

PLATFORM OF THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE 1899

The Anti-Imperialist League was founded in Boston in 1898 by a group of former abolitionists. It convened in Chicago in 1899 as a national organization and drafted this platform. The Anti-Imperialist League opposed the annexation of Hawaii, the U.S. acquisition of the Philippines from Spain, and the military repression of Filipino nationalists who opposed U.S. rule. Although the League faltered by 1901, it was highly influential in articulating arguments against this new U.S. imperialism.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Forming and Supporting Opinions

Would you have supported the Anti-Imperialist League in 1899? Why or why not?

We hold that the policy known as imperialism is hostile to liberty and tends towards militarism, an evil from which it has been our glory to be free. We regret that it has become necessary in the land of Washington and Lincoln to reaffirm that all men, of whatever race or color, are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We maintain that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We insist that the subjugation of any people is “criminal aggression” and open disloyalty to the distinctive principles of our government.

We earnestly condemn the policy of the present National Administration in the Philippines. It seeks to extinguish the spirit of 1776 in those islands. We deplore the sacrifice of our soldiers and sailors, whose bravery deserves admiration even in an unjust war. We denounce the slaughter of the Filipinos as a needless horror. We protest against the extension of American sovereignty by Spanish methods.

We demand the immediate cessation of the war against liberty, begun by Spain and continued by us. We urge that Congress be promptly convened to announce to the Filipinos our purpose to concede to them the independence for which they have so long fought and which of right is theirs.

The United States have always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right.

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

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

We deny that the obligation of all citizens to support their Government in times of grave National peril applies to the present situation. If an Administration may with impunity ignore the issues upon which it was chosen, deliberately create a condition of war anywhere on the face of the globe, debauch the civil service for spoils to promote the adventure, organize a truth-repressing censorship and demand of all citizens a suspension of judgment and their unanimous support while it chooses to continue the fighting, representative government itself is imperiled.

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

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

We cordially invite the cooperation of all men and women who remain loyal to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

Source: *The Philippines Reader*, edited by Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom (Boston: South End Press, 1987), pp. 30-31.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Some students may answer that they would have supported the Anti-Imperialist League because they oppose U.S. military intervention in the disputes of other nations. These students might cite the platform in arguing that such intervention betrayed American principles of liberty and the right to self-government. These students might also argue that no American lives should be risked on foreign soil. Other students may answer that they would not have supported the Anti-Imperialist League because they supported U.S. military intervention in the Philippines. These students might argue that the United States had strategic military and economic interests in protecting the Philippines and annexing Hawaii.