

To the Editor of the *Transcript*:

... We are now openly engaged in crushing out the sacredest thing in this great human world—the attempt of a people long enslaved to attain to the possession of itself, to organize its laws and government, to be free to follow its internal destinies according to its own ideals. [“War,” said Moltke, “aims at destruction, and at nothing else.”] And splendidly are we carrying out war’s ideal. We are destroying the lives of these islanders by the thousand, their villages and their cities; for surely it is we who are solely responsible for all the incidental burnings that our operations entail. . . .

It is horrible, simply horrible. Surely there cannot be many born and bred Americans who, when they look at the bare fact of what we are doing, the fact taken all by itself, do not feel this, and do not blush with burning shame at the unspeakable meanness and ignominy of the trick? . . .

The issue is perfectly plain at last. We are cold-bloodedly, wantonly, and abominably destroying the soul of a people who never did us an atom of harm in their lives. It is bald, brutal piracy, impossible to dish up any longer in the cold pot-grease of President McKinley’s cant at the recent Boston banquet—surely as shamefully evasive a speech, considering the right of the public to know definite facts, as can often have fallen even from a professional politician’s lips. The worst of our imperialists is that they do not themselves know where sincerity ends and insincerity begins. Their state of consciousness is so new, so mixed of primitively human passions and, in political circles, of calculations that are anything but primitively human; so at variance, moreover, with their former mental habits—and so empty of definite data and contents—that they face various ways at once, and their portraits should be taken with a squint. One reads the President’s speech with a strange feeling—as if the very words were squinting on the page.

The impotence of the private individual, with imperialism under full headway as it is, is deplorable indeed. But every American has a voice or a pen, and may use it. So, impelled by my own sense of duty, I write these present words. One by one we shall creep from cover, and the opposition will organize itself. If the Filipinos hold out long

enough, there is a good chance (the canting game being already pretty well played out, and the piracy having to show itself henceforward naked) of the older American beliefs and sentiments coming to their rights again, and of the administration being terrified into a conciliatory policy towards the native government.

The programme for the opposition should, it seems to me, be radical. The infamy and iniquity of a war of conquest must stop.

—WILLIAM JAMES, *from a letter to the Boston Evening Transcript, February 26, 1899. Perhaps the leading American thinker of the day, James was an active foe of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines from the time of the Spanish-American War until his death in 1910.*



THE LUST FOR EMPIRE

... If at any time hereafter [pro-imperialism senators] shall seek to put [their] theories into practice by reducing to subjection a distant people, dwelling in the tropics, aliens in blood, most of them Moslem in faith, incapable to speak or comprehend our language, or to read or to write any language, to whom the traditions and the doctrines of civil liberty are unknown, it will be time to point out what terrible results and penalties this departure from our constitutional principles will bring upon us. . . .

But the question with which we now have to deal is whether Congress may conquer and may govern, without their consent and against their will, a foreign nation, a separate, distinct, and numerous people, a territory not hereafter to be populated by Americans, to be formed into American states and to take its part in fulfilling and executing the purposes for which the Constitution was framed, whether it may conquer, control, and govern this people, not for the general welfare, common defense, more perfect union, more blessed liberty of the people of the United States, but for some real or fancied benefit to be conferred against their desire upon the people so governed

or in discharge of some fancied obligation to them, and not to the people of the United States. . . .

My proposition, summed up in a nutshell, is this: I admit you have the right to acquire territory for constitutional purposes, and you may hold land and govern men on it for the constitutional purpose of a seat of government or for the constitutional purpose of admitting it as a state. I deny the right to hold land or acquire any property for any purpose not contemplated by the Constitution. The government of foreign people against their will is not a constitutional purpose but a purpose expressly forbidden by the Constitution. . . .

Now, I claim that under the Declaration of Independence you cannot govern a foreign territory, a foreign people, another people than your own; that you cannot subjugate them and govern them against their will, because you think it is for their good, when they do not; because you think you are going to give them the blessings of liberty. You have no right at the cannon's mouth to impose on an unwilling people your Declaration of Independence and your Constitution and your notions of freedom and notions of what is good . . .

—U.S. SENATOR GEORGE FRISBIE HOAR,
*addressing the Senate, 1899. One of the great Congressional
statements on the role of the U.S. in the world,
the full address can be found in the Congressional Record,
fifty-fifth Congress, third session, p. 495.*

When I think of my party, whose glory and whose service to liberty are the guide of my life, crushing out this people in their effort to establish a republic, and hear people talking about giving them good government and that they are better off than they ever were under Spain, I feel very much as if I had learned that my father or some other honored ancestor had been a slave trader in his time and had boasted that he had introduced a new and easier kind of handcuffs or fetters to be worn by the slaves during the horrors of the Middle Passage.

—GEORGE FRISBIE HOAR, *from his autobiography,
Autobiography of Seventy Years, 1903. Hoar led the loyal*

opposition within the Republican Party as President William McKinley, a Republican, embarked on a career of empire after 1898. Many other prominent Republicans abandoned McKinley and, in some cases, the party, over the issue of imperialism.

If we [adopt a colonial system], we shall transform the government of the people, for the people, and by the people, for which Abraham Lincoln lived, into a government of one part of the people, the strong, over another part, the weak. Such an abandonment of a fundamental principle as a permanent policy may at first seem to bear only upon more or less distant dependencies, but it can hardly fail in its ultimate effects to disturb the rule of the same principle in the conduct of democratic government at home. And I warn the American people that a democracy cannot so deny its faith as to the vital conditions of its being—it cannot long play the king over subject populations without creating within itself ways of thinking and habits of action most dangerous to its own vitality. . . .

We must stop at the beginning, before taking Porto Rico [sic]. If we take that island, not even to speak of the Philippines, we shall have placed ourselves on the inclined plane, and roll on and on, no longer masters of our own will, until we have reached the bottom. And where will that bottom be? Who knows?

—CARL SCHURZ, "American Imperialism," a convocation address at the University of Chicago, January 4, 1899. Schurz, a German immigrant, was one of the leading liberal reformers in the United States from the 1850s to the early years of the twentieth century. He helped Abraham Lincoln build the Republican Party. He served as Lincoln's ambassador to Spain, as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War, and as a Republican U.S. senator from Missouri. Schurz split with expansionist forces within the Republican Party, however, and endorsed the presidential candidacy of Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who ran on an anti-imperialist platform in 1900.

PLATFORM OF THE AMERICAN ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE

We hold that the policy known as imperialism is hostile to liberty and tends toward militarism, an evil from which it has been our glory to be free. We regret that it has become necessary in the land of Washington and Lincoln to reaffirm that all men, of whatever race or

color, are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We maintain that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We insist that the subjugation of any people is "criminal aggression" and open disloyalty to the distinctive principles of our government.

We earnestly condemn the policy of the present national administration in the Philippines. It seeks to extinguish the spirit of 1776 in those islands. We deplore the sacrifice of our soldiers and sailors, whose bravery deserves admiration even in an unjust war. We denounce the slaughter of the Filipinos as a needless horror. We protest against the extension of American sovereignty by Spanish methods.

We demand the immediate cessation of the war against liberty, begun by Spain and continued by us. We urge that Congress be promptly convened to announce to the Filipinos our purpose to concede to them the independence for which they have so long fought and which of right is theirs.

The United States has always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right. . . .

We deny that the obligation of all citizens to support their government in times of grave national peril applies to the present situation. If an administration may with impunity ignore the issues upon which it was chosen, deliberately create a condition of war anywhere on the face of the globe, debauch the civil service for spoils to promote the adventure, organize a truth-suppressing censorship, and demand of all citizens a suspension of judgment and their unanimous support while it chooses to continue the fighting, representative government itself is imperiled. . . .

—THE AMERICAN ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE, *October 1899. Formed after the U.S. occupied Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands, the American Anti-Imperialist League campaigned with particular fervor against the role the U.S. military was playing in the Philippines, where American troops were*

suppressing an independence movement. The league attracted broad support from opponents of expansionism and empire, including Mark Twain, Henry James, and Andrew Carnegie. A membership appeal circulated a month after this platform statement was adopted, which declared, "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 tared 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?"

TWO BURDENS

With all due respect for the alleged genius of one Rudyard Kipling, his latest conglomeration of rot about the "white man's burden" makes us very, very tired. It has ever been the dark races who have borne the world's burdens both in the heat of day and the travail of the night. The white man has never had a burden that was not self-imposed, sometimes through a temporary wave of indignation or charity, but more frequently through greed of gold and territory.

Might has been made to pose for right and the weak and untutored peoples have had burdens forced upon them at the mouth of the cannon or point of the bayonet. The white man's burden is a myth. The black man's burden is a crushing, grinding reality. Let us have done with cant and hypocrisy.

—COLORED AMERICAN, editorial, March 18, 1899. This article expressed the general outrage of African-Americans at English writer Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden," a defense of imperialism that suggested that white Europeans had a responsibility to colonize Africa, India, and other regions. Kipling's poem, which was published approvingly by American daily newspapers that supported the U.S. conquest of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, was parodied in the African-American press of the day.

THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

"Take up the white man's burden!"
He's borne for many years,
With hardened hearts for justice
And a smile for the orphans tears.

"Take up the white man's burden!"
And go to the Southern land
Where cities and towns are governed,
By a fiendish, lawless band.

"Take up the white man's burden!"
That causes the heart to quake
As we read again with horror,
Of those burnings at the stake,

Of white caps riding in the night,
And burning black men's homes,
Of the inmates shot as they rush out
And the awful dying groans,

Of crimes that would outnumber
Those in the foreign Isle,
Committed by heathen people
"Half devil and half child."

Then free those Filipinos people,
From the accursed rule of Spain,
And put on them the shackles
Of a haughtier nation's reign.

With "Judas" acts in every form,
Conceivable by man,
And the thirst for blood, and greed for gold
Is surely the white man's plan.

Oh! Wait not until the Martyr dies
Before bears the crown,
But sing his praises to the skies
And the burden help lay down.

—ALICE SMITH-TRAVERS, "The White Man's Burden,"
in the *Freeman*, March 4, 1899. The *Freeman* was a
nationally circulated weekly newspaper.



THE BLACK MAN'S BURDEN

Pile on the Black Man's burden,
'Tis nearest at your door;
Why heed long-bleeding Cuba
Or dark Hawaii's shore?
Halt ye your fearless armies
Which menace feeble folks,
Who fight with clubs and arrows
And brook your rifle smokes.

Pile on the Black Man's burden,
His wail with laughter drown,
You've sealed the Red Man's problem
And now take up the Brown.
In vain ye seek to end it
With bullets, blood or death—
Better by far defend it
With honor's holy breath.

Pile on the Black Man's burden
His back is broad though sore;
What though the weight oppress him,
He's borne the like before.
Your Jim-Crow laws and customs,
And fiendish midnight deed,
Though winked at by the nation,
Will some day trouble breed.

Pile on the Black Man's burden,
At length 'twill heaven pierce;
Then on you or your children
Will reign God's judgement fierce.
Your battleships and armies
May weaker ones appall,
But God Almighty's justice
They'll not disturb at all.

—H. T. JOHNSON, "The Black Man's Burden," *Voice of Missions*,
April 1, 1899. This was the official publication of the Missionary
Department of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.



It is about time for the ministers of the A. M. E. Church, who, in the
aggregate, are the most progressive, enlightened, and racial of the
Africanite ministry of the world, with the highest regard for all other

denominations, to begin to tell the young men of our race to stay out of the United States Army. If it is a white man's government, and we grant it is, let him take care of it.

The Negro has no flag to defend. There is not a star in the flag of this nation, out of the forty odd, that the colored race can claim, nor is there any symbol signalized in the colors of the flag that he can presume to call his, unless it would be the stripes, and the stripes are now too good for him . . .

—"THE NEGRO SHOULD NOT ENTER THE ARMY,"
Voice of Missions, May 1, 1899.

To the Honorable William McKinley,
President of the United States

Sir:

We, colored people of Massachusetts in mass meeting assembled to consider our oppressions and the state of the country relative to the same, have resolved to address ourselves to you in an open letter, notwithstanding your extraordinary, your incomprehensible silence on the subject of our wrongs in your annual and other messages to Congress, as in your public utterances to the country at large. We address ourselves to you, Sir, not as suppliants, but as of right, as American citizens, whose servant you are, and to whom you are bound to listen, and for whom you are equally bound to speak, and upon occasion to act, as for any other body of your fellow-countrymen in like circumstances. We ask nothing for ourselves at your hands, as chief magistrate of the republic, to which all American citizens are not entitled. We ask for the enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness equally with other men. We ask for the free and full exercise of all the rights of American freemen, guaranteed to us by the Constitution and laws of the Union, which you were solemnly sworn to obey and execute. We ask you for what belongs to us by the high sanction of Constitution and law, and the Democratic genius of our institutions and civilization. These rights are everywhere throughout

the South denied to us, violently wrested from us by mobs, by lawless legislatures, and nullifying conventions, combinations, and conspiracies, openly, defiantly, under your eyes, in your constructive and actual presence. And we demand, which is a part of our rights, protection, security in our life, our liberty, and in the pursuit of our individual and social happiness under a government which we are bound to defend in war, and which is equally bound to furnish us in peace protection, at home and abroad. . . .

Are crying national transgressions and injustices more "injurious and menacing" to the Republic, as well as "shocking to its sentiments of humanity," when committed by a foreign state, in foreign territory, against a foreign people, than when they are committed by a portion of our own people at home? . . . Shall it be said that the federal government, with arms of Briareus, reaching to the utmost limits of the habitable globe for the protection of its citizens, for the liberation of alien islanders and the subjugation of others, is powerless to guarantee to certain of its citizens at home their inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, because those citizens happen to be Negroes residing in the southern section of our country? Do the colored people of the United States deserve equal consideration with the Cuban people at the hands of your administration, and shall they, though late, receive it? If, Sir, you have the disposition, as we know that you have the power, we are confident that you will be able to find a constitutional way to reach us in our extremity, and our enemies also, who are likewise enemies to great public interests and national tranquillity.

—ARCHIBALD H. GRIMKE, ET AL, "Open Letter to President McKinley by Colored People of Massachusetts," October 3, 1899.

This was one of several letters sent to McKinley by African-American groups, many associated with the Colored National League, that questioned why the president seemed to be more concerned with "ending the oppression" of foreigners than that of the victims of Southern racism.