

Anti-Imperialism in the United States, 1898-1935

Edited by Jim Zwick

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Address to the People of the United States

By the Anti-Imperialist League

(November 19, 1898).

A true republic of free men must rest upon the principles that all its citizens are equal under the law, that a government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, and that there must be no taxation without representation. These principles abandoned, a republic exists but in name, and its people lose their rights as free men.

Planting itself upon these lasting truths, the people of the United States solemnly declared in their Constitution that the citizens of each State should have the privileges and immunities of citizens of the several States; that all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to its jurisdiction should be citizens of the United States and of the several States; and that the rights of none should be abridged on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude. The Constitution gives to the United States, no more than to the individual, the right to hold slaves or vassals, and recognizes no distinction between classes of citizens.--one with full rights as free men, and another as subjects governed by military force.

We are in full sympathy with the heroic struggles for liberty of the people in the Spanish Islands, and therefore we protest against depriving them of their rights by an exchange of masters. Only by recognizing their rights as free men are all their interests protected. Expansion by natural growth in thinly-settled contiguous territory, acquired by purchase for the expressed purpose of ultimate statehood, cannot be confounded with, or made analogous to, foreign territory conquered by war and wrested by force from a weak enemy. A beaten foe has no right to transfer a people whose consent has not been asked, and a free republic has no right to hold in subjection a people so transferred.

No American, until today, has disputed these propositions; it remains for the new Imperialism to set up the law of might and to place commercial gain and a false philanthropy above the sound principles upon which the Republic was based. In defence of its position it has already urged the fallacy of the Declaration of Independence and proclaimed a wisdom superior to that of the framers of the Constitution. As solemnly as a people could, we announced the war to be solely for humanity and freedom, without a thought, desire, or purpose of gain to ourselves; all that we sought has been accomplished in Cuba's liberation. Shall we now prove false to our declaration and seize by force islands thousands of miles away whose peoples have not desired our presence and whose will we have not asked?

Whatever islands we take must be annexed or held in vassalage to the Republic. Either course is dangerous to the physical and moral safety of the nation, inconsistent with our professions, and must result in foreign complications which will imperil and delay the settlement of pressing financial, labor, and administrative questions at home.

Impressed with the importance of these views, and recalling the declaration of the President that the war with Spain could never degenerate into a war of conquest, we have deferred action until it has become apparent that pressure was being brought to bear upon the President, to convince him that public opinion demands the inclusion of alien territory and great masses of alien people into the territory of the United States.

We stand by the President's declaration, and in order to give evidence of the opposition to a foreign expansion policy by a vast body of our people, have organized an Anti-Imperialist League, upon the following general plan:

1. The centre of the movement to be at Washington, with a local secretary there for executive work.
2. Committees of correspondence to conduct the work in such manner as to bring together the united efforts of men of repute throughout the country, without regard to party, to deal with the subject in all its aspects, as follows: The moral iniquity of converting a war for humanity into a war for conquest; the physical degeneration, the corruption of the blood, and all the evils of militarism which will ensue if troops are to be kept in the Philippines and elsewhere longer than absolutely necessary to enable government to be established which will protect life and property; the political evils and the necessity of preserving the Union upon the principles of its framers; the clear necessity of large increase of taxes for the support of armies and navies, with a great probability that voluntary enlistment will have to be supplemented by drafts.

Committees of correspondence have begun work under the name of the Anti-Imperialist League, the first measure being to organize the moral forces of the country, for purpose of presenting the following protest to the President and to the Congress of the United States:--

To the President and to the Congress of the United States:

The undersigned, citizens of _____, in the State of _____, protest against any extension of the sovereignty of the United States over the Philippine Islands, in any event, or other foreign territory, without the free consent of the people thereof, believing such action would be dangerous to the Republic, wasteful of its resources, in violation of constitutional principles, and fraught with moral and physical evils to our people.

Name and residence. Occupation.

Every citizen believing in the above is urged to copy it, obtain immediately as many signatures as possible and send forward the signed protest to the secretary of the Anti-Imperialist League, Washington, D.C., where the names will be enrolled, without liability to assessment, as members of the League, and the protest presented to the President and Congress.

Submitted on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Anti-Imperialist League, of which Hon. G. S. Boutwell is President.

Erving Winslow,
Secretary.

Boston, November 19, 1898.

Erving Winslow (1839-1922) was secretary of the Anti-Imperialist League from its formation in 1898 until its dissolution in 1921. This was the first address issued by the Anti-Imperialist League.
