



March of the Flag Albert J. Beveridge (1898)

Aspiring politician Albert Beveridge delivered this speech during the 1898 midterm elections, at a Republican campaign event in Indiana. The speech promoted what Beveridge himself characterized as an imperialist policy, under which the United States would retain territories seized from Spain during the Spanish-American War. (At the time Beveridge gave the speech, active combat between the United States and Spain had ceased, but a final peace treaty had not yet been negotiated.) Beveridge, a Protestant with English ancestry, identifies Americans as “God’s chosen people”—also as a “race,” fundamentally Anglo-Saxon. Amplifying the then 50-year-old concept of manifest destiny, Beveridge looks forward to US rule being extended overseas to promote freedom, civilization, Christianity, and US commercial interests. As a result of the 1898 election, Beveridge became a US senator, in which capacity he continued to advocate for US imperialism.

Fellow citizens: It is a noble land that God has given us—a land that can feed and clothe the world, a land whose coastlines would enclose half the countries of Europe, a land set like a sentinel between the two imperial oceans of the globe, a greater England with a nobler destiny. It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing working folk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their heaven-directed purposes [...] It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people: a history whose keynote was struck by Liberty Bell; a history heroic with faith in our mission and our future; a history of statesmen who flung the boundaries of the Republic out into unexplored lands and savage wildernesses; a history of soldiers who carried the flag across the blazing deserts and through the ranks of hostile mountains, even to the gates of sunset; a history of a multiplying people who overran a continent in half a century; a history of prophets who saw the consequences of evils inherited from the past and of martyrs who died to save us from them [...]

Shall the American people continue their resistless march toward the commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign as the children of Liberty wax in strength, until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind? Have we no mission to perform, no duty to discharge to our fellowman?

[...]n 1898, [...] the American people fight the last great pirate of the world, in a war holy as righteousness. [...]he real career of history’s greatest republic has only just begun. [...] Hawaii is ours; Porto Rico is to be ours; at the prayer of the people, Cuba will finally be ours; in the islands of the East, even to the gates of Asia, coaling stations are to be ours; at the very least, the flag of a liberal government is to float over the Philippines, and I pray God it may be the banner that Taylor unfurled in Texas and Fremont carried to the coast—the stars and stripes of glory. And the burning question [...] is whether the American people will accept the gifts of events, whether they will rise as lifts their soaring destiny, whether they will proceed upon the lines of national development surveyed by the statesmen of our past; or whether, for the first time, the American people doubt their mission, question fate, prove apostate to the spirit of their race, and halt the ceaseless march of free institutions.

The opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer: The rule of Liberty, that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. I answer: We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent. I answer: How do you assume that our government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them? Do not the blazing fires of joy and the ringing bells of gladness in Porto Rico prove the welcome of our flag? And regardless of this formula of words made only for enlightened, self-governing peoples, do we owe no duty to the world? Shall we turn these peoples back to the reeking hands from which we have taken them? Shall we abandon them to their fate, with the wolves of conquest all about them—with Germany, Russia, France, even Japan hungering for them? Shall we save them from those nations, to give them a self-rule of tragedy? It would be like giving a razor to a babe and telling it to shave itself. It would be like giving a typewriter to an Esquimau and telling him to publish one of the great dailies of the world. [...]

If England can govern foreign lands, so can America. If Germany can govern foreign lands, so can America. If they can supervise protectorates, so can America. Why is it more difficult to administer Hawaii than New Mexico or California? Both had a savage and an alien population; both were more remote from the seat of government when they came under our dominion than Hawaii is today. [...W]e are of the ruling race of the world; [...] ours is the blood of government, ours the heart of dominion, ours the brain and the genius of administration[... R]emember that we do but what our fathers did: we but pitch the tents of Liberty further westward, further southward. We only continue the march of the flag. [...]

But [...] there is a difference. We did not need the western Mississippi Valley when we acquired it, nor Florida, nor Texas, nor California, nor the royal provinces of the far Northwest. We had no emigrants to people this imperial wilderness, no money to develop it, even no highways to cover it. No trade awaited us in its savage fastnesses. Our productions were not greater than our trade. There was not one reason for the land lust of our statesmen from Jefferson to Grant, other than the prophet and the Saxon within them. But, today, we are raising more than we can consume. Today, we are making more than we can use. Today, our industrial society is congested; there are more workers than there is work; there is more capital than there is investment. [...] Therefore, we must find new markets for our produce, new occupation for our capital, new work for our labor. And so, while we did not need the territory taken during the past century at the time it was acquired, we do need what we have taken in 1898, and we need it now. Think of the thousands of Americans who will pour into Hawaii and Porto Rico when the Republic's laws cover those islands with justice and safety! Think of the tens of thousands of Americans who will invade mine and field and forest in the Philippines when a liberal government protected and controlled by this Republic, if not the government of the Republic itself, shall establish order and equity there! Think of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who will build a soap-and-water, common-school civilization of energy and industry in Cuba when a government of law replaces the double reign of anarchy and tyranny! Think of the prosperous millions that empress of islands will support when, obedient to the law of political gravitation, her people ask for the highest honor Liberty can bestow: the sacred Order of the Stars and Stripes, the citizenship of the great Republic! [...]

[...T]he commercial empire of the Republic [...] is the greatest fact of the future. [...] Hawaii furnishes us a naval base in the heart of the Pacific; the Ladrões another, a voyage further into the region of sunset and commerce; Manila another, at the gates of Asia—Asia, to the trade of whose hundreds of millions American merchants, American manufacturers, American farmers have as good a right as those of Germany or France or Russia or England [...] Within two decades, the bulk of Oriental commerce will be ours—the richest commerce in the world. In the light of that golden future, our chain of new-won stations rise like ocean sentinels from the night of waters: Porto Rico, a nobler Gibraltar; the Isthmian canal, a greater Suez; Hawaii, the Ladrões, the Philippines, commanding the Pacific! Ah! as our commerce spreads, the flag of liberty will circle the globe; and the highways of the ocean, carrying trade of all mankind, [will] be guarded by the guns of the Republic. And as their thunders salute the flag, benighted peoples will know that the voice of Liberty is speaking, at last, for them; that Civilization is dawning, at last, for them—Liberty and Civilization, those children of Christ's gospel, who follow, and never precede, the preparing march of commerce! It is the tide of God's great purposes made manifest in the instincts of our race, whose present phase is our personal profit but whose far-off end is the redemption of the world and the Christianization of mankind. And he who throws himself before that current is like him who, with puny arm, tries to turn the Gulf Stream from its course or stay, by idle incantations, the blessed processes of the sun. [...]

Fellow Americans, we are God's chosen people. Yonder at Bunker Hill and Yorktown, His providence was above us. At New Orleans and on ensanguined seas, His hand sustained us. Abraham Lincoln was His minister, and His was the altar of freedom [that] the boys in blue set on a hundred battlefields. His power directed Dewey in the East and delivered the Spanish fleet into our hands on the eve of Liberty's natal day, as He delivered the elder armada into the hands of our English sires [three] centuries ago. His great purposes are revealed in the progress of the flag, which [...] leads us, like a holier pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, into situations unforeseen by finite wisdom [...] The American people [...] cannot fly from our world duties [...] We cannot retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for Liberty and Civilization. For Liberty and Civilization and God's promises fulfilled, the flag must henceforth be the symbol and the sign to all mankind [...]

Source: Albert J. Beveridge, *The “March of the Flag”* ([Indianapolis?]: n.p., [c. 1898]), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t1bk1g68r>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Beveridge erroneously dated the defeat of the Spanish Armada to “two centuries ago”; the correct dating, three centuries, has been inserted here in square brackets. Applause indicators omitted from this excerpted text. Two run-on sentences broken up. Spelling and punctuation emended in line with modern conventions, except that *Puerto Rico* and *Eskimo* appear with their Portuguese and French spellings, respectively, as in the source publication. The source’s erroneous use of *Esquimaux* as a singular form has been corrected here.

The capitalizing of divine pronouns reproduces the usage of the source publication; so does the capitalizing of *Providence* when a divine epithet but the lowercasing of that same word when a divine attribute. The capitalizing or lowercasing of *republic* also replicates the source, which consistently distinguishes between the word’s usage as a common noun or as an epithet for the United States. A use of *armada* to refer to the Spanish Armada has been converted from capital to lowercase because it functions in that sentence as a common noun. The regional label *the East* is capitalized here as in the source; for consistent handling of geographic references, *the Gulf Stream* has been capitalized here although lowercase in the source. Some unusual or informal appellations that were capitalized in the source publication have been converted here to lowercase: *opposition*, *altar of freedom*, *empress of islands*, *great Republic* (with *great* converted to lowercase but *Republic* remaining capitalized as in the source), and *stars and stripes of glory*. However, the name of a fictional *Order of the Stars and Stripes* remains capitalized here, as in the source, to preserve Beveridge’s metaphorical imagery. The words *Liberty* and *Civilization* are consistently capitalized here wherever they appear to be personifications, although inconsistently so in the source publication.

These edited excerpts from Beveridge’s speech are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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