Annexation of the Philippine Islands

Below you will find six letters expressing opinions on whether or not the United States should annex (bring under its control) the Philippine Islands in 1898. Read each letter.

Letter #1:

FROM: Commodore Dewey
TO: William McKinley, President of the United States

Mr. President:

You have asked my advice as to whether or not the United States should annex the Philippine Islands. I am amazed that any American would hesitate for one moment on this issue. There is no doubt we must have the Islands without delay for economic and strategic reasons.

Economically, the United States needs expanded world markets, raw materials, and new fields of investment—the Philippines will not only provide us with much of these, but also a stepping stone to unlimited opportunities in the Far East. Beyond the Pacific are the markets of the world that can be entered and controlled only by obtaining naval bases in that area. To affirm the importance of distant markets, and the relation to them of our own immense powers of production, implies logically the recognition of the link that joins the products and the markets—carrying trade. The three together constitute the chain of maritime power.

If we are to become a great seaboard power in the Pacific, we must stand guard against German and French rivalry. They have aspirations for commercial extension, for colonies and for influence in distant regions. These policies have brought us into a collision course with Germany. The incident of the Samoa Islands is suggestive of their ambitions. All over the world the German commercial and colonial push can be observed.

Strategically, the United States must have protection from possible German aggression in the Pacific. It is our preparedness and not quite our acquiescence that holds back Germany even now. The German navy now stands off Manila Bay. If we withdraw, they will certainly annex the Islands. Is the United States willing to see them taken by a powerful rival?

Militarily, the United States needs the Philippines. If the Pacific states and our commercial interests in the Pacific are to be protected, three things are needful: First, protection of the chief harbors, by fortification and coast defense ships; secondly, naval forces, which alone will allow this nation to extend its influence outward. Thirdly, it should be an inviolate resolution of our national policy that no foreign state should thenceforth acquire a coaling position within 3 thousand miles of San Francisco.

The Islands in question are needed to maintain our navy by allowing for coaling stations and as an outer perimeter of defense. A powerful American navy in the Pacific will induce a great increase in our commercial activity and provide an outlet to the East for our great industries.

The position of the United States, between the two Old Worlds and the great oceans has ended our self-imposed isolation. We must either expand to protect our western flanks or pay the consequences.
Letter #2:

Honorable President McKinley:

For centuries my people have struggled to free themselves from Spanish rule. Now Spanish power in these islands has crumbled. For the first time in modern history, the Filipino people dare to dream of freedom. With the help of Admiral Dewey and his forces, we have driven the Spanish from our land.

Let it always be said that the United States took up arms to aid a neighboring people struggling to be free—that the American people delivered the Filipino people from the tyranny of Spain.

But, Mr. President, are we really to be free? Have we escaped from one master only to be chained by another? Has the ancient doctrine of imperialism returned to our land in a new form? Our friends in Europe tell us that you plan to annex the Philippine Islands. Your army occupies our capital, Manila. Your navy patrols our water. Your forces have been increased by 20,000 men in the last week. Your Congress talks of a colonial policy for the Philippines.

Mr. President, you know we are at your mercy, we have little save the will to be free. Whether this war shall be known in history as a war for liberty or as a war for conquest; whether the principles of self government shall be strengthened or abandoned; whether we remain free or again become a conquered people depends on your decision. Mr. President, you know we will not willingly surrender our freedom. If you do not withdraw your army, there will be a war.

In closing, Mr. President, let me remind you of the words of Abraham Lincoln who freed a conquered people. “No man is good enough to govern another without that man’s consent.”

Emilio Aguinaldo
Commander of the Filipino Army

Letter #3:

President William McKinley
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Mr. President:

As a senator of this great nation, the United States of America, I feel it my duty to advise you on the question of annexing the Philippines. It is the manifest destiny of the United States to annex these islands. Social and economic reasons dictate this course.

Socially, the Unites States has been blessed with a superior culture reflected in its people
of Anglo-Saxon background. It is the duty of the white race to pick up this burden of spreading our civil liberty and civilization to the unfortunate darker peoples of the world. God has seen fit to show us the way. What right do we have to keep this way of life to ourselves? We must take the Philippines in order that we may share with them our great culture and bring the message of Jesus Christ to them.

Economically, we have been transformed from a virgin continent into one of the great commercial powers of the world. Frequently the output of American factories, working at full capacity, is much greater than the domestic market can possibly consume. It seems that every year we shall be confronted with an increasing surplus of manufactured goods. If American artisans are to be kept employed the year around, we must have access to the markets of Asia.

Mr. President, we should go forth to fight for humanity, but where American blood establishes liberty and law, the American people will see that blood is no shed in vain. A great civilization will arise where we establish our way of life. Annexation will allow the Filipino people to join our family as younger brothers in liberty, order and civilization.

John Beverage
Senator of Mississippi

Letter #4:

Mr. President:

I have looked over the various provisions of the Constitution of the United States and I find no clause that empowers the government to act as a receiver for any other government.

No member of Congress is more religious than I, but I do not believe in this doctrine that we are trustees under God of the civilization of the world. Search the Constitution and you will fail to find in any one of its provisions a justification for the exercise of such an authority. This Government is not a foreign missionary society. You start from a false premise, and then you conclude that it is our duty as a trustee to march around the outposts of civilization, to patrol the waters of the world, and wherever we can find a feeble or degenerate race to claim them as our trust, and then, as the chosen people of God, impose upon them our sovereignty.

I can never consent to the proposition that this is a government function, and that it is our duty to deprive a single race on earth, no matter how depraved and degenerate it may be, either in the name of religion or civilization of the slightest fragment of this possessions of liberty.

Deeply as I love my country, I would rather see that flag lowered and trampled upon than used as a pirate’s ensign and raised not as an emblem of honor, but as an instrument of terror and oppression to the helpless and enfeebled races of mankind.

The forcible annexation of the Philippine Islands will cost this country more than its honor. Who can estimate in money and men the cost of subduing and keeping in the subjection eight millions of people, six thousand miles away, scattered over twelve hundred islands and living under a tropical sun?

If this question is to be settled upon the basis of dollars and cents, who will insure the nation that receipts will equal the expenditures? Who will guarantee that the income from the Philippines will find its way back to the pockets of the people who, through taxation, will furnish
the money? And even if the amount invested in ships, armament and in equipment of soldiers is returned dollar for dollar, who will place a price upon the blood that will be shed? If war is to be waged for trade, how much trade ought to be demanded in exchange for a human life?

Mr. President, the demand for standing army of one hundred thousand men is the beginning of a policy which will increase the hours of toil and fill the homes of the land with vacant chairs. Are we by the force of arms going to apply our system of government to the Philippine people for the benefit of the Untied States? Is this the great purpose of our democracy?

Honorable Isidor Rayner
Congressman

Letter #5:

Address of the Reverend Josiah Strong delivered before the United States Missionary Council in Boston, 1898.

We have freed the Filipinos from the abuse of Spanish rule. We cannot leave them to drift alone on a dark aimless sea. We must save these less fortunate people from barbarism. We must patiently and with kindness teach these people to govern themselves and enjoy the blessings of Christian civilization.

This Missionary Council does not support a grab for empire, but we support a paternal arrangement of our government toward the Philippines. This will be a heroic effort to free the oppressed and teach millions of ignorant, debased human beings how to love. God has outfitted us with a task. Shall we shrink from it? It is a divine mission. Can we renounce this Holy trust? Can we leave the savage to this base condition?

There are so many real things to be done – canals to dig, railways to be laid, cities to be built, people to be saved. To these poor backward people, primitive and pagan, who sell their children into slavery, chew narcotic plants, and sacrifice animals to their spirits, we must make whatever sacrifice it takes to lead them from the darkness of superstition and ignorance into the light of Christian love.

Letter #6:

William Jennings Bryan – as reported in a newspaper interview, 1898:

Our nation is in great danger. The very foundation of our government is being assaulted. Our nation must give up any intention of entering upon a colonial policy. Our traditions and our future welfare all forbid our entering upon a career of conquest.

The forcible annexation of the Philippine Islands is not necessary to make the United
States a world power. We have been a world power for a hundred years.

It is not our destiny to push Anglo-Saxon religion and culture throughout the uncivilized world; for we are a blend ourselves; we are American culture, and this American culture teaches us to respect the rights of others and this will imprint our mark upon the hearts of all who long for freedom.

The forcible annexation, or even with consent, would prove a source of financial loss rather than gain. Who can estimate in money and men the cost of subduing eight million Filipinos.

The imperialists tell us that trade follows the flag. This argument cannot stand in the light of facts. England controls India, a land of three hundred million, yet does more trade with us, a country of eighty million, that she does not control.

It is argued by the imperialist that annexation of the Philippines would furnish a new field for the investment of American capital. If there is surplus money here seeking investment, why is it not employed here in developing domestic enterprises?

To those who inquire, “Who will haul down the flag?” let us reply, “Who would stain the flag with dishonor?”