“An Unpardonable Bit of Folly and Impertinence”: Charles Francis Adams Jr., American Anti-Imperialists, and the Philippines

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IN all recorded history, Charles Francis Adams Jr. announced to the American Historical Association, no “so-called inferior race or community has been elevated in its character, or made self-sustaining and self-governing, or even put on the way to that result, through a condition of dependency or tutelage.” Adams’s sweeping statement was embedded in a larger critique of United States imperialism, which he articulated in his presidential address before the association on 27 December 1901. According to Adams, a direct descendant of Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, the United States had embarked on a misguided course in the wake of the Spanish-American War. No longer adhering to its “Hands-off and Walk alone” policy implemented during interventions in Mexico and Haiti, the nation embraced colonialism rather than granting local autonomy to the “liberated” people.¹

In the fall of 1898, Adams had joined a heterogeneous anti-imperialist movement that coalesced after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War.² The group’s shrill protests fell short of swaying the Senate, its most important audience, and

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²Like Adams and many of his contemporaries, I define imperialism as territorial colonial expansion and not more broadly as foreign economic hegemony. See The New England Quarterly, vol. LXXXIII, no. 2 (June 2010). © 2010 by The New England Quarterly. All rights reserved.
on 6 February 1899 that body voted to approve the Treaty of Paris (signed on 10 December 1898), under which Spain ceded control over Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States and relinquished its sovereignty over Cuba.\(^3\)

In one stroke, the Senate had ratified a sprawling, overseas American empire.

Having lost its crucial fight, the anti-imperialist movement divided over how best to regroup. Adams played an instrumental role in the debate, endeavoring to shift the movement away from futile demands that the country renounce its empire toward a more pragmatic strategy of improving the established colonial regime. Spurred on by his political philosophy, sense of public duty, and native skepticism—what he termed his “otherwise-minded” nature—Adams pushed for constructive action focused on the Philippines, as he worked to uncover military abuses and harness public opinion to reform American policy. Adams, however, remained deeply ambivalent about the cause he advanced. Frustrated by waning public interest and outmaneuvered by opponents, he eventually dropped his protest.

Although other scholars have examined this period in Adams’s life, they have not adequately measured the influence nor the chronological breadth, personal depth, and political context of his shifting views.\(^4\) Moreover, understanding


\(^4\)By far the best examination of Adams and anti-imperialism is Beisner, Twelve Against Empire. Beisner devotes a chapter to Charles Adams, emphasizing his ambivalence—a product of character and ideology—as well as his pragmatism and forward-looking nature. My interpretation is indebted to Beisner’s analysis. Despite its keen insights, however, Beisner’s study does not carry Adams’s story far enough; it centers on the 1900 presidential election and thus lacks the historic scope required to explore Adams’s relationship with the anti-imperialist movement in its entirety. See also Edward Kirkland, Charles Francis Adams Jr., 1835–1915: The Patrician at Bay (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Tompkins, Anti-Imperialism in the United States; and Michael O’Brien, Henry Adams and the Southern Question (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), which give Adams and anti-imperialism
Adams’s involvement in the anti-imperialist cause illuminates the broader movement. Like Adams, many of those who objected to American overseas expansion were former mugwumps, Republicans who in 1884 had turned their backs on the party’s presidential candidate James G. Blaine. Hailing predominantly from the Northeast and elite backgrounds, they affixed their names to institutions such as the Massachusetts Reform Club, railed against the spoils system, and called for a return to clean, morally sound government. Adams’s ambivalent relationship with fellow independents and his efforts to alter U.S. policy in the Philippines help elucidate the Gilded Age tradition of genteel reform, a tradition he came to see as outmoded. The anti-imperialist movement marked the final organized undertaking of the old independent crowd, in effect its last hurrah.5

The “Wretched ‘Superior Race Obligation’ Cant”

Several years before he addressed the American Historical Association, Adams regarded U.S. territorial expansion with anticipation rather than apprehension. In January 1890, at the age of fifty-four, he traveled to Cuba and toured the sugar plantation of Edwin F. Atkins, an acquaintance who, like Adams, had accumulated a sizable fortune in business ventures. With nary a touch of his later anti-imperialism, he decisively pronounced his opinion on Cuba’s future. The “island ought to become a


part of the United States,” he wrote to his wife Mary on 31 January, “and the sooner the better.” Cuba could well “become the great Winter resort of the United States, and its possibilities in that respect are almost unlimited.” Incorporation, argued the confident observer, would not only solve Cuba’s political troubles but would also accelerate the development of other West Indian islands, even the entire American continent.6

The Caribbean’s problems, Adams maintained, were the result of “Spanish rule,” which “has cursed, and is now cursing, more than one half of the two Americas.” Adams had “no doubt,” as he stated several months later, that Spain’s brutal, retrogressive empire should end; in fact, he declared in 1896, it “never ought to have begun.” Discerning not a single redeeming feature in eighty years of Spanish rule in the Americas, Adams speculated what it might “cost” the United States to bring it to a close.7

But in the spring of 1898, as popular support for war with Spain grew, Adams reversed course and joined distinguished lawyer and mugwump Moorfield Storey as well as fellow political independent and reformer Carl Schurz in opposing the militant fever. At a meeting of the New York Central Labor Union in May, Adams, along with William Dean Howells and others, spoke out against the approaching conflict. After Commodore George Dewey destroyed a Spanish squadron in Manila Bay on 1 May, Adams declared future prospects “thoroughly disheartening.” He agreed “entirely” with Schurz on the harmful effects of imperialism and on what he termed the “wretched ‘Superior Race obligation’ cant.” One need only look at the country’s “shameful record to the Indian, the African, and the Chinese” to expose the utter hypocrisy of an American white man’s burden.8

6Charles Francis Adams Jr. to Mary Adams, 31 January 1890, folder 2, box 35, reel 53, Charles Francis Adams II Papers, 1861–1933, microfilm edition, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), Boston; quotations from this collection, here and throughout, by permission of the MHS. Charles Francis Adams Jr. is hereafter cited as CFA. See also CFA to Mary Adams, 13 February 1890, folder 4, box 35, reel 53, CFA Papers.

7CFA Memorabilia, 5 January and 18 December 1896, vol. 31, reel 10, CFA Papers.

Along with Storey and several other acquaintances, Adams helped organize the Boston Committee of the Anti-Imperialist League, which was established on 19 November 1898 to prevent the conflict with Spain “from being perverted into a war for colonial spoils.” A significant number of the league’s members, and especially its New England leadership, were drawn from the aging crowd of former mugwumps. Adams was named an honorary vice president.9

On 20 December 1898, Adams delivered an address before the Lexington Historical Society that crystallized his thoughts on American imperial pretensions. The speech, “‘Imperialism’ and ‘The Tracks of Our Forefathers,’” did not rue the end of Spanish domination in the Americas, which Adams once more insisted had been “one long series of crimes and violations of natural law.” The development of the United States, by contrast, reflected “one long protest against, and divergence from, Old World methods and ideals.” But as the country stood poised to embark upon imperialistic ventures, it cast aside its exceptional tradition and moved toward European principles of colonial tutelage. This radical departure resulted in what Adams termed “a mesh of contradictions” so profound as to resemble a geological fault.10

Adams considered his Lexington address an antidote to the “regular epidemic of cant and false sentiment [then] prevailing.” “I have protested,” he wrote in his private journal, “and my protest is of record. I am glad.”11

Anti-imperialists failed, however, to galvanize public opinion. They also neglected to cultivate the support of industries that benefited from government protectionism or groups that viewed colonialism as a source of unwanted competition rather


than commercial opportunity.\textsuperscript{12} The McKinley administration outmaneuvered the dissenters, including Adams's friend, Republican senator George Frisbie Hoar, who was similarly unable to advance an alternative policy or construct a bipartisan alliance with Democrats. Once the Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris in February 1899, Hoar pronounced empire “irrevocable.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{The “Mischief Is Done; the Mistake Is Irretrievable”}

In the months that followed, Adams found his position untenable and his allies impotent and increasingly irksome. Members of the Anti-Imperialist League held protest meetings, distributed petitions, and delivered resolute orations, but to what effect? They lacked the fundamental capacity to influence U.S. policy. By the middle of May 1899, Adams had had enough of the league’s hot air and its “parcel of cranks!”\textsuperscript{14} In an open letter published by the \textit{Springfield Republican}, he insisted that the anti-imperialists’ penchant to “criticize and find fault” was “plainly wearing on the public patience, and, consequently barren of results.” “Something tangible is called for; and that tangible something no one seems to rise to suggest,” Adams lamented. Turning his attention to the Philippines, he declared that the “mischief is done; the mistake is irretrievable.” The war had destroyed the very structures upon which an autonomous native government might have been formed. Chiding his backward-looking allies, Adams instructed the anti-imperialists to forsake their jeremiads and work toward establishing the most beneficial imperial regime possible.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12}CFA also thought that “race prejudice” could be used in the anti-imperialists’ favor. See CFA to Carl Schurz, 22 October 1898, box 126, reel 63, Carl Schurz Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. See also CFA to Moorfield Storey, 4 January 1899, box: Moorfield Storey–Charles Francis Adams Jr. Correspondence, 1882–1915, Moorfield Storey Papers, MHS. MHS permission to quote from this collection is gratefully acknowledged.


\textsuperscript{14}CFA Diary, 10 February 1899, vol. 22, reel 6, CFA Papers; CFA Memorabilia, 20 May 1899, vol. 31, reel 10, CFA Papers.

Adams’s open letter made things pretty “lively” with the anti-imperialist crowd, which, he reported, denounced him as a “quitter.”

Moorfield Storey, less vociferous than most, summarized the view of Adams’s erstwhile colleagues. “I could wish that you had found it in your heart to throw up the sponge quietly,” he wrote on 19 May, “without squeezing it down the backs of your late allies.”

When he threw his support behind William McKinley’s re-election in 1900, Adams further antagonized his former associates. Most of those Storey considered Adams’s “late allies”—Gamaliel Bradford, George Boutwell, Erving Winslow, and others—backed William Jennings Bryan. Adams, however, despised the Democratic candidate, who had previously run for president in 1896. Declaring that Bryan possessed “the jaw-bone of an ass,” Adams maintained that he could “talk longer, and say less, than any man in Christendom.” Not only did Bryan direct a dangerous political coalition of silverites, labor elements, and other unsavory groups, but he also headed the party of Tammany Hall. Putting a Democrat in the White House would strengthen boss rule and the spoils system—a more exigent threat to America than one “over the Pacific horizon.”

Adams believed he had found the appropriate course “we anti-imperialists ought to take,” a road leading out of the political wilderness. They must “demolish Bryan” and “reorganize the opposition” into a definite, well-led dissenting party. The Democrats’ endorsement of the boy orator made McKinley, whom Adams would gladly have seen defeated, a necessity. To check the Republican administration, Adams supported electing a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives,

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16CFA Diary, 19 May 1899, vol. 22, reel 6, CFA Papers; CFA Memorabilia, 20 May 1899, vol. 31, reel 10, CFA Papers. For examples of these critiques, see Winslow Warren to CFA, 19 May 1899, folder 14, box 5, reel 20, CFA Papers; Charles R. Codman to CFA, 19 May 1899, folder 14, box 5, reel 20, CFA Papers; and Thomas Wentworth Higginson to CFA, 20 May 1899, folder 14, box 5, reel 20, CFA Papers.

17Storey to CFA, 19 May 1899, folder 14, box 5, reel 20, CFA Papers.

which could pull tight the purse strings for empire.\textsuperscript{19} When the Anti-Imperialist League’s Liberty Congress endorsed Bryan as the most effective means of crushing imperialism, Adams de-\textsuperscript{19}rided their “utter absence of saving common-sense.”\textsuperscript{20}

While Adams’s own proposal to play the two parties against each other made little practical sense either, Bryan’s tepid campaign undercut his anti-imperialist supporters.\textsuperscript{21} The Democratic contender declared imperialism the burning question of 1900, but his fire was all for the silver issue.\textsuperscript{22} Bryan cared “no more for” imperialism “than for the hat on his head,” Adams insisted. On 7 November 1900 he recorded in his diary that “McKinley was re-elected with a rush, convincing my anti-imperialistic friends, I hope, that they are not infallible.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{The Country “Wants to Know the Facts”}

Adams interpreted McKinley’s “sweeping” victory as a repudiation of the rival anti-imperialist strategy, and he expected the Bryanites had “learned their lesson.”\textsuperscript{24} Schurz, for one, conceded that “those anti-imperialists who voted for McKinley under protest have the floor.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{19}CFA Memorabilia, 22 June 1900, vol. 31, reel 10, CFA Papers (emphasis added). CFA thus continued to identify with the anti-imperialist label even after his rift. As he declared to George Washburn, president of the Bryan Club of Massachusetts, “I am unquestionably a decided anti-imperialist.” See CFA to Washburn, 16 October 1900, folder 9, box 6, reel 21, CFA Papers.


\textsuperscript{21}Beisner, \textit{Twelve Against Empire}, pp. 124–26. See also Schirmer, \textit{Republic or Empire}, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{22}Thomas A. Bailey, “Was the Presidential Election of 1900 a Mandate on Imperialism?” \textit{Mississippi Valley Historical Review} 24 (June 1937): 43–50; Welch, \textit{Response to Imperialism}, p. 67. See also Tompkins, “Scylla and Charybdis,” passim.

\textsuperscript{23}CFA Memorabilia, 16 September 1900, vol. 31, reel 10, CFA Papers; CFA Diary, 7 November 1900, vol. 23, reel 7, CFA Papers.

\textsuperscript{24}CFA to Hoar, 8 November 1900, box: Charles Francis Adams, George Frisbie Hoar Autograph Collection, 1775–1915, MHS. Permission to quote from the Hoar Collection gratefully acknowledged.

\textsuperscript{25}Schurz to Louis R. Ehrich, 13 November 1900, in \textit{Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz}, ed. Frederic Bancroft, 6 vols. (New York: G. P.
While the Republicans retained control of the White House, events in the Philippines had taken a violent turn. On 4 February 1899, American and Filipino patrols clashed outside of Manila. The conflict quickly escalated, with a growing number of U.S. troops pitted against a nationalist Filipino insurgency under the command of Emilio Aguinaldo.

Adams sought to provide the American public with accurate information about the war on the ground. On 7 February 1901, he wrote to Andrew Carnegie to suggest that they finance an independent investigatory mission to the Philippines. “The country is tired of the [Philippine] business,” Adams asserted, “and wants to know the facts.”\textsuperscript{26} Carnegie remained skeptical, and on 15 February, Adams responded that “on public questions, especially when the scene of action is remote, correct information is what is most of all necessary to the formation of sound public opinion.”\textsuperscript{27}

Adams's prescriptions reflected his reform creed. Having served on the Massachusetts Railroad Commission from 1869 to 1879, he placed great faith in what investigative bodies could accomplish. Just as the commission had advanced railroad regulation by publicizing violations and mismanagement, Adams believed that by bringing abuses in the Philippines to light, an inquiry would persuade the American public to reject European-style colonialism and press legislators to enact beneficial policy changes.

Information about the conflict was making its way back to the United States, although not altogether systematically or reliably. Since the winter of 1900, rumors had circulated that U.S. soldiers were taking reprisals against Filipino civilians, and by early

\textsuperscript{26}CFA to Carnegie, 7 February 1901, folder 16, box 6, reel 22, CFA Papers.

\textsuperscript{27}Carnegie to CFA, 11 February 1901, folder 16, box 6, reel 22, CFA Papers; CFA to Carnegie, 15 February 1901, folder 16, box 6, reel 22, CFA Papers.
1902, the press routinely carried reports of atrocities. Many articles discussed the “water cure,” used to extract information from prisoners, as well as “reconcentration,” the army’s practice of herding civilians into camps and destroying villages and crops, a policy editorials likened to the actions of Spain’s infamous General Valeriano “Butcher” Weyler in Cuba.  

Mounting a counteroffensive, the McKinley and Roosevelt administrations took anti-imperialist critics to task for leveling false, unpatriotic, and disloyal accusations that contributed to the deaths of U.S. troops. Cartoons depicted Senator Hoar and his compatriots as ridiculous, effete comrades of Aguinaldo. Roosevelt flayed them as “unhung traitors” and “accessories before the fact to murder.” With equal contempt but more grace, Secretary of War Elihu Root asserted that “the men who are reviling and belittling America here, and the men who are shooting from ambush there, are allies in the same cause, and both are enemies to the interests and credit of our country.”

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Hoar’s colleague from Massachusetts, supported Roosevelt and Root. Lodge, like Adams, was a member of Boston’s elite, but ever the stalwart Republican, he had not been tainted with mugwump heresy. Lodge fought hard to ensure passage of the Treaty of Paris, and he served as chairman of the Committee on the Philippines, created in December 1899. The contest waged in the press played

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out in the hearings it conducted.32 “The fight is on here about the Philippines,” Lodge wrote to Roosevelt on 10 January 1900, and “my committee . . . seems to have plenty of work to do in the way of debate with the enemy.”33 That enemy consisted of a handful of Democratic senators and George Frisbie Hoar.

In January 1902, Hoar proposed an inquiry into the conduct of the Philippine war, and although Lodge viewed the request as a groundless, partisan tactic aimed at discrediting supporters of imperialism, he reluctantly complied. Lodge allowed thirty-nine-year-old Indiana senator Albert J. Beveridge, a staunch imperialist, to spearhead the proceedings. With his usual oratorical flair, Beveridge played the part of defense attorney to exonerate the army. He coaxed testimony from friendly witnesses and hectored those who incriminated the military. He sparred, in particular, with Democratic senators Edward Carmack of Tennessee, Charles Culberson of Texas, and Thomas Patterson of Colorado, who stressed the army’s misdeeds under the command of Republican administrations.34

Behind the scenes, Lodge orchestrated the committee process. He called hearings sporadically and gave ample time to witnesses who supported America’s policy in the archipelago, including William Howard Taft, the McKinley-appointed governor of the Philippines, and generals Arthur MacArthur, Elwell Otis, and Robert Hughes. Hoar and the Democrats, by contrast, labored to bring rank-and-file soldiers—men more likely to substantiate accounts of U.S. brutality—to testify in Washington. In doing so, they relied upon the indefatigable Philadelphia publisher and anti-imperialist Herbert Welsh, who


tracked down returning servicemen and persuaded them to go before the committee. Along with their testimony, the evidence Welsh compiled found its way into the Congressional Record.35

On 14 April 1902 Sergeant Charles Riley and Private William Smith were called to comment on the “water cure” that troops administered to Filipino prisoners in the town of Igbarras.36 Mr. Dooley, the fictional Irish bartender created by humorist and writer Finley Peter Dunne, described the technique:

We ar-re givin’ hundherds iv these pore benighted haythan th’ well-know, ol’-fashioned American wather cure. Iv coorse, ye know how ’tis done. A Filipino, we’ll say, niver heerd iv th’ histhry iv this country. He is met be wan iv our sturdy boys in black an’ blue iv th’ Macabebee scouts who asts him to cheer f’r Abraham Lincoln. He rayfuses. He is thin placed upon th’ grass an’ givin a dhrink, a baynit bein’ fixed in his mouth so he cannot rejict th’ hospitality. Undher th’ infllooence iv th’ hose that ceers but does not inebriate, he soon warrums or perhaps I might say swells up to a ralization iv th’ costitchoochion. At four gallons, he will ask to be wrapped in th’ flag. At th’ dew pint he sings Yankee Doodle.37

Riley and Smith appeared before the committee just days after an explosive report by Major Cornelius Gardener, the governor of Tayabas province in Luzon, was released on 10 April. Gardener recounted that U.S. troops routinely tortured and burned the homes of Filipinos, whom they derided as “niggers.” The report, which Taft and Root unsuccessfully endeavored to suppress, brought widespread attention to the military’s conduct in the Philippines. So did the court-martial testimony of Major Littleton W. T. Waller in Manila. According to Waller, General Jacob H. Smith had ordered soldiers to “kill and burn,” a directive that applied to every native over the age of ten, and

35Welch, George Frisbie Hoar and the Half-Breed Republicans, p. 284; Welch, Response to Imperialism, pp. 135–37; Schirner, Republic or Empire, p. 244; M. K. Sniffen to Herbert Welsh, 14 April 1902, in Letters to Mary S. Cobb, 1899–1904, 1 box, MHS. See, e.g., Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 1647–49 (12 February 1902).
called for “[t]he interior of Samar” to be turned into “a howling wilderness.”

“A Protest Voicing the Common Conscience of the Community”

Looking on with increasing alarm, Adams declared that the U.S. government was “engaged in one of the most grotesque proceedings which ever afforded laughter to cynical men,” nothing short of a “war of brutal extermination.” “Which are the savages,” Adams questioned in April, the “Filipinos or the Americans?” General MacArthur’s claim, made to the committee and repeated by others, that “it has been the most legitimate and humane war ever conducted on the face of the earth,” smacked of mendacity.

In mid-April Adams wrote to Schurz that “something ought to be done.” “What we now need,” he explained, “is some organization which should make itself heard in protest.” Adams put his idea before a national conference of anti-imperialists, which convened at New York City’s Plaza Hotel on 28 April 1902.

Before taking the floor, Adams listened to the worn-out, “familiar anti-imperialist line” from the back row. He then rose, insisted that the old crowd’s call for immediate dissolution of America’s empire at any cost was impracticable, and offered his own diagnosis of the problem. “I said that I stood there as an American, humiliated,” he recalled. “[W]e were disgraced in our own eyes, dishonored before the world.” The “dependency business” was in Adams’s view “an epidemic, world-wide” that, “like any other epidemic, must run its prescribed course.”

38 Senate Document 331, 57th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 844–45; Miller, Benevolent Assimilation, pp. 219–32. See also, Welch, Response to Imperialism, pp. 138–40.
39 CFA to Storey, 24 February 1902, Storey Papers; CFA Memorabilia, 12 April 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; and Senate Document 331, 57th Cong., 1st sess., p. 898.
40 CFA to Schurz, 15 April 1902, folder 11, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers; CFA Diary, 27 April 1902, vol. 23, reel 7, CFA Papers.
41 CFA Memorabilia, 4 May 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.
To alleviate the ill effects of the epidemic, he proposed that a committee be formed and empowered to take “all necessary steps to effect the full disclosure of the facts connected with processes and Executions in the course of military operations in the Philippine Islands.” The committee would also appear before “the present Senate Investigating Committee and take such steps there or elsewhere, as may be calculated to secure complete publicity and further to initiate such other action as may tend to vindicate national character.”

Adams’s plan received unanimous support, but Erving Winslow and George Boutwell sought to reintroduce the old hard-line anti-imperialist program. They characterized atrocity stories “as a passing excitement.” “I took issue at once,” Adams wrote, “arguing against any dissipation of force, and insisting on one thing at a time,—the present thing being the black blemish on the national character.” Backed by Herbert Welsh, Adams carried the majority, after which the assembly broke for a recess. He had succeeded in shifting the anti-imperialists’ protest from a wholesale indictment of imperialism to the much narrower issue of U.S. misconduct in the Philippines, a strategy that squared with his more conservative, more pragmatic sensibilities. An Adams might not balk at the exercise of American power abroad, but an Adams must not allow the nation’s honor to be sullied.

When the meeting reconvened, Carl Schurz announced the membership of the Philippine Investigation Committee. In addition to chairman Charles Adams, those who agreed to serve were Andrew Carnegie, former attorney general Wayne MacVeagh, Cornell University president Jacob G. Schurman, Chicago mugwump Edwin Burritt Smith, and Herbert Welsh; Schurz would join as an ex officio member. Adams retired to

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42CFA Memorabilia, 4 May 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; Julian Codman, meeting minutes in folder 12, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers. He modeled his recommendation on the historical precedent set by John Stuart Mill, who had helped organize the Jamaica Committee to investigate British atrocities committed in Jamaica during the insurrection of 1866.

43CFA Memorabilia, 4 May 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; Julian Codman, meeting minutes in folder 12, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers.
the Metropolitan Club, where he worked out operational details and convinced Moorfield Storey to be the committee’s legal counsel.  

“My plan is simple,” Adams explained in his journal. “I propose to see that a protest is put on the record,—a protest voicing the common conscience of this community.” Adams wrote to Charles Eliot Norton, a mugwump and Harvard instructor, he underscored the importance of discretion. So “far as I can influence the action of this Committee,” Adams wrote, “it will proceed very slowly, very quietly, very systematically. We are going to collect the evidence, frame it in the form of an indictment of many counts, and then, and not until then, press for a public investigation.” Adams clarified the committee’s undertaking to the public as well. “It is a mistake to call the new movement anti-imperialistic,” he told the Boston Evening Transcript. “It is in no way connected with the anti-imperialist league. We simply want to bring out the truth regarding the charges against the army in the Philippines,” he asserted; “that is all.” Adams told Welsh that their effort “to pry open, or break open, the adamantine Philippine Chamber of Horrors” was the best means of achieving constructive change. An aroused populace, he declared, would exert pressure on lawmakers who wallowed through a “chaos of ignorance to mistaken conclusions.” Only with accurate information could public opinion “slowly shape itself into well-considered legal enactments.” Because Adams had no faith that imperialism could be dismantled, the only practical course was to set about reforming it. In an earlier letter to Storey, he had remarked that “certain forces” were

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44CFA Memorabilia, 4 May 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers. Wayne MacVeagh and Jacob Schurman never served on the committee. See CFA to MacVeagh, 8 May 1902, folder 14, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers; Schirmer, Republic or Empire, p. 244.


46CFA to Charles Eliot Norton, 2 May 1902, folder 13, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers.

47The article appeared on 1 May 1902. See CFA Scrapbook, vol. 41, reel 13, CFA Papers.

48CFA Memorabilia, 4 May 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; CFA to Herbert Welsh, 9 May 1902, folder 13, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers; and CFA Memorabilia, 7 September 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.
simply too strong to resist; attempting to do so only brought disrepute. In his journal of 6 March 1899, Adams recorded a telling passage: a “man to-day who doesn’t yield himself to every passing craze, actually loses all influence; he is looked upon as unsympathetic, unpatriotic, and a ‘pessimist.’” Adams’s comparatively modest objectives were further circumscribed by the scope of his commitment. Having launched the committee, he now regretted his responsibilities as chair. “It will involve much labor,” Adams noted in early May, “with no recompense, beyond a sense of duty performed.” He felt impelled “without a spark of enthusiasm,” his mind on scholarly research and writing, the work he had “at heart.” Nevertheless, he put his shoulder to the “heavy yoke” of the Philippines business.

“A Full Presentation of the Facts and Discussion of Principles”

Adams resolved to take the “bull by the horns.” Before convening the committee, he decided to consult privately with Roosevelt and Lodge. “It is no use parading before the White House with a band of music,” he told Schurz on 12 May 1902, “or trying to carry the committee-room of the Senate by assault”; instead, he would strike a cooperative stance. Adams took the train to Washington on 14 May and made his rounds the next two days.

His discussions yielded meager results. Adams had wanted Roosevelt to appoint the commander of the army, General Nelson A. Miles, as head of an investigatory commission to report on conditions in the Philippines. Roosevelt declined, in part because he had no interest in granting Miles, whom he despised, such a prominent role. Having failed to persuade

49 CFA to Storey, 24 February 1902, Storey Papers; CFA Memorabilia, 6 March 1899, vol. 32, reel 10, CFA Papers.
50 CFA Memorabilia, 4 May 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.
51 CFA to Schurz, 6 May 1902, folder 13, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers; CFA to Schurz, 12 May 1902, folder 14, box 7, reel 23, CFA Papers.
the administration in private, Adams decided to go public. He drafted a memorial, circulated it to Schurz and Carnegie, and incorporated their comments in his final draft of 29 May. Giving Hoar advance notice, Adams sent the document, signed by all the members of the Philippine Investigation Committee, to Congress on 10 June 1902.52

On 17 June, Lodge presented the memorial to the Senate. Adams’s committee charged America with marked brutality toward and appalling conditions in its overseas possession. While it praised the work of the Senate’s Committee on the Philippines, the memorial emphasized that an inquiry conducted solely on U.S. soil would not suffice, especially since Lodge had blocked Filipinos from testifying. Adams’s committee “respectfully” asked Congress to appoint an investigatory commission, accompanied by a body of experts, “to proceed at the earliest practicable moment to the Philippine Archipelago.” Only then might the citizens of the United States feel assured that all information had been sought, all parties heard, and all grievances considered. “On the spot, and in this way only,” the committee submitted, “can the American people be properly and fully advised as to the duties and obligations now imposed upon them.”53

Although Lodge had introduced the memorial, he wrote to Adams to voice his reservations. Little would be gained from the proposed commission, Lodge maintained, because it would inevitably divide into “majority” and “minority” reports. Adams was “somewhat taken aback” by this objection, for he thought that an airing of both sides was exactly what the country needed. “In the present case,” he explained, “the American people is the Court, and its decision must be formulated by Congress upon a full presentation of the facts and discussion of the principles involved.”54

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53Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st sess., p. 6896 (17 June 1902); see the Memorial included in CFA to Hoar, 4 June 1902, Hoar Collection.

54CFA to Lodge, 10 June 1902, Storey Papers. (CFA sent a copy of the letter to Storey.)
Lodge was unmoved. Having concluded its questioning of Admiral Dewey on 28 June, his Committee on the Philippines closed its hearing room doors prior to the Senate’s adjournment. Senator Beveridge submitted his own report for the record. Not surprisingly, it exonerated the military’s conduct in the Philippines and refuted all allegations of brutality, which he claimed had no basis in fact. During the summer of 1902 public outrage about events in the archipelago had dissipated considerably, and the press took little notice of the Senate’s proceedings.\(^{55}\)

One committee member, however, was unwilling to allow Lodge his victory. On 30 June, Senator Carmack introduced a resolution that called for the Committee on the Philippines to continue its investigatory work during the Senate’s break. Its second provision, in line with Adams’s requests, authorized and instructed the committee “to visit the Philippine Islands during the recess of Congress for the purpose of examining witnesses and otherwise prosecuting the said investigation.”\(^ {56}\)

A group of Republican senators spearheaded by John Spooner of Wisconsin ensured that the resolution was sent back to committee before Congress adjourned. But Carmack fought on. Under Lodge’s leadership, the Tennessee senator insisted, “[t]here has been no real investigation” by the committee. Echoing Adams, he declared that “if we want to get the truth,” we “ought to go to the Philippine Islands and investigate right there upon the ground.” Carmack’s opponents responded—not without basis—that the Democrats endeavored to slant the evidence against the administration and against what they described as the honorable, “liberty-loving” army.\(^ {57}\)

Roosevelt and his allies had launched their own public relations campaign. Lodge took the Senate floor on 5 May, the president delivered an address on Memorial Day, Beveridge

\(^{55}\)Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st sess., p. 7746 (1 July 1902); Welch, Response to Imperialism, pp. 145–46; Miller, Benevolent Assimilation, p. 253; and Welch, “American Atrocities in the Philippines,” p. 247.

\(^{56}\)Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st sess., p. 7653 (30 June 1902).

\(^{57}\)Congressional Record, 57th Cong., 1st sess., p. 7741–48 (1 July 1902).
spoke out on 3 June, and Root gave a speech at West Point on 11 June. Each stressed that the war had been conducted with remarkable humanity; the few incidents of cruelty, which the military had addressed, were largely retaliatory strikes against Filipinos who had tortured U.S. troops. Each portrayed those seeking to uncover abuses as partisan muckrakers. Roosevelt further disarmed critics when he declared an end to hostilities in the Philippines, granted amnesty to insurgents, promised a thorough investigation, and then dismissed General Jacob Smith, one of the anti-imperialists’ most reviled targets, from the army.

“A Galvanic Shock to a Dead Carcass”

Facing renewed attacks and irritated by the Senate’s dismissal of his plan, Adams set about writing a “counterblast.” On 22 July 1902, he brought a draft to Lake George, New York, and with Herbert Welsh, Carl Schurz, and others, gave final shape to the Philippine Investigation Committee’s “vigorous and dramatic arraignment” of U.S. foreign policy. The document, which accused the Roosevelt administration of foot dragging and obfuscation, detailed a number of grievances: no action had been taken on the memorial the committee submitted; its efforts to bring more, and more disinterested, witnesses before the Senate’s Committee on the Philippines had been unavailing; and further attempts to get to the bottom of events in the Philippines had also been summarily blocked. The undersigned stated their willingness to cooperate with the government and to help furnish evidence. We “hold ourselves


59Miller, Benevolent Assimilation, p. 255; Garraty, Henry Cabot Lodge, p. 210; Morris, Theodore Rex, p. 127; Schirmer, Republic or Empire, p. 239.

Frustrated that he had met with so little success in Washing-

ston, Adams mobilized the committee to accomplish two final
tasks. First, it should draw up a report for the record that care-
fully set forth the facts and mustered additional evidence about
the Philippines. Second, because the committee had failed to
secure an official investigation “on the spot,” it should endeavor
to send out an agent of its own to gather reliable information.
With this material at the ready, the committee could speak with
authority and influence further developments in the Philip-

pines. Adams explained to his acquaintance John Bigelow
that this course had already been followed to good effect. The
“disclosures made have worked wonderful results in the Philip-

pines,” he wrote. U.S. military rule had now been subordinated
to civilian government, and those operating in the Philippines
knew they were being watched. No longer would they resort
to the draconian methods employed two years earlier.

But the “counterblast,” Adams lamented, did not produce
“much of an echo.” Evidently it arrived too late, especially for
a subject already “worn out.” Roosevelt wrote to Lodge on 30
July 1902 that this “foolish letter of Adams, Schurz, and Welsh
was simply acknowledged by my secretary.” “My present inten-
tion,” he confided to his friend, “is to take no further notice
of it.” Silence befitted what TR called “an unpardonable bit
of folly and impertinence.” “I doubt,” Roosevelt concluded,
“whether they are important enough to keep the public gaze
fixed upon them.”

Taking the president’s view of the matter,

61 CFA Memorabilia, 26 July 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers. The “counterblast,”
dated 22 July 1902, appeared in the Springfield Republican on 27 July. See CFA
Scrapbook, vol. 41, reel 13, CFA Papers. See also Lanzar-Carpio, “The Anti-Imperialist

62 CFA Memorabilia, 26 July and 7 September 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.

63 CFA to John Bigelow, 3 October 1902, which CFA sent to Storey and is included
in the Storey Papers. One of CFA’s associates, H. Parker Willis, later confirmed his
assessment, noting that anti-imperialist protests had a beneficial impact on the ground.
See Alfonso, Theodore Roosevelt and the Philippines, p. 58.

64 CFA Memorabilia, 26 July 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; CFA Diary, 28 July
1902, vol. 23, reel 7, CFA Papers; and Roosevelt to Lodge, 30 July 1902, in Selections
from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1:521.
the pro-administration *New York Times* branded the Philippine Investigation Committee’s letter a “most impudent communication.” Its authors’ failure to introduce “one scintilla of evidence not already passed upon by the public,” the *Times* asserted, indicated that the anti-imperialist cause might soon fall apart for good.\(^{65}\)

Adams acknowledged that Roosevelt had been “very adroit” in defusing the critics. “He has conciliated almost every one,” Adams remarked to Schurz in August.\(^{66}\) Yet Adams was not prepared to concede defeat. In late November, he reported being “as much occupied as ever,” almost “driven to death” with work. “The Philippine incubus” weighed heavily on him as the year drew to a close.\(^{67}\)

When Congress reconvened in early 1903, however, Adams appeared ready to terminate the work of the Philippine Investigation Committee. He dismissed Herbert Welsh’s suggestion that the committee demand that the congressional investigation be reopened so that the witnesses Lodge had blocked from testifying might be heard. He drew up another memorial requesting that the Senate thoroughly investigate allegations concerning flamboyant General Frederick Funston and the torture of Filipino priest Father Augustine and dispatched it to Welsh on 14 February. “I fancy it will prove our last shot,” Adams concluded. Shortly thereafter, he left for Europe. Adams had succumbed to the tactics of suppression, delay, and censure his opponents had masterfully deployed, as well as to the public’s apathy. His latest petition, he anticipated, would prove “a galvanic shock to a dead carcass.”\(^{68}\)

Although in June he declared that the “work of our Philippine committee may be considered done,” Adams did not completely abandon what he called “the most thankless, ungratified

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\(^{65}\)Quoted in Alfonso, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Philippines*, p. 198. On the negative reaction to the “counterblast,” see also *Literary Digest*, 9 August 1902.

\(^{66}\)Quoted in Morris, *Theodore Rex*, p. 129.

\(^{67}\)CFA Memorabilia, 7 September and 27 November 1902, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; CFA Diary, 31 December 1902, vol. 23, reel 7, CFA Papers.

task I ever undertook.” Of the duties he had previously outlined, one still remained glaringly unfinished. In late summer, Adams wrote to Storey to underscore the importance of an investigation in the Philippines, especially with the government still blocking inquiries. In October, he informed Professor H. Parker Willis of Washington and Lee University, who had been recruited for the task, that the committee was prepared to begin the expedition. Adams stressed the need for expediency and inconspicuousness, informing Willis that the committee planned to publish the results of his fact-finding mission the following summer, before the presidential election.69

Much to Adams’s dismay, complications with government authorities postponed Willis’s journey. Funding proved difficult as well. Pleading “sore financial straits,” Adams told Storey that he could no longer help support the Philippine mission. The burden therefore shifted entirely to Storey, who scraped together enough money on his own to sustain the undertaking. As Willis departed for the Pacific, Adams’s chairmanship of the Philippine Investigation Committee came to an end.70 At least privately he admitted fault. “I am painfully aware,” Adams wrote on 20 December 1903, “that I didn’t carry th[e] quarrel through.”71

“A Wholly New Phase of Political Existence”

Although he accepted responsibility, Adams soon found targets against which he unleashed his frustration. On 1 August 1904, he attended a meeting of the old Anti-Imperialist League

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69CFA Memorabilia, 28 June 1903, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; CFA to Storey, 22 August 1903, Storey Papers; and CFA to H. Parker Willis, 14 October 1903, included in the Storey Papers.

70CFA to H. Parker Willis, 23 October 1903, included in Storey Papers; CFA Diary, 28 November and 6, 10, and 27 October 1903, vol. 23, reel 7, CFA Papers.

71CFA Memorabilia, 20 December 1903, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers. But before he finished his committee work, Adams became involved with another, more moderate organization—the Philippine Independence League, which advocated immediate or ultimate Philippine independence with or without a protectorate. More outspoken anti-imperialists, such as Schurz and Storey, were excluded from its rolls. See Schirmer, Republic or Empire, pp. 247, 249. See also Storey to Carl Schurz, 4 February 1904, box 183, reel 95, Schurz Papers.
at Boston’s Fanueil Hall. Sidestepping the grand issue of empire, he exoriated the Senate for hindering his efforts to uncover misconduct in the Philippines. Adams branded that institution an “oligarchic body” whose power needed to be curbed, and his words resonated with the assembled crowd. “Rarely have I had such a volume of continuous applause,” he recalled.\(^72\)

In the spring of that year, Adams had privately railed against the executive branch as well. Roosevelt, Taft, and Root, he maintained, led America on a foolhardy mission to convert “Malays into Yankees.” He doubted that “a horde of Asiatics” would ever develop the “capacity for self-government,” even after one hundred and fifty years of dependency rule.\(^73\)

His confidence in a “hands-off” approach to colonial administration continued to erode over the next several years as he grew increasingly skeptical of the salutary principle of self-determination. “The Spanish-American is hopeless,” he wrote Storey in 1913, “just as, though in a greater degree, the Haitian. He cannot govern himself. . . . He needs something more drastic in the way of direction.”\(^74\) Adams expressed similar views about African Americans, arguing that slavery had accorded some benefits to black bondsmen.\(^75\) And earlier he had voiced the opinion that “The negro should have been . . . dealt with as a ward and dependent.”\(^76\) Such inconsistencies regarding what was once a central tenet of his political philosophy—that one

\(^{72}\)He described the gathering as “an ordeal into which I was forced, and from which I shrank.” See CFA Memorabilia, 2 August 1904, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers; CFA Diary, 1 August 1904, vol. 24, reel 7, CFA Papers.

\(^{73}\)CFA Memorabilia, 15 May and 3 April 1904, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.

\(^{74}\)CFA to Storey, 17 June 1913, Storey Papers. See also CFA to H. Parker Willis, 27 September 1905, and CFA to Storey, 4 December 1908, both in Storey Papers.


instructs “people to walk alone by making them walk alone, and not by everlastingly holding them up”—reflect his deeply ingrained racism and shifting views.\textsuperscript{77}

Most dispiriting of all, however, was Adams’s realization that he had been unable to significantly influence public opinion. Citizens accepted, or at least acquiesced to, McKinley and Roosevelt’s view of empire, which held that along with expanding territory, American values and political practices could be transplanted to and instilled in foreign cultures. Americans “do really believe themselves to be a gang of Jesuses!” Adams exclaimed.\textsuperscript{78}

Traditional means of enlightening the public—speeches, editorials, and other publications—had been fruitless, and investigatory commissions as well as petitions to Congress had been thwarted. Without the ability to mobilize public opinion, the chief vehicle of his reform creed was gone. “Why should I,” he now asked, incessantly run “up the attic stairs, thrust my head out of the skylight, and proceed to shout my message down?” when no one bothered to listen.\textsuperscript{79}

Adams’s willingness to drop the anti-imperialist cause stood in contrast to the unremitting efforts of Moorfield Storey. “I wonder how you can find the time,” Adams wrote to his friend, “and, I might add, the heart,—to carry on the controversy.”\textsuperscript{80}

Not only had the issue faded from view, but many of those protesting imperialism were either dead or exhausted. Hoar had passed away in September 1904, and two years later, Adams found it “terribly suggestive” that Herbert Welsh suffered a nervous collapse and both Edwin Burritt Smith and Carl Schurz had been laid to rest.\textsuperscript{81} Their day for agitation was over, Adams told Storey in 1910, when Adams reached the


\textsuperscript{78}CFA Memorabilia, 3 April 1904, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.

\textsuperscript{79}CFA Memorabilia, 2 August 1904, vol. 33, reel 11, CFA Papers.


\textsuperscript{81}CFA to Storey, 18 May 1906, Storey Papers. CFA served as a pallbearer at Schurz’s funeral.
age of seventy-five. But during the heady days of the anti-imperialist movement, Adams played a central role in pressing for a pragmatic strategy that would not leave the dissenters wholly irrelevant. The stakes were especially high because, in Adams’s view, America had discarded its exceptional past to follow in Europe’s imperial footsteps, a path that had led to Spain’s precipitous decay.

The protest against American empire proved to be the last major campaign—and a largely unsuccessful one at that—undertaken by Adams and fellow independents. It marked the end of the mugwump coalition. Some of these genteel reformers, including Adams, did not step blithely into the Progressive Era. They criticized the expansion of governmental authority and what they perceived to be a curtailment of individual liberties; the growth of urban centers and immigrant populations further unsettled them. Adams would not have been an admirer of Herbert Croly or Fighting Bob La Follette. The prescription of Hamiltonian means to achieve Jeffersonian ends was anathema to his political philosophy, as was the extension of direct, participatory democracy.

In the spring of 1915, Charles Francis Adams Jr. died. After receiving the news, his brother Henry wrote that the “world had changed too much” for Charles, “and he felt it.” Indeed, Charles himself had proclaimed that the “older order of things” had “passed away.” He traced that crucial shift to America’s rise to world power. “[D]ating from the Spanish war of 1898,” he maintained, “we entered on a wholly new phase of political existence.” The country had turned its back on

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82 CFA to Storey, 30 June 1910, Storey Papers.
the principles Adams embraced and strutted onto the global stage. Feeling “distinctly out of touch with the world,” Adams looked on apprehensively but no longer rose to proclaim his otherwise-minded opinions.86

86CFA to Storey, 30 June 1910, Storey Papers.

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