Manifest Destiny in the Midwest:
Selected Kansans and the Philippine Question

by Barry Hankins

When Word Reached Kansas of the United States Congress’ declaration of war against Spain in April 1898, people across the state joined in celebrations. At Leavenworth, salutes were fired at the fort and the National Military Home. Two thousand veterans of the home marched in the rain singing war songs. At Fort Scott a number of National Guardsmen assembled, ready to move at a moment’s notice, and several Spanish flags were either burned or blown to shreds by the cannon. The daily newspaper of Ottawa called for a meeting of volunteers and about fifty answered the call. Similar events took place in other towns such as Olathe, Pittsburg, Independence, and Salina. At Erie there was a salute from the cannon “Old Abe,” together with patriotic speeches and demonstrations.

A week after the declaration of war, Commodore George Dewey sailed into the Philippines and early on the morning of May 1 destroyed the minute Spanish fleet stationed there. Two days later the Topeka Daily Capital printed the following rhyme by the well-known local poet, Eugene Ware:

O Dewey was the morning
Upon the First of May,
And Dewey was the Admiral
Down in Manila Bay;
And Dewey were the Regent’s eyes,
“Them” orbs of royal blue!
And Dewey feel discouraged?
I Dew not think we Dew.

The little rhyme was in many ways like the “splendid little war”; short, to the point, and almost cute. The Spanish-American War, however, opened a whole new world to the United States—one fraught with difficulties and questions, not the least of which was what to do with the Philippines and other islands acquired from Spain. In June, the Washington Post announced prophetically: “The guns of Dewey at Manila have changed the destiny of the United States. We are face to face with a strange destiny and must accept its responsibilities. An imperial policy!” The celebrations at the outset of the war would shortly turn to serious consideration of the imperialism question by thoughtful Kansans. Many questioned the annexation of the Philippines, both on moral and constitutional grounds and from the standpoint of what advantage it would bring the Kansas farmer, but nearly all were united in their pride for Col. Frederick Funston and the Twentieth Kansas Volunteers. Funston and his men fought in the Philippines against Emilio Aguinaldo’s troops who had taken up arms against the United States following the war with Spain. Funston’s regiment returned to a hero’s welcome in Topeka on November 2, 1899, while Funston himself gained appointment in the regular army.

Upon return to the United States, however, at least one of Funston’s volunteers was critical of America’s aims in the Philippines. Private Todd L. Wagoner, who had fought with the Kansas regiment, wrote of his experiences in battle, including the atrocities he saw perpetrated against Filipinos by American soldiers. He asked, “Fellow Americans, can you not see the inconsistency of patriotism being the prevailing spirit in the heart of the American soldier, 8,000 miles from home, fighting a people in no way responsible for the cause in

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Barry Hankins holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Baylor University, Waco, Texas, and is presently a doctoral student in history and a teaching assistant at Kansas State University. He won first place in the graduate paper division in the 1984 Kansas History Teachers Association competition and was awarded the Anne Stewart Highman Prize as the best K-State graduate student in history for the year 1984–85.

4. Kenneth S. Davis, Kansas: A Bicentennial History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 162–63. Funston was responsible for the capture of Aguinaldo in 1901. Even with Aguinaldo out of the way, however, the insurrection continued.
which we had enlisted; fighting a people who loved their own homes as we loved ours?" Wagoner believed that the underlying cause of the conflict was lust for the wealth many assumed the islands would bring the United States. In the final analysis, he concluded that Americans and Filipinos were fighting one another so "that the ambitions of the powers that were, might be gratified in dollars and cents." Wagoner was not alone in feeling that American action in the Philippines was unjust. Others agreed. What were their arguments, and what were the arguments of those Kansans who favored imperialism? Below is a study of the various positions set forth by prominent Kansans on the Philippine question.

5. Todd L. Wagoner, "Fighting Aguinaldo’s Insurgents in the Philippines," Kansas Historical Quarterly 19 (May 1951): 175. This document is an excerpt from a journal Wagoner kept while in the Philippines.

6. Ibid.

The Anti-Imperialists

Like Wagoner, a minority in the Kansas House of Representatives was critical of America's imperialist designs on the Philippines. In reaction to a resolution that favored retaining the Philippines, M. F. Marks offered a statement which declared that imperialism had not been part of the original intent of the declaration of war. While Marks' resolution did not condemn in advance the possible ratification of the treaty with Spain, it did oppose forcible annexation of the islands until the American people had expressed a desire to depart from the original purpose of the war. Three legislators, including Marks, read their individual reasons for opposing imperialism into the House Journal. They believed annexation of the islands to be either dishonorable, dangerous, or unconstitutional since it imposed a nonrepresentative government on a distant people. Unfortunately for these representatives, however, the vast majority of the House disagreed, and
Marks' resolution failed by a vote of twenty-eight to eighty-five. The resolution which favored retention of the islands passed overwhelmingly. Marks and his colleagues represented an anti-imperialist position which few other prominent Kansans shared. However, the state produced at least two outstanding Populist opponents of imperialism, John Davis and Jeremiah Botkin.

Davis had moved to Kansas in 1872. The following year he became involved in farmers' movements and eventually helped organize the Greenback and People's parties. After two unsuccessful tries at the United States Congress, he was finally elected in 1891 as a People's party candidate and served two terms. He also owned and operated the Junction City Tribune from 1875 through 1895. Though no longer the editor, in 1899 he wrote a series of articles for the Tribune in which he refuted imperialism as a viable doctrine for the United States. He appealed to a wide variety of sentiments in order to show that annexation of the Philippines was not in the best interest of the nation.

Davis first presented the argument of cost. Using ancient Rome as a paradigm, he maintained that imperialism was expensive and nearly impossible to undertake successfully. Rome had attempted to subjugate the Britons for five centuries but had failed. The Romans had ravaged, burned, murdered, and desolated the people of the island of Britain, but upon abandoning the endeavor they had left scarcely a trace of their civilization. They had failed completely to assimilate the peoples of the island into the Roman Empire. Later, both Great Britain and Spain had attempted to foist an imperial policy on the Americas but had found the task extremely difficult.

Davis delineated a brief history of imperialism in several nations to further show the difficulty of such a policy. He included Napoleon's attempt to defeat the people of Santo Domingo, emphasizing that France with twenty-five million people was unable to subdue a land with only a quarter of a million inhabitants. In answer to those who used India as the supreme example of successful imperialism, Davis declared that only through three hundred years of herculean effort was Great Britain able to subdue the Indians; and further, the subjection was probably not permanent. Davis compared Britain's hold on India to that of a pickpocket over his victim. The thief has the innocent citizen down for the moment, but he will not permanently conquer him. Ireland was also an example of the inability of one nation to tame another. Davis' most pertinent example, however, was Spain itself. After three centuries, he argued, it had still not subjected completely the inhabitants of its islands. With such historic examples of the difficulties of imperialism, why, Davis asked, would the United States want to keep the Philippines?

Davis based his second argument against annexation on the Declaration of Independence. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were inalienable rights.
applicable to all nations, since all men were created equal. The Filipinos stood squarely on the platform of the Declaration. "Their battle flag floats the same emblazonry that waved over the armies of George Washington!" he declared. It was a bit absurd, Davis thought, that America was fighting against the very ideas on which it had been founded.11

In Davis' articles on annexation he posed what should have been the most obvious question for the average Kansan. What possible good could annexation do? While others, as will be shown, were expounding on the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and the manifest destiny of America, Davis attempted to bring people to the sober realities of the cost of ruling over ten million unwilling subjects. The alternative to an army of occupation was citizenship for the Filipinos. This, in Davis' estimation, would have been worse for the United States than imperialism. If made citizens, the Filipinos would constitute a cheap labor force, taking work from Americans. Furthermore, if the islands were made into a state or divided into two states, they would wield enormous political power. With representatives and senators in Congress, and with as many as sixty votes in the electoral college, the United States, Davis said, could look to the Philippines every four years and ask who the next president would be. Davis reminded Kansans that if made a state, the Philippines would have six times the number of representatives and electoral college votes as the Sunflower State.12 "Such a state," Davis wrote, "would be consulted, accommodated, flattered, obeyed and placated by every political party, and courted by every aspiring politician, in all the national conventions and as to all the nominations."13 The final horror or horrors was the possibility that someday the United States could have a Filipino president.14

Davis based one of his arguments against imperialism on a very loose interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine. Believing that the doctrine was based on an implied guarantee that the United States would not meddle in the affairs of Europe, he reasoned that since the Philippines were not properly in the western hemisphere, they were not within America's sphere of influence. The islands, unlike Hawaii, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, were closer to Asia than America. This made them part of the world in which the United States had said so often throughout the nineteenth century it would not intrude. If the nation abrogated this claim, nothing would restrain European countries from once again meddling in the western hemisphere.15

What the war against the Filipinos amounted to in Davis' view was a war against God-given rights. He compared Aguinaldo to George Washington and Pres. William McKinley to King George III. McKinley had

11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., February 3, March 3, 1899.

*Emilio Aguinaldo (1869–1964), shown here surrounded by his followers, was inaugurated as the president of the First Philippine Republic in January 1899. Hostilities soon erupted between the Filipinos and the Americans and continued until Aguinaldo's capture in 1901.*
purchased the Filipinos at two dollars a head—twenty million dollars paid to Spain for ten million inhabitants—and was now waging war against their liberties. In essence, the United States had purchased ten million moving targets. Davis accused McKinley of waging a war that was murderous, unjust, un-Christian, and un-American. Patriotism had been thoroughly distorted; having formerly meant love of one’s own country, it now meant love of someone else’s.16

Davis also compared annexation to slavery. Having fought the Civil War to eliminate the buying and selling of individual human beings, the government had now bought an entire nation of people. The flag was flying over the Philippines just as it had formerly flown over the “slave pens of the south.” Lincoln had labored to end slavery, while McKinley had completed the largest purchase of human beings ever.17

Arguing that in the Orient the United States would be only the sixth strongest nation at best, Davis offered a conspiratorial theory of annexation that was probably unique and definitely quite imaginative. He believed that Britain and other European nations were luring the United States into a trap in the Philippines. Unable to protect its own interests there, America would be forced to enter entangling alliances with the Europeans. Other than the assumption that this would cause a general weakening of the United States, Davis failed to specify precisely how European nations would benefit from this state of affairs. He urged, however, that the United States should steer clear of what he considered a European affair.18

Davis believed that the United States Constitution gave no power to colonize. It permitted only the addition of new states that would be on equal footing with those already established. Allowing the Filipinos into the nation would be unwise not only because of the political power they would wield, as mentioned earlier, but also because the Filipinos themselves, in Davis’ view, were undesirable. He called them a “teeming population of mixed, untaught and indolent race . . . .” They would be a destructive element in America.19 This attitude, however, did not preclude him from evaluating annexation from the perspective of the Filipinos themselves. In his final article on the is-

lands, he argued that their desire for self-government should be reason enough for the United States to grant them liberty. Davis found untenable the argument that only a few of the islanders sincerely desired independence, and he feared that only through great difficulty and expense could Aguinaldo’s fierce freedom fighters be subdued. It seemed to Davis that the United States was slaughtering Filipinos in an effort to “compel them to accept government ‘by consent of the governed!’”20 All arguments considered, he believed annexation simply would not pay.

The second outstanding Populist anti-imperialist was Jeremiah D. Botkin. Botkin had become a Methodist minister at the age of twenty-one. Like most Kansas Methodists he strongly supported prohibition and even ran for governor on the Prohibitionist ticket in 1888. In the Bryan Kansas landslide of 1896 he won an at-large seat in the United States Congress and served one term before failing in his reelection bid two years later. Following his defeat, he returned to what he evidently did best, preaching. However, he remained a Populist long after the movement had passed from prominence and ran as the party’s candidate for governor in 1908. Later he served briefly as warden of the Lansing prison and gained additional fame as a Chautauqua lecturer. Overall, he was in the Kansas limelight for many years.21

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13. Ibid., March 3, 1899.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., February 10, February 17, 1899.
16. Ibid., February 17, 1899.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., February 24, 1899.
20. Ibid., March 10, 1899.
Botkin found it ironic that a war undertaken to end oppression in Cuba was now being waged to acquire territory in the Philippines. Like Davis, he felt that imperialism was clearly a transgression against the Declaration of Independence. Speaking as a lame-duck congressman in the House of Representatives in January 1899, he declared that acquisition of the islands essentially meant that the nation did not take the words of the Declaration literally. In other words, America was expanding away from the document. He also quoted McKinley’s statement that annexing Cuba would be against America’s moral code and reasoned that if immoral in Cuba, then also immoral in the Philippines.

Since the Filipinos had been unwilling subjects in the Spanish empire, Botkin argued that by American standards Spain had no right to the islands in the first place. Therefore, the United States had no just claim to the islands no matter how much it had paid for the archipelago. In his judgment, the nation should not have been negotiating with Spain over who would keep the islands but with the islanders themselves. The Filipinos had fought long and hard for their freedom and should be recognized as capable of carrying on their own affairs. Botkin desired a coal mining station in the islands for the United States Navy, but only with the permission of the Filipinos.

Like Davis, Botkin raised the question of how profitable annexation would be for the average American. While not opposed to the expansion of American trade, he claimed that figures from 1896 showed that if import and export business with the Philippines had been monopolized by the United States, it would have amounted to a profit of forty-two cents per American citizen. If such trade could be monopolized, not by the United States but by a few large corporations, however, the profit would be considerable. Therefore, reasoned Botkin, trade resulting from annexation would benefit only the large trusts, not the average American.

Botkin also opposed the huge standing army he assumed would be required to subjugate the Filipinos. Alleging that tropical diseases would kill many American soldiers, he argued that while Americans were willing to die to make men free, they were probably not willing to die to conquer a string of islands on the other side of the world, especially when such action could result in American involvement in European controversies that would possibly lead to war. Furthermore, such an army would not be worth its cost.

Being a Methodist minister, Botkin was quite naturally concerned about the religious arguments many were setting forth in favor of annexation. He found it hard to understand how followers of the religion of Jesus, indeed many ministers of his own denomination, could support the policy. Christianity could not be furthered by force, he argued. One could not shoot the way of Christ into the Filipinos with guns, or punch it into them with bayonets. The only recorded instance of armed defense of Christ was the Apostle Peter’s attempt to fight off those who came to arrest Jesus; and, Jesus rebuked Peter for his actions. Every consideration of morality, Botkin maintained, required the application of the Golden Rule. The United States should treat the Filipinos as it would like to be treated by them. If the nation so acted, American teachers of religion would be welcome in the islands. Botkin took issue with the argument that the flag could not be taken down once hoisted over territory. The United States had already done this in Cuba; why not in the Philippines? After all, said Botkin, better to “haul down the flag” for the sake of justice than to tarnish it “with the blood of oppression.”

The Imperialists

A search for prominent Kansas Republicans who opposed imperialism outright will most likely be a fruitless endeavor. However, one can find in the person of William A. Peffer a Populist, or at least a former Populist, who supported annexation of the Philippines. Originally a Republican, Peffer had a stint as a Populist that covered precisely the lifetime of the People’s party, 1891—97. During these years he served as United States Senator from Kansas, then ran for governor on the Prohibitionist ticket in 1898. Opposing fusion with Democrats, Peffer announced in 1899 that although the Populists had been absorbed by the Democratic party, he was not about to become a Democrat; neither would he be a Republican. He would simply oppose the Democrats and stop there. By 1900, however, he was clearly a Republican once again. He campaigned for McKinley and later would admit that

23. Ibid., 12. This charge against McKinley was no idle one. McKinley actually did say that annexation of Cuba would be against the moral code found in America. For documentation of this statement, see DeConde, History of American Foreign Policy, 542.
27. Ibid., 15–16.
28. Ibid., 10–11.
he had returned to the party of his pre-Populist years.  

In 1900, Peffer wrote a book entitled Americanism and the Philippines in which he spelled out in detail his position on the imperialism issue. In the first two chapters of his book, Peffer defended McKinley’s policy toward the Philippines. He maintained that after the war an occupation army had been necessary for peace in the islands. The war with the Filipinos started only when they attacked American troops, following the shooting of a Filipino who crossed a dividing line set up by the Americans.  

Peffer argued further that the United States had never formulated a policy on expansion. Each time the nation had been faced with the possible acquisition of new territory, patriotic leaders had decided the issue on its own merits. From the Louisiana Purchase to the annexation of Hawaii, American statesmen had acted in the nation’s best interest when enlarging the country. All previous cases of expansion had in Peffer’s view proved profitable. He believed that the United States now needed the Philippines, though his reasons were highly suspect. First, he said, America needed the Philippines because the nation could raise the Filipinos’ level of civilization and at the same time exploit their untapped resources. This would benefit the entire world, not just America. Second, America needed the islands because they would give the nation “jurisdiction in a part of the world where we shall have much to do in the new international regime.” Reluctant to face the logical inconsistency of his argument, Peffer failed to see that there would have been no need for jurisdiction in Asia if the nation had decided to stay out of that area of the world. America’s presence there itself necessitated jurisdiction.

In what was perhaps a direct answer to Davis, Peffer maintained that the Monroe Doctrine did not apply to the Philippines. He agreed that the doctrine did preclude the United States from meddling in European affairs but believed that it did not extend as far as the Philippines. At the time the Monroe Doctrine was formulated, argued Peffer, Asia was virtually immune from outside penetration with the exception of the British ports in India. The doctrine, therefore, could not apply to this area of the world. Furthermore, Washington’s “Farewell Address” with its warning against entangling alliances did not apply to this situation either. The United States had entered into the war with Spain by its own volition, not because of an alliance. Now, however, wrote Peffer, the opponents of annexation were in effect urging that the nation enter into an entangling alliance with Aguinaldo, whom Peffer referred to as a man in charge of an imaginary government.

Peffer argued that the president had at no time usurped power over the Philippines in an unconstitutional manner. Every action by the United States had been aimed at restoring peace and instituting a sound government in the islands. Peffer believed the president had exercised not only his right but his duty when he insisted that the Filipinos recognize full American sovereignty and accept the military government the United States had imposed on them. Had Aguinaldo taken America’s “friendly advice,” wrote Peffer, the islands would have had peace and good government while they waited for the United States Congress to fashion for them an even better government. Peffer clearly missed the essential point of the constitutional

31. Ibid., 49–50.
32. Ibid., 75–76.
33. Ibid., 63–64.
34. Ibid., 82–83.
argument of the anti-imperialists. They believed the actions taken by the United States toward the Filipinos were unconstitutional precisely because the Congress was controlling their destiny, rather than allowing the islanders to represent themselves.

In direct contradiction to the Declaration of Independence, Peffer declared that consent of the governed was not a universal law but merely a convenience—the only way to run a government. Regarding Thomas Jefferson, Peffer wrote: “He recognized in the majority a right to rule, and he believed it to be the duty of the minority to acquiesce; not because of any fixed rule on the subject in any written code, but because that is the only way to carry on a free government.” Moreover, “The powers of government are just or unjust without respect to the consent or acquiescence of the governed.” The Filipinos, therefore, had no right to self-government. They, as Spain’s subjects, had been sold to the United States. They were not parties to the sale, wrote Peffer. He compared the transaction between Spain and the United States to the sale of a farm where the Filipinos were the workers. They had no say. It was merely the transferal of property.73

When Botkin accused the imperialists of not taking the Declaration of Independence literally, he must have had Peffer in mind. Peffer believed that few governments, if any, had ever been based on consent of the governed. Even in the United States, slavery had not been outlawed by the Declaration. This line of reasoning led him to write: “The words quoted from the Declaration of Independence cannot be applied literally, because government means the exercise of power, and includes the use of force to compel assent in innumerable instances.” Shortly thereafter, he wrote simply: “Consent, as a rule, is forced,—it is not voluntary.” The Civil War was his primary example. The South had been forced to consent to the will of the North.49 He also cited the Louisiana Purchase and American Indian policy in an attempt to show that government does not originate from consent of the governed, but “from the source whence originated the necessity for government.” In some instances, this being one, the best course of action was to rule against the consent of the people.41

Tackling the religious arguments against imperialism, Peffer wrote that the Golden Rule did not apply to nations. Indeed, it did not always apply to individuals. An officer of the law, for example, could not employ it because his individuality was merged with that of the state. While individuals could generally settle disputes by appropriating this biblical precept, nations could often only resort to war to reconcile international differences. But this was not always bad, according to Peffer. “Commerce, civilization, Christianity,” he wrote, “have followed in the wake of conquering armies and spread in places cleared by the sword.”46

Peffer believed that God was directing America in its imperialistic endeavors, just as he had directed the ancient Hebrews.43 Claiming as evidence the fact that every president had believed in God, he argued that the United States was a Christian nation. America’s rapid expansion had been no accident. Rather, God had prepared the nation for this work.44 In Peffer’s view, President McKinley was God’s Christian agent for justice in the Philippines; therefore, “the man who would lay so much as a straw in the way of this Christian magistrate in these trying situations is fit neither for counsel nor command.” Peffer found it incredible that Democrats would cast a shadow on America’s reputation by questioning the nation’s noble policy in the Philippines.45

Peffer’s book was filled with allusions to providence and divine initiative. It was only fitting, therefore, that he ended his work by arguing that enlightened nations were increasingly dominating the world as preparation for the “unification of government and the coming of our Father’s Kingdom.” These were not chance happenings but examples of God drawing all people to himself. Peffer concluded his book with the simple words “God reigns.”

Though not an annexationist from the outset, William Allen White also came eventually to the position that the United States certainly had jurisdiction over the Philippines and should make all important decisions concerning their destiny. White was in a better position to make his viewpoint known than any of the others in this study, for at the time of the debate over the Philippines he was fast becoming one of Kansas’ most influential citizens. In 1895, after a brief stint as a journalist in Kansas City, White purchased

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35. Ibid., 86.
36. Ibid., 87.
37. Ibid., 87–88.
38. Ibid., 91.
39. Ibid., 92.
40. Ibid., 100.
41. Ibid., 86.
42. Ibid., 189–40.
43. Ibid., 50.
44. Ibid., 147–48.
45. Ibid., 141–42.
46. Ibid., 144.
47. Ibid., 149–50.
From this base he launched himself onto the national scene as a writer. With his 1896 editorial, "What's the Matter with Kansas," in which he damned the Populists, he moved from local to national prominence. The piece was reprinted by Republican newspapers across the country and became one of that party's primary campaign pamphlets after Mark Hanna, McKinley's right-hand man, discovered it. By the end of his illustrious career, White had come to support every plank in the People's party platform. As one biographer has written, he could only support such measures after they had become respectable. Soon after his initial splash into journalism's limelight, he began to grow from a reactionary young provincial to one of the outstanding spokesmen for midwestern middle-class liberalism. The McKinley years, however, were years when White, as he would confess later, worshipped at the altar of Mammon. 48

Originally, White opposed entering the war in Cuba. In December 1896 he wrote: "The people of Cuba are mongrels with no capacity for self-government... They are a yellow legged knifesticking treacherous outfit, and the people of the United States have nothing in common with them." 49 Though White would eventually favor the war and McKinley's imperialist policy, his attitude toward the Cubans as a people was a portent of things to come.

Early in 1899, as the treaty with Spain was being considered by the United States Senate, White called for a full debate among private citizens on the issue of expansion. He urged Republican lawmakers, however, to follow the president's policy until the Republican convention determined what the official party platform would be. White believed that in the final analysis the party that tolerated the fullest debate on the issue would most closely approximate the truth.

White took it upon himself to join this debate, using his editorial column to expound a variety of views. He displayed a serious lack of consistency on this issue, and his arguments were sometimes exceedingly boorish. On January 10, 1899, he spoke exuberantly of commercial expansion in the East, claiming that it would result in prosperity for Americans. 50 Four days later he commented favorably on a reprint of a thirty-year-old article by former Republican leader James G. Blaine. Blaine had reportedly predicted that America would soon expand beyond the borders of the continent. He had argued specifically that the United States would someday of necessity control the Philippines, as they were the key to trade in the Orient. 52

White, therefore, wrote favorably of expansion and trade in the conquered Philippines. However, he also cautioned against any attempt to assimilate the Filipinos into American society. He wrote that McKinley's desired "benevolent assimilation" could soon turn to "acute gastritis." 53 He believed it impossible to extend the American system of self-government to the Filipinos or any other non-Anglo-Saxon peoples. Later, in March, he would write: "Only Anglo-Saxons can govern themselves." 54 What, then, was the answer to the Philippine question? White offered two possible solutions; either the United States should totally dominate the Filipinos or it should exterminate them. Incredibly, in subsequent editorials he often favored the latter alternative.

On the day the Filipino insurrection against American troops broke out, White wrote that it was impossible to teach the islanders civilization. The United States had attempted to civilize the American Indians, but according to White, there was not a civilized Indian to be found. "The Filipinos will be a burden on America," he wrote. "They will have to be murdered off just as the Indians were." 55 The most humane method of doing this would be to ship them whiskey and let them drink themselves to death. The question was not how to improve the condition of the Filipinos but how to kill them in a humane way or reduce them to slavery. Admittedly, this was brutal talk, but White believed it was based on human experience. He was simply not willing to pay the "white man's burden" with the lives of American young men. 56

White admitted there was no glory in moving down Filipinos with machine guns. However, it had to be done, and America was in the best position to do it. The sooner the Filipinos were exterminated and  

50. White, "Is Expansion a Republican Policy?" Emporia Daily Gazette, January 6, 1899.
51. White, "What Does It Mean?" Emporia Daily Gazette, January 10, 1899.
55. White, "Our Breech-Cloutted Brother," Emporia Daily Gazette, February 6, 1899. One would think that White had to have been speaking sarcastically when he advocated extermination of the Filipinos. However, he gave no indication that he was, and he spoke of this repeatedly over the span of several weeks.
56. Ibid.
Anglo-Saxons implanted in the islands, the better off civilization would be. It was in bad taste to glorify such a job. After all, America was merely acting as the world's butcher.57

White expressed an unwavering faith in the ability of President McKinley to do what was best for the nation. Rather than supporting McKinley because of his stand on the issue of imperialism, it appears that White supported imperialism because that was the position McKinley eventually came to hold. White believed that McKinley was the best president since Abraham Lincoln, and he compared him favorably to George Washington.58

In January 1899, White maintained that McKinley was not an expansionist and never had been one. Referring to McKinley's western speaking tour in the fall of 1898, White said that while the president believed he had ascertained the will of the American people, he had in fact been fooled. People attending McKinley's rallies were those most in favor of imperialism and did not represent the general sentiment of the masses. White concluded that McKinley would be better off listening to his conscience than to militant imperialists.59

On February 16, 1899, White again declared that McKinley had never actually favored keeping the Philippines. The following day, however, after McKinley had declared that the United States would indeed retain the islands rather than return them to Spain, White praised the president for doing his level best in a difficult situation. For this and other noble acts, McKinley would stand in history next to luminaries like Lincoln, Washington, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin.60

59. White, untitled article, Emporia Daily Gazette, January 24, 1899.
60. White, untitled article, Emporia Daily Gazette, February 16, 1899, and "His Level Best," ibid., February 17, 1899.
It appears that White favored keeping the Philippines over returning them to Spain. He urged ratification of the treaty because once the issue with Spain was out of the way, he believed the imperialism question could be settled by the people. It is unclear how this attitude coincided with his desire to exterminate the Filipinos—a sentiment he expressed at the same time he spoke both for and against expansion. What is clear is that in the first months of 1899, he believed the most important issue was ratification of the treaty with Spain. In March, he wrote that it was the manifest destiny of the Anglo-Saxons to go forth and conquer the world, taking possession of the islands of the sea. Once again he advocated exterminating the peoples that could not be subjugated. In the end, what was good enough for McKinley—retention, annexation, expansion, or any other policy—seems to have been good enough for White.

More than forty years later, White recounted in his autobiography how Emporia had thrilled to imperialism in the waning years of the nineteenth century. The people of that day, he wrote, believed that America's glory had resulted from the valor of United States soldiers and the blessings of liberty that were being extended to the dark places of the earth. The people of Emporia, like others across the nation, patted themselves on the back. "We were the chosen people," he wrote sarcastically, "imperialists always were—from Moses to McKinley." He admitted that the Gazette had been as crazy as any other newspaper, he hoped no worse. He recalled having had reservations about imperialism, writing, "For I, in my heart's heart, had my doubts that sometimes squeaked through in a questioning editorial." Perhaps this explains the young White's inconsistent and multifarious attitudes toward imperialism.

In May 1902, as the war against the Filipino insurrectionists dragged on, Republican Sen. Joseph Burton, who later gained infamy for his 1904 bribery conviction, gave a speech in the Senate opposing im-


Frederick Funston (1865–1917), shown here at left with two unidentified comrades in the Philippines, led a daring raid which resulted in the capture of Aguinaldo in 1901.
mediate independence for the islands. While not necessarily opposing the eventual independence of the Philippines, Burton clearly believed the only acceptable course of action at that time was to crush the rebellion against American rule. He cast the argument in partisan terms when he said that while Democrats supported the insurrectionists, Republicans supported the United States Army.  

Burton made his speech in the Senate in opposition to a bill that would have set a time limit on American dominance over the islands. He believed that rather than telling the Filipinos they would at a given time become independent, the United States should concentrate its efforts on forcing them to submit to American rule. The question of whether retention of the islands would be permanent could be dealt with at a later time.  

The United States, according to Burton, had not acquired the Philippines intentionally. Rather, the nation had entered the war to assist Cuba in its desire for independence. “We never expected any material benefit,” said Burton. “We never expected anything except the satisfaction of having done our duty.”  

Having acquired the islands, however, the nation’s duty had taken on new dimensions. The United States should not turn the islands over to the “benighted” Filipinos but instead should uphold the scriptural command to bear the islanders’ burden. The mission of the Anglo-Saxon race was to conquer and civilize the lesser races. Unlike White, Burton believed the United States had been somewhat successful in its attempt to civilize American Indians. Now, the nation was to do likewise in the Philippines.  

Burton said he favored civilizing the Filipinos regardless of the cost. He recounted how Dewey, after hearing that his forces had taken Manila without loss of American lives, had reportedly bowed his head and said that the hand of God must have been in the endeavor. This led Burton to exclaim that providence had directed the American nation from the time of the settlement at Jamestown to the present. Providence was directing America as the nation attempted to take Anglo-Saxon civilization to the benighted peoples of the Orient. If the United States performed its duty well, it would be greatly rewarded.  

65. Joseph R. Burton, Civil Government for the Philippine Islands, speech in the Senate, 57th Cong., 1st sess., May 7–8, 1902, 1. Reprinted from the Congressional Record, the speech can be found in Kansas Collected Speeches and Pamphlets, vol. 19. Library, Kansas State Historical Society (citations will be to this version). It appears also in the Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1902, 9, pt. 5, 5106–9 and 5151–57, passim.

66. Ibid., 11.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion shows how volatile the issue of imperialism was after the Spanish-American War. Both sides argued their positions strenuously, often disagreeing over the meaning of historical documents and policies such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Monroe Doctrine. They also differed on the profitableness of imperialism, one group arguing that the Philippines would bring wealth to the United States, the other maintaining that imperialism had nearly always cost more than it was worth. The most significant aspect of the debate, however, was the extent to which both sides employed the same premises to reach different conclusions. This was most obvious in the use of religion and Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Botkin, being a Methodist minister, was especially appalled that his brethren would employ religious arguments in favor of annexation. He argued convincingly that American Christians could not shoot the religion of Jesus into the Filipinos. The Golden Rule, he believed, required that Americans treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. To Botkin, this clearly meant that the United States should not make war on the Filipinos in an effort to force consent to American rule.

The imperialists also employed religious arguments, but in a very different way. Pfeffer, White, and Burton all maintained that God was leading America in its imperialistic endeavors. Alluding to the chosen nation theme, Pfeffer wrote that God was directing America just as he had the ancient Hebrews. Burton spoke of God’s direction from the founding of Jamestown to the present. White spoke repeatedly of the manifest destiny of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and their mission to either subjugate or exterminate lower races. Pfeffer went so far as to say that since McKinley was God’s Christian agent for justice in the Philippines, those who opposed his policies were unfit for public service. Manifest destiny, duty, and providence were, for the imperialists, important religious themes. For the anti-imperialists, the Golden Rule and a proper means of evangelism outweighed such shibboleths. Underlying the religious issue were two radically different views of how God related to the nation. For Botkin, God stood over the nation, requiring it to live up to biblical precepts. The element of judgment was paramount. For the imperialists, on the other hand, America stood in a special relationship to God and

67. Ibid., 12.

68. Ibid., 11–12.

69. Ibid., 13.
was called to perform certain tasks because of the superiority of its people.

Anglo-Saxon superiority was the second argument employed by each side. Peffer, White, and Burton argued that since Americans belonged to a superior race they had a right, and indeed a duty, to either civilize or subjugate the lesser peoples of the world. Davis, on the other hand, while also holding to the superiority of Americans, used this as a reason for wanting to exclude the Filipinos from the nation. The lowly, benighted islanders would only subvert the nation, especially if given political power. It would seem that Davis’ argument would have carried weight with the die-hard supremacists, for if the Filipinos were really as backward as both sides seemed to believe, then what would the United States gain by taking responsibility for them? Of course, there was always White’s solution—exterminate them and allow Anglo-Saxons to occupy their land.

Though there may be no agreed-upon standard by which to evaluate which side had the better argument concerning imperialism, a few references to what has been said previously raise interesting questions. It would seem that concerning the Declaration of Independence, the anti-imperialists clearly had the upper hand. Peffer made a mockery of the document by maintaining that it should not be taken literally. The same is true of the argument from Anglo-Saxon superiority and manifest destiny. White betrayed an inherent inconsistency when he argued that the most civilized peoples essentially had a license to act in the most barbaric manner. While each side reached different conclusions on the profitability of imperialism, the average Kansas farmer should have been impressed by Botkin’s argument that even if imperialism expanded trade, it would only help the large business trusts, not the average citizen. All these points considered, however, it appears that in Kansas, as on the national level, the imperialists won the argument. In the election of 1900, Kansas went for McKinley, and on the national level he won by a greater margin than he had in 1896 over the same candidate. In the campaign, his opponent, William Jennings Bryan, essentially ran on the same platform he had used in 1896 with the addition of anti-imperialism. He attempted to make imperialism the paramount issue, but, in the words of his own campaigner, failed to arouse the nation to its cause. It seems that manifest destiny, duty, and providence were strong, perhaps even intoxicating, arguments for the people of Kansas. In this respect, White was quite profound when he wrote that imperialists from Moses to McKinley have always believed they were the chosen people. At the turn of the century, Kansans, and indeed Americans in general, turned a deaf ear to sober arguments, choosing instead to believe that they were a special people called by God to the mighty task of subjugating a tiny string of islands on the far side of the world.