Congressional Speeches on Imperialism by Senator Albert Beveridge (Indiana) and Senator George Hoar (Massachusetts) (1900)

One of the great questions occupying the U.S. public at the turn of the twentieth century was the fate of the Philippines following the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War. In 1896, Filipino nationalists had revolted against Spanish rule. Led by Emilio Aguinaldo, the nationalists supported the United States when it declared war against Spain in April 1898. In June, Aguinaldo declared Filipino independence, and in January 1899 he was elected president. However, the United States refused to recognize the new government. Feeling betrayed, Aguinaldo declared war on the United States in February. As the following speeches illustrate, the ensuing debate concerning the appropriate policy toward the Philippines was as heated in the Senate as it was throughout the country, pitting imperialists against anti-imperialists.

Notes: Aguinaldo was captured in March 1901 and declared his allegiance to the United States, although many people questioned his sincerity. In the war between the United States and the Filipino nationalists, which lasted until 1902, more than 40,000 Filipinos and 4,000 Americans lost their lives. The United States finally granted Filipino independence on July 4, 1946.

United States Senate, January 9, 1900, in Congressional Record, 56th Congress, 1st session, pp. 704, 708, 711–712.

Policy Regarding the Philippines.

Mr. BEVERIDGE. I ask for the reading of the joint resolution introduced by me on Thursday last.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair lays before the Senate the joint resolution introduced by the Senator from Indiana, which was laid on the table subject to his call. The joint resolution will be read.

The Secretary read the joint resolution (S. R. 53) defining the policy of the United States relative to the Philippine Islands, as follows:

Be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Philippine Islands are territory belonging to the United States; that it is the intention of the United States to retain them as such and to establish and maintain such governmental control throughout the archipelago as the situation may demand.

Mr. BEVERIDGE. Mr. President, I address the Senate at this time because Senators and Members of the House on both sides have asked that I give to Congress and the country my observations in the Philippines and the far East, and the conclusions which those observations compel; and because of hurtful resolutions introduced and utterances made in the Senate, every word of which will cost and is costing the lives of American soldiers.
Mr. President, the times call for candor. The Philippines are ours forever, “territory belonging to the United States,” as the Constitution calls them. And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not repudiate our duty in the archipelago. We will not abandon our opportunity in the Orient. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world. And we will move forward to our work, not howling out regrets like slaves whipped to their burdens, but with gratitude for a task worthy of our strength, and thanksgiving to Almighty God that He has marked us as His chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world.

Philippines Command the Pacific.

This island empire is the last land left in all the oceans. If it should prove a mistake to abandon it, the blunder once made would be irretrievable. If it proves a mistake to hold it, the error can be corrected when we will. Every other progressive nation stands ready to relieve us.

But to hold it will be no mistake. Our largest trade henceforth must be with Asia. The Pacific is our ocean. More and more Europe will manufacture the most it needs, secure from its colonies the most it consumes. Where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus? Geography answers the question. China is our natural customer. She is nearer to us than to England, Germany, or Russia, the commercial powers of the present and the future. They have moved nearer to China by securing permanent bases on her borders. The Philippines give us a base at the door of all the East.

Lines of navigation from our ports to the Orient and Australia; from the Isthmian Canal to Asia: from all Oriental ports to Australia, converge at and separate from the Philippines. They are a self-supporting, dividend-paying fleet, permanently anchored at a spot selected by the strategy of Providence, commanding the Pacific. And the Pacific is the ocean of the commerce of the future. Most future wars will be conflicts for commerce. The power that rules the Pacific, therefore, is the power that rules the world. And, with the Philippines, that power is and will forever be the American Republic....

“The Blood of Our Soldiers.”

Mr. President, reluctantly and only from a sense of duty am I forced to say that American opposition to the war has been the chief factor in prolonging it. Had Aguinaldo not understood that in America, even in the American Congress, even here in the Senate, he and his cause were supported; had he not known that it was proclaimed on the stump and in the press of a faction in the United States that every shot his misguided followers fired into the breasts of American soldiers was like the volleys fired by Washington’s men against the soldiers of King George his insurrection would have dissolved before it entirely crystallized.

The utterances of American opponents of the war are read to the ignorant soldiers of Aguinaldo and repeated in exaggerated form among the common people. Attempts have been made by wretches claiming American citizenship to ship arms and ammunition from
Asiatic ports to the Filipinos, and these acts of infamy were coupled by the Malays with American assaults on our Government at home. The Filipinos do not understand free speech, and therefore our tolerance of American assaults on the American President and the American Government means to them that our President is in the minority or he would not permit what appears to them such treasonable criticism. It is believed and stated in Luzon, Panay, and Cebu that the Filipinos have only to fight, harass, retreat, break up into small parties, if necessary, as they are doing now, but by any means hold out until the next Presidential election, and our forces will be withdrawn.

All this has aided the enemy more than climate, arms, and battle. Senators, I have heard these reports myself; I have talked with the people; I have seen our mangled boys in the hospital and field; I have stood on the firing line and beheld our dead soldiers, their faces turned to the pitiless southern sky, and in sorrow rather than anger I say to those whose voices in America have cheered those misguided natives on to shoot our soldiers down, that the blood of those dead and wounded boys of ours is on their hands, and the flood of all the years can never wash that stain away. In sorrow rather than anger I say these words, for I earnestly believe that our brothers knew not what they did.

The Filipinos Are Children, Utterly Incapable of Self-Government.

But, Senators, it would be better to abandon this combined garden and Gibraltar of the Pacific, and count our blood and treasure already spent a profitable loss, than to apply any academic arrangement of self-government to these children. They are not capable of self-government. How could they be? They are not of a self-governing race. They are Orientals, Malays, instructed by Spaniards in the latter’s worst estate. They know nothing of practical government except as they have witnessed the weak, corrupt, cruel, and capricious rule of Spain. What magic will anyone employ to dissolve in their minds and characters those impressions of governors and governed which three centuries of misrule has created? What alchemy will change the oriental quality of their blood and set the self-governing currents of the American pouring through their Malay veins. How shall they, in the twinkling of an eye, be exalted to the heights of self-governing peoples which required a thousand years for us to reach, Anglo-Saxon though we are?...

The Whole Question Elemental.

Mr. President, this question is deeper than any question of party politics; deeper than any question of the isolated policy of our country even; deeper even than any question of constitutional power. It is elemental. It is racial. God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adepts in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. Were it not for such a force as this the world would relapse into barbarism and night. And of all our race He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the
regeneration of the world. This is the divine mission of America, and it holds for us all the profit, all the glory, all the happiness possible to man. We are trustees of the world’s progress, guardians of its righteous peace. The judgment of the Master is upon us: “Ye have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things.”

What shall history say of us? Shall it say that we renounced that holy trust, left the savage to his base condition, the wilderness to the reign of waste, deserted duty, abandoned glory, forget our sordid profit even, because we feared our strength and read the charter of our powers with the doubter’s eye and the quibbler’s mind? Shall it say that, called by events to captain and command the proudest, ablest, purest race of history in history’s noblest work, we declined that great commission? Our fathers would not have had it so. No! They founded no paralytic government, incapable of the simplest acts of administration. They planted no sluggard people, passive while the world’s work calls them. They established no reactionary nation. They unfurled no retreating flag.

God’s Hand in All.

That flag has never paused in its onward march. Who dares halt it now—now, when history’s largest events are carrying it forward; now, when we are at last one people, strong enough for any task, great enough for any glory destiny can bestow? How comes it that our first century closes with the process of consolidating the American people into a unit just accomplished, and quick upon the stroke of that great hour presses upon us our world opportunity, world duty, and world glory, which none but a people welded into an indivisible nation can achieve or perform?

Blind indeed is he who sees not the hand of God in events so vast, so harmonious, so benign. Reactionary indeed is the mind that perceives not that this vital people is the strongest of the saving forces of the world: that our place, therefore, is at the head of the constructing and redeeming nations of the earth; and that to stand aside while events march on is a surrender of our interests, a betrayal of our duty as blind as it is base. Craven indeed is the heart that fears to perform a work so golden and so noble: that dares not win a glory so immortal.

Do you tell me that it will cost us money? When did Americans ever measure duty by financial standards? Do you tell me of the tremendous toil required to overcome the vast difficulties of our task? What mighty work for the world, for humanity, even for ourselves, has ever been done with ease? Even our bread must we eat by the sweat of our faces. Why are we charged with power such as no people ever knew, if we are not to use it in a work such as no people ever wrought? Who will dispute the divine meaning of the fable of the talents?

Do you remind me of the precious blood that must be shed, the lives that must be given, the broken hearts of loved ones for their slain? And this is indeed a heavier
price than all combined. And yet as a nation every historic duty we have done, every achievement we have accomplished, has been by the sacrifice of our noblest sons. Every holy memory that glorifies the flag is of those heroes who have died that its onward march might not be stayed. It is the nation’s dearest lives yielded for the flag that makes it dear to us: it is the nation’s most precious blood poured out for it that makes it precious to us. That flag is woven of heroism and grief, of the bravery of men and women’s tears, of righteousness and battle, of sacrifice and anguish, of triumph and of glory. It is these which make our flag a holy thing. Who would tear from that sacred banner the glorious legends of a single battle where it has waved on land or sea? What son of a soldier of the flag whose father fell beneath it on any field would surrender that proud record for the heraldry of a king? In the cause of civilization, in the service of the Republic anywhere on earth, Americans consider wounds the noblest decorations man can win, and count the giving of their lives a glad and precious duty.

Pray God that spirit never fails. Pray God the time may never come when Mammon and the love of ease shall so debase our blood that we will fear to shed it for the flag and its imperial destiny. Pray God the time may never come when American heroism is but a legend like the story of the Cid, American faith in our mission and our might a dream dissolved, and the glory of our mighty race departed.

And that time will never come. We will renew our youth at the fountain of new and glorious deeds. We will exalt our reverence for the flag by carrying it to a noble future as well as by remembering its ineffable past. Its immortality will not pass, because everywhere and always we will acknowledge and discharge the solemn responsibilities our sacred flag, in its deepest meaning, puts upon us. And so, Senators, with reverent hearts, where dwells the fear of God, the American people move forward to the future of their hope and the doing of His work.

Mr. President and Senators, adopt the resolution offered, that peace may quickly come and that we may begin our saving, regenerating, and uplifting work. Adopt it, and this bloodshed will cease when these deluded children of our islands learn that this is the final word of the representatives of the American people in Congress assembled. Reject it, and the world, history, and the American people will know where to forever fix the awful responsibility for the consequences that will surely follow such failure to do our manifest duty. How dare we delay when our soldiers’ blood is flowing? [Applause in the galleries.]

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Applause is not permitted in the United States Senate.

Mr. HOAR. Mr. President—

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts will suspend for one moment. The Chair lays before the Senate the unfinished business, the title of which will be stated.
The SECRETARY. A bill (H. R. 1) to define and fix the standard of value, to maintain the parity of all forms of money issued or coined by the United States, and for other purposes.

Mr. HOAR. Mr. President, I ask that the unfinished business be informally laid aside, as I understand no Senator wishes to speak upon it this afternoon, and I desire to make a very few observations on the pending resolution.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts asks that the unfinished business may be temporarily laid aside. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and the Senator from Massachusetts will proceed.

Mr. HOAR. Mr. President, I have listened, delighted, as have, I suppose, all the members of the Senate, to the eloquence of my honorable friend from Indiana [Mr. Beveridge]. I am glad to welcome to the public service his enthusiasm, his patriotism, his silver speech, and the earnestness and the courage with which he has devoted himself to a discharge of his duty to the Republic as he conceives it. Yet, Mr. President, as I heard his eloquent description of wealth and glory and commerce and trade, I listened in vain for those words which the American people have been wont to take upon their lips in every solemn crisis of their history. I heard much calculated to excite the imagination of the youth seeking wealth or the youth charmed by the dream of empire. But the words Right, Justice, Duty, Freedom were absent, my friend must permit me to say, from that eloquent speech. I could think as this brave young Republic of ours listened to what he had to say of but one occurrence:

Then the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

And the devil said unto Him. “All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

Then saith Jesus unto him, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

Mr. President, the Senator himself and the evidence coming from our two commanders, General Otis and Admiral Dewey, and witnesses for whom they vouch, refute every one of the propositions of fact on which my honorable friend has built his glittering temple of glass. He describes the impotence and ineffectual attempt of Spain for three hundred years to reduce that people to subjection: tells us that she had failed. He counsels us to avoid the errors and the mistakes and the sins she has committed. If that be true, Mr. President, where did Spain get the right to sell the people of the Philippine Islands to us? They had risen against that effete and impotent and ineffectual effort of Spain; they had driven her from the entire soil of their island, save a single city; they hemmed in her troops in that single city of Manila by a cordon of their troops stretching from water to water; and Spain surrendered to us only because her soldiers could not get out of reach of the American guns without being compelled to surrender to the Filipinos.

I think you will have to enlarge the doctrines of the American Declaration of Independence. I think you will have to build anew a Constitution which, he says, is only
an instrument and not a rule of duty, before you can find your right to buy and sell that people like sheep.

My honorable friend, I am sure, when he reflects upon it, will never advise the people of the United States to do a base thing for all this wealth, for all this glory, for all this empire. I say if it be true that that was a people that desired independence and were fit for independence, then it would be a base thing for this young giant in its might to strike down that infant republic.

**Document Analysis**

How did Senator Beveridge use ethnicity and colonial history to support U.S. intervention in the Philippines? In his estimation, which races are superior?

How do both senators use Christianity to promote their arguments?

Which documents did Hoar use to refute Beveridge’s speech? What are the two sides of this argument, in brief?