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“Opposition to President McKinley’s Administration is the Real Motive”:

Henry R. Gibson’s 1899 Speech on Imperialism and the Hypocrisy of Southern Democrats

By David C. Turpie*

On January 25, 1899, Henry R. Gibson (1837-1938) took the podium on the floor of the House of Representatives to explain his support for the annexation of the Philippines. A Republican congressman from East Tennessee’s second district, Gibson was a proponent of protectionist measures, voted to declare war on Spain the previous year, and supported the annexation of Hawaii.1 By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had developed into a modern, industrial nation. As a result, many Americans believed that the country needed to project its power beyond North America and join European countries in their search for markets and resources on other continents. Like most of his fellow Republican congressmen, Gibson believed that imperial expansion was in the best interest of the United States, and his constituents in East Tennessee. However, Gibson believed that political interests, specifically southern Democrats who did not support President William McKinley’s policies, were interfering with

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1 Mary U. Rothrock, ed., The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee (Knoxville, 1946), 420-21; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress (Washington, D.C.), available at, http://bioguide.congress.gov. Gibson was a native of Maryland, but moved to East Tennessee soon after his service in the Union Army during the Civil War. He served in Congress from 1895 to 1904. In his retirement, Gibson wrote the highly influential Gibson’s Suits in Chancery (Knoxville, 1907), worked on revising the Code of Tennessee, edited the American and English Encyclopedia of Law and Practice, and published several works of poetry including The Box of Balderstone: An Epic (Boston, 1912). He died in 1938 at the age of 100.
the U.S. annexation of the Philippines. For many imperialists like Gibson, annexation was the destiny of the United States following its victory in the Spanish-American War.

The Philippines had come into the possession of the United States as a spoil of war. In the spring and summer of 1898, the United States fought a brief war against Spain. The war, it was claimed, was waged to end brutal fighting in Cuba, which had been going on since 1895. Cuban insurgents had been fighting against repressive Spanish colonial rule for more than three years and had more than held their own. Historians debate American motives for the entering the war. Was it to avenge the explosion of the USS Maine, which had occurred in Havana Harbor in February 1898? Was it to help the Cubans gain independence and free the poor reconcentrados—Cubans who were rounded up in Spanish concentration camps? Or was there an underlying motive, one in which the United States actually benefited—especially economically—from defeating Spain?

On February 15, 1898, the USS Maine exploded in Havana Harbor, killing over 250 Americans. Two months later the Spanish-American War began. Truman White, Pictorial History of Our War with Spain for Cuba's Freedom (n.p., 1898), 25.

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2 See, David Turpie, "The Failure of Reunion: The South and Republican Foreign Policy, 1898-1902" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maine, 2010), 48.
Regardless of what actually precipitated American intervention in Cuba, the United States declared war against Spain in late April 1898. In an effort to defeat the Spanish, American leaders expanded the war effort to several Spanish colonies, including the Philippines. Like the Cubans, the Filipinos had been rebelling against Spanish rule and fighting for national independence. In fact, the first battle of the Spanish-American War was a naval battle in Manila Bay in the Philippines. Many Americans were shocked to read in their newspapers on May 2, 1898, that the first battle in the war to free Cuba took place on the other side of the globe in Asia. Throughout the four-month Spanish-American War, the Filipino rebels were led to believe that the Americans were liberators helping them gain independence from their common enemy, the Spanish. The Spanish-American War ended in August 1898, with the ouster of Spain from most of its last remaining colonies around the globe, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.¹

Congress initially declared that Cuba would be given independence at the conclusion of the war. The government kept this promise and gave Cuba nominal independence, although the United States effectively dictated much of Cuba’s foreign and economic policy throughout the early twentieth century. Guam and Puerto Rico were small islands with small populations, and both were annexed and became U.S. territories. That left the Philippines, by far the largest of the island nations in question. Made up of thousands of islands (some large, but most small) in the Pacific, the Philippines had a population of nearly eight million people, about one-tenth of the population of the United States. While the decisions regarding the fate of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam were made with little discord, the fate of the Philippines led to a national debate that centered on the future of the republic as much as it did on the future of the eight million Filipinos and their fight for independence.¹

Following the conclusion of the war, representatives from the United States and Spain met in Paris to write a peace agreement—one that included the transfer of the Philippines from Spain to the United States. The Treaty of Paris was finalized in December 1898, and then needed the approval of the governments of Spain and the United States. In the latter country, that meant the Senate would have to approve the treaty. Needing a two-thirds majority, the treaty passed by one vote, 57-27. Southern Democrats, including Tennessee’s two senators, constituted a majority of the votes against the treaty.³ Their opposition stemmed solely from the provision that ceded the Philippines to the United States. Two days before the final vote

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³ Turpie, “Failure of Reunion,” 165-87. The tally for southern senators (from the former Confederate states) was 14 opposed and 8 in favor.

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During the Spanish-American War, the Spanish ruling class was taken aback by the size and steady advance of American troops and military might.

On the other hand, the Filipinos who saw American troops and camps knew that they were in for a fight. However, it was not so much the fighting as the imposition of the treaty that supported an American colonial presence in the Philippines.

Some in Congress argued that the treaty was the best way to secure the United States’ strategic interests in the Pacific.

Some Pacific residents—most of whom were American—decided to make the best of the situation.
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7 "The War is Over," Knoxville Journal and Tribune, November 30, 1898, 4.

8 See, Kenton J. Cryer, Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898-1916: An Inquiry into the American Colonial Mentality (Urbana, IL, 1898); Jürgen Pfeiffer, Expansionism of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands (1936; reprint, Chicago, 1964), 279-316.

9 In the 1898 election, a majority of the voters were given the vote in the former
arguments. Many Republicans believed that their party had directed the popular war against Spain and should not give away the spoils of that war. More importantly, many in the business community smelted profits, not only in the Philippines, but in nearby China.

Those against the annexation of the Philippines called themselves anti-imperialists, and they offered a number of reasons to explain their opposition to American rule over the Philippine archipelago. First, they focused on the racial issue of annexation. The anti-imperialists believed that the Philippines could never become a state, because the darker-skinned, and therefore "inferior," Filipinos could not reasonably be expected to become American citizens. Thus, the Philippines would have to remain as a colony, but the Constitution did not seem to allow for colonies. Anti-imperialists often bemoaned the denial of voting rights to Filipinos were their country to become an American colony. All governments, as Thomas Jefferson argued in the Declaration of Independence, derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. Anti-imperialists argued that Americans would be turning their backs on their own principles if they kept the Philippines as a colony. Keeping the Philippines as a colony presented other problems as well. It was expensive to run an empire, anti-imperialists argued, because a large standing army would be needed to control colonies. The costs of empire building, they believed, might even restrict domestic improvements and reforms.

Historians have generally viewed anti-imperialism as an amorphous movement that was not defined by partisanship. To some extent this portrayal is true. There were, in fact, many older Republicans who cooperated with the numerous Democrats and Populists to oppose what they considered to be a

greedy land-grab and the League was founded by well-known American

Although historians as being non-party, the 20th century was a period of imperial expansion, including the United States, or, as the League did not. During the late 19th century, American politics. Voters believed firmly in a democratic identity for many Americans. Southern whites, in particular, believed that southerners in the South could not live as free, independent, and white southerners. The South was a region that would affect domestic fortunes and business. Farmers' demand for the resources of the United States was the least, southern anti-imperialists viewed the South as a region that demanded the nation's wealth. ... We doubt that the anti-imperialists of the late 19th century threatened the nation's identity or wealth, but they did present a southern society.


11 This racially basis justification had been used by anti-imperialists as early as 1870, when President Ulysses S. Grant's administration attempted to annex the Dominican Republic. See, Eric T.L. Love, Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

that their party had directed the war for informal empire, annexation away the spoils of that war. The anti-imperialists believed that the Filipinos were not ready for independence because the darker-skinned, less educated, and less industrious Filipino would have to remain as a colony, arguably for centuries. Anti-imperialists believed that the Filipinos were not ready for independence because the costs of empire building, they argued, would bankrupt the United States. Even worse, the annexation of the Philippines would undermine the southern agrarian economy and the southern racial order. White southerners feared that the annexation of the Philippines threatened to undermine the southern agrarian economy and the southern racial order. The U.S. annexation of the Philippines was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life. The anti-imperialists argued that annexation was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to the southern way of life.
This partisan divide over the potential annexation of the Philippines was especially obvious in East Tennessee—a Republican stronghold within the largely Democratic South. Like other white southern Democrats, most Democrats in East Tennessee were anti-imperialists and opposed to the foreign policies of the McKinley administration. Robert W. McKee, an anti-imperialist Democrat from Greeneville, asked in mid-February 1899, could anyone “arrest this hellward gallop of the [McKinley] Administration?” McKee believed that President McKinley was “liable to impeachment” for waging such an unjust war in the Philippines. In contrast to the majority of their white southern counterparts, most East Tennesseans were Republicans in the 1890s, and, therefore, they generally supported Republican foreign policies, including the creation of an overseas empire. Charles W. Dabney, the president of the University of Tennessee, for example, believed that “we must care for the Conquered islands in some way. Then we must develop a Colonial policy & a Colonial bureau.” America’s new possessions, such as the Philippines, Dabney argued, “will bring us new fields of industry, new customers & new friends. It will open the way for American missionaries and teachers. It will promote the cause of liberty & good government.”

The arguments for overseas territorial expansion made by Dabney in a private letter were also made in the halls of the Capitol by many Republicans, including East Tennessee’s two Republican representatives in the House in 1899.

Mr. Chairman, it is the hope of all of us that we will not in the future see our country involved in hostilities. I do not believe that the question of the annexation of the Philippines will involve us in any hostilities.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I want to get to the substance of the question. I want to consider this problem in its proper perspective. I want to consider it first in the light of our history and the way in which it has developed. I want to consider it in the light of our commitments and our obligations.

I wish to state that I am in favor of the annexation of the Philippines. I believe that it is in the best interests of our country to annex the Philippines. I believe that it is in the best interests of the Philippines to be annexed to our country.

According to historian Gordon B. McKinney, “All available evidence indicates that both the [Spanish-American] war and the new empire were popular among the mountain population.” See, Gordon B. McKinney, Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community (Chapel Hill, NC, 1978), 187.

Charles W. Dabney to Mary Chilton Sumter Dabney, June 4, 1898, Dabney Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.
can divide over the potential for war with the Philippines was especially true in East Tennessee—a Republican state, the largely Democratic counties in the white southern Democrats, who were anti-
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Colonial policy was new to the Tennessean.
Mr. Chairman: There are grave problems today confronting our country, and it becomes us, in the solution of those problems, to use every power of our minds and be guided by our highest regard for the welfare of our common country.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I come to the most difficult of the problems that confront us, and that is our relations to the Philippine Islands.

I wish to discuss this problem in all its phases, and as their annexation to the United States is one of these phases, I will say a few words on that point, not that I intend here and now to commit myself to their permanent annexation, because I have not yet reached a conclusion on that point. The matter is too momentous for a hasty and uninformed judgment. The time has not arrived to pass on that question. We must take time to acquire information and consider.

I wish it understood, however, that I am one of those who implicitly believe that we have both the right and the power to permanently annex these islands. There was a day ninety-six years ago when this objection was open to argument, but we have done too much annexing to raise the constitutional question now. That question has been settled seven times: First, by President Jefferson,

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in 1803, when he annexed Louisiana; second, by President Monroe, in 1819, when he annexed Florida; third, by Congress, in 1846, when it annexed Texas; fourth, by President Polk, in 1848, when he annexed California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico; fifth, by President Pierce, in 1854, when he annexed the Mesilla Valley\(^2\); sixth, by President Johnson, in 1867, when he annexed Alaska; and seventh, by this Congress, when, in 1898, it annexed the islands of Hawaii, neither of the last two being annexations of contiguous territory.

In light of these facts it is a waste of time to discuss the constitutional right of annexation. Those who dispute this right are the intellectual descendants of those who, hundreds of years ago, disputed that the earth was round, that the stars were fixed, that the sun was stationary, and that the planet revolved. . . . To argue with these men is a waste of time, an insult to reason, and an outrage on patience.

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But we are told [by anti-imperialists] that the "consent of the governed" is the foundation of all just governments, and that we would violate the Declaration of Independence if we annexed the Philippines without their consent. Now, Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence and ought to have known its meaning, annexed Louisiana without even consulting its inhabitants, and not only without their consent, but in spite of their dissent.

It is true that the Declaration of Independence says that "all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," but the Constitution does not so provide. Neither is the proposition correct in every instance. At the time the Declaration was made there was no thought of obtaining the "consent" of the Indians or negroes.

\(^{23}\) Gibson was referring to the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, in which the United States purchased from Mexico much of present-day southern Arizona and part of present-day southern New Mexico.
The Indians to-day have no voice in the Government; and in the negro States their "consent" is not only not obtained, but is actually denied. And what is most strange, the men who pretend to be so indignant about governing the Filipinos without their "consent" are the very men who are most anxious to govern the negroes without their "consent"! Is an Asiatic Filipino who lives 10,000 miles from here entitled to any more rights than an American negro who lives next door to us? Why is it, Mr. Chairman, that some of these men who rave so for fear the Filipinos will be governed without their consent rave just as furiously when the negroes insist on not being governed without their consent?

Why do these professed champions of liberty insist on saying "turkey" to the Filipinos and "buzzard" to the negroes? What is sauce for the Philippine goose ought to be sauce for the African gander. I can not quite understand the hearts of those men who so dearly love the yellow Filipino whom they have never seen, and yet do not love the yellow negro whom they have seen. If the Filipinos are entitled to self-government, then the negroes are; and yet some of these men who are pretending to be so indignant because the savage, half-naked, heathen Filipino is to be governed without his consent are just as indignant when a civilized Christian negro asks not to be governed without his consent. Surely the charity of these lovers of the Filipinos does not begin at home.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, even in our own country government is not always based on the "consent of the governed...."

From 1861 to 1865 we waged a terrible war against the Confederate States because they would not "consent" to remain any longer in the old Union. And after the war we disfranchised them, so they would be unable to express their dissent.

Where would the United States of America be today if the first white men who landed on our coast had sailed away because the Indians objected to their coming?...

Where would be my own State of Tennessee if it had been necessary for Sevier, Shelby, and Robertson to obtain the "consent" of the Indians who lived within its boundaries? Where would be all the States?

Now, Mr. Chairman, are these men who deny the rights of yellow skins in America really anxious to defend the rights of yellow
skins in Asia? Do the men who despise the negro in America truly love the Filipino in Asia? If the Filipinos were as numerous in the South as are the negroes, would these gentlemen who now champion their right to self-government be as loud-mouthed in their behalf as they are today? Do we not know, Mr. Chairman, that if the negroes were in the Philippines and the Filipinos were here these same advocates of self-government would be caressing the negroes and oppressing the Filipinos?

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This being so, Mr. Chairman, what is the secret of this pretended friendship for the Filipinos?

Opposition to President McKinley’s Administration is the real motive and mainspring of their opposition; these champions of Asiatic barbarians behold the ship of state, commanded by William McKinley and manned by an American crew, every mast sound, every sail plaited, every rope tight, sailing proudly on the seas of prosperity and about to enter the harbor of national safety. And as the grand old ship of state sails by, towing three small ships named Cuba, Porto Rico, and Philippine, these pretended friends of self-government call out to the men in the three small ships, “Cut loose from McKinley’s ship! Don’t let him tow you into the harbor! Rebel, resist, fight to the last, and we will help you all we can.” Not that they love the people of Cuba, Porto Rico, and the Philippines, but they hate McKinley and hate his ship and hate his crew.

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But someone asks, “What will you do with the Philippines? Will you admit them as States into the Union?” I answer quickly, Never, as States, in our day. We will hold them as Territories. We will do all we can to civilize and Christianize them. We will establish schools and churches, construct roads, erect factories, open mines, build telegraphs, all of course at their own expense, and give them just as much participation in their own government as they are capable of. And when, in the process of evolution, they become capable of self-government, we will give them national independence with our blessing and good wishes. But, Mr. Chairman, let us do our duty in our day and leave the future to be taken care of by men of the future. All wisdom and patriotism will not be buried in our graves. The great and good God, who has cared for our country in the past, will raise up men in the future well able to deal with the Philippines in a manner suitable to our honor and welfare and compatible with the course of humanity...
The negro in America truly was as numerous in numbers as these gentlemen who now sit in this hall. But, as they must be as loud-mouthed in their demand for the negro's freedom, Mr. Chairman, I ask the question; what would the negro's treatment be, if we were to receive him? For myself, I would say, that the negro would be married, and his freedom be taken away.

That is the secret of this Administration is the real reason for their action ... these champions of freedom and justice, commanded by William Howard Taft, every mast sound, every man, even the Chinese, is on the sea of national safety. And as we must have our three small ships named after our pretended friends of self-protection, our three small ships: "Cut the Gordian knot! tow you into the harbor!" Not "Cut the Gordian knot!" from Mexico, and the Philippines, those who cannot help them, and hate his crew.

"With the Philippines! Will you settle it with the Philippines?" I answer quickly. Never, never will we settle it with the Philippines. We will do all we can to make them settle it with us.

We will establish schools, open mines, build factories, and give them just such a government as they are capable of getting when they become capable of it. We will bring independence with our flag, and then let us do our duty in care of by men of the Philippines, that they may be buried in our graves. It is better to do our duty in this country than to deal with the Philippines.

The Philippines, Mr. Chairman, are more than a thousand islands, little and big, with about 114,000 square miles and 7,000,000 people. These islands are in close reach of India, Malay, China, and Japan, countries that contain one thousand millions of human beings, three-fourths of all the people in the world. And the great commercial nations of the earth agree that the nation that owns these islands will control a large part of the commerce of the Eastern world. Our commerce now is immense. We shipped away from our country and sold in foreign lands last year over one thousand millions of dollars’ worth of the products of our fields and factories. We are knocking at the doors of all the nations of the earth and offering them the surplus stores we have to sell. Every dollar’s worth of goods we sell in a foreign land is that much gained. The Philippines will give us a grand base of operations at the very doors of India, China, and Japan, and will give us their trade. We will sell them our cotton, corn, wheat, beef, and bacon, and enormous will be the profit thereof, soon aggregating hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

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My solution of the Philippine problem is this: If those fifty or sixty thousand people out there who are claiming to represent 7,000,000 people, if they get a little too fresh, I would squelch them; I would turn enough grape-shot and canister into their ranks to teach them that the American Army and the American flag are not things to be trifled with, and that they who interfere with us do so at their peril.

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Less than a week later, Tennessee’s other Republican congressman, Walter P. Brownlow, followed with similar arguments for overseas expansion and the annexation of the Philippines. The issue of imperial expansion in 1898-1899, especially the annexation of the Philippines, was a partisan issue. In an effort to win public support and congressional votes, Republicans in Congress, such as Gibson and Brownlow, often made the argument that America had never been a land in which the consent of the governed had been taken very seriously. While Democrats paid lip service to “the consent of the governed” as a way to convince the American public that imperial

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24 Here Gibson was incorrectly claiming that the nationalist movement in the Philippines led by Emilio Aguinaldo had only about “fifty or sixty thousand” members.

25 Congressional Record, 55th Congress, 3rd session, appendix, p. 8890.

expansion in the tropics was against American ideals, most Republican congressmen dismissed such arguments as being quaint and simply not historically accurate. In other words, Republicans admitted that their policies would deny the Filipinos the right to consent to who governed them, but the practice of denying people a voice in the government was a perfectly legitimate American tradition to continue.

During these debates, Republican congressmen targeted white Democrats from the South because they were usually, as a group, the staunchest opponents of Philippine annexation. White southern Democrats were also as guilty as anyone of ignoring the consent of the governed—especially in the late 1890s as Jim Crow laws instituted racially based segregation of public facilities and disfranchised African American voters throughout the South. Thus, Republicans often noted that southern Democrats were hypocritical for arguing that the United States should not annex the Philippines because it violated the rights of others, who had not consented to be governed. The political bickering in Congress did nothing to stem the tide of Anglo-Saxon domination at home or abroad. Despite the Republicans’ attempt to embarrass white southern Democrats for racial segregation, the debates did not improve African Americans’ position in southern society. And, despite attempts by the Democrats to embarrass Republicans for conquering a foreign people, the subjugation and annexation of the Philippines moved forward.

Gibson and other Republicans argued that the annexation of the Philippines would be beneficial to the Filipinos, who allegedly needed American help in climbing the ladder of civilization. But, more importantly, annexation would be beneficial to Americans, and especially help boost the economy by getting American companies closer to the Asian market, especially in China. But, how much did Philippine annexation truly benefit Gibson’s constituents in East Tennessee? The vaunted China market never produced the riches for American companies as many, including Gibson, predicted. His January 1899 speech in favor of Philippine annexation reminds us that the issue of imperial expansion at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century was largely a partisan issue on the national stage. Because overseas expansion was a Republican foreign policy, most Republicans in Congress and the nation ultimately supported the annexation of the Philippines in 1898-1899. The East Tennesseans who supported the annexation of the Philippines likely did so because of their political allegiances and not because of the alleged benefits to the Filipinos or themselves.

The policies of the McKinley administration ushered the country into the modern era as a global power. Because of the demands of modern capitalism, Europeans had struck out into the world in a fit of imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century (what is often called the “new imperialism”). The Republican foreign policies of the late nineteenth and
During President William McKinley’s administration, the United States obtained an overseas empire and emerged as a world power. Charles S. Ollott, *The Life of William McKinley* (Boston, 1916), vol. 2.

Early twentieth centuries led the United States into an imperial race in search of markets and resources. Although the underlying motives for imperial expansion were economic and strategic, imperialists often described their policies in terms of “spreading civilization” to the “heathen races” of the globe.

Yet, although white Americans imperialists (like their European counterparts) saw their modern, Western civilization as being superior, many American imperialists paradoxically worried that American men had become over-civilized. Gibson, for one, argued in a February 1900 speech in Congress:

> In this day some of us Americans [men] have become so effeminate, either through wealth, or through excess of civilization, or through refinements of political or theological polemics, that they dread boarding a ship to go to the Philippine Islands, when their forefathers guided up their lains, saddled their horses, packed their mules, yoked their oxen to their own wagons, and took their wives and their children, traveling on foot 3,000 miles across plains and deserts, across mountains and valleys, across creeks and rivers, among Indians and wild beasts, in order to reach California, and they were not afraid.\(^{21}\)

In his January 1899 speech, Gibson argued that America’s civilization was worth spreading—it would bring modern conveniences and institutions to the “less civilized” Filipinos. Yet, Gibson, and many other leading men of his day, also worried that American men were becoming too modern and too civilized. It was an interesting and dichotomous argument that imperialists made—and one that was hotly debated between 1898 and 1902.

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Anti-imperialists lost the battle over annexation, but in some ways they won the war. Although the United States formally annexed the Philippines in 1899, and held it until World War II, the country never amassed a large overseas empire like Britain, France, or other Western European nations. By 1900, the U.S. overseas empire consisted of roughly 125,000 square miles. By contrast, Britain controlled nearly five million square miles of territory in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. As a result, the U.S. government never developed a colonial bureau, as the European powers did. Instead, U.S. policymakers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries opted for informal empire and nation-building rather than formal territorial rule in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

28 See, Love, Race Over Empire, 196-200.
29 David Mayers, Denouncing Voices in America’s Rise to Power (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 216.