

The Uncommon Commoner: William Jennings Bryan and his Opposition to American
Imperialism in *The Commoner*

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the correspondence and published writings of three-time Democratic Presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan in relation to his role in the anti-imperialist movement that opposed the US acquisition of the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico following the Spanish-American War. Historians have disagreed over whether Bryan was genuine in his opposition to an American empire in the 1900 presidential election and have overlooked the period following the election in which Bryan's editorials opposing imperialism were a major part of his weekly newspaper, *The Commoner*. The argument is made that Bryan was authentic in his opposition to imperialism in the 1900 presidential election, as proven by his attention to the issue in the two years following his election loss. Following Bryan's loss to William McKinley in the presidential race of 1900, the anti-imperialist cause which dominated his campaign seemed lost and his position in the movement was questioned. Despite this "low ebb," as historians have termed it, in his political career, Bryan's anti-imperialist articles in *The Commoner* remained central to the movement's rhetoric and his correspondence suggests that he continued to receive support for his stance on imperialism. Analysis of Bryan's thoughts on imperialism during this period illuminate his commitment to the issue and further provide evidence of a sizable minority of the American who supported Bryan's views.

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Introduction

On August 8, 1900, William Jennings Bryan delivered a lengthy acceptance speech as the Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States. In the speech, entitled “Imperialism: Flag of Empire,” Bryan criticized American involvement in the Spanish-American War and the subsequent occupation of the Philippine islands by the United States.¹ The speech was among the first that Bryan delivered with an exclusive focus on his opposition to US imperialism, which he called the “paramount issue” of his 1900 Democratic Presidential campaign. He opposed the McKinley administration’s annexation of the Philippines and the imperialist foreign policy it represented as being against the foundations of the United States. The principle of self-government, exemplified in the Declaration of Independence, was among the most commonly used in his arguments in opposition to the young American empire. Bryan’s opposition was not limited to just this principle, but contained a complex fusion of populist anxieties, adherence to constitutional principles and Christian morality. Bryan ultimately lost the election to William McKinley and the nation embarked on a colonial policy, but his anti-imperialist ideals provide insight into the climate in which the American Empire was born and the values of a sizable minority of voters in opposition to it.

Studies of Bryan’s anti-imperialism tend to overlook the period following his failed 1900 campaign, and some narratives took for granted that the Republican victory was a “mandate on imperialism” in which the decision of the election reflected the

¹ William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan, rev. And arranged by himself, with a biographical introduction by Mary Baird Bryan, his wife* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1913) 17.

nation's attitude toward empire.² Additionally, historians such as Richard H. Miller and Robert L. Beisner, attribute Bryan's failed campaign to his emphasis on domestic issues during the later weeks of his campaign, rather than imperialism. Bryan stopped talking about the newly acquired American colonies the closer he got to the November election, and contemporary and modern critics used this fact as evidence to prove that he was not genuinely interested in anti-imperialism, but sought only to use the issue for political gain.³

Yet despite these assertions, Bryan's opposition to the United States' acquisition of and colonial rule in the Philippines continued after his failed presidential campaign. He published front-page editorials in his newspaper *The Commoner* and gave many speeches in opposition to the Republican Party's imperialist policies. Bryan's motivations and beliefs were no more or less racist than those of any other politicians of his day, so he was hardly a man ahead of his time in opposing the growth of colonial empires. Still, the authenticity of Bryan's anti-imperialist sentiment and his efforts to rally the American people against McKinley's policies remain overlooked by historians. Likewise, Bryan gave his speeches and wrote his articles with an audience in mind, one which may have been outnumbered politically but which opposed imperialism too and responded to Bryan's sentiments by purchasing his newspaper.

This study will address questions regarding the authenticity of Bryan's anti-imperialist sentiment in 1900. The argument is made that Bryan was authentic in his opposition to imperialism in the 1900 presidential election, as proven by his attention to

² Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern American, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper/HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 207-208.

³ Richard H. Miller, *American Imperialism in 1898: The Quest for National Fulfillment* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970) 170-171, 175.

the issue in the two years following his election loss. Bryan's incorporation of both "conservative" and "populist" anti-imperialist principles sustained his continued opposition to the "mandate on imperialism" in 1900. The incorporation of populist ideals in his anti-imperialism rejects the notion that Bryan adopted those values with the sole purpose of appealing to Eastern Democrats in 1900. These principles showed little change after his loss to McKinley. After the campaign, Bryan did not slow his focus on anti-imperialism and the front pages of *The Commoner* featured anti-imperialist editorials every month from its first issue in January 1901 to September 1902. The emphasis on anti-imperialism in *The Commoner* from 1901 to 1903 shows that Bryan's adherence to those principles in 1900 was not purely motivated by his desire to win the election. Additionally, the inclusion of editorials attacking the United States' colonization of the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico were a reflection of support from a small, albeit significant, portion of the population. Many readers of *The Commoner* wrote in support of his anti-imperialism and advice from newspaper industry insiders confirmed that anti-imperialism would reach a wide enough audience to make the paper successful.

Bryan's efforts were a reflection of public attitudes amongst the average voting public. Bryan was most popular amongst the white, Christian farmer population of the Midwest; he shared their values and he was mindful of reflecting their views.⁴ His audience was mostly populist in its retention of what they believed to be the values of early republican America, including opposition to imperialism. By 1900, this political stance was becoming rapidly anachronistic as the rest of the country was moving in a progressive direction, soon to be embodied in the values of Theodore Roosevelt once he

⁴ William Jennings Bryan, *The Commoner*, Feb. 22, 1901, 5. In this article Bryan describes the purpose of his newspaper as being a reflection of customers' political ideals.

assumed the presidency in 1901. Bryan, meanwhile, reflected Midwestern anti-imperialist values and gave voters in agrarian regions a means to articulate those values while the rest of the country was leaving those values behind.

Additionally, Bryan was a skilled politician who understood the complex workings of the national political system. Since he did not hold office between 1896 and 1912 and did not practice significantly as a lawyer, Bryan relied heavily on the success of his newspaper *The Commoner* and public speeches on the Chautauqua Circuit for financial support. Therefore, like any person making their living in the realm of public opinion, he had to espouse values that convinced readers to buy *The Commoner* and to show up for his speeches. The issues he included and how he projected them to his audience are important and provide insight into how his audience felt about imperialism following the 1900 election. Bryan's financial and political success depended on the support of his views, and reflecting the views of his audience (and customers).

Historians have not agreed on an interpretation of Bryan's anti-imperialism. This seems to be in response to the confused nature of Bryan's political strategy. While Bryan's role in the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War is acknowledged as misunderstood, nearly all of the major biographical works on Bryan upheld him as a major player in the anti-imperialist movement. The works in support of this view have mostly included Bryan's campaign speeches as evidence, as well as articles published in *The Commoner*. Paolo Coletta's three volume *William Jennings Bryan* (University of Nebraska Press, 1969) series portrayed Bryan in this way, when discussing both the passing of the Treaty of Paris and the 1900 campaign. In *Missionary Isolationist* Kendrick A. Clements upheld this view of Bryan, discussing his unique

foreign policy approach as a combination of pacifism and the desire to spread Christianity across the globe.⁵ Even in one of the latest biographies, Michael Kazin's *Godly Hero* (2006), the author acknowledged Bryan as a major figure in the anti-imperialist movement. On the other hand, Bryan was left out all together as a member of the movement and is often presented as a counter force to the League, mocked for his failed presidencies and support for bimetallism, in the major works on anti-imperialism and the American Anti-Imperialist League. In the case of Tompkins' *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, Bryan was not mentioned until after the first 100 pages, and then only in contextual comments on his failed 1896 campaign. Much like the Anti-Imperialist League before them, authors on the subject criticized Bryan heavily for his role in the passing of the Treaty of Paris, which Tompkins dubbed "Machiavellian politics."⁶ Other authors, such as Merle Eugene in *Bryan and World Peace* attributed Bryan's anti-imperialism to party politics.⁷

Bryan's 1900 campaign, and the election itself, also proves contentious among historians. While most historians agree that McKinley's victory in 1900 was due to the public's satisfaction with the recovered economy and reluctance to adopt bimetallism, some historians support the idea that imperialism was the driving force behind the Republican victory. For example, Jackson Lears in *Rebirth of a Nation* (2010) supported the idea that the McKinley and Roosevelt victory proved that the public supported empire.⁸ In his study of Theodore Roosevelt's 1900 campaign for President McKinley, in

⁵ Kendrick A. Clements, *William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

⁶ Tompkins, 191.

⁷ Curti, 125-126.

⁸ Lears, 207-208.

American Cyclone (2015), John M. Hilpert placed support for imperialism as Roosevelt's main issue for the campaign, the public support of which gave victory to the Republican ticket.⁹ The work of Thomas A. Bailey contested this view, in his belief that the election was more about both the public's satisfaction with the postwar prosperity and their dislike for Bryan and his radical economic aspirations.¹⁰

Historians also dispute the reasons for Bryan's failure in the campaign. Richard H. Miller, in *American Imperialism in 1898*, argued that Democratic failure was due to Bryan's inclusion of populist economic and cultural ideals, rather than a sole focus on anti-imperialism.¹¹ In opposition, Nathan Jessen's *Imperialism and Populism* (2017) claimed that Bryan did not bungle the election, since the Republicans never countered Bryan's attacks on trusts and won on their own emphasis on "power, profit and patriotism."¹²

Bryan's anti-imperialism following his 1900 loss remains understudied. Accounts of the "Great Commoner's" opposition to the annexation of the Philippines often end with the McKinley victory. To further understand the seriousness of Bryan's opposition to imperialism one must study the continued publication of anti-imperialist literature between 1900 and 1903, a period in which his direct election was not a motivation, while his maintenance of a livelihood hung partially in the balance. His anti-imperialist efforts during this period show that he was serious about his opposition to imperialism and spoke for a wider audience than has been previously acknowledged.

⁹ John M. Hilpert, *American Cyclone: Theodore Roosevelt and His 1900 Whistle-Stop Campaign* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press 2015).

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

¹¹ Miller, 170-171.

¹² Jessen, 211.

Chapter One: A Brief Biography

William Jennings Bryan was born on March 19, 1860 in Salem, Illinois, the son of Silas Lillard Bryan, an Illinois state senator, and Mariah Elizabeth Jennings Bryan in Salem, Illinois. Bryan was the fourth child of Silas and Mariah, but the first one to make it to adulthood. After him, Silas and Mariah had five more children, four of which survived infancy. Silas practiced law in Salem in 1852 and by 1866 had won an election as a state circuit judge.¹³ His success in law elevated the family to the ownership of a 530 acre farm outside of Salem where William was brought up.

Bryan's parents ensured that he was raised in a strong religious household, complemented by Jacksonian Democratic politics. Despite a failed attempt to win a congressional seat in 1872, Silas' devotion to the Democratic Party and Jacksonian principles were ingrained in his child's upbringing, and also led him to support Illinois Democrats such as the controversial Senator Stephen A. Douglas, whose ambivalence toward Slavery helped define the nation's moral struggles of the 1850s.¹⁴ The Bryan household was also very religious. As Silas was a Baptist and Mariah a Methodist, William was exposed to both churches and allowed to pick which service he wanted to attend on Sundays.¹⁵

When William was fifteen he was sent to a private school in Jacksonville, Illinois and afterwards stayed there to Jacksonville to study at Illinois College. In college

¹³ Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan, Vol. 1: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 3.

¹⁴ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2006), 5.

¹⁵ Kazin, 4-5, 9.

William became involved in public debate and oratory contests as well as being the chaplain of his fraternity. It was clear early on that he had talent as an orator.¹⁶ In 1879, while at Illinois College, William Jennings Bryan met Mary Elizabeth Baird, who he would marry in 1884. Bryan graduated at the top of his class and went on to law school at Union Law College in Chicago.¹⁷ While in law school, Bryan worked for the attorney and former Senator Lyman Trumbull. Trumbull was a friend of Silas Bryan and was an important political ally for William Jennings Bryan from the start of his political career to Trumbull's death in 1896. After graduating Bryan returned to Jacksonville and held a position in a law firm but was dissatisfied with the political and economic opportunities presented in the town. In 1887, William and Mary moved to the fast-growing city of Lincoln, Nebraska, with which they would be associated for the rest of his life.¹⁸

In Lincoln, Bryan established a legal practice with partner Adolphus Talbot, a Republican colleague from law school.¹⁹ Bryan entered the political scene in Lincoln by offering his oratorical skills to Democratic campaigns. He delivered speeches on behalf of major Nebraska Bourbon Democrat Julius Sterling Morton and President Grover Cleveland. His speeches made him popular amongst Nebraskan crowds and politicians.²⁰ By 1890 Bryan's popularity and support from Nebraska Democrats allowed him to run for the city of Lincoln's seat in the US House of Representative. The policies Bryan campaigned on were reflective of the reform-minded, populist-influenced Democrats in western states, and especially Nebraska. Bryan ran on a reduction of tariff rates, the

¹⁶ Ibid, 9-10.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17-19.

²⁰ Ibid., 22-24.

monetization of silver at a rate of sixteen ounces to every one ounce of gold as backing for the dollar, and an increased government involvement in reducing the power of corporate trusts.²¹ Bryan won the 1890 election at the relatively young age of 30, defeating incumbent Republican Congressman William James Connell, and was the second Democrat to represent Nebraska in Congress.²²

Bryan's times were marked by rapid change and reaction in the form of societal and political reform. Following the conclusion of the Civil War, the United States experienced economic growth during the Second Industrial Revolution. The growth in industry was aided by new methods to organize wealth amongst the owners of capital, which culminated in the monopolies and trusts run by men such as steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, banker J.P. Morgan and oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller, among others.²³ The Populist movement from which Bryan's candidacy emerged was among the most significant reform movements of the period for its reaction to social and political changes. Populists were mostly people working in the agricultural portion of the economy, struggling in the 1890s in the late stages of a worldwide agricultural depression.²⁴ Their economic livelihoods were being squeezed out by major agricultural combines, railroad interests that coveted their land and financial concerns that ignored their need for cash flow to maintain their production. In response, farmers, agricultural workers, small businessmen that relied on local agrarian economies and other concerned Midwesterners turned to politics to get their interests heard by men like the newly-elected

²¹ Ibid., 25.

²² Coletta, 48.

²³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

²⁴ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931).

William Jennings Bryan. They amounted to a large portion of the population which was becoming anxious with the corruption of regional politics and the decline of the social status of the yeoman farmer, due to the corporatization of America and the rural anxieties of a rapidly increasing urban society.²⁵ To recover the myth of their centrality to American moral and economic life, populists asserted that the average farmer and citizen should have the same representation in government as the wealthy.²⁶ However, on a more prosaic level, the populist-minded farming population, based heavily in the Midwest and west, were concerned with increasing the price of their crops and lessening the severity of their debt.²⁷

At the same time that Midwestern farmers fretted over their economic decline, immigration from central and southern Europe provided major corporations in the east and in the cities with an easily exploited workforce to fill the new low-paying jobs made available in industrial urban centers. Labor unions began to organize in the 1870s, and conflicts with management and ownership of industrial corporations rose severely into the 1880s and 1890s. Strikes were used as the primary weapon for laborers in their effort to establish reforms and even mere recognition.²⁸ The labor upheaval was a part of a widespread reform movement of the period, and labor and industry conflicts frightened conservatives and the upper middle classes who were interested in maintaining the status quo.²⁹ While Republicans, the wealthy and Bourbon Democrats like Grover Cleveland tended to be unified in their claims throughout the 1890s that the social and political

²⁵ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) 45-47.

²⁶ Hofstadter, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987).

²⁹ H.W. Brands, *The Reckless Decade: America in the 1890s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

structure of capitalism need not be disturbed, reformists varied in the degree of their radicalism and formed a number of movements which did not always cooperate with one another in their opposition to the moneyed classes. Bryan's candidacies for the presidency in 1896, 1900 and 1908 would all be marked by his increasingly failing efforts to unite these disparate communities of populists, industrial workers and radicals into a Democratic voting coalition.

In 1893 an international depression occurred, referred to as the Panic of 1893. Stock prices dropped severely, leading hundreds of banks to close and thousands of people to lose employment. The economic strife following the Panic of 1893 led populists to focus on economic issues that they thought might benefit farmers such as the enactment of tariffs on foreign-produced food, but most dramatically they supported a bimetallic monetary system. Populists in support of the use of silver as a currency sought to weaken the dollar, which used a careful supply of gold to maintain its worth, in order to lessen debt.³⁰

The call for bimetallism was scrutinized by many economic actors and politicians as being unwise, as economic principle at the time favored a strong currency. Yet because of its appeal to a large voting base, the idea of bimetallism split both the Democratic and Republican Parties. Within the Republican Party, the short-lived Silver Republican Party was formed by mostly western supporters of free silver in the Republican Party in 1896. Silver Republicans such as Henry M. Teller and Richard F. Pettigrew were elected to Congress but the party dissolved after the election of 1900.³¹ Bimetallism had a bigger

³⁰ Painter, 70.

³¹ Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People*, 116.

impact on the Democratic Party, and Bryan was eventually perceived as its champion. The rise of a third party in American politics, the populist People's Party, and leftist reform ideals such as bimetallism split the Democratic Party between conservatives like President Grover Cleveland and Midwestern congressmen like Bryan who welcomed the populist influence. The conservative wing in favor of sound money was largely based in the north eastern states. Cleveland blamed the Panic of 1893 on the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which increased the amount of silver that the US treasury bought, and which he had repealed once returned to office in 1893.³² Cleveland's support of the gold standard echoed the widely-held fear of further economic upheaval prevalent in those opposed to bimetallism.³³

Support for free silver within the Democratic Party was strongest in the agrarian south, the Midwestern states and the western territories, with pro-gold Democrats mostly in the more populous industrial Northeast. Farmers in the southern Cotton Belt and in the Great Plains hoped that inflation would increase the price of their crop and decrease the value of their debt, while in the West, where most of the nation's silver mines were located, miners stood to benefit from the increased value and sale of silver was of the most interest. Within the Republican Party, the short-lived Silver Republican Party was formed by mostly western supporters of free silver in the Republican Party in 1896. Silver Republicans such as Henry M. Teller and Richard F. Pettigrew were elected into congress but the party dissolved after the election of 1900.³⁴ While the influence of populism did not continue past the 1900 election, the strife which bimetallism brought to

³² Coletta, 83.

³³ John Ashley Soames Grenville and George Berkeley Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy; Studies in Foreign Policy 1873-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 45-46.

³⁴ Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People*, 116.

the Democratic and Republican Parties was in reaction to large scale support for the issue.

Bryan's two terms representing Nebraska in the House of Representatives were therefore heavily marked by the demand for the equality of silver as currency. Bryan himself rose among the leaders of the pro-silver Democrats as the American economy struggled through the Panic of 1893. To improve his political profile, Bryan decided to abandon his congressional seat in 1894 to contest one of Nebraska's seats in the US Senate. He also launched a career as a journalist, becoming editor of the *Omaha World-Herald*, and sustained his income through his reputation as an orator, drawing huge crowds as a public speaker on the political issues of the day, especially bimetallism. At the time, US Senators were appointed by their state legislatures, and the Republican Party swept to a majority in the state legislature, so Bryan lost his position in Washington. Yet as a result of the success of his powerful "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic National Convention held in Chicago, the relatively unknown former congressman was nominated as Presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in 1896, becoming the youngest presidential candidate ever nominated by one of the major parties at the age of 36.³⁵

In the campaign Bryan faced a fierce rival in Republican candidate William McKinley. The Republican Party was able to blame the 1893 Panic on the Cleveland administration and formed a coalition of conservatives who did not feel that the nation's economic structure needed drastic change.³⁶ Aided by industrialist campaign manager

³⁵Ibid., 5.

³⁶Ibid., 6.

Mark Hanna and a \$3.5 million dollar budget, McKinley was able to secure victory with a majority in the popular vote and the Electoral College.³⁷ Bryan's effort at appealing to the reform-minded agrarian voter cost the Democratic Party their wealthy, upper-middle class and urban voters in the eastern states who were appeased by the Republican support for manufacturing interests, such as protective tariffs.³⁸

Bryan was unable to ride the populist wave into the White House, yet the 1896 election nonetheless attracted a large turnout which ensured the future of his national political career following his "First Battle." Bryan appealed as a populist moral pillar to a large portion of the population for his inclusion of Christian morals in his assertion of the "common" agrarian farmer's place in government. In 1896, Bryan was viewed as "being hoisted on the shoulders of the have-nots"³⁹ and was the antithesis to the establishment. Bryan's attack on monopolies and belief in individual rights spoke to six million voters in 1896. His campaign built a following which was strong enough to place Bryan in a high position of leadership in the Democratic Party, so high that he would later run for the Presidency again in 1900 and 1908.

Once McKinley became president in 1896, the defining moment in his foreign policy was the Spanish-American War. Following the outbreak of the third liberation war fought by Cuban insurgents against their Spanish colonial rulers, the McKinley Administration decided on intervention in order to rid the Spanish from the Caribbean in the name of self-government for the Cubans. In February 1898, the *USS Maine* exploded

³⁷ William T. Horner, *Ohio's Kingmaker: Mark Hanna, Man and Myth* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 176.

³⁸ Glad, 195.

³⁹ Charles Morrow Wilson, *The Commoner: William Jennings Bryan* (Garden City, New York: Double Day Books, 1970), 228-229.

and sank in the Havana harbor, killing 260 sailors on board. Though historians since have guessed that the explosion was not a function of sabotage, at the time, most Americans blamed the Spanish colonial regime for the explosion. Following nearly five years of front-page newspaper reports on the harsh counter-insurgency tactics practiced by the Spanish, President McKinley called for war. Historians generally agree that McKinley was reluctant to go to war with Spain, but did so because of pressure from public opinion.⁴⁰ Support was widespread and most workers, populists, industrialists and imperialists felt they were conducting a humanitarian war.⁴¹ The United States won the war handily and in short order, as it lasted from April until August 1898, when negotiations for the controversial Treaty of Paris began.

While the American public favored intervention, the establishment of a colonial empire was a more contentious matter. Upon President McKinley's call to Congress for a declaration of war, Democratic senator Henry M. Teller of Colorado authored an amendment that assured that the United States would recognize Cuban sovereignty following intervention.⁴² The amendment was mostly the result of anxieties amongst those in the West and South who feared that the McKinley administration had plans to annex Cuba after defeating the Spaniards. In general, the South was concerned with incorporating the largely Afro-Caribbean and Catholic populations of Cuba while the West was concerned with protecting the domestic sugar trade.⁴³

⁴⁰ Marcus M. Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War: A Study in War Propaganda* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), xiii.

⁴¹ Hofstadter, 92.

⁴² David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981), 55.

⁴³ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Cambridge: Oxford University press, 2008), 303-310.

While Cuba was nominally independent following the cessation of hostilities with Spain in 1898, the Platt Amendment to the 1901 Army Appropriations Bill established a relationship with the United States in which Cuban sovereignty was severely limited and subservient. The Cuban government could not conduct foreign policy and commerce without consultation with the United States, and it was forced to cede Guantanamo Bay to the United States as a coaling and naval station. The Platt amendment was heavily criticized for the imperialist role that the United States assumed in its relationship with Cuba.⁴⁴

Despite war being declared in the name of providing self-government to a colonized people and ridding the western hemisphere of European colonialism, the Treaty of Paris ceded Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the United States, giving the United States its first formal overseas colonial empire. Puerto Rico's annexation to the United States was largely undisputed by anti-imperialists, as the lack of insurrection showed annexationists that the Puerto Rican people favored citizenship. Guam, in the western Pacific, was annexed for its use as a coaling station for American ships headed to the Philippines. Both Guam and Puerto Rico were incorporated into the United States as territories, granting their people citizenship despite lack of statehood. This state of governance remains to present times.

Before American troops had even been mobilized in Cuba, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt had ordered the admiral in charge of the Navy's Pacific fleet, George Dewey, to sail to Manilla and defeat the Spanish fleet harbored there. While Roosevelt was criticized for his order to Dewey so early in the war, the move itself was a

⁴⁴ Ibid., 483.

part of the war plan held by the Navy, in case of war with Spain, as a means of protecting the West Coast from any possible Spanish attack.⁴⁵ Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet at Manila and accepted control of the islands following the end of the war. President McKinley decided to hold onto the Philippines and a transfer of \$20,000,000 to Spain in the Treaty of Paris established American sovereignty over the Filipino people.

Notably different than Puerto Rico and Guam, the Philippines were not as quietly conquered. Like Cuba, a bloody independence movement had been waged against the Spanish since 1896 and continued after the realization that the United States would extend its sovereignty over the Asian archipelago. Following the establishment of the First Philippine Republic, the first constitutional republic in Asia, armed conflict erupted in February 1899, beginning the Philippine-American War. While initially the war was fought through traditional methods, the Filipino insurgents quickly resorted to guerilla tactics that would last sporadically until 1904.

The Spanish-American War and its outcomes were a turning point in American foreign policy. For most of the nineteenth century, the United States' relations with other countries was typically reactive and unstructured. With the war in Cuba, the decision for intervention was not made as part of a formulated plan but rather represented the executive office's reaction to public opinion. In fact, the entire conduct of the war was seemingly a series of uncoordinated governmental actions.⁴⁶ The decision to send Dewey to Manila and the decision to annex the Philippines were not handled by McKinley or a central team of foreign policy planners; rather, Roosevelt, as Assistant Secretary of the

⁴⁵ Richard E. Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 4-7.

⁴⁶ George Kennan, *American Diplomacy 1900-1950*, (Chicago,IL: University of Chicago, Press, 1951), 22.

Navy, ordered Dewey to Manila while the debate and decision to annex the Philippines was largely held by the Senate in the ratification of the Treaty of Paris.

The war happened during a period in which the United States formulated and put into practice its “Large Policy.” Members of the military, most notably the naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, sought to enhance American power projection in the Pacific and South America by greatly increasing the size and efficiency of the Navy.⁴⁷ The “Large Policy” was heavily influenced by business interests and the desire to extend American influence in Asia.⁴⁸ The desire for increased exports to the vast Asian populations was generally portrayed at the time as a solution to the problem of overproduction, which had hurt both industrialists and farmers, in the recent economic depression.⁴⁹ China was largely dominated by European imperial powers and expansionist sentiment in the United States favored an assertion of American power as proof of the nation’s racial vitality in a social Darwinist climate. Acquiring colonies was also an assertion of masculinity and virility in opposition to the perceived decline in traditional “Anglo-Saxon” American values due to immigration from southern and eastern Europe and east Asia. The outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1899 further increased anxieties over the United States becoming disconnected from the fabled “Chinese Market.” Expansionists called for the Philippines to be held as a means of establishing permanent power in the region and securing American trade.

⁴⁷ Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951). Richard H. Miller, *American Imperialism in 1898: The Quest for National Fulfillment* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970).

⁴⁸ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).

⁴⁹ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern American, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper/HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

In 1900, despite his defeat in the 1896 election, Bryan was still a popular figure in the Democratic Party, and still had support from the waning populist movement. The Democratic Party's last victorious candidate, Grover Cleveland, had won election to two non-consecutive terms, so there was no reason to believe Bryan's political fortunes had declined. But his political experience was still limited, especially when it came to the then-current issue of imperialism. Yet his ideas on foreign policy in general, and imperialism in particular, were only half-formed and often contradictory to the point where he could be accused of duplicity.⁵⁰

In the Democratic platform for 1900, the "paramount" issue was opposition to US imperialism, but Bryan was insistent on upholding his populist-influenced principles of bimetallism and antitrust agitation as a part of his platform.⁵¹ Bryan's decision to include the populist ideals in his campaign cost him dearly, as the American public was more concerned with economic stability than foreign policy and was by now afraid of Bryan's radical plans of bimetallism.⁵² Bryan included bimetallism and antitrust agitation in his campaign because he felt that despite the importance of opposing US imperialism, domestic reform was still of supreme priority.⁵³ With this move Bryan was attempting to hold onto his populist support in the West, in exchange for losing his anti-imperialist support in the staunchly Republican northeast.⁵⁴ McKinley defeated Bryan again, and the election saw the demise of the Populist Party's presence in Congress, as its base

⁵⁰ William Jennings Bryan, *The Old World and Its Ways* (St. Louis: The Thompson Publishing Company, 1907), 185-186.

⁵¹ Jessen, 220.

⁵² Miller, 170-171.

⁵³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, ed., *History of American Presidential Elections 1789-1968* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971) 1882.

⁵⁴ Jessen, 220-231.

supported Democratic candidates instead. Despite both parties gaining seats, due to the increased size of the House from the 1900 U.S. Census, the Republicans remained in control.

Following the loss in 1900, Bryan had to recover his political clout and wanted to maintain his influence in Democratic Party politics. A group of Democrats wanted to oust the populist influence from the party, and likewise saw the United States' acquisition of an empire as an opportunity to express the party's patriotism in support of expansion overseas. Bryan could be expected to oppose the former, but his opposition to the latter- his principles as an anti-imperialist- could be viewed by historians as more of a surprise. From 1900 until 1904, Bryan spent most of his time supporting his family by publishing a newspaper, *The Commoner* and giving speeches on the Chautauqua circuit. On the circuit Bryan typically gave speeches on topics related to Christianity.⁵⁵ In the newspaper, many of his editorials were focused on his moral opposition to the United States domination of the peoples of Puerto Rico, Guam and especially the Philippines, an issue he clearly considered important to the United States' future as a world power and to the fortunes of the Democratic Party too. The 1902 congressional election loomed a year after the assassination of President William McKinley, and in the middle of his successor President Theodore Roosevelt's first term. During this time, Bryan continued to publish heavily politicized articles in *The Commoner* in an effort to help "Bryanize" Democrats to win over Congress in the midterm elections.

⁵⁵ Coletta, 305-308.

Chapter Two: Bryan and the Rhetoric of the Anti-Imperialist Movement

The imperialist policy of the United States Government following the Spanish-American War received support from a public who had not yet come down from the highs of a quick, victorious war in 1898. Yet there was a significant minority of the American public whom Bryan spoke for in his 1900 presidential campaign, represented by factions within both the Democratic and Republican parties. Historians have since divided the movement between “conservative” anti-imperialists, mostly eastern and southern Democrats, and “populist” anti-imperialists, mostly western members of the People’s Party and reformist Democrats. A discussion of the Bryan’s anti-imperialist principles in relation to the “conservative” and “populist” factions refutes the accusation that Bryan adhered to his anti-imperialist principles in 1900 solely to appeal to Eastern Democrats.

The Democratic Party stood for “old Jeffersonian principles” since its formation under Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren in the late 1820s. These principles supported an agrarian society and were against a strong central government and government intervention in the economy. When in power, the party tended to have negative legislation. After the Civil War and the resented Republican reconstruction policies, the Democratic Party dominated the “Solid South.”⁵⁶ Grover Cleveland was elected President in 1884 and 1892, after years without a victory in the White House,. His administration supported the Gold standard, or “sound money,” as well as business

⁵⁶ David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harpers Perennial, 1976), 406-415.

interests and the goals of the railroads and banks, leading to their being named the “business Democrats” by opposition.

In the North, urban political machines, embodied by boss William M. Tweed in New York’s Tammany Hall, dominated the Democratic Party. Tammany Hall, and others, took advantage of the increase immigrant populations in northern urban centers and used those votes as political capital. By appealing to the needs of urban immigrant communities, Tammany Hall and others were able to gain the loyalty of a huge voting bloc. The boss system was pro-business and fostered widespread corruption, much to the dissatisfaction of the emerging populist movement in the 1890s.⁵⁷

Following the Panic of 1893, the populist movement had increasing influence over the Democrat Party. Many democrats suffering from the economic depression had sympathized with populist policies such as bimetallism and the government ownership of railroads, both incompatible with the policies of Cleveland and other “Business” Democrats. By the presidential election of 1896, the influence of the populists was enough to elect William Jennings Bryan and others who supported populist policies. The Democratic platforms of 1896 and 1900 both featured populist policies in their platforms.⁵⁸

Anti-imperialism was a sentiment which both populist and “business” conservatives shared. Both factions had opposed the annexation of the Philippines and joined in the multi-party anti-imperialist coalition following the Spanish-American War. In the election of 1900, Bryan was hopeful that anti-imperialism would unite the two

⁵⁷ William T. Horner, *Ohio’s Kingmaker: Mark Hanna, Man and Myth* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 103-110.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 269.

factions. Bryan's "Imperialism" speech marked a pivotal change in his political career as it was the first time he had paid exclusive attention to US foreign policy in a speech. Conservative Eastern Democrats were highly skeptical of Bryan's capabilities as a leader because of his support for bimetallism in the failed 1896 campaign.

With his nomination speech, Bryan was able to show conservative Democrats that he was serious about anti-imperialism as an issue for his 1900 campaign.⁵⁹ Eastern Democrats did support his anti-imperialism, but their differences regarding support for bimetallism and Bryan's populist influence, mainly in his attacks on trusts, heavily contributed to his failure in 1900. Many "business" Democrats in the Cleveland faction campaigned against Bryan in 1900 and consciously made the choice between two evils- silver or imperialism- having felt Silver to be more dangerous.⁶⁰ Ultimately, President William McKinley, aided by the fiery campaign of Vice-President Theodore Roosevelt and a recovered economy, was victorious and the nation embarked on a policy of imperialism. The populist movement suffered following the election of 1900, leading to a brief dominance of the conservative "business" faction in the Democratic Party, which would not win the presidency again until 1912.⁶¹

Bryan's nomination acceptance speech has been used by biographers as a main representation of Bryan's anti-imperialism, as its rhetorical themes presents a clear balancing act between conservative and populist imperialism. Bryan successfully incorporated the main elements of eastern anti-imperialism (the principle of self-

⁵⁹ Merle Eugene Curti, *Bryan and World Peace* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1971),127.

⁶⁰ Paul Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964), 30.

⁶¹ William T. Horner, *Ohio's Kingmaker: Mark Hanna, Man and Myth* (Athens,OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 103. LeRoy Ashby, *William Jennings Bryan: Champion of Democracy* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 117.

government) while also containing that of populist imperialism (imperialism as a distraction from domestic reform, anti-militarism).

Despite this central position, there is no consensus among historians on where to place Bryan in the anti-imperialist movement. In the histories of the anti-imperialist movement written during American involvement in the Vietnam War, the argument and story of the conservative anti-imperialists were the most prominent. For example, in the histories of the American Anti-Imperialist League, a largely eastern organization responsible for a large portion of anti-imperialist publications and lobbying, Bryan's role is almost antagonistic. Robert Beisner's 1968 work *Twelve against Empire* argues that Bryan's support for the cause of anti-imperialism was solely a political strategy to unite the Democrats in 1900. He asserts that Bryan's anti-imperialism was not genuine, as he was mostly focused on domestic issues until he was able to use the foreign policy issue for his own political maneuvering.⁶² Another early study of the anti-imperialist movement, Berkeley E. Tompkins' *Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, barely mentioned Bryan outside of his failed 1900 campaign.⁶³ Continuing this trend, Richard H. Miller in *American Imperialism in 1898* criticized Bryan's lessened emphasis on imperialism in the later weeks of his campaign. He notes that Bryan returned to discussing domestic issues after speeches of imperialism fell on indifferent crowds. Miller points to Bryan's eagerness to drop the imperialism issue in the 1900 campaign as evidence of the shallow nature of Bryan's anti-imperialism.⁶⁴

⁶² Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968) xii.

⁶³ Berkeley E. Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970).

⁶⁴ Richard H. Miller, *American Imperialism in 1898: The Quest for National Fulfillment* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970), 170-171.

This treatment of Bryan could be attributed to the historians' agreement with contemporary conservative anti-imperialist opinions of Bryan. The Anti-Imperialist League was at odds with Bryan following his support for the Treaty of Paris. The treaty transferred the Philippines from Spanish rule to American, and passed by two votes in the Senate. Bryan supported the treaty due to his beliefs that opponents of empire should not have prolonged the war, and that the granting of independence to the Philippines should be made by American legislation, not Spanish largesse.⁶⁵ The Anti-Imperialist League, and its historians, never forgave Bryan and blamed his support as being instrumental in the passing of the treaty. Bryan's influence on the passing of the treaty has been disputed, namely by Paolo Coletta. In the first volume of his three-volume biography of Bryan, Coletta argued that it was not Bryan but Henry Cabot Lodge and Republican patronage that ultimately won over the crucial votes in the senate.⁶⁶

Along with the other leading biographers, Coletta places Bryan in a more significant role in the anti-imperialist movement. Titles like "the staunch champion of the Philippine cause"⁶⁷ have been bestowed upon Bryan when detailing his anti-imperialist speeches, publications and campaign of 1900. Outside of biographies, recent works on the anti-imperialist movement have also placed Bryan in a more central role than previous scholarship. Michael Patrick Cullinane, in *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism*, uses Bryan's 1900 campaign as a high point in the anti-imperialist

⁶⁵ Curti, 125-130.

⁶⁶ Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan, Vol. 1: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 234.

⁶⁷ Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 296.

movement, without questioning Bryan's authenticity. Cullinane introduced Bryan as being "among the ringleaders of the American anti-imperialist movement."⁶⁸

This portrayal of Bryan as a central figure to the anti-imperialist movement, however, does miss the point that authors like Beinser and Tompkins made when dissociating him from the conservative, eastern faction of the movement. The differences between the factions are illuminated by Nathan Jessen in *Populism and Imperialism*, which brought to light the western populist element of the anti-imperialist movement. Jessen presents Bryan as being more considerate of the populist faction of the anti-imperialist movement, and posits his 1900 presidential campaign as a central moment for the movement.⁶⁹ The distinction made by Jessen, presenting Bryan as a member of the populist faction but also central to the movement as a whole, promotes the genuineness of Bryan's anti-imperialism.

This chapter seeks to connect the differing views of Bryan, and argues that his anti-imperialism was legitimate and not a shallow effort to appeal to Eastern Democrats. In fact, this chapter will argue that Bryan's anti-imperialist rhetoric was genuine specifically *because* of the subtle differences between his ideas and theirs, as evidenced in his support for a populist influenced anti-imperialism. The major difference between the two factions lies in the presentation of anti-militarism. While most anti-imperialists were against militarism in America, the nature of that opposition to militarism shows the difference in attitudes between the conservative and populist anti-imperialists. Conservative anti-imperialists were concerned that the militarization of the United States

⁶⁸ Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism: 1898-1909* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁶⁹ Jessen, 211-220.

would result in conflict with the militarized European powers. On the other hand, populist anti-imperialists were worried that militarization would directly lead to oppression of the American masses. The primary concern of neither faction was in interests of the Filipinos themselves, but focused on the impacts that imperialism would have on the United States.

The element of anti-militarism in Bryan's political rhetoric during the campaign of 1900 is the key to its authenticity, as it supplies the main difference between his anti-imperialism and conservative anti-imperialism. If Bryan were choosing to focus on the issue of imperialism *only* to unite Democrats, his anti-militarism would perhaps be more similar to that of the conservative anti-imperialist. In proving Bryan's honest belief in anti-imperialism in 1900, this study will compare Bryan publications with that of conservative anti-imperialist rhetoric. Works published by members of the American Anti-Imperialist League are used for their representation of the conservative element. For Bryan, published speeches and written articles are used for analysis of his campaign rhetoric, while his editorials in *The Commoner* is used as the main source for the years that followed the election. The presentation of populist anti-imperialism uses excerpts from Populist congressmen in the *Congressional Record* as its main point of analysis.

To understand the principles of the movement in which Bryan's role has been disputed, the principles of the conservative anti-imperialists must first be understood. The eastern faction was largely the sole protagonist in the histories of the anti-imperialist movement because it is in the east where most of the anti-imperialist organizations were. These organizations, such as the American Anti-Imperialist League located in Boston, were largely instrumental in making anti-imperialism a large scale issue. Through

publication of articles and pamphlets, the American Anti-Imperialist League made a serious effort to make imperialism the “paramount” issue, as Bryan later coined it, of the 1900 campaign.⁷⁰ This study will use publications from the American Anti-Imperialist League to introduce the main tenets of opposition towards American expansion.

The 1899 platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League represents its main argument against American expansion. The League demanded the “immediate cessation of the war against liberty,” the Philippine-American War, as well as an immediate declaration of purpose made by Congress towards US policy in the Philippines. The platform criticized the expansionist claim that annexation was inspired by the desire to bring civilization to the Philippines. It discussed the ideological contradictions of an American empire and the “betrayal of American institutions.” The principle that government derives its just power from the consent of the governed, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, was among the major tenets of the anti-imperialist argument. The League therefore assumed that most Americans thought the way they did—that the war in the Philippines was unjust. Furthermore, the League did not just oppose American policy towards Filipinos; the focus was on the dangers of the McKinley administration’s imperial policy in general, as a policy that challenged the principles the United States was founded on. In fact, the League expressed that sentiment in the opening sentence of the platform. The League identified that “imperialism is hostile to liberty and tends towards militarism, an evil from which it has been our glory to be free.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Tompkins, 197.

⁷¹ Carl Schurz, “The Policy of Imperialism,” in *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, ed. Frederic Bancroft, vol. VI (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 77-78.

At the root of the conservative anti-imperialists' argument was the denial of self-government given for the Filipino people. Principles of republicanism and revolutionary America, which fought a foreign ruler in the name of self-government, were said to have been abandoned with the annexation of the Philippines. It was against the principles of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence for the United States to have subjects instead of citizens, as the Filipinos were perceived to be. Since the Filipinos were denied the rights given by the Constitution, anti-imperialists argued that they were equal in status to that of subjects in a monarchy.⁷²

Conservative anti-imperialists feared that tolerance of powers exercised outside of constitutional reach would lead to further violations. While the islands were annexed in the Treaty of Paris, the war against the Filipinos raged in order to establish American sovereignty over what the Filipinos declared as an existing Republic; the League challenged that taking the Filipino's sovereignty from them was unconstitutional. Likewise, since Congress did not declare war on the Filipinos, conservative anti-imperialists argued that the war itself was illegal.⁷³

This fear was shared by populist anti-imperialists and was, perhaps, emphasized more in their arguments against both the Filipino war and the increased standing army. Nebraska Senator William V. Allen, arguing in 1899, was fearful that the constitutional power of declaring war was shifting from Congress to the executive. According to the constitution, the power was entirely in Congress, leaving the executive with "no more power to declare war or to conduct it without the consent of Congress than the humblest

⁷² Cullinane, 3.

⁷³ Schurz, 72.

private citizen in the land.”⁷⁴ William Hope “Coin” Harvey, a populist intellectual whose 1894 publication *Coin’s Financial School* helped spread support for bimetallism, held more fervent opinions on the war’s constitutionality. Harvey was concerned with the cost of the war, which he felt would have been restricted if declared by Congress. To Coin, the war showed that power was “arbitrarily concentrated in the hands of the President; and that when the time comes to strike they will tear the constitution to shreds.”⁷⁵ Harvey continued, “I arraign the President for *treason* in waging a war without that having been first declared by Congress, as required by the Constitution!” Harvey’s sentiment was typical of populist rhetoric for its conspiratorial allegations towards those in favor of expansion. Conspiratorial allegations were also aimed at the relationship between business and government, as expressed in antitrust sentiments.

Carl Schurz, former Senator, Secretary of the Interior and leader of the short-lived Liberal Republican Party, quoted President Abraham Lincoln in his 1899 denunciation of American Empire in his speech “Militarism and Democracy.” In the speech, Schurz touched on the danger of public acceptance of expansion as a result of a military victory in Manila. “History shows that military glory is the most unwholesome food that democracies can feed on.” For Schurz, “War demoralizes the civic values of a nation,” which are essential to democracy.⁷⁶

Conservative anti-imperialists also feared the impact of a colonial policy on the United States itself. Since the early days of the anti-imperialist movement, around 1895, conservative anti-imperialists expressed serious concerns with militarism and its impact

⁷⁴ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 3rd sess., Vol., 32, 562-564.

⁷⁵ William Hope Harvey, *Coin on Money, Trusts and Imperialism* (Chicago: Coin Publishing Company, 1899), 154.

⁷⁶ Schurz, 72.

on the United States.⁷⁷ Conservative anti-imperialists, similarly to Coin Harvey and many other populist anti-imperialists, were worried of the expense of maintaining a large standing army. Following the outbreak of the Philippine-American War, McKinley and the Republican congress passed “An Act for Increasing the Efficiency of the Army of the United States,” increasing the size of the regular standing army from the 25,000 regular soldiers in 1896, to 200,000 in 1901. This increase was large a expense which had not previously been handled by the United States in peacetime. J.G. Carlisle, long time business Democrat and Secretary of the Treasury under Grover Cleveland during the Panic of 1893, was among those who attributed part of American prosperity to its ability to abstain from the problems of militarism.⁷⁸ When speaking of the “burden of taxation” that a large military places on the American public, Carlisle expressed the way in which it could prevent further American prosperity:

Our energies have been devoted to the cultivation of the arts of peace, the construction of great highways, to the development of our mineral resources, to the improvement of waterways, to agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and to the establishment of charities and institutions of learning, and all the other interests and objects which most distinguish the civilization of peaceful American republic from that of the armed and fortified kingdoms and empires of the Old World.⁷⁹

Carlisle continues, “Under this policy our military and naval establishments have been comparatively inexpensive, and as a general rule they have practically constituted mere branches of the civil service.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Tompkins, 15-30.

⁷⁸ William Jennings Bryan, et. al., *Republic or Empire?: The Philippine Question* (Chicago: The Independence Company, 1899), 655.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Conservative anti-imperialists were certainly not alone in their argument that money spent on the military could be more usefully spent on development in the United States itself. Richard Pettigrew, Silver Republican Senator from South Dakota, felt that a build up of a large standing army was to “employ discontent and distract its attention.”⁸¹ Carl Schurz held a similar sentiment that the glories of war take away “the popular attention from those problems and interests which are, in the long run, of the greatest consequence,”⁸² Pettigrew’s inclusion of class in the matter shows the distinct element of his populist anti-imperialism. For Pettigrew, the distraction from reform which militarization creates was a “scheme of plutocracy.”⁸³ The element of class and the antagonizing of the wealthy were mainstays in populist rhetoric and were not as emphasized in the arguments of the conservative anti-imperialists.

Others were worried about the sustainability of a large military budget. The cost of militarism “comes out of the pockets of the people,” according to Princeton professor Henry van Dyke. Van Dyke was worried about the additional military costs plaguing future taxpayers, as he saw its amount only increasing as imperial ventures increased.⁸⁴ Carl Schurz joined others in his critique that an increased military budget would be an unnecessary expense for the United States government. Among his concerns was the large buildup of the navy, later sent on a world tour under President Roosevelt in 1907.⁸⁵ The nature of building a navy, in the highly competitive arms race between the European powers, was dangerous as its expenditure was not based on need, but on what the other

⁸¹ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 2nd sess., Vol. 31, 1560.

⁸² Schurz, 73.

⁸³ *Congressional Record*, 1560.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 443.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 347-348.

powers had. Additionally, military technology became obsolete with the production of new innovations, and thus spending money on the technology was often “futile.”⁸⁶ Schurz felt that large scale investment into the military was harmful to the nation’s budget, as it took money earned from productive means and put them into a wasteful military buildup.

Schurz, among the most outspoken of the conservative anti-imperialists, also feared the costs of pensions for the increased regular army. He detailed the cost of pensions before the Spanish-American War at \$140 million and noted that another \$20 million would be added with the buildup. Part of the issue was that pensioners were “notoriously slow” in dying off. The costs were too high for his preference, as he noted the pensions alone were more than the expenditure of the German Army in peacetime.⁸⁷ The budget of the federal government was a serious concern for conservative anti-imperialists and they saw the large expenses as leading the country down a path of irredeemable debt. They felt that the country had recovered well from the debt of the Civil War and the resulting pension costs, and did not want to risk a sound budget for an offensive foreign policy.⁸⁸

Industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who offered to pay \$20,000,000 for the independence of the Philippines himself, suggested that the expense of militarism was more than just the cost of supporting a military, but in the strains on the business world which the anxiety over war brought about. Carnegie felt that by committing to the protection of the Philippines in Asia, business interests in the United States would

⁸⁶ Schurz, 67.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 69

constantly be worried about the outbreak of war. “One point should always be remembered,” wrote Carnegie

it is the unceasing alarms of war which work most injury, causing capital to shrink from enterprise, frightening the whole financial, commercial and manufacturing world, and throwing upon the workingmen at last the chief burden of want and suffering, through loss of employment.⁸⁹

Carnegie’s considerations for the wellbeing the workers was ironic, considering his role in such controversies as the 1889 Johnstown Flood and the 1892 Homestead Strike, but his concerns about the burdens of militarism in the American economy were reflective of the conservative, “business” Democrat, anti-imperialists.

In the 1890s, a shrinking of capital was less of a worry for workingmen than the use of a standing army as a police force. Strikes such as the Pullman Strike of 1894 saw the use of federal troops, in this case issued by President Grover Cleveland, in the often violent suppression of strikes.⁹⁰ Maryland Senator Arthur P. Gorman expressed his concern that an increased standing army would be used “not alone to take care of our affairs in those distant islands, but as a police force to help control the American people.”⁹¹ While the conservative anti-imperialist faction contained such pro-labor men as Samuel Gompers, who certainly was worried about a standing army being used to suppress the working classes, most other conservative anti-imperialists did not inject any ideas of class division in their anti-militarism. It is in this point that the conservative element comes to light, as these men did not share the populist view that the wealthy

⁸⁹ *Republic or Empire*, 96-97.

⁹⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955) 230-236.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

class would use the military to suppress the lower classes. Instead, conservative anti-imperialists emphasized that standing armies were antithetical to democracy and brought about despotism and militarism, rather than class domination.

Populist anti-imperialists centered their anti-militarism around the idea that the standing army would be used by the wealthy to subjugate the masses. Following the 1899 Coeur d'Alene labor confrontation, which saw the use of state militia to quell a mining strike, populists were reminded of the threat of a military being used against the masses. Articles against an increased standing army circulated in western Democratic newspapers, such as the *Omaha World Herald*.⁹² "Coin" Harvey mirrored this sentiment when arguing that "a regular army is organized in a way that causes it to unjustly shoot down the people when protesting against a change in their form of government."⁹³ While both conservative and populist anti-imperialists worried about the increased standing army being used as a police force, it was the populist anti-imperialists who explicitly warned of its use by the wealthy classes against the masses.

Key to anti-militarism was the idea that the military should not be expanded past the necessities of defense. As such, armaments were to be restricted to "the narrowest practical limits."⁹⁴ Anti-militarists felt that a militia-based military was the most compatible with American principles. The "citizen soldiery" was the traditional system in which, in times of war, the American army was raised by volunteer regiments from the individual states, with a regular army being limited to 25,000. Likewise, if the government relied on volunteers to wage war, it would prove necessary to convince those

⁹² See "Labor Day Incidents" (September 10, 1899), "Lest We Forget" (October 29, 1899) and "Why an Increased Standing Army" (November 11, 1899) for antimilitarist articles influenced by the mining strike.

⁹³ Harvey, 158.

⁹⁴ Schurz, 48-77.

volunteers and the public of the necessity of war. Conservative anti-imperialists reasoned that citizens would not join the war effort if they saw it as unjust, such as with an imperial war. Additionally, these soldiers would not hold the negative traits of a regular soldier, who are trained to take orders, but would contain the traits of individualism and justice that were believed to be held by the democratic American citizenry. The Civil War was used as an example for the virtues of this system, as following its conclusion the volunteer and conscripted armies swiftly returned home and rejoined “productive” citizenship.⁹⁵ While the citizen soldiery was deemed the best system for an American military by conservative anti-imperialists, they did not ruminate on the matter with the same focus on class as populist anti-imperialists.

Populist anti-imperialists often glorified the system of citizen soldiery. As “Coin” Harvey put it, “Any war that our citizen soldiers will not fight is an unjust war!”⁹⁶ They emphasized that the system was in accordance with the wishes of the founding fathers, specifically Thomas Jefferson. “Sockless” Jerry Simpson, Kansas Populist Representative, argued that Jefferson held the citizen soldiery as a key element to the retention of a republic.⁹⁷ Due to the justification of their volunteership being morally grounded, it was believed that the citizen soldiery could not overthrow the Republic like a standing army could.⁹⁸

Populist anti-imperialists heavily criticized the regular soldiers themselves. Having a regular army was thought to attract men with undesirable traits. Many agreed

⁹⁵ Schurz, 50.

⁹⁶ Harvey, 158.

⁹⁷ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 2nd sess., vol. 31, 3690-3691.

⁹⁸ Harvey, 158-159.

with Populist Colorado Representative John Calhoun Bell's opinion that the regular army attracts unemployed men.⁹⁹ Rather than work in a productive industry, these men were opting to be trained fighters as a job. John Shafroth, Silver Republican representative, emphasized that contrary to the citizen soldiery, regular soldiers were not motivated by justice but would fight when or wherever, and were thought to be indifferent to the results of the execution of their orders.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, officers in the regular army were deemed dangerous because they were motivated to receive a promotion. For them, war was an opportunity for a career advancement, as opposed to the last-chance defensive action, as the populist anti-imperialists viewed it. At the time enlisted soldiers were banned from having a wife and typically did not have a home. The lack of these motivators in the men's' lives were pointed to as a reason for their inhumanity. While volunteer soldiers were typically presented as morally well rounded family men, the regular soldiers' "sphere is narrow, and to gratify their mere selfish wants becomes the usual limit of their ambition,"¹⁰¹ according to "Coin" Harvey. Coin continued, "They are trained in cruelty, til they become anxious to practice that cruelty, by planting bullets in the body of some human being."¹⁰² Populist anti-imperialists saw the danger in an "easily corrupted" regular army which would be "partisans to a would-be despot."¹⁰³

Conservative anti-imperialists and populist-imperialists shared a majority of their views on expansionism and colonialism and the distinction between their views is narrow. While the arguments based on the American principle of self-governance and the

⁹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 3636.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3689-3690.

¹⁰¹ Harvey, 159

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 2nd sess., vol. 31, 3629.

expense of militarism were shared by both camps, the outlook of the workings of the global political system was the main point of difference. Conservative anti-imperialists were far more elaborate in their discussion of America's foreign policy. Europe was constantly used as an example for the dangers of militarism. A Southern Democrat, and proponent of the "lost cause of the confederacy", John W. Daniel, used the fervent European militarization as an example of the poor direction in which the United States was headed. The impact of the large expenses of militarism, on states without great resources, like Spain, was seen as a warning for the deepening debt which was sure to follow militarism. Additionally, many noted the amount of soldiers present in European cities as unsettling, as the military presence of the state was constant.¹⁰⁴

For conservative anti-imperialists, militarism was bound to lead to the contravention of one of President Washington's most dire warnings from his Farewell Address: the fear of European entanglements. All anti-imperialists held this fear, but conservative anti-imperialists especially emphasized militarism as a betrayal of Washington's wishes for the nation. The "armed camp" of Europe, as Carnegie described it, was bound to clash with the United States at some point. According to David Starr Jordan, the founding president of Stanford, "the main reason of our prosperity is the freedom from war."¹⁰⁵ Competing with the nations of Europe, as imperialism demanded, was an unnecessary risk for the United States. Gifted by isolation from the Old World, and a friendly British ally in Canada, the United States was without the hostile neighbors that each European power had. At the time, the threat of a European invasion over the

¹⁰⁴ *Republic or Empire*, 378, 445.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

Atlantic was rejected by most, but nonetheless was used by some who supported imperialism. The notion that the Atlantic Ocean was but a “big pond” and that thousands of troops could be sent over from Europe at any moment was refuted by conservative anti-imperialists.¹⁰⁶ The idea that the military buildup was not needed for mainland America’s safety, as proposed by conservative anti-imperialists.

Conservative anti-imperialists were aware that building an empire in the Pacific would lead to more frequent smaller wars. The 1887 Samoan Crisis, in which the United States was at a standoff with the United Kingdom and Germany over control of the islands, was used as an example of empire leading to more diplomatic conflicts.¹⁰⁷ The Philippines, and the other annexed islands in the Pacific, were viewed as an unnecessary weak spot in the United States’ border, which was otherwise strong in its isolation.

The conservative anti-imperialists felt that the militarization conducted by the European states in an effort to prevent war with each other would, in actuality, lead to war. Their isolationism came from their understanding of the foreign policy history of the United States as well as the current developments in Europe. By building massive armies and expensive navies, Europeans were preparing for a “gigantic killing-and-demolishing match,” as vibrantly worded by Schurz.¹⁰⁸ Extensive coverage of the Hague convention of 1899, proposed by Russian Czar Nicholas II to halt the European arms buildup, was included in conservative anti-imperialist warnings of European militarization leading to war.¹⁰⁹ Discussion of the Hague conference is an example of how conservative anti-

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1899, Vol. 32, p. 990. This claim was made by Republican Congressman Richard W. Parker in his argument for the need of a growing army to compete with the armies of Europe. The claim is refuted in Schurz, 44.

¹⁰⁷ Schurz, 66-67.

¹⁰⁸ Schurz, 48.

¹⁰⁹ *Republic or Empire*, 347-348.

imperialists incorporated the European power system in its argument against American expansion. This emphasis on the severity of the European military buildup is a strong distinction between the conservative anti-imperialists and the populist anti-imperialists.

Critical to their distinctive understanding of the international system was their alternating view towards Great Britain. Great Britain was often portrayed as both an example of the ills of imperialism, as well as a strong ally in the Great Power system. The Boer War, which saw the British suppress the independence of two South African republics, was often compared to the Philippine-American war. The United States was often compared to the negative traits of the British government for its role in their expansive war. Balancing out this soft antagonism towards Britain was an understanding of the vital position that Britain played in American foreign policy. Britain, seeking to keep the United States as an ally in case of war with European powers, encouraged American expansion and allowed for its existence. Andrew Carnegie felt that “only Britain’s holding back the other powers gave us the Philippines.”¹¹⁰ The conservative anti-imperialists were against the British Empire but showed no signs of Anglophobia, which would prove to be a distinction separating them from the populist anti-imperialists.

The populist understanding of the international political system was largely influenced by the “money power conspiracy”. The money power conspiracy was the belief that financial institutions, rather than governments, held the real power over the masses. Governments were believed to have been under control of the financial powers due to their large debts. These financial institutions were believed to shape governmental policy in their own interests and were behind the major populist bugbears of trusts and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 96.

the gold standard.¹¹¹ “Coin” Harvey was a fierce proponent of the money power conspiracy. In his publication *Coin on Money, Trusts and Imperialism* (1899), the banks’ “evil influence” was said to be behind most of the governmental policies which Coin opposed. This “evil influence,” had “possession of the President and both houses of Congress.”¹¹² Populists attributed both militarism and imperialism as serving the agenda of the money power. The money power was thought to encourage “wars of conquest,” as they required governments to take out large amounts of loans.¹¹³ According to Harvey, these loans, and the debt from an imperialist policy, was to “put us, in the end, still more securely in the hands of the men who make a business of loaning money, and will eventually engulf us in ruin even though the war continues indefinitely.”¹¹⁴ The increased military expenditure, with its noted increase to national debt, was opposed by William V. Allen due to the debt leaving the American government further under the power of the money lenders.¹¹⁵

While the Populists generally used vague terms such as “money lenders,” “money power,” and “the banks,” at times the British were specifically to blame. For populists, British bankers were at fault for the gold standard in the United States. If a bimetallic policy had been instated, the value of previous investments under the gold standard would decrease in the world market. These bankers, according to populists, did everything in their power not to lose any money on investments in the United States. Coin Harvey was among those who blamed the British for a myriad of problems. In his

¹¹¹ Nathan Jessen, in *Populism and Imperialism*, provides the most recent study into the overlooked money power conspiracy and populist congressmen in the 1890s.

¹¹² Harvey, 146.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 3rd sess., vol. 32, 562-564.

Coin on Money, Trusts and Imperialism, Harvey stated that the nation was in debt to English bankers, rather than the vague “money power.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, Harvey blamed the British for American imperialism and the war with the Filipinos. Harvey, like both conservative and populist anti-imperialists, wished for the United States government to spend its money budget on the material improvement of its citizenry rather than on imperial wars designed to extend commerce abroad. Harvey placed the British behind American expansionism, as American debts to English bankers were said to be reconciled by increased overseas commerce. “We can thus pay our debts to England,” writes Harvey, “and stop her subtle design for *our* conquest.”¹¹⁷ While the populists included elements of an international system in their opposition towards American expansion, it was in their limited portrayal of the system being dominated by the money power conspiracy that separated their views from the conservative anti-imperialists. While the role of England was discussed by both camps, the populists attribute the diplomatic strategy of the British to that of their money power.

William Jennings Bryan’s goal as a politician seeking the presidency and the advance of the Democratic Party was to place himself at an ideological middle-ground for the two camps. Bryan was peculiarly interesting for his role as a leading national figure of the Democratic Party, while also appealing to many populists for his strong support of bimetallism in the 1896 campaign. His opposition to imperialism, while inclusive of many attributes of conservative anti-militarism, tended to lean towards the populist camp. Bryan’s ideology could have catered more towards eastern anti-

¹¹⁶ Harvey, 78-79.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

imperialists, had that been his only motivation towards his opposition to American expansion. The populist appeal in his opposition to empire invalidates the idea that his anti-imperialism was a shallow effort to appeal to eastern Democrats.

While Bryan leaned more towards populist anti-imperialism, he shared some main tenets of his ideology with the conservative anti-imperialists. The idea that American expansion and denial of self-government to the Philippines were against American principles, as argued by both conservative and populist anti-imperialists, was evident in many of his speeches from 1899 and 1900. In his “Imperialism” speech, Bryan stated, “If this nation surrenders its belief in the universal application of the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence, it will lose its prestige and influence which it has enjoyed among the nations as an exponent of popular government.”¹¹⁸ Later in the speech, Bryan also shared the belief that “military rule is antagonistic to our theory of government.”¹¹⁹ He emphasized this point in his 1899 Denver, Colorado speech “Naboth’s Vineyard.” “Imperialism might expand the nation’s territory,” wrote Bryan, “but it would contract the nation’s purpose.” The “nation’s purpose” was the idea of self-government. “That idea is entwined with our traditions; it permeates our history.” Bryan warned, “unless we are ready to abandon that idea forever we cannot ignore it in dealing with the Filipinos.”¹²⁰

In his 1900 presidential campaign, Bryan routinely delivered speeches on anti-militarism. Having served as Colonel in the Third Nebraska Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish-American War, Bryan was joined by conservative and populist anti-imperialists

¹¹⁸ William Jennings Bryan, “Imperialism”, (speech, Indianapolis, Indiana, August 8, 1900).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ William Jennings and Mary Baird Bryan, *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 16.

in his support for the citizen soldiery system and opposition to a large standing army. “The government which relies for its defense upon its citizens is more likely to be just than one which has at call a large body of professional soldiers.”¹²¹ Bryan injected class in his support for the citizen soldiery, and emphasized his belief that that working class should be relied on for a national fighting force. He felt that the nation should have retained a small regular army and a “well-equipped and well-disciplined” State militia, but in times of emergency rely on volunteers “from all occupations” who after the war could “return to productive labor.” Bryan thought the volunteer force should have been made up of “men who fight when the country needs fighters and work when the country needs workers.”¹²²

Bryan also shared the conservative anti-imperialist concern about the increased expenditure needed to pay for an increased standing army. In *Republic or Empire?: The Philippine Question*, in which Bryan’s articles were presented first, the tax burden which an increased army placed on the American public was listed as his first concern. Similar to sentiment held by conservative anti-imperialists, Bryan felt that the tax burdens did “injustice to those who contribute to the support of the Government.”¹²³ While his problem with the expense of an increased military aligned with concerns held by the conservative anti-imperialists, it was in his injection of class in the matter which showed his populist influence.

The inclusion of religion and morality were prominent and unique features of Bryan’s anti-imperialism from its emergence in 1899 and to the end of his career. In his

¹²¹ Ibid., 28.

¹²² Ibid., 29.

¹²³ Ibid.

speech “Naboth’s Vineyard,” Bryan compared imperialism to the biblical story of King Ahab. Ahab wanted the vineyard of Naboth and, after Naboth refused to sell the property, “placed false charges” against Naboth “to furnish an excuse for getting rid of him.”¹²⁴ In the story, Ahab broke the sacred Christian laws forbidding covetance, bearing false witness, murder and theft. All three were “broken in order to get a little piece of ground!” Bryan connected the story of Ahab with imperialism. “Wars of conquest have their origin in covetousness, and the history of the human race has been written in characters of blood because rulers have looked with longing eyes upon the lands of others.”¹²⁵

Bryan equated the morals of an individual to that of a nation’s foreign policy. His criticism of imperialism in 1899 and 1900 frequently included the argument that a strong imperialist nation murders others in order to steal land or resources from a weaker nation. “Whether a man steals much or little may depend upon his opportunities, but whether he steals at all depends upon his own volition. So with our nation.”¹²⁶ Thus, Bryan felt a national foreign policy should be judged on the same moral basis as the individual. He warned that an imperialist policy would tempt the nation to “depart from its ‘standard of morality’ and adopt a policy of ‘criminal aggression.’”¹²⁷ The moral standing by 1899 was far from perfect for its treatment of non-whites and years of warfare against Native Americans and Bryan’s suggestion that the US held a “standard of morality” shows his embrace of American exceptionalism. In this way, Bryan was a man of his times.

¹²⁴ Bryan, *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan*, 6-7.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

Bryan's attitudes towards race in relation to imperialism are particularly interesting. Bryan, as a man of his times, supported the idea that he belonged to a superior race. His race was not Anglo-Saxon, but the American race. "The process of race evolution," wrote Bryan in February 1899, "was not completed when the Angle and the Saxon met. A still later type has appeared which is superior to any which has existed heretofore... the American, in whom are blended the virtues" of all of the great civilizations.¹²⁸ To Bryan, the American race had been superior for its 'civil and religious liberty, universal education and the right to participate, directly or through representatives chosen by himself, in all the affairs of government.'" The American people were not to use force to exploit inferior races, but "will, by the influence of example, excite in other races a desire for self-government and a determination to secure it."¹²⁹

While accepting the idea of race superiority, Bryan did not support the "race sympathy" popularized in Rudyard Kipling's 1899 novel "The White Man's Burden." Bryan still believed that all men should govern themselves, regardless of race. "It was God himself who placed in every human heart the love of liberty. He never made a race of people so low in the scale of civilization or intelligence that it would welcome a foreign master."¹³⁰ Bryan's racism, while moderate, was not benevolent. Bryan was among those in the anti-imperialist movement who feared that the annexation of the Philippines would increase the amount of Asian immigrants to the country. In his

¹²⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 24.

“Imperialism” speech Bryan asked, “are we to bring into the body politic eight or ten million Asiatics, so different from race and history that amalgamation is impossible?”¹³¹

Bryan’s focus on class in both his opposition to imperialism and militarism show his clear distinction from the conservative anti-imperialists. In his “Imperialism” speech, Bryan highlighted the populist idea that imperialism was for the benefit of financial elites. Bryan attacked the wealthy and argued, “No one has a right to expect from society more than a fair compensation for the services which he renders to society, if he secures more it is at the expense of someone else.” This focus on class exploitation was applied to imperialism. “Against us are arrayed a comparatively small but politically powerful number who really profit by Republican policies [imperialism].”¹³² Bryan shared the populist anti-imperialist fear that a professional military would be in the service of the wealthy classes to subjugate the masses. Unlike conservative anti-imperialists, who mentioned no words of class when discussing their fear that the military would be used as a police force, Bryan held no reserve. “Imperialism gives to the aristocracy and to the privileged classes an increased influence in government; do we need to increase their influence in our government? Surely they are potent enough already.”¹³³ Bryan used arguments such as this to express his populist views towards the military, but the complexity of his anti-imperialism does not limit him to the populist camp alone.

While the populist anti-imperialists offered a limited understanding of the international system based on the money power conspiracy, Bryan presented both an

¹³¹ Ibid., 29.

¹³² Ibid., 35-36.

¹³³ *Republic or Empire*, 85-86.

understanding of European power politics and the money power conspiracy. In his use of Europe as an example of the ills of militarism and imperialism, Bryan commonly emphasized the difference in government principles between America and the “despotically governed nations.” “The American people cannot apply the European and monarchical doctrine of force in the subjugation and government of alien races,” wrote Bryan, “and at the same time stand forth as defenders of the principles embodied in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution.”¹³⁴ Bryan detailed the empires of Germany, the Dutch, and British India in *Republic or Empire*. He used a lengthy history of colonized India to show the problems that the British had with maintaining an empire. “The opponents of imperialism...find in India’s experience a warning against a policy which places one nation under the control of another and distant nation.”¹³⁵ The comparison with European imperialism displayed Bryan’s understanding of European imperialism, similar to conservative anti-imperialists, but evidence of his support of the money power theory, paired with a negligence regarding a possible large scale war, as discussed by Carnegie and Schurz, shows his populist influence.

Bryan joined populists in antagonizing England as a foreign money power. For Bryan, the Democratic party “opposed an English financial policy in 1896; it opposes and English colonial policy now.”¹³⁶ His connection between the English support for gold standard in the United States and their support for an American empire was no coincidence. While Bryan did not use such explicit language as “Coin” Harvey and Senator Castle in his presentation of the money power, he did imply its existence and its

¹³⁴ *Republic or Empire*, 32.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

influence in his foreign policy rhetoric. Writing in 1899, Bryan said, “Those who in 1896 were in favor of turning the American people over to the greed of foreign financier and domestic trusts may now be willing to turn the Filipinos over to the tender mercies of military governors and carpetbag officials.”¹³⁷

While Bryan expressed many of the same arguments as conservative and populist anti-imperialists, it is in his inclusion of class and his foreign policy outlook that place him in the center of the two camps, containing the distinct elements of both. It has been detailed above that both conservative and populist anti-imperialists opposed the annexation the Philippines due to the denial of foundational American principles to the Filipinos. The lack of self-government was a major tenant in the argument of the American Anti-Imperialist League and the populist anti-imperialists. Both camps opposed the abandonment of traditional American principles and referenced the words of Lincoln, Jefferson and Washington in their plea for the public’s ear. The concept of a citizen soldiery, opposition to the establishment of a large professional military establishment, was heavily supported by both camps but its intricacies revealed their differences. Populist anti-imperialists contained the strong element of class that conservative anti-imperialists did not. The fear that a large standing military was to be used against the American masses was shared by both camps, but while the populist anti-imperialists suggested it would be in service to the wealthy and aristocratic classes, the conservative anti-imperialists only detailed its danger to principles of “liberty,” the Republic and democracy as a whole. The understanding of the international political system was also a major point of difference between the two camps. While conservative

¹³⁷ Ibid.

anti-imperialists expressed a clear understanding of the military and political situation of European imperialism and militarism, the populists limited their view to their belief in the money power conspiracy. While the conservative anti-imperialists worried about American involvement of in the “gigantic killing match” that Europe was preparing, the populist anti-imperialists feared further exploitation from the money power in the expansion of an American empire and military.

Bryan’s placement in the middle of the two camps, as evidence of his influence from both the shared and distinct qualities of both populist and conservative anti-imperialists, contributes to evidence in support of Bryan’s authentic interest in making imperialism the “paramount issue” of his 1900 presidential campaign. His campaign speeches in 1899 and 1900 express his ideology as he joined the diverse coalition in opposition to American imperialism and militarism. His populist leaning shows that his interests in anti-imperialism were authentic, and not motivated by the sole purpose of gaining Eastern Democratic votes in 1900. Furthermore, the arguments that Bryan presented in his speeches from 1899 and 1900 very much remained a part of his political rhetoric after the founding of his paper *The Commoner* in 1901. He carried on the fight against Republican imperialist policies and his inclusion of the main elements of both conservative and populist anti-imperialism continued his central position.

Chapter Three: *The Commoner* and the Rhetoric of the Anti-Imperialist Movement

Following his defeat in the 1900 presidential election, William Jennings Bryan and his brother Charles started *The Commoner*, a Lincoln, Nebraska based newspaper which was, according to Charles' biographer Larry Osnes, a "means of contributing toward the advance of those principles for which the Democratic Party stands."¹³⁸ The weekly paper was very much an effort to present Bryan's highly partisan solutions to the many political problems at the time. The paper was a success and was one of the nation's highest circulating political weeklies. With yearly subscriptions priced at \$1.00, the subscription list climbed from 17,000 pre-ordered subscribers to 145,000 by 1905, mostly residing in the Upper Mississippi Valley.¹³⁹ *The Commoner* was Bryan's main source of income at the turn of the century, and along with his profits from other editorials and speaking tours, he made enough profit to be able to purchase the sizeable Fairview estate in Lincoln. The success of the paper is evidence that Bryan's political ideals were supported by a significant portion of the rural Midwestern American population, and indeed the American population in general.

Anti-imperialist editorials were a serious component of the early issues of *The Commoner*. The period immediately following the 1900 election, from 1901 to 1903, shows that the issue was a mainstay of Bryan's political ideology during his publication

¹³⁸ Larry Osnes, "Charles W. Bryan: Latter-Day Populist and Rural Progressive," PhD diss., (University of Cincinnati, 1970), 108.

¹³⁹ Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 108-112.

of *The Commoner*. Bryan continued to write about anti-imperialism and included anti-imperialist editorials on most of the *The Commoner's* front pages between January 1901 and May of 1902. Bryan's anti-imperialist editorials contained the same principles of his anti-imperialist speeches from the 1900 presidential election campaign, and the persistence shows his authentic interest in the anti-imperialist cause.

Bryan's contributions to the *The Commoner* were heaviest during its inception and initial publications, before his travels and other commitments relegated Charles, the paper's manager, and other writers, such as William M. Maupin, to handle most of the publication's content.¹⁴⁰ Bryan's front page editorials were largely of his pen and his choosing during the first issues, many of which featured anti-imperialism. The first year was also regarded by Bryan's industry advisors as extremely important to its success. Special attention and care were demanded by Bryan in order to ensure success. William Randolph Hearst corresponded with Bryan following his first reading of *The Commoner*. He emphasized the importance of *The Commoner's* first year and suggested to Bryan that editorials were necessary to capture the public's attention.¹⁴¹

As Bryan's contributions were heavy and the success of the paper was dependent on its first year, the first issues tell a lot about what Bryan was trying to do with *The Commoner*. It is noteworthy that these issues feature editorials with an anti-imperialist slant, and shows that Bryan valued anti-imperialism as a major component of what he felt the nation, and more specifically the Democratic Party, should follow as a policy. In the first issues of *The Commoner*, Bryan's editorials were focused on what he felt to be the

¹⁴⁰ Osnes, 112-116.

¹⁴¹ William Randolph Hearst, to WJB, 3/25/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

ideal stances of the Democratic Party, in which anti-imperialism appeared at the top of his list. After the Democratic Party's losses in the 1902 congressional elections, Bryan's role lessened in both the paper and the national Democratic Party. By this time Charles Bryan and others were contributing more editorials to the paper than in early issues. By 1903, "W.J. Bryan's influence over his newspaper was considerable but he never maintained an office at *The Commoner* office and he had little to do with the daily operations of the paper."¹⁴²

At the same time the "reorganization" element of the Democrat Party, the gold-supporting Cleveland "business" faction, regained control of the party in time for the 1904 presidential election. According to biographer Paolo Coletta, by 1903 Bryan had entered the "lowest political depths" of his career. Starting in the fall of 1902, with the midterm elections, front-page articles paid increasingly focused attention on battling the reorganization elements of the party and defending Bryan-and his supporters'-role in the party. It is important that fewer of the front-page editorials had an anti-imperialist focus once Bryan had to defend his leadership role.

Those writing on this period of Bryan's life have neither analyzed nor paid extensive attention to his anti-imperialist editorials in the first issues of *The Commoner*. In the premier biography of Bryan's life during this period, Paolo Coletta spent a mere three pages specifically discussing *The Commoner*. These pages are an overview of the paper's formation and content, placing a recap of Bryan's anti-imperialist ideals after all other issues.¹⁴³ The most recent major biographical work on Bryan, Michael Kazin's *A*

¹⁴² Osness, 112.

¹⁴³ Paolo Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan, Vol. 1: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964, 291-294.

Godly Hero (2006), also gave a short overview of *The Commoner's* formation and content. Kazin's specific focus was on Bryan's inclusion of religious ideals in his editorials. Kazin did not touch on Bryan's anti-imperialist articles, outside of a brief mention.¹⁴⁴ The most recent comments on Bryan's anti-imperialism are included in a 2013 article recounting his 1905-1906 world tour. In the article, author Daniel Scroop discusses Bryan's anti-imperialist attitudes while visiting the Philippines and colonial Southeast Asia and India. Scroop, however, does not use articles from *The Commoner* or discuss Bryan's pre-trip anti-imperialism in detail.¹⁴⁵

The author who has dealt most with Bryan's role in *The Commoner* and the behind-the-scenes operation and formation of the paper's first issues is Larry Osnes in his 1970 dissertation about Bryan's brother, "Charles W. Bryan: Latter-Day Populist and Rural Progressive." In the 30 plus pages on *The Commoner*, Osnes showed that William Jennings Bryan was incredibly important in the first issues, before Charles' role increased.¹⁴⁶ Kazin, in his biography, only used this source when discussing Charles' political career and the end of *The Commoner's* publication by 1923.

In response to the gap in historiographic coverage, as well as the historiographic questions regarding Bryan's intentions and attitudes towards the anti-imperialist movement, this chapter argues that the principals involved in Bryan's anti-imperialism in *The Commoner* showed little deviation, which undercuts the notion that Bryan adhered to anti-imperialism solely for the purpose of winning the election. Bryan included anti-imperialism heavily in the early issues of *The Commoner*, when his role was significant,

¹⁴⁴Kazin, 111-113.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel Scroop. "William Jennings Bryan's 1905-1906 World Tour. *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 2 (2013): 459-486.

¹⁴⁶ Osnes, 100-130.

which shows his authentic interest towards the issue. His argument against the annexation of the Philippines by the United States was representative of his earlier arguments against imperialism from the 1900 campaign trail, in which both “conservative” eastern and “populist” western concerns were displayed. Bryan felt that ruling the Filipino people without representation nor an extension of constitutional rights was not aligned with the founding principles in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In addition, Bryan also brought questions of morality and religion from the Bible to show that the Christian text was against imperialism and war in general. Imperialism was also presented as being strictly to the benefit of wealthy few, and at the expense of the non-rich, working masses. His attitudes towards race in relation to empire, mainly the desire to keep the American population “homogenous,” were also shown in his editorials after 1900.

The heavy inclusion of anti-imperialist editorials on the front-page from January 1901 to August 1903 shows that Bryan felt the issue to be a part of his core beliefs. He clearly considered opposition to American imperialism to be in a serious political issue at the time and believed it should have been national policy. Every month from the paper’s inception in January 1901 until August 1902 featured front-page anti-imperialist articles, with multiple issues’ front-page being devoted to the issue entirely. The frequency aligned with Bryan’s involvement and only died out as Bryan’s leadership in the paper and party lessened.

This study will look at the editorials from *the Commoner’s* first year, into 1902 and as the issue slowed down into 1903. My selection of editorials for analysis are anti-

imperialist editorials on the front-pages, as well as some relevant backpage editorials which shared common themes.

The arguments Bryan included in *The Commoner's* first issues reflected the anti-imperialist sentiments that he displayed on the campaign trail in 1899 and 1900. The principals involved in Bryan's editorials were the same that he expressed during his campaign. The articles included elements of both "conservative" eastern anti-imperialism and "populist" western anti-imperialism. While his principles remained similar, they performed a different role in the editorials of *The Commoner*, however. Bryan was most often writing in response to many of the national political stories involving imperialism, which saw his principles applied to a myriad of situations, rather than a singular attack on imperialism as a policy in general. The variety of stories on which Bryan commented allowed for his anti-imperialism to grow in sophistication. He poked at many different aspects of the McKinley administration acquisitive and colonial policies, and he defended himself from the attacks received from his many opponents. Bryan did still include editorials in which he professed his opposition to imperialism without including current events, but these were the minority on front-pages in *The Commoner*.

The principle of self-government was the most significant and longest lasting in Bryan's arguments against imperialism. Bryan felt that it was wrong for the United States to deny constitutional rights to Filipinos, as he believed all men deserve the right of self-government as put forth in the Declaration of Independence. This was his main point in the 1900 campaign and was the principle behind any anti-imperialist editorials which were found in *The Commoner* after 1903.

Bryan incorporated this principle when discussing many issues. He often reprinted speeches or articles from other newspapers which he agreed with or supported. In “Towne’s Great Speech,” from February 1901, Bryan reprinted a speech from retiring Minnesota Senator Charles Arnette Towne. In the speech, Towne argued for the granting of self-government to the Filipinos. “As an arraignment of imperialism,” Bryan wrote, “the speech has never been surpassed.”¹⁴⁷

Bryan often reprinted widely known historical speeches, usually with editorial comments discussing the necessity of their relevance to a particular political problem. In May 1901, Bryan reprinted President Lincoln’s Gettysburg speech to show how President Lincoln, in the context of slavery, valued the principle of self-government. “At no time within the past quarter of a century has there been more necessity than there is now...,” wrote Bryan, “to preserve a government of the people by the people and for the people.”¹⁴⁸ In “The People Sovereign,” Bryan reprinted large portions of President Monroe’s 7th annual message to the congress, in order to discuss the Monroe Doctrine and its relation to imperialism in the Philippines. Imperialists at the time used the Monroe Doctrine, in which the United States government declared its intent to prevent the spread of European imperialist influence to the newly liberated South American nations, as justification for the extension of American power into Asia. This idea, later iterated by Theodore Roosevelt in the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, sought to use American force abroad as a policing force. Bryan argued against this in his November 1901 article by reprinting the speech to highlight Monroe’s emphasis on the

¹⁴⁷ “Towne’s Great Speech,” *The Commoner*, February 6, 1901.

¹⁴⁸ “Lincoln’s Gettysburg Speech,” *The Commoner*, May 24, 1901.

reasoning behind preventing European expansion in South America- the Latin American people, like Filipinos, deserved self-government as a series of republics, rather than subservience as the colonial entities of a monarchy.¹⁴⁹

Bryan often pointed to the the instabilities involved with using force to subjugate the Filipino people's desire for self-government. He attacked the American claim to the Philippines- the purchase of the archipelago's sovereignty after defeating Spain- as being based on force. In the December 1902 article, "Doctrine of Destiny," he criticized Republican Party reasoning. "When he attempts to distinguish between force as the foundation of national expansion and force as the foundation of individual acquisition," Bryan wrote of the Republican imperialist, "he will begin to realize what imperialism really means."¹⁵⁰ Bryan here suggests that the United States' claim to the islands is akin to that of a mugger's claim to their victim's money.

Bryan continued to challenge the American claim over Filipino sovereignty in his controversial editorials on Filipino revolutionary Emilio Aguinaldo. In response to a reader's letter asking him whether or not Aguinaldo should be considered a rebel, Bryan argued that he was not. Using the official dictionary definition of the term "rebel," Bryan explained that a rebel is a person who acts in rebellion against an established government. As the United States was not a legitimate established government in the Philippines, Bryan argued that Aguinaldo owed no allegiance to the United States and thus was not a rebel.¹⁵¹ In the April 1901 article, "He Bows to Force," Bryan reprinted the captured revolutionary's manifesto and contributed comments. Bryan discussed Aguinaldo's word

¹⁴⁹ "The People Sovereign," *The Commoner*, November 22, 1901.

¹⁵⁰ "Doctrine of Destiny," *The Commoner*, December 5, 1902.

¹⁵¹ "Was Aguinaldo a Rebel?," *The Commoner*, April 19, 1901.

choice to emphasize that force was the sole motivator behind the Filipino's acquiescence to be ruled by the United States. Aguinaldo cited the "irresistible force" which persuades Filipinos to support American efforts, in which Bryan contextualized, "irresistible force is a new argument for republics to advance."¹⁵²

Bryan also attacked Republicans who felt that it was not only necessary to use force to bring the Filipinos to self-government, but that this process also justified an increased military. In August 1901's "A Strange Moulding Force," Bryan reprints General Arthur MacArthur's statement that as of August 1901, Filipinos were not subjugated and a large navy and army were still needed in order to make the Filipinos "gratefully" a part of the United States. In the article, Bryan argues, "It is rather strange to be told that in the opinion of representatives of the greatest republic on earth 'beneficial republican institutions' are represented by a condition in which 'the moulding force' is a 'well organized army and navy.'" Bryan questioned the general's belief that an occupying military in the Philippines would convince the Filipinos to support the American agenda, as it was "open to serious doubt whether such a force would so operate upon the Filipino people that they would become "warmly attached to the United States by a sense of gratitude."¹⁵³

In the May 1901 article "Tolstoi's [sic] Noble Appeal," Bryan reprinted the Russian "great humanitarian" and author's letter to Czar Nicholas II, in which Leo Tolstoy asked the czar to end his own authoritarian suppression before calling for international peace at the Hague conferences. Bryan agrees with Tolstoy and comments,

¹⁵² "He Bows to Force," *The Commoner*, April 4, 1901.

¹⁵³ "A Strange Moulding Force," *The Commoner*, August 23, 1901.

“What, indeed, is the prestige of a crown that depends solely upon the sword for its existence?”¹⁵⁴ While not specifically mentioning imperialism, the article does show how Bryan applied the principles of government without application to the threat of force across a variety of issues. Bryan was not simply rehashing anti-imperialist rhetoric when he argued for self-government in the Philippines and his use of the principle in relatively unrelated topics shows that he was serious about it.

Bryan disagreed with Republican policy towards the Philippines and Puerto Rico and their denial of constitutional rights to the islands. He felt that the US constitution’s laws should apply to any place under the jurisdiction of the United States. In his commentary on the Supreme Court cases known later as the Insular Cases, Bryan criticized the decision that the Constitution did not extend to Puerto Rico.¹⁵⁵ The cases sought to define the legal status of the newly acquired Puerto Rican Islands and established a system for incorporating territories without extending full constitutional rights. The main reasoning behind Bryan’s opposition to the cases was that the Puerto Rican people were completely under the rule of Congress, but without any representation. According to Bryan, “there is not a vital right that they can claim as theirs.”

One of the most interesting cases in which Bryan applied this argument was in his editorials discussing the sale of the Danish West Indies, located in the Caribbean, to the United States. The islands, eventually renamed the Virgin Islands in 1917, were to be sold to the United States on terms established by the Danish parliament. The Danish parliament required that the people of the islands vote on whether or not they wished to

¹⁵⁴ “Tolstoi’s Noble Appeal,” *The Commoner*, May 3, 1901.

¹⁵⁵ “Perhaps!,” *The Commoner*, June 14, 1901.

be a part of the United States, and demanded the people became full citizens upon annexation. Of this demand Bryan quipped, "...it is humiliating for this nation to be compelled to accept instructions in liberty."¹⁵⁶ Bryan interestingly supported expansion of US sovereignty to the islands, purchased for a higher price than the Philippines, as long as their citizens supported the annexation and were given full citizenship to the United States. While this example shows that Bryan was not wholly opposed to US expansion, it shows how important the principle of self-government was in his anti-imperialism.

In the anti-imperialist editorials that he wrote for *The Commoner* from 1901-1903, Bryan represented both the "conservative" eastern argument that imperialism was not aligned with American theories of government and the western "populist" fear that imperialism would bring about large scale abuses of power against citizens of the United States itself. In the editorial "Large Concessions in the Downes Case," which occupied the entire front page of the July 5 1901 issue, Bryan spoke against the Insular Case rulings and highlighted his argument that imperialism is too much of a break from tradition in American government. In the cases, the Supreme Court, "...surrenders the principles of constitutional government in order to vest in Congress power to administer a different kind of government that [sic] contemplated by our forefathers."¹⁵⁷ Bryan criticized the supporters of the court's rulings for their willingness to disregard the constitution in order to justify the McKinley administration's imperialist policy. In "Roosevelt on Duty," Bryan criticized a May 1901 statement made by then- Vice

¹⁵⁶ "Denmark's Good Example," *The Commoner*, April 5, 1901.

¹⁵⁷ "Large Concessions in the Downes Case," *The Commoner*, July 5, 1901.

President Theodore Roosevelt that it was the duty of the United States to take the Philippines and develop them for the benefit on the Filipino people. Bryan didn't believe that the sole purpose of American imperialism was to advance a selfless humanitarian mission, and expressed his fear that imperialism was a drastic deviation form the nation's founding principles. "Nowhere does Mr. Roosevelt discuss the effect of the new policy upon our theory of government;" writes Bryan, "nowhere does he attempt to explain why a colonial system was wrong in 1776 and right now."¹⁵⁸

Bryan feared that corruption and despotism would follow from an imperialist policy. In the May 1901 editorial "Upsetting the Government" Bryan explained that imperialism would allow for the ruling administrations in government to use a constant state of war to reduce opposition. If the nation was constantly in a state of war in the empire, according to Bryan, then any opposition to the ruling party or administration could be criticized as getting in the way of the administration's agenda, undermining support for any military deployment and ultimately harming American soldiers at war. Bryan's argument did reflect the fact that anti-imperialists were called traitors for their opposition. In his coverage of the Insular Cases, Bryan's article reprints a statement made by Senator John Coit Spooner that the Supreme Court was destined to go along with the imperialist policy because it did not wish to "upset the government." Bryan attributed this reluctance to the allegedly authoritarian spirit which imperialism leant to the McKinley administration. Bryan argued that imperialism as a policy "upsetted the government" because it was not aligned with the founding principles, and followed with a point by point highlight of the policy's contradictions.

¹⁵⁸ "Roosevelt on Duty," *The Commoner*, May 10, 1901.

In the following week's issue, Bryan wrote about how the constitution's purpose was to protect liberty, and criticized the claim made by the *American Review of Reviews* that the constitution should not "hamper the people in providing for the government, development and true progress of the territories that they have acquired by recent annexation."¹⁵⁹ Bryan's attack on imperialist rhetoric continued into 1902. In the January 1902 "A Change of Base," Bryan criticized the editor of *The Outlook* for using the argument that "all governments exist for the benefit of the governed" to justify American imperialism. Of this, Bryan commented, "...we must give its editor credit for recognizing the inconsistency between the Declaration of Independence and the Philippine policy of the republican administration."¹⁶⁰

Bryan's interpretation of the Declaration of Independence was a mainstay in his argument that imperialism was not aligned with founding American principles. In the April 1902 article, "Treason in the Philippines," Bryan detailed a law from the Philippine commission that made public speaking on independence and the dispersal of literature on independence illegal.¹⁶¹ Disgusted with this law, Bryan pointed out that under this law the Declaration of Independence would not be allowed to be read aloud. The following week Bryan continued his argument in the article, "Plutocracy in Instruction." Bryan commented on a story which detailed a University of Chicago scholar's trip to the Philippines to conduct research on "Tropical Colonialism." Bryan argued against the findings of the research, and suggested that the true purpose of the study was to "cultivate

¹⁵⁹ "Hampers' in the Constitution," *The Commoner*, July 12, 1901.

¹⁶⁰ "A Change of Base," *The Commoner*, January 17, 1902.

¹⁶¹ "Treason in the Philippines," *The Commoner*, April 4, 1902.

a contempt for the doctrines set forth in the Declaration of Independence and to inculcate a love for the doctrines of conquest and spoliation.”¹⁶²

Just as Bryan’s incorporation of eastern “conservative” and western “populist” concerns were displayed in the first issues of *The Commoner*, his anti-militarist arguments were evident in the early editorials. In general, anti-militarist editorials carried on similar arguments that were resonant in his 1900 campaign. Much like anti-imperialism, Bryan wrote editorials in opposition to militarism in response to a variety of stories. *The Commoner* had very few front page editorials that addressed militarism generally as a principle.

One of the principles of Bryan’s anti-militarist argument was that the maintenance of a full-time military was too expensive of a policy for the United States to conduct. In the second page of *The Commoner*’s first issue, Bryan warned readers of the impossibility of the military providing pensions to veterans, as the professional military payroll grew. In “Militarism against Pension,” Bryan detailed the story of the German government’s debate over military veteran pensions, ultimately opting to reduce the amount given to past veterans. Bryan used this story to argue that the United States would encounter the same problem if it had a large professional military, as it could “better afford to do injustice to those whose fighting days are over than to alienate those upon whom it must rely for future assistance.”¹⁶³ Bryan continued, “liberal pensions are possible with a small military establishment, but hardly probable when the resources of a country are drained to support a large body of professional soldiers.”

¹⁶² “Plutocracy in Instruction,” *The Commoner*, April 11, 1902.

¹⁶³ “Militarism against Pensions,” *The Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

Bryan challenged the imperialist rhetoric that American expansion in the Philippines would ultimately benefit the United States and provide financial opportunities for extended business relations. Bryan felt that was too costly. In the July 1901 “The Cost of War,” Bryan reprinted statements from a professor from the University of Colombia who disputed the claim that war brings prosperity. In his comments supporting and elaborating on the speech, Bryan asked, “Is Mr. Hanna paying this money out of his own pocket? By no means. The money comes from the public treasury and the people are bearing the burden and will yet feel the burden.”¹⁶⁴

Bryan’s emphasis on the majority being exploited for the benefit of the few was one the main elements of both his anti-militarism and anti-imperialism, as well as his third major tenet of the 1900 campaign, antitrust. Following the election, Bryan continued the western “populist” sentiment that imperialism and militarism were a scheme of the wealthy and that the average working man would not benefit from American expansion. In the simply titled “Militarism,” one of the few campaign-style editorials addressing militarism without a supporting news story, Bryan emphasized that “the people who profit by a large military establishment... are insignificant in numbers compared to those who are injured.”¹⁶⁵ In his recap of the 1901 elections, Bryan said imperialism was one of the main reasons that the Republican Party was not for the man who “earns a living.” “In the bank control of our currency, in the monopolistic control of our industries and in an imperial policy for the country there are danger and disaster for a large majority of the people.”¹⁶⁶ In his response to a December 1901 speech by now-

¹⁶⁴ “The Cost of War,” *The Commoner*, July 12, 1901.

¹⁶⁵ “Militarism,” *The Commoner*, February 13, 1901.

¹⁶⁶ “The Election of 1901,” *The Commoner*, November 15, 1901.

President Theodore Roosevelt, in which Roosevelt justified imperialism as being for the benefit of the Filipinos, Bryan warned, “this doctrine [imperialism] is a dangerous one, because it justifies the pretensions of an imperial government wherever people can be found rich enough to invite exploitation and weak enough to be conquered.”¹⁶⁷

Bryan emphasized the exploitation of Filipinos by American businesses when discussing the “Philippine Tariff”, in which exports from the islands were subjected to high tariffs as imposed upon them by the Dingley Act. In a December 1901 front page editorial, Bryan wrote, “now they [Filipinos] are to be shut out from commercial intercourse with the United States by a high tariff wall constructed to enable a few American manufacturers to grow rich at the expense of the rest of the people...”¹⁶⁸

For Bryan, one of the major manifestations of exploitation of the many by wealthy elites was widespread corruption. Bryan was worried that an imperialist mindset, as well as an increased military, would breed corruption. In “Senator McLaurin’s Bolt,” Bryan criticized a speech made by North Carolina Republican Senator John McLaurin and charged the South with giving “corrupt commercial plutocrats” to the Senate. The speech by Senator McLaurin highlighted the importance of the spread of industry to the South as a means of reasserting the region’s importance in national politics. Bryan connected the growing commercialism with imperialism and corruption and stated, “Imperialism gives to the plutocrat his opportunity.”¹⁶⁹ Bryan used the speech to criticize politicians who supported imperialism for its extension of trade relations, “those who are willing to purchase trade with everybody’s blood but their own and who would sell any

¹⁶⁷ “The President’s Message,” *The Commoner*, December 13, 1901.

¹⁶⁸ “The Philippines Tariff,” *The Commoner*, December 27, 1901.

¹⁶⁹ “Senator McLaurin’s Bolt,” *The Commoner*, May 3, 1901.

political or moral principle for a pecuniary consideration rush to defend the administration's Philippine policy."

Bryan often connected this commercialism directly with Republican policy and officials. "When [the Republican party] legislates on the subject of imperialism it tramples upon the most sacred traditions of the nation...in the hope of securing rich commercial reward by the subjugation of distant peoples." In the article from which the quote is taken, "A Minister's Lament," Bryan furthered the idea that imperialism was conducted for the benefit of the wealthy, and connected US Steel's achievement of \$1 billion in net assets with the advancement of "republican commercialism and imperialism."¹⁷⁰

Through corruption, imperialism was feared to reap financial gains for corrupt politicians. In the March 1901 article, "Should be Above Suspicion," Bryan discussed the story of Iowa Republican Representative John A. T. Hull, who as chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs invested in the American-owned Philippine Lumber Company. Bryan pointed out that Hull only invested in the company following McKinley's victory in 1900 and used the story to argue that the increased military and imperialism were for the protection of investments and ultimately to benefit the wealthy.¹⁷¹

In a similar article, Bryan commented on the story of Colorado Republican Senator John F. Shafroth, who, after a visit to the Philippines vouched for increased salaries for members of the Philippine Commission. The Philippine Commission voted to

¹⁷⁰ "A Minister's Lament," *The Commoner*, August 9, 1901.

¹⁷¹ "Should be Above Suspicion," *The Commoner*, March 15, 1901.

raise their own salaries, which Bryan viewed as a representation of the corrupt nature of imperialism. The salaries were “an indictment against the entire carpet-bag system, and the Republican’s conscience must be seared indeed if he cannot see in the extravagance of the commission an indication of what may be expected under a colonial system.”¹⁷²

While corruption was a widespread issue in American politics at the time, Bryan’s argument was that corruption would continue to grow under policies of imperialism, and both were at the expense of the many and for the benefit of the few.

Another way in which Bryan argued against the expansion of the military as being for the benefit of the elites was by arguing that the military officer corps was made up of elites themselves. In the second page of *The Commoner’s* first issue, Bryan commented on a story of how some of the most comfortable and career-boosting military positions in the Puerto Rican occupation force and for the volunteer army were given to the sons of Supreme Court justices. In “Questionable Appointments,” Bryan argued that the sons of Supreme Court justices were given these positions in order to bind the justices’ personal decisions during the Insular Cases to the careers of their sons.¹⁷³

Bryan also reprinted a letter from a Navy gunner who did not make promotion because he lacked the “social advantages” of wealthier men. In the reprinted denial letter sent from an unnamed Navy admiral to the gunner, the admiral describes to the gunner that the Navy wanted the best men to represent Americans when abroad, which excludes those without the “social advantages” of the wealthy. Bryan criticized the Navy’s decision to reject the gunner’s promotion based on social status and used this story to

¹⁷² “Shafroth on Philippine Question,” *The Commoner*, October 18, 1901.

¹⁷³ “Questionable Appointments,” *The Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

highlight what he felt was the merging of the American military with an aristocratic elite class. Bryan wrote to readers to not condemn the admiral for the rejection, as he “speaks for those who are dominating the administration and shaping our national policy.” He continued, “Gunner Morgan will prove a public benefactor if this correspondence opens the eyes of the American people to the fact that we cannot have imperialism, with its large army and navy, without accepting with it aristocracy in society and plutocracy in government.” This quote could serve as a general thesis of Bryan’s argument that imperialism and militarism benefit the wealthy, as well as his hope to appeal to a wider audience which he hoped was alarmed about the connections between aristocracy and plutocracy with imperialism and militarism.

The element of Bryan’s anti-imperialism that had arguably the longest-lasting impact on his foreign policy ideals came from his ideas on morality and religion. Bryan often used the Bible as a basis of morality from which to argue against imperialism and militarism. In its most subtle form Bryan upheld the principle of self-government as “god’s law.”¹⁷⁴ More often, if Bryan included religion in his anti-imperialist editorials it was explicit. In the first article of the first issue of *the Commoner*, Bryan wasted no time in appealing to Christians and using Christian values as a moral basis for opposition to imperialism. In the article, “A Living Fountain,” Bryan argued that self-government was advocated in the Bible. Bryan recounted the words of Jeremiah in the quote, “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water,” and used the simile to reflect on the danger that came from turning back to the “once discarded doctrine of empires.” “To compare self-government

¹⁷⁴ “We Have Imperialism Now,” *the Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

with an arbitrary form of government,” preached Bryan, “is like comparing a living fountain with a broken cistern.”¹⁷⁵

Bryan disagreed with Christians who supported American imperialism in the Philippines as a means of providing Protestant missionary opportunities to convert the Catholic and Muslim Filipinos. In “Christianity Versus War,” also from *The Commoner’s* first issue, Bryan used a long quote from Erasmus to display how the teachings of Christ and war did not mix. In the quote, Erasmus criticized those who prayed before entering battle, as all men were brothers under God and bloodshed was a serious sin. Bryan directed the quote at those “who preach a strenuous gospel of bloodshed, and who imagine that they see God’s hand directing a war waged for conquest and the extension of trade.”¹⁷⁶ Bryan used the words of Christ and his advocacy of peace in the Bible to criticize Christian imperialists. In the December 1901 article “Prince of Peace,” Bryan argued that “Christianity, civilization and militarism,” should not be forced by bayonet on people.¹⁷⁷

One of Bryan’s more controversial moral principles was the idea that a nation should be judged by the same moral guidelines as the individual. Bryan felt that imperialism involved murder and theft; the United States had purchased the Philippines without regard to the natives’ wishes and waged a bloody war against Filipino revolutionaries and population. Armies killed and governments claimed ownership through force, two very punishable crimes when committed by an individual. In the May 1901 article “Motion, Not Progress,” Bryan recalled the Biblical story of Cain and argued

¹⁷⁵ “A Living Fountain,” *the Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

¹⁷⁶ “Christianity Versus War,” *The Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

¹⁷⁷ “The Prince of Peace,” *The Commoner*, December 22, 1901.

that Cain, through the murder of his brother Abel, was the “first man to act upon the imperialist idea.” Since Cain’s murder of Abel, “Imperialism has been killing ever since.” Bryan detailed the moral crimes of imperialism, as it “disregards human rights and moral principles,” and argued that, “the fact that a nation instead of an individual commits a wrong does not change the character of the act.”¹⁷⁸

In his large editorial response to the Supreme Court rulings in the Insular Cases, Bryan criticized the idea that destiny was the driving force behind American imperialism and argued that it obliterated “all distinction between right and wrong... the only force behind imperialism is the commercial argument that the constitution and all moral principles must give way to the almighty dollar.” “There is no more reason to believe that God commands a big nation to destroy, subjugate or rob a weaker nation,” Bryan wrote, “than there is to believe that God commands a strong man to kill or rob a cripple, and yet the imperialists invoke the law to punish the individual as a criminal while they extol a war of conquest.”¹⁷⁹

In his response to a Democratic newspaper editor urging Democrats to drop their anti-imperialism, Bryan attacked the immorality of imperialism. Bryan claimed that the writer supported the Republican “theory that God is responsible for what we have done [imperialism].” “The Republican argument,” Bryan wrote, “is built upon the theory that wrong done upon a large scale loses its evil character, and becomes an integral part of God’s plan.”

¹⁷⁸ “Motion, Not Progress,” *The Commoner*, May 17, 1901.

¹⁷⁹ “Large Concessions in the Downes Case,” *The Commoner*, July 5, 1901.

There is no more reason for throwing upon the Almighty the responsibility for a war of conquest, and for an imperial policy which burdens our nation with a large army and suppresses the aspirations of distant peoples for self-government, than there is to blame Him because one individual chooses to kill another, or because a great corporation attempts to control a state government.¹⁸⁰

Bryan's inclusion of morality in his foreign policy ideals were to be seen in his later career as Secretary of State for Woodrow Wilson, specifically in his efforts in gaining signatories for his 1913 International Arbitration and Peace Congress treaties. His editorials in *The Commoner* were among his first comments on what would later be called "moral diplomacy," and reveal the anti-imperialist nature behind his pacifist ideals. While later applied to pacifism in the atmosphere of a looming world war, these editorials show that Bryan's "moral diplomacy" was rooted in the prevention of exploitation of weak nations by powerful nations, before applying it to the prevention of war between powerful nations.

After Bryan's loss of the presidential campaign in 1900, the Democratic Party became concerned with "reorganizing" itself, to take the party leadership away from Bryan and the populists. Naturally, this effort became one of the Bryan brothers' major concerns, as reflected in *The Commoner*. The "reorganizers" were dangerous to Bryan's political aspirations mainly for their rejection of bimetallism, but also for their lack of enthusiasm in the fight against American imperialism. While members of the reorganizing faction, such as Grover Cleveland, were against imperialism throughout the

¹⁸⁰ "Watterson on Destiny," *The Commoner*, April 19, 1901.

1890s, the failure of Bryan's anti-imperialist rhetoric in 1900 and the voting public's perceived support for imperialism influenced the reorganizers' decision to shift the focus away from anti-imperialism in anticipation of the 1904 presidential election.

Beginning in July 1901, Bryan's front page editorials on imperialism increasingly became occupied with highlighting the reorganizing faction's willingness to abandon anti-imperialism as a platform of the Democratic Party. In response to the Ohio Democratic Party's 1901 platform, Bryan began to criticize the reorganizing element's condemnation of imperialism "without pointing out a remedy."¹⁸¹ Bryan noted the platform's sharp deviation from the 1900 national platform adopted at the Kansas City convention and criticized it for dropping anti-imperialism despite what he felt to be a shared sentiment by the public. "The people are considering militarism and imperialism," wrote Bryan in October 1901, "but the new party apparently regards these questions as of no importance, as no mention is made of them."¹⁸²

Throughout the fall of 1901 and into 1902, Bryan continued to vouch for the inclusion of anti-imperialism as a major political issue. In November 1901, in his full-front-page recap of the 1901 elections, Bryan argued that "the Philippine question will be the most important matter considered by this congress and in all probability the most important issue in the campaign of 1902."¹⁸³ The article, "A Democratic Duty," showcased Bryan's prioritization of anti-imperialism as a major issue and disparaged the reorganizers' stance on the issue. Other issues, such as the explicitly titled "Imperialism

¹⁸¹ "The Ohio Platform," *The Commoner*, July 19, 1901.

¹⁸² "The New Party," *The Commoner*, October 4, 1901.

¹⁸³ "The Democratic Duty," *The Commoner*, November 29, 1901.

Still an Issue,” republished statements from other newspapers and politicians who sought to keep anti-imperialism as a platform issue of the Democratic Party.¹⁸⁴

In criticizing the reorganizers for accepting imperialism as an “accomplished fact” and joining in “the shout for blood and conquest,” Bryan interestingly attributed imperialism to the omnipotent “money power.” In the January 1902 article “Steadfastness,” Bryan asked, “who says that the money power is omnipotent, and that the democratic party [sic] must compromise with it or surrender to it?”¹⁸⁵ Bryan’s suggestion that the reorganizing elements were submitting to the “money power” in their abandonment of anti-imperialism is an explicit example of his “populist” western influenced anti-imperialism. His belief in a “money power” being responsible for imperialism was apparent during his 1900 campaign but became much more explicit after the reorganization elements took over the Democratic Party. Bryan could have been seeking to secure his populist base in his inclusion of the “money power” conspiracy and while there is no direct evidence of his intentions, the lack of mention of the “money power” in reference to imperialism before reorganization is peculiar.

While Bryan criticized many for not holding the same anti-imperialist ideals as he, or not caring about the issue as strongly as he did, his own anti-imperialist editorials in *The Commoner* showed some interesting contradictions. Bryan’s stance on the sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States reveals some insight into his anti-imperialism. In the September 27, 1901 article “Another Problem,” Bryan presented the breaking story of the sale of the islands as a complication and something the Roosevelt

¹⁸⁴ “Imperialism Still an Issue,” *The Commoner*, February 28, 1902 and “Smith & Herod,” *The Commoner*, May 9, 1902.

¹⁸⁵ “Steadfastness,” *The Commoner*, January 10, 1902.

administration should avoid. Bryan was concerned with whether the islands would become “by mere purchase a part of the great American Empire,” or “an integral part of the Union with their inhabitants entitled to all the rights, privileges and immunities.”¹⁸⁶

By February of 1902, in an about-face, Bryan wrote that the “purchase of the islands is wise and the price satisfactory, provided always that we can purchase them without violating American principles and without making unwilling citizens of the inhabitants.”¹⁸⁷ Bryan wrote in May 1902, “The islands will be valuable acquisition if the people come in as citizens and come in voluntarily.”¹⁸⁸ In this case, Bryan suggested that he supports the extension of US sovereignty as long as the island population’s right to self-government was respected. This is key to understanding Bryan’s attitude toward expansion in the Philippines, as compared to that in Puerto Rico and the Danish West Indies. As noted in earlier pages, Bryan’s biggest issue with annexations conducted by the United States was the lack of self-government granted to those islands, as well as the denial of constitutional rights. His editorials and stance on the acquisition of the Danish West Indies show how important those conditions were in defining his stance on the expansion of United States sovereignty, as they were necessary for the “wise” purchase of the islands.

Bryan’s attitude towards race in his 1900 anti-imperialism was upheld in his editorials in *The Commoner* from 1901 on. The desire for the United States to remain “homogenous” by prohibiting the immigration of Japanese and Chinese laborers remained amongst Bryan’s anti-imperialist principles in *The Commoner*. Bryan feared the

¹⁸⁶ “Another Problem,” *The Commoner*, September 27, 1901,

¹⁸⁷ “Danish Treaty Needs Amendment,” *The Commoner*, February 14, 1902.

¹⁸⁸ “A Plebiscite in Danish Islands,” *The Commoner*, May 9, 1902.

Philippines would become a backdoor for Asian immigrants to enter the United States. He argued that the Philippine islands ought to be independent from the United States, to prevent an inclusion of the racially “distant” Filipinos, Japanese and Chinese to the United States.

In his December 1901 article, “Yellow Peril,” Bryan detailed his opposition to Chinese and Japanese immigration to the United States. He felt that Asian immigration threatened the “homogenous” unity of the “national family.” While the United States was never close to being homogeneous throughout its history, and certainly not in 1900, Bryan’s argument that immigration would have added more complexity to the “race problem” is significant. He did not support racial injustice to African-Americans and immigrants, but was aware of how strong the anti-immigrant and anti-black sentiments were at the time. “No distinct race like the Chinese can come into this country without exciting a friction and a race prejudice which will make it more difficult for us to exercise a wholesome influence...”¹⁸⁹

Bryan was a man of his times in regards to his attitudes towards the concept of race. In Roger Daniels words, “Bryan was at worst a moderate racist in an age of immoderate racism.”¹⁹⁰ Bryan firmly believed in the categorization of race and the superiority of the white, European races over non-whites. In the February 13, 1901 article “Chinese Atrocities,” Bryan opposed the European military presence in China in response to the Boxer Rebellion. He detailed Chinese accounts of foreign soldiers looting and murdering civilians, leading some Chinese civilians to kill themselves to avoid the

¹⁸⁹ “The Yellow Peril,” *The Commoner*, December 6, 1901.

¹⁹⁰ Roger Daniels, “William Jennings Bryan and the Japanese,” *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 3, September 1966, pp. 227-240.

“Christian conquerors.” In the article, Bryan stated that the example proved “the fact that in a war between different races, the superior race as a rule sinks to the level of the inferior.”¹⁹¹

While Bryan upheld the superiority of white races, he believed non-white peoples should govern themselves. In *The Commoner's* second issue, Bryan used race in his response to imperialist claims that anti-imperialists were traitors for encouraging revolutionary forces in the Philippines. “Men who insist that liberty was designed for the brown man as well as for the white man and the black man,” wrote Bryan, “these men are not made of stuff of which traitors are constructed.”¹⁹²

Bryan refuted the idea of “race sympathy,” the idea that more developed European countries had an obligation to develop other countries through colonialism. Bryan felt it was best to spread American ideas to the world by temporarily exposing foreigners to American institutions. “This country can do infinitely more for itself,” wrote Bryan, “and infinitely more for the world by educating representatives of foreign nations and sending them back to apply American principles to their social and political problems than it can by wars of conquest.”¹⁹³

Bryan put this principle into practice in 1901 when a young Japanese student, Yaschichira Yamashita, arrived unannounced at Fairview’s doorstep and asked to join the household. Yamashita sought to be educated by Bryan after becoming familiar with Bryan’s political career. Bryan arranged for Yamashita to attend Lincoln public schools and the University of Nebraska in the five and a half years which Yamashita lived at

¹⁹¹ “Chinese Atrocities,” *The Commoner*, February 13, 1901.

¹⁹² “Lese-Majeste,” *The Commoner*, January 30, 1901.

¹⁹³ “Let Our Ideas Conquer,” *The Commoner*, December 6, 1901.

Fairview. After his education, Yamashita returned to Japan to be a school principal and be involved with the Japanese Peace Society.¹⁹⁴

Overall, Bryan's arguments made on imperialism and militarism were very similar to that of his 1900 anti-imperialist campaign rhetoric. His editorials in *The Commoner* in 1901 and 1902 contained elements of both "populist" western and "conservative" eastern anti-imperialism. While similar, the nature of the articles was certainly different. Most of Bryan's editorials responded to other published articles, speeches and news events and provided criticism and solutions to what Bryan saw as the major political problems of each week. The principals involved in his argument were consistent, if complex, and this lends evidence to the argument that his campaign rhetoric in opposition to imperialism in 1900 was a reflection of genuine feeling and was not just a brazen effort to gain votes. *The Commoner* was his outlet from which he pronounced what he felt to be the defining principles of the Democratic Party. His perseverance in writing in opposition to imperialism after the 1900 election, and the continued presence of the principles during and after the 1901 and 1902 elections, show that anti-imperialism was a genuine part of Bryan's political ideology.

¹⁹⁴ Bryan, *Memoirs*, 282, 310.

Chapter Four: Influence and Reflection of Support in *The Commoner*

The feedback that Bryan received prior to publishing *The Commoner* and through its first year of distribution shows that there was a sizable audience, albeit a national minority, interested in Bryan's opposition to American imperialism. His editorials attacking the new United States empire and its contravention of what he saw as American principles of self-government were to a certain extent a reflection of the ideals of his followers. This is shown in letters from readers who expressed their shared concern and satisfaction with Bryan's editorials, and advice he received from industry advisors, who expressed their belief that anti-imperialism and anti-militarism would sell copies. As he was not practicing as a lawyer, Bryan's main income outside of public speaking was from *The Commoner* and his financial and political success was largely tied in with that of the newspaper. Bryan's decision to write anti-imperialist editorials shows that the issue was important to him in principle, and that he believed it would make *The Commoner* successful and reach out to the American voting public.

After his 1900 defeat Bryan had reason to believe that his opposition to imperialism and political principles in general received support. The first issues of *The Commoner* reflected the influences which Bryan received in the weeks after the election. In December 1900 Bryan put significant effort into not only writing the editorials and setting up the Business framework for *The Commoner*, but he was also developing what he felt the paper should stand for. In choosing these principles, he received positive feedback from influential and like-minded individuals. Those writing to Bryan in the two months between his 1900 loss and the release of *The Commoner* were concerned with

many different aspects of anti-imperialism. Bryan was viewed as a leader in the anti-imperialist movement and he received encouragement for his position.

Andrew Carnegie wrote Bryan a long handwritten letter following the election loss in which the steel magnate commended Bryan for his anti-imperialism and for supporting “the cause we have at heart-saving our country from entanglements with the wars of Europe.” While he was most focused on this cause, was also very worried about the McKinley administration’s handling of the Philippines. Carnegie was worried that if the Republicans did not “do as you [Bryan] advocate & promise free [sic] & independence” for the Philippines, there would be a negative reaction from the American working population. “The workers all against imperialism,” wrote Carnegie.¹⁹⁵

Meanwhile, a less prominent supporter from Nome, Alaska, A. Bienkowski, wrote to Bryan to express that “in the northernmost part of Alaska you have many warm friends and admirers, men, some of whom have the privilege of knowing you personally, and many others who admire your sterling patriotism and broad Americanism.” Bienkowski also informed Bryan of the general Alaskan belief that “Expansion in the FAR EAST cannot inure to the best interests of the American Nation.”¹⁹⁶ While Bryan did not win the election, he was ensured that carrying on his opposition to imperialism was promising.

Writing afterward, Bryan’s cousin W. S. Bryan published an immediate analysis of the 1900 election. His analysis of Bryan’s loss argued that Bryan’s stance regarding trusts ultimately cost him the election, and that he did “not believe that the financial plank

¹⁹⁵ Andrew Carnegie, New York City, New York, to WJB, 12/18/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

¹⁹⁶ A. Bienkowski, Nome, Alaska, to WJB, 1/22/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

or Imperialism had much if anything to do with the result of the election.” He felt that Bryan’s attack on the trusts was an impossible one, as “the trusts exercise a greater influence than many suppose.” W.S. felt that Bryan “would not surrender an honest opinion for any office in the world” and was “right and honest” in his stance on imperialism.¹⁹⁷

Dudley G. Wooten an attorney from Dallas, Texas, wrote to Bryan in December 1900 and expressed his “pleasure and gratification” at hearing news of *The Commoner’s* January release. Wooten was in strong support of a paper “to be devoted to the vindication and advocacy of the principles for which the Party stood in this campaign.” Wooten believed that the press in the “great centers of population and intelligence in the East and North, seem to be either subsidized or terrorized by the influence of the money power.” The attorney expressed his support of *The Commoner’s* anticipated “vindication of the great popular principles,” which meant the “most for the race and for humanity.”¹⁹⁸

In a December 1900 letter, an Indiana Lutheran Priest, Father Riupe expressed to Bryan not only his community’s support for anti-imperialism, but their concern that Republicans were not clear in their policy. Fr. Riupe assured Bryan that “our people (German Lutheran) are certainly as a unit against Imperialism. But they were again scared away as in ‘96.”¹⁹⁹ Strikingly, while making it apparent that his community did not support Bryan’s free silver monetary policies, the priest expressed his fear of the damages which imperialism would bring to the country. Riupe supported Bryan’s

¹⁹⁷ W.S. Bryan, St. Louis, Missouri, to WJB, 12/1/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

¹⁹⁸ Dudley G. Wooten, Dallas, Texas, to WJB, 12/17/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

¹⁹⁹ Father Riupe, Tolleston, Indiana, to WJB, 12/10/10--, BPLC, Box 26.

“assault on Republicanism for the salvation of our country, for if the Republic is to be saved, those men that will then and there be with you [Bryan] must help to do it.”

Henry H. Smith, a Washington-based author, wrote to Bryan in the weeks following the election to commend Bryan for his fight against imperialism in the campaign. Smith authored and published a pamphlet entitled “Empire and Humanity,” which he sought to distribute to “every clergyman in the Northern states, to the libraries, colleges and universities,” along with a host of prominent politicians.²⁰⁰ The pamphlet was aimed at Christians who supported imperialism and exposed the moral shortcomings of the policy. Smith sought Bryan’s feedback on the pamphlet and viewed Bryan as a leader in the movement.

Louis R. Ehrich, writing from Colorado Springs in December 1900, also supported Bryan’s moralistic approach towards anti-imperialism. Ehrich agreed with Bryan that “in the late election personal selfishness triumphed over national and international justice.” Ehrich was no doubt referring to imperialism in his statement, and warned, “the battle which lies before us is the effort to tear away the veil of selfishness which is obscuring the vision of this nation and make our citizens see and follow the path of Right in our treatment of other races.”²⁰¹

Selfishness and greed were a major component of Bryan’s moral criticism of the United States’ imperialist treatment of “other races.” In “Watterson on Destiny”, published April 19, 1901, Bryan criticized an editor from the Louisville-based *Courier-Journal* for an editorial in which the editor urged Democrats to given the issue of anti-

²⁰⁰ Henry H. Smith, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 12/8/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

²⁰¹ Louis R. Ehrich, Colorado Springs, Colorado, to WJB, 12/5/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

imperialism. The editorial argued that God and Providence had gave the Philippines to the United States and “instead... of discussing the abstraction of imperialism, illustrated by the rights and wrongs of the Philippines, Mr. Bryan were [sic] more profitably engaged in considering how we may best administer possessions, which for good or for evil, are with us to stay.”²⁰² Bryan lashed back at the editor and argued for the assertion of morality in discussion of imperialism, sharing the same sentiment as Louis R. Ehrich. “It is immoral because it obliterates the distinction between right and wrong.” Bryan wrote of the argument that God gave the United States the Philippines as a colony. “The republican argument is built upon the theory that wrong done upon a large scale loses its evil character, and becomes an integral part of God’s plan.”²⁰³

In Bryan’s full front-page editorial on the Insular Cases, “Large Concessions in the Downes Case,” Bryan also displayed his moralistic approach to imperialism. Speaking of the decision made by Supreme Court Justice Henry Billings Brown that imperialism was not restricted in the Constitution, Bryan wrote imperialism was “yielding to temptation; it is the conscious departure from the right path with lame and halting apologies therefor. It is the ancient argument that the end justifies the means- an argument that has been used to bolster up everything bad and to excuse all villainy.”²⁰⁴

During December 1900 and January 1901 Bryan was also receiving letters from supporters who shared Bryan’s fear about the growth of militarism in the United States. In a December 10 letter from the office of the General Assembly Order of Knights of Labor, General Secretary-Treasurer John W. Hayes asked for Bryan’s help in defeating

²⁰² “Watterson on Destiny,” *The Commoner*, April 19, 1901.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ “Large Concessions in the Downes Case,” *The Commoner*.

an Army Appropriations Bill which was pending in Congress. Hayes and the Knights of Labor were very worried about the nation being “saddled with a continually increasing standing Army.” The labor union wanted Bryan to “assist us by influencing one or more of your friends in the United States Senate” to include a stipulation to the bill which would require the size of the army to be reduced after two years or until the “present troubles in the Philippine Islands will have been adjusted.”²⁰⁵ The union was very concerned with how imperialism would mean an expansion of the military and shared with Bryan the sentiment that American imperial holdings would create a permanent need for a large standing army.

Bryan also received letters expressing the fear that militarism would bring about an unmanageable debt. A December 8, 1900 letter from John F. Friets, of the *Chicago Citizen*, detailed his anxiety that the Republican victory would result in an army 100,000 strong, a massive military budget that would drive the government into debt, and an isthmian canal, “at our...expense, for the accommodation of Europe!”

The sentiment that an increased standing army would be too expensive and result in debt was reflected in Bryan’s article on the second page of the first issue, “Militarism against Pensions.” In the article, Bryan discussed the German military’s decision to limit those eligible for pension to only veterans of the most recent wars. Bryan warned that the decision to reject pensions was one of the natural results of a large military. “As the burdens of militarism increase a government which rests up on force finds it necessary to choose between the army of the present and the soldiers of the past.” Speaking of the fear that an increased military in the United States would result in an unmanageable debt,

²⁰⁵ John W. Hayes, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 12/10/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

Bryan argued that “liberal pensions are possible with a small military establishment, but hardly probable when the resources of a country are drained to support a large body of professional soldiers.”²⁰⁶

Southern Democrats in the Senate were particularly worried that imperialism, and the increased army which was to follow, would be used as a tool of the wealthy. South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman wrote to Bryan on December 5, 1900 and expressed his fear that the Republican victory and agenda would result in “the centralization of our government and the control of our destiny as a people by a standing army working the will of an oligarchy of wealth.”²⁰⁷ Arkansas Senator James K. Jones was also concerned with the Republican imperialist agenda. Jones feared that McKinley would “interweave the army with the influential classes in every state for the purpose of preventing the possibility of a reorganization and reduction” of the military.²⁰⁸

Bryan’s reflection of this fear that a military would be used as a “scheme of the wealthy” was later shown in front page editorials repeatedly throughout 1901. In the February 1901 article “Militarism,” Bryan criticized the increase of the standing army for its large expense and imperial use. “When the awakening comes,” wrote Bryan, “it will be found that the people who profit by a large military establishment, however powerful in present influence, are insignificant in numbers compared with those who are injured.”²⁰⁹ In the March 1901 article, “Is This Aristocracy?” Bryan used letters from a navy gunner who was denied promotion from his admiral on the grounds that the gunner

²⁰⁶ “Militarism against Pensions,” *The Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

²⁰⁷ Benjamin Tillman, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 12/5/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

²⁰⁸ James K. Jones, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 12/1/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

²⁰⁹ “Militarism,” *The Commoner*, February 13, 1901.

was “recruited from a class of men who have not had the social advantages which are requisite for a commissioned officer.” Bryan believed this should open the “eyes of the American people to the fact that we cannot have imperialism, with its large army and navy, without accepting with it aristocracy in society and plutocracy in government.”²¹⁰ In his recap of President Theodore Roosevelt’s 1901 State of the Union address, Bryan attacked Roosevelt’s argument that the United States annexed the Philippines for the sole humanitarian benefit of the Filipino people. Bryan wrote a short summary of his anti-imperialist beliefs which shows the significance of his sentiment that imperialism was for the benefit of the wealthy. “This is the Philippine question in a nutshell: Hold the islands; providence gave them to us and we must make all the money out of them we can.” Bryan continued, “show the taxpayer that it is his duty to bear the burden, and you will have no difficulty in showing the exploiter that it is his duty to reap the reward.”²¹¹

In early 1901, the American Anti-Imperialist League and others in the anti-imperialist movement began to oppose the British effort to subjugate the South African Republic (the Transvaal) and the Orange Free State to British rule in South Africa’s Boer War. The organization saw a direct parallel between the cause of the Filipinos and the Boers, as both represented republics fighting for self-government. In the letter, the League addressed the criticism that Bryan “espoused the cause of the Boers last year only for the purpose of attaining success thereby [in the election], and have alleged that you are saying very little now about them.”²¹²

²¹⁰ “Is This Aristocracy?” *The Commoner*, March 8, 1901.

²¹¹ “The President’s Message,” *The Commoner*, December 13, 1901.

²¹² W. A. Croffut, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 1/5/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

The League wanted Bryan to continue to fight for the cause of the Boers. In 1901, a consul representing the South African Republic visited the United States on a mission to drum up support against the British. In the presence of the Anti-Imperialist League secretary when he asked Bryan to help gather signatures for a petition in support of the Boer cause, to be presented to the Peace Conference at the Hague. The League, which supported Bryan in 1900, felt that “there is nobody in the United States so thoroughly equipped by ability and reputation as yourself to induce people” to the cause. The self-government principle was a leading motivation in both Bryan’s and the Anti-Imperialist League’s opposition to the British in the Boer War. Both felt that the United States should support the Boers for this reason, a sentiment which was not shared by the majority of the Republican Party.

Bryan wrote about the Boer cause throughout his front page editorials in 1901 and continued to apply the principles of his opposition to American imperialism to the British imperial conflict. On the third page of *The Commoner’s* first issue, Bryan detailed the importance supporting the Boer cause, by Americans and worldwide “lovers of liberty.” “Millions here and throughout the world, who believe in self-government and deny the right of a strong nation to cast its sovereignty like a net over a weaker people,” Bryan wrote in “The Boers- God Bless Them,” “are watching with intense interest the unequal struggle of the Boers in the defense of their independence.”²¹³ This sentiment was also displayed in the March 15, 1901 article “A Pathetic Statement.” “It is something new for the United States of America,” wrote Bryan, “to withhold its sympathy from a republic struggling for freedom and constitutional government against the aggressions of a

²¹³ “The Boers- God Bless Them,” *The Commoner*, January 23, 1901.

formidable adversary.”²¹⁴ In the March 29, 1901 article, “Harrison’s Last Words,” Bryan reprinted the last public letter written by former President Benjamin Harrison. “Never before has American sympathy failed,” wrote Harrison, “when a people were fighting for independence.”²¹⁵ Bryan wrote that Harrison’s quote “presents sentiments so truly American and so thoroughly consistent with international morality, as well as with our nation’s traditions.”

Bryan frequently reflected the American Anti-Imperialist League’s concern that the United States should support the Boers in their war of independence by criticizing the McKinley and Roosevelt administrations for showing preferential treatment to the British. In the August 16, 1901 article “Why Not to Kruger?” Bryan criticized McKinley for sending condolences to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany after the monarch’s mother died and to the English Royal Family when the Queen of England died, but not to President Kruger of the South African Republic after his wife died as prisoner of war. “How then does it happen,” wrote Bryan, “that although the President of a small republic is staggering under the greatest load that can fall upon a man no word of sympathy has reached him from the President of the greatest republic on earth.”²¹⁶ In anticipation of President Theodore Roosevelt’s State of the Union speech in late November 1901, Bryan urged Roosevelt to pledge support to the Boer cause. Bryan provided long quotes from Presidents Monroe, Adams and Taylor in which they expressed their desire for South American republics to win their independence. Criticizing Roosevelt’s support for the British, Bryan wrote,

²¹⁴ “A Pathetic Statement,” *The Commoner*, March 15, 1901.

²¹⁵ “Harrison’s Last Words,” *The Commoner*, March 29, 1901.

²¹⁶ “Why Not to Kruger?” *The Commoner*, August 16, 1901.

What is there in the atmosphere of the present day that would restrain an American president from expressing in a polite yet vigorous [sic] way the hope and the prayer of the American people that in every struggle between an empire and a republic, in every contest between a monarchy and a people's government, that the republic may live, and that the people's cause may prevail?²¹⁷

In the months preceding its publication, Bryan received considerable advice on how to best run *The Commoner*. As early as May 1900 Bryan had inquired into making a national Democratic paper, and he threw himself into the enterprise following his defeat in the 1900 election.²¹⁸ Having been reassured of support, Bryan sought to keep his name and principles before the American voting public. In December 1900, Bryan reached out to prominent leaders involved in the newspaper industry, including the president of the American Press Association, P.S. Bennett, the philosopher and newspaper editor, Orlando J. Smith, and newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst. Advice given to Bryan really emphasized the importance of the business aspect of the paper, as Bryan's involvement in the industry had been limited to editing work. Those in his inner circle were aware that Bryan did not intend on being anything more than a contributor of editorials and suggested that Bryan be careful in his selection of a solid business manager.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ "Our Duty to the Boers," *The Commoner*, November 22, 1901.

²¹⁸ Osnes, 100.

²¹⁹ P.S. Bennett, New York City, New York, to William Jennings Bryan, 12/11/1900, Bryan Papers Library of Congress, Box 26. P.S. Bennett, New York City, New York, to WJB, 1/21/1901, BPLC, Box 26. James K. Jones, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 12/19/1900, BPLC, Box 26. Willis, Albert, Ann Arbor, Michigan, to WJB 12/30/1901, BPLC, Box 27. Osnes, 101.

Bryan ultimately chose his brother Charles to manage the paper, valuing his experience in running the 1896 and 1900 presidential campaigns. During the campaigns, Charles compiled a superb filing system in which useful political news clippings and correspondence were filed according to subject and name. In addition, Charles developed a large mailing list of Bryan sympathizers which was extremely useful in plotting *The Commoner's* 17,000 pre-subscriptions.²²⁰ Charles managed the paper successfully, taking over “full operational control” from after the first year until the paper’s death in 1922, when Charles’ own political career and William’s old age got in the way of the management of the paper.

Many industry advisors felt that *The Commoner* would be a profitable business venture and anticipated the Bryans becoming wealthy. P.S. Bennet, in his letter from December 18, 1900 wrote that Bryan would be “elevated into the wealthy set” by the profits from *The Commoner*.²²¹ Josephus Daniels, a newspaper editor and publisher of the *North Carolina News and Observer*, wrote to Bryan that he trusted *The Commoner* “will have a great circulation in every part of the country, both for the good it will do the cause and that it may give you a large and growing income.”²²² However, the Bryans were very worried about profiting from *The Commoner*, as the wealth they accumulated could be used to criticize them for losing touch with their audience, “the common man”. For the brothers, the paper was “not started as a money making scheme,” but as a tool for assisting their political careers.²²³

²²⁰ Osnes, 94-104.

²²¹ P.S. Bennett, New York City, New York, to WJB, 12/18/1900, BPLC, Box 26.

²²² Josephus Daniels, Raleigh, North Carolina, to WJB, 1/18/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²²³ Osnes, 108.

It was necessary for the paper to be self-supporting, and, with a low subscription price of \$1.00 per year, revenue was expected to come from advertisements.²²⁴ The Bryans, so firmly anti-trust, did not offer advertisement space for any trusts or corporations, which severely limited advertisement revenue. However, there is evidence from Bryan's correspondence which shows that he used advertisement space for not only supporting *The Commoner*, but for his own financial gain. In a September 1901 letter from Albert Harroh, an Iowa breeder of prize short-horn cattle "of the most fashionable strains" agreed to a request from Bryan to exchange one of his cattle for an advertising spot. Bryan had seen Harroh's cattle at the 1901 Lincoln Fair, after which Harroh had offered Bryan to "take out the amount of the purchase in advertising in your paper."²²⁵ Bryan used *The Commoner* to acquire more livestock in February 1902 in a letter from A. T. Mohr. The cattle breeder from Buffalo, New York agreed to Bryan's request to trade \$150 worth of ads for a bull calf.²²⁶ In another deal, this with the Davis Acetylene Company, Bryan received a sizable discount on a large "100-light gas generator." The generator, worth \$300, was offered to Bryan for only \$100, with the Davis Acetylene Company "taking the balance in advertising space."²²⁷ Ultimately, the Bryans tried their best to keep profits low by restricting advertising space to small businesses, but did profit from bartering opportunities from the same

After the first issues of *The Commoner* entered circulation in January 1901, many of Bryan's industry and political advisors gave their feedback on what would make the

²²⁴ Osnes, 104. Subscription rates dropped down as low as \$.25 per year around voting season, showing the political priorities held by the Bryans.

²²⁵ Albert Harroh, Newton, Iowa, to WJB, 9/30/1901, BPLC, Box 27.

²²⁶ A.T. Mohr, Buffalo, New York, to WJB, 2/17/1902, BPLC, Box 27.

²²⁷ Frank Price, Chicago, Illinois, to WJB, 12/14/1901, BPLC, Box 27.

paper successful. Many were concerned with *The Commoner's* exclusive focus on partisan political news. Following the first issue, Orlando Jay Smith wrote to Bryan again, arguing that *The Commoner* needed “more current issues-the new army bill, the question before the Supreme Court, etc.”²²⁸ The “current issues” which Smith was referring to were the Spooner amendment to the 1901 Army Appropriations Bill, which would end the US Army’s occupation of the Philippines in favor of a typical civilian administration of the islands in the model of a European colony, and the Insular Cases, a series of rulings by the Supreme Court that allowed the McKinley administration to add the newly-acquired Spanish colonies to United States territory and jurisdiction without extended constitutional rights to the colonized peoples. Smith suggested that these topics would be profitable for *The Commoner*.

Arkansas Senator James K. Jones also wrote after reading the first issue, noting that he was afraid “that the desire for something sensational in a newspaper way is so strongly fixed in the minds of the average reader, that he will not stick as earnestly and faithfully to sound and wholesome newspaper writing as he ought to.”²²⁹ In February 1901, the prolific newspaper editor, journalist and author W. J. Abbot advised Bryan that “*The Commoner* is all right- but lighten it up a little. Don’t be so wholly political.”²³⁰ George S. Canfield, secretary of the Minnesota Democratic State Central Committee, was worried a “mere political paper” would not be “suffice to acquire the great circulation” which they had hoped for with *The Commoner*. Canfield urged Bryan to include additional “features or departments as will attract the general reader.” Canfield warned,

²²⁸ Orlando Jay Smith, New York City, New York, to WJB, 1/28/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²²⁹ James K. Jones, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 2/21/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²³⁰ J. Abbot, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 2/7/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

“a paper cannot be given a large general circulation... by a mere personality.”²³¹ In the age of Yellow Journalism, advisors apparently feared *The Commoner* would lose the public’s attention if it did not include a wider coverage and more “sensational news” stories.

This advice was reflected in the February and March 1901 issues of *The Commoner*. The newspaper fleshed out into sections devoted to home and family life as well as a page of short humorous political quips penned by writer William M. Maupin. It also started to include more sensational stories detailing American soldier misconduct in the Philippines, the existence of slavery in the southern Moro islands and gruesome tragedies which had occurred in European imperialist wars. In the February 1901 article “Chinese Atrocities,” Bryan detailed the misconduct of foreign soldiers in China during the Boxer Rebellion and the reaction of Chinese civilians who were allegedly committing suicide in large numbers as an alternative to coming in contact with the European soldiers.²³² The March 1 issue of *The Commoner* also included a sensational headline on its front page; “The President an Emperor” featured Bryan’s criticism of the Spooner amendment. Echoing many of the anti-imperialist members of his party, Bryan argued that the amendment gave powers to the executive which he equated to an emperor.²³³ Clearly, if an audience existed for a newspaper which espoused Democratic political opinions and news stories which were anti-militarist and anti-imperialist, Bryan wanted to reach that audience.

²³¹ Geo S. Canfield, St. Paul, Minnesota, to WJB, 3/11/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²³² “Chinese Atrocities,” *The Commoner*, February 13, 1901.

²³³ “The President an Emperor,” *The Commoner*, March 8, 1901.

Anti-militarist front-page editorials were most frequent during the first issues of *The Commoner*. The fourth issue, published February 13, 1901, featured the front page article “Militarism,” written in opposition to the increase in the standing army. Bryan continued writing anti-militarist editorials for his front pages into March, including “Is This Aristocracy?” and “Should be Above Suspicion,”²³⁴ both of which appealed to Bryan’s western “populist” audience in arguing that militarism would only benefit the wealthy. While “Is This Aristocracy” dealt with the rejected promotion of a navy gunner on grounds that the man did not come from a high social class, “Should be Above Suspicion” detailed the corruption of a chairman of the house committee on military affairs. In the article, Bryan explained that Iowa Republican congressman John A. T. Hull had invested in and became president of an American-owned lumber company operating in the Philippines. “As president of the Philippine Lumber and Development Company he was interested in increasing the army for the protection of his Philippine investments.”²³⁵

Bryan also wrote heavily on the Insular Cases at this time, frequently using the articles as a vehicle for expressing many of his anti-imperialist concerns. March featured the front page editorials “Elastic Logic” and “Cuba Should Be Free,” both of which criticized the United States’ treatment of Cuba. In “Elastic Logic,” Bryan criticized the “elasticity of logic and conscience” of Republican Whitelaw Reid. Reid argued that after the Supreme Court’s decision in the Insular Cases, the United States should annex Cuba since declaring it a protectorate effectively gave Cuba the same freedom as a state in the union. Of this notion, Bryan wrote, “can any person read the pledge made to Cuba [Teller

²³⁴ “Is This Aristocracy?” *The Commoner*, March 8, 1901. “Should be Above Suspicion,” *The Commoner*, March 15, 1901.

²³⁵ “Should be Above Suspicion,” *The Commoner*, March 15, 1901.

Amendment] and then read Mr. Reid's construction of that pledge without recognizing the hypocrisy of the republican position?"²³⁶ In "Cuba Should Be Free," Bryan criticized the influence of the United States in the Cuban Constitution and dominance of Cuban foreign relations. "The action of the administration in insisting that the Cuban constitution shall define that island's relation with the United States," wrote Bryan, "is without justification in law or morals."²³⁷ Bryan continued to inject questions of morality in his warning that "we cannot afford to turn from the role of a Good Samaritan to the role of a dictator."

Orlando Jay Smith's advice addressed the fact that Bryan wrote editorials in *The Commoner's* first issues that were based on speeches he had made on the 1900 campaign trail. They were therefore notable for their discussion of Bryan's principles without adhering to a current news story. For example, the first article of the first issue was Bryan's "A Living Fountain," which applied a Biblical passage to the principle of self-government. The following issues saw less of these types of editorials. It is important that these articles were written before Smith's advice, because their purpose was to provide Bryan with a forum from which to present his political ideals, one of which was his opposition to US imperialism. Clearly, if Bryan was writing editorials whose only purpose was to present his political principles to the public, and many of them were anti-imperialist, he must have considered those principles an important part of his platform as a prominent politician and culture figure. After the first few issues, Bryan wrote editorials

²³⁶ Elastic Logic," *The Commoner*, March 1, 1901.

²³⁷ "Cuba Should Be Free," *The Commoner*, March 8, 1901.

in response to issues in the news at the time, which was more current, more newsworthy, and likelier to sell more newspapers as a result.

The most prominent amongst Bryan's industry advisors was William Randolph Hearst. In a March 1901 letter to Bryan, the newspaper mogul offered significant advice which seems to have had an impact on Bryan's approach to *The Commoner*. In the letter, Hearst emphasized the importance of the paper's first year of publication. Hearst detailed the importance of "curiosity sales" which every new newspaper received. Hearst felt that readers were generally more interested and curious about a newspaper in its first year of publication, before either subscribing or ceasing to read the paper. Publishers should capitalize on this "great opportunity" to establish the standard of their newspaper, as gaining readers after the first year "would be many times more difficult." Hearst suggested that Bryan make editorials the main point of the paper, but have "Many columns or interesting family reading."²³⁸ Hearst also suggested that if Bryan wanted to publish a leading national Democratic paper, he should move his headquarters from Lincoln to Washington, D.C.

Bryan did not move his paper to the nation's capital, but did take the rest of Hearst's advice to heart. The first year of *The Commoner's* publication saw Bryan's heaviest participation in order to secure the newspaper's standard and gain the most readers during its "curiosity year." Key to this was Bryan's emphasis on his editorials as presented on the front pages of *The Commoner*. The first year and a half of the paper thus saw its heaviest inclusion of anti-imperialist articles. In March and April 1901, the months after receiving advice from Hearst and others, *The Commoner* featured nine front

²³⁸ William Randolph Hearst, New York City, New York, to WJB, 3/25/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

page anti-imperialist editorials each, the highest in the paper's history, often occupying the entire front page.

June and July 1901 featured five issues which had their entire front pages occupied by a single editorial. Each of these editorials dealt with the Insular Cases as Smith had suggested. This first of these, "Emperor McKinley," was Bryan's immediate response to the rulings of the Downes case, which dealt with the administration of Puerto Rico. "By a vote of five to four," wrote Bryan, "the Supreme Court has declared President McKinley emperor of Porto Rico [sic]."²³⁹ The article occupied the issue's first two and a half pages and featured a larger title than that of the paper itself.

The June 14 issue featured the full front-page editorial "Perhaps!" In the article, Bryan reprinted a passage from Supreme Court Justice Brown's decision. "To sustain the judgement in the case under consideration it by no means becomes necessary to show that none of the articles of the constitution applies to the island of Porto Rico." Bryan criticised Justice's Brown notion that some rights in the Bill of Rights is saved for "local application," in exclusion of territories. Bryan, in his criticism of Brown's opinion, wrote "it would be interesting to American patriots to learn that rights for more than a century considered inalienable are now divided into "general" rights and "local rights."²⁴⁰

Bryan continued to criticize what he believed to be the undermining of Constitutional rights in the Downes Case. In the June 21 issue of *The Commoner*, the editorial "Constitutional Liberty" occupied the entirety of the front page. "The worst feature of the supreme court decision in the Downes case," wrote Bryan, "is that it strikes

²³⁹ "Emperor McKinley," *The Commoner*, June 7, 1901.

²⁴⁰ "Perhaps!" *The Commoner*, June 14, 1901.

a blow at constitutional liberty.” Bryan also displayed fear that the undermining of constitutional rights to Puerto Ricans could lead to future abuses to the rights of American citizens. “According to the decision of the court, Congress can govern Porto Rico [sic] as a colony, without constitutional limitations, so far as the taxing power is concerned, and enough is said in the majority opinion to show that no political right is absolutely secure.”²⁴¹

In fourth of five consecutive full front-page editorials dealing with the Downes case, Bryan printed the Declaration of Independence in its entirety. In his introduction to the foundational American document, Bryan discussed its relevance as “it assured the world that the waters of despotism had reached their flood and were receding. God grant that they may never rise again!”²⁴²

The last of these full front-page editorials was “Large-Concessions in the Downes Case.” In the article, Bryan used the decision of Justice Brown in the Downes case to deliver a long-winded criticism of Brown’s opinion that in the American empire “the administration of government and justice, according to Anglo-Saxon principles, may for a time be impossible.”²⁴³ Bryan’s opposition was based on the notion that Brown was allowing the United States to abandon its traditional governmental principles. Bryan wrote, “he [Brown] surrenders the principles of constitutional government in order to vest in Congress power to administer a different kind of government from that contemplated by our forefathers.”²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ “Constitutional Liberty,” *The Commoner*, June 21, 1901.

²⁴² “Declaration of Independence,” *The Commoner*, June 28, 1901.

²⁴³ “Large Concessions in the Downes Case,” *The Commoner*, July 5, 1901.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Industry advisors gave valuable advice for what they felt would make *The Commoner* a successful business venture. Bryan used advice from Smith, Hearst and others to make editorials the focus of the paper. It is therefore important that he chose to write his editorials in opposition to the acquisition of a U.S. empire in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in the first year and a half of the paper because it shows that he believed anti-imperialism would appeal to an audience which agreed with his editorials and his political principles. Since anti-imperialist editorials were encouraged by advisors such as Smith, it shows that those in the industry were aware of an audience for anti-imperialism and that Bryan had the capability to reach it.

After the first few issues, Bryan got both positive and negative feedback about *The Commoner* and his new role as editor and proprietor of a national Democratic paper. The idea that Bryan was a public man owning the paper, rather than a corporate operation, seems to have connected with those buying *The Commoner* in its first year. Julian Hawthorne, of *The North American*, wrote to Bryan in late March 1901 that “the copies do not remain long on the stands,” and that “the main thing is that the people trust you as they trust no other public man, and what you say is the thing they want to read.”²⁴⁵ Others, however, were not as enthusiastic after *The Commoner's* first issue. Orlando Jay Smith, in his advice to Bryan, claimed to have spoken with several men who said that they would not renew their subscription after reading the first issue.²⁴⁶

Bryan's questioning of the morality of empire in editorials was subject to both criticism and support from those reading the paper in its first year. After the first issues of

²⁴⁵ Julian Hawthorne, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to WJB, 3/28/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²⁴⁶ Osnes, 106.

The Commoner were published, with their many anti-imperialist editorials on the front pages, Bryan republished an article in which an unnamed St. Louis journalist criticized Bryan's topic matter as being ignorant to municipal and local domestic issues, which Bryan had been consumed with before 1899. Bryan defended his focus on foreign policy by stating that, "any man who is ignorant to the issues of imperialism and militarism" would not be capable of being a strong politician at any level.²⁴⁷

Bryan's article, "A Minister's Lament," received direct feedback after its publication in August 1901. The article itself was Bryan's response to a letter sent to Bryan by an unnamed minister who was worried that the "nation has already gone so far on the road to commercialism that its course cannot now be changed."²⁴⁸ The minister was worried that the "capitalist powers of this country and of the world are in the plot" in which "they can bribe or send an ultimatum with the army and navy, as the case may require, to achieve their goals."²⁴⁹ In the responsive article, Bryan urged the minister that "the case is not hopeless." Bryan argued that although American imperialism "tramples upon the most sacred traditions of the nation, and violates self-evident truths in the hope of securing rich commercial reward by the subjugation of distant peoples," "the democratic party [sic] has tried to remedy it," and would when in power to do so.²⁵⁰

In response to "A Minister's Lament," a *Commoner* reader from Mayville, North Dakota, Samuel Ferguson, wrote to Bryan, "The position of the clergyman whom you quote is a common one. I have heard many express the views that there is no use of

²⁴⁷ "The Situation in St. Louis," *The Commoner*, March 22, 1901.

²⁴⁸ "A Minister's Lament," *The Commoner*, August 9, 1901.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

opposing the dominant forces any longer.” Ultimately, Ferguson agreed with Bryan that the anti-imperialist principles would prevail, and it was not the time to abandon them. “Your analysis of the dominant influences in the Republican Party is masterly and I believe these will become so plain that even the dullest will see them.”²⁵¹

A March 1901 letter writer, Lee Meriwether of St. Louis, requested 100,000 copies of Bryan’s editorial “Sample of Harmony.” The article detailed Bryan’s anxieties about the possibility of Rolla Wells, a reorganizing Democrat, winning the mayoral election of St. Louis in anticipation of the 1904 World’s Fair. Bryan emphasized that St. Louis was a strong anti-imperialist town in the 1900 election. In the article Bryan wrote, “In the campaign of 1900 the democratic party [sic] stood for the declaration of independence... and the democrats of St. Louis gave loyal support to the ticket.”²⁵²

Meriwether sought to disperse Bryan’s article to oppose the Democratic Party reorganization elements in the city. Meriwether wrote Bryan of his support and informed him that he was a “Chicago-Kansas City platform Bryan Democrat.”²⁵³ Meriwether shared the fears which Bryan expressed in his article, “Sample of Harmony,” and assured Bryan that he believed “few Democrats who supported you and the Kansas City platform will stultify themselves by voting for Mr. Wells.”²⁵⁴

Bryan often wrote editorials in response to letters he received. In a March 10, 1901 letter written by Ralph E. Case, a Pittsburgh reader, he asked, “don’t you think you are a little too bitter against Republican persons and things in your paper, the

²⁵¹ Samuel Ferguson, Mayville, North Dakota, to WJB, 8/10/1901, BPLC, Box 27.

²⁵² “Sample of Harmony,” *The Commoner*, March 15, 1901.

²⁵³ Lee Meriwether, St. Louis, Missouri, to WJB, 3/16/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

‘Commoner’?’²⁵⁵ Case wrote to Bryan that he had “always had the warmest admiration for your manly course in politics” but could not understand Bryan’s “changed attitude.” Bryan, of course, had no qualms in treating Republicans and their principles harshly in his editorials. In the April 5 1901 article, “Severe-But True,” Bryan that every word of the editorials displaying his “bitter” attitude towards the Republicans was true. He wrote that such criticism was justifiable, as “republican leaders have grievously offended against our principles of government and against the interests of the people.”²⁵⁶

Bryan’s fight against the reorganization element of the Democratic Party, especially its desire to drop the party’s opposition to imperialism was supported by his political allies and followers within the anti-imperialist movement. In their first communication since the 1900 election, the New England branch of the American Anti-Imperialist League gave their support to Bryan in a July 1901 letter. The letter said of Bryan’s 1900 nomination acceptance speech, “Imperialism,” “There could be no better key note of the cause than your magnificent Indianapolis address and it seems to me that you may justify your consistency and maintain your influence with the Democracy as represented by the National Convention through this great point of union.”²⁵⁷ The organization shared the belief with Bryan that the reorganization Democrats would not continue the anti-imperialist cause. If they were to regain power the organization felt that, “it probably will involve the sacrifice of true Anti-Imperialist principles for which we stand, for I take it those men are as rank Imperialists as the group which controls the Republican Party.” The League asked Bryan to keep imperialism as an issue, for “the

²⁵⁵ Ralph E. Case, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to WJB, 3/10/1901, LCBP, Box 26.

²⁵⁶ “Severe- But True,” *The Commoner*, April 5, 1901.

²⁵⁷ The New England Anti-Imperialist League, Boston, Massachusetts, to WJB, 7/24/1901, BPLC, Box 27.

Anti-imperialist force is still large and undismayed. If your great following can be pledged to the Democratic Party upon the policy of giving independence to the people of the subjugated territories, these two elements ought to be able to dictate its programme in this regard.”

An Indiana writer expressed similar concern in her August 1901 letter to Bryan. Helen Gougar, writing from La Fayette, was worried that “the next Democratic National convention will go over to the corporations and the people will have no party to defend them from the domination of the trusts and imperialism.”²⁵⁸ Gougar supported Bryan’s continued fight against imperialism and wished “the next campaign could be fought on the trusts and anti-imperialism.” Bryan did not run for president during the next available campaign, 1904, but did continue to fight imperialism in his editorials throughout 1901 and 1902. Gougar’s emphasis on imperialism benefiting the wealthy is certainly in line with Bryan’s ideology and this sentiment saw reflection in *the Commoner* through to 1903.

Bryan’s questioning of the morality of empire in *The Commoner* was subject to both criticism and support from those reading the paper in its first year. In a letter from November 1901, Scudday Richardson wrote Bryan to express his dissatisfaction with Bryan’s idea that should be judged with the same moral values as an individual. In this moral equality, a nation conducting imperialist policies should be judged in the same way as a man who beats and robs other people. Referring to Bryan as “colonel” in reference to his service in the Nebraska Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish-American war, Richardson detailed his memory of being hospitalized in the “division hospital” in

²⁵⁸Helen Gougar, La Fayette, Indiana, to WJB, 8/19/1901, BPLC, Box 27.

Jacksonville during the Spanish-American War, where Bryan's unit was stationed, and seeing Bryan's regiment in training. Richardson wrote, "I am surprised, my dear colonel, that you imply that I would kill and rob if I applied in daily life the principles which I uphold as dignifying a national policy."²⁵⁹ On these grounds, Richardson excused the individual moral shortcomings of Thomas Jefferson and Otto Von Bismarck in exchange for their achievements in bettering their respective states. Of imperialism, Richardson wrote, "in this world ideas change and I think I am on the side of the ideas that will prevail, Colonel."

Bryan did receive support for his moralistic approach from a significant reader, Orlando Jay Smith. In a May 1901 letter sent personally to Bryan, Smith wrote, "I like the way you put the moral questions to the front. The people like moralizing..."²⁶⁰ Smith felt that there was an audience for Bryan's emphasis on the morality of the political issues he brought forth in *The Commoner*. Smith was supportive of Bryan's efforts and shared his worry in the changing political tide in 1901. "We are nearing the culmination," wrote Smith, "of the great boom of plutocracy and imperialism." Smith merged the two, plutocracy and imperialism, much like Bryan, and both felt that imperialism was morally wrong for its use by the wealthy to exploit the working masses.

In a January 1902 letter from a Texas senator²⁶¹, the senator criticized Bryan's stance on the extension of constitutional rights to Filipinos. In the letter, the Senator addressed his perception of Bryan's thought regarding Filipino citizenship. The senator

²⁵⁹ Scudday Richardson, Beaumont, Texas, to WJB, 11/15/1901. BPLC, Box 27.

²⁶⁰ Orlando Jay Smith, New York City, New York, to WJB, 5/10/1901, BPLC, Box 26.

²⁶¹ ?, Washington, D.C., to WJB, 2/13/1902, BPLC, Box 27. The author's signature is impossible to decipher. Charles Allen Culberson and Joseph W. Bailey were the Senators representing Texas in 1902, and, as Culberson was on the "Lodge Committee" on the Philippines in 1902, his concern with Bryan's anti-imperialism is the most probable.

was confused how Bryan could believe that “the Philippine Islands are a part of the United States over which all our laws should operate uniformly and equally,” while still having “advocated the exclusion of the Filipinos from this country along with the Chinese.” The Senator noticed “some months ago in some other paper that you [Bryan] advocated” the exclusion policies.

The week after this letter was written, Bryan published the editorial “Oppose Colonialism,” which delivered an attack on the imperialist rhetoric towards Filipino exclusion and argued that if imperialists wanted to exclude Filipinos from citizenship, they should grant independence to the Philippines.²⁶² Bryan’s desire for full citizenship to be given to Filipinos could be understood as strategy to urge Republicans to favor independence. Bryan wrote in the article:

If independence is not to be granted to the Filipinos we must choose between colonialism and the incorporation of the Filipinos into full citizenship. When the rank and file of the republican party understand that there is no escape from these alternatives, they will rise up and demand the independence of the Filipinos not less for the Filipino’s good than for our safety.²⁶³

Bryan’s call for the extension of rights to the Danish West Indies islanders and Filipinos were in line with his racial thought in that he was advocating for their political rights and by no means arguing for equality. Bryan concluded the article urging *Commoner* readers to remind “their republican [sic] friends” of the Kansas City Platform. He then continued to quote the platform’s stance on Filipino citizenship, “the Filipinos cannot be citizens without endangering our civilization; they cannot be subjects without

²⁶² “Oppose Colonialism,” *The Commoner*, February 21, 1902.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

imperiling our form of government.”²⁶⁴ While Bryan did not mention the Texas Senator by name, his responsive editorial seemed like an answer the Texan Senator’s letter.

In March 1901, Bryan received a letter from Sixto Cortez, a Filipino man living in Philadelphia. Cortez thanked Bryan, “on behalf of my [Cortez] fellow countrymen, for your [Bryan] brilliant advocacy of justice for the Filipinos.”²⁶⁵ Cortez was hopeful that the United States would ultimately be “convinced that when they knew all the truth” that “they will demand that justice shall be done, irrespective of personal gain, and without regard to the greatness of the sacrifice.” Cortez supported Bryan’s inclusion of morality in conversations on empire and felt that a moral foreign policy should not be abandoned for commercial growth. “This country is too great to allow “Commercialism;” or any other policy subversive of national morality, to ultimately triumph.” Cortez continued, “the shortest road to industrial, of any other form of greatness, [is] by the sage, though, to some, not always alluring, path of righteousness.”

In the months following Cortez’ letter, Bryan did not shy from publishing editorials which reflected the sentiment that commercialism should not disregard morality in the United States treatment of weaker nations. In “Senator McLaurin’s Bolt,” Bryan criticized a speech made by South Carolina Senator John L. McLaurin which justified imperialism as increasing market opportunities for American business. “Imperialism gives to the plutocrat his opportunity,” wrote Bryan. “Those who are willing to purchase trade with everybody’s blood but their own and who would sell any political or moral principle for a pecuniary consideration rush to defend the administration’s Philippine

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Sixto Cortez, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to WJB, 3/27/1901, LCBP, Box 26.

policy.”²⁶⁶ In “The Growth of Imperialism,” Bryan criticized an editorial from the Boston Herald which suggested that imperialist policies required innovations to American government, one of which being the allowance of a third presidential term. “Imperialism would not be tolerated but for the spirit of commercialism which is abroad in the land,” wrote Bryan, “and commercialism,” equally with imperialism, protests against frequent elections.”²⁶⁷

In his discussion of the Supreme Court rulings in the Insular Cases regarding Cuba, Bryan received positive feedback from those writing to him in 1901. In a March 25, 1901 letter, a prominent Louisville doctor named M.F. Coomes informed Bryan that he had met with the leader of the “Cuban Civil Government,” who expressed the fear that the United States was not trying to grant Cuba freedom. Coomes wanted the words of the Cuban Civil Government leader to be printed in *The Commoner*, as he felt the paper “represents the true sentiment of Americanism and not Bossism or Plattism.”²⁶⁸ Coomes applauded Bryan’s support of Cuban independence, and his heavy criticism of the imperialist idea that the United States should retain property or rights over Cuba and its people for fighting off the Spanish.

In the weeks prior to and following Coomes’ letter, Bryan published many editorials criticizing the veiled freedom which the United States was granting Cuba in the Platt Amendment to the Army Appropriations Bill. In “Cuba Should Be Free,” Bryan criticized the Republican argument that Cuba should be under complete control of the

²⁶⁶ “Senator McLaurin’s Bolt,” *The Commoner*, May 3, 1901.

²⁶⁷ “The Growth of Imperialism,” *The Commoner*, June 14, 1901.

²⁶⁸ M.F. Coomes, Louisville, Kentucky, to WJB, 3/25/1901, LCBP, Box 26.

United States.²⁶⁹ In the April 19, 1901 article, “Not Ingratitude, But Caution,” Bryan criticized an argument put forth by the veteran-ran Spanish War Journal. The Spanish War Journal argued that Cubans were being “ungrateful” for resisting American efforts to control Cuba through the Platt Amendment. “After all the Americans have done for them, the lives we gave up for them and the suffering we endured for their sake, they want to turn us out of Cuba without any rights whatever, not even a coaling station.” Bryan’s criticism supported the Cuban cause. “Men who fought many years for freedom and endured every conceivable sacrifice in their efforts to secure it, ought to be dealt with as patriots and not as renegades.”²⁷⁰

Bryan was so negative and “wholly political” in the first issues of *The Commoner* because he was genuinely worried about the threat that imperialist policy represented for the United States in 1901, 1902 and 1903. The first editorials in the issues of *The Commoner* were focused on what Bryan felt to be his ideal Democratic principles, as well as a reflection of what the “common” people wanted. Between 1900 and January 1901, while Bryan was finalizing plans for *The Commoner*, his advice from industry advisors showed that, from a business standpoint, many felt editorials on anti-imperialism would be received warmly by the public, and make the paper a success in its crucial first year. In addition, Bryan’s anti-imperialist articles reflected the concerns and support from many of his political allies and voting base who wrote to him in before and after *The Commoner* began publication. While he received some criticism from readers, the

²⁶⁹ “Cuba Should Be Free,” *The Commoner*, March 8, 1901.

²⁷⁰ “Not Ingratitude, But Caution,” *The Commoner*, April 19, 1901.

principles of Bryan's anti-imperialism were largely supported by those writing letters in the first issues of *The Commoner*. The advice, influence and feedback Bryan received before and during *The Commoner's* first year prove that he was earnest in his anti-imperialism, but that he also sought out an audience of like-minded followers, likely to gauge how well his principles might translate into winning the office of the presidency in the future. *The Commoner* was successful in its first year and was able to increase its subscription rates and remain in publication for over two decades. The inclusion of anti-imperialism in Bryan's editorials was a significant part of *The Commoner's* first year and showed that Bryan valued it heavily in his political ideology and reflected the values of a significant following.

Conclusion

Bryan left for his tour of Europe in November 1903. By this point *The Commoner* reached nearly 150,000 subscribers and Bryan's editorials in the paper were mostly the same essays written for publication in Hearst papers which funded his trip.²⁷¹ The trip marked a clear turning point for Bryan's contributions in *The Commoner* as well as his reputation as a statesman. On the trip, European politicians such as British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour and royalty such as Russian Czar Nicholas II received Bryan with the same esteem as an elected official of the United States government.²⁷² While in Europe, he attended many public speeches on the leading political issues having an impact on European states which influenced his own political thought about domestic and foreign policy in the United States. Bryan's attitudes towards bimetallism, public ownership of utilities, combatting corporate trusts and anti-imperialism were reinforced through conversations with leading European politicians and theorists who held similar views.²⁷³ In Russia Bryan spent several days with the aged novelist and philosopher Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy's notions on passive resistance strongly reinforced Bryan's pacifism and

²⁷¹ Paolo Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan, Vol. 1: Political Evangelist 1860-1908* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 316.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 317.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

left a very favorable and lasting impression.²⁷⁴

Bryan's absence from the United States in 1903 during his tour of Europe was not scheduled on a whim. It allowed him to separate himself from the reorganization of the Democratic Party while also re-branding him to the American press via *The Commoner* and Hearst papers as an internationally respected statesmen.²⁷⁵ This trip gave Bryan credibility for his future appointment as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson in 1913 and made pacifism the dominating principle of his efforts in that office.

Bryan did not seek nomination as the Democratic candidate for the presidency in the 1904 election, but his name and public image were still strong. The Democratic Party lost badly in the 1904 presidential election to President Roosevelt, so they nominated Bryan for the presidency for a third time in 1908, a testament to his continued popularity and party leadership. Yet his third bid for the presidency, unprecedented as it was, turned out even less successfully than the previous two as he lost badly to Republican William Howard Taft.

Bryan returned to national prominence in 1912, when he supported the successful presidential bid of Democrat Woodrow Wilson. In return, Wilson appointed Bryan Secretary of State, a position for which he proved ill-suited, despite all of his rhetoric in opposition to American imperialism. As Secretary of State, Bryan attempted to negotiate arbitration treaties with the European Powers that would prevent war as an instrument of international diplomacy by imposing a period of economic sanctions over aggressors and establishing a prescribed program of international negotiations over disputes. The treaties

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 318.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 318.

were an obvious failure once the Great War began in 1914. In 1915, the Wilson administration cut off diplomatic ties to Germany after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, after which Bryan resigned, afraid that the severance of diplomatic ties would eventually lead to war.²⁷⁶ His final years saw Bryan return to making a living based on speaking tours around the country, now with a heightened emphasis on the teachings of Christianity in opposition to Darwinian evolutionary theory.²⁷⁷ Famously, this crusade reached its zenith with Bryan's involvement in the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, when he came across as a representative of ignorance and opposition to progress. He died soon after at age 65, and when Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee wrote the 1955 play *Inherit the Wind* about the trial, Bryan's historical legacy became focused on the trial, as opposed to his political career, ever after.

The period following Bryan's failed 1900 presidential campaign is considered a "low ebb" by biographer Paolo Coletta. Bryan's attitudes towards imperialism and militarism are often overlooked between 1901 and 1903, between the election and his tour of Europe, but the principles he used in his anti-imperialist editorials in *The Commoner* are important in understanding his ideals towards foreign policies in the period before he was mostly occupied with pacifism. Bryan's effort to preserve American neutrality as Secretary of State under Wilson from 1913 to 1915 could be viewed as a more important moment to study his foreign policy ideals, but the anti-imperialism of his "low ebb" period shows the foundations of where Bryan's ideals came from in the first place.

²⁷⁶ Bryan, William Jennings. *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia: The United Publishers of America, 1925), 395-396.

²⁷⁷ William Jennings Bryan, *the Prince of Peace* (Chicago: The Reilly & Britton Co., 1909), 7.

William Jennings Bryan had an authentic interest in opposing imperialism in the United States at turn of the twentieth century. He believed that the principles behind the United States' acquisition of an empire were antithetical to the values of the United States itself: as the world's first colonial rebel, and as a champion of the concept Woodrow Wilson would later define as national self-determination. The principles of his anti-imperialist arguments in his 1900 presidential campaign were displayed in his editorials in *The Commoner* with little variation. The longest lasting issue for Bryan, the one which appeared in anti-imperialist editorials the longest, was that the United States should not deny self-government to any people within its jurisdiction. Bryan was fearful that a rejection of constitutional rights to Filipinos and the building of a military adequate to maintain the Philippines as a colony was a first step that would lead to the eventual abuse of American citizens' rights in the United States. Bryan's anti-imperialism and anti-militarism were also a reflection of the influence of supporters: intellectuals, corporate titans, journalists, politicians and millions of average voters. His correspondence shows that many of the people who chose to write him were supportive of his anti-imperialistic editorials and expressed similar fears. Additionally, letters from those in the newspaper industry suggested ideas that Bryan used in his editorials on militarism and imperialism, which enhanced support for those ideals amongst *The Commoner's* readers.

Bryan's views are important because they were supported by a large number of Americans during this time. As *The Commoner* was a commercial success and Bryan was nominated three times for the Democratic candidate for the candidacy, his political principles obviously provide insight into an important shade of American attitudes toward politics, international policy and public at the turn of the twentieth century.

Studying Bryan's attitudes towards imperialism aids in understanding the political environment into which the American empire was born, an environment which opposition to the acquisition of an empire came from a sizable portion of the American public.