

# Albert J. Beveridge: The March of the Flag (1900)

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*Although the ostensible reason for declaring war against Spain was to stop the oppression of Cubans, the McKinley administration decided to dispatch Commodore George Dewey's Pacific naval task force to Manila Bay, where on 1 May 1898, it destroyed the Spanish Pacific fleet and took control of the Philippines. Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States in the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the war on 10 December 1898. This posed an unexpected dilemma. 'What was to be done with the Philippines now that they were in American hands? Those supporting annexation were led by a small but prominent group of imperialists that included Theodore Roosevelt, senators Henry Cabot Lodge and Albert Beveridge, and John Hay, soon to become secretary of state. In the following selection, Beveridge articulated why he supported annexation of the Philippines--and perhaps other areas in the future.*

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From Albert Beveridge, "The March of the Flag:" in Congressional Record, 56th Cong., 1st sess., 9 January 1900, pp. 4-12.

Fellow citizens, It is a noble land that God has given US; a land that can feed and clothe the world; a land whose coast lines would enclose half the countries of Europe; a land set like a sentinel between the two imperial oceans of the globe, a greater England with a nobler destiny. It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing working folk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven directed purposes--the propagandists and not the misers of liberty.

It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people; a history whose keynote was struck by Liberty Bell; a history heroic with faith in our mission and our future; a history of statesmen who flung the boundaries of the Republic out into unexplored lands and savage wildernesses; a history of soldiers who carried the flag across the blazing deserts and through the ranks of hostile mountains, even to the gates of sunset; a history of a multiplying people who overran a continent in half a century; a history of prophets who saw the consequences of evils inherited from the past and of martyrs who died to save us from them; a history divinely logical, in the process of whose tremendous reasoning we find ourselves today....

Shall the American people continue their resistless march toward the commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign as the children of liberty wax in strength, until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind?

Have we no mission to perform, no duty to discharge to our fellowman? Has the Almighty Father endowed us with gifts beyond our deserts and marked us as the people of His peculiar favor, merely to rot in our own selfishness, as men and nations must, who take cowardice for their companion and self for their deity-as China has, as India has, as Egypt has?

Shall we be as the man who had one talent and hid it, or as he who had ten talents and used them until they grew to riches? And shall we reap the reward that waits on our discharge of our high duty as the sovereign power of earth; shall we occupy new markets for what our farmers raise, new markets for what our factories make, new markets for what our merchants sell-aye, and, please God, new markets for what our ships shall carry?

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Hawaii is ours; Porto Rico is to be ours; at the prayer of her people Cuba will finally be ours; in the islands of the East, even to the gates of Asia, coaling-stations are to be ours at the very least; the flag of a liberal government is to float over the Philippines, and I pray God it may be the banner that Taylor unfurled in Texas and Fremont<sup>1</sup> carried to the coast-the Stars and Stripes of glory....

The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent I answer, The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. I answer, We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent. I answer, How do you assume that our

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<sup>1</sup> John Charles Fremont was an American soldier and explorer who seized California for the United States during the Mexican War in the mid-nineteenth century. General Zachary Taylor led American troops in the Mexican War.

government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them? ...

Today, we are raising more than we can consume. Today, we are making more than we can use. Today, our industrial society is congested; there are more workers than there is work; there is more capital than there is investment. We do not need more money—we need more circulation, more employment. Therefore we must find new markets for our produce, new occupation for our capital, new work for our labor. And so, while we did not need the territory taken during the past century at the time it was acquired, we do need what we have taken in 1898, and we need it now ....

Think of the tens of thousands of Americans who will invade mine and field and forest in the Philippines when a liberal government, protected and controlled by this republic, if not the government of the republic itself, shall establish order and equity there! Think of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who will build a soap-and-water, common-school civilization of energy and industry in Cuba, when a government of law replaces the double reign of anarchy and tyranny!—think of the prosperous millions that Empress of Islands will support when, obedient to the law of political gravitation, her people ask for the highest honor liberty can bestow, the sacred Order of the Stars and Stripes, the citizenship of the Great Republic!

What does all this mean for everyone of us? It means opportunity for all the glorious young manhood of the republic—the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen. It means that the resources and the commerce of these immensely rich dominions will be increased as much as American energy is greater than Spanish sloth; for Americans henceforth will monopolize those resources and that commerce....

Fellow Americans, we are God's chosen people.... His power ... delivered the Spanish fleet into our hands on the eve of Liberty's natal day, as he delivered the elder Armada<sup>2</sup> into the hands of our English sires two centuries ago. His great purposes are revealed in the progress of the flag, which surpasses the intentions of Congresses and Cabinets, and leads us like a holier pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night into situations unforeseen by finite wisdom, and duties unexpected by the unprophetic heart of selfishness. The American people cannot use a dishonest medium of exchange; it is ours to set the world its example of right and honor. We cannot fly from our world duties; it is ours to execute the purpose of a fate that has driven us to be greater than our small intentions. We cannot retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for Liberty and Civilization ....

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did Beveridge justify American acquisition of new territories? Does one country have the right to control another country, without "the consent of the governed"?
2. What did he mean by asserting that Americans were "God's chosen people"?
3. Do you share his belief that it was the "manifest destiny" of the United States to bring the blessings of its civilization to other peoples?
4. How did Beveridge imply that domestic economic concerns were dictating American foreign policy?

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<sup>2</sup> The Spanish Armada was a naval fleet sent to attack England in 1588. It fell victim to powerful storms.