

The Commoner As Nation-Builder: The Aggressive And Active  
Foreign Policy Ideas Of William Jennings Bryan

By Reed Miller

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For Mom, Dad, and my loving family.

About the Author -

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this book is to examine the foreign policy ideas of American statesman William Jennings Bryan. It is a straight history, and the purpose of straight history about a single person and the players around that person is to learn everything that influenced the one person's thinking and decisions, and then compare the thinking and decisions to other people in history. Bryan was a leader of the Populist and Progressive movements in the United States from the turn of the 20th Century until 1925. Consequently, he often is identified with domestic reforms. Bryan advocated policies such as: prohibition, women's suffrage, a graduated income tax, the direct election of senators, government ownership of railroads and telegraph systems, the initiative and referendum, and limits of one term in office for the President and Vice President. Historians have written little about his foreign policy beliefs in comparison with his ideas on domestic reform, however. In large part, this seems due to the fact that he negotiated 30 arbitration treaties as Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson. Historians have assumed him to be a strict pacifist because of the arbitration agreements, and argued that he offered the United States no realistic means of accomplishing its foreign policy goals. Bryan's foreign policy ideas have been portrayed as idealistic at best, so many historians have not taken that much of an interest in them.

History offers much evidence of realpolitik in the Commoner's foreign policy thinking, however. Bryan volunteered to fight in two American wars, the Spanish-American War and World War I. He also advocated the deployment of U.S. troops in Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic to calm long-lasting revolutions and in-fighting there. Eventually, he even came to support U.S. participation in the League of Nations. Bryan believed that the United States should not lose its chance to influence the way nations interacted with each other, especially after the calamity of World War I. The Commoner's decision to support the League of Nations came after a long personal struggle. There was enough realpolitik in his foreign policy beliefs, in fact, that he held onto the Monroe Doctrine as one of his main guides to foreign relations for the bulk of his career.

If the Commoner was willing to risk his own life in war and send American troops abroad, then, the question becomes what was the Commoner after? He was not after American empire, or the subjugation of other peoples. He made this clear from early in his career. In the election of 1900, Bryan ran for President on a platform that included anti-imperialism as its main plank. He believed that the United States should not annex Cuba, the Philippines, or Puerto Rico, which it had occupied during the Spanish-American War. The Commoner said that he was after the idea of self-government. In his nomination speech for the presidency in 1900, he announced that the new American mission should be to "raise nations." The chief aims of U.S. foreign policy, he added,

should be to promote the concepts of "government by consent of the governed" and democracy, and to develop a system of relations between nations that would bring a lasting world peace. During the election, he offered to create American protectorates over Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico while they each developed a democratic government.

What is not clear from this research is to what degree the Commoner respected the unique histories and characters of other nations.

From all indications, he seems to have believed that the American form of democracy, with its President, judicial branch, and legislative branch, was the crowning achievement of history. It is not clear if there was room for other forms of democracy in the Commoner's plan for foreign policy, such as legislative monarchies and socialist governments. By 1920, when Bryan argued for American participation in the League of Nations, he seems to have come to the realization that other nations, and especially democracies, could be negotiated with. He also seems to have believed that all nations deserved a voice in the new organization. This is an area that should be explored by further research.

A second area that needs further exploration is Bryan's foreign policy towards Asia. He did support the Open Door policy because of its emphasis on free trade with Asian countries, but he appears not to have spoken out a great deal about policy in the Far East during his career.

Perhaps this was because of his reliance on the Monroe Doctrine, which he drifted away from towards the end of his career.

This thesis is compiled from both primary and secondary sources. The main primary sources used are The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan, World Peace: A Written Debate Between William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan, Bryan on Imperialism: Speeches, Newspaper Articles, and Interviews, and other books that contain the Commoner's speeches. The secondary sources are discussed in the Introduction to the book.

Reed Miller has written another book called Come Forth Now, Servant Nation Of Peace! It is a philosophical and religious work that encourages the United States to adopt the attitude of the servant in international relations, and promote peace and the economics of a large world family, rather than seeking to dominate others economically and through war. Similarities between the Natural Law of family relations (the principles of a loving, successful family) are considered and emphasized in the book, and compared to the principles of the New Testament to develop national policy. A plan for world peace also is developed based on a conflict resolution dispute used by Buddhists, who have not had a major conflict amongst themselves in 2,000 years.

## Chapter One

### Introduction and Historiography

What historians have written concerning William Jennings Bryan has changed somewhat since the first works were published on him in the mid-1920's. This thesis uses primary and secondary sources to explore the foreign policy ideas of Bryan, who became Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson. Most of all, the research presented here seeks to discover whether Bryan was a pacifist, an isolationist, or an advocate of aggressive foreign relations. Histories written about the Great Commoner to date have generally portrayed the statesman as a pacifist or isolationist. There is much evidence to the contrary, however. Also discussed in the thesis are the principles that stood behind Bryan's foreign policy beliefs. The principles were surprisingly traditional, yet they led him to be an advocate of an aggressive foreign policy for the United States.

Early historical works about the Great Commoner portrayed his tenure as Secretary of State as a political failure. Historians criticized Bryan as having been too idealistic and too progressive to function within the United States government. He had, for example, negotiated 30 arbitration treaties, the practicality of which could

supposedly be seen at the beginning of World War I.<sup>1</sup> The historiography also depicted Bryan's resignation from the State Department in June 1915 as evidence that he was disloyal. The Commoner had weakened the President at the moment when he needed the appearance of strength most.

Wilson was negotiating with the Germans over the sinking of the British passenger ship Lusitania, and the loss of Americans who were on the vessel. One wrong move by Bryan, historians said, and he could have caused America to slip into the Great War in 1915 instead of 1917.

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<sup>1</sup>Selig Adler, "Bryan And Wilsonian Caribbean Penetration," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. 20 (May 1940): 199.

In 1936, the first truly favorable biography of Bryan appeared. It was written by Wayne C. Williams and entitled William Jennings Bryan. In the biography, the author argued that the Great Commoner was indeed a very idealistic statesman for his time, but one that later had most of his idealistic policies vindicated.<sup>2</sup> For example, Bryan promoted: the direct election of Senators by the general public, a graduated income tax, a Cabinet position for labor, the initiative and referendum, and women's suffrage.

Williams also argued that Bryan's arbitration treaties, which have been used by many historians to indicate that the Commoner's ideas failed, actually became the basis for the League of Nations. At the center of each treaty was the idea that international disputes should be investigated for a period of six months to a year by an international committee before the nations involved in the disagreement could go to war. This concept may have had an impact on President Wilson. Williams claimed it was, in fact, Wilson's inspiration for the League of Nations.<sup>3</sup> The author concluded that since so many of Bryan's ideas later came to be accepted, it demonstrated that his policies were in touch with what was best for the American people. Williams'

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<sup>2</sup>Wayne C. Williams, William Jennings Bryan (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), 503.

<sup>3</sup>Edward G. Hoffman, Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1920, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bookwalter-Ball Printing Co, 1920), 239. Bryan himself said in a speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1920 that, "You cannot call me an enemy of Woodrow Wilson; it was my treaty plan that he took to Paris (for the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles); I have helped him to become immortal."



overwhelming praise of Bryan, however, may be attributed in part to a reaction against the international lawlessness of Adolf Hitler and the fascists during the 1930's. The Commoner's efforts to maintain peace between nations through arbitration probably had an appeal to Americans in the mid-1930's, when William Jennings Bryan was written.

Bryan's interventionist policies in Latin America were not dealt with to a great extent in Williams' biography. The Commoner's support for American military interventions in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti contradicted Williams' thesis that Bryan was primarily an idealist. In these cases, the statesman was willing to use the blunt realism of the sword to advance American aims in Latin America. Historians seem to have had little luck with explanations of the Commoner's support for these interventions, in fact, until the 1940's.

In May 1940, Selig Adler published an article entitled "Bryan And Caribbean Penetration" that made an excellent attempt to deal with Bryan's Latin American policies.<sup>4</sup> The article stated that once the Commoner joined the State Department, he came to found his policy towards Latin America on the Monroe Doctrine. Bryan believed that the United States must prevent European nations from establishing colonies in Latin America. He also decided that the primary reason despotic rulers existed in Latin America was because European countries backed them financially. The Commoner took up the position that it would be perfectly allowable for the United States to intervene in Latin American countries to promote stable democracies there. In this way, the

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<sup>4</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 210.

Europeans would have their ambitions stymied in the Western Hemisphere.

One weakness of Adler's article was that the author did not touch on the role that patriotism played in Bryan's decision to adopt the Monroe Doctrine. Throughout his life, Bryan was a highly patriotic person. He volunteered to fight in two American wars, including the Spanish-American War in 1898. By 1913, when Bryan became Secretary of State, the Monroe Doctrine had become an American tradition not only in the State Department, but among the American people as well. Consequently, it would have been almost inconceivable for the Commoner not to have adopted at least some premises of the doctrine on his own. Clear evidence exists to show that Bryan had adopted the doctrine as a guide to his foreign policy beliefs as far back as 1898.

Adler also did not link the Monroe Doctrine to the Commoner's struggle to keep America from participating in World War I. The doctrine not only stated that the U.S. should keep European nations from establishing colonies in the Western Hemisphere, after all, but said that the country should not become entangled in the quarrels of Europe.

After the appearance of Adler's article, the idea that Bryan had many traditional beliefs, including tenants of the Monroe Doctrine, began to disappear from much of the historiography about the statesman.

An excellent example of this was a book published in 1965 by Lawrence W. Levine entitled Defender of the Faith.<sup>5</sup> In the work, the author argued that Bryan may have exhibited conservative tendencies at certain

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<sup>5</sup>Lawrence W. Levine, Defender Of The Faith, William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915-1925 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

points in his life, but he was predominantly a liberal politician in favor of progressive reform and pacifism. The fact that Bryan was a liberal undoubtedly is true, as he ran for President three times on progressive Democratic platforms. The author misjudged the extent of Bryan's pacifism, however. The Commoner was willing to send the American military to intervene in Latin America countries on two occasions, and would have done it on a third occasion except for his resignation as Secretary of State.

The trend to portray Bryan as primarily a progressive reformer and pacifist has continued up to the present day. Writings in the 1980's portrayed the Commoner as a missionary isolationist, meaning that while Bryan wanted the United States to help and improve the world, he simultaneously wanted the country to remain free of the world's entanglements and wars. An excellent example of this portrayal was a book written by Kendrick A. Clements entitled William Jennings Bryan, Missionary Isolationist. The book was published in 1982, and it portrayed the Commoner as a man torn between idealism and traditional American isolationism.<sup>6</sup> The author emphasized that Bryan tried to use progressive reform to make America a moral example for the rest of the world.

Once again, however, Bryan's interventions in Latin America seemed to perplex the author. Clements did not successfully explain how an "isolationist" could support the use of American military might to

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<sup>6</sup>Kendrick A. Clements, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), xii.

promote democracies in Latin America. Clements also did not pick up on the fact that Bryan, much like President Theodore Roosevelt, chose to expand the uses of the Monroe Doctrine to include the prevention of European financial influence in Latin America. The Commoner went further than Roosevelt in some ways, however, as shall be discussed later. Clements' book is nicely written, but it tends to downplay the traditional side of Bryan's policies during the period in which Bryan was Secretary of State. The Commoner went from a progressive stance to a more traditional stance when he became Secretary of State, and not the other way around. It seems, in fact, that the traditional ideas of William Jennings Bryan need more emphasis in most of the histories written about the former Secretary of State.

The research presented here is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is this introduction. The second chapter is an overview of the Commoner's foreign policy ideas. It mainly focuses on Bryan's statements and actions as Secretary of State, but touches on his involvement in the Spanish-American War in 1898 to show how aggressive he could be in foreign policy. The chapter is presented early in the thesis so that the reader can get a general overview of Bryan's foreign policy beliefs. In the course of the research conducted for this report, however, it became clear that the Commoner was heavily involved in foreign policy debates at two other points in his career. The first point was immediately following the Spanish-American War, when Bryan ran for President in 1900. The Great Commoner chose to make anti-imperialism one of the main Democratic themes of that campaign. His

views on imperialism, and what the United States should do with the lands it occupied during the war, are discussed in chapter three.

The second point at which Bryan weighed in strongly on foreign policy issues occurred at the conclusion of the Great War. The United States became embroiled in a debate over whether or not to join the League of Nations at that time. Interestingly, the Commoner had been giving thought to the question for some time before 1918. In June 1915, ex-president William Howard Taft had founded a group called the League to Enforce Peace. Its main aim was to promote the establishment of an organization similar to the League of Nations. Bryan engaged in a written debate with Taft in 1916 and 1917 about the proposal for a League to Enforce Peace. His views on that organization, and the later proposal for a League of Nations, are discussed in the fourth chapter.

The conclusion of this thesis follows chapter four. It precisely defines what Bryan's foreign policy beliefs were based on the information uncovered in this report, and answers whether Bryan was an advocate of passive or aggressive foreign relations.

## Chapter Two

### The Commoner as a Student of the Monroe Doctrine

William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State under the Woodrow Wilson administration, has often been described by historians as a missionary isolationist. The Secretary of State is said to have believed that the United States had a special duty to improve and serve the world, while simultaneously believing that the U.S. should stay free of the world's entanglements.<sup>7</sup> This apparently is why Mr. Bryan resigned from Mr. Wilson's Cabinet, as he felt the President was following a course of action that was likely to lead America into World War I. In other areas of Bryan's foreign policy, however, it seems he was anything but an isolationist. In Latin America, for example, the Secretary came to support military interventions in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico. Bryan also signed a treaty with Nicaragua that made it a virtual protectorate of the United States. These actions all came from a Democrat who ran for President in 1900 on a platform that harshly criticized the imperialist policies of the Republicans. During that election, Bryan stated he thought it "better a thousand times that our flag in the Orient give way to a flag representing the idea of self-government than the flag of this Republic should become

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<sup>7</sup>Kendrick A. Clements, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), xii.

that of an empire."<sup>8</sup> The questions that remain, therefore, are how and why did Bryan change from his anti-imperialist beliefs in 1900 to interventionist policies during his tenure as Secretary of State; and what, if anything, did the Secretary's actions in Latin America indicate regarding missionary isolationism?

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<sup>8</sup>Paul W. Glad, The Trumpet Soundeth: William Jennings Bryan And His Democracy, 1896-1912 (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 77.

It is not surprising that historians have labeled Bryan as a missionary isolationist when one looks at what the Great Commoner stood for before he became Secretary of State in 1913. Bryan was the long-avowed leader of the Populist movement in America. As a Populist, he stood for policies that he felt would "morally improve" the fabric of American society. Examples of his pursuits include: prohibition, a graduated income tax, the direct election of senators, government ownership of all railroads and telegraph systems, free coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one, the initiative and referendum, limits of one term in office for both the Vice President and President, and eventually, women's suffrage.<sup>9</sup> The Populist movement also made anti-imperialism its "paramount issue" in the election of 1900, and chose Bryan as its presidential candidate.<sup>10</sup> During that election, Bryan criticized Republican politicians for promoting U.S. empire overseas when Americans had always stood for democracy and self-government at home. He feared that President William McKinley would annex Cuba and the Philippines instead of giving the countries self-rule. The Commoner was not against establishing American protectorates over the nations, however (see chapter three).

Although the Great Commoner often criticized the Republicans in the White House in the late 1800's and early 1900's, he was not disloyal to the United States government. He simply believed that a leader must

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<sup>9</sup>Glad, The Trumpet Soundeth, 52.

<sup>10</sup>Selig Adler, "Bryan And Wilsonian Caribbean Penetration," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 20 (May 1940): 200.



stand up for what he or she believed in. Bryan told his wife that a true leader could not back down from his or her own positions because no matter how radical the public viewed the leader's positions to be, "all progress comes through compromise; not a compromise of principle, but an adjustment between the more radical and the less radical positions."<sup>11</sup>

"These questions (of politics) are more important than my personal fortunes," Bryan told his wife.<sup>12</sup> In 1896, 1900, and 1908, Bryan ran for President on progressive platforms that he felt would improve the fabric of American society. With strong moral stands, the Commoner came to be a widely accepted Democratic politician. Bryan almost won the election of 1896, in which he received the most popular votes of any candidate who had run up to that time. He did not gain enough electoral votes to clinch the victory, however.<sup>13</sup>

Bryan also proved his loyalty to the United States by volunteering to join the American Army in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. This is not something usually associated with a Populist. The Commoner, however, took the view that the American intervention in Cuba was morally correct. The Spaniards had set up concentration camps in Cuba, and hundreds of thousands of Cubans were already dead.<sup>14</sup> Bryan described his reasoning towards Cuba as follows:

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<sup>11</sup>William Jennings Bryan and Mary B. Bryan, The Memoirs Of William Jennings Bryan (Chicago: The John C. Winston Company, 1925), 299.

<sup>12</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 299.

<sup>13</sup>Glad, Trumpet Soundeth, 57.

<sup>14</sup>Robert H. Ferrell, American Diplomacy: The Twentieth Century (N.Y. : W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 31.

The time for intervention has arrived. Humanity demands that we shall act. Cuba lies within sight of our shores and the sufferings of her people cannot be ignored unless we, as a nation, have become so engrossed in money making as to be indifferent to distress... Responsibility sometimes leads a nation, as well as an individual, into danger.<sup>15</sup>

The former Representative from Nebraska applied for a military commission directly to President McKinley. On July 13, 1898, he became colonel of the Third Nebraska Regiment, United States Volunteers.<sup>16</sup>

By the time the regiment was trained and sent to Florida, however, the war was almost over. Bryan never became involved in the actual fighting. While in Florida, the Commoner declared that his regiment: "volunteered to break the yoke of Spain in Cuba, and for nothing else. They did not volunteer to attempt to subjugate other peoples, or establish United States sovereignty elsewhere."<sup>17</sup> Even at this early point in his career, the Commoner was very much against American imperialism. Two years later, he ran for President on a Democratic platform with a plank against American annexation of Cuba and the Philippines.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Bryan Rejects Deep Incursions into Caribbean Nations Prior to Secretary of State Position**

Bryan's crusade against imperialism continued throughout the first

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<sup>15</sup>David D. Anderson, William Jennings Bryan (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1981), 99.

<sup>16</sup>Anderson, William Jennings Bryan, 100.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Glad, Trumpet Soundeth, 77.

decade of the 1900's. During the Roosevelt administration, the Commoner fought against the inclusion of the Platt Amendment into a treaty with Cuba. The Platt Amendment stated that the U.S. had the right to intervene in Cuba to preserve independence and law and order whenever America felt it was necessary. The amendment also stated that the Cubans were not to let their national debt exceed the amount of revenue collected by the government each year. From these two principles, it appeared Cuba had little sovereignty of its own. Lastly, the amendment said that the United States could develop coaling stations in Cuba. Bryan announced that the Platt Amendment was a "scheme of injustice" that would humiliate the Cubans worse than the English had humiliated the Boers.<sup>19</sup> The Great Commoner said he hoped Cuba would hold the Republican party solely responsible for the horrible deed.

Bryan also fought against Theodore Roosevelt's "Big Stick" diplomacy. In 1906, he addressed a gathering at Madison Square Garden, saying that the American Navy should no longer be used to collect debts for American bankers.<sup>20</sup> The previous year, President Roosevelt had taken over the customs houses of the Dominican Republic after European bondholders began to call for forceable intervention in the country to collect their debts. In 1903, President Roosevelt had also sent American naval vessels into the vicinity of Puerto Rico after the Germans, British, and Italians sent gunboats to Venezuela to blockade ports there. The three countries were concerned about debts that the

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<sup>19</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 200.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 201.

Venezualans were refusing to pay. Roosevelt claimed that he sent ships to Puerto Rico to prevent the foriegn powers from seizing land in Venezuela, however, and not to collect debts. Nonetheless, the Commoner had come to the conclusion that Roosevelt's use of the Navy was a violation of the sovereignty of other nations. In essence, it was forced capitulation. In 1910, Bryan repeated his demand about the Navy, adding that: "as we do not imprison people for debt in this country, we will not man battleships and kill people because they owe people in this country."<sup>21</sup>

Within Bryan's views on foreign policy prior to his appointment as Secretary of State, therefore, anti-imperialism can be seen. Not only that, but a certain moral tone can be heard within his pronouncements. The Great Commoner did not believe that a peaceful and democratic nation like the United States should violate the sovereignty of other nations.

This is probably why the idea has been spread that Bryan was a missionary isolationist. He was simultaneously trying to make America a moral example for the world through progressive reform, after all.

After the Commoner's appointment to the Secretary of State position, however, a very different picture of Bryan emerges. The Commoner repeatedly intervened in the affairs of Latin American countries, even to the point of using America's military. The real world turned out to be a far more complex place than Bryan realized during his political career of the early 1900's. As a solution, Bryan turned to a traditional view of American foreign relations based on the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Monroe Doctrine. He had been leaning on the doctrine as a guide to foreign policy since the turn of the century, but now used it to justify his own interventionist policies. The Commoner's view of diplomacy, in fact, turned out to be quite similar to the view Henry Cabbot Lodge espoused in his fight against American participation in the League of Nations. America was to protect Latin American countries from European domination, and maintain its distance from the quarrels of Europe.

When Bryan took office on March 4, 1913, he was inexperienced in foreign policy. Although he had spent many years announcing his views on American foreign policy, the Commoner himself had never been in any position to conduct foreign relations. Essentially, he was an ex-Representative from the state of Nebraska who had failed three times to win the presidency of the United States. In 1912, however, Woodrow Wilson succeeded in winning the presidency on a progressive platform. Bryan had played a key supportive role for Wilson in the Democratic primaries, even though many Democratic Congressmen had suggested that Bryan himself should run for President.<sup>22</sup> In return from Wilson, and for his long leadership of the party, Bryan received an appointment as Secretary of State.

#### **Latin America Turns Out More Complex Than Expected**

In early 1913, Bryan quickly learned that Latin America was not as easily understood as he had once supposed. In Mexico, he and Wilson were faced with the problem of whether or not to recognize dictator

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<sup>22</sup>Wayne C. Williams, William Jennings Bryan (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), 335.

Victoriano Huerta, a general who had murdered the previous President and Vice President of the republic and was currently endangering American property. In Haiti, the government owed various creditors about 24 million dollars. This was not a large sum unless it is considered that between 1885 and 1911, ten of the eleven presidents of Haiti were killed or overthrown. In the Dominican Republic, a series of revolutions had occurred by 1913, resulting in American attempts to create stable democratic government there by controlling the nation's customs services. Lastly, in Nicaragua, President Taft had propped up a friendly democratic government during the previous administration with American marines. Democrats in the Senate, however, were angry with Taft for having failed to ask Congress if he could use the marines. When Bryan took office, therefore, the issue of a treaty with the Nicaraguans remained unresolved.

The situation in Latin America was unstable. Bryan and the State Department began to fear the instability because they realized that the opening of the Panama Canal meant America had large commercial interests in the area.<sup>23</sup> The canal was also viewed by the State Department as vital for America's defense. The U.S. Navy no longer had to sail around the horn of South America to transfer from the East to the West Coast of the United States, but could take a short-cut that made the trip thousands of miles shorter. The Caribbean quickly became an area in which stability became very important for the United States. With all of the problems in Latin America in 1913, however, stability was sure to

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<sup>23</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 203.

be a difficult task for the State Department to achieve. The situation seemed more suited to a policy of realpolitik than the idealistic foreign policy that had been espoused during Wilson's campaign.

Nevertheless, Wilson and Bryan started out their policy towards Latin America with an announcement that resembled the idealism brought forth in the election of 1912. Five days after his inauguration, President Wilson read a prepared statement that said "cooperation is possible (with Latin American nations) only when supported at every turn by the orderly processes of government based upon law, not upon arbitrary or irregular force."<sup>24</sup> The statement was applied by Wilson to Mexico, where the President refused to recognize the government of General Huerta. Wilson also announced that the policy of nonrecognition would be applied to all other Latin American governments that subverted the liberties of their peoples. This was a major change in U.S. foreign policy, because America had always recognized the governments of other nations on a "de facto" basis before.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after the announcement of this policy, however, Bryan began to try to think of ways in which he could realistically solve the stability problems in Latin America. It was obvious, after all, that simply cutting-off normal relations with despotic rulers would not solve America's security problem in the Caribbean. Bryan, as mentioned before, was also quite inexperienced with foreign relations. He turned

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<sup>24</sup>John M. Cooper, Jr., "An Irony Of Fate: Woodrow Wilson's Pre-World War I Diplomacy," Diplomatic History 3 (Fall 1979): 429.

<sup>25</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 94.

to the Division of Latin American Affairs in the State Department for answers.<sup>26</sup> The Division of Latin American Affairs was devoted to the traditional, realistic principle of the protection of American interests abroad. The division also usually based its policy suggestions on the Monroe Doctrine, which included the goal of keeping the Europeans from establishing colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

The administration of Theodore Roosevelt had expanded the Monroe Doctrine with the Roosevelt Corollary in 1904, thus giving the Wilson administration even more leeway to work with. The corollary said: Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.<sup>27</sup>

The United States, in other words, now claimed the right to intervene in the internal affairs of countries in the Western Hemisphere to prevent weakness that might result in a European takeover. Bryan, ironically, had once criticized this policy as being a violation of the sovereignty of other nations.<sup>28</sup> By 1913, he was trying to think of ways in which he could balance it with the idealism of the Wilson administration. The Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary were just the type of realistic policies Bryan needed to deal with instability in Latin America.

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<sup>26</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 203.

<sup>27</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 82.

<sup>28</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 201.



## **Bryan Covers Financial Bets in Latin America With the Monroe Doctrine**

On October 28, 1913, the Secretary of State wrote a letter to the President in which he said that he had found a new way in which the Monroe Doctrine could be applied. The letter gave an idealistic interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine. The Secretary said:  
A new necessity for the application of the principle has arisen, and the application is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the doctrine and carries out the real purpose of that doctrine. The right of American republics to work out their own destiny along lines consistent with the spirit of popular government, is just as much menaced today by foreign financial interests as it was years ago by the political aspirations of foreign governments. If the people of an American republic are left free to their own interests, no despot can long keep them in subjection; but when a local despot is held in authority by powerful financial interests, and is furnished money for the employment of soldiers, the people are as helpless as if a foreign army had landed on their shores. This, we have reason to believe, is the situation in Mexico, and I cannot see that our obligation is any less now than it was then. We must protect the people of these republics in their right to attend to their own business, free from external coercion, no matter what form that external coercion may take."<sup>29</sup>

Bryan had again expanded the Monroe Doctrine, just as the Roosevelt administration had done. The doctrine was to be employed not only to prevent European political pressure and conquest as in the past, but to prevent European financial "coercion" as well. Roosevelt had created the corollary in 1904 to prevent European bond holders from invading the Dominican Republic. He had even taken over the customs houses of the Dominican Republic to collect debts for European and American financiers. There was a real difference between the policies of

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<sup>29</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 360.

Roosevelt and Bryan, however. President Roosevelt was primarily focused on preventing invasion. The Roosevelt Corollary was largely a reactive policy in this regard -- it did not attempt to prevent financial problems in Latin America, but tried to remedy them after they had already developed. The Commoner wanted to take the corollary and the Doctrine a step further by creating a loan program to keep European financiers out of the Americas in the first place (see text below). He created a proactive plan to prevent European financial pressures from affecting Latin America.

Bryan's trust in the Monroe Doctrine was not surprising, as he had always been patriotic, and by 1913, the Monroe Doctrine had become a fixed American tradition. Bryan, in fact, had never tried to prevent the establishment of U.S. coaling stations and naval bases in the Western Hemisphere as part of his anti-imperialism campaign, even during his most progressive years prior to becoming Secretary.<sup>30</sup> It is not clear, however, as to what degree Wilson accepted the expansion of the Monroe Doctrine. Wilson, for example, vetoed Bryan's idea for a loan program in Latin America.

While studying the financial instability of Latin American countries, Bryan discovered that American and European bankers were demanding high interest rates on loans to those countries due to unusual risk, and then removing the risk by persuading the U.S. government to use its Navy to collect.<sup>31</sup> American bankers, in other words, were

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<sup>30</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 204.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 208.

adding to the financial instability of Latin American nations by charging unnecessarily high interest rates. The Commoner decided to remedy the situation by providing a "modern example of the Good Samaritan" to Latin American countries. This would hopefully draw the countries closer to the U.S. and away from Europe.<sup>32</sup>

Bryan's plan stated that Latin American nations were being essentially forced to pay five to six percent interest on loans to European and American banks because no other loans of adequate size were available on the market. To remedy the situation, the Commoner proposed that the United States government should "loan" the countries its own credit by selling them bonds that would draw four and a half percent interest, one and a half percent more than regular U.S. bonds.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, he added that the money the U.S. gained in the transaction would be deposited into a sinking fund. This fund, in a reasonable time and with compound interest, could be used to pay off the remainder of the debt of Latin American countries. If any money was left over, Bryan proposed that it would be used to develop the natural resources of the countries. The Commoner believed that this plan suited the Monroe Doctrine because it would increase American influence in Latin America. He also hoped the newfound influence could be used idealistically, to "prevent revolution, promote education, and advance stable and just self-government."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 209.

Wilson, however, did not react enthusiastically to the plan. In fact, he remained silent on it for six months. Finally, in March 1914, Bryan decided to test Wilson on the subject. The Secretary proposed that the U.S. government make a direct loan to the government of Panama for the construction of a much needed railroad. Wilson was apprehensive about the loan, saying that it would strike the country "as a novel and radical proposal."<sup>35</sup> When Bryan asked the President about extending the new type of credit to other countries, Wilson responded with a veto of the entire plan. It is questionable, therefore, as to what degree, if any, Wilson wished to increase American financial influence in Latin American countries and lessen European financial influence. Perhaps this plan tended to lean too much towards the traditional American fear of Europeans for the President.

#### **Large Military Intervention Advocated to Resolve Mexican Chaos**

Outside of the question of loans, however, the President did appear to be returning to the use of the Monroe Doctrine and its new corollaries as a guide to Latin American relations. In Mexico, for example, Wilson chose to intervene militarily to prevent a German shipment of arms from reaching General Huerta.<sup>36</sup> On April 18, 1914, American marines went ashore to occupy the port of Veracruz. They were met, however, with more resistance than expected. Nineteen Americans were killed and 47 were wounded. By June of 1915, Secretary of State

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<sup>35</sup>Louis W. Koenig, Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan (N.Y. : G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 514.

<sup>36</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 95.

Bryan, the avowed anti-imperialist, was advocating a large scale American military intervention in Mexico.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the Dominican Republic, the Great Commoner's attitudes were not much different. In that country, the United States had intervened in 1905 to prevent intervention by European governments seeking to protect bondholders.<sup>38</sup> By 1907, President Roosevelt had established a treaty with the Dominican Republic that gave American collectors control over the customs service of the country. For the next four years, the republic experienced a period of prosperity and stable government. In 1911, however, the nation's gains were destroyed when Santa Domingo's President was assassinated. President Taft sent in American troops to restore order and set up a provisional government. The provisional President, Jose Bordas Valdes, was seeking to establish himself as a permanent President during the Wilson administration when a revolt broke out.

#### **No More Revolutions Will be Permitted**

Secretary of State Bryan was outraged at both sides in the struggle. In July 1914, he received President Wilson's approval of a plan to send the U.S. Navy to bombard the island unless the factions agreed to a truce and fair democratic elections.<sup>39</sup> In October 1914, elections were held in Santa Domingo, but the Congress moved to impeach the new President. Bryan, however, made it clear that he would back the

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<sup>37</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 94.

<sup>38</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 83.

<sup>39</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 83.

new President to the fullest extent. "The election having been held and a Government chosen by the people having been established," the Secretary warned, "no more revolutions will be permitted."<sup>40</sup>

Bryan also tried to follow his expanded Monroe Doctrine in Haiti. There, too, he wished to establish a stable democratic government so that European nations could not prop up a despotic ruler. Haiti owed European nations and the U.S. 24 million dollars by 1915.<sup>41</sup> Not only that, but between 1885 and 1911, ten of eleven presidents had either been killed or overthrown. Bryan and Wilson became alarmed at European intentions regarding Haiti in 1914, when France and Germany proposed the establishment of a joint customs receivership in Haiti with the United States. The President and the Secretary also had the fear that France or Germany might establish a naval base in Haiti, which could then be used to threaten the Panama Canal.<sup>42</sup> The Secretary of State, therefore, concluded that the United States "cannot consent to stand by and permit revolutionary conditions constantly to exist there."<sup>43</sup>

Bryan recommended a plan to Wilson to establish American supervision of Haitian elections, American customs control, and a non-alignment pledge for the port of Mole Saint Nicolas, which Bryan wished to purchase for an American Naval base.<sup>44</sup> In February of 1915,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>41</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 89.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 517.

<sup>44</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 89.

Bryan sent an American commission to Haiti to supervise a general election there. Bryan also was on the verge of recommending an American military intervention that year after rumors had spread that France and Germany, although at war in Europe, planned a joint military action in Haiti.<sup>45</sup> On July 28, 1915, after Bryan had left office, his plan was carried out when American troops were landed in Haiti after a revolution began.

In participating in relations with Latin America countries, therefore, Bryan had adopted what he considered to be the reliable and accepted tradition of the Monroe Doctrine. He had also expanded the doctrine by including in it the right of America to resist European financial influence in Latin America. Bryan's goal was not to annex Latin American countries, but instead to establish governments within those countries that were elected and supported by the people, not controlled by European-backed despots. This is why Wilson could make his now famous pledge in 1913 that "the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest."<sup>46</sup> The promise by Wilson, however, did not discourage Bryan from establishing a treaty with Nicaragua that made it a virtual protectorate of the United States, true to Monroe Doctrine form.<sup>47</sup>

Bryan's policies in Latin America do not indicate that the Secretary was a missionary isolationist. Instead, they indicate that

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 364.

<sup>47</sup>Adler, "Caribbean Penetration," 213.

Bryan was quite willing to become involved in the world's entanglements.

The question remains, therefore, as to why the Secretary of State felt he had to resign when he realized that Wilson was following a course of action that would lead America into World War I? Again, it seems, the Monroe Doctrine is the answer. The Monroe Doctrine, after all, not only stated that America should not allow European nations to establish colonies in the Western Hemisphere, but also stated that America should avoid becoming involved in the quarrels of Europe.<sup>48</sup> President Wilson and Secretary Bryan, however, came to have a difference of opinion as to what constituted American involvement in World War I, and this disagreement led to Bryan's resignation.

**Wilson Says America to Remain Neutral  
in Great War in "Thought as Well as Deed"**

The disagreement between Bryan and Wilson centered around America's stance of neutrality in the Great War. President Wilson had stated that Americans should remain neutral "in thought as well as deed" at the beginning of the war. As the war progressed through its early stages in late 1914 and early 1915, however, Secretary Bryan came to feel that the U.S. government was not really following a policy of neutrality.<sup>49</sup> The government was permitting a heavy trade in arms to go on with Great Britain, while Germany could not participate in the trade. The British Navy was stopping American ships from transporting food and arms to

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<sup>48</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 16.

<sup>49</sup>John D. Passos, Mr. Wilson's War (Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), 123.



Germany.<sup>50</sup> Bryan felt that this was a violation of American neutrality, and deserved official American protests. At first, Wilson was agreeable to such protests. As time went on, however, the German use of submarine warfare captured the President's attention, as well as that of the world. Wilson began insisting that stiff notes be sent to the Germans against submarine warfare, while postponing letters to the British about their violations of American neutrality. The Commoner believed such a policy showed bias towards the Allies, and might lead to war with the Germans. Eventually, Bryan resigned his Cabinet post over his belief that the United States was no longer truly acting as a neutral.

In late 1914, the Commoner was permitted by Wilson to send protests to the British government regarding its blockade of American ships.<sup>51</sup> Bryan assigned State Department attorneys to the task, and numerous letters were passed on to the British government on the subject. The Commoner was concerned not just with American trade rights, but with the impact that the blockade was having on civilians in Germany. He feared that if the blockade was kept up, starvation might eventually set in.<sup>52</sup> At one point, Bryan wrote a letter to Wilson about this concern. "I feel myself more and more inclined in the opinion that the British position is without justification," he said.<sup>53</sup> The Commoner mentioned in the letter that he had conducted inquiries with the German

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<sup>50</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 395.

<sup>51</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 537.

<sup>52</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 537.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 537.

government, which reported that food was becoming a problem. The German government, Bryan wrote, "is willing to give assurances that the food imported will not be taken by the government."<sup>54</sup> The Germans also would let American organizations distribute the imported food. "This, it seems to me, takes away the British excuse...", Bryan said.

The British reply to the protests of the U.S. government was simple and straightforward. Sir Edward Grey wrote a letter to American Ambassador Walter Hines Page that said, "The right to stop foodstuffs destined for the civil population must... be admitted if an effective 'cordon' controlling intercourse with the enemy is drawn, announced, and maintained."<sup>55</sup> Later in the letter, Grey added that preventing food from reaching a civilian population was "a natural and legitimate method of bringing pressure to bear on an enemy."

On February 4, 1915, the Germans made a move which drew the ire of the American government. Germany announced that it would sink Allied merchant ships without warning in a war zone around the British Isles. The announcement contained a second statement that hit home with politicians in the United States. The Germans had discovered that the British were sometimes using neutral flags, including the flag of the United States, to disguise their ships against submarine attacks.<sup>56</sup> The note said that neutral ships would not be intentionally sunk, but added that since the British were sometimes using neutral flags to disguise

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 537.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 538.

<sup>56</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 106-107.

their ships, it would be hard for submarine commanders to avoid mistakes. It was apparent to everyone in Washington that the German policy deserved a protest. U.S. ships could be lost. Bryan was in the American West on a speaking tour, and could not take part in the discussions regarding the reply.

President Wilson asked one of Bryan's counselors at the State Department, Robert Lansing, to draft a letter to the German government.

It stated that Germany would be held in "strict accountability" for any harm done to American ships or American citizens.<sup>57</sup> It also said the German proclamation was an "indefensible violation of neutral rights." For balance, a note was sent to Great Britain protesting the country's use of neutral flags to disguise British ships.<sup>58</sup> The letter did not address the British blockade of American ships bound for Germany, however, which was one of Bryan's great concerns. The Commoner was disappointed with the way the situation was handled while he was away. Bryan believed the language of the note to Germany was inflammatory, and that if German violations of American neutrality were to be protested, British violations should be addressed as well. The statesman did not want it to appear as if the United States was taking sides in the European conflict. After he resigned, the Commoner would write, "I submit the thought that the administration was lacking in neutrality -- not in commission, but in omission; not the notes which were written, but the notes which were not written, threw the delicate machinery out

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<sup>57</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 106.

<sup>58</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 106-107.

of balance."<sup>59</sup>

The sinking of the British passenger ship Falaba on March 28, 1915, brought the issue of neutrality to the forefront between Wilson and Bryan. An American engineer, Leon C. Thrasher, was killed in the catastrophe. Wilson believed that national interest required him to respond to the incident, and asked the State Department for suggestions on a reply.<sup>60</sup> Counselor Lansing said the sinking was a grave violation of international law. He recommended that the United States demand an apology for the act, payment for damages, and punishment for the submarine commander. He also pointed out that any note to the Germans would essentially have to be a condemnation of submarine warfare.<sup>61</sup> If the sneak attack on the Falaba was wrong, being a British ship and enemy of the Germans, then all submarine attacks were wrong. Lansing freely acknowledged that the letter could lead to war, but was willing to take the risk to protect American interests.<sup>62</sup> The President seemed to agree with Lansing, although he was distressed by the thought of starting a major confrontation with Germany.<sup>63</sup> Wilson had also dispatched a personal aide to Great Britain, Colonel Edward M. House, who was trying to draw interest for peace talks between Britain and Germany in the

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<sup>59</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 539.

<sup>60</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 107.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>62</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 540.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 540.

first months of 1915.<sup>64</sup> The President wanted to give House every chance of success.

The Commoner sought to avoid confrontation with Germany. He favored the legal argument of Chandler P. Anderson, a top-ranking adviser at the State Department and former counselor at the American embassy in London.<sup>65</sup> Anderson's view was that since Thrasher had been on a British ship when it went down, the incident did not involve any direct offense to the United States. The best the United States could hope for under international law was pecuniary damages. To these sentiments, Bryan added his own recommendation, which was that American citizens should be warned against traveling on belligerent ships. The Commoner wrote several letters to Wilson on the subject. One note said that any American who boarded a British ship, knowing the German methods of warfare, "stands in a different position from that occupied by one who suffers without any fault of his own."<sup>66</sup> Another letter asked whether any U.S. citizen should, "by putting his business above his regard for his country, assume for his own advantage unnecessary risks and thus involve his country in international complications? Are the rights and obligations of citizenship so one-sided that the government which represents all the people must bring the whole population into difficulty because of the citizen, instead of regarding his country's interests, thinks only of himself and of his interests?" The Commoner

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 540.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 539.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 540.

also said that Wilson's decision about a reply to Germany should not just be based on legal considerations, but on practicality. Bryan wrote that "a large element of our population" is sympathetic with Germany and has "criticized us violently" for partiality to the Allies.<sup>67</sup>

The debate over the Falaba case dragged on for almost a month. On April 22, 1915, the President revealed how he believed the United States should proceed. Wilson decided to ignore the legal technicalities of the case and take the high ground. He said the United States should protest the Falaba catastrophe "not on the loss of this single man's life, but on the interests of mankind which are involved... ; on the manifest impropriety of a single nation's essaying to alter the understandings of nations."<sup>68</sup>

The Commoner was shocked by the President's decision. He thought that such a strong stand, which would, in fact, be an indictment of submarine warfare, would anger the Germans. In a letter to Wilson on April 23, 1915, Bryan explained his thoughts on the Falaba incident further. He believed that a contrast could be seen between the U.S. government's attitude toward the Allies and its attitude toward the Germans. The Commoner wrote:

The note which you propose (on the Falaba) will, I fear, very much inflame the already hostile feeling against us in Germany, not entirely because of our protest against Germany's action in this case, but in part because of its contrast with our attitude toward the Allies. If we oppose the use of the submarine against merchantmen, we will lay down a law for ourselves as well as Germany. If we admit the right of the submarine to attack merchantmen, but condemn their

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 540.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 540.

particular act or class of acts as inhuman, we will be embarrassed by the fact that we have not protested against Great Britain's defense of the right to prevent foods reaching non-combatant enemies. ...

The fact that we have not contested Great Britain's assertion of the right to use our flag (on their ships) has still further aggravated Germany and we cannot overlook the fact that the sale of arms and ammunition, while it could not be forbidden under neutrality, has worked so entirely for the benefit of one side as to give Germany -- not justification but an excuse for charging that we are favoring the Allies. I have mentioned these things to show the atmosphere through which the Thrasher note will be received by Germany.

Believing that such a note as you propose is, under the conditions that now exist, likely to bring on a crisis, I venture to suggest an alternative, namely, an appeal to the nations at war to consider terms of peace. We cannot justify waiting until both sides, or even one side, asks for mediation. As a neutral we cannot have in mind the wishes of one side more than the wishes of the other side.<sup>69</sup>

Protests to Great Britain regarding its blockade of American ships had fallen by the wayside during the uproar over German submarine warfare. This concerned Bryan. Again, he emphasized that he did not want it to appear as if the United States favored one side or the other in the Great War.

The Commoner's argument, Wilson later acknowledged, "made a deep impression on me."<sup>70</sup> The President decided to change his course. He still wanted a letter to be sent to Germany about the Falaba, but agreed not to demand reparations for the death of Leon Thrasher until after the war.<sup>71</sup> Wilson asked Bryan to write a note to Germany to this effect,

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<sup>69</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 396-397. In this letter of April 23, 1915, the Commoner indicates that the U.S. had not protested Britain's use of neutral flags to disguise its ships. The United States had sent a protest to Britain on February 10, 1915, regarding its use of neutral flags, however.

<sup>70</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 540.

<sup>71</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 107.

which delighted the Commoner.<sup>72</sup> On the subject of trying to bring about peace negotiations, however, Wilson began to waiver from his earlier efforts involving Colonel House. The President wrote to Bryan that to ask for mediation after the Falaba incident would be "futile." He added, "We would lose such influence as we have for peace."<sup>73</sup> Wilson wanted no mention of mediation to be made in the protest to Germany.

Before Secretary Bryan could finish the protest to Germany, however, two American vessels were attacked -- the Cushing and Gulflight. Three Americans were killed in the second incident. Then, an event occurred that would shock the United States, and push Wilson and Bryan even further apart.

#### **The Lusitania Goes Down**

On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat sank the British passenger and merchant ship Lusitania, killing 128 Americans.<sup>74</sup> Wilson and Bryan reacted differently to the sinking. The Commoner felt that absolute neutrality should be maintained concerning the incident. If a letter of protest was to be sent to the Germans concerning the killing of neutrals, Bryan advised that a letter of protest should be sent to Britain concerning its violations of American neutrality.<sup>75</sup> Wilson, however, was not enthusiastic about a letter of protest to the British government. He explained his position in a roundabout way when he wrote

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 541.

<sup>74</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 130.

<sup>75</sup>Glad, Trumpet Soundeth, 203.



to Bryan that the German Foreign Office "always misses the essential point involved, that England's violation of neutral rights is different from Germany's violation of the rights of humanity."<sup>76</sup> The President wanted the issue of British violations of American neutrality to be dealt with separately from the issue of submarine warfare. Privately, Wilson also appeared to show personal bias in favor of England.

Regarding the Lusitania, the President told his private secretary Joseph Tumulty that: "England is fighting our fight and you may well understand that I shall not, in the present state of the world's affairs, place obstacles in her way... No matter what may happen in the next election, I will not take any action to embarrass England when she is fighting for her life and the life of the world. Let those who clamor for radical action against England understand this!"<sup>77</sup>

Since Wilson would not transmit a protest to the British, Bryan began to look for another way to lessen the impact of a lone note to the Germans. He again suggested that the administration issue a statement warning Americans against boarding belligerent vessels.<sup>78</sup> In a letter to the President on May 9, 1915, he added a second proposal. Bryan enclosed the clipping of a press article in the note that said the Lusitania had been transporting ammunition when it went down. "My special reason for calling attention to this editorial is that it makes a suggestion for which I ask your consideration, namely, that ships

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<sup>76</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 545.

<sup>77</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 404.

<sup>78</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 542.

carrying contraband should be prohibited from carrying passengers," the politician wrote. "The idea occurred to me last night that some such (policy) should be adopted. Germany has a right to prevent contraband going to the Allies, and a ship carrying contraband should not rely upon passengers to protect her from attack -- it would be like putting women and children in front of an army."<sup>79</sup> The President replied that he would only consider the propositions.

In the meantime, Wilson wanted a note drawn up to protest the sinking of the Lusitania. Again, he solicited opinions from the State Department. Counselor Lansing took a hard line against the Germans, insisting that they should disavow submarine warfare, apologize for the Lusitania, pay reparations, and guarantee the future safety of Americans.<sup>80</sup> If Germany declined any of the measures, Lansing suggested that the United States should sever diplomatic relations with Germany. Bryan wanted a less strongly worded note to be developed. He believed that the United States should offer to have the Lusitania incident put into arbitration. "Germany has endorsed the principle of investigation embodied in the 30 (arbitration) treaties signed by as many nations," the Commoner wrote to Wilson. "These treaties give a year's time for investigation and apply to all disputes of every character. From this nation's standpoint, there is no reason why this policy should not control as between the United States and Germany... The United States and Germany, between whom there exists a long standing friendship, may

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<sup>79</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 398-399.

<sup>80</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 542.

find it advisable to postpone until peace is restored any disputes which do not yield to diplomatic treatment."<sup>81</sup> If the United States took this stand, Bryan added, it would not have relinquish its "role of peacemaker" in Europe.<sup>82</sup> As in the case of the Falaba, however, the President gradually drifted towards Lansing's position during the debate over a reply to Germany.

At a cabinet meeting on May 11, 1915, Wilson read a rough draft of a letter to the Germans that he had prepared. It said that U.S. citizens had an "indispensable" right to sail the high seas, and demanded reparations for the deaths of Americans on the Lusitania. The note also announced that nothing less than a complete cessation of submarine warfare would be acceptable to the United States.<sup>83</sup>

Bryan believed that the protest was too harsh towards Germany. Nowhere in the document, he pointed out, was there a reiteration of America's friendship towards Germany. The letter, he said, would mean war unless it was tempered by an offer to postpone settlement of the Lusitania issue until after the war, or by a simultaneous note to the British regarding their violations of American neutrality.<sup>84</sup> Lansing and Wilson, however, did not feel that a reiteration of America's friendship towards Germany was necessary in the note. The debate over the document continued for days. Finally, Bryan signed the document not

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<sup>81</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 400.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 543.

<sup>83</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 108.

<sup>84</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 200.

because he agreed with it, "but because it was the opening statement of our position and simply called for a similar statement on the part of Germany."<sup>85</sup>

On May 14, 1915, the day after the note was sent to Germany, President Wilson told Bryan that he would not issue a warning to Americans against boarding belligerent ships. Such a warning, he said, would be "weak, yielding to threat and danger."<sup>86</sup> The Secretary of State also was denied a statement that was supposed to be issued to the press. The statement would have said that the debate between the United States and Germany concerning the Lusitania was taking place under friendly auspices.<sup>87</sup> The only good word from Wilson, in fact, was that Bryan was permitted to draw up a letter of protest to Britain that would then be considered by the President.

On May 28, the German government replied to the first Lusitania note in a nonconciliatory fashion. The country admitted no wrongdoing in the attack and made no indication as to when unrestricted submarine warfare might stop. The Germans did express sorrow over the loss of lives in the incident, but maintained that the destruction of the Lusitania was an act of "just self-defense."<sup>88</sup> The reply led Wilson to prepare a second letter to the Germans. When the President asked Bryan

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<sup>85</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 421.

<sup>86</sup>Merle E. Curti, Bryan and World Peace (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 203.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 544.

for advice on the document, the Secretary of State said that the United States ought to take its time formulating a reply and that the note should be "couched in terms of friendly language."<sup>89</sup> Wilson promptly rejected Bryan's advice. He wrote to the Commoner that "time is of the essence in this matter in order that the German government should be made to feel that we regard it as pressing."<sup>90</sup> The letter Wilson drafted also said that the Germans were violating the laws of humanity by conducting sneak attacks on British and American ships. On June 1, at a dramatic meeting of the Cabinet, the second note to Germany was discussed. One of the secretaries present suggested that if such a strongly worded document was to be sent, a note should also be sent to Britain concerning its violations of American neutrality.<sup>91</sup> Bryan stated that he had long supported such a document, as the British were preventing American exports from reaching a country where the American people had the right to send them.<sup>92</sup>

#### **Bryan Snaps Out "You People Are Not Neutral"**

After much debate during the meeting, however, most of the secretaries objected to the note to England. Bryan became angry with the Cabinet. Suddenly, he snapped out, "You people are not neutral. You are taking sides!"<sup>93</sup> The President was seen to be visibly shocked

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 545.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 545.

<sup>91</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 545.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>John D. Passos, Mr. Wilson's War (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), 128.

at this comment. "Mr. Secretary, you have no right to make that statement," Wilson responded. "We are all honestly trying to be neutral against heavy difficulties."<sup>94</sup> When Bryan returned home that night he was extremely saddened. He told his wife what had happened and explained that he thought he would have to resign. "If I wait until this note goes and a curt rejoinder is returned, it will be too late," the Commoner said. "The President evidently feels he is voicing the sentiment of the country. I feel sure there are comparatively few Americans who want our country to be involved in this cataclysm. If I resign now, I believe it will be possible to bring the real sentiments of the people to the surface."<sup>95</sup> Bryan had decided that the note to Germany would lead to war, and throughout his tenure as Secretary of State, he had followed the tenants of the Monroe Doctrine. In this case, he believed that the American people were thinking along the traditional lines of staying out of a European conflict.

#### **The Great Commoner Resigns as Secretary**

When the final draft of the letter was delivered to the Secretary of State on June 4, Bryan found himself unable to sign it in good conscience. At a Cabinet meeting that day, he pulled Wilson aside and told him that he would have to resign.<sup>96</sup> The President was saddened, as Wilson and Bryan had admitted to each other on several occasions that they enjoyed working together, and had always maintained a friendly

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<sup>94</sup>Passos, Wilson's War, 128.

<sup>95</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 423.

<sup>96</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 547.

relationship. In his letter of resignation, Bryan wrote to Wilson: "Obedient to your sense of duty and actuated by the highest motives, you have prepared for transmission to the German government a note which I cannot join without violating what I deem to be an obligation to my country, and the issue involved is of such moment that to remain a member of the Cabinet would be as unfair to you as it would be to the cause which is nearest my heart, namely, the prevention of war."<sup>97</sup> When the press asked the Commoner to explain his resignation, he cited his concerns over American neutrality, and the fact that the President had refused to submit the Lusitania incident to investigation and arbitration.<sup>98</sup>

After his resignation, Bryan continued to battle for American neutrality. On June 30, 1915, the Commoner gave a speech in Nebraska entitled "The Farmer's Interest in Peace." When Bryan reached the portion of the speech at which he explained his points of difference with the President and his reasons for resignation, the crowd cheered him wildly.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, when Bryan delivered a speech to labor unions at Carnegie Hall that same month, the audience "almost raised the roof" when he spoke of his desire to warn Americans against boarding belligerent ships.<sup>100</sup> It seemed, therefore, as if the politician had correctly read the heart of many Americans. The press gave the Great

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<sup>97</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 407.

<sup>98</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 110.

<sup>99</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 407.

<sup>100</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 433.

Commoner a brow-beating for his resignation, however.<sup>101</sup> Newspapers accused him of weakening President Wilson's ability to respond to the Germans and to be taken seriously by them.

From 1915 to 1917, Bryan also continued to appeal to Wilson for an American mediation of the war in Europe.<sup>102</sup> The submarine question was temporarily resolved in April 1916 after the U.S. government sent a note to the Germans regarding the sinking of the French steamer Sussex. The letter said that unless submarine warfare against passenger and freight-carrying vessels was stopped at once, diplomatic relations would be severed between the United States and Germany. The German government complied with the American request, which again opened up the President to ideas of an American mediation of the war.<sup>103</sup> Wilson put Colonel House to work on the task once again, and on December 18, 1916, he sent a note to both sides in the conflict calling for a peace conference.<sup>104</sup> Bryan asked Wilson if he could be included on an American peace commission, assuming that a conference evolved.<sup>105</sup>

On December 26, Germany called for a peace conference without the participation of neutral countries, however. The request was rejected by the Allies, which made a list of demands that Germany would have to meet before the allied countries would attend such a conference. On

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<sup>101</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 397.

<sup>102</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 113.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>104</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 120.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 119.



January 22, 1917, Wilson made his famous "peace without victory" speech.

It called for both sides in the war to drop hopes of victory in favor of ending the slaughter in Europe. The Allies ignored the appeal, and the Germans renewed unrestricted submarine warfare in a zone around the British Isles on January 31. The United States responded by severing diplomatic relations with Germany. Continued submarine attacks on American ships and the Zimmermann Telegram would lead the United States into the war on April 6, 1917.<sup>106</sup>

#### **Bryan Backs U.S. to the Hilt After War is Declared**

When war was finally declared against Germany, Bryan threw his full weight behind the President. He had never been unpatriotic, but had felt that most Americans were still of the mind set to avoid European conflicts. "Gladly would I have given my life to save my country from war," Bryan told a crowd on April 6, "but now that my country has gone to war, gladly I will give my life to aid it."<sup>107</sup> In accordance with this statement, he telegraphed the President that he would take on "any work I can do," including serving as a private in the army.<sup>108</sup> For most of the war, however, Bryan toured the country urging Americans to buy Liberty Bonds, conserve food, and raise larger crops. The ex-Secretary launched a campaign for American unity. No matter what anyone had

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<sup>106</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 135. The British government intercepted a telegram in which the German foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmermann, tried to convince the Mexican government to declare war on the United States. The British government turned the telegram over to the American government.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

thought about entering the war before the President's decision, he argued, the majority ruled in a democracy. "Any discord or division after the government has acted would prolong the war and increase its cost in money and men," the Commoner said.<sup>109</sup>

William Jennings Bryan, therefore, was not the missionary isolationist that some historians have claimed. Instead, he was a politician that came to found his foreign policy beliefs on the Monroe Doctrine. Early in his political career, he may have issued some statements that made him seem as if he wanted to lead the world solely by moral example. These statements, in particular, involved his stance against using the U.S. Navy to collect debts in Latin America. The Commoner turned away from these ideas when he became Secretary of State, however. Bryan learned that problems in Latin America and Europe were too hopelessly complex and linked to be handled by a simple stance of American moral superiority. To meet these challenges, he chose to keep expanding the Monroe Doctrine along the lines President Roosevelt had taken. Americans were not only to prevent European nations from exercising political influence in Latin American countries, but to prevent them from exercising economic influence as well. Bryan used this reasoning to justify American interventions in Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

Concerning the war in Europe, the Commoner seems to have made a misjudgment about the wishes of the American people. He believed that the American public, like himself, favored the traditional stance of

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

avoiding American participation in European conflicts. When Bryan realized his mistake, however, he threw his full weight behind the war effort. After his appointment as Secretary of State, the Commoner never acted like a missionary isolationist. Instead, he was a politician that was willing to intervene in other areas of the world under the right circumstances, and with enough support from the American people. Bryan believed in the Monroe Doctrine as the correct guide foreign policy, and he believed that "it is the duty of the patriot to support his country with all his heart in time of war."<sup>110</sup>

In the next chapter, the Commoner's statements against American imperialism during the election of 1900 are examined. The chapter seeks to determine whether Bryan behaved like an isolationist before his appointment as Secretary of State. The fact that the statesman volunteered to fight in the Spanish-American War indicates isolationism was not part of his agenda, and as it turns out, Bryan was not against all annexations of the land that the United States had occupied during the war. Furthermore, the Commoner proposed that American protectorates could be established over Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines during the election.

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<sup>110</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 413.

## Chapter Three

### The Treaty With Spain and Bryan's Expansion of the Monroe Doctrine

The victory of the United States in the Spanish-American War in 1898 brought a new series of questions for American statesman at the time. The biggest of these questions, not surprisingly, was what to do with the territories that America's military had occupied during the conflict with Spain. Was the U.S. to go the way of the European monarchies and their imperialistic policies, and annex its newly acquired lands? Or, was the country to grant independence to the territories? There was an alternative position, however, which stated the United States should promise to give the island countries independence later, after the U.S. had tutored the nations to accept forms of democracy similar to America's own. The Commoner could not resist discussion on such an important national issue after volunteering to fight in the war. The position Bryan eventually took on the subject of what to do with Spain's former colonies, however, surprised many American citizens.

Debate over Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines began to rage in Congress just after the victory celebrations of August 1898. The anti-imperialists who resided in Congress were a diverse group. Consequently, Bryan led only a small portion of them. In November of that year, a group called the Anti-Imperialist League formed. It

disagreed with the Commoner's opinions about the future of the occupied territories. The League was made up of old Radical Republicans like George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts, former Liberal Republicans like Carl Schurz, and much of the old Mugwump wing of the Grand Old Party. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the League chose to differ with the Democrat from Nebraska. The group argued that the U.S. itself had an anti-imperialist heritage because the nation had revolted against the British, so the country should not annex the former Spanish colonies under any circumstances. Members of the Anti-Imperialist League declared their chief aim to be an outright defeat of the Treaty of Paris, which was signed with Spain on December 13, 1898. They felt that the agreement with Spain was too imperialistic because it transferred the sovereignty of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States.

Bryan led a large number of the Democrats in Congress on the treaty debate, and flatly disagreed with the league. He believed the U.S. government should ratify the settlement without renegotiating any of its terms, including its resolutions to grant control of the island countries to the United States. In an interview at Savannah, Georgia, in December 1898, he explained his stance:

Some think that the fight should be made against ratification of the treaty, but I would prefer another plan. If the treaty is rejected, negotiations must be renewed and instead of settling the question according to our ideas we must settle it by diplomacy, with the possibility of international complications. It will be easier, I think, to end the war at once by ratifying the treaty and then deal with the subject in our own way.<sup>111</sup>

The Commoner feared foreign interference might occur if Congress required the peace team in Paris to reopen negotiations on the treaty for the sake of granting independence to the occupied territories. He seemed to view diplomacy as a risky pursuit in which outside powers could get involved, and thought it best for the United States to accept the treaty as it already was written. In this way, he argued, the U.S. government would also make the future of the islands purely an American issue.

Bryan's stance on the agreement with Spain shocked many anti-

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<sup>111</sup>William Jennings Bryan, Bryan On Imperialism (New York: Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1970), 6.

imperialists. This is witnessed by the fact that the Commoner felt he had to constantly explain his position in articles and speeches he published.<sup>112</sup> Anti-imperialists wondered how a politician who had argued so strongly against a colonial policy two years before could back a settlement that added Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States? The answer was that Bryan did favor independence for the occupied lands, and backed the treaty because its ratification would allow the U.S. to grant freedom to the territories without interference from foreign nations. At the December 1898 interview in Georgia, the Commoner expressed his personal desire to see the former colonies obtain self-rule. He said:

The President in his message says our only purpose in taking possession of Cuba is to establish a stable government and then turn the government over to the people of Cuba. Congress could reaffirm this purpose in regard to Cuba and assert the same purpose in regard to the Philippines and Porto Rico. Such a resolution would make a clear-cut issue between the doctrine of self-government and the doctrine of imperialism.<sup>113</sup>

So, the Commoner had another aim in mind than the acquisition of land when he championed the treaty. He saw ratification of the agreement as

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<sup>112</sup>See the speeches in Bryan on Imperialism entitled "Liberty, Not Conquest," and "Imperialism;" and the article from the *New York Journal* entitled "Ratify the Treaty, Declare the Nation's Policy;" in all of which Bryan justifies his support for the Treaty of Paris.

<sup>113</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 6.

a simple obstacle that had to be bypassed before America could grant freedom to the islands. And, by giving the nations independence, he reasoned the U.S. would thereby deal with the larger issue of the day - American imperialism.

Bryan's position on the Treaty of Paris reflected a wise piece of statesmanship at the time, and the Commoner knew it. The stance was something he was later proud of, and he wrote fondly about in his memoirs. Bryan's policy eliminated the possibility that Spain could reject the peace settlement on the premise that their former colonies would be receiving a premature independence. The general climate in Europe was one of a race for empire, and the European nations had long been using the "civilizing mission" as a justification to conquer and sustain colonies. If Congress had rejected the treaty with the idea of requiring it to be rewritten with a pledge of freedom for the islands, it is possible the Spanish might have turned down a new settlement on the grounds that a great power was needed to civilize the islands' natives. Similar ideas of sharing "white man's burden" had already helped the Europeans divide Africa among each other in a less confrontational manner than might otherwise have been expected. The Spanish may even have decided to renew war with the United States if Congress rejected the agreement. Many of the European countries, after all, were reluctant to give their colonies autonomy even into the 1960's.

Bryan even expressed a belief that other European powers might go to war with the U.S. if they thought democracies were being established



on the islands. In his memoirs, he wrote:

I have never regretted the position taken; on the contrary, I never showed more statesmanship than I did when I insisted upon the termination of the war and the making of the promise embodied in the Bacon Resolution. ... the Democrats and I would have had to borne the responsibility for the continuation of war expenditures and for any dangers that arose during the continuation of the state of war. ...

Then, too, several of the great nations of Europe, such as England, Germany, and Russia were interested in the Orient and might resent the setting up of a Republic there. ...

If we had insisted upon the recognition of the independence of the Philippine republic, it might have brought us into conflict with the interests of several European powers, and it was not necessary for us to take this risk because we could give independence to the Filipinos more easily than we could force Spain to give independence.<sup>114</sup>

European interference, it appeared in the memoirs, could come either at the negotiating table, on the battlefield, or through a combination of both.

The Bacon Resolution would have promised the Philippines independence at some point in the future, after the United States helped the country establish a sound government. The Commoner's backing of it is yet another indication of his desire to see the occupied territories receive freedom. The measure failed in the Senate in 1898 after a tie vote was broken by Vice President Garrett Hobart, however, and it would not have changed the Treaty of Paris. All the proposed legislation called for was a pledge to tutor the Filipinos toward good government - it did not set a timetable within which the country had to be freed. Such a promise to the Filipinos was enough for Bryan, though, as he supported ratification of the treaty as it already was written.

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<sup>114</sup>William Jennings Bryan, The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan (Chicago: The John C. Winston Company, 1925), 121.

There was a second set of motives for the Commoner to back the treaty besides the fact that accepting the settlement would allow America to deal with the question of the island countries' independence alone. They were politically based. A new Senate was elected in the autumn of 1898, just after the Spanish-American War ended, and it was controlled by Republicans. The treaty would thus almost certainly be approved as it already was established in the next session of Congress, meaning the U.S. would gain sovereignty over Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Bryan reasoned that by backing the settlement during the current session of Congress, he might be able to get the Bacon Resolution added to the government's agenda for the Philippines.<sup>115</sup>

There were still a substantial number of Democrats in the Senate who desired to see the territories receive autonomy, so the Commoner attempted to use them as his electoral base. The result of this politicking was that Bryan took the unusual stance of supporting the settlement with Spain because it transferred sovereignty of the islands to the United States, and backing the Bacon Resolution because it promised freedom to the Philippines down the road.<sup>116</sup>

The last motivation the Commoner displayed for championing the treaty was based on the Monroe Doctrine. He, as mentioned earlier, feared that if the settlement was not ratified, Europeans would interfere in the negotiations with Spain. Or, worse yet, he thought they might get involved in the dispute militarily. These concerns may

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<sup>115</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 121.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 121.

not have been founded on any real threats, but Bryan believed them to be legitimate. What the suspicions indicate is that he held a traditional American apprehension towards European nations that dated back to the creation of the Monroe Doctrine. In 1823, President James Monroe had warned his fellow countrymen in a message to Congress not to get involved in European disputes or alliances, and to keep Old World countries from creating new colonies in the Western Hemisphere. This message became the heart of U.S. diplomacy for the course of the 19th Century. Much of the American public even came to disdain loose connections with the Europeans because of the doctrine. Bryan seems to have internalized the aversion, as his statements about Old World countries during the treaty debate indicate. In a letter of acceptance for the Democratic nomination for president in 1900, the Commoner wrote: The reasons given by Washington, Jefferson, and the other statesman of the early days in support of the doctrine that we should maintain friendly relations with all nations, but enter into entangling alliances with none, are even stronger today than they were a hundred years ago. ... We cannot connect ourselves with European nations and share in their jealousies and ambitions without losing the peculiar advantage which our location, our character and our institutions give us in the world's affairs. The doctrine enunciated by Monroe, and approved by succeeding Presidents, is essential to the welfare of the United States.<sup>117</sup>

One point that must be made about the doctrine, however, is its meaning was in a state of change during the latter half of the 19th Century. What Monroe had originally told Congress in 1823 was not the meaning of the doctrine in 1898. The president had stressed two main

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<sup>117</sup>Richard L. Metcalfe, ed., The Real Bryan: Being Extracts From The Speeches and Writings of "A Well-Rounded Man" (Des Moines, Iowa: Personal Help Publishing Company, 1908), 153-154.

points: first, European nations could not establish new colonies on the American continents; and second, the U.S. should not participate in the quarrels and alliances of Europe. By 1898, the meaning of the two axioms had been transformed. This metamorphosis was due to a series of events that caused both the American public and Congress to interpret Monroe's declaration differently.

In the decades immediately following the creation of the doctrine, American foreign policy makers were reluctant to invoke its principles against European nations despite their occasional armed interventions in Latin America. The reason for the lackluster use seems to have been that Monroe's main concern in the declaration was to ensure European mercantilism would not be strongly reestablished in the Western Hemisphere by the Quintuple Alliance of the Old World.<sup>118</sup> Several Latin American countries had revolted against European control during the Napoleonic wars and created republics, and the president didn't want to lose the ground he felt the idea of "self-government" had gained in the Southern Hemisphere. The fact that the people of Central and South America now held sovereignty over their homelands also provided a buffer for the United States from European aggression. But, attempts to recreate the colonial system were seldom made during the 1820's and 1830's, which encouraged the U.S government not to employ the doctrine during the period.<sup>119</sup> There are also some indications that the United

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<sup>118</sup>By 1823, the Quadruple Alliance of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Britain which had defeated Napoleon became known as the "Concert of Europe," or the Quintuple Alliance by including France in the pact after a probationary period.

<sup>119</sup>Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, ed., The Reader's Companion to American History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), 744. One reason the doctrine did not have to be used was that the British gave some

States would not have even been able to muster an effective army to fight in Mexico during the two decades, let alone South America.<sup>120</sup>

In 1842, the first real use of Monroe's declaration came when President John Tyler used the doctrine and the idea of "manifest destiny" to justify seizing Texas for America. Tyler and the Whig party felt that if Texas was not annexed by the United States, the territory would ally with Great Britain to secure protection against Mexico.<sup>121</sup> Such a defensive pact would not have been a direct violation of the Monroe Doctrine because the British wouldn't be creating a new colony on the American continents. But, the president and his administration thought the establishment of the alliance might eventually lead the Lone Star state to be annexed by the great empire. President Tyler used the declaration in a more aggressive way than originally intended by preventing a simple alliance between a European nation and an American territory. Monroe's statements had only called for blocking territorial grabs in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>122</sup>

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unexpected help to the United States by also announcing that the Spanish colonies should not again be reestablished in the Americas. The Spanish had always severely restricted English trade in their territories, and the British wanted to avoid having those markets closed off again. The Russians also became less interested in the California coast because its sea otter population had been virtually wiped out by trappers by the 1820's.

<sup>120</sup>Joseph R. Conlin, The American Past: A Survey of American History, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1990), 239.

<sup>121</sup>Conlin, The American Past, 351.

<sup>122</sup>Robert H. Ferrell, American Diplomacy: The Twentieth Century (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 13. There is some historical debate over whether Monroe did in fact attempt to forbid the Europeans from extending their alliances to the New World. He stated that the U.S. was intimately connected with the independence movements of the New World, and "the political system of the allied powers is essentially different in this respect from that of America." A few sentences later he added, "... we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portions of this Hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety." It therefore is rather ambiguous as to whether Monroe intended to keep the Europeans from extending alliances to the New World. He himself considered the doctrine to be largely an expedient required by the diplomatic situation of the

A trend of finding new, aggressive uses for the principles of the doctrine continued through the remainder of the 19th Century. In 1861, Secretary of State William H. Seward attempted to invoke the doctrine to prevent the Civil War. The secretary suggested to President Abraham Lincoln that the United States begin a drive to liberate Cuba from Spain, and thus divert attention from the growing crisis between the states.<sup>123</sup> Seward also hoped that if the U.S. made such a brazen move, it would deter European nations from future interventions in Latin America, and permanently end colonialism there. Lincoln rejected the advice, choosing instead to deal with domestic strife over slavery and state's rights. Nonetheless, the doctrine had been proposed as a way to oust a European power from the Western Hemisphere, which was not one of Monroe's original aims in the declaration. The president had allowed Old World countries to maintain sovereignty over colonies that they established prior to his announcement, and did not establish a goal to end all European influence in the Americas.

The Civil War and Reconstruction put a temporary damper on the increasingly offensive uses of the doctrine. But, by 1869, U.S. statesmen were at it again. President Ulysses S. Grant attempted to invoke the declaration as part of his reasoning behind a move to annex the island nation of Santo Domingo.<sup>124</sup> Grant initiated the plan after a rebellion broke out against the Spanish in many of their colonies. The

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moment in Europe.

<sup>123</sup>Foner and Garraty, Reader's Companion, 744.

<sup>124</sup>Conlin, American Past, 445.

new president of Santo Domingo had asked to become a territory of the United States to gain protection from Spain. The president had his scheme foiled, however, by isolationist members of the Republican party.

They refused to approve the annexation for fear that it would lead to an American colonial policy.

President Rutherford B. Hayes term in office from 1877 to 1881 also saw an attempted use of the doctrine for aggressive purposes. Hayes was responding to a French company's announcement that it planned to build a canal across the isthmus of Panama.<sup>125</sup> The often forgotten president took a strong stand in this case, warning the French government that the canal must come under American control because of its location in the Western Hemisphere. Little came of the incident until the early 1900's. The canal project was slow in development and its pioneering company experienced financial difficulties in the 1880's.

### **The New Monroe Doctrine**

A trend had developed in the accepted uses of the Monroe Doctrine by the 1890's. Americans were anticipating possible European threats to the New World's security, and employing the doctrine as a justification to prevent the threats from actualization. They were maneuvering before the Europeans did. This anticipatory use can be seen in the annexation

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<sup>125</sup>Foner and Garraty, Reader's Companion, 146. The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty which the U.S. government had signed with Great Britain in 1850 had stated that neither of the countries would have exclusive rights to build a canal across the isthmus of Panama, and required the neutralization of any canal which came under the control of one country. The French company's proposal was seen as a violation of this agreement, and though the treaty was over 25 years old, Hayes chose to enforce it. The French government itself was not a party to the company's plan or to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.

of Texas, in Seward's proposal to liberate Cuba from Spain, and in Hayes' declaration to the French on the Panama Canal. The Venezuelan affair of 1895 also demonstrates the U.S. governments' growing aggressiveness with the doctrine.

A disagreement erupted between the U.S. and Great Britain over whether or not the British could enlarge their colony of Guiana in South America at the expense of Venezuela. President Grover Cleveland decided it would be wise to prevent the English from making good on the proposed expansion on the basis of Monroe's principles. He informed the British government that the United States had long made it a policy that no new European dependencies would be created in the Western Hemisphere. But, now America did not take kindly to the addition of territory to existing European colonies either, he said.<sup>126</sup> Cleveland's Secretary of State Richard Olney said this best during negotiations when he told a British ambassador:

Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition. Why? It is not because of the pure friendship or good will felt for it. ... It is because, in addition to all other grounds, its infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable against any or all other powers.<sup>127</sup>

The Cleveland administration had boldly stated that European ambitions

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 744. Again there is some ambiguity here as to the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine concerning whether or not the Europeans could expand the area of their colonies. Monroe stated, "With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere." He did not explain, however, what would be done if the Europeans attempted to enlarge the colonies they possessed. The president seemed to leave it open as to what course America might pursue in such an event.

<sup>127</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 25-26.



in the Western Hemisphere were no longer valid unless approved of by America - and that the current government did not approve of Great Britain's proposal to expand Guiana. Lord Salisbury, Olney's adversary at the meeting, reportedly "made courteous expression of his thanks" upon hearing the administration's policy, and "expressed regret and surprise that it had been considered necessary to present so far-reaching and important a principle and such wide and profound policies of international action in relation to a subject so comparatively small."<sup>128</sup>

What shocked the British ambassador was the culmination of the increasing trend of the U.S. government to use the Monroe Doctrine aggressively. The upstart nation in the West now wanted to grant European nations permission before they could pursue any plans of action in the Western Hemisphere, which was not one of the original principles of Monroe's declaration. In this case, the Cleveland administration was unwilling to even discuss the possibility of territorial acquisitions by the British, although the doctrine had allowed room for such negotiations to occur. Monroe said in his 1823 speech, in fact, that the United States should seek "to cultivate friendly relations" with the Europeans, and that "with the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere."<sup>129</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 26.

<sup>129</sup>Philip P. Riley, et. al., eds., The Global Experience: Readings in World History Since 1500, vol. 2 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 106. This idea of keeping peace with the European nations was one of the reasons the doctrine was not enforced in the 1820's and 1830's, along with the fact that the American military was not yet strong enough to offer a stiff resistance to the Europeans if a large-scale war occurred.

president also tended to view his policy as only a temporary necessity.

He hoped that one day the new republics in the Americas would be able to defend themselves against the Concert of Europe.<sup>130</sup> It is not likely that Monroe expected his declaration to become the major guide to U.S. foreign policy by 1895, let alone that it would be used to rebuff the British in such a harsh manner. The original fear of European countries expressed in his speech grew over the course of the 19th Century until it reached enormous proportions by 1895. The apprehension became so overwhelming that it turned what was once viewed as an isolationist doctrine into one that was used to threaten and cajole Old World countries any time they proposed gains in the Western Hemisphere. The declaration appeared on the verge of becoming a predominantly offensive policy, rather than a defensive guide to America's national security.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 was yet another example of the doctrine's uses being expanded, but this time the changes involved the Commoner. Monroe's principles were invoked by Bryan and others as part of the reasoning behind ridding Cuba of its harsh Spanish rule. The Commoner referred to pushing the Spanish off the Caribbean island as taking up arms against "cruelties which would have been a disgrace to barbarism."<sup>131</sup> And regarding the doctrine, in a speech delivered in June 1898 the Commoner said:  
Nebraska's attitude upon the subject (the war) does not, however, indicate that the state is inhabited by a contentious or warlike people; it simply means that our people understand both the rights conferred, and the obligations imposed, by

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<sup>130</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 13.

<sup>131</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 3.

proximity to Cuba.<sup>132</sup>

It is clear Bryan felt Monroe's declaration imposed various duties upon the United States, one of which included freeing Latin American countries from European control if needed. In 1900, Bryan in as much said this in a letter of acceptance for the Democratic nomination for president. He wrote:

The doctrine enunciated by Monroe, and approved by succeeding Presidents, is essential to the welfare of the United States. The continents of North and South America are dedicated to the development of free government. One Republic after another has been established, until today the monarchical idea has barely a foothold on the new world.

While it is not the policy of this country to interfere where amicable relations exist between European countries and their dependencies in America, our people would look with disfavor upon any attempt on the part of European governments to maintain an unwilling or forcible sovereignty over the people living on this side of the Atlantic.<sup>133</sup>

Bryan had extended the meaning of the doctrine by advocating that it now be used as a justification for Americans to help end European sovereignty over colonies where Old World countries had to maintain control by force. This wasn't an original aim of the declaration, as has been touched on, because Monroe allowed European nations to retain control of the dependencies they had established before he initiated his policy. Within his speech to Congress, the chief executive had also stated that the United States would not "interfere" with existing colonies so long as the Europeans made no further attempts to extend their "system" to any portions of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>134</sup> Monroe said

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>133</sup>Metcalfe, Real Bryan, 154.

<sup>134</sup>Riley and others, eds., Global Experience, 106.

that as long as this general rule was followed, the U.S. government would recognize the governments of the colonies on a "de facto" basis. Bryan, McKinley, and others, however, were now willing to oust European powers from the Western Hemisphere on the premise that moral judgements could be made about the nations' rule over an American territory. They were no longer willing to recognize governments simply because they existed, and consequently had changed a basic tenant of the Monroe Doctrine and U.S. foreign policy in general. President Theodore Roosevelt later reinforced this new facet of U.S. diplomacy by making a judgement about Colombia's rule over Panama. The U.S. government helped spark a revolution there that gave the United States control over the Panama Canal. In 1913, President Wilson also denied General Victoriano Huerta de facto recognition for his government in Mexico, which he set up after executing President Francisco Madero. After months of putting political pressure on Huerta, Wilson even ordered an invasion of the port of Veracruz.<sup>135</sup> The Americans left Veracruz after Wilson had difficulty explaining the invasion to the American public. Nevertheless, Wilson's statement during the affair that recognition of Latin American governments was "possible only when supported at every turn by the orderly processes of just government based upon law, not upon arbitrary or irregular force," became policy at the State

Department until September 1930.<sup>136</sup>

#### **A New Role for America Overseas?**

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<sup>135</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 95.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid, 94.

With all the changes made in Monroe's principles over the 19th Century, and with a new use of the doctrine created for the Spanish-American War, it was clear that U.S foreign policy would be in a state of flux during the immediate post-war years. A new question pressing in on Americans after the conflict was whether or not the doctrine would again be invoked to justify annexing territory, as had been the case with the Lone Star state. Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, after all, might ally with a European country if given autonomy, as had been the fear with Texas. The fact that even supposedly staunch anti-imperialists like Bryan supported the Treaty of Paris also indicated some Americans might favor annexation of the territories. If a well known anti-imperialist backed a settlement that transferred control of the island countries to the United States, who was to say that other Americans didn't desire the acquisition to be permanent? President McKinley had taken a solid imperialist stance in the late weeks of the war by choosing to maintain an American presence in the Philippines, and occupying the Baker Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico.<sup>137</sup> The table was set for the States to formally annex the islands, if only enough public support could be gathered for the measure. All that was needed was for charismatic political leadership to come to the fore of American politics in favor of the acquisition. A larger question that must also be asked about the post-war time period, of course, is would the inclination for Americans to use the doctrine in an increasingly

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<sup>137</sup>Louis W. Koenig, Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 285.

aggressive manner carry over after the conflict with Spain and cause the United States to annex its occupied territories?

The Commoner, as has been discussed, visualized an eventual independence for the island countries, and began to lead a movement after the war to pass legislation pledging freedom to the territories. He supported the settlement with Spain because it allowed the U.S. to deal with the subject of island independence without interference from "several European powers."<sup>138</sup> The question arises as to whether the Commoner was against all expansions of U.S. territory, however, since his actions during the treaty debate indicate he was not against all such acquisitions. Bryan advocated independence for the island countries, but not without some gains of land for the United States.

#### **Fitting the U.S. With Naval Bases Fits the Plan**

An example of the Commoner's willingness to annex territory can be found in the fact that Bryan suggested America should keep harbors and coaling stations in areas it liberated from Spain.<sup>139</sup> His reasoning behind the suggestion was two-part. First, the Commoner believed coaling stations and harbors would be a just repayment for the United States' role in ending Spanish tyranny. "We should reserve a harbor and coaling station in Porto Rico and the Philippines in return for services rendered," he said at an interview in 1898, "and I think we would be justified in asking the same concession from Cuba."<sup>140</sup> In a speech

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<sup>138</sup>Bryan, The Memoirs, 121-122.

<sup>139</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 6.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 6.

delivered in August 1900, the Commoner elaborated on the repayment theme

by saying:

The Democratic party is in favor of the expansion of trade. It would extend our trade by every legitimate and peaceful means; but it is not willing to make merchandise of human blood. ... a war of conquest is as unwise as it is unrighteous. A harbor and coaling station in the Philippines would answer every trade and military necessity and such a concession could have been secured at any time without difficulty.<sup>141</sup>

Bryan, although feeling that the occupied territories deserved independence, also argued the U.S. would be prudent if it negotiated for naval bases on the islands. He thought the harbors would be a just reimbursement for American participation in the islands' revolutions, and could be used for defense and trade purposes.

The second part of the Commoner's logic behind advocating that the United States obtain ports in the occupied territories involved Bryan following the trend of expanding the uses of the Monroe Doctrine, whether he knew it at the time or not. This point will have to be elaborated on as the discussion progresses because the Commoner's support for a new extension of Monroe's principles culminated later, in an acceptance speech he gave for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1900. But, a few points should be made here. The benefits of keeping naval bases would be enormous if Bryan were to emphasize a new foreign policy for America under the guise of an expanded doctrine. The Commoner had already backed the Bacon Resolution, which called for the U.S. to help the Filipinos establish a stable government, and who was to

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 87.

say he might not propose similar legislation in the future? In an

interview in December 1898, Bryan said:

The President in his message says our only purpose in taking possession of Cuba is to establish stable government and then turn that country over to the people of Cuba. Congress should reaffirm this purpose in regard to Cuba and assert the same purpose in regard to the Philippines and Porto Rico.<sup>142</sup>

Therefore, the Commoner did seem to have inclinations towards compelling Americans to "tutor" the natives of the occupied territories in good government. The only question was, would these promises obligate the United States to protect the islands while U.S. citizens helped establish governments there? Bryan's rhetoric through 1898 seemed to indicate that he believed such an obligation existed, and he intended to keep naval bases to fulfill it.

Legislation in favor of protecting the island countries and creating sound governments would cause two new extensions of the Monroe Doctrine. First of all, America would not only be defending areas of the Western Hemisphere from European colonization, but would be building governments there. Bryan proposed a policy similar to this in a January

1899 article in the *New York Journal*. He wrote:

If we announce to the world that we hold the Philippine Islands not for pecuniary profit but in trust for the inhabitants; if we declare that our purpose is to assist the Filipinos to establish a stable and independent government, friendly relations will be maintained and there will be little need of troops.<sup>143</sup>

The United States new role overseas appeared to be one of a nation-

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 36-37.



builder. In a February 1900 article in the *New York Journal*, in a most

idealistic fashion Bryan added:

New peoples must be raised. When this nation incorporates new people within its limits, the new people must be raised to the level of our people. ...

This Republic can have no higher destiny than to be a light unto the struggling and the oppressed in every land. It can win the highest glory by being a moral factor among the nations of the world, casting its influence always upon the side of those who believe in the doctrines set forth in our Declaration of Independence.<sup>144</sup>

The Commoner obviously leaned towards the creation of legislation that called for Americans to "raise" other nations. The Monroe Doctrine would be stretched in the direction of nation-building if any of the bills became law.

The second way that Bryan's support of plans to create governments overseas would extend the Monroe Doctrine is that America would not just be defending nations in the Western Hemisphere from European interventions, but guarding the Philippines as well. The Commoner's promotion of resolutions to aid the Filipinos would expand the area safeguarded under Monroe's declaration to a country in Asia. This topic will be elaborated on later in the discussion, because it also culminates in the Commoner's Democratic acceptance speech of 1900, but it suffices to say here that Bryan did realize his stance on the Philippines was a decisive break from past American policy. It was a schism he felt compelled to try to reconcile during his oration in 1900.

Overall, however, the Commoner's support for the acquisition of naval bases in Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines indicated two

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 66.

important facts about his notions of foreign policy. First, it demonstrated he may have been caught up in the joy the American people were experiencing after having won the "splendid little war," and consequently believed expanding America's role overseas would have no serious consequences. Bryan hinted that the United States should become more involved in the Philippines, and it remained to be seen where this line of thought would lead. Secondly, his desire for harbors showed he was not against all expansions of U.S. territory. The American government would be responsible for the safety of the ports it annexed or leased. So, the Commoner appeared willing to commit the United States to a somewhat risky policy for the sake of gains in trade and defensive capabilities.

Bryan backed additions to American lands in other ways as well. Immediately following the Spanish-American War, for example, many Puerto Ricans expressed a desire to become a territory of the United States rather than gain independence. The Commoner saw no problem with this request. At an interview in 1898, he said:  
In the case of Porto Rico, where the people have as yet expressed no desire for an independent government, we might with propriety declare our willingness to annex the island if the citizens desire annexation. ..."<sup>145</sup>

The reason he took this position was because he believed it was in accordance with American tradition. As long as a country's future was decided by its inhabitants, the nation was abiding by the U.S. principle of self-government. Bryan did not think the United States should annex

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 6.

other nations without their permission. He explained this theory best in a speech he gave at Michigan State University in February 1899. The Commoner said self-rule was a sacred American idea, and if anyone disagreed: "They must lay the blame upon American statesman long since dead."<sup>146</sup> He then used the writings of Thomas Jefferson and the speeches of Abraham Lincoln in an attempt to prove that the principle of "government by consent of the governed" was at the core of American society. In conclusion, Bryan said: "The American people cannot apply the European and monarchical doctrine of force in the subjugation and government of alien races and at the same time stand forth as defenders of the principles embodied in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution."<sup>147</sup> But, since Puerto Ricans had requested annexation themselves, they had chosen their own form of government, and could become part of the United States.

The Commoner did realize it had not been a common U.S. practice to annex land off of the North American continent before the war with Spain. Consequently, he sought additional justification for the annexation of Puerto Rico in other American traditions. In a December 1898 article, Bryan wrote that Jefferson had been in favor of the annexation of Cuba - an island not far from Puerto Rico. The then ex-president made one condition that would have to be met before the acquisition of the sugar island could take place, however. In 1823, Jefferson wrote to President Monroe in 1823 and advised him that America

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 19.

should only receive Cuba "when solicited by herself."<sup>148</sup> The great advocate of self-government had upheld his own principle in dealing with the Cubans. The country could only be added to the United States if the Cubans asked for annexation. This same principle, Bryan argued in his article, should be followed in regard to Puerto Rico. America could annex the Caribbean island, but only if its inhabitants requested it.<sup>149</sup>

#### **The Commoner Backs Westward Expansionism**

In regard to acquiring new U.S. territory, the Commoner was also not against the American "expansionism" that had inspired hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens to conquer the "Wild West" during the 19th Century. What he did attempt to do, was differentiate between expansionism and imperialism. Bryan believed expansionism focused on gaining territory in the Western Hemisphere, whereas imperialism centered on gaining land in remote regions of the world. In a December 1898 interview, Bryan said Jefferson had been quoted in support of imperialism, but those who quoted him must distinguish between expansionism and imperialism.<sup>150</sup> "They must also distinguish between expansion in the western hemisphere and an expansion that involves us in the quarrels of Europe and the Orient," the Commoner stated. "They must still further distinguish between expansion which secures contiguous territory for future settlement, and expansion which secures us alien

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 30.

racess for future subjugation."<sup>151</sup> And, at the end of the interview, Bryan said: "Jefferson favored the annexation of necessary contiguous (nearby) territory on the North American continent, but he was opposed to wars of conquest and the acquiring of remote territory." Bryan had yet again found a justification for the annexation of Puerto Rico. And, at the same time, he separated the concepts of expansionism and imperialism so the American public could observe the difference.

Bryan's theory that only areas of the Western Hemisphere could be added to the United States appeared to contradict his earlier statement that he wished to keep naval bases in the Philippines. The problem is eliminated if one considers the fact that Bryan was supporting independence for the Philippine Islands, and not annexation of the country. He wanted America's role in the islands to be one of a chaperon that would help the Filipinos establish stable government. This is why he had supported the Bacon Resolution and called for other similar legislation after its defeat. Bryan did not want to annex the country under any circumstances. He made this clear at a press conference in December 1898 when he said:

In the case of Porto Rico, where the people have as of yet expressed no desire for an independent government, we might with propriety declare our willingness to the annex the island if the citizens desire annexation, but the Philippines are too far away and their people too different from ours to be annexed to the United States, even if they desired it.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 5. Bryan did not comment on whether the land taken from Mexico in the Mexican War of 1846-1848 was a just acquisition in his opinion.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 6.

And, in an article printed in the *New York Journal* in January 1899, Bryan added that if the Philippines were annexed, "... a long step will have been taken toward those entanglements against which Washington and Jefferson with equal emphasis warned their countrymen."<sup>153</sup>

Besides the fact that the islands were distant from America, Bryan saw other poor qualities in the Philippines. In the January 1899 article in the *Journal*, the Commoner wrote that if the U.S. annexed the country, the acquisition was likely to bring with it a heavy increase in Asiatic immigration. He said this new immigration would hurt the average American laborer because it would result in "oriental competition upon the farms and in the factories of the United States."<sup>154</sup>

Towards the end of the writing, the Commoner rather simply asked of annexation, "Will it pay?" Bryan believed that it would not, and concluded the article by writing that the acquisition would lead to heavier taxes, Asiatic immigration, and an opportunity to furnish more sons for the army.<sup>155</sup>

Ethnocentrism also played a role in the Commoner's attitude toward the Philippines. He wasn't sure whether the Filipinos were intellectually capable of participating in the U.S. government, and believed in a scale of "race evolution."<sup>156</sup> The "American type" of race, he said at a meeting of the Virginia Democratic Association in February

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 23.

1899, was more highly advanced than all others.<sup>157</sup> This belief led him to question whether the Filipinos were fluent enough in democratic skills to participate in the American political landscape. At a speech made in Chicago in January 1899, Bryan said: "The Filipinos are not far enough advanced to share in the government of the people of the United States, but they are competent to govern themselves. ... Give the Filipinos time and opportunity, and while they never will catch up with us, unless we cease to improve, yet they may some day stand where we stand now."<sup>158</sup> The Commoner believed the Filipinos could be instructed to obtain the level of democracy held by America in 1899, but by the time this happened, the United States would be on a new, higher level of republican achievement. He was trying to explain exactly why the Filipinos could never be annexed on the basis of his own racist reasoning.

It can be seen from Bryan's statements that the politician loathed the possibility of the islands in the Far East being acquired by America. He made a distinction between the Philippines and Puerto Rico.

This separation was partially based on the Monroe Doctrine, which is why Bryan referred to the Philippine Islands as "too far away" from the United States, and partially based on the Commoner's ethnocentrism, which is why he said the Filipinos were "too different" to be annexed.<sup>159</sup>

The distinction did not apply to naval bases, however, which Bryan was

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 6.

willing to acquire in the Philippines for defense and trade purposes. It remained to be seen exactly what type of relationship the Commoner would like to see established with the Philippines, since he was backing legislation to send advisors there who would aid in establishing a government.

It is only fair to point out that the politician's race-centered attitudes towards the people of the Philippines were, no doubt, influenced by a rebellion that exploded in the country after U.S. troops forced the Spanish off the islands. The Filipinos were already fighting for independence from Spain when the United States entered the war, and feared the prospect of a new master in the United States. Consequently, many Filipinos simply took up arms against U.S. soldiers after their old enemy left the nation.

The insurrection proved very costly for America, which lost over 5,000 lives to guerilla tactics in two and a half years of fighting. In fact, President McKinley called in over 65,000 troops before General Arthur MacArthur captured the leader of the rebellion, Emilio Aguinaldo.

The revolt was an international embarrassment for the McKinley administration, because the U.S. had supposedly sent soldiers to the country to create peace. But, the troops had instead become frustrated at their inability to catch the rebels who thwarted them, and slaughtered whole villages suspected of harboring insurgents. Bryan soured at this turn of events as much as the rest of his country. He, along with others, blamed the U.S. government, American troops, and the



Filipinos for the atrocities that occurred on the islands.<sup>160</sup>

To the Commoner, the insurrection was also a quagmire that could have been avoided. He believed that if the Bacon Resolution had been approved, it would have prevented the Filipinos from taking up arms against America in the first place. The Commoner continued to state throughout the duration of the revolt that if the U.S. created legislation promising the Philippines independence once a sound government was established, the islands' inhabitants would lay down their weapons. The Commoner made his argument most clearly in a speech delivered at Michigan State University in February 1899. He said: It is putting the cart before the horse to say that the nation cannot reveal its purpose until the Filipinos lay down their arms. If the nation would declare its intention to establish a stable and independent government in the Philippines and then leave that government in the hands of the people of the islands, hostilities would be suspended at once, and further bloodshed would be avoided. ... The responsibility (for the rebellion) rests, not upon those who opposed the treaty, but upon those who refused to disclose the nation's purpose. ...<sup>161</sup>

Bryan later repeated the call for a resolution promising freedom to the Filipinos in his acceptance speech for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1900, along with a call for other beneficial measures for the islanders.

The Commoner's foreign policy views before his nomination speech can be summarized as follows: Bryan had advocated that the United States should end a European nation's control of its colonies in the Western

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

Hemisphere, he had found ways to justify the annexation of Puerto Rico, and he advocated the establishment of naval bases in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. His foreign policy has often been portrayed as being guided by an "isolationist instinct" during the debate over the Treaty of Paris, and yet most of the politician's proposals indicate he was in favor of expanding American interests and territories overseas.<sup>162</sup>

The only possible exception to this tendency to enlarge U.S. goals was that he was not willing to annex the Philippine Islands. The principles embodied in the Monroe Doctrine, he said, forbade the United States from such an action. In fact, in an article featured in the *New York Journal* in January 1899, the Commoner wrote:

What a change the imperialistic idea (of annexing the Philippines) has already wrought in the minds of its advocates! During the Nation's infancy and development the American people spurned the thought of foreign alliance and its attendant obligations; they refused to yoke the young republic with a monarchy. The wisest among us are not able to measure the cost of a policy which would surrender the Nation's independence of action and drag it into the broils of Europe and Asia.<sup>163</sup>

Later in the article, Bryan rhetorically asked: "The Monroe doctrine, too, what will become of it? How can we expect European nations to respect our supremacy in the Western Hemisphere if we insist upon entering Asia?" He answered, "So long as we confine ourselves to our own continent we are strong enough to repel the world; but are we prepared (or is it worth while to prepare) to wage an offensive warfare

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<sup>162</sup>Kendrick A. Clements, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist (The University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, 1982), 30.

<sup>163</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 42.

in other parts of the globe?"<sup>164</sup> Bryan opposed annexation of the Philippines on the grounds that it was simply too risky a step for the United States to take in international affairs.

Before discussing the Commoner's acceptance speech, one last point must be made about the politician's foreign policy ideas before 1900. It is that the Commoner had already supported some small American expansions into the Eastern Hemisphere, even with all of his rhetoric about the doctrine. When Hawaii, Guam, Wake, and the Baker Islands were annexed by the United States during the Spanish-American War, Bryan said surprisingly little about the acquisitions. Part of the silence was because the Commoner had volunteered for the armed forces during the war, and chose to have a case of "military lockjaw" on issues of state, as he put it. But, another part of his quietness came because the politician appeared to see acquisition of the islands as necessary for U.S. defense. Before the conflict with Spain began, Bryan had presided over a meeting of the Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress in July 1897. Resolutions were passed at the Congress in favor of the annexation of Hawaii, the construction of a Nicaraguan canal, and the recognition of Cuban belligerency.<sup>165</sup> The Commoner made no objections to the resolutions, apparently approving of them and seeing them as non-issues. In one of the few public statements Bryan made about the acquisition of Hawaii, in the *New York Journal* he wrote: "The Hawaiian

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<sup>164</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 42.

<sup>165</sup>Julius W. Pratt, Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands (New York: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), 224.

Islands are nearer to the Western than to the Eastern Hemisphere, and their annexation was urged largely upon the ground that their possession by another country would be a menace to the United States. When objection was made to the heterogeneous character of the people of the islands, it was met by the assertion that they were few in number."<sup>166</sup> The Commoner seemed to favor the acquisition of Hawaii for defensive purposes, and therefore was willing to stretch the area protected under the Monroe Doctrine.

If Bryan's behavior after the Spanish-American War is examined, his support for the annexation of Hawaii fits the pattern of his foreign-policy reasoning. He did, after all, propose that the United States should attempt to obtain naval bases in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines in return for "services rendered."<sup>167</sup> The politician also said America would be justified in annexing territory in the Western Hemisphere if invited to do so by its inhabitants. This type of thinking is probably why Bryan felt compelled to write Hawaii was close to the U.S., and would be a threat to the country if occupied by a foreign power.<sup>168</sup> He was trying to justify the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands on the basis that it was necessary for the security of his homeland.

#### **The Influence of Naval Power on History**

Lastly, concerning the expansion of U.S. territory into the Eastern

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<sup>166</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 39.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 39.

Hemisphere, it seems the Commoner may have been caught up in a tide of public opinion during the 1890's that favored the establishment of U.S. naval bases around the world. The rise of the popular feeling can be cited as beginning at many different points in American history. In the 1850's, Commodore Matthew C. Perry suggested that the United States purchase or lease harbors in the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands in Asia, and set up a colony in Formosa. In the 1860's, Secretary of State Seward attempted to buy the Virgin Islands from Denmark, advocated annexation of Haiti and Santo Domingo, and wound up purchasing Alaska from the Russians.<sup>169</sup> But, the most likely impetus for the wave of opinion in favor of acquiring ports in the 1890's can be traced to the actions of President Benjamin Harrison and his Secretary of State James G. Blaine.

The president and secretary made it a goal during their administration to increase trade with Latin American nations as a result of reports that there were large markets in the southern hemisphere that American manufactures were not being sold in.<sup>170</sup> The statesmen initiated a program in 1890 to build modern steel battleships to protect merchant vessels, and sought to obtain harbors overseas.<sup>171</sup> The plan netted the

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<sup>169</sup>Seward also explored the possibility of purchasing Cuba, Puerto Rico, Greenland and Iceland; backed plans to build an isthmian canal; and believed Hawaii, Canada and Mexico would eventually elect to become territories of the United States.

<sup>170</sup>David Healy, U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890's, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 42-43. The move to expand the navy was partially the result of the findings of a committee to investigate Latin American market prospects established by President Chester Arthur in 1884. The committee found that Latin countries were selling agricultural goods in the U.S., and then using the proceeds to buy manufactures from Europe. The report of the committee concluded: "the time has come now ... when new markets are necessary ... in order to keep our factories running. Here lies to the South of us our India. ..."

<sup>171</sup>Healy, U.S. Expansionism, 42-43. The administration felt that the United States had better enlarge the navy because the Europeans were heavily engaged in trade in the region, and disputes might arise when U.S. merchants increased the flow of American products to the area.

United States thirteen heavy ships that were operational or being built by the beginning of the Spanish-American War. In 1891, Blaine wrote that while he himself was "not much of an annexationist," he felt that "in some directions, as to naval stations and points of influence, we must look forward to a departure from the too conservative opinions which have been held heretofore."<sup>172</sup> The often forgotten President Chester Arthur can even be seen as having contributed to the pursuit of a powerful American navy. In 1883, he had backed a plan to build the United States' first steel warships. These early crafts were somewhat smaller than most of the European vessels of the day, but they were an important step towards a modern navy.

Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan published a book entitled The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783 in 1890, and the Harrison administration's drive to enlarge the navy and establish naval bases gained a widespread popular following. Mahan argued that the great nations of history had always been sea-faring countries possessing large, powerful navies.<sup>173</sup> He also criticized the United States for having let its navy run down since the Civil War, and for not keeping up with modern technology.

The publication had a powerful effect on Americans, who feared falling behind other nations, and not being able to defend the country from naval attack. Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy made reference to a hypothetical attack on New York City in his annual report for 1890,

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid, 43.

<sup>173</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 24.

and the burning of Washington during the War of 1812 became an often cited public example of what could happen if U.S. coasts were left unguarded.<sup>174</sup> The modern battleship of the day was now steam-powered, but the American navy still largely relied upon sailing vessels. New naval bases were required around the world if the nation was to maintain the same range it had with its old fleet.<sup>175</sup> The sailing vessels did not need to stop for coal, so they could traverse the globe if assigned to do so. Bryan may have gotten caught up in the public frenzy over the navy when he supported the annexation of Hawaii, and suggested that the United States negotiate for harbors in the Philippines.

#### **The Nation-Building Mission and the Election of 1900**

By the time of Bryan's nomination for president in 1900, the Treaty of Paris had been approved by Congress. The settlement brought with it the technical end to the Spanish-American War, which Bryan had sought. It also made it possible for America to decide the fate of Puerto Rico and the Philippines without foreign interference.

The future of Cuba had already been decided before the war in the form of the Teller Amendment. The amendment was supported by Bryan and several other prominent Democrat and Republican anti-imperialists because it promised the Cubans that the U.S. would not annex the island country after the conflict with Spain - the resolution was an attempt to

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<sup>174</sup>Healy, U.S. Expansionism, 44. Most U.S. citizens also felt some degree of humiliation upon learning during the *Baltimore* affair of 1891 that the tiny country of Chile had two battleships, while the United States had none yet ready to launch. In that dispute unarmed American soldiers on leave had been attacked in the Chilean city of Valparaiso, and the Harrison administration demanded a public apology for the redress. The U.S. and the Latin nation went to the brink of war before the Chilean government issued an apology.

<sup>175</sup>Conlin, American Past, 586.

morally purify the United States' reasons for going to war. Due to bipartisan efforts, the bill made it through the Senate with little difficulty.<sup>176</sup> The Commoner felt the Cubans had made a choice for self-government years before by rebelling against Spain before the United States became involved in the fight. He expressed this sentiment in a January 1899 article in which he stated, "The President has said that the only purpose our nation has in taking possession of Cuba is to assist the inhabitants to establish a stable and independent government.

It can do no harm for Congress to reaffirm this purpose, and it may do much good."<sup>177</sup> Later in the article, Bryan added, "The Cubans, having fought for independence for many years and against great odds, are naturally jealous of the liberty which they have won, and no doubt should be left as to the sincerity and good faith of our government in its dealings with them."<sup>178</sup> The Commoner then called for a simple recommitment by Congress to the pledges it had made in the Teller Amendment before the war. The McKinley administration, however, did not view such a resolution as necessary since the promises had already been made.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 29. The Teller Amendment was actually a compromise bill negotiated between the McKinley administration and the anti-imperialists in Congress. Senator David Turpie (a Democrat) and Senator Joseph B. Foraker (a Republican) had drafted the Turpie Amendment, which called for the U.S. to recognize the Cuban rebels as the proper government of the nation when a war declaration was made against Spain. McKinley, however, wanted some liberty of action in regard to the recognition of a government, so he had his administration negotiate the Teller Amendment, which stated only that the United States would not annex the island after the war. The compromise bill passed by unanimous decision.

<sup>177</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 36.

<sup>178</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 36.

<sup>179</sup>Louis W. Koenig, Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 285.



The fate of Puerto Rico had also theoretically been decided before the political race of 1900. But, the position taken on the country was not completely to the Commoner's liking. He had supported annexation of the Puerto Ricans on the basis that they were choosing their own form of government when they requested to become a territory of the United States. What he did not bargain for, however, was that the McKinley administration would annex the island, and subsequently not allow its citizens to have representation in Congress. McKinley and his cohorts went so far as to have a tariff passed against imports from the territory without a Puerto Rican being present in the U.S. legislature.

In an article published in the *New York Journal* in February 1900, the Commoner criticized the president for his violations of American tradition. Bryan wrote:

To impose upon the people of Puerto Rico such taxes as Congress may determine when the people of Puerto Rico have no representative in Congress is to assert either that taxation without representation is right, or that it is wise for us to do wrong. ... If the Republican leaders in Congress act without authority from the Constitution, they must do so with a full recognition of the fact that the people who make constitutions, and who elect public officials, will have a chance to speak before a republic is converted into an empire.<sup>180</sup>

It was clear that the politician from Nebraska wished to challenge the McKinley administration on the issue of imperialism in the upcoming election. The Commoner was disgruntled about the treatment of Puerto Rico and saw it as imperialistic, but this was just the tip of the iceberg. In both articles and speeches leading up to the election Bryan

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<sup>180</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 62-63.

claimed that the possibility of the Republicans adopting a colonial policy was the paramount issue facing the country. An example of this can be found in a speech he gave in February 1899, when the Commoner announced America had "reached another crisis."<sup>181</sup> This crisis, Bryan stated, was that "The ancient doctrine of imperialism, banished from our land more than a century ago, has recrossed the Atlantic and challenged democracy to mortal combat upon American soil." The Commoner went on to explain that whether the Spanish conflict would be remembered as a fight for liberty or as a war of conquest, whether the principles of self-government would be strengthened or abandoned, and whether the nation would remain a homogeneous republic or become a heterogeneous empire must all be decided in the election.<sup>182</sup> In another article during that same month, the politician claimed that imperialists in the country were seeking to create the impression that the ratification of the treaty had eliminated all controversy in regard to the future of the Philippines by transferring control of the islands to America.<sup>183</sup> Bryan retorted: "... there is not ground whatever for such a conclusion. The President has not as yet outlined a policy and Congress has so far failed to make any declaration upon the subject ... the treaty extinguishes Spanish sovereignty, but it does not determine our nation's course in dealing with the Filipinos."<sup>184</sup> The Commoner believed the time had come for the

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 54-55.

United States to decide what was to be done with the land American troops occupied during the war. It had been two years since the fight against Spain ended in August 1898, so Bryan harshly condemned the McKinley administration as having a poor track record in the territories.<sup>185</sup>

The chief executive's policies in the Philippines were also a target of the Commoner. He argued that the policies were even more unprecedented than those the administration pursued in Puerto Rico. The president had taken an ambiguous position in regard to the future of the eastern nation since the beginning of the Spanish-American War. Although McKinley had worked hard to avoid the conflict with Spain, and apparently had developed no pre-existing designs on the Philippines, once the fighting began he took the position that an invasion of the island country was the quickest path to American victory. His stance was influenced by the planning of the navy, which had theorized since 1895 that the best way to defeat Spain in a war would be to blockade Cuba and capture Manila Bay in the Philippines.<sup>186</sup> McKinley ordered the scheme to be carried out, and it was far more successful than originally anticipated. It was so successful, in fact, that the president saw an opportunity to establish a much-prized naval base at Manila. He ordered ground troops to fan out from the harbor and seize islands that would be essential to the safety of the bay.

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<sup>185</sup>Fighting against the Spanish ended, but fighting in the Philippines continued until March 1901 against rebels who desired independence, and not U.S. rule over the island.

<sup>186</sup>Healy, U.S. Expansionism, 57-58.

From this point on, McKinley's policy towards the territory in the Far East took an increasingly aggressive turn. By late summer 1898, he was engaged in a speaking tour designed to test public opinion in regard to annexation of the islands.<sup>187</sup> The jump in ambitions apparently resulted from the presence of a German naval squadron at Manila. The military ships caused a fear within the State Department that the Germans might attempt to seize the Philippines if U.S. troops departed.<sup>188</sup> Japan also caused the administration no small concern, as it had invaded Korea in 1894. The State Department believed the nation may have designs on the Philippines next.

Bryan and Congressional anti-imperialists responded to McKinley's speeches by calling for the president to issue a promise to the Filipinos that their nation would someday receive independence. McKinley ignored the requests. He believed a naval base in the Philippines could not be successfully defended unless all of the islands were annexed. He also wasn't sure if the people of the islands could defend themselves alone.<sup>189</sup> A poll given to newspaper companies immediately after the war indicates that 50 percent of the organizations favored annexation of the country. Nearly 40 percent of the newspapers believed the U.S. should keep only a naval base in the territory, while 10 percent advocated that the United States should create a protectorate

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 64. McKinley, like most Americans, also had some doubts that the Filipinos were prepared for self-government due to ethnocentric reasoning. Many Americans viewed the Filipinos as uneducated, backwards, and to put it bluntly, not trained in white culture.

over the islands.<sup>190</sup>

**Bryan Portrays the Philippines  
Question as Democracy vs. Militarism**

The Commoner took a more customary American approach to the Philippines than the president. Bryan issued statements that the nation could not be annexed, even if its inhabitants desired it, because the country was too far away from the U.S. He followed the Monroe Doctrine more closely than McKinley, and for this reason believed he could force the president to reveal that he secretly wanted to hold or annex the islands. In an article published in December 1898, the Commoner openly challenged the president on the subject. He wrote:

... let it be remembered that President McKinley only a year ago, in a message to Congress discussing the Cuban situation, said: 'I speak not of forcible annexation, for that is not to be thought of. That, by our code of morality, would be criminal aggression.'...

In his recent speech in Savannah, Secretary Gage, in defending the new policy of the administration, suggested that 'philanthropy and five per cent' may go hand in hand. Surely we know what a day may bring forth if in so short a time 'criminal aggression' can be transformed into 'philanthropy and five percent.'<sup>191</sup>

Later in the article, Bryan asked what beauty and riches the "isles of the Pacific" possessed if they could tempt the United States to abandon "the traditions of a century."<sup>192</sup> In his typical doctrine-oriented fashion, Bryan had blasted away at McKinley's stance on the Philippines and challenged him to reveal his true intentions.

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 64. This survey was given to the editing staffs of newspaper companies by the *Literary Digest* to determine the mood of the United States in regard to annexing the Philippines. One hundred sixty-eight newspapers participated in the poll.

<sup>191</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 26.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 26.

In a second article published in January 1899, the Commoner took on the Republican party as a whole on the issue of the islands in the Far East. He stated that while America was not prepared to draft a complete code of laws suited to the particular needs of the Filipinos, the country ought to be able to decide whether it intended to deal with them according to the principles of the U.S. government, or the customs prevailing among European monarchies. He wrote, "Even a Republican Congress ought to be able to choose without hesitation between a policy which establishes a republic in the Orient and a policy which sows the seeds of militarism in the United States. A resolution declaring the Nation's purpose presents a plain and clear-cut issue between the theory of self-government and the colonial policy."<sup>193</sup> Bryan also stated that because the Republicans were reluctant to give a statement of intention on the Philippines, they were not abiding by the rules of common decency. The Filipinos had been fighting for independence when the United States entered the war, he said, and had received friendly assurances from American officials that if they cooperated against the Spanish they would receive freedom.<sup>194</sup> "Whether or not such assurances were actually given, frankness and honesty should characterize our dealings with them," the Commoner wrote.<sup>195</sup> Bryan blamed not only McKinley, but the whole Republican party, for not following a course he thought would be more consistent with national honor.

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<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 36.

## **The Quest for American Protectorates**

It was not until the Commoner's acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination in August 1900 that he accused the Grand Old Party of outright imperialism. Bryan had hinted that the Republicans had colonial aims throughout the articles he wrote in 1899, and challenged them to clarify their position, but had never actually made a specific charge against them.<sup>196</sup> From the beginning of his nomination speech it was clear the Commoner's tone had changed. The politician began by praising the Democrats and Republicans for their bipartisan efforts during the Spanish-American War, but then quickly added that "Republicans who three years ago condemned 'forcible annexation' as immoral and even criminal are now sure that it is both immoral and criminal to oppose forcible annexation."<sup>197</sup> Instead of meeting the issue boldly and submitting a clear plan for dealing with the Philippines, the Republican convention had adopted a platform that was devoted to boasting and self-congratulation, Bryan claimed.<sup>198</sup>

The speech focused on a supposed a turn for the worse by the Republicans. Bryan believed that because the McKinley administration had not acted upon the question of the Asian country's future since the end of the war, the conclusion could be drawn that the Republicans were

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<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 34-59. The articles entitled "Ratify the Treaty, Declare the Nation's Policy," "British Rule in India," and "What Next?" in particular hint that President McKinley needed to clarify the nation's purpose in the Philippines. In a similar way, Bryan had hinted at the message delivered in his "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 convention without making a full charge against the Republicans before the convention.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., 71.

imperialists that were attempting to squat on the islands until the American public forgot about it. "Nearly sixteen months elapsed after the ratification of the treaty before the adjournment of Congress last June, and yet no law was passed dealing with the Philippines," the Commoner stated. "The will of the President has been the only law in the Philippine Islands wherever the American authority extends."<sup>199</sup> Bryan also made the remarkable claim that the Grand Old Party had accepted the "European idea," and "planted itself upon the ground taken by George III, and every ruler who distrusts the capacity of the people for self-government or denies them a voice in their own affairs."<sup>200</sup> He believed that this imperialistic stance by the Republicans was why they had refused to legislate on the question of the Philippines' independence. They knew that the creation of a resolution declaring the nation's purpose in the islands would expose their desire to become a colonial power, he claimed. "A law would disclose the radical departure from history and precedent contemplated by those who control the Republican party," the Commoner said.<sup>201</sup>

With the charge of imperialism laid on the table, Bryan went on to make his own proposals about what should be done with American foreign policy. It is these recommendations that clear up the ambiguity in the Commoner's earlier stance that the United States should establish a naval base in the Philippines, and yet not annex the country. Bryan

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 79.



made a decisive promise that formed the heart of Democratic platform.

He said that if elected:

... I will convene Congress in an extraordinary session as soon as inaugurated and recommend an immediate declaration of the nation's purpose, first, to establish a stable form of government in the Philippine Islands, just as we are now establishing a stable form of government in Cuba; second, to give independence to the Cubans; third, to protect the Filipinos from outside interference while they work out their own destiny, just as we have protected the republics of Central and South America, and are, by the Monroe Doctrine, pledged to protect Cuba.<sup>202</sup>

Therefore, Bryan had apparently wanted a harbor in the Philippines because he saw an expanded role for the United States in the Far East. He proposed that the U.S. would help establish a sound form of government in the Philippines, and was willing to commit the American military to defend the country while the government was being put together. The Commoner even went so far as to explain why this policy was not the same as a European colonial policy. "A European protectorate often results in a plundering of the ward by the guardian," Bryan said. "An American protectorate gives to the nation protected the advantage of our strength, without making it the victim of our greed."<sup>203</sup>

The Commoner thought the United States' new mission around the world was to be one of a nation-builder.

The idea of raising governments in other lands did not have precedents in American history, and if Bryan had been elected, would have been a radical new departure for U.S. foreign policy. The nation

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., 90.

would not only be defending countries in the Western Hemisphere from European interventions, as it had in the past, but would help create stable governments there and in the Orient.<sup>204</sup> Both the notion that the United States could raise nations, and the conception that the mission could be extended into an area of the Eastern Hemisphere were new. The Commoner was testing the limits of the Monroe Doctrine, and yet in some ways, still referred to it as his major guide to foreign policy. He had, after all, objected to the annexation of the Philippines on the basis that the islands were too far away from America. And in the January 1899 article in the *New York Journal*, the Commoner wrote: When this nation abandons its traditions and enters upon a colonial policy, a long step will have been taken toward those entanglements against which Washington and Jefferson with equal emphasis warned their countrymen. ... The wisest among us are not able to measure the cost of a policy which would surrender the Nation's independence of action and drag it into the broils of Europe and Asia.<sup>205</sup>

**Self-Government Pulls Equal  
Weight With the Monroe Doctrine**

How could Bryan justify the creation of an American protectorate in the Philippines if he so admired the Monroe Doctrine, however? The answer is that the Commoner also used a belief in the U.S. tradition of self-government as a major guide to his foreign policy recommendations.

He spoke of his personal belief in this principle throughout the nomination acceptance speech, and advocated that America should spread

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<sup>204</sup>The quotation above concerning Bryan's major proposal for the future of U.S. foreign policy stated that the United States was already creating a stable government in Cuba, and protecting the country. This was in addition to the protection Bryan was now offering the Philippines.

<sup>205</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

the idea around the globe. In one section of the speech entitled "Our Place in World Politics," Bryan said that for over a century the United States had been affecting the politics of humanity more than all other nations combined. "Because our Declaration of Independence was promulgated," the Commoner stated, "others have been promulgated... because the patriots of 1776 fought for liberty, others have fought for it."<sup>206</sup> The Commoner stated that the growth of the American principle of self-government had been the overshadowing political fact of the 19th century, in fact.<sup>207</sup> He also said that nothing had been able to check the growth of the idea thus far, and he "would not exchange the glory of this Republic for the glory of all the empires that had risen and fallen since time began."<sup>208</sup> It became clear that the Commoner viewed America's purpose in the world to be to promote the advancement of self-rule around the globe.

In another section of his commentary, Bryan described exactly how this charge was to be accomplished. As noted, the politician had suggested that the United States should establish a protectorate over the Philippines. The creation of such dependencies was the major portion of his plan to spread the democratic idea. He had stated that the U.S. should defend the Philippines "just as we have protected the republics of Central and South America and are, by the Monroe Doctrine,

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 85-86.

pledged to protect Cuba."<sup>209</sup> Consequently, Bryan already felt that a protectorate had been created in Cuba, and hoped to initiate the same situation in the Far East. It would be "better a thousand times that our flag in the Orient give way to a flag representing the idea of self-government, than that the flag of this Republic should become the flag of empire," the Commoner said.<sup>210</sup> Concerning Cuba, Bryan stated that when the American flag was hauled down from over that island, he hoped "the flag of the Cuban Republic is ready to rise in its place."<sup>211</sup> His immediate plan for the promotion of self-rule was to defend the countries U.S. troops had occupied during the war, while sending advisors to the nations to build sound governments.

The idea of establishing dependencies may have been new for the United States, but it was not completely new for the Commoner. Bryan had discussed his plan throughout the year of 1899 in articles and speeches he presented, so the scheme was a consistent line of thought for the statesman. In a January 1899 article in the *New York Journal*, the Commoner wrote, "I suggest below a few reasons in support of a resolution declaring it our Nation's purpose to establish a stable government in Cuba and the Philippines, and then to give the inhabitants independence under an American protectorate which will guard them against molestation from without."<sup>212</sup> The first reason Bryan gave to

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<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 85-89.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

support the measure was that it was consistent with national honor because it was better to tell countries up front how the U.S. was going to deal with them than leave them guessing. The second reason he gave to back the bill was that he believed such a resolution would present a clear-cut issue between the theory of self-rule and colonial theory. America would grant the occupied territories independence eventually, the Commoner reasoned, so it would not engage in an imperialistic policy. At a speech delivered in February 1899 at a Democratic banquet in Minnesota, Bryan said the ratification of the treaty with Spain cleared the way for the creation of a Philippine republic. But, what course would the United States pursue, the politician asked? Would the country "send the Statue of Liberty back to France and borrow from England a statue of William the Conqueror," or would it "act as to enable the American people to join with the Filipinos in placing in the harbor of Manila a statue of Liberty enlightening the Orient?"<sup>213</sup> The Commoner had consistently suggested that the United States should guard the island countries while helping them develop self-rule. What this pattern of thought also demonstrates, however, is that Bryan relied on the principle of "government by consent of the governed" to guide foreign policy at least as much as the Monroe Doctrine.

One of the most interesting points that can be made about the Commoner's speech during the Democratic Convention, in fact, is that it can be determined that at least for the moment, Bryan was advocating that the ideal of self-government should take precedence over the Monroe

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<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

Doctrine - or be a catalyst to expand the area safeguarded by the declaration into the Eastern Hemisphere. Bryan had proposed "to protect the Filipinos from outside interference while they work out their own destiny, just as we have protected the republics of Central and South America, and are, by the Monroe Doctrine, pledged to protect Cuba."<sup>214</sup> So, it sounds as if he had decided the Philippines could be included in the territory defended by the doctrine. Bryan later explained this decision by saying, "For three-quarters of a century the Monroe doctrine has been a shield to neighboring republics and yet it has imposed no pecuniary burden on us."<sup>215</sup> He added, "After the Filipinos had aided us in the war against Spain, we could not honorably turn them over to their former masters; we could not leave them to be the victims of the ambitious designs of European nations, and since we do not desire to make them a part of us or to hold them as subjects, we propose the only alternative, to give them independence and guard them against molestation from without."<sup>216</sup> The Commoner believed that since the Filipinos helped America defeat the Spanish during the war, the United States owed them something. He was not willing to annex the islands, so he proposed what he saw as the only alternative, that the U.S. grant the territory protection under an extended Monroe Doctrine. Bryan also worked his other major foreign policy guide into his plan by stating the United States would give the Filipinos independence.

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 90.

Overall, Bryan's nomination speech in August 1900 portrays the Monroe Doctrine as one his main guides to foreign relations, along with the idea of self-government. The path the Commoner advocated for the future of U.S. foreign policy was unprecedented. It was a mission of nation-building, and it extended into the Eastern Hemisphere. In the finale of his speech, the politician stated that the Republicans were arguing America was in the hands of destiny and could not avoid annexing the Philippines. Bryan replied that George Washington had believed not only in the destiny of the United States, but that the destiny of the republican form of government throughout the world was intrusted to American hands. The Commoner said this was an "immeasurable responsibility," and "upon the success of the experiment rests the hope of humanity."<sup>217</sup> He concluded the oration by explaining exactly what he thought America's role should be in international affairs in the future.

The quote demonstrates the idealism that played so large a role in the Commoner's recommendations on foreign policy. He said:  
I can conceive of a national destiny surpassing the glories of the present and the past - a destiny which meets the responsibilities of today and measures up to the possibilities of the future. Behold a republic, resting securely upon the foundation stones quarried by revolutionary patriots from the mountain of eternal truth - a republic applying in practice and proclamation to the world the self-evident propositions that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with inalienable rights; that governments are instituted among men to secure these rights, and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. ... Behold a republic increasing in population, in wealth, in strength, and in influence, solving the problems of civilization and hastening the coming of an universal brotherhood - a republic which shakes thrones and dissolves aristocracies by its silent example and

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<sup>217</sup>Ibid., 91.

gives light and inspiration to those who sit in darkness. Behold a republic gradually but surely becoming a supreme moral factor in the world's disputes - a republic whose history, like the path of the just, 'is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'<sup>218</sup>

One last point that must be made about Bryan's nomination speech before summing up his foreign policy ideas during the years from 1898-1900 is that the Commoner was not necessarily advocating "self-determination" for the Cubans and Filipinos. Self-determination implies the citizens of the occupied territories would have been free to choose any form of government they liked, without interference from the United States. Bryan did not back such a policy. He consistently suggested the Americans on the islands should "help" the natives develop stable governments. What the policy implies is that the people of the territories would not be free to create whatever form of government they desired, but would instead be guided towards democracy by Americans. In an article published in the *New York Journal* in February 1900, Bryan came as close as he ever did to literally proposing such an idea. He wrote:

New peoples must be raised. When this nation incorporates new peoples within its limits, the new peoples must be raised to the level of our people. ... It (the U.S.) can win the highest glory by being a moral factor among the nations of the world, casting its influence always upon the side of those who believe in the doctrines set forth in our

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<sup>218</sup>Ibid., 91-92.



Declaration of Independence.<sup>219</sup>

The Commoner appeared willing to grant the people of the island nations self-government because all it implied was they would eventually rule themselves, after a period of instruction from the United States. He was probably not willing, however, to give the citizens of the islands self-determination - within its boundaries the natives might choose a form of government other than a republic. It is even possible that during this phase of his political career, the Commoner identified self-government alone with democracy. During his acceptance speech, he said the difference between a monarchy and a republic could be summed up in one sentence: "In a monarchy the king gives to the people what he believes to be good government; in a republic the people secure for themselves what they believe to be good government."<sup>220</sup>

**Isolationist, or Advocate of Aggressive Foreign Relations?**

The overriding question that must be asked of Bryan's foreign policy recommendations from 1898 to 1900, then, is whether or not the Commoner really believed the United States should lead the world solely by "its silent example?"<sup>221</sup> The answer is that he did not, and he even proposed that the nation take up an expanded role in international affairs. Bryan had supported the Spanish-American War, backed the ratification of the Treaty of Paris, defined the annexation of Puerto Rico as justifiable, and recommended that the United States keep naval

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<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 92.

bases in the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In August 1900, he even went so far as to suggest the U.S. should establish protectorates over Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, and help raise democracies there. The Commoner was not following a policy of leading the world solely by silent example, but instead was advocating that the U.S. take a more active role in other areas of the globe. The new mission to promote republican government was, as he put it, "... a national destiny surpassing the glories of the present and the past - a destiny which meets the responsibilities of today and measures up to the possibilities of the future."<sup>222</sup>

The task Bryan assigned to the United States in 1900 was unprecedented in American history. For the sake of disseminating the idea of self-rule around the globe, he was willing to amend his other major guide to foreign policy, the Monroe Doctrine. The doctrine would change, first of all, because the U.S. would not just be protecting countries from European interventions, but helping to establish stable governments there. Secondly, Monroe's declaration would be altered due to the fact that America would extend its arm of protection to islands in the Far East. The very set of principles that the Commoner said had kept the U.S. out of the entanglements of Europe and Asia would be tested to create "a Statue of Liberty enlightening the Orient."<sup>223</sup> Bryan had already expanded the doctrine once to justify the country's move to oust Spain from the Western Hemisphere, and he was prepared to do it

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 17.

again.

The Commoner appears to have had little resemblance to the politician who has often been accused of having an isolationist impulse during the period immediately following the Spanish-American War.

Historian Kendrick A. Clements stated it was during the treaty debate that Bryan first began "to move toward the development of a missionary isolationism that promised service to the world without involvement."<sup>224</sup>

The Commoner, it can be sure, did envision a new role for the United States in world affairs after the conflict with Spain, but it involved anything but a distant service to humanity. He was willing to commit American military might and advisors to remote regions of the globe to advance the cause of republican government. The Commoner was not an isolationist - he was a politician who relied upon the traditions of the Monroe Doctrine and self-rule to define where U.S. spheres of influence in the world should be. In the case of the Philippines, Bryan saw an opportunity to promote the spread of democracy, pay Filipinos back for their cooperation in the war, and establish a naval base. For these reasons, it can justifiably be argued that the Commoner was following an aggressive foreign policy in the post-war years. At least for the time being, it looked like his democratic idealism had won out over the realpolitik expressed in the Monroe Doctrine to some degree.

During Bryan's tenure as Secretary of State, the pendulum appears to have swung back in the other direction, towards the realpolitik of the Doctrine. The Commoner ended up resigning his Cabinet position to

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<sup>224</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 23.

keep the United States out of a European war. He again appeared to be focused on the Western Hemisphere as the correct area of the world for American foreign policy to be carried out in. There still was some idealism in the mix, however, as Bryan advocated American interventions in Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic to create stable governments there. The Commoner seemed to be attempting to raise nations, as he had announced nearly 15 years earlier during the election of 1900.

The next chapter of this thesis focuses on Bryan's last great foreign policy debate, which was over the League of Nations. During the period between 1916 and 1920, U.S. politicians engaged in a war of words over whether or not the country should join an organization designed to enforce peace. Would an avid follower of the Monroe Doctrine accept American participation in a League that would have European members? The answer is both complex and surprising.

## Chapter Four

### The League of Nations

Long before the United States entered the First World War in April 1917, and even longer before Wilson issued his famous "Fourteen Points," calling for a "general association of nations" to be created after the conflict, Bryan and other American politicians engaged in a hotly contested debate. The argument centered on whether or not a League of Nations was needed to promote world peace. The Commoner changed his position on the League over the course of the discussion, primarily because the Wilson administration decided that the United States should enter the war in Europe. The move gave the country a much greater interest in the type of peace that would be established after the Old World's guns fell silent.

In the early opinions that Bryan expressed about the League, he showed an unwillingness to support the organization on the grounds that it would draw America into the alliance system of Europe. U.S. participation would violate the Monroe Doctrine. The Commoner also expressed the belief that a U.S. entry would cause Americans to adopt what he viewed to be a "decaying morality" in Old World nations. This decline of morals, he said, had caused the Great War in Europe.

By January 1919, the Commoner had changed his opinions on the League. America had undergone its baptism of fire in the Great War, and

come out a winner. Like many Americans, Bryan hoped for a newfound respect for the United States among the nations of the world. He wanted to see America become a leader, and believed that the League of Nations was one avenue the United States could use to establish this presence. For the Commoner, however, the Monroe Doctrine remained. Bryan did not want the United States to be drawn into any military actions it did not approve of by the League. Furthermore, he set about to ensure that the organization would not merely become a huge alliance among England, the United States, France, and like-minded nations.

The majority of the Commoner's early opinions on the proposed League can be found in a written debate he engaged in with ex-president William Howard Taft during 1916 and 1917. The debate was published in mid-1917, probably just after the United States declared war against Germany in April. In this case, Bryan's statements came before a political battle over the assembly consumed the U.S. during 1919 and 1920. The discussion is unique in this regard, and deserves scholarly attention. In fact, it even appears the publication was written almost entirely before America picked sides in the Europe conflict. A section was added after the concluding arguments of the debate entitled "Final Statements In The Light Of Recent Events." Within the new text, the Commoner wrote that while great changes had taken place since Taft and he began the discussion in the book, they did not "materially affect" the matter at issue. "The question under consideration is whether the United States shall, after this war is over, enter into such an agreement such as that proposed by the League To Enforce Peace," Bryan stated.<sup>225</sup> The Commoner answered the query with a response that was representative of his stance against a League of Nations in the book.

He wrote:

A review of the arguments heretofore presented will make it clear that our entrance into this war does not furnish any excuse for obligating ourselves to aid in the settlement of European disputes hereafter. We are at war with Germany because she violated our rights, sunk our ships and drowned our citizens. ... It must be remembered that our Nation enters this war by the formal action of Congress - the body in which the Constitution vests the power to declare war. It will be seen, therefore, that the League to Enforce Peace

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<sup>225</sup>William Jennings Bryan and William Howard Taft, World Peace: A Written Debate Between William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 154.

cannot use our entrance into this war to support its plan. The League proposes that, in advance of any cause of war, we shall authorize a council or committee - which we cannot hope to control - to call us into war even when there has been no invasion of our rights.<sup>226</sup>

The Commoner's desire to prevent European countries from controlling America's foreign policy and armed forces became the central theme of his initial position against an assembly of nations. First, it is necessary to describe exactly what proposal the Commoner was arguing against in the debate, however, since it clearly was not the same plan as that advanced in the Covenant of the League of Nations in 1919. The plan discussed in the book World Peace: A Written Debate Between William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan was devised in June 1915 by a group called the League to Enforce Peace. The League to Enforce Peace was founded in June by Taft and several other prominent Americans, including Theodore Marburg and Hamilton Holt. The body's members held a common concern about the war that was afflicting Europe. If a "world war" had arisen so quickly, they asked, what was to ensure that another bloody contest of its magnitude would not rage across the globe again in the future?

To answer the question, the members of the League to Enforce Peace set out to develop a plan that would, hopefully, prevent all wars once a peace was established in Europe. This was the proposal the Commoner vehemently opposed.

The scheme Taft's group created was based on the idea that in order for a calm state of affairs to be maintained between nations, countries

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<sup>226</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 154-155.



would have to commit to jointly enforcing peace with military action. Nations literally were to join a "League to Enforce Peace" that would occasionally use armed force to stop overly aggressive countries from going forward with belligerent actions. The assembly was to sit in judgement of its members, and employ a democratic vote to decide when a country was guilty of "criminal" behavior. This blueprint for peace was a strange plan in many ways. It attempted to base peace upon the threat of violence. But, the plan was virtually the same as the League of Nations that Wilson and the Allies later built under the Treaty of Versailles.

Even the details of the proposal of the League to Enforce Peace correlate with the organization the Allies established. Taft's group created a charter for itself that contained four main planks. Each plank represented an idea the members of the League hoped would become an official policy of the U.S. government. The first plank simply said it was desirable for the United States to join an assembly of nations that would bind its signatories to submit "all justiciable disputes" to an international judicial tribunal for hearings and recommendations.<sup>227</sup> The suggestion was similar to what the Covenant of the League of Nations proposed, except that the Covenant stated the League could also initiate an investigation of international disagreements on its own.<sup>228</sup>

The second plank called for conflicts not settled by the judicial

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<sup>227</sup>Ibid., xii-xiii.

<sup>228</sup>Kendrick A. Clements, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 133.

tribunal to be directed to a council of conciliation for secondary consideration and advice. It remained unclear as to which countries would make up this council, as was the case with the judicial tribunal.

But, the plank represented a backup measure for times when the advice of the tribunal went unheeded. The Covenant of the League of Nations was not as explicit concerning backup contingencies. The document only assured that extensive deliberations would occur before the assembly resorted to disruptive actions, such as economic sanctions or force, to solve disputes.

The third principle in the charter of the League to Enforce Peace moved away from the investigative qualities of the group's plan. It said that all countries that became members of the assembly would have to agree in advance to jointly use economic and military force against any one of their number that committed acts of hostility against other nations before submitting its grievances to the tribunal. The plank resembled the infamous "Article 10" of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 10 pledged members of the League to "respect and preserve against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members."<sup>229</sup>

It was assumed by the signatories of the Covenant that this article meant they would sometimes have to use military action to protect the sovereignty of other countries, although the Treaty of

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<sup>229</sup>Joseph R. Conlin, The American Past: A Survey of American History, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1990), 685. The United States Senate eventually rejected the Treaty of Versailles largely because of objections to Article 10, which some Senators felt would interfere with the power to declare war that was granted to Congress under the U.S. Constitution.

Versailles never clearly made the requirement. Consequently, there was a slight difference between the platform of the League to Enforce Peace and the Covenant of the League of Nations. The charter of Taft's organization openly requested that countries agree to use force at the direction of an assembly of nations. The League Covenant only half-heartily asked nations to do so. Article 10 was worded in this manner, in fact, because the Allies themselves were not certain -- after World War I -- if they wanted to sacrifice their militaries to all of the peace-keeping missions the League might engage in.

The last plank of the League to Enforce Peace mentioned that conferences would be held from time to time between nations to formulate "international laws" that would govern the decisions of the judicial tribunal. Any law that was created, however, could be vetoed by a member of the League if the country objected to the statute within a set amount of time from the conference date.<sup>230</sup> The time limit was to be determined later by the League.

The idea that international laws could be established was not new in 1915. It had been around since at least the Hague Conference of 1899, at which many of the largest European nations and the United States established agreements concerning what the "proper" techniques of warfare were.<sup>231</sup> It is also possible that some of the treaties the U.S.

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<sup>230</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, xii-xiii. The charter of the League to Enforce Peace left many such details ambiguous so that they could be decided of at one of the early meetings of the assembly of nations.

<sup>231</sup>Robert H. Ferrell, American Diplomacy: The Twentieth Century (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 115. At the Hague Conference in 1899, countries jointly signed declarations against asphyxiating gas, expanding bullets, and the throwing of projectiles from balloons. They also arranged for the establishment of a Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, to which nations could submit disputes if they desired to.

negotiated with Old World countries during the nineteenth century could be considered to have created international regulations, as they contained clauses that defined the rights of neutral nations during periods of war. In both situations, multiple countries attempted to apply legalistic codes to international behavior. But, the codes cannot specifically be described as "laws." The regulations were not backed-up by an international conglomerate of nations, and thus did not have the enforceability of statutes.

The Covenant of the League of Nations agreed that rules should be developed to govern the actions of nations. The Allies did not explicitly state that international laws would be created by the League, but it was made clear that members of the assembly could be judged to have violated the independence and territorial integrity of other nations, and their neutrality. This implied that at least an informal method of measuring the lawlessness of countries would be developed by the League, whether members of the organization described the system as law or not.

#### **Wilson Backs the League, Redefines Doctrine**

The plan Taft and his cohorts set forward as proper U.S. foreign policy in 1915, then, was similar to the scheme for peace that Wilson and the Allies built under the Treaty of Versailles. President Wilson even gave an address to the League to Enforce Peace on May 27, 1916. In it, he announced that he supported the principle of collective security. The president also called for the establishment of a League of Nations,

but only after the war in Europe subsided.<sup>232</sup>

In another speech delivered in October 1916, Wilson reiterated his support for an assembly of nations. He said, "What disturbs the life of the whole world is the concern of the whole world, and it is our duty to lend the full force of this nation, moral and physical, to a league of nations which shall see to it that nobody disturbs the peace of this world without submitting his case first to the opinion of mankind."<sup>233</sup> The president seemed to be making a move away from the Monroe Doctrine.

In fact, in a speech delivered to the Senate on January 22, 1917,

Wilson said:

I am proposing that all nations henceforth avoid entangling alliances which would draw them into competitions of power, catch them in nets of intrigue and selfish rivalry, and disturb their own affairs with influences intruded from without. There is no entangling alliances in a concert of power. When all unite and act in the same sense and with the same purpose all act in the common interest and are free to live their lives under a common protection.<sup>234</sup>

But, Wilson went on to suggest that the League of Nations should adopt the Monroe Doctrine's principles as "the doctrine of the world." He said the declaration's main premise was that no nation should seek to extend its polity over another country or people. Consequently, in the president's mind, the mission of the League and the purpose of the doctrine were one - to protect the sovereignty of individual

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<sup>232</sup>Lloyd E. Ambrosius, Wilsonian Statecraft: Theory and Practice of Liberal Internationalism during World War I (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1991), 80-81.

<sup>233</sup>Ambrosius, Wilsonian Statecraft, 80-81.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid., 80.

countries.<sup>235</sup>

The ideas of Wilson and the League to Enforce Peace also correlated well on this point. Members of Taft's group expressed few fears that membership in an assembly would be an abandonment of the Monroe Doctrine. In his debate with Bryan, Taft wrote, "The League does not enable us or authorize us to acquire and colonize territory in Europe by purchase or conquest any more than it authorizes a European nation to do so on this side; and that is all the Monroe Doctrine forbids."<sup>236</sup>

The fact that ex-president Taft was involved in the creation of the League to Enforce Peace was not strange. He personally took steps to promote world peace during Theodore Roosevelt's administration and his own term in office. In 1905, while he was secretary of war for Roosevelt, Taft negotiated an informal accord with the Japanese that became known as the Taft-Katsura Agreement. The document was designed to calm tensions between the United States and Japan, which just had laid a crushing defeat on the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>In the case of Latin American countries, of course, Wilson was sometimes using this "purpose" of the doctrine as a justification to intervene in Latin nations to stabilize their governments. He feared that if the United States did not do so, European powers would send their navies to collect debts in Latin American countries and perhaps create puppet governments there.

<sup>236</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 107-108. Taft also claimed that in some cases, a League to Enforce Peace might be willing to help the United States enforce the Monroe Doctrine if the violation of the doctrine was also a violation of the principles of the League. He believed that in such cases, the U.S. would receive the aid of an "International Police Force" to drive violator of the doctrine out of the Western Hemisphere.

<sup>237</sup>Roosevelt had originally hoped the Japanese would win the Russo-Japanese War and open Manchuria to trade with the West, but the Japanese were too successful for Roosevelt's comfort level when they sank the Baltic fleet of Russia. The president came to fear that there would be no power left to stop Japan's territorial ambitions in Korea, Manchuria, and possibly even the Philippines; and that the Japanese would be able to establish in actuality a closed trading block if they annexed all of these lands.

Both Roosevelt and Taft feared that the Japanese would turn their territorial ambitions south, toward the Philippines. The McKinley and Roosevelt administrations had established an American protectorate there after the Spanish-American War of 1898.

The Taft-Katsura Agreement stated that the United States would not resist any of Japan's ambitions in Korea, a Chinese satellite, as long as the Japanese would renounce "any aggressive designs whatever" on the Philippines.<sup>238</sup> It was a strange way of approaching peace, admittedly, but a lot of Roosevelt's ideas regarding the establishment of peace were strange. This was witnessed by his "walk softly and carry a big stick" approach to foreign policy, and by his 1905 decision during the peace negotiations between Japan and Russia to create a parity between the two nations in land and military might in Asia. Roosevelt created the equality even though the Japanese had the upper hand in the war when the armistice was signed.

Taft's next attempt at reducing world tensions came during his own term as president from 1909-1913. Following the cues of the previous administration and suggestions from progressives, Taft tried to negotiate arbitration treaties with Great Britain and France. The treaties were supposed to differ from their predecessors, which were established during the Roosevelt administration, by including more types of disputes to be mediated on the international level. Roosevelt's agreements excepted from arbitration all conflicts that concerned the vital interests of countries, their independence, and their national

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<sup>238</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 59.

honor.<sup>239</sup> Taft's treaties excused no dispute.

Instead, Taft's agreements sought to establish a "Joint High Commission of Inquiry" between the United States, Great Britain, and France anytime there was a disagreement between any of the three. This commission would investigate whether or not a dispute was justiciable. If a conflict was found to be "susceptible of decision by the application of the principles of law or equity", the treaties called for the negotiation of a secondary treaty that would define the question at issue, the powers of the arbitrators involved, and the method of mediation to be followed.<sup>240</sup> The agreements between the U.S., England, and France represented a serious attempt at establishing a lasting peace between the three countries. But, they were defeated in the United States Senate. As it turns out, many senators feared that the treaty-making privileges granted to them in the Constitution would be interfered with by the Joint High Commission of Inquiry. It could negotiate secondary treaties on its own. Taft, nonetheless, had proven himself to be an advocate of world peace before June 1915, when he helped found the League to Enforce Peace.

**The Commoner Cites the Doctrine  
and Realistic Criticisms Against League**

As noted in the previous chapter, Bryan also was interested in building a lasting peace between nations. This goal makes the initial

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<sup>239</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 119. Roosevelt's treaties were, in fact, rendered ineffectual by these numerous exceptions, and never used to settle an international conflict.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., 119. A dispute therefore could be found to be non-negotiable, but Taft's treaties at least required a public investigation of every disagreement, whereas Roosevelt's treaties did not.



stance he took against the charter of the League to Enforce Peace seem almost inexplicable. The reasons he advanced within the debate with Taft for opposing the formation of a League of Nations explain his position, however. And, they reveal the position was very much in line with Bryan's other foreign policy ideas.

The Commoner opposed an assembly of nations because he believed an American role in the organization's founding, or a U.S. membership in the body, would violate the Monroe Doctrine. He said the European powers were certain to become prominent players in the League, and they would "entangle" the United States with Old World quarrels and alliances. Bryan also thought it was too much to ask countries to come together to establish international laws and punish belligerent nations.

This second criticism focused on the idea that the League would make "unrealistic" demands of its members that would largely go unfulfilled. The constant misfires ultimately would lead to the assembly's demise.

The critique Bryan made of the platform of the League to Enforce Peace shall be explained in further detail, but first it is necessary to point out that the Commoner's early views of the plan seem to have involved a great deal of egotism as well. It became clear during his discussion with Taft that the Commoner thought he had already helped to develop the most promising means of maintaining peace between countries: arbitration treaties. Other plans for peace were seen as second rate by Bryan, and he described them as such.

One of the most easily detectable criticisms of the plan for an assembly that the Commoner presented in World Peace was the idea that

the United States might lose control of its military and foreign policy if it joined a League. In the eighth argument of the debate, Bryan wrote, "It (a league) would not only encourage a reliance upon force instead of persuasion and conciliation; but it might excite a desire among European nations to use the military and naval strength of the United States for selfish purposes."<sup>241</sup> The Commoner stated that while it was best to assume the Europeans would act fairly and truthfully with the United States in all diplomatic discussions, Americans knew for a fact that monarchs and their advisors were subject to "the frailties of the flesh." Royal families had their kingly prerogatives to guard, imperial fortunes to protect, and alliances with other dynasties to consider.<sup>242</sup> Monarchies would use lying and intrigue to control the armed forces of a League to Enforce Peace, Bryan said. Nations had to commit ahead of time to use their own militaries against other countries when the League demanded it. The Commoner saw this as foolhardy.<sup>243</sup> At the end of the eighth argument, he wrote:  
We (the United States) could not expect to dominate such a council as that which would direct the activities of a League to Enforce Peace. To become a member of such a council would commit us in advance to any course that the council might adopt and thus put our army and navy under the command of foreign generals and admirals. It is inconceivable that the toiling millions of the United States should place their destiny in the hands of aliens and agree to furnish blood and money, on demand and in unlimited quantities, to settle quarrels between rival trade combinations, rival races, rival militarists, and rival royal families.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 112.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., 113.

Overall, Bryan had adopted a realistic criticism of the League. He argued it would be unwise for the U.S. to participate in the organization because it would be dominated by European powers.

Bryan's concern that Old World countries might come to direct the U.S. military and U.S. foreign policy was not new, but had been in existence among American statesman since at least the presidency of James Monroe. Monroe warned the American people not to get involved in the alliances or quarrels of Europe for fear that the country would end up being pulled into the terrible wars that plagued Europe during the Napoleonic era. The concern over the European threat also traces further back, to the writings and speeches of American revolutionaries.

In the famous pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*, for example, Thomas Paine warned, "It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she can never do, while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the make-weight in the scale of British politics."<sup>245</sup> Statesman John Adams of the revolution was asked by British emissary Richard Oswald during treaty negotiations in Paris if the U.S. was afraid of being made a "tool" of the European nations. Adams replied, "Indeed I am. It is made obvious that all the powers of Europe will be continually maneuvering with us, to work us into their real or imaginary balances of power."<sup>246</sup> Finally, during his Farewell Address of 1796, even George Washington asked whether or not it was wise

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<sup>245</sup>Ferrell, *American Diplomacy*, 14.

<sup>246</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

for America to interweave its destiny with that of any part of Europe.<sup>247</sup>

He concluded it was not a reliable policy because of European rivalries, territorial ambitions, and caprice. The Commoner's fear that Old World countries could gain control of the United States' military and foreign policy if Americans did not use caution in foreign relations was time-honored tradition by 1917. It expressed the realistic idea that if America's foreign policy became directed by another nation, it could spell disaster for the United States.

#### **Bryan Opposes the "Big Bang" of a Big Alliance**

But, the question is begged as to what the Commoner viewed the proposed assembly of nations to be if he criticized the organization for rendering control of the U.S Army and Navy to foreign powers. Bryan went further with his critique in the debate with Taft. He saw the organization as something earlier American statesman had feared, but on the largest scale ever. The League would be the biggest European alliance ever created. In the first argument of the debate, Bryan wrote:

The plan of the League to Enforce Peace rests on the theory that previous wars have arisen from an insufficient display of force - the alliances not having included enough nations or the preparation not having been adequate. ... Will the League build its hope of peace upon its ability to assemble a larger military and naval force than ever brought together before? Was not this unprecedented conflict preceded by preparation without a precedent?<sup>248</sup>

Later in the argument, the statesman added that the League's blueprint

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<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 28-29.

for peace was not new in principle, but merely extended and enlarged a plan the world had outgrown. The alliance system, he claimed, was "a plan which has written history in characters of blood and filled the earth with unutterable woe."<sup>249</sup>

Other indications that Bryan saw the League as a large, faltering alliance can be found in the first argument of the debate. Bryan asked what would happen if not all of the European countries joined the assembly, for example. He said this scenario was likely to develop since the League's platform did not call for all countries to join the group.<sup>250</sup> The Commoner predicted the organization would simply become a pact between the nations that did join. These countries were likely to come from either the Allies or Central Powers, but not both. Bryan wrote:

... suppose only a few nations enter the League; does it make no difference how few? And is it a matter of indifference what nations join? Europe is now divided into two powerful groups; and they are at war. Is it proposed that we shall join one of these groups without regard to the action taken by the members of the other group? That would make a larger alliance than ever before formed; but would that give assurance of peace?<sup>251</sup>

In the first argument, Bryan also stated that the huge collections of potential force that alliances represented actually made the world more unstable. "Reliance upon it (force) gives diplomacy a threatening tone, breeds conspiracies and intrigues, and inspires hatreds instead of

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<sup>249</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>250</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>251</sup>Ibid., 28.

friendships," the politician wrote. "The age-long attempt of powerful nations, sometimes acting alone and sometimes in groups, to terrorize the world into peace has failed and failed miserably."<sup>252</sup> The United States was to avoid joining a League of Nations because it was a large European alliance, and because it used force as its main method of keeping countries in line.

A critique of Taft's idea that force could be used to promote peace became one of the Commoner's other main criticisms of the platform of the League to Enforce Peace. Bryan believed that if the assembly of nations relied on military action to enforce international law, it would train countries to use similar action to achieve their goals. He first mentioned this concept in the second argument:

But whatever uncertainties may be concealed in the details to be worked out by the International Conference, one thing is clear, namely, that the employment of *Force* is the central thought, the ground upon which the hope of success is built. ... This is a false philosophy with which professional soldiers and traffickers in war material have deluded the world for ages. If a war fails to bring about a permanent peace, the remedy they propose is another war. ... The fundamental error lies in the fact that a plan which relies upon 'Force' for its 'vitality,' *cultivates the spirit that breeds war.*<sup>253</sup>

Bryan explained this concept more clearly in the fifth argument of the book. He wrote, "The League's plan to add the use of *force* by the rest of the group against any contracting nation that refused to submit its controversy to investigation, while *seeming* to go farther in the direction of peace, really weakens the plan instead strengthening it

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<sup>252</sup>Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 38-39.

because it invokes the principle of coercion which carries with it the cultivation of the military spirit and reliance upon a display of force, both of which are destructive of the disposition to conciliate and persuade." <sup>254</sup>

The politician's fear was really that the organization to "enforce" peace would actually enforce the use of the military as the correct way to deal with international disagreements. Bryan believed this threat was so great, in fact, that he felt it necessary to remind Taft that any military action was an act of war - even if it was League sanctioned. And once wars begin, he warned, they are not easily controlled. <sup>255</sup>

Another reason Bryan believed America should not become a member of a League was that such a membership would violate the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. Monroe warned Americans not to become involved in European conflicts, and the Commoner saw joining an assembly that required every member to commit its military to the decisions of the organization as a sure-fire way to get mixed up in Old World wars. <sup>256</sup>

"We could not hope to keep Europe out of Western Hemisphere politics if we attempted forcible intervention in the politics of Europe," Bryan wrote in the seventh argument. "We must, therefore, be prepared to surrender the Monroe Doctrine if we joined the League to Enforce

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<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 122.

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Peace."<sup>257</sup> The Commoner did not recommend an abandonment of the doctrine, and described the horrible events that would occur in the Western Hemisphere if the United States disembarked from its historical guide to foreign policy. He claimed the smaller republics of the Americas would be converted into colonies by the European powers, that grievances would be solved by the seizing of harbors in the Western Hemisphere, and that colonialism would, due to its plundering nature, lay the foundation for new wars in the Americas and the Old World.<sup>258</sup> For the first time in a century, Bryan wrote, Latin American countries were seeing the benevolent purpose of the Monroe Doctrine due to the war in Europe. They also were realizing that it was meant to protect them from European intervention.<sup>259</sup> Accordingly, the statesman argued that to revoke Monroe's declaration would be a mistake - it had taken a long time to cultivate friendly relations with the peoples of Central and South America. To conclude the seventh argument, the Commoner wrote that one of his main problems with the proposed League was: "The League's plan, so far as I have seen, does not consider this contingency; it contains no clause designed to protect the Monroe Doctrine."<sup>260</sup>

#### **Realistic Criticisms of the League**

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<sup>257</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 102. It is doubtful that the people of all Latin American countries felt this way, however, as the Wilson administration intervened militarily in Mexico, Santo Domingo, and Haiti at different points during Wilson's terms in office.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid., 102.



The final points Bryan made against the assembly fall under the realm of realistic criticisms. By this, it is simply meant that the Commoner thought it was unrealistic to expect nations to come together and agree upon international laws, let alone how to enforce them. The first problem Bryan had with Taft's platform in this regard was that it did not take into account that each country's citizens had developed their own unique system of societal morality. This meant the establishment of international law was theoretically impossible to the Commoner. There were no morals that pervaded every society, in his view.

The closest thing to an international code of ethics that Bryan found were the rules that govern contact between individual people. But, even these were problematic for the statesman. "The real difficulty with Europe is that the governments reject the moral standards that regulate individual life," Bryan wrote in the sixth argument. "And, since there is no moral standard except that to which individuals conform, there is no international standard of morals."<sup>261</sup> Later in the debate, the politician said that even if the League did manage to create a stable system of international law, it could not hope it would be "enforceable by common agreement and united action."<sup>262</sup> The Commoner predicted that nations in the assembly would pursue their own "pecuniary interests," and choose to occasionally turn down calls for

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<sup>261</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid., 89.

joint military and economic action.<sup>263</sup>

A second realistic criticism Bryan offered was that the plank that required League members to force other nations to submit disputes to arbitration would be a violation of the sovereignty of the countries that were attacked. He argued that there were certain fundamental questions upon which nations must be able to act independently, without approval from an international body. "There is no international law-making power," the Commoner wrote in his sixth argument, "and if such a law-making power existed, there are certain questions upon which it would not assume to act - certain questions which each nation, whether large or small, is conceded the right to decide for itself without regard to the views or interests of other nations."<sup>264</sup> These questions were the same ones President Roosevelt had exempted from his mediation agreements. They included questions of honor, questions of the independence of a nation, questions of the vital interests of a country, and questions that arise when a third party becomes involved in a dispute.<sup>265</sup> In each case, Bryan believed it was not justifiable to force a nation to bring the issue to arbitration. The Commoner wrote that to do otherwise, "... proposes to deal with sovereign and independent nations as if they were criminals; and it proposes to deal with undefined, and, thus far, undefinable offenses as if they were

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<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>264</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 88.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid., 88.

violations of statute law."<sup>266</sup>

Bryan already had attempted to include these controversial questions in the conciliation treaties he designed as secretary of state. But, it appears that he believed there was a major difference between his agreements and the plan for an assembly of nations. The treaties did not set forth force as a valid measure to coerce nations into submitting disputes to arbitration. "Thirty treaties have recently been negotiated by our government with governments exercising authority over one billion three hundred millions of people, or three-fourths of the population of the world," the politician wrote in his fourth argument. "The League accepts the principle embodied in the (treaty) plan but adds a sort of gattling-gun attachment - the plan needs no such aid."<sup>267</sup> The principle Bryan spoke of was the idea of investigation before war.<sup>268</sup> The Commoner saw the delay that an investigation of an international conflict would create as fundamental to peace because it would allow the tempers of government leaders to calm. He even stated in the fourth argument that he believed a week's time for investigation would have prevented the Great War, and a month's time was certain to have done so.<sup>269</sup> Bryan also asked, "Why not try this plan built upon persuasion instead of adopting a plan to which the force plank gives

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>269</sup>Ibid., 66.

vitality?"<sup>270</sup>

The Commoner never had required nations to be forced into mediation under his arbitration plans, and he still felt it was not the proper way to create peace. He concluded the fourth argument by saying: I venture to suggest, therefore, that the League change its name by substituting the word Promote for the word Enforce, and then employ its great influence to persuade the nations of Europe to enter into treaties with each other embodying the American plan, relying upon the cultivation of friendship - instead of fear - to ensure the faithful observance of the treaties.<sup>271</sup>

The final realistic criticism Bryan offered of Taft's plan was that an assembly of nations could set a limit on the amount of arms each of its members could have. The concern arose after Taft wrote, in the third argument, that the League would be forced to require a minimum amount of arms to be held by each member nation to ensure that joint military action was possible.<sup>272</sup> Bryan responded by saying that limiting countries from determining the arms they needed would violate their sovereignty. "Would any self-respecting nation surrender its right to determine for itself and its people the minimum amount of armament needed for protection?," he asked.<sup>273</sup> Bryan didn't think so, and added that the power to set an arms quota implied the power to tax. Many countries would need to enlarge their militaries to meet an arms

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<sup>270</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>272</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>273</sup>Ibid., 49.

minimum, after all.<sup>274</sup> "To put a nation's neck under a foreign yoke and coerce it into taxing its citizens to meet a foreign-made assessment would be to arouse opposition among any liberty-loving people, but to delegate to a foreign Council or to alien Governments authority to determine its national policy on the question of armaments - this would be intolerable," the Commoner stated.<sup>275</sup>

What all of these criticisms of the League indicate was that the Commoner desired to maintain an independence of action for all countries of the world, but especially the United States. He did not want any nation to lose control of its foreign policy or military. He believed each country had a right to maneuver in those areas as it desired. It was almost as if Bryan assigned to nations the same rights that the U.S. Constitution gave to individuals. Countries had a right to arm themselves to the degree they felt necessary, and to act in any way they deemed necessary in a case of self-defense. The politician had spoken of "the coming of an universal brotherhood on the Earth" before 1917, and yet did not seem willing to trust other nations enough in that year to join a world organization for peace.<sup>276</sup> Part of his reasoning was based on the Monroe Doctrine, but part of it was based on the common-sense approach of most statesman - that it is unwise to yield control of

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<sup>274</sup>Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>276</sup>William Jennings Bryan, Bryan On Imperialism: Speeches, Newspaper Articles, and Interviews by William Jennings Bryan (Chicago: Bentley & Company, 1900), 92. This particular quote was from his 1900 acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination for president, but the Commoner also spoke of the coming of a universal brotherhood in his 1914 publication The Prince Of Peace, and in many speeches and newspaper articles oriented towards Christian ideology.

foreign policy to other nations. Bryan had come out strongly against a League of Nations. As shall be discussed, however, there also were some signs that the Commoner was beginning to waver on his belief that the United States should not become involved in the quarrels of Europe.

#### **What Alternatives to the League are Offered?**

The question must be asked that if Bryan could find so many faults with the proposed League, what did he offer that could better accomplish the organization's goal to create a lasting peace? The Commoner did hold a desire to establish lasting peace, after all. The politician suggested four alternative plans to Taft's proposal in the fifth argument of the debate. Bryan also suggested an additional scheme in the ninth argument, bringing the total alternatives to five. The Commoner believed any one of his plans would work more efficiently than a League. He also thought, not surprisingly, that they agreed more with traditional U.S. foreign policy, or might extend the American version of democracy to other areas of the globe.

The first plan the statesman recommended involved the creation of what he called a "world court."<sup>277</sup> All of the nations of the world were to be represented on the court, and its primary mission was to give recommendations to countries on how to solve international disputes. The process of adjudication began when one nation, or all of the countries in a disagreement, submitted the conflict to the court for investigation. The body of nations would then appoint a commission from their lot to conduct hearings on the dispute, and to make

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<sup>277</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 74.

recommendations on how to solve the problem peacefully. If the proposals failed to improve relations between the nations in disagreement, however, the commission would then give a report to the entire world court on the issues involved in the case and turn adjudication over to that body. The court was to conduct a new set of hearings on the problem, and through a final vote, make a list of recommendations on how to put an end to it.

Up to this point, the plan sounded similar to what Taft had proposed. There was, however, one main difference between the Commoner's scheme and the League to Enforce Peace. Under the version of the assembly Bryan advocated, countries never were to be forced to bring their disagreements to arbitration by the assembly. In the fifth argument of the debate, the Commoner wrote that the League's plan to use military action against any contracting nation that refused to submit a controversy to investigation weakened the League's peace mission. The policy trained countries to rely upon force instead of conciliation.<sup>278</sup> Bryan therefore suggested that, "For final arbitration in justiciable cases, and for full investigation in cases not justiciable, the findings of the court rest upon their merit and be enforceable only by the nations which are parties to the dispute."<sup>279</sup>

The statesman realized his plan for a court would not make war impossible, but stated, "... it would so greatly lessen the probability

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<sup>278</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>279</sup>Ibid., 74-75.

of war as to constitute a great advance."<sup>280</sup> Force and peace were opposites in the Commoner's mind, and he did not see how an organization formed to promote peace could use military measures to do so. If this idea is combined with the politician's belief that a League might someday come under control of European powers, it can be seen that there also was an element of realism in Bryan's assessment that military action must not be connected with the organization. The League would be the largest amount of potential force ever collected, and therefore the greatest threat to any individual nation's security. His argument that military action must not be an option for the world court was two-sided.

It contained the idealistic belief that lasting peace could be created without using military means to enforce it, but also held onto the realistic idea that the United States might not be able to control when and where armed forces were used. Bryan also pragmatically claimed that nations should be allowed to arm themselves as much as they wanted.

The second plan introduced as an alternative to the League was a referendum on war that would be given to the people of each country involved in a conflict before the nations could declare war on each other.<sup>281</sup> "Nothing would more surely lessen the probability of war than the inauguration of a world-wide system requiring the consent of the people who, in case of war, must furnish the blood needed and pay the taxes that follow in the wake of war," Bryan wrote.<sup>282</sup> The referendum

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<sup>280</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>281</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>282</sup>Ibid., 75.



was something the Commoner had long supported so the American people could make decisions on domestic issues that were stalled in Congress. But now, Bryan was willing to use it for foreign-policy as well. He even said that although the Constitution granted the power to declare war to Congress, the referendum had since been established in the United States. It should be applied to the most vital of questions for the American people - war, he claimed.<sup>283</sup>

Bryan reasoned that the original Constitution did not include the referendum within it, but said if the "founding fathers" had seen fit to do so, they would have allowed U.S. citizens to decide when it was proper to call for the ultimate sacrifice. The Commoner did not go head-over-heels for the concept of the war referendum, however. He said that there should be at least one exception to when the vote would be given to the people of any country. That was when a nation was faced with actual invasion.<sup>284</sup> The statesman accepted the fact that in such a case, a country would be obliged to defend itself.

The Commoner elaborated on the referendum in the eighth argument of the debate, and added a unique twist to the proposal not often seen in other suggestions on how to keep peace. If the United States encouraged other nations to use the referendum and they adopted it, he said, the U.S. would disseminate the American form of democracy to other parts of the globe. This would be beneficial for those countries in the Commoner's view. He wrote:

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<sup>283</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>284</sup>Ibid., 75.

As long as the people can be called into battle at the will of rulers - without any voice in deciding upon the necessity for the war - so long will the ambitions of monarchs, the greed of commercial interest and the false standards of professional soldiers prevail over the common sense and the common welfare of the masses. And it is necessary that the theory of 'government by the consent of the governed' shall be put into actual practice. It is not sufficient that it be preached in the abstract. ... It is with this view that I have, in a previous article, proposed a referendum on war, except in the case of actual invasion.<sup>285</sup>

Bryan ended his comments on the referendum by adding, "... it will, by its example, render the oppressed people of the other countries more service than it can possibly render by encouraging them to rely in the future, as in the past, upon military alliances which invite intrigue and secret combinations."<sup>286</sup>

The next proposal made to take the place of Taft's plan was simply to encourage countries to reduce their armaments.<sup>287</sup> It should be remembered that Bryan had written that nations must maintain the autonomy to determine the amount of arms they needed on their own. This did not mean, however, that countries could not encourage each other to reduce arms. Instead of setting a minimum amount of weapons each nation must stockpile, as Taft suggested, the Commoner advocated that no quota should be established and that the U.S. should recommend arms reductions to other countries. His reasoning was that if a competition developed to slow arms production after the calamity of the First World War, an established minimum might make nations afraid to drop below that

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<sup>285</sup>Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>286</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>287</sup>Ibid., 76.

level.<sup>288</sup> If such a competition began, it would reduce taxes for the war-torn people of Europe, who would already be paying off debts for the Great War, Bryan said.

The Commoner's plan did not violate his democratically oriented belief that nations must be allowed to determine the amount and kind of weapons they need. It would just leave the door open for the possibility of mutually agreed upon arms reductions - cuts of the type that occurred at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922.<sup>289</sup> Setting limits on how far arms reduction could go would prove detrimental to the cause, Bryan argued.

The reason the Commoner felt a reduction in armaments would lead to increased chances of a lasting peace was that he believed military build-ups caused countries to rely upon the principle of force to solve international disputes. He explained this idea best in his fifth argument, when he stated that when large military establishments were created near national capitals, generals and arms dealers tended to gain influence over the leaders of governments. The Commoner believed this was dangerous because professional soldiers and war traffickers were primarily trained in the "art" of taking of human life, and rarely saw

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<sup>288</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>289</sup>Robert H. Ferrell, American Diplomacy: The Twentieth Century (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 171-174. At this conference a Five-Power Treaty was signed in February 1922 which set up ratios of naval tonnage for large-class warships among its participants. Although the treaty largely held tonnage at existing levels, some scuttling of ships was necessary to meet the arrangement among the countries involved. The United States and Great Britain were given parity at 5 (a battleship tonnage of 525,000, and aircraft carriers at 135,000), Japan a ratio of 3 (battleships at 272,000, carriers at 81,000), and Italy and France a ratio of 1.67. Although the treaty was largely an arms limitation rather than an arms reduction, this was clearly the direction the Commoner wanted nations to go with weapons production.

other ways of settling difficulties.<sup>290</sup> "Their philosophy gives a threatening tone to diplomacy and magnifies trifling disputes," the politician wrote. "It keeps countries in controversy, and, by stimulating rivalry in preparation for emergencies that are always visible to the military eye, arouses suspicions and fans the hatreds out of which wars grow."<sup>291</sup> Any possible reduction in the size of the military forces of nations, therefore, could bring an increase in the use of non-threatening diplomacy by those countries.

The fourth alternative Bryan gave to the League was to promote the spread of arbitration treaties, which he had already advanced and signed as secretary of state. The treaties have been dealt with in some detail both in this chapter and the last, so only a few comments are necessary here. As was mentioned earlier, the Commoner argued that his treaties were preferable to the League plan because the assembly of nations would use force to cajole countries into submitting conflicts to mediation. Bryan felt the spirit in which negotiations were conducted was essential to creating and maintaining peace. Force only beget force in his mind.

In the eighth argument, the Commoner said, "The treaty plan will, in my judgement, do more than the League's plan to reduce the probability of war because it seeks to substitute persuasion for force and the spirit of co-operation for the spirit of combat."<sup>292</sup> He also wrote: The theory of *peace by terrorism* has exploded with bursting shells.

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<sup>290</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 76.

<sup>291</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid., 90.

Why not offer a new hope built upon the plan which has been proved so successful between individuals? If two neighbors fall out, they call in friends, if their relations have become too strained to permit personal discussions of differences and allow investigation and friendly advice. Each party reserves the right of independent action at the conclusion of the investigation, just as contracting parties do in the thirty treaties. The success of efforts at reconciliation depends largely upon the spirit in which the conference is conducted. ...<sup>293</sup>

Bryan realized Americans might view his plan to promote peace by disconnecting it from military action as naive, and sought to address this concern at points during the debate with Taft. One of the problems that the Commoner believed U.S. citizens would have with a plan to promote the spread of arbitration treaties was that the agreements seemingly provided no incentive for countries to submit their differences to mediation. Ironically, the Commoner thought this was one of the strengths of his scheme. The conciliation agreements that he advocated allowed nations to avoid bringing their disagreements to arbitration, without having to fear an attack by an international conglomerate of countries.<sup>294</sup> A democratically-oriented independence of action was preserved for the nations involved in the mediation agreements, which would hopefully build up trust among them. Furthermore, Bryan stated that if the governments of nations weren't even willing to enter into arbitration treaties with each other, it was hardly likely they would abide by the laws set forth by a League to Enforce Peace.<sup>295</sup> The conciliation treaties, the statesman pointed out,

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<sup>293</sup>Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>295</sup>Ibid., 65-66.

established no international laws and made no threats against nations. So, they required very little from their signatories. If countries refused to join the mediation agreements, Bryan believed they would never agree to join an organization that based its authority and vitality on terror. In support of this claim, Bryan wrote: Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy have joined in these treaties (the first three since the war began); and Germany Austria and Belgium endorsed the principles although they have not yet signed the treaties.

As these seven nations, now involved in war, have thus accepted the principle of *Investigation Before War*, it is fair to assume that they will be willing to enter into such a treaty with each other - if not, they certainly will not accept the League plan.<sup>296</sup>

To the Commoner, the plan of spreading the use of arbitration treaties was not more idealistic than Taft's scheme for a League. It was more realistic because Bryan felt countries would accept conciliation agreements more readily than an assembly of nations.

A second point that the Commoner believed U.S. citizens would criticize his arbitration treaties on was that the 26 treaties that had been signed by Bryan and ratified by Congress before August 1914 failed to prevent World War I. In rebuttal, Bryan argued that although America had held discussions with Austria and Germany before and during the war on the subject of signing agreements, the two nations had failed to do so.<sup>297</sup> He claimed there had not been enough time to work out the formal details of the treaties with the Central Powers before the war began.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup>Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>298</sup>Ibid., 65.

What this meant was American statesman did not hold the correct "machinery for the settlement of disputes" to solve the conflict that led to the Great War.<sup>299</sup> The politician elaborated on this point in the fourth argument when he wrote that he thought the disagreement over Serbia's role in the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand could have been brought to a peaceful solution if only the dispute had been submitted to a week-long period of investigation and recommendation by an international commission.<sup>300</sup> He also said, "A year's time (for arbitration) would allow passion to subside and reason to resume her sway, time for separations of honour from questions of fact, time for the peace forces of the world to bring influence to bear on the estranged nations."<sup>301</sup> By no means did Bryan feel the world should give up on arbitration treaties. Many of its largest nations had not even tried them as a way to prevent armed confrontation.

**Bryan Backs Down, Will Occasionally Fight in Europe if Nation Calls**

The final proposal offered in place of the League to Enforce Peace was made in the ninth argument. Bryan suggested that the U.S. government could announce an intention to participate in preserving the peace of Europe when Congress and the American people felt conditions in the Old World were right to do so. This was the most surprising statement from Bryan in the book, as he had argued so vehemently

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<sup>299</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>300</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>301</sup>Ibid., 66.

throughout it that the United States must avoid the quarrels of Europe.

The politician wrote:

If it were true, as Mr. Taft contends, that the time has come when we should actively join the European nations in the effort to compel peace, it would be much better for our nation to reserve the right to say when and upon what terms we should contribute our strength. ... Instead of becoming party to such a League, as Mr. Taft proposes, why not, if such be the wish of the American people, announce that it is our determination to assist in the future in the preservation of peace in Europe by joining in the punishment of any nation which resorts to war without an excuse which to us seems sufficient? I do not think such a policy wise or necessary; but it would have all the advantages conferred by membership of the proposed League without its dangers. It would save us from war, except when we regarded the cause of the war sufficient to justify intervention; but it would cause our favor to be courted by Europe.<sup>302</sup>

The United States, then, was to remain outside of the League, but was to have the option of participating in a war in Europe to "compel peace." This recommendation appeared to work against the Commoner's dependence on the Monroe Doctrine, which he had sacrificed his career in the State Department for in order to bolster the doctrine as correct foreign policy.

If Bryan's quote is examined more closely, however, it is clear that he used extremely hesitant language about the possibility of occasionally abandoning the doctrine to compel peace in Europe. He stated that he did not think such a policy was wise or necessary, but he would go along with the move if U.S. citizens decided it was necessary.

The politician also wrote that one of the chief advantages of remaining outside an assembly of nations was that it would save the United States

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<sup>302</sup>Ibid., 124-125.



from war, except when the American people decided there was sufficient cause to fight. The Commoner gave the edge to remaining free of European entanglements in his statements. But, he also was willing to work with the people of the U.S. if they decided to move in the opposite direction.

The hesitancy of Bryan to commit the United States to a pledge to intervene in the Old World when Americans agreed upon it resurfaces in the concluding argument of the debate. The Commoner wrote, "In my ninth argument, I suggested a fifth plan which I did not deem necessary, but which is preferred to the League's plan; namely, the announcement of an intention to take part in future wars *when the excuse for the war is such as to commend itself to our nation*, the sufficiency of the excuse to be determined by our Congress when the time for action arrives and the issue is clearly defined."<sup>303</sup> Again, it appears as if Bryan would not personally recommend such a course for the U.S. But, if American citizens chose to make the country a "world player" against his own suggestions, the politician thought there was a definite course the nation must follow. The United States must not join the League to Enforce Peace. That way, it would preserve an independent foreign policy and could be cautious before entering the conflicts of Europe. This recommended caution also is probably why Bryan wrote that the country should only go to war in the Old World when it found a sufficient "excuse" to fight. He did not believe involvement in Europe should become standard American foreign policy. At the end of the

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<sup>303</sup>Ibid., 142.

concluding argument, the Commoner wrote:

I venture to express the hope that the proposed League, being a child, so to speak, of the European war and being nourished by the spirit of preparedness which has been so assiduously cultivated in this country, will find its final repose in the calm that will follow the restoration of peace. Then we may expect a reaction against militarism and a clearer vision of America's mission as the exponent of peace based upon love, friendship, and co-operation.<sup>304</sup>

Bryan reserved hope that the United States would be able to disconnect peace negotiations from military action, rather than having to commit the nation to sometimes use force to preserve peace in Europe.

Overall, the Commoner's first four alternatives to a League reflected his belief that the use of armed forces must be disconnected from peace negotiations. The war referendum was the only proposal that did not clearly express this idea, but Bryan believed that in most cases the people of the countries of the world would vote not to go to war if given the chance.<sup>305</sup> The other three recommendations - the world court, arms reduction, and arbitration treaties - all had elements of the politician's non-provocative approach to a lasting peace. Furthermore, the referendum also featured the added bonus, according to the Commoner, of spreading the American concept of "government by consent of the governed" to other areas of the globe. Even at this stage in his career, Bryan adamantly supported disseminating the concept of "self-government" throughout the world. There was at least one more prominent element of U.S. democracy visible within the four schemes, and it was

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<sup>304</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>305</sup>Ibid., 75.

something that was not surprising considering the Commoner's training as a lawyer. In each of them, nations ultimately would have their own choice as to whether they would submit international disputes to arbitration, join in arms reduction, or declare war. Bryan, as stated during the sixth argument, felt that countries were innocent of the charge of unnecessary aggression until proven guilty, and should not be treated like "ordinary criminals" until they had proven otherwise.<sup>306</sup> Nations had the same independence of action that U.S. citizens were guaranteed under the Constitution, until it was shown beyond a reasonable doubt that the countries had engaged in criminal aggression.

It also was obvious that the Commoner believed nations could engage in criminal aggression. In the "Final Statement," which was added to the book after the U.S. declared war on the Central Powers, he wrote: There is not reason to believe that we would have entered the war but for the invasion of our rights. It is true that Germany's actions indicated a determination to pursue a policy that menaced the welfare of ALL neutral nations; and this furnished added reasons for the action taken by Congress in declaring a state of war to exist. ... We are now in a world-war surpassing any former conflict in cost, whether measured by money or men; and a United Nation will support the Government to the end.<sup>307</sup>

The final alternative to the League to Enforce Peace, that of declaring an intention to participate in the wars of the Old World when the U.S. believed the action was necessary to establish peace, was not favored by Bryan. It was a compromise the Commoner was willing to make if the citizens of the United States thought it was necessary. And,

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<sup>306</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>307</sup>Ibid., 154-155.

this was only so long as the country did not join an assembly of nations that required its members to use force when the organization demanded it. Overall, the statesman's early approach to the League to Enforce Peace featured a realistic assessment of the proposed assembly, and a reliance on democratic ideas to develop alternatives to it. Although Bryan's belief that peace negotiations needed to be disconnected from military threats may have seemed unrealistic, the Commoner had a clever response. He said that if countries were unwilling to enter into agreements that threatened them very little, they could not be expected to faithfully engage in agreements that threatened them a great deal.

**The Commoner Hints at a Possible Acceptance of the League**

Before discussing the events that led the Commoner to change his opinion on the League of Nations during the late months of 1918, and to support American participation in the organization, it is necessary examine whether there were any indications that Bryan was wavering on his negative opinion of the League during the debate with Taft. The Commoner did appear to contradict himself many times in the debate, after all. The biggest contradiction was that he vehemently argued the United States must stay out of the quarrels of Europe, but then ultimately caved in and said that if the American people elected to take a more active role in the Old World, he would support the effort. During the debate, this was only if the nation remained outside of the League, however. Another contradiction is the fact that Bryan wrote force must be disconnected from the peace process, but stated countries must retain the ability to use military action when and where they

choose. With discrepancies like these, it is necessary to try to define exactly what the Commoner thought proper American foreign policy should be, and why he eventually decided to reverse his position on the League to Enforce Peace.

The first important fact to point out about Bryan is that although he abhorred the idea of using military might to force nations to submit disagreements to investigation, he did not think the use of military action should be outlawed on the international level. To limit nations from the option of using armed force, he said in the sixth argument, would be to violate their sovereignty.<sup>308</sup> It would also leave them defenseless, which was one of the Commoner's major criticisms of the League plan. He felt the assembly would amass such a large potential military force that individual countries would be left defenseless against it. The claim that countries should have the option of military solutions to problems can also be found in the fact that Bryan believed there were certain situations in which governments had the right to decide the course of action they should follow independently from international arbitration committees. He even said that countries had the right not to submit their disputes to mediation, or to reject the decisions of the committee investigating them. Although the Commoner hoped that nations would not act in such a nonconciliatory fashion, he ultimately reasoned that nations had the right to act independently, and to even choose to go to war if they felt it was merited by the circumstances.

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<sup>308</sup>Ibid., 89.

Bryan's willingness to fight in the Spanish-American War and to support the American war effort during World War I show this was his belief, and possibly even a guide for him to proper U.S. foreign policy.

So, the Commoner's statement that the United States government might declare an intention, if the American people felt it was warranted, to intervene in European conflicts to compel peace was not totally out of character for Bryan. Force was a valid national option for him. He argued within the debate without exception, however, that military action should not be connected to a peace keeping organization. To him, it went against that organization's very nature.

A second contradiction in the politician's arguments that deserves attention is that he argued the Monroe Doctrine should be a major guide to U.S. foreign policy, yet wrote that the United States could issue a statement that it would attack a European nation anytime the American people deemed the action necessary to create peace. Even in the ninth argument of the debate, Bryan reemphasized his commitment to Monroe's principles. He said that Taft had argued George Washington's counsel to avoid the entangling alliances of Europe had no application to the League because the organization would not represent an American alliance with one European nation, but an alliance among all the countries of the world.<sup>309</sup> The Commoner replied:

My answer is this, that the reasoning employed by Washington not only applies to the proposed League but applies with even greater force. If it is unwise to link ourselves to one nation because Europe has a set of interests different from ours, there is more reason why we should not enter into a League with all, or a large number of the nations, thus

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<sup>309</sup>Ibid., 120.

entangling ourselves with interests not only diverse but conflicting.<sup>310</sup>

Bryan also wrote within the ninth argument that since the distance between the East Coast of the Atlantic and the West had been shortened by the use of the steamship, it only provided more reason for the United States to reserve its energies to protect the Western Hemisphere from European exploitation.<sup>311</sup> "To allow the trans-Atlantic nations to assist in determining the controversies on the American side of the Atlantic would be to invite new perils," Bryan stated. "They could not resist the temptation to claim compensation in territory."<sup>312</sup>

The Commoner appeared to heartily adhere to the doctrine. Underneath all of his rhetoric about Monroe's guidelines to foreign policy, however, something seemed to be changing in the politician's thoughts about the doctrine. Bryan's statement that if Americans desired a more active role for the United States in Europe, he felt the country should remain outside of the League and sometimes participate in the preservation of peace indicated this was the case.<sup>313</sup> Even though the Commoner claimed he did not believe such a foreign policy was "wise or necessary," the fact remains that he proposed it, and probably would have pushed for the policy if America's citizens decided to call for a permanently increased U.S. involvement in Europe. His conceptualization

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<sup>310</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>312</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>313</sup>Ibid., 124.

of the Monroe Doctrine was evolving once again. Instead of viewing the declaration as an absolute guide to foreign relations, as he apparently did when he resigned from Wilson's Cabinet, Bryan was once again returning to his earlier view of the doctrine as an adjustable and expandable policy that could sometimes be altered to advance the United States' other diplomatic aims. Bryan had called for changes in the doctrine to justify forcing Spain out of the New World, and to propose an American protectorate over the Philippines. Now, he seemed willing to redefine its principles again if public opinion forced him to. Bryan's new plan for the doctrine, if he found the alteration necessary, seemed to be to use the declaration as the primary grounds for rebuffing European interventions in the Western Hemisphere, but to not follow it so closely as to prevent the United States from ever participating in a European war. It was obvious that even if the Commoner's fifth alternative to the League did become U.S. foreign policy, Bryan did not think America should interact with the Europeans very often. This is why the Commoner wrote in the concluding argument that if the United States did issue a pledge to the Europeans, the country must not join a League of Nations, but only go to war in the Old World when it found an "excuse" compelling enough to do so.<sup>314</sup> It was as if he was saying America should stick by the Monroe Doctrine as much as possible in the future, but could occasionally break from it under the right circumstances.

A third contradiction in the Commoner's comments was that he said

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<sup>314</sup>Ibid., 142.



international laws could not be arrived at between nations because their codes of morality were different, but then suggested that a world court would be a good alternative to the League. The politician left it unclear as to exactly what guidelines the court would use to adjudicate cases. But, it seems that some form of international law would be necessary to give countries fair "trials," even though the parties in a dispute could reject the recommendations of the court. Bryan did not elaborate much on international law in his proposal, however. At another point during the debate, the Commoner wrote that he could see how a League to Enforce Peace could enforce "universally-accepted laws" like those against piracy, but stated that laws could simply not be created on some subjects, like questions of national honor.<sup>315</sup> Again, Bryan seemed to waver on one of his criticisms of Taft's plan. It remained unclear in the debate regarding what the Commoner's true opinion of the possibility of creating international law was, because Taft never attempted to exploit this contradiction in Bryan's arguments.

One of the most surprising points that can be made about these three ambiguities in the Commoner's statements is that they represented weaknesses in Bryan's arguments against the League, and the they may have been reasons the politician eventually was willing to endorse American participation in an assembly of nations. The first contradiction, for example, was on the issue of military action. The Commoner approved of the use of force by individual countries to defend themselves, but did not think armed interventions should be employed by

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<sup>315</sup>Ibid., 88-89.

an organization whose main purpose was to promote peace. The fact that Bryan approved of the use of military action in some cases indicated that perhaps under the right circumstances, he might be willing to accept force as valid option for an assembly of nations - or at least an option that was not so dangerous alone as to prevent the United States from participating in a League of Nations. Within World Peace, however, he did not waver from his claim that force should not be employed by an organization that aimed to promote peace.

The second contradiction the Commoner made was concerning the Monroe Doctrine, and to what degree he expected the American government to abide by it in the future. It has been shown that Bryan was willing to commit the U.S. to sometimes participating in European wars to establish peace overseas. What this also suggested about the statesman, however, was that he was indeed interested in the United States having a major role in the creation of a lasting world peace. Consequently, he might allow the country to participate in an organization that had peace-building as its main aim. This is especially true if it is combined with the knowledge that Bryan proposed a world court, which had as its only stated goal the idea of maintaining world peace.

The last ambiguity in the Commoner's arguments was concerning whether or not international law could realistically be created. Bryan left his opinions on the subject rather unclear. But, he did say there were some "universally-accepted laws" that could be enforced by a League of Nations. The world court concept as well, by its nature, suggests that some standards of conduct would have to be established for nations,

whether they were known as statutory law or not. It is therefore probable that the Commoner did believe countries could come together and form some kind of regulations for conduct between nations, although certain restrictions on countries' actions were clearly out of the question for the politician - such as in cases when a nation's honor, independence, or vital interests were at stake.

Overall, regarding the contradictions in Bryan's arguments, although the statesman harshly lambasted President Taft's plan to create an assembly of nations that would "enforce peace," he also showed some glaring weaknesses in his own arguments that another politician might be able to exploit to convince Bryan to back U.S. participation in a League of Nations. Indeed, with the number of logical flaws the Commoner displayed in the debate, it was even possible that he might decide on his own to accept the proposed assembly. Bryan wrote in "Final Statement" of the book, in fact, that:

The League proposes that, in advance of any cause of war, we shall authorize a council or committee - which we cannot hope to control - to call us into a war even when there has been no invasion of our rights.

We are now in a world-war surpassing any former conflict in cost. ... But, in view of the uncertainties which lie before us, it is surely the part of wisdom to await the conclusion of this war before pledging ourselves to embark on such a course as that proposed by the League to Enforce Peace. Why should we deny ourselves the advantage of the experience which we shall gain during this war?<sup>316</sup>

This was a somewhat unclear statement, but it indicates the Commoner had

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<sup>316</sup>Ibid., 155-156. The "Final Statement" was the comments which were added to the debate by Bryan and Taft after the United States declared war on Germany. It was also an argument in which the Commoner, as in other speeches, called for Americans to unequivocally support the war effort now that the country had been drawn into war by German submarine warfare.

begun to hedge on his harsh criticisms of Taft's plan after the U.S. declared war on Germany. Bryan, ironically, now seemed to be adopting a "wait and see" attitude toward the League. It was almost as if United States involvement in the Great War might change his opinions of the organization. Bryan may have believed that if the U.S. came out of the war with quasi-superpower status, it should not relinquish the position, but instead join the League of Nations so it could use the status to influence the peace-keeping methods adopted by the assembly.

### **The U.S. Should Not Lose Its Place in History**

There was one final reason, outside of the weaknesses the Commoner displayed in his arguments, which suggests why Bryan may have been willing to later advocate American membership in the League of Nations.

Throughout the debate with Taft, Bryan expressed a desire for the United States to become a leader in the growing movement among nations to find a permanent solution for war. The desire was most clearly demonstrated within the concluding argument, but was visible within earlier arguments as well. What the ambition suggests is that over time, as the League of Nations did begin to form under Wilson's support, the Commoner may have come to feel that if the U.S. did not join the assembly, the country would have little influence upon the peace-keeping methods adopted by the organization. Such a scenario may have been the worst possible chain of events for Bryan. He believed that American recommendations for the preservation of world peace were morally superior to Old World suggestions, which he labeled "peace by terrorism." In a sense, if the United States did not become a member of

the assembly, European countries were likely to follow the same path that had led them to World War I - a path that featured large alliances, military build-ups, and threats of force. The creation of a League in reality might have forced the Commoner to back American participation in the organization.

The most prominent example of Bryan's call for his countrymen to lead the effort to create peace occurred in the concluding argument. The Commoner wrote, as noted, that it was "America's mission" to be "the exponent of peace based upon love, friendship and co-operation."<sup>317</sup> And before this pronouncement, he had stated that the United States had already influenced other nations with the morally superior path it had taken throughout its history, and he wanted the country to continue its leadership. Bryan explained this concept by writing:

Our nation has for a century been inspired with an honorable ambition to conquer with its ideals rather than with its arms; and it has rejoiced to see its political principles making progress throughout the world. Within a decade China, the sleeping giant of the Orient, has aroused itself.

Breaking off its monarchical fetters, it has declared itself a republic; and, passing over imperial designations, it has honoured our nation by giving to its chief executive the title President. ...

Within the last few days in Russia, the largest European nation when measured by population or territory, has overthrown its arbitrary government and commenced to build a national authority upon popular consent. Surely the American people, believing as they do in free institutions, must find great satisfaction in the increasing influence exerted by our example. Shall we exchange our moral prestige for the tinsel glory of military power?<sup>318</sup>

The Commoner viewed the U.S. as having a special place in history: It

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<sup>317</sup>Ibid., 142-143.

<sup>318</sup>Ibid., 140.

was to be the advocate of democracy and peace based on friendship. If these two ideas are combined, as they were in Bryan's concluding argument, it is easy to understand how the Commoner might have grown to fear what would happen if a League of Nations formed and the United States remained outside of it. The U.S. could lose its place in history because its influence was sure to decline in the face of such a powerful organization. Bryan may have come to reason, therefore, that the United States would have to join a League if it did take shape so that the country could continue its "American mission."

Another example of the Commoner's recommendation that his countrymen step to the fore of the movement to create world peace occurred in the eighth argument. Bryan praised President Wilson for a speech he delivered to the Senate on January 22, 1916. In the oration, the president suggested that the United States should set a goal of becoming the mediator of the Great War. Wilson said he believed the American people would be willing to arrange a "peace without victory" in Europe if the countries at war would agree to it. The Commoner was ecstatic about the president's plan, and called the speech a "heroic and epoch-making document" in the eighth argument. He also wrote, "I can most heartily commend the basis upon which the President would construct a peace between the nations now at war."<sup>319</sup> It was clear, consequently, that he wanted the U.S. to have the role of peacemaker in Europe, although he stated earlier in the debate that he felt the country should not get involved in European conflicts.

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<sup>319</sup>Ibid., 110.

Bryan apparently saw a difference between mediating Old World disagreements and taking up arms in European disputes. The statesman thought the United States could mediate Old World conflicts because mediation implied a neutral stance by the country. But, the Commoner cautiously argued the nation should show no signs of taking up sides in a European disagreement because charges of partisanship might draw the U.S. into the conflict. He went on to state, after his initial praise of the new American role as peacemaker for Europe, that such a position would also provide the United States with a chance to spread its

democratic ideas to Europe. He said:

The President is wise in urging that nations shall be recognized as equal in rights, without regard to territory or population; he is right also in contending for 'the freedom of the seas' and in presenting, as a condition precedent to permanent peace, the doctrine of government by consent of the governed. This is fundamental. As long as the people can be pulled into battle at the will of rulers - without any voice in deciding upon the necessity for the war - so long will the ambitions of monarchs, the greed of commercial interest and the false standards of professional soldiers prevail over the common sense and the common welfare of the masses.<sup>320</sup>

The last manner in which Bryan expressed his ambition for America to lead the movement for peace was simply due to the fact that even after all of his criticisms of the League, he was still willing to suggest that if the American people voted to do so, the U.S. government could issue a pledge to European countries that the United States would sometimes participate in Old World wars to compel peace. The recommendation showed a desperation on the part of the politician to

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<sup>320</sup>Ibid., 111-112.

ensure that the United States would occupy the role of peacemaker in Europe, rather than partisan ally. Bryan appeared to reason that if the American public really did want to adopt an increased involvement for the U.S. in the Old World, as Taft said they did, he would rather have this involvement be for the sake of creating peace than winning spoils for the United States. In his main reference to such a promise in the ninth argument, Bryan wrote that the sole U.S. goal would be "the preservation of peace in Europe" if it went to war.<sup>321</sup> He did not mention any other aims that would be proper to adopt either in that reference, or in the only other reference to such a pledge to European nations. It appeared in the concluding argument.<sup>322</sup> Furthermore, because the Commoner insisted that peace in the Old World should be based upon friendship rather than force, and the principle of "government by consent of the governed," these ideas make it unlikely that Bryan would be willing to justify American participation in a European war for selfish purposes, such as the acquisition of land. His belief in the Monroe Doctrine also makes this unlikely. The Commoner feared that if the United States became involved in an Old World conflict, it would have a hard time keeping European nations from intervening in the Western Hemisphere. His statement that the U.S. could participate in European wars to create peace, therefore, truly did appear to be a ploy by Bryan to keep Americans from developing selfish motives for going to war in the Old World. The Commoner was trying to

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<sup>321</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>322</sup>The reference in the concluding argument starts on page 142 of World Peace.



make sure that if Americans adopted a larger role in Europe, it would be for the lofty goal of creating peace rather than selfish motives.

In conclusion, it can be said that Bryan made some harshly realistic criticisms of the proposal for a League to Enforce Peace in his debate with Taft, but that he also showed some glaring weaknesses within his own arguments that indicated why he might later be able to support American participation in an assembly of nations. The flaws, which appeared in the form of contradictions by Bryan, were probably not the cause of his decision to support the League in time, however. The only motive for such a flip-flop in position that is visible within World Peace appears to have been Bryan's passionate desire for the United States to become the leader of the movement to create a stable system of international relations in the post-war world. Bryan believed that the U.S had an obligation, or "mission," to demonstrate the correct way in which to establish a lasting peace. That way was through the development of friendships and trust between nations. The Europeans, he reasoned, had already failed with their preferred method of preventing war - the development of large military forces through the signing of alliances and manufacturing of weapons. Bryan believed this Old World system destabilized the international environment by causing countries to feel threatened, and as if they must take military action. The Commoner's main criticism of the League was that the organization relied upon force, but it is clear that something triggered in Bryan the hope that the U.S. could join the organization and then make positive changes to it. Reasons for this change in attitude shall be discussed further

in the next section. But, it has been speculated here that once the League began to form, the Commoner realized the United States would not be able to influence the peace-keeping methods adopted by the organization if the country remained outside of it. Consequently, Bryan was forced to advocate American membership in the League, or concede his ambition for the U.S. to become recognized as the peacemaker in Europe.

The Commoner's belief that America should be the leader in establishing world peace also reveals the last great contradiction Bryan made in his discussion with Taft. The contradiction was that although the Commoner made numerous realistic criticisms of Taft's plan for a League to Enforce Peace, he still held on to the idealistic belief that the United States could indeed come up with a scheme that would create a virtually permanent global peace. The Commoner did not disagree with the idealistic aim of Taft's proposal, in other words, he just disagreed with the means that the League would employ to achieve the goal. Perhaps it was ultimately for this reason that Bryan agreed to accept the League and to work within it rather than against it.

#### **Bryan Backs the League and the Doctrine**

Did Bryan abandon the Monroe Doctrine by November 1918, when the armistice was signed between the Allies and Germany? The answer is a resounding no. He held onto the Monroe Doctrine as the core of his foreign policy ideas, but also offered support for the League of Nations. During the months after the war, Bryan's position moved from one of multiple criticisms against the League, which were expressed in his debate with Taft, to one of holding a few reservations about the

League, as most senators did at the time. At first, the Commoner suggested that the Treaty of Versailles should be ratified by the Senate as it was written, and that Congress could pass amendments later to clarify exactly how the United States would participate in the League. Later, after meeting fierce opposition in the Senate to passing the treaty as it was written, Bryan proposed passing the treaty with reservations. This put him in direct opposition with President Wilson, however, who believed the treaty needed to be ratified as it was written to demonstrate the United States' commitment to the Allies and the League idea itself.

Many of the criticisms that Bryan offered about the League of Nations were virtually the same as those he offered about the League to Enforce Peace. In a letter the statesman wrote on March 3, 1919, for example, Bryan said:

My idea is to present the League principle as the greatest advance in modern times and to insist that no matter in what form the president gets it adopted it is better that we should have the League than that we should fail to organize, and then to advance the third proposition that while I think we should support anything the President is able to secure, we should help him to secure the best thing possible -- that is we should try to amend the plan in such a way as to strengthen its weakness and increase its strength. Among the things which I will point out as desirable are: First, the Monroe Doctrine should be specifically protected. ... Second, a clear decision of each member's right to decide at the time -- not in advance -- whether it will adopt the methods recognized by the Court for the enforcement of peace. ... Third, that any nation's right to refuse to act as a mandatory should not be left in doubt. Fourth, that the means of entering the League should be made as easy as possible on the theory that it is desirable that all nations should join. The idea of two-thirds of the nations in the League shall consent to the entrance of a new member looks too much like the rules of a social club.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup>Letter in the Bryan papers, March 3, 1919. Library of Congress.

So, by March 1919, the Commoner had come to believe the League was the greatest advance ever made towards a permanent world peace, but he still held reservations about the organization. The politician wanted the U.S. to be able to protect the Western Hemisphere under the Monroe Doctrine, and to stay free from the entanglements of Europe when it wanted to. Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations became paramount in this way of thinking. It loosely committed the United States and other nations to military action when the League demanded it.

Bryan sought to back away from that big a commitment in the four suggestions he made. This was especially true of his call for the United States to have the right to refuse to take part in League sanctions against countries. The Commoner also hinted that it might be necessary to "amend" the treaty to reflect his concerns about the League of Nations. He did not say how this was to be done, however. It can be presumed that other key players in the then-forming organization, such as Great Britain, France, and Italy, would have concerns about amendments to the treaty, even if they were designed to clarify how the United States would participate in the League. The Commoner apparently was hoping for silent approval of the amendments from the United States' allies.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup>Paolo E. Coletta, William Jennings Bryan: Political Puritan, 1915-1925 (Lincoln, Ill.: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 94. Later in this section, the 14 reservations that Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge held toward the Treaty of Versailles are discussed. Bryan supported some of Senator Lodge's reservations, but found the preamble of the reservations to be objectionable. It stated that the treaty would not be binding for the United States "until said reservations and understandings adopted by the Senate have been accepted by an exchange of notes as a part and as a condition of this resolution of ratification by at least three of the four principal allied and associated powers, to wit, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan." Apparently, Bryan first wanted to see if the United States' allies would accept the reservations without an exchange of official statements.

In an article that Bryan wrote for *The Commoner* in January 1919, the statesman further explained his position toward the League. The politician wrote that he agreed with Wilson when the President said the League must wipe out the "balance of power" concept, and called the alliance system "an outgrown system as completely shattered as the arbitrary power of kings."<sup>325</sup> These ideas kept in step with the *Commoner's* statements regarding alliances and the League of Nations. Bryan feared that a League would become the largest alliance ever created, with a huge amount of potential force. That is why he chose to emphasize that it should be made easy for all nations to enter the organization.

In another article Bryan wrote for *The Commoner* in March 1919, he reiterated that the Monroe Doctrine must be protected. The doctrine needed to be "preserved," he said, and added that "the League is not to interfere in the internal affairs of the nations belonging to the League."<sup>326</sup> Under no circumstances should the United States go to war against its will, Bryan wrote. Each nation in the League must have the right to choose when to back League sanctions, whether military or economic. The *Commoner* also was concerned that the U.S. might not have as much clout in the organization as it deserved. "The most powerful nation in the combination (of countries is America), whether measured by population, wealth, and influence. . . .," Bryan wrote. "It has no larger vote than nations with much inferior population, wealth, and influence.

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<sup>325</sup>Coletta, William Jennings Bryan, 88.

<sup>326</sup>Coletta, William Jennings Bryan, 90.

This must be corrected."<sup>327</sup>

Despite his critiques of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Commoner initially urged ratification of the Treaty of Versailles without reservations. His plan was to "Ratify and Resolve," as he stated in an article in *The Commoner* in August 1919.<sup>328</sup> Bryan hoped that Congress would pass the treaty to show its commitment to world peace, and then make adjustments in the United States' stance toward the League later. These adjustments could come in the form of amendments to the treaty that would explain how the United States would participate in the organization. Representatives from America could also work within the League to "improve" it.<sup>329</sup> "The risks we take in accepting (the League) are less than the risks we take if we reject it and turn back to the old ways of blood and slaughter," Bryan wrote in an article in *The Commoner* in April 1919.<sup>330</sup> "Our nation could not reject (the treaty) without stultifying itself," he added in a letter to David Lloyd George in March 1919. "The world moves forward, the United States leading the way."<sup>331</sup>

**The Commoner and Wilson Split Over Whether to Add Reservations to the Treaty of Versailles**

In taking the position that the treaty should be passed in the Senate without reservations, Bryan put himself in the corner of

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<sup>327</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>328</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>329</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>330</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 132.

<sup>331</sup>Ibid., 132.

President Wilson. He was not firmly in Wilson's corner, however. The president initially said he would accept some "mild" or "interpretive" reservations regarding the treaty, but stood firmly against any changes to Article 10 of the treaty.<sup>332</sup> Article 10, as mentioned, committed League members to preserve the territorial integrity of nations "against external aggression" when necessary. This was largely taken to mean that the United States could be called upon by the League to use force to preserve the independence of other countries. In effect, Wilson's stance on Article 10 put him in opposition to most reservations regarding the treaty because they were aimed at preventing foreign powers from gaining even a peripheral control over the U.S military. The President did not take a stand against all reservations until January 1920, however. As of August 1919, Bryan had not clearly defined his position on Article 10, except to say that the United States must reserve the right to reject League sanctions against countries, which could include military action. He had not been tested on whether he would side with President Wilson in a political debate over Article 10. The events of the fall of 1919 would drive Wilson and Bryan apart on the League question.

By August 1919, considerable opposition to the Treaty of Versailles was mounting in the Senate. It was based on the concern that joining the League would drag the United States into the conflicts of Europe, and the fear that the United States would lose control of its military to the League. Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge led the

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<sup>332</sup>Coletta, William Jennings Bryan, 93.

fight against the treaty and League, although many different senators were involved. Republican Senator Warren G. Harding, for example, said, "I could no more support mild reservations than I could support mild Americanism."<sup>333</sup> Both Lodge and Harding were of the post-Waterloo school of thought, which said the United States must maintain a free hand in its foreign policy so that the country could look after its interests alone when disputes arose between nations.

In August, Lodge proposed 45 amendments to the Treaty of Versailles and four reservations to it. Taken together, they were aimed at blocking the United States from participation in the League of Nations. As a Senate vote on the treaty neared on November 19, 1919, Lodge boiled his criticisms of the treaty down to "14 Lodge Reservations" designed to compete against Wilson's 14 Points.

In the meantime, President Wilson had embarked on a coast-to-coast speaking tour of the United States in September 1919. He wanted to drum up support for the League of Nations. At roughly the same time, Bryan was advocating his "Ratify and Resolve" strategy in *The Commoner*. On September 25, the president collapsed in Colorado. He was partially paralyzed by a stroke that hit him after he returned to the White House that month. Bryan was asked to fill in on the tour, and did so. The *Commoner* pushed for ratification of the treaty without reservations in his speeches on the tour. The statesman also held a meeting with 14 Democratic senators in late September. Bryan urged them to enter the

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<sup>333</sup>Ferrell, *American Diplomacy*, 151.



League and improve it later.<sup>334</sup> He appeared to be in sync with the President on the topic -- the President had not taken a stand against all reservations yet. "(Wilson) has borne the strain of a long time," Bryan wrote to a colleague.<sup>335</sup> "I trust the Senate will cheer him by ratifying without reservations."

Two Senate votes that occurred on November 19, 1919, proved to be a breaking point between Wilson and Bryan. In the first vote of the day, the Senate defeated the treaty, which included the 14 Lodge reservations, by a vote of 39 yeas to 55 nays. Wilson had written a letter to Democratic senators urging them to vote against a treaty that included the Lodge reservations.<sup>336</sup> The problem for Wilson and Bryan, however, was that in a second vote that day for a treaty without reservations, the treaty lost by a tally of 38 yeas to 53 nays. Bryan took this to mean that a compromise between Democrats and Republicans would be necessary before the treaty could pass the Senate. As a supporter of mild reservations, the Commoner was ready for such a deal. Wilson did not favor the compromise because of the possibility that Article 10 could be negatively impacted.

With the presidential election of 1920 looming in the distance, Bryan began to consider what type of political implications the treaty question would have on the race. He believed that most Americans were conservative towards foreign policy, so the Democrats would be at a

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<sup>334</sup>Coletta, William Jennings Bryan, 93.

<sup>335</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>336</sup>Ibid., 94.

disadvantage if they held onto the call for a treaty without reservations. In a letter written to Senator Henry F. Ashurst on

November 23, 1919, the Commoner said:

(The Republicans) could secretly get control of the government while the two parties waged a sham battle over foreign questions. There must be compromise. This question must be gotten out of the way. Our chances do not look bright next year for Democrats, but they will be worse if we try to ignore domestic questions and make the fight against the reservations -- some of them good... the treaty must be ratified.<sup>337</sup>

On December 18, 1919, Bryan split publicly with Wilson. At a Democratic caucus the Commoner had organized to discuss the League question, he told 20 party leaders that reservations to the treaty were inevitable and must be accepted. Likewise, at a Jackson Day dinner held on January 8, 1920, the politician suggested it was the Democrats who needed to compromise. The Commoner said that he had argued for ratification without reservations, but now realized that the majority of Americans supported reservations. If the Democrats attempted to block the reservations, it would put the party in the position of a filibustering minority, he added. The statesman also took a firm position on Article 10 at the dinner. Nobody could take away from Congress the right to declare war, he said, and Americans should "never transfer to any foreign nation the right to send our boys to war."<sup>338</sup>

Wilson decided to take the opposite track on the treaty. Instead of suggesting that mild reservations to the treaty were permissible, as

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<sup>337</sup>Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>338</sup>Ibid., 97.

he once had, he now took the stance that reservations were not acceptable. At the same Jackson Day dinner Bryan spoke at in 1920, the President had a letter read to attendees by Democratic National Chairman Homer S. Cummings. It stated that the treaty could not be rewritten with amendments because the approval of the Allies would be required, and declared, "We must take it without changes which alter its meaning or leave it."<sup>339</sup> Compromise was not an option for Wilson. The President wrote that he now believed "the only way out" was to make the election of 1920 a "great and solemn referendum" on the treaty.<sup>340</sup>

Throughout 1920, Bryan stepped up his campaign to get the Treaty of Versailles ratified with reservations in articles and speeches.<sup>341</sup> Among Democratic party leaders, he argued that it would be a mistake for the party to make the treaty a campaign issue in 1920. He believed Americans were conservative towards foreign policy, and wanted reservations. In March 1920, the Commoner even suggested in a speech that Wilson's illness had "denied (him) information essential to sound judgement and safe leadership."<sup>342</sup> The President should stand aside and let the majority rule, Bryan said. In a third Senate vote that month, the treaty, which included the Lodge reservations, was defeated by a tally of 49 yeas to 35 neas. It did not obtain the two-thirds majority necessary for a treaty to pass the Senate.

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<sup>339</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>340</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>341</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>342</sup>Ibid., 100.

In April 1920, Bryan won a Democratic primary in Nebraska, which set him up to be a more active participant at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco in June 1920. He also was nominated to be on the Committee on Resolutions at the convention, which he accepted. The split with the President over the treaty carried through to the convention. Bryan hoped to make ratification with reservations a plank of the Democratic platform. In a speech made before the convention, the Commoner said:

(The delegates of the convention) tell me, as they say in the platform, that we must stand by this treaty with no reservations that materially alter it. Why, my friends, I made more speeches in this country than any other public man for ratification without a single reservation. I did it until I found that we could not get ratification without reservations... Shame on the man, Democrat or Republican, who talks of making a partisan question of the great issue (of the treaty), with the world on fire. Who will give a guarantee of the future? Who will give us the assurance that Europe will not drift back into war?<sup>343</sup>

Bryan went on to add, "I never consented to a single reservation until I was convinced, as everybody else must have been by that time, that ratification without reservations was impossible. ... If you make (the treaty) an issue in this campaign, if Republicans and Democrats spend another four months denouncing each other, you make it impossible to secure ratification at the end of the campaign, because everybody knows that neither party will have a two-thirds majority in the Senate when this campaign is over."<sup>344</sup> Of course, the Commoner was exaggerating to

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<sup>343</sup>Edward G. Hoffman, Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1920 (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bookwalter-Ball Printing Co.), 238.

<sup>344</sup>Hoffman, Democratic National Convention, Pg. 238

some degree. He had fought for a "Ratify and Resolve" strategy all along, which showed his own approval for reservations.

Bryan took two other actions at the convention to try to ensure that the Treaty of Versailles would pass in the Senate. The first was to highlight the portions of the League idea that Republicans and Democrats weren't fighting over. "How pitiful the difference between the reservations that have been discussed in the Senate for a year when you compare them with the great provisions in that treaty," Bryan said in a speech.<sup>345</sup> "The three great things in that treaty have never been disputed; no Senator has objected; they aroused no controversy. What are they? Nine months' deliberation before resorting to war; six months for investigation and three months' time to decide what they will do when the report is filed." The Commoner went on to add, "It will be almost impossible for two nations to go to war after they have spent nine months investigating the cause."<sup>346</sup> The politician was hoping to establish common ground between the Republicans and Democrats so that the parties would pass the treaty in the Senate as quickly as possible.

Secondly, Bryan tried to speed ratification of the treaty by encouraging a second plank to be put in the Democratic platform that would slash the number of Senators needed to pass a treaty from two-thirds to one-half. He said:  
(The fifth plank) simply provides a way of carrying out the purpose that we all have, for we all favor the League of Nations and desire its early establishment. My amendment reads: 'The Democratic party demands an amendment to the

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<sup>345</sup>Ibid., 238.

<sup>346</sup>Ibid., 238.

federal constitution providing for the ratification of treaties by a majority vote, so that it will be as easy to end a war as to declare a war.' -- placing ourselves upon the most fundamental principle of popular government; namely, the right of the people to rule, a doctrine in support of which we have recently spent over \$25 billion and for which we have sacrificed a hundred thousand precious lives. We favor an immediate reconvening of the Senate in order that this principle may be applied to the treaty.<sup>347</sup>

Bryan's move to have a plank that supported ratification of the treaty with reservations had an uphill fight at the convention, however.

President Wilson engaged in some heavy politicking before the event to ensure that his message would get across. For example, Wilson wrote a letter to senators who opposed the treaty asking them to resign and then run for reelection based on their records of opposition.<sup>348</sup> If a majority of them won, the President said he would resign. Wilson also threatened to form a new Democratic party with himself as a third-term presidential candidate if the Democrats did not back the treaty as it was written.<sup>349</sup> Lastly, the President convinced National Chairman Cummings to make ratification of the treaty without reservations the paramount issue in his keynote address at the convention.<sup>350</sup> Wilson's strong stand had its desired effect. The President controlled the proceedings of the convention from the beginning, although agreeing not to run for a third term as president.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup>Ibid., 202-203.

<sup>348</sup>Coletta, William Jennings Bryan, 100.

<sup>349</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>350</sup>Ibid.

<sup>351</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 125.

Regarding the Treaty of Versailles, the Democratic platform ended up saying:

We advocate the immediate ratification of the treaty without reservations which would impair its essential integrity; but do not oppose the acceptance of any reservations making clearer or more specific the obligations of the United States to the League associates. Only by doing this may we retrieve the reputation of this nation among the powers of the earth and recover the moral leadership which President Wilson won and which Republican politicians at Washington sacrificed. Only by doing this may we hope to aid effectively in the restoration of order throughout the world and to take the place which we should assume in the front rank of spiritual, commercial, and industrial advancement. We reject as utterly vain, if not vicious, the Republican assumption that ratification of the treaty and membership in the League of Nations would in any wise impair the integrity or independence of our country.<sup>352</sup>

Originally, the platform did not say that the Democrats would "not oppose the acceptance of any reservations making clearer or more specific the obligations of the United States to the League associates."<sup>353</sup> Bryan led a fight to get this clause added to the platform, because he felt running on a platform without such a statement would be fatal to Democratic chances in the election. Wilson had really won the day, however. No vital provision of the treaty, such as Article 10, could be touched according to the platform. On the question of adding a plank that would change the number of votes required in the Senate to ratify a treaty, the Commoner was less successful. No such plank was included in the platform.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>352</sup>Hoffman, Democratic National Convention, 182.

<sup>353</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 135.

<sup>354</sup>Ibid., 135.

As it turns out, Bryan probably read the American public better than Wilson did in 1920. James M. Cox, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate for 1920, lost the election that year. Other issues were certainly involved in the election, especially prohibition, support for women's suffrage, and the degree to which the federal government should intervene in the economy. However, Warren G. Harding, the Republican candidate, won the election after sitting on his front porch and making speeches about a return to "normalcy" in the United States.<sup>355</sup> "America's present need is not heroics but healing; not nostrums but normalcy; not revolution but restoration," Harding said.<sup>356</sup>

The Republican platform did not support the League of Nations. It included a vague commitment to establish another association between nations if Harding was elected, but no details were given on what form the association would take.<sup>357</sup>

The conservatism of the Republicans worked. Americans apparently were tired of the experiments by the Wilson administration that had gotten them involved in the politics and wars of Europe. After Harding won the election, he said in his victory speech, "You just didn't want a surrender of the United States of America to go under American ideals. That's why you didn't care for the League, which is now deceased."<sup>358</sup> The Harding administration ended the technical state of war with Germany

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<sup>355</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 153.

<sup>356</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>357</sup>Hoffman, Democratic National Convention, 21.

<sup>358</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 154-155.



by a resolution of Congress on July 2, 1921. The United States signed the Treaty of Berlin with the Germans on August 25, 1921, which transferred to the American government all of the rights stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles. Similar treaties were later signed with Austria and Hungary. The United States never joined the League of Nations, and the Republicans never created another association of nations.

### **Why Did Bryan Shift Positions?**

The question remains as to why Bryan went from smashing the League to Enforce Peace in 1916 and 1917 to promoting the League of Nations in 1919. There is not much material available in which Bryan directly discusses his change of positions. America's new status as a world power undoubtedly played a role in the position, as Bryan was concerned that a nation with the United States' "population, wealth, and moral influence" was not getting enough voting power in the League of Nations.<sup>359</sup> The election of 1920 also lends a couple of clues. In one speech made at the Democratic National Convention, for example, Bryan said:

They will never be able to erase from the pages of history the name of Woodrow Wilson, who carried the peace plan to the world. You cannot call me an enemy of Woodrow Wilson; it was my (arbitration) treaty plan that he took to Paris; I have helped him to become immortal.<sup>360</sup>

Apparently, the Commoner believed or had been convinced that his ideas were embodied in the League of Nations. After all, one of its main

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<sup>359</sup>Coletta, William Jennings Bryan, 91.

<sup>360</sup>Hoffman, Democratic National Convention, 239.

principles was the idea of investigation before war, and Bryan had pushed hard for that in the 30 arbitration treaties he negotiated prior to World War I (see chapters one and two).<sup>361</sup> Lastly, regarding making the League the defining issue of the campaign, the Commoner said at the convention:

I am not willing to be a party to it. No, my friends, across the ocean there are little republics that sprung into existence (after World War I) in response to our invitation; they are trying to get on their feet; monarchy is surging back on one side and Bolshevism is threatening them on the other, and we cannot hold out a hand to help them (by becoming a member of the League). Shame on the man, Democrat or Republican, who talks of making a partisan question of this great issue, with the world on fire.<sup>362</sup>

Nation-building was once again an issue for the Commoner. If the United States turned its back on the League, it would apparently be turning its back on small republics. America had a new mission by 1920, according to the Commoner. It was to raise republics and educate the world about "government by consent of the governed." It was to act like a world leader. Bryan had again turned aggressive in his foreign policy thinking by advocating that the United States join the League, but he simultaneously demanded that Americans keep their respect for the Monroe Doctrine.

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<sup>361</sup>The arbitration treaties required a one-year period of investigation of a dispute between nations before the parties involved could go to war, much like the Covenant of the League of Nations required a one-year period for the same purposes.

<sup>362</sup>Ibid., 238.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

From the election of 1920 until Bryan's death in July 1925, the Great Commoner remained active in American politics. He continued to give speeches in a lecture tour known as the "circuit Chautauquas," as he had for most of his adult life. He also continued to write his newspaper, *The Commoner*. Bryan was no longer as prominent a force in the Democratic party as he once had been, however. His influence waned in the organization from 1920 to 1925. This was in large part due to the fact that he was identified with the old Populist movement from the turn of the century. It also was because he had publicly opposed Woodrow Wilson on two occasions when the President's leadership was being sought by the party. The Commoner's resignation as Secretary of State and his call for reservations to the Treaty of Versailles were seen as having splintered the party by some in the organization. Nonetheless, Bryan continued to be a good foot soldier for the Democrats. He toured the United States stumping for Senatorial and Congressional candidates in 1922, and did the same for the Democratic nominee for President, John W. Davis, in 1924.

From 1920 to 1925, Bryan's attention turned largely towards domestic issues. He became increasingly concerned with prohibition and religious fundamentalism, and tended to focus on the two issues in his

Chautauqua lectures.<sup>363</sup> He also began to teach Sunday school for adults on a regular basis. Thousands of Americans turned out to see him speak in church. Foreign policy issues still were of great interest to the Commoner, but he rarely became involved in hotly contested foreign policy debates, as he had in the past. When he did speak out on U.S. foreign relations, his comments held to the course he had set earlier in his career. During the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22, for example, Bryan said that he favored disarmament, but was uneasy with the United States signing actual disarmament agreements because they could limit the nation's freedom of action if a national emergency arose.<sup>364</sup> The Commoner would not back the Four-, Five-, and Nine-Power Treaties signed at the conference until the U.S. Senate passed amendments to each of the agreements saying that the United States had the right to increase its military strength when it determined it was necessary.<sup>365</sup> During the Democratic National Convention of 1924, Bryan also said that he believed his party must elect a presidential candidate that supported American participation in the League of Nations.<sup>366</sup> This was one of his last public pronouncements on foreign policy before his death.

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<sup>363</sup>Kendrick A. Clements, William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist (Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 41.

<sup>364</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 139.

<sup>365</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 140.

<sup>366</sup>Louis W. Koenig, Bryan: A Political Biography of William Jennings Bryan (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 285.

Although the Great Commoner has largely been remembered by historians as a progressive politician who focused on domestic issues, he was surprisingly vocal about foreign relations during his career. His three runs for the presidency in 1896, 1900, and 1908 required him to take firm stands on foreign policy questions, and his two-year stint as Secretary of State firmed up his foreign policy beliefs. Taken on the whole, Bryan's foreign policy ideas can be seen as aggressive and active, contrary to what most historians have argued in the past. It is true that the Commoner spoke a great deal about the United States becoming a moral example for the world, but he was willing for the country to become more than just an isolated moral example. Bryan put America's armed forces on the line in a few cases, and believed that the United States could "raise" republics through loans, education, and infrastructure development. In the election of 1900, the Commoner announced that it was time for the United States to become a nation-builder. He set about trying to accomplish this new American mission as Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1914, for example, the Great Commoner set before Wilson a plan to send the U.S. Navy to the Dominican Republic to bombard the island unless the factions in a revolution there called a truce and set up elections. The Commoner also attempted to resolve disorder in Haiti. He recommended that the United States establish a military presence in Haiti, supervise Haitian elections and customs, and set up a naval base at Mole Saint Nicolas. Bryan feared that France and Germany might collaborate on a joint military action to collect debts in the country,

even though they were already at war in Europe. In July 1915, just after the Commoner resigned his post as Secretary of State, U.S. troops were landed on Haiti to squelch a revolution there.

Bryan's desire to develop small republics did not just take the form of military interventions, however. The Commoner attempted to set up a loan program under the Wilson administration that would undercut the loan opportunities Latin American countries were getting from European nations. The plan called for the United States to "loan" Latin American countries its own credit by selling them U.S. bonds that paid four and a half percent interest, one and a half percent more than regular U.S. bonds. Bryan also proposed that the proceeds gained from the bond transactions could be rolled into a sinking fund. The sinking fund would be used to pay off the remainder of the debts of Latin American countries, after it had grown in time with interest. The plan would be carried out under the guise of the Monroe Doctrine.

The proposal for the loan program set the Commoner apart from President Theodore Roosevelt, who had taken over the customs houses of the Dominican Republic in 1905 after European nations became aggressive about collecting debts there.<sup>367</sup> The President had used a new "corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine to justify the U.S. intervention. It said:

Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of a civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may

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<sup>367</sup>Robert H. Ferrell, American Diplomacy: The Twentieth Century (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 84.

force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.<sup>368</sup>

The Roosevelt Corollary was essentially a reactionary policy. The United States was to intervene in Latin American nations only in cases of "chronic," or long-lasting, wrongdoing by a native government. In contrast, Secretary Bryan sought to alleviate the financial difficulties of Latin American countries before American interventions became necessary. This did not mean that the Commoner was not willing to use a reactionary policy. He did advise that American troops should be sent into Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, after all. Bryan just advocated that a proactive policy needed to be available for Latin America as well. President Wilson rejected Bryan's loan program, however, saying that it would strike the American public as a new and "radical" proposal.

Like most Americans, the Commoner viewed the Monroe Doctrine to be the most sacred and safe guide to U.S. foreign policy. He referred to the Doctrine in the speeches he made when he ran for President in 1900, in the positions he took as Secretary of State, and in his arguments regarding a League of Nations. Bryan also consistently attempted to take the Doctrine to new places, however. This can be seen in his desire to oust the Spanish from Cuba, in his loan program, and in the politician's desire to raise nations. He announced the nation-building concept during the election of 1900, prior to Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. Consequently, the Commoner was one of the earliest

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<sup>368</sup>Ferrell, American Diplomacy, 82-83.

politicians to advocate the idea that European nations could be kept out of the Western Hemisphere by developing strong, independent governments in their former colonies.<sup>369</sup> President William McKinley ran against Bryan in 1900 advocating a similar policy in Cuba. In fact, he established a U.S. military governorship over the island in 1899 for the purpose. Its mission was to prepare the Cubans for independence by enacting political, social, and medical reforms, and helping to build a stable government.<sup>370</sup>

By the early 1900's, the Doctrine apparently even included some measure of protection for the Philippines in the Commoner's way of thinking. During the election of 1900, Bryan promoted the idea that the United States should have sovereignty over Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico until the countries could thrive by themselves. Bryan said that if elected, he would:

... convene Congress in an extraordinary session as soon as inaugurated and recommend an immediate declaration of the nation's purpose, first, to establish a stable form of government in the Philippine Islands, just as we are now establishing a stable form of government in Cuba; second, to give (eventual) independence to the Cubans; third, to protect the Filipinos from outside interference while they work out their own destiny, just as we have protected the republics of Central and South America, and are, by the Monroe Doctrine, pledged to protect Cuba.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 285.

<sup>370</sup>It should be noted that Bryan did not trust McKinley's intentions in Cuba, however. The President advocated an American annexation of Puerto Rico during the election of 1900, which Bryan opposed, unless the Puerto Ricans themselves voted for it. McKinley also backed the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines. The President's desire for so many annexations caused Bryan to fear that McKinley might later try to do the same with Cuba. The Commoner made anti-imperialism the key issue of the Democratic platform in 1900.

<sup>371</sup>William Jennings Bryan, Bryan On Imperialism (New York: Arno



The Commoner went so far as to draw comparisons between an American protectorate and a European protectorate. "A European protectorate often results in a plundering of the ward by the guardian," Bryan said.

"An American protectorate gives to the nation protected the advantage of our strength, without making it the victim of our greed."<sup>372</sup> A key to Bryan's position, however, was that he did promote an eventual independence for the Philippines. He did not believe the Monroe Doctrine gave the Philippines the same benefits as the countries located close to the United States, such as Cuba and Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico could vote to become a member of the United States if it wanted to, for example.<sup>373</sup> Bryan said the Philippines could never become part of the United States because they were "too far away."<sup>374</sup>

Although the Commoner consistently expanded the uses of the Monroe Doctrine, it can never be forgotten that the politician resigned his post as Secretary of State to protect it. The fact that he did this shows just how much of a believer in the Doctrine Bryan was. The Commoner wanted the United States to remain neutral in World War I at all costs because he followed the Doctrine's advice about staying out of the entanglements of Europe. The resignation was no small sacrifice for Bryan, who had run for president three times and lost before winning a

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Press & *The New York Times*, 1970), 90.

<sup>372</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 90.

<sup>373</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 41.

<sup>374</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 6.

spot in Wilson's cabinet.

Bryan's foreign policy ideas were aggressive and active in other ways as well, besides expanding the uses of the Monroe Doctrine. For example, the statesman was not adverse to the United States making some territorial gains as the result of its military actions. President Wilson said that not a single foot of ground would again be added to the United States by conquest, but that did not prevent Bryan from trying to lease naval bases on the islands America had occupied during the Spanish-American War. The Commoner also was not adverse to the Westward expansion that had occurred on the U.S. mainland throughout the course of the 19th century. He drew a distinction between this type of expansion, which occurred in lands that were contiguous with the United States, and expansion to overseas territories.

One area in particular that Bryan seemed "active" in concerned the League of Nations. The Commoner has been described as an idealist by most of his biographers, and yet he made many harsh realistic criticisms of the League of Nations before turning to support the organization. His criticisms included: the idea that the League could turn out to be the largest alliance ever created, the notion that nations would not be able to agree upon international laws, the idea that the sovereignty of a country that was disciplined by the League would be violated, the belief that the League would inherit the power to tax because it could require members to stockpile a "minimum" amount of arms, the idea that the United States could lose control of its military to the League, and the notion that there were certain questions that countries must be able

to act on alone, such as when they are invaded or a third party becomes involved in a dispute. It can be seen that while Bryan was an idealist in the context of desiring a great number of domestic reforms, such as the direct election of senators, there was an element of realpolitik in his foreign policy thinking. Many of these realistic critiques can be separated from the Commoner's reliance on the Monroe Doctrine, which shows that he was an "active" thinker on foreign policy issues.

In the Commoner's last great foreign policy debate, he ended up arguing in favor of the Monroe Doctrine and in favor of the League of Nations. It would have seemed impossible for a politician to have argued for both 20 years earlier, after the United States had defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War. There was a great deal of fear at the time that other European countries were going to cross the Atlantic to wrestle away American gains in the Western Hemisphere. The European nations were seen as too powerful and too morally corrupt to trust concerning foreign policy. It does not seem surprising that Bryan was able to argue for both the Doctrine and League by 1920, however. The United States had shown itself to be a major world power in World War I, and many American citizens did not want the country to relinquish the prestige and influence it had won. Neither did they want the United States to be dragged into foreign wars that were not truly in the country's interest. The Commoner's argument that the United States should join the League of Nations to take up a leadership role and promote democracy would have appealed to many American citizens. This is especially true when tempered with his insistence that the United

States should have the right to reject participating in League sanctions against nations. The Monroe Doctrine would have been protected under such a policy, and the United States would have been able to stay out of unwanted wars.

It even seems that President Wilson may have been able to take a page from Bryan's reading of the Monroe Doctrine during the election of 1920. The Commoner came to the realization that the Treaty of Versailles would not be ratified in the Senate without reservations because many senators and Americans were still conservative towards foreign policy. Wilson may have come to that realization, but he chose not to speak about it. In fact, the President emphasized that he would not accept any changes to Article 10 of the Treaty of Versailles. The article pledged members of the League of Nations to act jointly to preserve each other's territorial integrity. The stance by Wilson distanced him and the Democrats from the American people, who were leaning towards conservatism on foreign policy issues. As Bryan pointed out, a little rhetoric about the Monroe Doctrine in the Democratic platform of 1920, as well as the need to preserve an American independence of action in regard to the League, may have done the Democrats and James Cox a lot of good in the election.

The idea of self-government also cannot be underplayed when discussing Bryan's foreign policy beliefs. The Commoner appeared to value the idea of self-government as a guide to foreign policy as much as he valued the Monroe Doctrine. The best example of this can be found in the election of 1900, when he called for an American protectorate to

be established over the Philippines. Bryan was willing to extend the Monroe Doctrine to cover a set of islands outside of the Western Hemisphere for the sake of self-government. "After the Filipinos had aided us in a war against Spain, we could not honorably turn them over to their former masters," Bryan said. "We could not leave them to be the victims of the ambitious designs of European nations, and since we do not desire to make them a part of us or to hold them as subjects, we propose the only alternative, to give them independence and guard them against molestation from without."<sup>375</sup> He added that it would be "better a thousand times that our flag in the Orient give way to a flag representing the idea of self-government, than that the flag of this republic should become the flag of empire."<sup>376</sup>

During the Commoner's acceptance speech for the presidential nomination in August 1900, Bryan also said on self-government: I can conceive of a national destiny surpassing the glories of the present and the past -- a destiny which meets the responsibilities of today and measures up to the possibilities of the future. Behold a republic, resting securely upon the foundation stones quarried by revolutionary patriots from the mountain of eternal truth -- a republic applying in practice and proclamation to the world the self-evident propositions that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with inalienable rights; that governments are instituted among men to secure these rights; and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.<sup>377</sup>

This idea -- promoting "government by the consent of the governed" in

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<sup>375</sup>Bryan, On Imperialism, 90.

<sup>376</sup>Ibid., 85-89.

<sup>377</sup>Ibid., 91.

foreign policy -- seemed to carry through until the election of 1920 for Bryan. At the Democratic National Convention that year, the Commoner argued that one reason the United States should join the League of Nations was to support the new republics that had been created in Europe. He said:

I am not willing to be a part to it (the defeat of the League of Nations). No, my friends, across the ocean there are little republics that sprung into existence (after World War I) in response to our invitation; they are trying to get on their feet; monarchy is surging back on one side and Bolshevism is threatening them on the other, and we cannot hold out a hand to help them (by becoming a member of the League). Shame on the man, Democrat or Republican, who talks of making a partisan question of this great issue, with the world on fire.<sup>378</sup>

The Commoner wanted to give aid to the new democracies that the United States had helped create in Europe, such as Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

A possible exception to Bryan's reliance on the idea of self-government as a guide to foreign policy can be found in his call for American interventions in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It can be argued that the Commoner was trying to help those countries build stable, independent governments, however. He did not want the United States to annex the two nations. He just wanted the countries to develop stable treasuries and governments that would not be overthrown every few years. Here, the Monroe Doctrine again becomes paramount for the Commoner. He believed that it was his duty to create stability in

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<sup>378</sup>Edward G. Hoffman, Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bookwalter-Ball Printing Co., 1920), 238.

Latin America to keep the Europeans out of the Western Hemisphere, and to protect the Panama Canal. In the process, he probably thought he was creating strong, independent governments in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. This is evidenced by the fact that regarding the Dominican Republic, Bryan said, "The election having been held and a government chosen by the people having been established, no more revolutions will be permitted."<sup>379</sup> Concerning Haiti, the Commoner added that the United States "cannot consent to stand by and permit revolutionary conditions constantly to exist there."<sup>380</sup>

One last area of Bryan's foreign policy ideas that must be discussed is his push to create arbitration treaties during his tenure as Secretary of State. The Commoner was an adamant supporter of arbitration agreements -- there can be no doubt about that. He negotiated 30 of them during his tenure as Secretary of State. He also claimed that the treaties had failed to prevent the First World War only because Germany and Austria had not negotiated agreements with the United States before the war. During his debate with William Howard Taft over the League to Enforce Peace, Bryan wrote that the lack of these two particular treaties meant American statesman did not hold the correct "machinery for the settlement of disputes" that led to World War I.<sup>381</sup> He added that he believed a week-long period of investigation and

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<sup>379</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 85.

<sup>380</sup>Koenig, A Political Biography, 517.

<sup>381</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 64-65. The United States did sign treaties with Great Britain and France, so it seems that Bryan believed the United States could have mediated between the Central Powers and the Allies under the auspices of the treaties to prevent the war in Europe.

recommendation by an international commission after the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand would have prevented the war.<sup>382</sup> "A year's time (for arbitration between countries) would allow passion to subside and reason to resume her sway, time for separations for honour from questions of fact, time for the peace forces of the world to bring influence to bear on the estranged nations," the Commoner wrote. He believed in the treaties as one method that could be used to preserve peace.

The mistake that many historians have made, however, is to assume that because Bryan backed arbitration agreements, he was a pacifist who was unwilling to get involved in the disputes of the world. From early in his political career, he showed this not to be the case. In 1898, Bryan volunteered to fight in the Spanish-American War. He said of the conflict:

The time for intervention has arrived. Humanity demands that we shall act. Cuba lies within sight of our shores and the sufferings of her people cannot be ignored unless we, as a nation, have become so engrossed in money making as to be indifferent to distress... Responsibility sometimes leads a nation, as well as an individual, into danger.<sup>383</sup>

The Commoner stated that his regiment had "volunteered to attempt to break the yoke of Spain in Cuba, and for nothing else. They did not volunteer to attempt to subjugate other peoples."<sup>384</sup> Bryan also

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He never said this directly in his debate with Taft, however.

<sup>382</sup>Bryan and Taft, World Peace, 66.

<sup>383</sup>David D. Anderson, William Jennings Bryan (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1981), 99.

<sup>384</sup>Anderson, William Jennings Bryan, 100.



recommended that American protectorates should be established over Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, which would have put the U.S. military at risk. The Commoner backed American military interventions in the Dominican Republic and Haiti as Secretary of State, and volunteered to fight as a private in World War I after the United States entered the conflict.<sup>385</sup> It is clear that Bryan loved peace, as he expressed this sentiment in speeches and articles throughout his career. However, there was an element of realpolitik in the Commoner's foreign policy thinking that led him to back American military actions, or the flexing of U.S. military muscle, under certain circumstances. In particular, he believed in enforcing the Monroe Doctrine to prevent Europeans from making gains in the Western Hemisphere, and in promoting "government by consent of the governed."

In the conclusion of William Jennings Bryan: Missionary Isolationist, author Kendrick A. Clements expresses wonder at the fact that before Bryan died, he requested to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Clements writes:  
The request was honored, but the message of his example was not very clear, either to his contemporaries or to later biographers. 'I think it is proper and fitting,' said Mrs. Bryan, 'for he battled for America, too, and he battled for the God of his fathers, courageously, unafraid,' but others wondered why a near-pacifist should choose to lie in a national military cemetery.  
To me, the Arlington grave suggests not merely the paradox of a pacifist interred among soldiers but a more fundamental contradiction as well -- Bryan's inability to recognize and reconcile the conflict between his missionary impulse to world service on the one hand and his desire for the security of perfect isolation on

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<sup>385</sup>President Wilson turned down the Commoner's offer to fight as a private in the Great War, instead using him as a speaker in the campaign for war bonds and American preparedness.

the other.<sup>386</sup>

The Commoner's foreign policy ideas were not nearly so complex, however.

He was not a man caught between a missionary impulse and an isolationist instinct. In fact, he never was an isolationist. From 1898 on, Bryan was willing for the United States to pursue an aggressive foreign policy in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the Philippines. American troops entered all of these countries with the Commoner's backing. Bryan wanted to spread American influence and the concept of self-government. What he also demanded from the U.S. government and its citizens, however, was respect for the Monroe Doctrine. That is why he was slow to support an American entry into World War I. Ultimately, it also is why he came to back American participation in the League of Nations with the stipulation that the United States should be allowed to refuse to participate in League sanctions against countries. As an advocate of an aggressive foreign policy and a veteran of the armed forces, it is not surprising that Bryan requested to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. The request fit his mindset, and his belief in the traditional American concepts of the Monroe Doctrine and self-government.

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<sup>386</sup>Clements, Missionary Isolationist, 142.

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