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# ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE

While traveling through Europe on a lecture tour in 1898, Mark Twain (1835–1910) observed a prevailing anti-American sentiment among Europeans critical of his country's intervention in Cuba. For decades, the Spanish attempted to subjugate Cuba's popular anticolonial insurgency while the United States watched idly. The humanitarian crisis eventually generated enough public outrage to warrant US intervention, and Twain felt compelled to defend that decision. In his estimation, the war against Spain in Cuba was "the worthiest one that was ever fought," even more so than the American Revolution or Civil War. "It is a worthy thing to fight for one's freedom," he commended, but "it is another sight finer to fight for another man's. And I think this is the first time it has been done" (Mark Twain to Joseph Twichell, June 17, 1898, in Twain 1917, vol. 2, 663).

## ORIGINS IN THE WAR AGAINST SPAIN

American military operations in what is traditionally called the Spanish-American War began in Cuba in April 1898, but soon extended to Spanish colonies in the Pacific and elsewhere in the Caribbean. When the war ended in an American victory later that year, US forces occupied most of Spain's overseas empire, including Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. President William McKinley (1843–1901) determined to acquire and govern these territories, a decision that led hundreds of thousands of Americans to organize in protest. A meeting of four hundred self-proclaimed "anti-imperialists" met in Boston on June 15, 1898, and quickly spawned nationwide correspondence and propaganda campaigns. In less than a year, more than a dozen cities hosted anti-imperialist leagues. A national office opened in Chicago and a lobbying office in Washington, DC. To encourage membership, the leagues conscripted famous Americans, including former presidents Benjamin Harrison (1833–1901) and Grover Cleveland (1837–1908) and a bipartisan assortment of senators and congressmen. Newspaper editors like E. L. Godkin (1831–1902), labor leaders like Samuel Gompers (1850–1924), businessmen like Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919), and celebrities like Mark Twain joined the movement. After returning from Europe, Twain declared himself committed to the New York league. When asked about joining, he said, "A year ago I … thought it would be a great thing to give a whole lot of freedom to the Filipinos, but I guess now it's better to let them give it to themselves" ("Mark Twain in America Again," *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 1900).

An anti-imperial tradition developed alongside arguments for American expansion long before 1898. Federalists questioned the constitutionality of expansion when Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) purchased Louisiana; Whigs protested James Polk's (1795–1849) annexation of Mexico in 1848; and, with greater success, anti-imperialists opposed Ulysses S. Grant's (1822–1885) acquisition of Santo Domingo after the Civil War. Despite this tradition, the anti-imperialist movement that followed the liberation of Spanish territory set itself apart by insisting that the United States planned, for the first time in its history, to govern distant possessions as colonies. Unlike previous episodes of territorial expansion, the United States made no effort to extend representation to ten million Filipinos, and although two million Puerto Ricans were granted a small measure of representation, the United States would not extend statehood to the island. This conflicted with past precedents that put territories on a path to equal status in the Union and inspired the first anti-imperialist meeting in Boston. The membership drive increased when President McKinley insisted, in overt racial rhetoric, that indigenous populations untrained in democratic government could not successfully rule the islands. The anti-imperialist leagues condemned McKinley's policy as despotic and anti-American.

The acquisition of the Philippines instigated the movement, but what propelled it was the subjugation of Filipino nationalists who had once fought alongside Americans in toppling the Spanish regime. In 1899, while US senators debated McKinley's foreign policy, Filipino and American forces in Manila, suspicious of each others' intentions, clashed violently. The conflict prompted McKinley to order the absolute pacification of the archipelago before any further discussion concerning governance of the islands could take place. Anti-imperialists condemned McKinley as a militarist bent on securing an overseas empire by conquest. The Philippine-American War continued until 1902 and inspired an

anti-imperialist protest against the means, as well as the merits, of expansion.

## A DIVERSE CHORUS OF ANTI-IMPERIALIST RESISTANCE

Although constitutional interpretations and antiwar sentiment formed the bedrock of anti-imperialist opposition, a diverse chorus of resistance arose in reaction to American expansion, with a multitude of voices that included unlikely bedfellows. Racial intolerance led many Americans to join the leagues to prevent the United States from acquiring territories with people of different racial backgrounds. Class anxieties stirred speculation that Filipinos would steal American jobs and led labor leaders to support the crusade. Preachers like William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925) declared overseas expansion a sinful policy capable of destroying the republic and blamed the lust for economic markets. Even so, businessmen joined to oppose military spending that might detract from international commerce and trade.

Initially, the leagues coordinated attacks on political opponents. They challenged the legitimacy of territorial acquisition and colonial government as arbitrary in a democratic system. They opposed the Treaty of Paris, the peace agreement that formally ceded Spain's colonies, and campaigned against imperial candidates during the 1900 presidential election. They even challenged the constitutional basis for American imperialism in the US Supreme Court. Each instance failed to reverse the policy. In 1899, the Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris. In 1900, President McKinley won reelection by a resounding majority. In 1901, the Supreme Court ruled in a series of cases—the most important of which were *De Lima v. Bidwell* and *Downes v. Bidwell*—that the president's imperial policy was entirely legal.

## THE RESPONSE TO MILITARY ATROCITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

The movement's fortunes changed when news of military atrocities in the Philippines came to light. Filipino revolutionaries dedicated to fighting Spanish rule turned on their new occupiers and began a guerrilla war designed to cripple the political will of the United States. It prompted President McKinley to adopt a counterinsurgency strategy that employed a variety of unethical tactics, including torture, starvation, looting, burning of villages, and mass murder to suppress the revolution. Anti-imperialists publicized news of these military atrocities, whose grim nature required no added editorializing for the American public to understand that they were antithetical to national values. Although weakened by the political failures that preceded this, anti-imperialists gained new supporters and helped bring US soldiers to trial for the atrocities. That fortunate turn ended on July 4, 1902, when McKinley's successor, President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), declared the Philippine-American War over. Although resistance to American occupation continued until 1915, Roosevelt announced the end of large-scale combat operations and the arrest of the uprising's most important leaders. It also ended the widespread use of heinous counterinsurgency tactics.

## DECLINE IN MEMBERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

From 1903, many anti-imperialist leagues closed, including the national offices in Chicago, and membership declined. Internal differences hardened after years of activism, and members splintered into new associations. The New England League was reconstituted as the national office and dedicated its operations to eradicating imperialism in all forms. These protesters considered American capital as equally exploitative as territorial colonization. Other groups, like the Filipino Independence Society, focused solely on withdrawal from the Philippines. As the United States granted the Philippines more independence, these groups dwindled too, and the New England branch stood alone. It continued to operate until 1920, but never wielded the same degree of influence that it had during the war against Spain or when atrocities committed against Filipinos came to light.

American anti-imperialism existed in a global context. League members boasted a cosmopolitan view of empire and defended subjugated people worldwide. They worked closely with Filipinos to establish a sustainable campaign against American imperialism while supporting South African Boers against Britain, and they opposed King Leopold's rule in the Congo. The late nineteenth-century surge of imperial abuses spawned an abundance of anti-imperial activity. Members of the American anti-imperialist leagues worked with like-minded activists in India, Egypt, Korea, Indochina, and Africa. Although unsuccessful in reversing American foreign policy, the anti-imperialist leagues dulled the once optimistic impression of an American empire.

**SEE ALSO** *Spanish-American War; Twain, Mark*

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# ANTISEMITISM

**SEE** *Judaism.*

# ANTISLAVERY

Since the late eighteenth century, American abolitionism has been both a domestic and a transnational crusade. Early American abolitionists such as Anthony Benezet (1713–1784), James Pemberton (1723–1808), and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) worked closely with leading European abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846) and Granville Sharp (1735–1813) of England and Jacques-Pierre Brissot (1754–1793) of France to fight slavery by abolishing the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These transnational networks were established and maintained through meticulous exchanges of information by way of personal letters, petitions, memorials, pamphlets, books, and other printed texts. Such exchanges planted the seeds for what would grow, by the mid-nineteenth century, into an extensive and effective network of abolitionists dedicated to the universal eradication of slavery, the slave trade, and forced labor.

By 1808, the United States and Great Britain had abolished the Atlantic slave trade, leading many abolitionists to turn their attention toward West Africa. During this period, organized Anglo-Atlantic abolitionism focused on gradual change through legislative action. The growing number of free blacks in the United States and England, however, led many white abolitionists to consider colonizing West Africa through the repatriation of blacks. American and British abolitionists argued that settling free blacks in West Africa would provide them with the best opportunities for success, while also offering a peaceful way to Christianize and "civilize" Africa. Under the auspices of Granville Sharp, in 1787 the British had made the first attempt at colonization by establishing the Province of Freedom on the coastline of present-day Sierra Leone. For the next several decades, this colony provided a depot for the British to resettle Africans living in England, Nova Scotia, and Jamaica, and those captured and liberated from slave ships.

Drawing inspiration from the British, American abolitionists formed the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 and established the colony of Liberia in 1822 for similar purposes. The ACS garnered support from a mixed group of factions. Northern abolitionists and evangelicals felt that colonization would further gradual abolition, while American slaveholders viewed colonization as an opportunity to remove free blacks from the United States. By 1830, the ACS had established more than 200 auxiliary societies across the nation, but support for this organization started to wane as northern free blacks started resisting colonization and a new generation of American abolitionists arose, led by William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879).