

PLATFORM

AMERICAN ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE

Opposition to the progressive position coalesced in the Anti-Imperialist League, founded in the Boston office of insurance mogul Edward Atkinson in June 1898, shortly after the United States went to war with Spain. Its leading spokesmen were an unlikely coalition of businessmen, professors, politicians, and writers. They included Massachusetts Republican George F. Hoar (1826–1904) and unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925); classical liberal editor E. L. Godkin (1831–1902); millionaire steel magnate Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) and labor leader Samuel Gompers (1850–1924); professors William James (1842–1910) and William Graham Sumner (1840–1910); and Mark Twain (1835–1910). Although the motives of the League’s members varied, they had in common a primary concern for American independence and uniqueness—her moral and spiritual health, constitutional integrity, prosperity.

Initially, the League’s purpose was to focus the American effort in the Spanish-American War on liberating oppressed Spanish colonies rather than acquiring an empire in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and especially the Philippines. After the fighting stopped in August 1898, the League’s objective became the defeat of the Treaty of Paris, which ceded the islands of the Philippines and other overseas territories to the United States. When the Senate approved the Treaty in February 1899 and war broke out in the Philippines, the League opposed the policy of the McKinley administration, which had resulted in the Filipinos rebelling against the United States and which required American troops to fight far from home against people seeking their own independence.

The League’s Program was published October 17, 1899, and, together with Senator Beveridge’s speech, reveals what it was about the Filipino war and the question of overseas imperialism that so polarized Americans.

“Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League,” *The Land of Sunshine: The Magazine of California and the Old West* 12 (December 1899–May 1900):126–27.

1899

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 re-affirm 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 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 have 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.

Imperialists assume that with the destruction of self-government in the Philippines by American hands, all opposition here will cease. This is a grievous error. Much as we abhor the war of "criminal aggression" in the Philippines, greatly as we regret that the blood of the Filipinos is on American hands, we more deeply resent the betrayal of American institutions at home. The real firing line is not in the suburbs of Manila. The foe is of our own household. The attempt of 1861 was to divide the country. That of 1899 is to destroy its fundamental principles and noblest ideals.

Whether the ruthless slaughter of the Filipinos shall end next month or next year is but an incident in a contest that must go on until the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are rescued from the hands of their betrayers. Those who dispute about standards of value while the foundation of the republic is undermined will be listened to as little as those who would wrangle about the small economies of the household while the house is on fire. The training of a great people for a century, the aspiration for liberty of a vast immigration, are forces that will hurl aside those who in the delirium of conquest seek to destroy the character of our institutions.

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. 5

We propose to contribute to the defeat of any person or party that stands for the forcible subjugation of any people. We shall oppose for re-election all who in the White House or in Congress betray American liberty in pursuit of un-American ends. We still hope that both of our great political parties will support and defend the Declaration of Independence in the closing campaign of the century. 10

We hold with Abraham Lincoln that “no man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent. When the white man governs himself, that is self-government, but when he governs himself and also governs another man that is more than self-government—that is despotism.” “Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in us. Our defense is in the spirit which prizes liberty as a heritage of all men in all lands. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it.” 15 20

We cordially invite the co-operation of all men and women who remain loyal to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. 25