

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, "FREE SILVER, TRUSTS, AND THE PHILIPPINES"  
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**Abstract:** This essay examines a vice presidential campaign speech by Theodore Roosevelt that reveals his vision of American national character and its role in world affairs. Delivered in support of William McKinley in 1900, the speech shows how Roosevelt defended American intervention in the Philippines. Presenting the administration's expansionist policies as a test of America's honor, national unity, and strength, Roosevelt portrayed critics of expansionism as weak, unpatriotic, and unwilling to perform America's "manly" duties.

**Key Words:** Campaign of 1900, Theodore Roosevelt, American Identity, Imperialism, The Philippines, U.S. Foreign Policy, Expansion

Theodore Roosevelt is one of our most celebrated presidents, and his leadership in the early 1900s made him "the symbol of the new century."<sup>1</sup> Yet, even before he became president, Roosevelt worked hard to define the nation's ideals and its proper role in the world. Writing and speaking prolifically, Roosevelt spent much of the 1880s and 1890s advocating that the United States do more to realize its destiny as a leader among nations. During his campaign for vice president in 1900, Roosevelt previewed many of the themes that he would address in his more famous presidential speeches, including his calls for America to assume a more active role in international affairs. Roosevelt's legacy is deeply connected to his vision of the United States. He believed in the honor and nobility of the U.S. government, and he believed in rugged individualism, which he viewed as the basis for both personal and national character. As Leroy G. Dorsey explains, Roosevelt "provided citizens with an appealing image--that of dynamic, strong, reasoned, and uniquely capable people who had dominated their surroundings through their strength of body, mind, and character."<sup>2</sup> These visions were also connected to America's physical reality. The myths surrounding the American frontier and western expansion were crucial to the ways in which Roosevelt talked about the United States.

Roosevelt's attitude toward world affairs is often summarized by his famous phrase, "speak softly and carry a big stick." His views were more complex than this aphorism would suggest, however, as he often made subtle distinctions between America's friends and foes and offered nuanced arguments about America's foreign policy interests. Prior to assuming the presidency, Roosevelt's most famous performance on the world stage came during the Spanish American War, when he led his famous cavalry charge up San Juan Hill. Yet Roosevelt's early speeches and writings reveal that TR was much more than a warrior and a champion of "The Strenuous Life."<sup>3</sup> He also had a complex and considered *philosophy* of the American character that would be tested in the international arena. For Roosevelt, as Stephen Wertheim explains,

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"nations, like individuals, rose and fell on their character, their set of emotional, intellectual, and particularly moral qualities that were partly granted by race and partly molded by experience."<sup>4</sup> Even before his presidency, Roosevelt's speeches and writings reflected his vision of American identity.

The campaign of 1900 brought to the fore the differences between the Republican and Democratic platforms on U.S. foreign policy. Determined to make the election a referendum on imperialism, the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, blasted away at the McKinley administration for its hypocrisy. Focusing upon an ongoing debate over whether the United States ought to annex the Philippines, he claimed, "Republicans who three years ago condemned 'forcible annexation' as immoral and even criminal are now sure that it is both immoral and criminal to oppose forcible annexation."<sup>5</sup> While McKinley barely responded, preferring to emphasize his incumbency by conducting only a "front porch" campaign, Roosevelt seized upon the opportunity not only to respond to Bryan but to elaborate upon his own philosophy of American character and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. Traveling thousands of miles and delivering hundreds of speeches, the young vice presidential candidate became the face of the Republican campaign, particularly on the "imperialism" issue.

In a speech given on September 7, 1900 at Grand Rapids, Michigan, Roosevelt defended the administration in his usual fashion, but he also outlined more explicitly the administration's policies in the Philippines. While many of the arguments presented in this speech were touched on in other addresses during the campaign, he more clearly clarified his larger vision of American character in the Grand Rapids speech, articulating the nation's proper role in world affairs. In defending the administration's policy, Roosevelt described the importance of the Philippines for the United States, distinguishing his position--and presumably that of the administration--from those who simply sought new markets or new trading opportunities in the Philippines. Roosevelt framed the whole issue in terms of what he believed made America great: honor, national unity, and strength. For Roosevelt, the debate over the Philippines was not just about American prosperity or even its proper role in international affairs. It was about the country's sense of self and America's "manly" duty to protect the Philippines. Thus, the speech not only defended the administration's policy in the Philippines, but also clarified his notion of "Americanism" and his attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy.

### *Theodore Roosevelt: The Myth and Legend*

Theodore Roosevelt cultivated the image of a rough-and-tumble cowboy, but he was brought up as an urban gentleman. Born in 1858 in New York City, he was the second child of a respected banker and the daughter of a prosperous Georgia planter. Roosevelt was a sickly child who suffered from frequent asthma attacks. His early life hardly resembled his later persona. Richard Collin states, "An aristocrat by social status if not overwhelming wealth, young Theodore had the classic gentleman's schooling: private tutoring and trips to Europe rather than formal learning in school."<sup>6</sup> Descending from Dutch immigrants, his family's lineage could be traced back to 1642, and the Roosevelt clan was strongly identified with American public life. Relatives had battled in the Revolutionary War, helped build New York City, and fought on both sides of the Civil War. According to David Burton, this lineage deeply affected the young Roosevelt, who had a "patriotic dedication" deeply embedded in his "ways of thinking and

acting, a presupposition of his public work and personal principles. America's best interest and doing one's best were hardly distinguishable in his ancestors or, in his own judgment, in himself."<sup>7</sup> By the age of twenty-five, Roosevelt already had published a well-regarded historical work, *The Naval War of 1812*, but he aspired to more than the solitary life of a scholar. In 1881, he entered politics and was elected a New York State Assemblyman, the youngest person ever to win that office.<sup>8</sup> Still in his twenties, Roosevelt seemed destined for political greatness.

While his upbringing and heritage explain much of Roosevelt's scholarly and political leanings, he was also greatly influenced by his experiences in the American West. After the tragic loss of his first wife and his mother on the same day (from two unrelated diseases), Roosevelt left for the Dakota Territory in 1884.<sup>9</sup> The trip was in part therapeutic, as he apparently hoped that the challenges of the West would distract him from his grief. Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels write that Roosevelt believed that if he "could survive the severe self-testing" of life on the frontier, "he could expect to live his full span of years and prosper."<sup>10</sup> Roosevelt had previously been out West, both to aid his health and on hunting excursions, but from 1884 to 1886, he lived as a rancher. His experiences profoundly affected his later views of politics and of the American character. Roosevelt "identified himself personally as a part of the great western movement led by the Anglo-American race," writes Burton. And "The West captured the imagination of Theodore Roosevelt the American and enabled him to place the frontier history of his country in the context of the modern world."<sup>11</sup> Later reflecting upon the frontier and his experiences in the West, Roosevelt wrote an epic four-volume history, *The Winning of the West*, which essentially endorsed Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" that "taming" the frontier shaped America's unique character as a nation.<sup>12</sup>

After a terrible winter killed much of his livestock, Roosevelt returned to New York in 1886 and was defeated in his bid to become the Republican candidate for mayor of New York City. During this time, however, he continued to write, and by the close of the decade he was again involved in politics, accepting an appointment as a U.S. Civil Service commissioner from 1889-1895. After a short term as President of the Board of Police Commissioners in New York, President McKinley appointed Roosevelt Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897.<sup>13</sup> The following year, Roosevelt resigned that position in order to organize the First U.S. Voluntary Cavalry Regiment, better known as the "Rough Riders," for service in the Spanish-American War.<sup>14</sup> The experience officially thrust Theodore Roosevelt into the public limelight and made him a national political figure.<sup>15</sup>

The Rough Riders reflected Roosevelt's own odd combination of personality traits. Consisting of more than 1,200 men, the unit included both cowboys from the western plains and Ivy leaguers from the East.<sup>16</sup> The only requirement was that they could ride a horse and shoot a gun. The national media immediately had its eye on the group. The *Denver Field and Farm* declared, "Keep an eye on Teddy's Terrors. They are the stuff from which came the knighted chivalry of old."<sup>17</sup> The men were also impressed by Roosevelt: "The troopers were awed by this straightforward dynamo who claimed that whatever an individual wills himself to be, he can be. . . . When the men wrote home, they declared that he was one of the wonders of America, as turbulent and as terrific as Niagara Falls."<sup>18</sup> Although they saw earlier action, the crowning moment for the Rough Riders came on July 1, 1898, during the battle of San Juan Heights in Cuba. Roosevelt, now as colonel, displayed strong leadership and personal courage as he led the group in a charge up Kettle Hill, which helped to secure the heights overlooking

the capital city of Santiago.<sup>19</sup> The Rough Riders, and above all Roosevelt, became overnight heroes.

Shortly after the Rough Riders' return, Roosevelt reentered the political arena. Nominated by the Republican Party within six months of his return, Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York. Yet before the year was out, he left the state to campaign as William McKinley's vice presidential candidate.<sup>20</sup> McKinley and Roosevelt won the election, but Roosevelt's tenure as vice president would be short-lived. In September 1901, McKinley was assassinated by the anarchist named Leon Frank Czolgosz and Roosevelt assumed the presidency as the youngest Commander-in-Chief in U.S. history. In the 1904 election, Roosevelt won reelection by a margin of more than two-and-a-half million votes.<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt interpreted his win in 1904 as an endorsement of his leadership and a mandate to continue his domestic and foreign policies.

The seven years Roosevelt served as president, as well as his subsequent career, were certainly remarkable. As president, Roosevelt became well-known for his criticism of the trusts, for establishing a stronger U.S. presence in Latin America and building the Panama Canal, and for creating the national park system. For his efforts to end the Russo-Japanese War, he was the first American awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>22</sup> Later, his expeditions to Africa helped supply the Smithsonian with valuable animal specimens. In 1912 he again ran for president on the Progressive or "Bull Moose" ticket. Although he lost that election to Woodrow Wilson, he won the greatest number of electoral votes of any third party candidate in American history.

Throughout his life, Roosevelt was a fighter. While campaigning for president in 1912, he was shot and wounded in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Not only did he go on to deliver his speech as scheduled, he would carry the bullet in his body for the rest of his life. In the final years of his life, Roosevelt continued to speak out about politics, and he wrote extensively. Most notably, he pushed hard for American involvement in World War I, but he would not live to witness the debate over the Versailles treaty and the League of Nations.<sup>23</sup> On January 6, 1919, less than two months after the armistice ending WWI, Roosevelt died at the age of sixty from a coronary embolism. Roosevelt's leadership, however, helped transition the country into the new century.

### *Welcoming the Modern Era: The Context for TR's Vice Presidential Campaign Speeches*

The turn of the twentieth century marked a momentous time in U.S. history. The Republican Party rode high on economic prosperity and the startling success of the Spanish American War. In just 109 days, the young country had brought an established European power to its knees. Roosevelt understood the significance of that victory and the challenges the United States would now face as a world power. The previous thirty years had witnessed a scramble for economic advantage by the world's imperial powers. Within the United States, as G. Wallace Chessman notes, a variety of impulses drove fervent nationalistic impulses: "Nationalism grew harsh and militant as it was infused with fears of exclusion from valuable markets, and with the persuasive theory that survival in the struggle of nations, as of men, went to the fittest. Christian apologists joined racists in justifying the extension of civilized rule over the worlds' backward peoples."<sup>24</sup>

William Jennings Bryan was particularly concerned that annexation of the Philippines would create a permanent thirst for expansion. He argued, "The spirit which will justify the

forcible annexation of the Philippine Islands will justify the seizure of other islands and the domination of other people, and with wars of conquest we can expect a certain, if not rapid, growth of our own military establishment."<sup>25</sup> Bryan worried specifically about the effects of a large military on the United States itself, but he also empathized with the Filipinos. Bryan, a religious man, was particularly concerned about arguments that the nation had a moral duty to control the Philippines, arguing that God "never made a race of people so low in the scale of civilization or intelligence that it would welcome a foreign master."<sup>26</sup> In some regards, Bryan's arguments were as much practical as moral. He explained, "If the islands [the Philippines] were uninhabited American citizens would not be willing to go there and till the soil. The white race will not live so near the equator."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Bryan suggested that the environment was best suited to the darker races and that white, "civilized" people were ill-suited for the tropics. While Roosevelt was not among those who advocated expansion primarily in religious or racial terms, he still felt the need to respond to Bryan's charges. Roosevelt had to answer the charge that domination of the Filipinos and other foreign peoples was not only impractical but immoral.

Compared to many of his contemporaries, Roosevelt's views on the duties of the white race were actually quite restrained. No doubt he shared the view of many white Americans that their race was superior to the brown, black, and red peoples of the world. But he suggested that such "backward" races eventually might progress to the point where they were capable of enjoying the blessings of liberty. Writing in 1904, Roosevelt argued that, "in dealing with the Philippines," only "jack fools" could seriously believe that "any group of pirates and head-hunters" could be awarded independence and "turned forthwith into a dark-hued New England town meeting . . ." <sup>28</sup> Roosevelt's rejection of immediate independence for the Filipinos was thus cast in specifically racial terms. At the same time, his larger point was about the need to educate and prepare people for democratic citizenship. Like the famous pro-imperialist poet Rudyard Kipling, Roosevelt embraced "The White Man's Burden" to uplift or "civilize" the Philippines, and Kipling even sent his poem to TR to encourage him to push for annexation.<sup>29</sup>

Roosevelt also seemed to believe that a continued U.S. role in the Philippines would provide the United States with a new "frontier" where it could demonstrate its honor, strength, and courage to the rest of the world. Wertheim explains that Roosevelt believed that through "outward expansion, civilization would revitalize its core."<sup>30</sup> The frontier experience had consequently shaped America's character as a great nation; the new frontier of the Pacific, Roosevelt reasoned, afforded another opportunity for the nation to prove itself on the international stage.

The Philippines, however, proved to be particularly difficult territory. While Guam and Puerto Rico saw limited fighting and the countries transitioned easily from Spanish to U.S. control, the Philippines was a different matter. Beginning in 1896, Filipinos led revolts against the Spanish, and they fought with the United States during the Spanish-American War. The cooperation was short lived, however, for after the war's conclusion, the Filipinos were unwilling to substitute one colonial ruler with another. By the time of Roosevelt's speech, the Philippines had spent four years developing a strong sense of national identity and an army willing to fight for that cause. Oscar Alfonso writes that, to a certain extent, the United States was "paying for the sins of Spain and feeling the effects of the Filipino's new-found sense of national coherence."<sup>31</sup> While some Americans suggested that the Filipinos should be granted independence for their cooperation, others agreed with Roosevelt that Philippine General

Emilio Aguinaldo and his military leaders were unfit to govern a nation. Many other Americans, however, doubted that the United States could ever effectively govern the Philippines. Eight thousand miles from San Francisco, the Philippines consisted of more than 1,000 inhabited islands (and nearly 7,000 islands total) and a population that reached 7,000,000 people, according to the first U.S. census in 1903.<sup>32</sup> To maintain control over this distant, sprawling, and unfamiliar nation would be a daunting task, but Roosevelt portrayed it as an opportunity for the country to prove itself and to bring civilization to the very fringes of the known world.

Roosevelt carried this message to the campaign trail with great enthusiasm, serving as McKinley's point man in the campaign of 1900. The president conducted a "dignified" canvass from his front porch in Canton, Ohio, Chessman writes, but Roosevelt "crossed the country defending the administration."<sup>33</sup> Roosevelt became the public face of the McKinley campaign, and he took full advantage of the opportunity, campaigning with seemingly boundless energy from one end of the country to other. By the end of the campaign, TR had traveled more than 21,000 miles, giving 673 speeches to an estimated 3,000,000 people.<sup>34</sup> The campaign, according to Richard Murphy, "almost worked him to death."<sup>35</sup> In just eight weeks, Roosevelt had visited 24 states, covering more territory than any other presidential or vice presidential candidate before him, including Bryan himself.<sup>36</sup> To many, it seemed as if Roosevelt, not McKinley, was the real head of the Republican ticket.<sup>37</sup> A political sketch from the time period captured TR's campaign: "Tis Tiddy alone that's runnin,' an' he ain't runnin,' he's gallopin."<sup>38</sup> September 6-7, 1900, was typical of his campaign. Starting out in Detroit, Michigan, TR ended up in Grand Rapids the following day after delivering ten speeches.<sup>39</sup>

Roosevelt's whistle-stop tour through Michigan came early in the campaign, but he attracted huge and wildly enthusiastic audiences. The *Kansas Semi-Weekly Capital* reported that in Detroit "the floor and galleries of the great hall were crowded. Many were on the outside, unable to obtain seats or standing room within hearing distance." Roosevelt received "a tremendously enthusiastic greeting" as he prepared to speak, as a "large proportion of the audience stood upon chairs and yelled frantically for 'Teddy.'"<sup>40</sup> In Grand Rapids, the reception was equally enthusiastic, according to the *Boston Morning Journal*, as "an exuberant street demonstration met Gov. Roosevelt [upon] his arrival in the city" and the "crowds everywhere were appreciative and responsive."<sup>41</sup> Every report reflected the overwhelming excitement people felt at seeing a living legend, and they responded enthusiastically to his speeches. Stephen E. Lucas explains that unlike most vice presidential candidates, Roosevelt was already "a major national figure at the time of his nomination." His "vigorous stumping" only further enhanced his popularity.<sup>42</sup> Even as a vice presidential candidate, Roosevelt thus reached a large national audience and solidified his reputation as an American hero.

### *"Free Silver, Trusts, and the Philippines"*

Roosevelt's speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan on September 7, 1900, touched on three subjects: free silver, trusts, and the Philippines, and was in some ways typical of his campaign efforts.<sup>43</sup> Like others that TR delivered during the campaign, this speech was, in large measure, a response to criticisms from the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan. Bryan, of course, had raised the issue of "free silver" in the previous election, but by 1900, that issue had lost its luster. Despite Bryan's dark prophesies, the Republican Party's win in 1896 had brought

economic relief to the country, and Roosevelt took every opportunity to point that out. Roosevelt argued that while President McKinley's administration was not "solely responsible for our present well-being," his policies "rendered it possible for the American people to achieve such well-being. I insist furthermore that the one and only way to insure wide-spread industrial and social ruin would be now to reverse the policy under which we have so prospered, and to try that policy . . . we rejected in '96" (1). Bryan's 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech had made a name for the Nebraska Senator. His campaign for the silver standard, which would have, ostensibly, given farmers some economic relief (largely at the expense of North-Eastern creditors), represents a key moment in the populist tradition of American politics. By 1900, however, the issue had faded, and Roosevelt was able to effectively dismiss Bryan's financial ideas and proposals as "utterly ruinous" (1).

Bryan himself tried to turn the election of 1900 into a referendum on U.S. imperialism. Roosevelt's speech in Grand Rapids sheds light on how the Republicans defused that challenge. Responding specifically to Bryan's criticisms of America's role in the Philippines, Roosevelt turned the issue into a question of national honor and America's moral responsibilities. Indeed, for both sides in the 1900 election, as Paul McCartney has noted, "America's expansion into the Philippines was much more than just a foreign policy." For good or ill, it also was "an expression of national morality." Moreover, many believed that the very "identity of the United States" hung in the balance as the voters decided whether to embrace a policy of U.S. intervention in the Philippines and elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> According to Roosevelt, Bryan and others opposed McKinley only because he had been "too active in upholding the honor of the flag" (1).

In speaking about the Philippines, Roosevelt described the situation as a humanitarian crisis demanding American intervention. Robert V. Friedenberg explains that Roosevelt typically cast political issues in moral terms, arguing that the "answers to public questions" invariably involved "fundamental rights and wrongs."<sup>45</sup> Roosevelt portrayed the conflict as a continuing war demanding unity and commitment from the American people. Finally, he urged empathy for the suffering Filipinos and suggested that the U.S. intervention was their only hope for the future. All of these arguments were, at bottom, *moral* arguments, and Roosevelt stated his own moral convictions with his usual assurance.

Roosevelt rested his moral argument for intervention in the Philippines on a historical comparison between the elections of 1864 and 1900. Abraham Lincoln, of course, had become a larger-than-life character by the turn of the twentieth century, and comparing McKinley with "honest Abe" recalled the glory days of the Republican Party. Roosevelt's claim was simple and direct: "Not since the close of the Civil War have we ever had an administration which did so much to uphold the honor and interests of America as President McKinley's" (3). And just to assure that his listeners understood the full implications of the comparison, Roosevelt elaborated on both the morality of the cause that led the United States into the Philippines and the positive effects of that war on American politics and culture: "Not only was the Spanish War the most righteous foreign war undertaken by any nation during the lifetime of the present generation, but it welded this country once and for all into an undivided nation" (3).

Roosevelt argued that, like Lincoln, McKinley risked his own political fortunes to do the right thing in the Philippines. Indeed, McKinley's intervention in the Philippines, Roosevelt suggested, was comparable to Lincoln freeing the slaves. "In 1864," he declared, "the name of liberty was invoked to secure the continuance of slavery. In 1900 it is invoked to secure the

abandonment of American honor and to throw the Philippines under the rule of a corrupt and tyrannous oligarchy" (4). For Roosevelt, the parallels were obvious. "In 1864, the cry of imperialism was raised exactly as it is now raised," he concluded, and it was raised "with just as little basis" (4).

Roosevelt did little to clarify why the Spanish War represented a "most righteous" cause, nor did he fully detail the parallels between 1864 and 1900. He did, however, appeal to his audience's national pride and moral idealism. Calling upon his listeners to join in a righteous crusade, he made support for the administration's policy in the Philippines a test of one's patriotism. In demanding terms he asserted: "As we in the time of the war appealed to all men who were good Americans, so now in preserving the results of the war . . . we appeal again to all good men whatever their political affiliations have been in the past . . . to stand with us because we stand for the honor and interest of our common country" (3). While other parts of the speech specifically criticized aspects of the Democratic platform, Roosevelt sought to transcend party lines with his appeals to patriotism and national honor.

The Civil War analogy was complex but allowed Roosevelt to further emphasize the value of national unity. While the Civil War tore the nation apart, the Spanish American War (and by extension the continued fighting in the Philippines) presumably brought it back together, uniting both North and South in common cause. Roosevelt explained, "Our generals [in the Spanish-American War] included not only men who fought on the Union side in the Civil War, but men who had with equal gallantry and equal devotion to what they deemed their duty, borne arms for the South," and the country "took equal pride in them all" (3). National unity, like rugged individualism, was an important theme for Roosevelt, especially during war. When threatened from abroad, it was not enough to have individual men of strength and character; the nation as a whole also had to act as one.

Having portrayed the conflict in the Philippines as a great moral cause demanding national unity, Roosevelt, not surprisingly, was particularly harsh toward those who dissented against the policy. Roosevelt supported his position by using a quotation from a U.S. soldier stationed in the Philippines. Reading the Southern Democrat's words, TR relayed that "From an intelligent prisoner the other day I learned that the people were assured that Bryan would be elected and that our ships would be withdrawn and the massacre of Americans would be the order of the day . . . ." Despite his party affiliation, the Democrat wrote to Roosevelt "that if Bryan and his sympathizers cannot make their campaign without such acts and speech as are traitorous to the government in time of war, it would be more generous and noble to hold their opinions in abeyance until we can straighten out this tangle" (10). By quoting the Southern Democrat, Roosevelt hoped to show that support for the troops transcended partisan and sectional differences. Beyond that, of course, he indirectly characterized Bryan's views on the Philippines as virtually treasonous. In another speech during his campaign swing through Michigan, Roosevelt was even more direct in suggesting that Bryan had betrayed U.S. soldiers in the Philippines: "It is a terrible and most lamentable truth that our soldiers who are now facing death in the Philippines are forced to recognize in the Bryanistic Democracy their most dangerous foe." He went on to say, still more dramatically, that the "bullets that slay our men in Luzon are inspired by the denouncers of America here."<sup>46</sup> Quoting soldiers under fire, of course, gave credibility to Roosevelt's claim that Bryan's policies threatened the troops in the field and implied that any dissent against the war threatened the lives of American soldiers.

In addition to arguing that Bryan's policies would be disastrous for the United States and the troops already fighting in the Philippines, Roosevelt insisted that the nation had the moral duty to help the natives of the Philippines. Roosevelt's attitude toward the Filipinos was rooted in a patronizing and paternalistic attitude, but he described it as an obligation to protect them from both Spain and their own leaders: "The simple truth is that we rescued those islands from the hideous tyranny of the Spaniards and the anarchy of the corrupt and bloody insurgent chiefs." According to Roosevelt, there could be no "blacker wrong" to now "turn them back to their own devices to work out their own destruction" (7). With the insurgents particularly ruthless toward those natives who had supported the American presence, pulling out now, Roosevelt suggested, would result in more bloodshed and chaos.

Roosevelt's rhetoric suggested that the Filipinos needed to be nurtured and cared for until they could be trusted to govern themselves. Until then, they would be reliant on the leadership and protection of the Americans. Quoting an American General in the Philippines, Roosevelt made his point in explicitly racial terms: "It would probably be impossible to find any fairly competent white observer in the islands who regard the natives as able to maintain order here or to protect the persons and property of foreigners" (14). Roosevelt, like many of the political cartoonists of the day, viewed the Filipinos as too child-like to govern themselves. Wertheim explains, "So long as they remained childlike, their will lacked moral significance."<sup>47</sup> The Filipinos could not be trusted with independence until they better understood how to sustain a democratic government. Roosevelt initially believed that it might take generations before the Filipinos were ready for independence; as president though he did work to lead them down a path toward eventual self-rule. In 1907, he created a Philippine legislative assembly that included both elected Filipinos and American appointees.<sup>48</sup> In this earlier period of active conflict, however, Roosevelt held firm to the view that the United States should maintain complete control over the islands.

Roosevelt argued that granting independence to the Filipinos would not only show weakness but betray the Filipinos and "civilization" in general. Giving the Filipinos independence would be an act "of culpable folly and weakness," he insisted, as well as one of "treachery and inhumanity" (12). He concluded that, almost by definition, expansion by the United States meant the spread of civilization and peace. As Roosevelt put it: "Our stay in the islands is the condition precedent of peace. With us expansion means, as it always meant, peace." To clarify his point, Roosevelt reminded his audience of what the United States had already accomplished through expansion: "When we expanded west of the Mississippi it meant that we put a stop to the tribal warfare which had endured for ages among Sioux and Crow, Cheyenne and Pawnee. So now the establishment of our rule in the Philippines means to give the islands peace, and it is the only chance they have of getting good government" (6). Apparently oblivious to criticisms of America's Indian policies on the western frontier, Roosevelt thus made explicit the connections he saw between America's taming of its own frontier and its intervention in the Philippines.

In this sense, America's policy in the Philippines became, for Roosevelt, something of a natural continuation of America's own frontier experience. Like that earlier westward expansion, American intervention in the Philippines brought peace and stability to the area, benefiting both the native people and the larger cause of civilization. For Roosevelt, American intervention in the Philippines was, at one level, simply the right thing to do. As Friedenber

noted, Roosevelt believed that the "readiness to employ force on behalf of righteousness" was not only the mark of a great nation, but ultimately was necessary to "avoid the violence and injustice that weakness provoke[s]." <sup>49</sup> Beyond that, he believed that America's unique and distinctive character had been forged by the challenges the nation faced on its own Western frontier. Greatly impressed by Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis," as Collin has noted, Roosevelt was convinced that the strength and distinctive character of the American people had been forged by "their own westward movement," <sup>50</sup> including the taming of the "savage" Indians of the West. This narrative, as Dorsey notes, was essentially a "retelling of the Puritans' mission into the wilderness," <sup>51</sup> through which they discovered the true purpose or calling in life. With the American frontier now closed, Roosevelt arguably looked to the Philippines and other noncontiguous lands as a "new frontier" where Americans might not only prove themselves but advance civilization. In this narrative, America was not just another "imperialist nation" but one with a special destiny to spread democracy and "civilization." In so portraying expansion as simply "carrying forward an old American tradition," as Howard Beale has noted, Roosevelt and other expansionists were able to quiet people's fears about "a new departure" from its traditional isolationism and marshal "national pride" with memories of America's "glorious past." <sup>52</sup>

In concluding his speech in Grand Rapids, Roosevelt made a final appeal to his audience's sense of manhood. He argued, "We respect the man who goes out to do a man's work, to front difficulties and overcome them, and to train up his children to do likewise" (17). Here Roosevelt was asking his audience to do what he believed he himself had done throughout his life: strive "manfully" to overcome weaknesses, physical obstacles, and difficulty. Hunting, ranching, and even combat were all, in effect, extensions of Roosevelt's own childhood struggles to overcome his physical limitations. <sup>53</sup> Roosevelt's final plea reflected how he valued these masculine ideals and tied them to his larger vision of national greatness. He asked individuals, regardless of party, "to stand with us now when we ask that the hands of President McKinley be upheld, and that this nation instead of shrinking in unmanly terror from its duty, shall stride forward, to use its giant strength for the upholding of our honor and the interests of mankind in doing that part of the world's work which Providence has allotted to us" (17). Roosevelt thus pulled all his themes together, emphasizing honor, unity, strength, and duty. And for good measure, he concluded by portraying the expansion in the Philippines as part of God's plan for America.

### *Roosevelt's Enduring Legacy*

To highlight all the ways in which Theodore Roosevelt left his mark on American politics and culture would be a daunting task, but the more specific legacies of his speech in Grand Rapids are more easily described. First, Roosevelt's September 7th speech helps us to understand Roosevelt's rhetorical gifts and his success as an orator. As in many of his more famous speeches, his speech in Grand Rapids appealed to fundamental American values. By appealing to his audience's values and their pride in American ideals, Roosevelt invited his audience to identify proudly with his narrative of American history. He presented complex issues in simple, moralistic terms, inviting his audience to think about right versus wrong. Although an aggressive man himself, he turned the U.S. war in the Philippines into a defensive

policy, bound-up with the country's "natural" duty. In these ways, Roosevelt reframed expansion as consistent with America's traditions and as a matter of principle. Bryan wanted to turn the election into a referendum on the morality of imperialism, but Roosevelt undercut that effort by portraying American intervention in the Philippines as a morally worthy crusade.

Many of Roosevelt's appeals were distinctive but hardly unique. Other politicians, both for and against expansion, spoke about national honor and the nation's moral duties.<sup>54</sup> Many also echoed Roosevelt's call for national unity. Yet in comparing the conflict in the Philippines to the Civil War and blaming the Democrats for dividing the nation, Roosevelt launched a harshly partisan response to Bryan's critique of imperialism. According to Roosevelt, the Democrats were not just misguided or wrong about America's duties overseas; they were jeopardizing American troops and dishonoring the nation.

At the most basic level, Roosevelt was also asking his audience to act like "real men." The Philippines presented a challenge, and it demanded a "manly" response. The United States needed to show strength and protect the weaker population of the Philippines; Roosevelt had long cultivated the personal ethos to issue such a command. He had spent much of his life proving his own "manliness," and he was now asking the nation to do the same. Roosevelt's personal adventures reflected "the daydreams of thousands of action-oriented American boys,"<sup>55</sup> and many of his achievements as president, including the establishment of the national parks and his other conservation initiatives, reflected his commitment to the active, outdoor life. So did overseas expansion. Roosevelt imagined national adventures in the Philippines and elsewhere providing the same sorts of challenges and "tests" of character that he chronicled in his writings about the "winning of the West."

The most obvious legacy of Roosevelt's speech in Grand Rapids--and the policies it defended--can be seen in the fate of the Philippines themselves. The Philippines did not remain under American control forever. On its own independence day, America granted the Philippines its independence on July 4, 1946, ending fifty years of governance as a U.S. territory. That long period of dependence, however, meant that the islands would likely remain closely connected to the United States economically and militarily. Roosevelt approved of America's early domination of the Philippines, but he likely would also have approved of the current relationship between the two countries. In Roosevelt's framework, now that the Philippines had "grown up," they earned the right to govern themselves. When Roosevelt announced his famous corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904, he made clear that the United States claimed the right to intervene in Latin America when the instability of local governments threatened regional security. Once a government proved its ability to pay its own debts and to police itself, the United States had no interest in governing it from afar, according to the corollary.<sup>56</sup> And that principle also applied to the Philippines. Of course, Roosevelt's framework, as presented in the September 7th speech, also helped justify the annexation of Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and eastern Samoa, all of which remain under U.S. control.

Even today Roosevelt's legacy can be seen in arguments for American intervention in distant parts of the world. Patrick Brantlinger has made those connections explicit: "The idea that the majority of Filipinos were savages . . . in need of civilizing by the United States or some other branch of white race, is an obvious instance of the standard justification for imperial expansion used from the Renaissance to the present situation of 'nation-building' in Afghanistan and Iraq."<sup>57</sup> Roosevelt's rhetoric was comparatively charitable toward the Filipinos

and their abilities as a race (in comparison, say, to Albert Beveridge), but he clearly viewed them in 1900 as incapable of self-government and "savage" in character. Today, as John Wickham has suggested, the terrorist attacks of September 11 have revived similar attitudes toward allegedly "backward" peoples, and some have even combined a "Christian sense of mission with patriotism" in a new version of "manifest destiny" known as the War on Terror.<sup>58</sup> Like Theodore Roosevelt, President George W. Bush's rhetoric after the 9/11 terrorist attacks drew clear and simple lines between right and wrong and suggested that our course was beyond debate. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, for example, Bush declared: "America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right, true and unchanging for all people everywhere."<sup>59</sup> Roosevelt championed some of these same core values of American identity, and they continue to be invoked as justifications for American interventionism.

America's history of interventionist foreign policies are certainly not Roosevelt's legacy alone. Yet his rhetoric played on a popular American sentiment which holds that the country has a special right or calling to "police" the whole world in the name of American ideals. At the time of the Spanish American War, such claims seemed optimistic, even brash, as America was just beginning to rise to world leadership. As Collin observes, "American was young, exuberant, and developing; Spain was old, tired, and decadent."<sup>60</sup> Today, on the other hand, much of the world has grown wary and suspicious of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Yet even now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the rhetoric of national honor, unity, and strength continues to be important. Roosevelt helped to craft a sense of American identity that remains strong still today.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Leroy G. Dorsey, *We Are All Americans, Pure and Simple: Theodore Roosevelt and the Myth of Americanism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 20.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of "The Strenuous Life" and multiple versions of the speech text, see Leroy G. Dorsey, "Theodore Roosevelt: 'The Strenuous Life,'" *Voices of Democracy*, 3 (2008): 1-16, <http://www.voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/TRStrenuousLife.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Wertheim, "Reluctant Liberator: Theodore Roosevelt's Philosophy of Self-Government and Preparation for Philippine Independence," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (2009): 499.

<sup>5</sup> William Jennings Bryan, "Imperialism: August 8 1900," *Voices of Democracy*, para 9. See also William Jennings Bryan, in *Bryan on Imperialism* (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1970), 71.

<sup>6</sup> Dorsey, *We Are All Americans*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> David H. Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Murphy, "Theodore Roosevelt," in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, edited by Marie Kathryn Hochmuth (New York, Russell and Russell, 1955): 3:313-365.

<sup>9</sup> His first wife died from a kidney infection shortly after giving birth to their first child, Alice, on St. Valentine's Day, 1884. His mother had died hours earlier in the same house from typhoid fever.

<sup>10</sup> Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan: The Making of a President* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>11</sup> Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> The first two volumes were published in 1889; the last volume was finished in 1896. He also published other accounts of his life in the West, such as *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1886), *Ranch Life and Hunting Trial* (1888), and *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893).

<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt had also remarried (to his childhood sweetheart Edith Kermit Carow) and had five additional children that competed for his time.

<sup>14</sup> Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> H. W. Brands, "Politics as Performance Art: The Body English of Theodore Roosevelt," in *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership*, edited by Leroy G. Dorsey (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002): 119.

<sup>16</sup> Samuels and Samuels, *Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan*, 31-36.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in Samuels and Samuels, *Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Samuels and Samuels, *Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan*, 47

<sup>19</sup> Samuels and Samuels, *Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan*, 46. While the general opinion tends to hold that Roosevelt was a hero because of his efforts, others argue the entire battle was really about publicity. Juan R. Torruella suggests that in fact "it took some 4,000 U.S. troops several days to dislodge 521 ill-armed Spaniards from atop San Juan Hill." See: *Global Intrigues: The Era of the Spanish-American War and the Rise of the United States to World Power* (San Juan: La Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2007), 107.

<sup>20</sup> McKinley's first Vice President, Garret Augustus Hobart, died while in office in 1899.

<sup>21</sup> G. Wallace Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 101.

<sup>22</sup> Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist*, 191-192.

<sup>24</sup> Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, 62.

<sup>25</sup> Bryan, "Imperialism: August 8 1900," *Voices of Democracy*, para 38 (*Bryan on Imperialism*, p. 76).

<sup>26</sup> Bryan, "Imperialism: August 8 1900," *Voices of Democracy*, para 26 (*Bryan on Imperialism*, p. 74).

<sup>27</sup> Bryan, "Imperialism: August 8 1900," *Voices of Democracy*, para 35 (*Bryan on Imperialism*, 76).

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: Letters and Speeches*, edited by Louis Auchincloss (New York: Library of America, 2004), 357.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, "Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden' and Its Afterlives," *English Literature in Transition* 50 (2007): 177.

<sup>30</sup> Wertheim, "Reluctant Liberator," 499.

<sup>31</sup> Oscar M. Alfonso, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Philippines 1897-1909* (Quezon City: University of Philippines Press, 1970), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Alfonso, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Philippines 1897-1909*, 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, 77.

<sup>34</sup> "Roosevelt Ends His Tour," *New York Times*, November 3, 1900, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Murphy, "Theodore Roosevelt," 317.

<sup>36</sup> "Roosevelt Ends His Tour," *New York Times*, November 3, 1900, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen E. Lucas, "The Rhetoric of Theodore Roosevelt: 1900-1909" (master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1971), 51.

<sup>38</sup> From Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley, as quoted in Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> "Roosevelt on Trusts: Makes Ten Speeches on His Tour Across Michigan," *New York Times*, September 8, 1900, 2.

<sup>40</sup> "Roosevelt Begins Tour of the West," *The Kansas Semi-Weekly Capital*, September 7 1900, 1.

<sup>41</sup> "Roosevelt. His Name the Watchword Yesterday," *The Boston Morning Journal*, September 8 1900, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Lucas, "The Rhetoric of Theodore Roosevelt," 50.

<sup>43</sup> The title "Free Silver, Trusts, and the Philippines" is given to the speech in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, National Edition, vol. 14 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926): 346-359. However, the speech text I used is the original typed version with Roosevelt's personal edits from "Speech of Governor Roosevelt at Grand Rapids, Mich. Sept. 7th, 1900." Library of Congress, *Theodore Roosevelt Papers* 5A 1899-1918. The two texts are nearly identical. The following citations from the speech are referenced by their paragraph number.

<sup>44</sup> Paul McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 267.

<sup>45</sup> Robert V. Friedenber, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rhetoric of Militant Decency* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>46</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "The Prophecies of Mr. Bryan: September 7, 1900," in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 14:381. [It seems she hasn't cited this speech fully yet except a bit in note #43, although there the "Free Silver" speech not the Bryan speech is cited. I don't know if it's necessary, but I cited it fully here.]

<sup>47</sup> Wertheim, "Reluctant Liberator," 501.

<sup>48</sup> Wertheim argues that Roosevelt did not really believe the Filipinos to be ready to move toward independence but was responding to the country's outcry about U.S. control in the Philippines and a growing concern that discontent in the islands would lead Japan to use the islands as a staging ground to attack the United States. See Wertheim, "Reluctant Liberator," 494-518.

<sup>49</sup> Friedenber, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rhetoric of Militant Decency*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 28.

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<sup>51</sup> Dorsey, *We Are All Americans*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1956), 65.

<sup>53</sup> Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Senator George Frisbie Hoar particularly invoked U.S. honor and duty as reasons to oppose expansion in his congressional speeches.

<sup>55</sup> Samuels and Samuels, *Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress for 1904," House Records HR 58A-K2, Center for Legislative Archives; National Archives, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=old&doc=56>.

<sup>57</sup> Brantlinger, "Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden' and Its Afterlives," 179.

<sup>58</sup> John Wickham, "September 11 and America's War on Terrorism," *American Indian Quarterly* 26 (2002), 115.

<sup>59</sup> As quoted in Wickham, "September 11 and America's War on Terrorism," 115.

<sup>60</sup> Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, 104.