Women's Anti-Imperialism, 'The White Man's Burden,' and the Philippine-American War

Erin Murphy

At the Chicago Liberty Meeting in April 1899, organized to protest U.S. imperialist advances in the Philippines, Jane Addams was the only woman of eight plenary speakers. There she stated, “To ‘protect the weak’ has always been the excuse of the ruler and tax-gatherer, the chief, the king, the baron; and now, at last, of ‘the white man’” (Addams 1899). A few months earlier, in late 1898, the United States purchased the Philippines from Spain in the Treaty of Paris despite a preexisting revolutionary movement for independence. Subsequently, the Philippine-American War broke out, with Filipinos continuing to seek an end to colonial rule, be it the rule of Spain or the United States. President Roosevelt officially announced the war to be over on July 4, 1902, although fighting continued in some provinces through 1913.

With the U.S. military mobilized in the Philippines, U.S. citizens mobilized an opposition movement in the metropole. The Anti-Imperialist League (AIL), the vanguard of the movement, organized around the Constitutional contradictions of imperialism and democracy. Those eventually identifying as "anti-imperialists" included men and women, people of various “races,” conservatives and progressives, elites and laborers, Boston Brahmins and rural populists. The initial goal of the movement was to stop the U.S. from taking the Philippines as a colony. After the ratification of the Treaty of Paris in the Senate, the AIL endorsed William Jennings Bryan as an anti-imperialist candidate for President in the 1900 election, which yielded another defeat. It then appeared to many anti-imperialists that the U.S. was on an imperialist course that could no longer be stopped, so they dropped out of the movement. Those left focused on the news of the U.S. military committing egregious violence in the Philippines and became determined to expose such "atrocities" to the public. Women made material and symbolic contributions to this movement at home and abroad. However, their contributions have been previously disregarded.

Anti-Imperialism and the White Man's Burden

White men from privileged or well-known backgrounds represented the public face of the anti-imperialist movement, men such as: steel-magnate Andrew Carnegie, labor leader Samuel Gompers, satirist Mark Twain, lawyer-activist Moorfield Storey, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. (grandson of John Quincy Adams), Harvard philosopher William James, Yale sociologist William Graham Sumner, and reformers known for their connections to abolitionism, like William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. However, rank and file anti-imperialists included many working-class whites, Black and white women, as well as Black men, all of whom disagreed with the path the United States was taking in the Philippines.

For example, in February 1899, McClure’s magazine published Rudyard Kipling’s poem
“The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands.” In the midst of debates over the United States’ involvement in the Philippines, the poem spread quickly. In it, Kipling advised the United States to take its place alongside Great Britain and make the sacrifices necessary for the civilization of those “half devil and half child.” However, it was also the inspiration for many anti-imperialist counter-poems, serving as a phrase for anti-imperialist ridicule because of contradictions between violence and civilization.

While anti-imperialists were carving out the organization and its agenda, pro-imperialists were there to oppose them at every turn. In her work, Fighting for American Manhood (1998), Kristin Hoganson notes “imperialists derided the antis' manliness” (p. 175). Supporters of imperialism did this through depicting anti-imperialist men in cartoons as the "aunties," feminizing their opposition to the Philippine-American War. Feminizing anti-imperialists was meant to delegitimate their public influence on imperialist policies (Hoganson 1998). Hoganson (1998) states, "depicting men as women was the most effective way of showing they lacked the manly character necessary for political authority" (p. 176-177). But even for pro-imperialists, Anglo-Saxon men's supposed "adaptability," previously seen as so advantageous for progress, now needed to be reconsidered in light of colonial contact with "savage" Filipinos (Newman 1999). Therefore, during the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War, martial masculinity hegemonically redefined the relationship between gender, race, and nation (Hoganson 1998), emphasizing white men's independence. This put the masculinities of other white men, like anti-imperialists promoting cautiousness, in question with regard to their claims to patriotism and citizenship. Targeting governmental policies for change meant that the AIL’s main audience would be enfranchised citizens (i.e. in 1899, mainly white men), and pro-imperialists appealed to the same audience. Though formulations of it were contested, “the white man's burden” was inescapable.
the tension between the nationalist masculinities of the imperialists, embodied in the physically large, strong, young, white soldiers, and the miniscule, older white anti-imperialists, many dressed as women, apropos the "aunties." Anti-imperialist men were called "old women with trousers on," "squaw men," the "'old lady element' of public affairs," and were said to resemble a "nagging wife" (Hoganson 1998,177).

The intersectionality of anti-imperialists' race, class, and gender informed their views (Collins 2000). Therefore, there was no single coherent anti-imperialism. Rather, there were multiple anti-imperialisms. For example, in the context of "the white man's burden" debates, anti-imperialist leaders had an ambivalent take on gender and on women's roles as anti-imperialists. They spent little time discussing women, gender, or themselves as "emasculated" men in their correspondence to each other-- a function of their gendered privilege (Kimmel 2006). Their anti-imperialism came from a particular conception of their role as responsible citizens, carrying out their obligations to keep the nation true to its democratic legacy. While they espoused freedom, liberty, and self-determination, they practiced patriarchal control of the resistance. While they tried to prevent the nation from committing violence against racialized imperialist subjects, they kept Black men and women at the margins.

However, rejoinders to "the white man's burden" filled the pages of Black publications in various forms of "the Black man's burden" (Gatewood 1975). Some Black men like Clifford H. Plummer, who was secretary of the National Colored Protective League and an attorney in Boston, were involved with plans to form a Black auxiliary to the AIL (Gatewood 1975), and more formed their own organizations such as the "Colored National Anti-Imperialistic League" and the "Negro National Anti-Imperial and Anti-Trust League" (Foner and Winchester 1984: 167). Booker T. Washington wrote to the New York AIL declaring his support of anti-imperialist efforts and publicly declared his opposition given already existing "race problems" (Gatewood 1975). Kelly Miller, a professor at Howard University and a colleague of W.E.B. Du Bois in editing The Crisis, authored a broadside (an extended pamphlet) published by the AIL which stated "The whole trend of imperial aggression is antagonistic to the feebler races. It is a revival of racial arrogance." The anti-imperialist analyses of Black men ranged from radical to moderate, but they were all rooted in critiques of spreading race prejudice beyond the U.S. "race problems" (Gatewood 1975) with Indians, Blacks, and Chinese (Murphy 2005). Led by Ida B. Wells and the African American woman's club movement, the anti-lynching campaigns at the turn of the 20th century were seen as anti-imperialism by these women, including Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells (Carby 1985).

Although anti-imperialist leaders periodically made arguments comparing lynching Black men at home with torturing Filipinos in the colony, their practices of exclusion reproduced inequalities across race, class, and gender within the movement. Anti-imperialist leaders appreciated and accepted the support of women and women's organizations, but they were not open to taking on gender inequality along with anti-imperialism, though Susan B. Anthony did seek the support of men in the AIL. Keeping gender politics off the table enabled a situation where gendered contradictions could coexist, explicitly invoking gendered discourses only if immediate benefits were clear.

Although many women supported anti-imperialism, most of the women directly involved with the AIL were white and middle-class, a fact that enabled them to make monetary contributions to the movement. White women from the Midwest and the East Coast
formed auxiliary organizations of the AIL. The women's auxiliary of the Boston AIL petitioned other women for support in 1899. They implored, "We, women of the United States, earnestly protest against the war of conquest into which our country has been plunged in the Philippine islands. We appeal to the Declaration of Independence, which is the moral foundation of the constitution you have swore to defend, we reaffirm its weighty words." Other women's organizations such as the WCTU, the Congress of Mothers, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) also took official anti-imperialist stances, offering the AIL support.

WCTU leadership educated affiliated women on international affairs and violence in the Philippines, which they attributed to prostitution and liquor (Papachristou 1990). Two extraordinary women, Jane Addams and Josephine Shaw Lowell, transcended the expected roles for women of the AIL. Both of these white women acquired informal leadership positions as extraordinary "individuals" with valuable resources. Both had prior experience as reformers, informing their anti-imperialism and their style of activism, which was familiar to progressives.

Addams is frequently listed as one of the AIL’s most well-known vice presidents. She lent her name to the anti-imperialist cause as well as spoke at the 1899 Chicago Liberty Meetings against imperialism. In her speech, "Democracy or Militarism," Addams opened, “None of us who has been reared and nurtured in America can be wholly without the democratic instinct. It is not a question with any of us of having it or not having it; it is a merely question of trusting it or not trusting it” (Addams 1899), illuminating from her standpoint as a middle-class white woman that democratic values were taken for granted by US Americans. Therefore, she allowed anti-imperialists to use her social capital to support democracy.

In 1901, Josephine Shaw Lowell was the first woman appointed vice president of the New York Anti-Imperialist League. Lowell had lived with her husband in military camps during the Civil War. She subsequently devoted her life to philanthropic and reform work in the New York region. Like Addams, she was a seasoned and connected reformer when she took on the cause of anti-imperialism. As an anti-imperialist, Lowell was well into her 60s and deeply involved in the New York AIL. She gave opening and closing remarks at multiple AIL meetings. She had the most prolific correspondence with Ordway of any anti-imperialist, making suggestions as to the best and most effective courses of action. She agitated for more protests and public demonstrations against imperialism, specifically requesting something akin to what had been done during the abolitionist movement. She favored gathering petitions against imperialism in the Philippines with signatures of prominent Americans, and the New York AIL followed her preference.

However, Lowell was aware of the gendered politics around women’s involvement in anti-imperialist activities. She believed that keeping her name off petitions and other public matters would garner more support for anti-imperialism than taking credit for her activities. Therefore, Lowell asked to have her name left off petitions even though she had often conceived of and helped to implement them. She also feigned ignorance at how much money she was donating to persuade Ordway to take her frequent and generous donations. Lowell’s performance illustrates how she used her reformer experience as a subject and agent at the intersection of her race, class, and gender in the service of anti-imperialism by supporting and exploiting the coexistence of gendered contradictions.

Another woman who provided networks and labor for the AIL was Mary Storer Cobb of Northampton, Massachusetts, where she helped form a chapter of the AIL. With evidence of atrocities being committed by the
U.S. military in the Philippines, most sensational through the "water cure" torture and "reconcentration" camps, the AIL agitated public debate specifically on violence. This led to a Senate Investigation on Affairs in the Philippines (hereafter referred to as SIAP), which included lines of questioning on the violence committed by the U.S. military. Cobb's unique contribution was preparing soldiers to go before the SIAP. Her work was behind the scenes, yet crucial to the anti-imperialist campaign to expose violence in the Philippines, which had been the central issue for anti-imperialist women, regardless of race, from the outset.

**Women in the Public Debate on Imperialism**

Mainstream research on social movements tends to focus on a narrowly defined political arena, which often misses the contributions of women made behind the scenes (Ferree and Merrill 2000; Taylor 1999), such as Cobb. Anti-imperialist women frequently made interventions in the public debate through poems. Kipling's poem advising the U.S. on the Philippines, "The White Man’s Burden" (now infamous as a euphemism for imperialism), sparked a flood of anti-imperialist poems in response. At the turn of the twentieth century, poems were a legitimate public medium for both women and men (Harrington 2002; Nelson 2001). Contributing a poem to a public forum was just as appropriate as a letter to the editor for political expression, with newspapers allotting space specifically for the genre. The poems I select in this section directly respond to "the white man's burden" and demonstrate the author as a subject of prior experience and as an anti-imperialist agent.

Women, in particular, were more likely to express their political views through poems. The less direct format of poetic imagery allowed these disfranchised citizens a more conventionally accepted but still public outlet for civic participation. One of these women, Alice Smith-Travers, contributed the poem, “The White Man’s Burden” published in the Black Indianapolis newspaper *The Freeman*, March 4, 1899, focusing on the horrors of violence and the "Judas"-like behavior of the United States. She wrote,

"'Take up the white man's burden!'  
That causes the heart to quake  
As we read again with horror,  
Of those burnings at the stake,

Of white caps riding in the night,  
And burning black men's homes,  
Of the inmates shot as they rush out  
And the awful dying groans,

Of crimes that would outnumber  
Those in the foreign Isle,  
Committed by heath[sic] people  
'Half devil and half child.'

Then free those Filipinos[sic] people,  
From the accursed rule of Spain,  
And put on them the shackels [sic]  
Of a haughtier nation's reign.

With 'Judas' acts in every form,  
Conceivable by man,  
And the thirst for blood, and greed  
for gold  
Is surely the white man's plan."  

Smith-Travers’ analysis shows her criticism of "civilization" and "the white man’s burden" as a subject produced through the experiences of witnessing violence as a Black woman in the U.S. Her clarity on the contradictions of imperialist violence, through irony, rearticulated imperialism as Anglo-Saxonist disagreements over (rather than with) "civilization." Additionally in 1899, Anna Manning Comfort, a leading white suffragist, connected the problem of the “white man’s
burden” with lynching, treatment of Indians, and women’s suffrage in her poem “Home Burdens of Uncle Sam.” By 1902, this line of argumentation had been adopted (or co-opted) by the AIL in the campaign to expose violence in the SIAP.

As an organization the AIL also contributed poems to the debate, including some authored by women. In 1900, the New England AIL published a volume entitled, *Liberty Poems: Inspired by the Crisis of 1898-1900*, whose publication was underwritten by Mary Pickering, a substantial AIL donor (Zwick 2005). In total, the volume included 76 poems, with most written by anti-imperialist leaders and 13 authored by women.

**Image 3. Liberty Poems: Inspired by the Crisis of 1898-1900. On the inside cover of this volume is a picture of a trench in the Philippines, with dead Filipinos and U.S. soldiers standing over them. Picture taken by author.**

Expressing their standpoint in newspapers, women consistently highlighted the violence being committed in the Philippines and raised the question of women’s suffrage, pointing out the hypocrisy of (purportedly) spreading liberty abroad while disfranchising citizens at home. They expressed their indignation concerning "the white man's burden" both as citizens without the vote and as women, many of them mothers, with a moral duty to show their abhorrence for violence committed in the name of liberty. However, these explicitly gendered anti-imperialisms were conventional women’s issues and outside of the formal agenda of the AIL. Therefore, they did not disrupt the masculinist practices of the organization, but they did add another dimension to anti-imperialist debate.

**Women's Monetary Contributions**

Besides entering the public debate as women with criticisms of violence, women with anti-imperialist views were contributing monetarily to the AIL. Between 1898-1902, the dates recorded in the AIL ledger books, women gave $7,082, which was 29% of the total number of donations to the AIL’s funds. Even more significant, in light of assertions of their noninvolvement and general inattention, is that of the total AIL budget between 1898-1902, multi-millionaire Andrew Carnegie—who contributed $1000 at a time—contributed $4,400, which was 20% of the total funds, while women’s contributions totaled 33% of the AIL funds, and other men’s contributions totaled $10,236, or 47% of the AIL funds.

Given the relative unavailability of independent expendable income for women during this period, the fact that women gave more than their representative numbers demonstrates anti-imperialist women’s deep concern and corresponding mobilization over imperialism. This is an economic example of the rupture between gendered schemas and resources that exemplifies masculinist ambivalence in the AIL, showing women’s expanded role—nudging along their inclusion—despite the insistent exclusion of women’s leadership in, or public influence over, the AIL.

**Women in the Philippines**

Women also contributed to anti-imperialist
activities from the Philippines. The wife of a captain stationed in the Philippines first wrote back to a newspaper in the United States, breaking the story on the military's use of the "water cure" in cooperation with her husband. Together they thought it better for her to expose the story as his wife than for him as a commissioned officer. This set anti-imperialists into a fury of investigations regarding violence used by the military and general conditions in the Philippines, leading directly to their involvement in the SIAP.

One investigator informing the AIL was Helen Calista Wilson. In 1903, under the anonymity of "A Massachusetts Woman," she published her impressions on the reconcentration policy while on a fact-finding mission sponsored by a former anti-imperialist executive committee member, F. Fiske Warren. Warren sponsored her independently of the AIL, although her information aided AIL activities at home. Her information on the reconcentration policy published in 1903 was the first information available to the public demonstrating how the military operations in the Philippines were affecting the Filipino people, not just insurgents. She later made more systematic analyses of the policy, sending back reports to the Springfield Republican until reconcentration was abandoned in 1906 (Kramer 2006). As with Addams and Lowell, the AIL used her skills as an "individual" with the ability to speak Spanish and network both with U.S. colonials, especially other stenographers and teachers, in the colony as well as elite Filipino families.

One member of such a family, Clemencia Lopez, visited the United States as a guest of the AIL in 1902-1903 (Zwick 2001). She spoke to various groups across the U.S., specifically disputing the idea that Filipinos were too uncivilized for self-government. She was living evidence to the contrary according to instructors at Wellesley College, where she studied English and persuaded other women of the importance of the anti-imperialist cause (Zwick 2001). Lopez spent almost two years in the U.S. speaking on conditions in the Philippines. Because the U.S. military government in Batangas had imprisoned three of her brothers (Zwick 2001), she also made a special appeal to President Roosevelt on behalf of her family, which was submitted as evidence in the SIAP. In her farewell speech at a luncheon given in her honor by the AIL, she said,

"When I planned to return to my native land it never occurred to me that my friends would gather to bid me farewell. Still less could I have expected that the gathering should be presided over by the friend of John Brown [Mr. Sanborn]; that the words of parting should fall from the lips of the son of the Liberator [Mr. Garrison]; that I should see among the guests the secretary of Charles Sumner [Mr. Storey]; and that there should be present in propria persona that aged and honored paladin of liberty, Gov. Boutwell. These names became famous at a time when the victim was the black man. Now it is the     brown."

Like other Filipino nationalists, she was familiar with the history of racist exclusions of U.S. democracy and understood the implications for new racisms on democracy in the Philippines under U.S. rule. As a woman, she was able to speak out in the U.S. without posing a threat, while her brothers were considered enemies of the state. In this context, "masculinist ambivalence" served her particular cause more than feminist politics espousing gender equality could have (see Murphy's (2009) "Women's Anti-Imperialism, The White Man's Burden, and the Philippine-American War: Theorizing Masculinist
Ambivalence in Protest” in *Gender & Society* for the original article giving the theoretical elaboration and application of masculinist ambivalence).

**Masculinist Ambivalence and Contentious Politics**

The creative application of prior experience influenced how anti-imperialists argued against “the white man's burden” and for democracy over time. Initially, the leadership of the AIL argued over ideals of masculine citizenship, middle-class white women argued over the ideals of civilization, Black men argued against the conflagration of race prejudice, and Black women argued with the existence of civilization as it was defined. Noting these differences is not enough; these differences were relationally constituted through the experience of being anti-imperialist as subjects constituted at the intersection of race, class, and gender. After the defeat of Bryan in 1900 and a period of shared anti-imperialist struggle, white men increasingly adopted arguments over ideals of civilization and all anti-imperialist debates focused on violence such as those Black anti-imperialists had earlier espoused regarding violence in the metropole (e.g. lynching) and violence in the Philippines. Pro-imperialists essentially won the debate over masculine citizenship. Therefore, the more inclusive and democratically based arguments proved to be the most robust for anti-imperialists over time.

The AIL struggled within the limits of gendered conceptions of citizenship and nation, rather than taking stances that posed challenges to gender inequality. It did, however, acknowledge the utility of women’s resources and adopt their focus on violence. Although the well-known anti-imperialist, Edward Atkinson, noted as early as 1899 that having influential women in public leadership roles would be beneficial for gaining the support of organized women's groups in the U.S. (Hoganson 1998), and Herbert Welsh made efforts to obtain women activists, mentioning to AIL president, Moorfield Storey, that reputable women would be helpful for organizing other women, no organized plans were made to involve women as a group.

Despite this, over time women were increasingly granted the symbolic office of vice president of the AIL. Therefore, in 1909 a committee was appointed to "consider the propriety of inviting women to become members" of the AIL (rather than the auxiliaries they had previously constituted). Following up at a meeting in 1910, however, the AIL deemed inviting women members "inexpedient" and continued their formal exclusion. Having been feminized by pro-imperialists, white anti-imperialist men faced a kind of "double bind" (Einwohner et al 2000) of formally identifying with anti-imperialist women and further delegitimating anti-imperialism with the mainstream (although they had already lost widespread support by this time) and of not fully including women at the risk of alienating them and losing their resources. Although AIL leaders maintained male-domination as a strategic resource to secure legitimacy, “Paradoxically, diversity often increases the resources and power of challengers” (West and Blumberg 1990:21). This was recognized by some white anti-imperialist men but not fully embraced, ultimately limiting the appeal of the AIL. Just as the long list of vice presidents was a symbolic message of anti-imperialists' social capital, so was the official exclusion of women as members symbolic of who was qualified to be an "anti-imperialist" to those outside the anti-imperialist movement. Homosocial politics based on "the white man's burden" tightened the boundaries of exclusion around anti-imperialism, even as anti-imperialists struggled for democracy.

**Conclusion**

Anti-imperialists creatively deployed gendered
resources without reconciling gendered contradictions. Masculinist norms were not disrupted, if sometimes questioned, creating a space where women's informal leadership was acceptable for extraordinary individuals, while women as a group were funneled into activities already established as gender appropriate, such as planning anti-imperialist luncheons, hosting Filipino guests, and forming auxiliary organizations. Within the AIL masculinist ambivalence stifled the possibility of explicitly gendered contentious politics opposing imperialism through informal inclusion of women's resources (such as money, social capital, and cultural capital) and formal exclusions of women's membership. Nevertheless, women were involved in the AIL to such an extent that the AIL would not have been able to achieve many of its goals without the monetary resources or the social networks of women. Women's contributions were key to the successes anti-imperialists did achieve.

Erin L. Murphy, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is the author of the "'Prelude to Imperialism': Whiteness and Chinese Exclusion in the Reimagining of the United States." Journal of Historical Sociology (2005), 18:457-490, and "Women's Anti-Imperialism, 'The White Man's Burden,' and the Philippine-American War: Theorizing Masculinist Ambivalence in Protest." Gender & Society (2009), 23:244-270. She can be contacted at murphymc@illinois.edu

See also


Notes

1 I enclose race in quotes in the first reference here to underline its socially constructed, time-dependent meaning.
3 Letter dated May 14, 1901, Box 1, EO.
5 Letter dated Jan. 20, 1900, Box 1, EO.
7 Women’s Auxiliary of the Anti-Imperialist League.
8 MSLOC; EO; Record Book Vol. I, Anti-Imperialist League, MLC.
Newspaper clipping, undated. Herbert Welsh Papers, Special Collections, Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan.

Anti-Imperialist League Papers, Swarthmore Peace Collection, Swarthmore College.

Letter dated October 19, 1899, Box 1, EO.

Letter dated November 27, 1901, Box 1, EO.

Letter dated January 10, 1902, Box 1, EO.

The exact amount is unclear as the New York AIL ledger books are not included in any of the collections. E.g., see letter dated January 25, 1902, Box 1, EO.


The “water cure” was an ironic label. The contemporary “water curist” movement encouraged drinking a lot of water to improve health and wellbeing.

Senate Investigation on the Affairs in the Philippines. 1902. Congressional Hearings.

Mary Storer Cobb Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.


Ibid. These numbers come from my calculations based on the information found in the ledger books of the Anti-Imperialist League.

Correspondence from Herbert Welsh to Storey, January 31, 1902. MSLOC.


Letter dated February 4, 1902, Box 1, MSLOC.

Dissertation. MLC.

Record Books of Anti-Imperialist League, Vol. 4. MLC.

References


Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the


**Archival Sources With Multiple Citations**

EO, Edward Ordway Papers Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library. Ordway was the secretary for the New York based AIL.

MSMHS, Moorfield Storey Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Storey was an anti-imperialist leader based in Boston, member of the AIL executive committee, and served as President after George Boutwell.

MLC, Maria Lanzar-Carpio Papers, Special Collections at Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Lanzar-Carpio was a doctoral student at University of Michigan in Political Science through the Pensionada program.

MSLOC, Moorfield Storey Papers, Library of Congress, Washington DC.