79, 94-96; James E. Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent In Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 217-225. For gubernatorial vote totals in this and the following paragraphs, see Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1861-1911* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010).

¹⁶⁶ Riddle, *Old Radicalism*, 280-281; Robert D. Saltvig, "The Progressive Movement in Washington" (PhD. diss., University of Washington, 1966), 29-31, 66-73.

the Democrats had been forced to officially renounce the administration of their own governor. But because of the relative strength of the Democrats in the mining states compared with the party elsewhere in the West, fusion arrangements had always faced serious obstacles. Though Populists joined winning coalitions in the region in 1900, these victories painted no bright picture for the future of the party.¹⁶⁷

Bryan's explanation of the defeat was published the next month in the *North American Review*. Though imbalanced in places and overly simplistic in others, a few substantive points remain worthy of note. He observed that there was no national shift in votes toward McKinley, but instead that McKinley had taken the West while Bryan had improved in the East. Perhaps most troubling considering the focus of his crusade, Bryan had lost substantially among rural voters while he gained in the biggest cities. He knew well that his showing had been worse than it was four years earlier. In accounting for that, he pointed to the Republican campaign chest—which overflowed while his own was empty—the war in the Philippines, and “better times.” Though he acknowledged that many were likely influenced by ongoing war and the argument “that it is not safe to swap horses while crossing a stream,” and so preferred McKinley, he inevitably claimed that “prosperity” had won the day for the President.¹⁶⁸

Bryan all but accepted the McKinley campaign's arguments wholesale—not that he agreed with them, but that he deemed them to have been effective. In fact, the

¹⁶⁷ On the congressional races, see *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 6th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), 1111-1114.

¹⁶⁸ William Jennings Bryan, “The Election of 1900,” *North American Review* 171 (December 1900): 788-801.

situation was far too complex to explain with simple economic determinism. Of all the groups Bryan examined, he suggested that farmers were likely the most susceptible to the economic arguments of the administration. But in his study of Bryan's home state, historian Robert Cherny demonstrated that although ethnic factors had been increasingly trumped by economic ones over much of the 1890s, the opposite was true for 1900. Farmers were at least as influenced by their cultural background as they were their pocketbooks.¹⁶⁹ In Colorado, the single most important determinant was vocation. Miners provided solid support for Bryan and Orman, while farmers and ranchers were less interested.¹⁷⁰ The miners' view of the events in Idaho and subsequent rejection of militarization likely played as substantial a role as did the faint hope that silver could still be remonetized.

Rogers victory may be one off the most telling of all. In Washington state, the Governor outpaced Bryan by five to ten percent of the vote in nearly every county, whether urban or rural, eastern or western. Though his victory is difficult to pin on any single factor, his acceptance of American empire and his willing participation as the state's leading booster surely made a difference. Those who had identified with the Populists and Silver Republicans earlier in the decade supported McKinley in 1900, but no small number of them declined to renounce Rogers. This may suggest support for

¹⁶⁹ Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism*, 100-103.

¹⁷⁰ Wright, *Politics of Populism*, 222-224.

imperialism—or wartime support for the nation and its soldiers—alongside a continued to hope for reform.¹⁷¹

The defeat of both Populism and anti-imperialism in 1900 was no small matter. The campaign had been waged on many fronts and it more fully demonstrated the complexity of American life and the nation's place in the world than had the celebrated contest of just four years earlier. Political economy, an overseas war, and questions of American identity were discussed in detail, even if they were not resolved as neatly as the electoral contest had been. But now the most substantial of the late nineteenth century's movements for economic justice was all but dead. The triumph of conservatism was nearly complete, and it would be McKinley's vision of harmonious empire that would receive its trial run at the opening of the twentieth century.

¹⁷¹ On the votes, see Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 598; Edgar Eugene Robinson, *Presidential Vote*, 364-367.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has confronted a basic problem in the existing historiography. Historians of politics—especially those who have examined the last great reform movement of the nineteenth century—have largely been uninterested in the years after 1896. In the coverage they have provided to those years, they have generally had little to say regarding America’s overseas activities or its impact upon domestic debates. Those academics who have instead examined American imperialism and its opponents have likewise missed a great deal. They have ignored the part played by those who questioned the form of American development in the foreign policy debates at the end of the decade. By ignoring the contribution made by western Populists and their allies, historians have failed to explain both the political impact of imperialism and the important place of industrial reform proponents among the anti-imperialists.

Despite the little attention given to the Populists and their western allies in the aftermath of Bryan’s first presidential run, the western half of the movement retained a great deal of vitality. Its adherents continued to call for sweeping changes that would dramatically alter the way people engaged with their government and the market and, despite their idealistic rhetoric, they also proved capable of bringing tangible change that dealt with the immediate concerns of many farmers and laborers. Bryan pulled together these myriad groups in 1896, but his defeat did not mark the death of the movement. Instead, as he and others suggested, the campaign for silver was to represent a new beginning. The western reformers who continued their fight hoped to create bottom-up economic opportunity and accountable, responsive government, but they would soon hit a

roadblock. Just over a year after the election, events overseas drew attention away from their domestic reform agenda.

Western reformers were among the many drawn to the Cuban independence movement. They had already developed a critique of uneven economic development and global exploitation based upon unequal trade. By 1898, they had extended that analysis to the Cuban situation, identified the cause of the Cuban freedom fighters as one much like their own. They successfully pushed for intervention on behalf of the Cubans, but only when war actually came did they see how a wartime president could use the power of a commander-in-chief to dictate policy and influence public sentiment. Within just a matter of weeks, many among them knew that their hoped-for a war of liberation had become a war for empire.

Hawaii—the long-coveted Pacific outpost for those with expansionist ambitions—was the first objective of the McKinley administration. The president's backers argued that the islands were necessary for the war against Spain, and enough potential opponents of annexation were pressured to tow the line for the sake of patriotism to ensure that it would pass. But the formal debate over annexation was important, for it was at this time that western reformers first demonstrated how they could deploy their own analysis of territorial expansion in the industrial age. Unlike in previous eras, they argued, newly acquired territories offered no new homes or lands for yeoman farmers. The plantation agriculture and exploited laborers of Hawaii represented a model antithetical to that envisioned by the nation's founders. Instead, the Hawaiian situation as they saw it was more in tune with current trends in the global economy, but it was just this kind of exploitative systems that they hoped to avoid. For the western

reformers, overseas imperialism signified yet another step down the road toward despotism.

As it became apparent that the administration intended to acquire nearly every piece of territory it could lay its hands upon, the great majority of western reformers adopted an anti-imperialist position. More than any other event, the annexation of the Philippines convinced them that the expansionists must be stopped. They perceived the acquisition of an archipelago with several million Asian inhabitants as a racial, political, and economic threat. They shared with others a fear that American citizenship would be “degraded” and that representative government could not withstand the contradictions that came with being an imperial republic. They also believed that the colonial peoples would be used—either in place or upon their immigration to the United States proper—to lower the wages of labor.

But the western reformers did not merely adopt anti-imperialism due to their notions of race and a desire to preserve the privileges of whiteness. While imperialists followed McKinley’s lead and declared that the addition of new territories would strengthen the nation’s prospects for trade and investment overseas, western Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans declared that the American economic system was already too flawed to be extended to far-flung colonies. The people and resources of Asia and Latin America would be subjugated to the needs of American capital—to their own detriment and to the disadvantage of farmers and laborers at home. The reformers also channeled their traditional disdain for centralized authority into their attack upon the basis of colonialism. With greater conviction than their sometime allies (conservative and muguwump anti-imperialists), westerners argued that rule at the point of a bayonet

would not be restricted to such places as the Philippines. The force of the government had already been used to crush movements for change, and the recent fervor for conquest and colonies was just further proof of the elite's growing disdain for democracy and its principles.

War and empire did provide conservatives a path to power, even if they did so in ways that proved less nefarious than the reformers had feared. Before 1898, McKinley's party had been on the decline throughout West. The Populists had succeeded in changing the political discourse from matters of culture and recent history to the concerns of economic and political power. In that environment, Republicans had struggled. Its candidates had been most successful in the previous era by pointing to their party's record of loyalty during the Civil War and promoting a vision of top-down prosperity in a society without class division. With the coming of war, they sensed that events gave their old program new life.

In the campaigns of 1898 and 1900, Republicans in the West came triumphantly back into power. They did so by stressing national unity and painting their opponents as prophets of strife and traitors to their nation. In 1898, they claimed that the threat of renewed war (including a chance of intervention by the great powers) required all to scorn opponents of the administration. From McKinley on down to the editors of the smallest local press, Republicans demanded votes to save the nation. Those Democrats and Populists who criticized the President or threatened to hold up the treaty negotiations provoked America's enemies, the Republicans said, and as traitors they should be driven from office. With the echoes of war still in the air, western voters set aside their reservations about Republican economics and returned the "patriots" to office.

The lessons of 1898 were further demonstrated in 1900. The Republican campaign, both nationally and in the West, was more nationalist than imperialist. The little that was said of the new American empire stressed secure prosperity through forceful control of international markets and trickle-down wealth that benefitted all. But the greatest emphasis was upon unquestioned loyalty at a time when American soldiers were in harm's way. Opponents of McKinley's policies were no better than Aguinaldo's insurgents or the irrational Boxers, they declared. Worse still, by vocalizing their opposition, they lent support to those who would kill Americans if given the opportunity. Republicans were again successful at labeling their partisan rivals, and no response would prove adequate to the persistent charge of treason. The Republican "redemption" of much of the West in 1900 only added to the party's resurgent dominance at the beginning of the new century.

The Republican Party was ascendant in the West and nationally, but the man who had returned them to power, William McKinley, would not long survive his reelection. In September of 1901, while visiting the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, he was shot by Leon Czolgosz, a son of Polish immigrants who claimed to have been influenced by the speeches and works of political anarchists. Ironically, especially given the rhetoric of the last campaign, Czolgosz repeated in the days after the shooting "I done my duty." The President had been a servant of wealth, the assassin said. McKinley was targeted because of what he represented, and historians have been satisfied enough with the idea that they have used his death to mark a transition in American public life. Roosevelt's elevation to the presidency supposedly marked a new

era of national politics, one in which the chief executive would be receptive to the reforms advocated by the nation's urban middle class. This narrative has been persistent, and in a way it makes the defeat of Populism seem irrelevant. Yet this view misses much, and it totally ignores the problems of the 1890s as seen by those in the West and elsewhere.¹

Following their defeat in 1900, the Populist parties in much of the West all but collapsed, and they would never recover. The Pacific Coast Populists essentially disappeared after 1900. The movement in Washington dissolved, and even the newly-minted Democrat John Rankin Rogers died just over a year after his reelection.² Along the Plains states, the parties continued for a few years but with such reduced membership that they became almost immediately irrelevant. In Nebraska, the Populists remained a bit stronger than in most, and they were able to name the fusion gubernatorial candidate in 1902 and influence the selection in 1904. Still, they too faded fast, and most members of the state organization were compelled to rejoin the old parties or abandon politics altogether. Almost half joined the Democrats, and politics in Nebraska became far more

¹ Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt's America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), especially x-xii, 8-38. See also Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (1987; W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 170-171; Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 39; Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 100-101. One of McKinley's biographers treated him more as a transitional figure than as the last of a breed, but still admits he was hardly the "modern" man that Roosevelt was. See H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 526-527.

² On the end of Populism and its legacy in Washington, see Thomas W. Riddle, *The Old Radicalism: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 280-287.

competitive than it had been before the 1890s, but the Republicans still dominated.³ As a consequence of the Populist defeat, the agrarian reform agenda was essentially without advocates after 1900. A few of the eastern urban elite and academic professionals did advocate self-help reforms among the agrarians, but—as though they had somehow missed the events of the last decade—they contended that an excess of rural “individuality” was the greatest obstacle to change. Farmers outside of the Northeast showed little interest in this “Country Life” movement, and they told its advocates that their ills required a different remedy. What they really wanted was “a chance to make more money,” as one so bluntly put it. But Populism’s death meant that there were no longer proponents of the kind of structural reforms farmers still desired.⁴

The fate of Populism in the Mountain West was little different despite their victories in 1900. In these states, where the Democrats were stronger than in much of the rest of the West, the Populists’ position had always been tenuous. The party had helped represent the demands of the most militant members of organized labor. Though these labor activists had also begun to engage in non-partisan interest group politics, many of the most dedicated had been Populists. The existence of such a party gave labor a voice in fusion arrangements, and in states like Colorado the Democrats had been forced to accept a large number of labor candidates and a pro-labor platform. When the fusion process broke down, neither the party nor radical labor would survive.

³ Robert. W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 74-108.

⁴ McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 105-107.

In the campaign of 1902, Colorado's Democrats refused to cooperate with the state's Populists. The Populists then ran a separate ticket with no chance of victory as the Democrats were left to hope that Populist backers would willingly abandon their allegiance. In this they were disappointed. The avowedly pro-business Republican state ticket, headed by James H. Peabody, was victorious. His term in office would be characterized by the suppression of organized labor on a scale that had been unknown in the history of the state up to that time. Labor unrest in 1903 led Peabody to call out the Colorado National Guard and, under the leadership of former mine manager and one-time Rough Rider Sherman Bell, the state militia was used to crush the local chapters of the Western Federation of Miners. Strikebreakers received official escort, union leaders were arrested without cause, and many WFM members were forcibly placed aboard trains and dropped off beyond the state line. The WFM never fully recovered in Colorado, and the Populists died with them.⁵

The new president, Theodore Roosevelt, looked on with approval. Though he had never had the chance to line Populists up in front of a wall and shoot them (as he had once recommended), surely this was the next best thing. While many Americans still thought of his intervention in the anthracite coal strike in 1902, for Roosevelt the events were not proper parallels. First, the coal strike threatened the supply of a vital and commonly used good as winter was fast approaching; the metals produced by the

⁵ James Edward Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent In Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 219-225; Elizabeth Jameson, *All that Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 199-225; George G. Suggs, Jr., *Colorado's War on Militant Unionism: James H. Peabody and the Western Federation of Miners* (1972; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

Colorado mines were not as directly a public interest. The blatant arrogance of the coal mine owners also destroyed any public sympathy for their position and made it impossible for such a conscientious politician as Roosevelt to side with them. The absentee owners of the Colorado mines, on the other hand, largely remained out of the headlines. The most important factor, however, had to do with the politics of the West. Unlike the United Mine Workers, the union that dominated the eastern coal fields, the WFM called for a substantial restructuring of the capitalist order. Radical organizations brought out class resentment and social disorder, and Roosevelt had no tolerance for them.⁶

This represented the most fundamental difference between the Populists and the reform movement that followed them. The middle-class progressives were troubled by both those above and those below, and they saw both the wealthy elite and disgruntled workers as selfish and potentially dangerous. Those among them who were outside the political centers of power created organizations to support specific causes, but through these affiliations they hoped to create identities separate from those based upon socioeconomic status. Those in high office held similar goals. Their aim was to remove the worst sources of social tension and the most blatant abuses of power. They did not imagine a new economic order, but sought just enough reform to stave off the conflicts that disrupted domestic peace. Their analysis bears no real resemblance to the Populist view of the situation, particularly as it related to those at the bottom. While they, too, occasionally stated a fear of the poorest members of society, their anxiety had been based

⁶ McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 118-125, 139-140, 143.

upon a belief that the most desperate could be manipulated by those who held power over them. The Populists rarely displayed a fear of revolution from below; on the contrary, at least a few looked forward to such an event.⁷

National progressivism should be considered in light of the destruction of the Populists. As long as a group like the Populists existed in any substantial numbers, moderate progressive reform was not a viable position for most Republicans. While some in the West had advocated reform positions in the 1890s, no state party in that region had accepted such a position, perhaps with the fear that it would legitimize the Populist critique. But by the time Roosevelt entered office, the Populists were gone and even Democrats from outside of the South were few in number. It also appeared that Bryan himself was discredited, and he announced shortly after the election that he would not accept his party's nomination in 1904. Conservatives openly declared their intent to take back the Democracy, and no effective leader emerged to challenge them. William V. Allen published a piece in the reform magazine *Arena* which explained that the regression of the Democrats demonstrated the need for a Populist alternative, but there was no one left to heed the call. When conservative New Yorker Alton Parker received the Democratic presidential nomination in 1904, the western reformers discovered they no longer had a vehicle for their movement. Roosevelt won in a landslide, and his majorities were even larger in the West than elsewhere.⁸

⁷ Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, xxxiii-xl, 103-109, 186-187; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 54-55, 64, 66-67, 134-135, 155-158, 175-176. One recent work in particular emphasizes the progressive's blind spot regarding class. See Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

⁸ J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan* (Chicago:

With the elimination of their chief electoral and ideological rivals, Roosevelt and those Republicans who favored change could push through reform on their own terms. There was little chance that the government interventions that they initiated would be transformed into radical legislation or turned into fodder for a movement that advocated more thoroughgoing reform. The elimination of the Populists and the humiliation of Bryan allowed the members of the comfortable classes to ameliorate the worst abuses of the industrial system while maintaining the essential imbalance in power that had allowed such abuses to occur in the first place.

As their movement faded into the background, a handful of western reformers did manage to continue on in state and national politics. However, their most notable contributions in the years that followed were not in debates over political economy. Instead they continued to attack American imperialism. In January, 1901, months before McKinley's second inauguration, Senator Henry Teller introduced an address and petition signed by over two thousand residents of Manila. The petitioners stated that the war against the Americans had been supported by the whole of the people and that a majority of them still demanded independence. The war in the Philippines had continued, despite all of the Republican suggestions that the insurrection would collapse following Bryan's defeat, and Teller made this point clearly.⁹

University of Chicago Press, 1963), 187-233; Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 290-352 *passim*; William V. Allen, "Necessity for the People's Party," *The Arena* XXX (July 1903): 410-419.

⁹ *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 2nd Sess., Jan. 10, 1901, p. 806-808.

As the war slogged on, stories of the brutality of the war came to circulate with increasing frequency in the American press. In particular, American words and actions directed at the rebels of the province of Batangas and on the island of Samar brought attention to the methods employed by the Army. Following the defeat of one isolated American detachment in late 1901, and almost immediately following his accession to the presidency, Roosevelt ordered more “stern measures” to be used against the rebels of the archipelago. With this directive in mind, General J. Franklin Bell instituted a policy of “concentration” in Batangas, a policy not so dissimilar from the practices instigated by Weyler in Cuba. On Samar, General Jacob H. Smith declared that his men should now take no prisoners and that all Filipinos above ten years of age were to be treated as enemies. While his subordinates showed greater restraint than their commander had desired, it was nonetheless shocking for Americans to discover (as they soon did) that one of their generals demanded that an entire island be converted into a “howling wilderness.” Reports of this sort led to a Senate investigation of conditions in the Philippines and the conduct of the war there.¹⁰

It was certain that the investigation would make a report that Roosevelt would find acceptable. Imperialists made up a clear majority of the committee members, which included Albert Beveridge, Henry Cabot Lodge as the chair, and the recently elected Senator from Nebraska, former governor Charles H. Dietrich. George Hoar and Eugene Hale of Maine, the only two anti-imperialist Republicans in the Senate, were also on the

¹⁰ Stuart Creighton Miller, “*Benevolent Assimilation*”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 206-212. See also Glenn A. May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), chapter 9.

committee. The rest of the committee was made up of western and southern anti-imperialist Democrats, including Joseph Rawlins of Utah, Fred Dubois of Idaho, and another freshman senator, Thomas Patterson of Colorado.¹¹

The eastern media described Hoar as the top anti-imperialist of the lot, but it was Patterson who thoroughly embarrassed Lodge's witnesses. He pressured William Howard Taft into an admission that the war in the Philippines had been conducted in an "uncivilized" manner; he dressed down a member of the clergy whom Lodge had allowed to pontificate upon "God's plan"; and he bickered with Beveridge when the latter questioned Patterson's statement that the "water cure" constituted torture. He and the other anti-imperialists of the committee succeeded in making the war look ugly, but it was the hollowest of triumphs. Despite the testimony of soldiers who openly admitted to torturing captives and burning villages, the official findings of the committee gave a sanitized account of American involvement. Senator Beveridge, never satisfied with half measures, went even farther in a separate report that historian Stuart Creighton Miller has identified as a "deceitful cut-and-paste job." If nothing else, it was a fitting conclusion to an investigation that added little to the reputation of the United States Senate.¹²

No matter the objections, Roosevelt and his supporters were able to dominate in foreign policy and domestic politics. In so doing they shaped the course that the country would follow in both arenas. When Democrats finally did re-emerge as a force for

¹¹ For this and the following paragraph, see Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 212-218, 238-245.

¹² *Affairs in the Philippines: Hearing Before the Committee on the Philippines of the United States Senate*, 57th Cong., S. Doc. 331, pt. 1, p. 77-79; *ibid.*, 331, pt.3, p. 1979, 2686-2687.

national reform, they still claimed elements of the agenda that Bryan had pushed at the opening of the century. However, the nature of reform under the Roosevelt and then the Taft administrations had placed the emphasis upon the control of great corporations through regulation and judicial action. They had rejected policies designed to shift the distribution of wealth. When Woodrow Wilson entered office with new Democratic majorities to support him in Congress, few were inclined to dismantle the system that their predecessors had so effectively promoted.¹³

The legacy of Roosevelt and Taft were just as strong in international affairs. Roosevelt's international engagement was with little precedent in American history up to that time. In particular, his involvement in the affairs of Columbia and his part in the creation of an independent Panama in order to obtain an American policy objective was an act that stretched the bounds of propriety for a peacetime commander-in-chief. Taft may have openly disdained such policies, but in Nicaragua his "dollar diplomacy" looked far more like the Rooseveltian "big stick" than he would have cared to admit. Wilson himself had always been ambivalent toward the question of empire—whether formal or informal. While he came to embrace a global reformist position that combined elements of modern Democrat's economic analysis with a desire to create a liberal world order,

¹³ Some have attempted to describe the Democrats of the Progressive Era as fundamentally different than the progressive and "insurgent" Republicans of those years, but these works primarily demonstrate a difference of degree, not of kind. See David Sarasohn, *The Party of Reform: Democrats in the Progressive Era* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1999). The historians of "corporate liberalism" have explained the Wilsonian analysis in a more appropriate and thoughtful way. See Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (1963; New York: Free Press, 1977), especially 204-212, 255-260; Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially 381-394.

empire was at its core. He demonstrated no interest in the abandonment of America's dominant position in the Caribbean and Central America to the violent and irrational people he believed lived there. At its core, the Wilsonian perspective shared with its Republican predecessors a distaste—or perhaps even an outright fear—of revolution from below. Wilson extended this view from internal politics into the arena of international affairs. While his quest for stability eventually led to the development of the League of Nations, it had also brought about interventions in Mexico and Russia. Even William Jennings Bryan, Wilson's Secretary of State for the first two years of the administration, posed no obstacle to the policy of informal empire. Much of the Caribbean basin was so thoroughly under American influence by that time that to disengage would have created a power vacuum and likely only added to the turmoil of the region, or so the Commoner reasoned. Once began, the cycle of involvement and intervention became normative. Put another way—or at least as one historian so aptly put it—empire became a way of life.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Lloyd C. Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 108-138; Edward S. Kaplan, *U.S. Imperialism in Latin America: Bryan's Challenges and Contributions, 1900-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998). Most histories still focus upon Wilson's idealism, but they often struggle to maintain this view (or are forced to admit its limitations) when they describe Wilson's policies toward Mexico. See Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 30-32, 75-82, 102-104; Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24-30, 81-84. For the phrase by the historian, see William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

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