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WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S 1905–1906 WORLD TOUR*

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ABSTRACT. *This article is a study of the 1905–6 world tour undertaken by William Jennings Bryan and his family. Bryan was one of the major US politicians of his era. Three times a Democratic party presidential nominee (1896, 1900, 1908), he played a prominent role in the various reform crusades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was the leading figure on the populist, agrarian wing of his party. To date, however, historians have paid little attention to his extensive travels and voluminous travel writing, in large part because hostile journalists and historians – chief among them Walter Lippmann, H. L. Mencken, and Richard Hofstadter – succeeded in casting him as an archetype of American parochialism. This study makes us aware of Bryan's published and unpublished correspondence, the memoirs of his daughter Grace, newspaper reports, and cartoons to form a reassessment of Bryan, focusing primarily on his encounters with unfamiliar cultures, and with imperialism in the Philippines, British India, and the Dutch East Indies. In so doing, it places Bryan for the first time in a global and transnational frame, and mounts a broader critique of the rigidly regional and national orientation of the US historiography of populism.*

On 27 September 1905, following a reception at the San Francisco Press Club, William Jennings Bryan boarded the steamship *Manchuria* with his wife Mary, his son William Junior, and his daughter Grace. Bryan had lost to William McKinley in the presidential contests of 1896 and 1900 but that afternoon, as he sailed through the Golden Gate bound for Hawaii and the world beyond, he remained one of the most popular and powerful politicians of his era.¹ In fact, no other Democrat came close to matching the political appeal of Nebraska's Great Commoner. When Bryan's party nominated Alton B. Parker, a sound

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¹ Grace Bryan (GB), 'William Jennings Bryan', unpublished manuscript, vol. 1, 'Notes on foreign travel', p. 5, box 57, William Jennings Bryan papers, Library of Congress (WJBLC); Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan* (2 vols., Lincoln, NE, 1964), I, p. 360.

money conservative, for the presidency in 1904 they suffered a disastrous defeat, winning only twelve states (none of them outside the south) to Theodore Roosevelt's thirty-three. Not since 1872 had the Republicans won such a crushing victory. In these circumstances, Bryan might easily have chosen to stay at home to help lick the Democratic party's wounds, and then to deploy his formidable charisma and rhetorical powers to secure the 1908 presidential nomination. But Bryan did not want to stay at home: he wanted to see the world and to be seen seeing it.² And so, together with his family, he embarked upon a great adventure, an eleven-month world tour which would take him across Asia, the Middle East and Europe.³

The first, and in many respects most important, phase of the Bryans' tour took them to Japan, Korea and the Philippines. They travelled at a politically sensitive time: Japan's victory over Russia in the war of 1904–5 had cemented its status as a major imperial power; Korea was losing its autonomy as Japan accelerated the plans for annexation which came to fruition in 1910; and parts of the Philippines – now under a mix of US civilian and military control – were unstable, while the annexation itself, which Bryan had opposed, remained unpopular. The second stage of their tour took them through the early months of 1906 to the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, Ceylon, Burma and India, giving the Bryans manifold opportunities to observe colonialism at close quarters.⁴ The third and last stretch of the tour began in the spring of 1906, when they arrived in Egypt. They visited biblical and historical sites in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine before entering Europe, touring Greece, Turkey, the Austro-Hungarian empire, Germany, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Great Britain, France and Spain. They left for home on 20 August 1906, the Rock of Gibraltar – and the North African coast – fading in the distance behind them. Nine days later, they were sailing into New York City, where they were greeted rapturously by a large crowd, among them practically every Democrat of note, as well as a good number of Nebraskans who had made a special effort to welcome home their returning hero.⁵ A few hours later, when Bryan Sr set foot once more on American soil, he became the first US politician to have circumnavigated the globe while still at the height of his powers.⁶

² For discussion of the peripatetic nature of Bryan's life and politics see Michael Kazin, *A godly hero: the life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, NY, 2006), pp. 121–41.

³ Bryan's oldest daughter, Ruth, did not travel with them. Kazin, *Godly hero*, p. 121.

⁴ Initial plans to visit Australia and New Zealand were abandoned. See William Jennings Bryan to Charles Wayland Bryan (CWB), 8 Apr. 1906, world tour correspondence, William Jennings Bryan papers, Occidental College, Los Angeles (WJBOC).

⁵ 'Bryan ashore in arms of friends', *Washington Post*, 30 Aug. 1906, p. 1; 'Cheers for Bryan as he comes home', *New York Times*, 30 Aug. 1906, p. 1; 'Commoner returns', *Los Angeles Times*, 30 Aug. 1906, p. 1; 'Sure he'll lead party in 1908', *Chicago Tribune*, 30 Aug. 1906, p. 1; 'Democracy's idol, his wife and daughter, and head of the "home folks" delegation', *Chicago Tribune*, 30 Aug. 1906, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.* Ulysses S. Grant's 1877–9 world tour failed to revive his already flagging political career.

Historians are not accustomed to thinking of William Jennings Bryan in global terms. His historiographical reputation is that of a parochial figure, a man of fixed views whose instincts and political style mirrored the purported insularity of the American heartland. Perhaps influenced by this reputation, historians have paid scant attention to Bryan's foreign adventures, despite the fact that he wrote about and publicized them extensively.⁷ Consequently, we have little sense of how overseas travel informed this major US politician's understanding of America's place in the world in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The powerful and persistent image of Bryan as an archetype of American parochialism was in large part established by three early and mid-twentieth-century authors: H. L. Mencken, Walter Lippmann and Richard Hofstadter. Each in their own way, these unusually gifted writers insisted that Bryan embodied precisely what was most backward and inward-looking in modern American political life. In so doing, they shaped interpretations not only of the meaning and significance of the life of Bryan, but also of Bryan's people, and the wider agrarian and populist movements to which his political career was connected.

Walter Lippmann captured the essence of the cosmopolitan critique of the provincial Bryan in his 1913 classic *Drift and mastery: an attempt to diagnose the current unrest* when he cast him as the prime representative of 'a nation of villagers', arguing that his creed, as expressed in his famous Cross of Gold speech at the 1896 Democratic national convention, amounted to nothing more than a defence of 'the old and simple life of America, a life that was doomed by the great organization that had come into the world'.⁸ For Lippmann—as for Mencken and Hofstadter—Bryan symbolized a dying America inhabited by people engaged in a futile struggle to resist the inexorable emergence of a modern, complex, large-scale environment. Bryan's village mentality rendered him incapable of comprehending the new scale of things,

⁷ Coletta gives the longest account to date, though his focus is chiefly on Bryan in Europe: Coletta, *Bryan*, I, pp. 360–75. See also Paxton Hibben, *The peerless leader: William Jennings Bryan* (New York, NY, 1929), pp. 264–75; Paul W. Glad, *The trumpet soundeth: William Jennings Bryan and his Democracy, 1896–1912* (Lincoln, NE, 1960); Louis W. Koenig, *Bryan: a political biography of William Jennings Bryan* (New York, NY, 1971), pp. 405–15; and Kazin, *Godly hero*, pp. 121–2, 127–31. Bryan's wife, Mary Baird Bryan, gives her account in Mary Beard Bryan and William Jennings Bryan, *The memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (2 vols., Port Washington, NY, 1925), II, pp. 308–26. Bryan's published travel writings include *Under other flags: travels, lectures, speeches* (Lincoln, NE, 1904) and *The old world and its ways* (Lincoln, NE, 1907). Works Bryan wrote while he was on his world tour include William Jennings Bryan, *Letters to a Chinese official: being a Western view of Eastern civilization* (New York, NY, 1906); *British rule in India* (Westminster, 1906); 'Individualism v. socialism', *Century Magazine*, n.s., 71 (Apr. 1906), pp. 856–9; and 'Path to peace', *The Independent*, 61 (30 Aug. 1906), pp. 483–9.

⁸ Walter Lippmann, *Drift and mastery: an attempt to diagnose the current unrest* (London, 1914), pp. 121–48, at p. 129.

and this in turn made him an object of amusement, a sort of living anachronism:

Bryan has never been able to adjust himself to the new world in which he lives. That is why he is so irresistibly funny to sophisticated newspapermen. His virtues, his habits, his ideas, are the simple, direct, shrewd qualities of early America. He is the true Don Quixote of our politics, for he moves in a world that has ceased to exist.⁹

If Lippmann's *Drift and mastery* established the parameters of a particular liberal-cosmopolitan perspective in relation to Bryan's place in American historiography, H. L. Mencken's widely syndicated reporting of the Scopes trial, filed from Dayton, Tennessee, through the sweltering summer of 1925, did much to cement a negative view of William Jennings Bryan in the popular imagination.¹⁰ Mencken first encountered Bryan when, as a twenty-four-year-old cub reporter, he heard him speak at the 1904 party national convention in St Louis. He was sufficiently impressed by Bryan's stirring 'I Have Kept the Faith' speech to compare its effect to that of listening to 'the *finale* of Beethoven's *Eroica*'.¹¹ Observing the Scopes trial at close quarters, however, convinced Mencken that Bryan's religiously inspired brand of democratic populism, with its scepticism toward science and wariness of expertise, was positively dangerous. Bryan's followers were primitives, 'deluded by a childish theology', Mencken wrote; the man himself was 'a peasant come home to the barnyard'.¹² He was uncivilized, semi-savage, Mencken implied, because he 'liked people who sweated freely, and were not debauched by the refinements of the toilet'.¹³

These critical perspectives from the 1910s and 1920s were woven more tightly into the fabric of US historiography when, in 1948, the Columbia University historian Richard Hofstadter published *The American political tradition: and the men who made it*, a book which by 1965 had sold more than 400,000 copies.¹⁴ Influenced by Lippmann and Mencken, Hofstadter dubbed Bryan 'a provincial politician following a provincial populace in provincial prejudices'.¹⁵ Writing from his perch on Morningside Heights, he reprised Lippmann's assessment of Bryan as a myopic and anachronistic figure, describing his intellect as that of 'a boy who never left home', and concluding his impish sketch with the statement that he was a man who 'long outlived his time'.¹⁶ Hofstadter reserved his most barbed criticism, however, for the Great Commoner's intellectual failings. 'What was lacking in him', Hofstadter wrote

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁰ This negative view was later reinforced by theatrical and cinematic representations of the Scopes trial, notably Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee's 1955 play *Inherit the wind*, and Stanley's Kramer's similarly titled 1960 film adaptation.

¹¹ H. L. Mencken, 'Beaters of Breasts', *Heathen days: 1890-1936* (New York, NY, 1968), pp. 283-4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ David Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: an intellectual biography* (Chicago, IL, 2006), p. 146.

¹⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *The American political tradition: and the men who made it* (New York, NY, 1948), p. 201.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 202.

in an effort to explain what he termed Bryan's mental 'torpor',¹⁷ was 'a sense of alienation':¹⁸

He never felt the excitement of intellectual discovery that comes with rejection of one's intimate environment. The revolt of the youth against paternal authority, of the village agnostic against the faith of his tribe, of the artist against the stereotypes of philistine life, of the socialist against the whole bourgeois community—such experiences were not within his ken.¹⁹

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that only Bryan's critics have overlooked the impressive scope of his world travels or doubted his capacity to learn from exposure to alien places, peoples, and cultures. Historians who have worked to establish Bryan's credentials as one of the great American reformers of his age—praising his faith in the inherent virtue of the American people; emphasizing the democratic possibilities of the wider agrarian challenge to monopoly capitalism and imperial expansion; noting his capacity to shape the direction of American political reform even when experiencing personal political defeat—have also hesitated to say that he was the most worldly, sophisticated or open-minded of men. He 'almost totally lacked any introspective quality',²⁰ Hofstadter's student Lawrence Levine wrote in the preface to *Defender of the faith*, his book on Bryan's last decade: 'He never questioned his own actions, he never sought to know his deepest motives, he never agonized about the "real" meaning of things.'²¹ 'Bryan was not a paragon of self-discovery', Michael Kazin wrote in *A godly hero*, a book from which its subject emerges as a crusading champion of the Christian left.²² Arguably, such judgements reveal as much about the therapeutic preoccupations of the post-war American Left as they do about Bryan's actual psychological make-up and capabilities.

Reading historians' assessments of Bryan's inflexible and closed mind, a mind which even his sympathizers have suggested was peculiarly unreflective, prompts the question as to why such a man might even contemplate foreign travel. One answer, presumably, is that he did not contemplate it—he just went. This study, however, proceeds on the assumption that there was more to it than that: it makes use of Bryan's private correspondence, his published travel writings and the Bryan family's scrapbooks and diaries to reassess Bryan's capacity to engage with unfamiliar people and cultures, and to place this quintessentially provincial figure in a global context. Since Bryan was a prominent critic of US imperial expansion, it focuses in particular on his encounters with, and writings about, imperialism. Finally, this article investigates Bryan's world tour as a means of examining the relationships among cosmopolitanism, parochialism and political reform in the historiography of the United States.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4.

²⁰ Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the faith: William Jennings Bryan: the last decade* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. ix.

²¹ Levine, *Defender*, p. ix.

²² Kazin, *Godly hero*, p. 127.

I

Like other comparably gifted orators of his era such as Robert M. La Follette Sr and Eugene V. Debs, William Jennings Bryan's political style demanded that he live life constantly on the move. Whether he was on the campaign trail or holding forth at Chautauqua tent meetings, he was in his element when meeting and responding to new audiences. For Bryan, therefore, overseas travel merely extended the geographical scope of what was essentially a peripatetic life. Born in 1860 in Salem in south-central Illinois, Bryan went to school in Jacksonville before receiving legal training in Chicago; he was later drawn west, settling in 1887 in the town and state with which he is most closely associated—Lincoln, Nebraska. It is true that Bryan was based in Lincoln for the greater part of his life, but his perpetual campaigning, crusading and speechmaking ensured that he was usually out of town. Growing into late middle age, he moved to Miami, attracted by the climate and the property boom; but he did not die there. His days ended in Dayton, Tennessee, shortly after the close of the Scopes trial, the victim not of a busted belly as Clarence Darrow so cruelly claimed, but, most likely, of a mix of overwork, heat exhaustion and diabetes, the disease which had also killed his father.²³ That Bryan did not feel that he had any single home in part explains his choice of burial place, Arlington Cemetery.²⁴ His private papers are also scattered, split between Lincoln, Washington DC, and Los Angeles. For a man so often caricatured as representing a fast-fading locally oriented world, Bryan was surprisingly rootless.

The Bryans had considerable experience of international travel when, six days into their tour, they approached the Hawaiian Islands, rounding the spectacular volcanic mass of Diamond Head as well-wishers—a mix of party political leaders, Elks Club members, and assorted Hawaiian dignitaries—cheered and threw garlands into the air.²⁵ In 1903–4, for example, Bryan had visited Europe with his son, William Jr, where he discussed city government in Glasgow with the Scottish labour leader John F. Burns (whom Bryan was delighted to discover was also a teetotaller), and spent Christmas in Berlin ('a splendid city with beautiful streets, parks, and public buildings'), commending the German SPD for their commitment to workers' education.²⁶ He also spent time in Ireland, France, the Low Countries, Switzerland and Italy. But without question the highlight of this trip was meeting Leo Tolstoy at his estate 130 miles south of Moscow. Bryan spoke with the novelist-sage for twelve hours.²⁷ Other American reformers had made this same pilgrimage to Yasnaya Polyana but in this case there was genuine fellow feeling between the two

²³ Ibid., p. 364 n. 101.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 297.

²⁵ GB, 'Notes', p. 5.

²⁶ Bryan, *Under other flags*, pp. 36, 68.

²⁷ Bryan's account of his meeting with Tolstoy appears in Bryan, *Under other flags*, pp. 96–108. See also Kenneth C. Wenzler, 'Tolstoy and Bryan', *Nebraska History*, 77 (1996), pp. 140–8.

men.²⁸ Tolstoy had followed Bryan's career closely since the 1896 presidential campaign, and in 1910, when he was dying, Bryan's was the only portrait he kept on his bedroom wall.²⁹

This 1903-4 tour, with its earnest discussions about municipal reform, education, direct democracy and the public ownership of railroads and utilities, fits the mould of the progressive-era 'social politics' described by Daniel T. Rodgers in his seminal *Atlantic crossings*.³⁰ Only Bryan's meetings with Irish and French bimetallists hint at the distinctly populist orientation of his progressivism.³¹ But his other travels—and certainly his 1905-6 circumnavigation—cannot be cast in this way. In total, he visited Europe four times, including a visit to Edinburgh in 1910 to attend the World Missionary Conference, a key moment in the founding of the modern ecumenical movement; but he also made several trips to Canada, three to Mexico (in 1897, 1900, and 1908) and four to the West Indies.³² According to his daughter Grace, who accompanied him on all but one of his foreign trips, he travelled through the Panama Canal twice, and made three visits to Cuba, including one, in May 1902, during which he witnessed the birth of the Cuban Republic on 20 May 1902.³³ The 1905-6 world tour by no means exhausted Bryan's appetite for world travel: in the spring of 1910, he travelled extensively through South America, stopping at major ports and meeting with business, religious and political leaders.³⁴

Why did Bryan, this prototypically small-minded man, travel so widely? For Grace Bryan, writing a biography of her father in 1941, the answer was simple: her father earnestly desired to understand how the world worked.³⁵

Father found the greatest pleasure in foreign travel. It was his only complete relaxation and recreation from the numerous demands made upon his time and energies. He did not, however, travel solely for pleasure, but rather to gain a more intimate knowledge of other peoples and their public institutions.³⁶

In fact, Bryan's motives were various, and were as much pecuniary and political as they were self-educational. Bryan sailed from San Francisco Bay knowing that he would be paid handsomely by William Randolph Hearst's newspaper chain for writing a series of weekly 'letters' describing his impressions of the places he visited and the people he met on his grand tour.³⁷ Such travel impressions were

²⁸ For comparative purposes, see Jane Addams's account of her visit to see Tolstoy in Addams, *Twenty years at Hull-House* (New York, NY, 1911), pp. 267-73.

²⁹ Kazin, *Godly hero*, p. 170.

³⁰ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age* (Princeton, NJ, 1998).

³¹ Bryan, *Under other flags*, pp. 23, 40.

³² GB, 'Notes', p. 1. For Bryan and Mexico, see Boyd Carter, 'William Jennings Bryan in Mexico', *Nebraska History*, 41 (1960), pp. 53-64; Edward H. Worthern, 'The Mexican journey of William Jennings Bryan, a good neighbor', *Nebraska History*, 59 (1978), pp. 485-500.

³³ *Ibid.* Bryan, *Under other flags*, pp. 156-70.

³⁴ Coletta, *Bryan*, II, 9-10; Kazin, *Godly hero*, p. 177.

³⁵ GB, 'Notes', p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Coletta, *Bryan*, I, p. 361.

a popular literary genre around the turn of the century, and Hearst clearly believed that material produced by his fellow Democrat would shift copy.³⁸ As well as appearing in the Hearst press and in other papers, Bryan's letters – there were forty-five in total and they were published between 19 January and 23 November 1906 – were also printed in *The Commoner*, which was edited by his brother Charles from Lincoln, Nebraska.³⁹ Bryan's income was further boosted by payments for speaking engagements at which he exploited his global reputation as one of the all-time great American orators. He was 'the greatest living orator in a nation of orators', the people of Bombay were told when Bryan arrived in that city in the spring of 1906.⁴⁰

The Hearst contract and professional speechmaking helped Bryan to pay his family's way around the world, but they also afforded him a platform from which to promote both his politics and his faith. Convinced of the power of his message of Christian love and brotherhood, the political and religious motivations for Bryan's decision to tour the globe were intermingled. Accordingly, as he travelled he spoke as often on religious as on political themes, exploiting pre-existing transnational missionary networks in order to piece together his schedule. Missionary stations, schools, and hospitals were a staple of his itinerary, which included visits to missions in Hawaii, Japan, Korea, China, Singapore, India, Egypt, Palestine and Turkey.⁴¹ If this was parochialism, then, it was parochialism on a grand scale. He believed that individual Christians, as well as what he termed 'Christian nations' had an obligation to participate in 'reforming the world'.⁴² The world was Bryan's parish.

Bryan's decision to leave the United States for almost a year was predicated on pragmatic political, as well as more idealistic and religious, grounds. In 1905–6, Bryan's ill-starred quest for the presidency was still very much in progress. It was unorthodox of Bryan – courageous even – to seek his party's presidential nomination while circling the globe, but it was also an astute political manoeuvre: there was much to be gained from being away from the hurly-burly of his party's struggle to come to terms with Theodore Roosevelt's crushing 1904 election victory. By placing himself above the fray in this way, he might portray himself as a maturing statesman, a politician who commanded the respect, as well as curiosity, of world leaders. We can never know what Bryan might have achieved politically had he stayed at home, but it is a remarkable fact that, in a period known for its stay-at-home 'front-porch' campaigns – from James A. Garfield's in 1880 to William McKinley's in 1896 and Warren Harding's in 1920 – Bryan fought for the 1908 presidential nomination while visiting Japanese shrines, Chinese tombs, Egyptian pyramids and Norwegian fjords.

³⁸ Rodgers, *Crossings*, p. 66.

³⁹ Coletta, *Bryan*, 1, p. 361.

⁴⁰ Kazin, *Godly hero*, p. 122.

⁴¹ Bryan, *Old world*, p. 470.

⁴² *The Commoner*, 6 July 1906, p. 13. For transnational missionary networks and their connection to worlds of reform, see Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the world: the creation of America's moral empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2010).

II

There is little evidence to support the view advanced by Bryan's critics that he was a man peculiarly incapable of comprehending the scale and complexity of the twentieth-century world. On the contrary, Bryan's public and private world tour correspondence suggest that he understood that the new scale of things was a great challenge, particularly to people like him who viewed it through what his daughter Grace self-consciously termed 'midwestern eyes'.⁴³ In fact, his world tour writings betray a man striving to make sense of rapid change, and seeking practically to exploit the opportunities it presented, rather than someone overwhelmed or bewildered by progress.

Bryan's first published letter, mailed from Yokohama on 10 December 1905, was printed in the US newspapers in mid-January 1906.⁴⁴ Recounting the highlights of their sea voyage, and of their visit to Hawaii, it begins with a discussion of geographic scale. Readers, Bryan proposed, should acquire for themselves a copy of a new US government map of the Pacific showing the shortest routes of travel between various points. 'The curved line indicating the northern route between San Francisco and Yokohama', Bryan noted, 'is only 4,536 miles long, while the apparently straight line between the two points is 4,791 miles long, the difference being explained by the curvature of the earth'.⁴⁵ Welcoming the technological advances that had made his world tour possible, he marvelled at how scientific progress had collapsed time and space to a degree previously unimaginable. Though he did not mention it, he might also have pointed to the map's significance as an indicator of the United States' desire to extend the reach of its power and influence in the Pacific region.

Bryan's preoccupation with matters of scale informed his description of the *Manchuria*, the steamship which took him and his family to Honolulu. It was, he wrote, 'one of the leviathans of the Pacific', and that was a fair description given that she was at that time the 'largest ship afloat under the American flag', measuring 616 feet from stern to prow, and with five decks and a dining saloon that could seat 216 passengers.⁴⁶ As well as being an enormous vessel, the *Manchuria* was splendidly luxurious (her music room was furnished in white and gold, her smoking room of Flemish oak boasted friezes depicting Dutch water scenes) and was equipped with the very latest communications technology.⁴⁷ Eagerly exploiting this latter fact, but avoiding steerage with its 'joss house' and 'opium den' (facilities laid on for the ship's predominantly Chinese crew), Bryan made use of the steamship's telegraph apparatus, using it frequently for personal and political correspondence.⁴⁸

⁴³ GB, 'Notes', p. 400.

⁴⁴ 'Around the world with William Jennings Bryan', *Washington Post*, 14 Jan. 1906, p. M3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 'Steamer Manchuria here', *New York Times*, 30 May 1904.

⁴⁸ 'Around the world with William Jennings Bryan', *Washington Post*, 14 Jan. 1906, p. M3.

In addition to being a symbol of modernity and progress, the *Manchuria* was also a product of monopoly capitalism. This was an awkward fact for Bryan since he had devoted much of his career to attacking 'the trusts', monopoly and other manifestations of concentrated economic power. The great ship, constructed in Belfast at the Harland Wolff shipyard, had cost \$3.5 million to build and had initially been paid for with the aid of a loan from J. P. Morgan, a man whose influence on US political and economic life Bryan considered to be wholly malign. However, by the time she arrived in California, ready for the Bryans to board, the *Manchuria* was in the hands of another stupendously rich titan of American capitalism, Edward Harriman, the railroad tycoon who, since 1901, had owned both the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads. Bryan mentioned the Harriman connection in his first published world tour letter and gave no sign of being discomfited by it.⁴⁹ Evidently, he considered his pact with monopoly an inevitable but acceptable cost of taking his broader political and religious message to the world.

In fact, there were only two occasions during the world tour on which Bryan intimated any unease at the extent to which his world tour activities made him dependent on monopoly capitalism. The first came on a visit to a Honolulu aquarium when his attention was caught by an octopus, that great symbol of concentrated economic power: 'It was hiding under the rocks', Bryan wrote, 'and when the attendant poked it with a stick, it darkened the water with an inky fluid, recalling the use made of the subsidized American newspapers by the trusts when attacked.'⁵⁰ The second, more serious, occasion arose on 4 July 1906 when Bryan was in London to give an Independence Day address on the subject of 'The White Man's Burden in the East'.⁵¹ At the lavish reception which preceded the speech, Bryan, while chatting amiably to other guests, was suddenly taken by the arm and introduced to a stout man in a smart suit. It was J. P. Morgan. 'Bryan? Bryan?', Morgan said, 'The name sounds familiar. But I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before.'⁵² Bryan looked narrowly at Morgan but did not respond.⁵³ Their hands touched momentarily before they went their separate ways.⁵⁴

This encounter was no doubt uncomfortable, but Morgan was a known enemy whose political position Bryan clearly understood. Much more challenging for him and his family were the early months of the world tour, the period from their arrival in Japan in mid-October 1905 to their departure from Bombay in the spring of 1906. As the Bryans journeyed through East and South Asia they were regularly exposed to unfamiliar situations which tested

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Among the audience were Prime Minister Henry Campbell Bannerman, Winston Churchill, and Alice Roosevelt Longworth. See *The Commoner*, 6 July 1906, p. 13; Alice Roosevelt Longworth, *Crowded years: reminiscences of Alice Roosevelt Longworth* (New York, NY, 1933), p. 124; Koenig, *Bryan*, pp. 408–9; Coletta, *Bryan*, 1, p. 366.

⁵² Hibben, *Peerless*, p. 270; Coletta, *Bryan*, 1, p. 366.

⁵³ Coletta, *Bryan*, 1, p. 366.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

their capacity to engage in genuine intercultural exchange, a quality his critics insisted that Bryan Sr particularly lacked. Bryan's travels through Asia also permitted him to observe at first hand, and for the first time, how imperialism functioned on the ground.

Early on the eleventh day of their tour the Bryans sailed into Yokohama Bay where they were met by the American legation from Tokyo, the American consul, Japanese officials, a smattering of US residents and their interpreter, Yashichiro Yamashita. Bryan Sr wore a silk hat in recognition of the formality of the occasion.⁵⁵ The Bryans stayed in Japan for a month: after two days in Yokohama they went to Tokyo, from where they day-tripped north to see the Buddhist shrines and temples at Nikko, before moving south and west to Osaka. Their next stop was Miyanoshta, where the owner of the Bryans's resort hotel proudly showed them the guestbook in which Ulysses S. Grant had written his signature during his 1877-9 world tour.⁵⁶ After admiring the views of Mount Fuji they continued to Kyoto, Nara and Kobe, where they took the Sanyo railroad to Shimonoseki on Honshu's westernmost edge. It was from here that the Bryans eventually boarded a steamer for Fusan, Korea.

In Japan, the Bryans exhibited a set of prejudices commonplace among white western travellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bryan Sr and his daughter Grace were convinced, for example, that the Japanese were a much more advanced people than the Koreans and Chinese. Writing from Korea, and reflecting on the barren landscape he had observed while taking the train from Fusan to Seoul, Bryan noted with approval the response of 'an intelligent son of Japan' who, when confronted with the notion that the Japanese were responsible for the abject condition of the Korean land, replied that 'as his country recovered from earthquake shocks within a few years, the Koreans should have been able to remove the traces of an invasion in less than three centuries'.⁵⁷ Koreans were 'not so alert' as the Japanese, possessed 'no extensive literature' of their own and lacked Japan's 'gorgeous temples', Bryan averred.⁵⁸ Compared to the Japanese, the Chinese were unhygienic and ill-mannered: 'The contrast between the bath-loving Japanese and the dirty, complaisant Chinese labourer is very marked', he wrote, after observing houseboat life on the Huangpu in Shanghai and on the Pearl River in Canton.⁵⁹

Again, following a conventional trope, the Bryans declared themselves completely foxed by Japanese customs but rationalized their confusion by insisting that the Japanese simply did things the opposite way round to Europeans and Americans: they served their wine hot and their soup cold; they mounted horses from the right not the left; their carpenters drew their planes

⁵⁵ GB, 'Notes', p. 401.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁵⁷ 'Bryan's experiences in the hermit kingdom, poor little Korea a bone of contention', *Washington Post*, 4 Mar. 1906, p. SM8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ 'Bryan tells about the strange customs of the people of the flowery kingdom', *Washington Post*, 18 Mar. 1906, p. M8.

and saws towards them, not away; they wrote vertically and from right to left not horizontally from left to right.⁶⁰ The food was problematic, to be sure, and chopsticks – which the Bryans gamely tried – they found impossible, but there was always rice, and this, Bryan insisted, was superior to the Chinese sort.⁶¹ Bryan found Japan to be a country of ‘many strange things’, but not all of his encounters were alienating. He was pleased to discover, for example, that Japan had an active temperance scene: a Mr Ando, head of the Tokyo branch of the national temperance society, awarded him a badge in recognition of his ‘total abstinence habits’.⁶²

One of the ironies apparent to anyone studying Bryan’s attitudes to the places and people he encountered on his world tour is that he used the very same markers of civilization and savagery to discriminate between his equals and inferiors that critics such as Lippmann and Mencken used against him and his followers at home. In addition to being extremely polite, the Japanese, Bryan noted approvingly, were meticulous in matters of personal hygiene.⁶³ They exhibited delicacy and taste in the porcelain and pottery they produced.⁶⁴ All in all, Bryan concluded, he ‘had never seen such a quiet, orderly, or self-restrained people’.⁶⁵ As we saw at the beginning of this study, it was of course precisely Bryan’s emotionalism, his perceived lack of self-restraint and the potentially disorderly potential of his brand of popular politics that Bryan’s critics feared, derided and mocked.

But for the Bryans, Japan was not wholly foreign terrain. Before they left for Korea, they made a sentimental journey, straying from the standard tourist track to visit the home village of their interpreter, Yashichiro Yamashita, fifteen miles from Kagoshima in the far south of Kyushu. The story of Yamashita’s connection to Bryan – like Tolstoy’s – is testament to the global reach of Bryan’s fame, and to the international appeal of his peculiar mix of populism, peace advocacy, and economic heterodoxy.

Yamashita was a teenager when, during the 1896 campaign, he wrote to the Bryans, addressing them as ‘My dearest American Parents’, and asking whether he might come to Nebraska in order to take Bryan’s teachings back to Japan.⁶⁶ Mary Bryan, who dealt with her husband’s substantial worldwide correspondence during the campaign, replied, telling the besotted youth that since she had three children of her own she was not in a position to adopt a Japanese son.⁶⁷ A second letter, this time addressed to ‘My dearest custodians’, told the

⁶⁰ ‘Bryan sees many strange things in Japan’, *Washington Post*, 28 Jan. 1906, p. SM5.

⁶¹ ‘Bryan describes Japan and its people’, *Washington Post*, 21 Jan. 1906, p. SMA3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ ‘Bryan describes Japan and its people’, *Washington Post*, 21 Jan. 1906, p. SMA3

⁶⁴ ‘Many interesting facts told by Mr. Bryan about things in Japan’, *Washington Post*, 11 Feb. 1906, p. SM6.

⁶⁵ ‘Bryan describes Japan and its people’, *Washington Post*, 21 Jan. 1906, p. SMA3.

⁶⁶ William Jennings Bryan, Jr, ‘My Japanese brother’, http://nishidanishida.web.fc2.com/digest_1f.htm, 1 Oct. 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Bryans that Yamashita's father had not yet sold the family farm and that as a result his plans to travel were on hold.⁶⁸ The Bryans assumed that this was the end of the matter. It came as something of a shock, therefore, when in the spring of 1898 the Bryans received a third letter in which Yamashita explained that he was now in San Francisco, struggling to scrape together funds for a train fare to Lincoln.⁶⁹ Bryan Sr contacted friends in California with a view to deterring the determined young man, but to no avail: on a cold October evening William Jennings Bryan Jr responded to a knock at the door and there stood Yamashita, hat in hand and with a large bag at his side.⁷⁰ The Bryans took him in, and a one-night stay turned eventually into more than five years, during which time Y. Bryan Yamashita, as he now called himself, graduated from the University of Nebraska.⁷¹ The Bryan family's hospitality was not unconditional since Yamashita, at his own insistence, washed dishes, polished glassware, tended the garden, and groomed the horses in order to earn his keep.⁷² But in addition to these menial tasks, he was permitted to join the family for picnics, for impromptu baseball games, and, every Sunday night, for hymn singing around the piano.⁷³

In a *Reader's Digest* article published in 1955, William Bryan Jr referred to 'Yama' as his 'Japanese Brother'.⁷⁴ He described how, half a century before, the entire population of Yamashita's village, its schools closed for the day, had turned out to welcome 'Yashichiro's American Family' as they rode on a jinrikisha between lines of children waving alternate Japanese and American flags.⁷⁵ Bryan Sr planted a double-trunked camphor tree to symbolize friendship between the two families and nations. It was almost destroyed in an air raid during the Second World War, but the tree, and the bonds of affection between Bryan and Yamashita families, survived the terrible conflict.⁷⁶ 'Even war cannot destroy the true friendship of true friends', Yamashita's daughter wrote.⁷⁷ Remembering that friendship, she allowed missionaries to hold prayer meetings at her house.⁷⁸

It would be churlish to suggest that the Bryans were not generous in the degree of hospitality they granted to Yashichiro Yamashita. That the Bryans shared not just their home but also aspects of their family life with this man – quoting Exodus, Bryan Jr referred to him as a 'stranger in a strange land' – does cut against the grain of Bryan Sr's established historiographical reputation as man of limited curiosity, uninterested in unfamiliar people and places.⁷⁹ But it should also be noted that Yamashita was a Christian stranger: whether he would have been allowed across the threshold of the Bryans's home had he followed a different faith (or none) is questionable.

⁶⁸ Ibid.⁶⁹ Ibid.⁷⁰ Ibid.⁷¹ Ibid.⁷² Ibid.⁷³ Ibid.⁷⁴ Ibid.⁷⁵ 'Bryan sees many strange things in Japan', *Washington Post*, 28 Jan. 1906, p. SM5.⁷⁶ Bryan Jr, 'My Japanese brother'.⁷⁷ Ibid.⁷⁸ Kazin, *Godly hero*, p. 129.⁷⁹ Bryan, Jr, 'My Japanese brother'.

In his published letters, Bryan repeatedly pointed to the inferiority of faiths other than his own. Shintoism ‘can hardly be called a religion’, he wrote in one of his letters from Japan, dismissing it as nothing more than ‘ancestor worship’.⁸⁰ Buddhism was losing popularity, he explained, as ‘the educated element of the Japanese population’ turned to Christianity.⁸¹ The ‘triumph of the Gospel of Love’, he predicted, equating progress with the diffusion of Christianity, ‘will open the way to a still larger triumph in Asia’.⁸² Despite the busy work of American missionaries, he held out less hope for Burma, where he accused Buddhist monks of selfishness for pursuing ‘blissful unconsciousness’ when they should instead be acting ‘in the service of [their] fellows’.⁸³ In India, he decried Hinduism for its idolatry and ‘pernicious’ caste system; Muslims, he reflected in his letter on Turkey, ‘are sluggards in intellectual pursuits’, forming the ‘lowest strata’ of the populations of the Philippines, Java, India, Egypt, Syria and Palestine.⁸⁴ Only the Christian religion, he insisted, ‘enlarges the sympathies and links each individual with all other human beings’.⁸⁵

An illustration of Bryan’s Christian chauvinism is *Letters to a Chinese official: being a Western view of Eastern civilization*, the short book he wrote midway through his world tour, as he waited in quarantine on the shores of the Suez Canal following a death on their ship.⁸⁶ While his family amused themselves by playing cribbage, collecting pebbles and sea shells, and waving to pilgrims on passing ships bound for Mecca, Bryan was busy describing Chinese officialdom as ‘notoriously corrupt’, bluntly telling his imaginary interlocutor that ‘The salient characteristic of your civilization is its irresponsibility.’⁸⁷ The Chinese education system, he went on to argue, was ‘antiquated and effete’.⁸⁸ Here Bryan adopted a posture of cosmopolitan superiority, claiming that whereas the American system brought ‘students into contact with all nations, all ages, and all climes through the teaching of history, geography and literature’, the Chinese system was ‘narrow, shallow, and provincial’.⁸⁹ In China, evidently, Bryan considered himself a man of the world representing a nation and faith whose openness others should emulate.

The circumstances that provoked Bryan to write this book further illuminate the limits of his cultural sensitivity. It was conceived as an angry riposte to *Letters from a Chinese official, being an Eastern view of Western civilization*, a critique of Christianity purportedly based on its author’s observations and travels in England.⁹⁰ Bryan assumed that the book’s anonymous author was Chinese, a mistake he perhaps would not have made if he had known that the first British edition, published in 1901, possessed the title, *Letters from John Chinaman*.⁹¹ As a

⁸⁰ Bryan, *Old world*, p. 73.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ ‘Burma and Buddhism as seen by Bryan’, *Washington Post*, 27 May 1906, p. SM2.

⁸⁴ Bryan, *Old world*, pp. 269, 380.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ Bryan, *Letters to a Chinese official*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 13; GB, ‘Notes’, p. 472.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹⁰ *Letters from a Chinese official: being an Eastern view of Western civilization* (New York, NY, 1906).

⁹¹ *Letters from John Chinaman* (London, 1901).

number of American readers immediately realized, the slim volume which had so aggravated Bryan was in fact a satire.⁹² Its author was G. Lowes Dickinson, a Cambridge historian, pacifist, religious sceptic, and sometime member of the Bloomsbury circle. Apparently unfazed by this revelation, Bryan added a short postscript to the preface of his book, admitting that had he known its author was an Englishman he might have tempered his language somewhat, but stating that he had decided to 'leave the letters as they were written' since 'it is not an individual but an argument that I am combating'.⁹³ In addition to suggesting that he still failed fully to grasp Dickinson's satirical intent, this episode highlights the extent to which Bryan's sense of 'western' superiority rested on a defence of Christian values and characteristics.

The Bryans never felt wholly at ease in China. Indeed, their visit began in unpropitious fashion when their steamer ran aground on a sandbar several miles from Tientsin (Tianjin) harbour.⁹⁴ Bryan's published letters on China describe it as a wholly alien place, whose people 'could scarcely be more different from ours'.⁹⁵ They were repulsed by its odours, nauseated by its sewers, and lived in constant fear of water-borne infection. As Grace Bryan explained in her diary, the family drank only bottled water or, when they were on the move, from a special 'water valise' – a bamboo suitcase with movable partitions.⁹⁶ (They were looked after in China by 'Luda', a Chinese servant, whom they had borrowed from an American friend in Peking: '[L]ittle bright-eyed Luda', as Grace described her, would cook for the Bryans using a small charcoal brazier placed at the back of their carriage as they travelled through rural China by train.)⁹⁷ The Bryans politely admired the city walls, Ming tombs and other historical and cultural sites they visited, but it was only when they reached Shanghai's international zone, with its 'clean broad streets, healthy water, and sewerage systems', that they felt comfortable again.⁹⁸ After a few days in Hong Kong – where they were taken by Sedan chair to enjoy the harbour views from the 1,800 foot summit of Victoria Peak – and a short trip to Canton, they set sail again, this time for the war-ravaged, US-occupied islands of the Philippines.⁹⁹

III

The Bryans were largely confined to their beds during the 690 mile voyage from Hong Kong to Manila.¹⁰⁰ Their boat caught the tail-end of a typhoon, breaking its railings, throwing its deck chairs into the ocean and causing Bryan Sr, and his wife Mary, great distress. '[M]y parents moaned together thru two days and nights of that furious storm', Grace remembered.¹⁰¹ The sea was calm, however,

⁹² For evidence that some American readers realized at the time that the author was probably not Chinese, see G. W. Lee's letter to the *New York Times*, 19 Mar. 1904, Review of Books section, p. BR186. ⁹³ *John Chinaman*, p. viii. ⁹⁴ GB, 'Notes', p. 411.

⁹⁵ 'Bryan finds China a mountainous land with mighty deserts', *Washington Post*, 11 Mar. 1906, p. M9. ⁹⁶ GB 'Notes', pp. 413-14. ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 415A.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

when, early on the morning of 21 December, their battered vessel entered Manila harbour to be met by a group of US military and political officials, who were ready to escort the family to the nearby Bay View Hotel.¹⁰² Soon they were comfortable again, enjoying the hospitality of the Elks, who hosted a lavish Christmas Eve reception in the Bryans' honour, for which the Elks clubhouse rooms were specially decorated with colourful flags and potted plants.¹⁰³ Guests enjoyed an extravagant six-course meal featuring caviar, fine wines and cigars; they were serenaded as they ate by musicians from Lieutenant Loving's constabulary band, who were playing from 'a gaily lighted gondola'.¹⁰⁴ 'The music floated up from the water in delightful cadences entrancing the guests with its charm', the *Manila American* reported.¹⁰⁵ The reception, the newspaper added in exaggerated terms, was 'one of the most brilliant social affairs in the history of the most popular organization in these Islands'.¹⁰⁶

Bryan's arrival in the Philippines marked the beginning of the most politically perilous part of his tour. He was travelling, he insisted disingenuously, as a private citizen and newspaper representative and for this reason declined an invitation to reside at the home of Acting Governor-General Henry Clay Ide, who had only recently taken that position following the departure of his unpopular and repressive predecessor, Luke Edward Wright.¹⁰⁷ On 29 December, at a banquet given in his honour, Bryan set out the position he would adopt while touring the Philippine archipelago: 'I will be listening more than usual and talking less than is my habit', he explained.¹⁰⁸ 'I speak here under limitations', he continued: 'I do not feel at home.'¹⁰⁹ Caught between his avowed opposition to colonial rule and his reluctance to make a direct call for independence – a move he considered would be inflammatory – he declared that he would restrict his comments to non-political matters until he left the islands, at which point, he said, his 'case of lockjaw' would be 'cured'.¹¹⁰

There was cowardice, perhaps, in Bryan's decision to adopt this non-political pose. Indeed, the Commoner's self-imposed silence might well be interpreted as confirming Mencken's opinion that he was a buffoon, or Lippmann's that he was out of his depth. Equally, however, Bryan's lockjaw can be understood in pragmatic terms: this cautious approach was consistent with his short-run determination to win the 1908 Democratic party presidential nomination, and with his long-range goal of establishing a reputation for international

¹⁰² Ibid. 'Bryan comes at daylight', *Manila Times*, 21 Dec. 1905, in Capt. James Moss's scrapbook, 'Album of photographs (Bryan's trip to the Philippine Islands, 1905–06)', box OV5, WJBLC.

¹⁰³ 'Aguinaldo and Bryan said howdy', n.d., clipping in Moss scrapbook, OV5, WJBLC.

¹⁰⁴ GB, 'Notes', p. 434.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ 'Bryan comes at daylight', *Manila Times*, 21 Dec. 1905, in Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBLC; Paul Kramer, *The blood of government: race, empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), pp. 291–2.

¹⁰⁸ 'Entertain Bryan', *Manila Times*, 26 Dec. 1905, in Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBLC; GB, 'Notes', p. 440.

¹⁰⁹ GB, 'Notes', p. 440.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

statesmanship. He was successful in both respects: he won the 1908 nomination with ease, and in 1913 was made Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state partly on the basis of his overseas experience. In purely political terms, therefore, there was reason in Bryan's calculation that he should hold his criticisms of the US administration of the Philippines in check on the grounds that he was engaged in a fact-finding mission and not a political campaign. Furthermore, Bryan's silence had the added benefit of preventing him from appearing to be ungrateful to the US colonial officials who had organized his visit and afforded protection not only to him but also to his family. Bryan's policy of discretion opened him to ridicule, but it also protected him from the attacks on his patriotism that would inevitably have been made had he openly criticized the US imperial subjugation of the Philippines before the conclusion of his 'fact-finding' tour.

Aided by their contacts with US civilian and military authorities, the Bryans were able to explore the Philippine archipelago much more thoroughly than most foreign visitors. First, they travelled through Luzon in the more Christian and Spanish-influenced north. They were struck by the warmth of their reception: on a railway excursion from Manila through Gapan, Malolos and Pasig the track was lined by Filipinos bearing placards proclaiming 'Welcome to Our Saviour', 'Champion of Liberty' and 'Want Independence as soon as possible'.¹¹¹ At Malolos, a stronghold of the independence movement, Bryan was introduced as 'the real champion of a democratic people, the true defender of the rights of the people'.¹¹² Here, again, he demurred from directly tackling political questions, choosing instead to praise the patriotism and good intentions of his Republican party opponents.¹¹³ On this, and on other occasions at which he spoke, Bryan was made powerfully aware of the high expectations some Filipinos invested in his visit.¹¹⁴

In addition to touring Luzon, the Bryans also visited the central and southern islands of the Philippine archipelago. Accordingly, on 3 January, they departed from Manila aboard the *Polillo*, a coastguard steamer which had been requisitioned especially for their benefit as it was able to navigate the narrow straits, small harbours and treacherous waters around the southern islands.¹¹⁵ In the central Visayan Islands, Bryan spoke at Bacolod, Cebu and Iloilo. At Bacolod, having run aground, they were stranded at sea until they were pulled ashore by a water buffalo drawing a two-wheeled cart; at Cebu, accompanied by the acting governor-general, they were met by 'crowds of natives'; at Iloilo, Bryan visited a textile factory causing him to reflect on the injustice of US tariff policies, especially when combined with the harsh effects of the Chinese boycott on

¹¹¹ 'Entertain Bryan', *Manila Times*, 26 Dec. 1905; GB, 'Notes', p. 437.

¹¹² Bryan, *Old world*, p. 168.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹¹⁴ See for example the text of Joaquin Jortich's 5 Jan. 1906 speech at Bacolod in Bryan, *Old world*, p. 171.

¹¹⁵ 'Itinerary of trip through the southern islands of the Honorable William Jennings Bryan and party', Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBLC.

American goods.¹¹⁶ On the chiefly animist and Muslim southern islands of Mindanao and Sulu, they travelled with a military escort led by Generals Leonard Wood and Henry C. Corbin. They began at Camp Overton on the north coast of Mindanao, then moved south through Malabang to Cotabato, and then west to Zamboanga, which was the capital city of the Moro Province, one of the two special provinces created by US authorities as part of their bifurcated state-building strategy by which ‘non-Christian tribes’ and Hispanicized Filipinos were governed separately.¹¹⁷ The Bryans then island-hopped along the Sulu archipelago: their first stop was at Jolo, where, as [Figure 1](#) shows, they arrived on horseback to meet Jamal-ul Kiram II, the sultan of Sulu.¹¹⁸

Under the 1899 Bates Agreement, the sultan had ceded much of his domain’s sovereignty in return for US recognition of Sulu customs, laws and tribute payments.¹¹⁹ Grace Bryan was thoroughly disorientated by the experience of meeting the sultan, whose extravagantly colourful attire she could only compare to that of ‘a doorman in front of some American hotel’.¹²⁰ Such domesticating similes pepper her account of this leg of the tour, bringing Mindanao’s ‘jungleland’, ‘weird shadows’ and ‘brilliant tropical moon’ into what was for her a comprehensible frame.¹²¹ They then crossed the Sulu Sea to Sandakan and Kudat on the north-east coast of Borneo.¹²² It was from Kudat, on 15 January, that the Bryans departed the Philippines, boarding the north German Lloyd steamer *Marudu* bound for Singapore.¹²³

Bryan’s views on the merits of imperialism in general – and on US imperial expansion in particular – did not change in any significant way as a result of his travels. Before visiting the Philippines, he had believed that all people had a god-given capacity to govern themselves, even if this capacity varied among different peoples. ‘Other nations may dream of wars of conquest and of distant dependencies governed by external force; not so with the United States’, he said in 1899, a matter of days before the outbreak of the Philippine–American war.¹²⁴ ‘The fruits of imperialism’, he added ‘must be left to the subjects of monarchy.’¹²⁵ Bryan’s tour did however give him confidence that views previously held on an abstract basis withstood practical examination on the ground. He was careful to thank members of the Taft Commission for their personal kindness to him and his family, and to insist that the American officials

¹¹⁶ GB, ‘Notes’, p. 443; ‘Bryan impressed with the northern Philippines and their people’, *Washington Post*, 8 Apr. 1906, p. SM6.

¹¹⁷ ‘Itinerary’, Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBPLC; Kramer, *Blood of government*, pp. 214–15.

¹¹⁸ Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBLC. ¹¹⁹ Kramer, *Blood of government*, p. 217.

¹²⁰ GB, ‘Notes’, p. 446.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 445–6.

¹²² ‘Itinerary’, Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBLC. For the Bryans’ meeting with the sultan of Sulu see GB, ‘Notes’, pp. 446–7, and ‘Bryan visits the wild Moro country and calls upon the sultan of Sulu’, *Washington Post*, 15 Apr. 1906, p. F8.

¹²³ ‘Itinerary’, Moss scrapbook, box OV5, WJBLC.

¹²⁴ Bryan, ‘Naboth’s vineyard’, *Under other flags*, p. 361.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1. Members of the Bryan family arrive at the home of the sultan of Sulu. Grace Bryan is at the front (4), followed by her mother Mary (3). William Jennings Bryan Jr is further back (1).

ruling the islands were 'men of good character, ability, and standing', but in the published letters he wrote on the Philippines he was clear that colonialism was an evil from which all manner of injustice inevitably flowed.¹²⁶ Noting that the overwhelming majority of Filipinos wanted the Americans out of their country without delay, he argued that his countrymen had no business ruling over a land of which they were largely ignorant.¹²⁷ The people of the Philippines were fighting for independence long before most Americans knew where it was on the map, he observed.¹²⁸ The United States, he proposed, should immediately declare its intention to recognize Philippine independence, a goal he thought was achievable within five years.¹²⁹ It would be a negation of all that republican government stood for, he concluded, if the United States were to put its economic self-interest ahead of the Filipino people's desire for self-rule.¹³⁰

It is important to acknowledge the circumscribed character of Bryan's anti-imperialism. In no way, for example, did it prevent him from seeing the world in racially hierarchical terms. As Eric Love has shown, in this period the dynamics of racial and imperial ideologies did not move in lockstep but were, rather,

¹²⁶ 'Bryan impressed with the northern Philippines and their people', *Washington Post*, 8 Apr. 1906, p. SM6.

¹²⁷ 'Self-government for Filipinos says Bryan', *Washington Post*, 22 Apr. 1906, p. RA12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

often discordant, or even antagonistic to one another.¹³¹ This applied also to the relationship between race and anti-imperialism: Bryan took issue with proponents of US expansion not because he believed non-white people were the equal of their colonial masters – he did not – but because he thought that imperial rule was inherently corrupting, and that as such it was inimical to American democracy. He did not question the racialized division of the Philippine colonial state between Spanish-influenced lowland areas, which were deemed to be evolving toward self-rule, and ‘peripheral’ special provinces ruled militarily on account of the ‘savage’ characteristics of its people. In fact, he began his first letter from the Philippines by endorsing the logic of this division, writing that it was in the predominantly Catholic northern islands that one could find ‘practically all of the civilization of the Philippines’.¹³² He expanded upon this theme in a second letter, in which he ruminated on the problem of how to govern Mindanao’s ‘warlike tribes’, in this way adopting wholesale the language deployed by American colonizers to legitimate military rule.¹³³ And in a third letter setting out how the Philippines’ path to independence should be navigated, he made Jim Crow-style disenfranchisement a pillar of his recommended policy, arguing that suffrage restrictions be used to exclude the ‘most ignorant’ inhabitants of the archipelago from the democratic process.¹³⁴ This kind of limited democracy worked well, he claimed – drawing on the experience of his previous travels – in both Mexico and Japan.¹³⁵ Grace Bryan, too, thought it natural to discriminate between civilized Christians and uncivilized others. In her account of the tour, she wrote that whereas ‘many people’ in the north were ‘as cultured and refined’ as Americans, ‘the Moros’ practised ‘a degraded Mohammedism’.¹³⁶

As he had promised it would, Bryan’s lockjaw healed immediately upon his departure from the Philippines. Now he was free to talk, and sure enough, as he toured the Dutch East Indies and British India through the early months of 1906, he ventured a series of stinging attacks on imperialism. Even so, he and his family continued to enjoy lavish hospitality laid on by colonial officials. In Java, the Bryans spent time in hotels and at the American consulate, but they were also invited by Governor-General Johannes van Heutsz to dine at the Dutch colonial headquarters at Buitenzorg amid the splendour of its world-famous botanical gardens.¹³⁷ Here, they marvelled at the abundance of

¹³¹ Eric Love, *Race over empire: racism and U. S. imperialism, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

¹³² ‘Bryan impressed with the northern Philippines and their people’, *Washington Post*, 8 Apr. 1906, p. SM6.

¹³³ ‘Bryan visits the wild Moro country and calls upon the sultan of Sulu’, *Washington Post*, 15 Apr. 1906, p. F8.

¹³⁴ ‘Self-government for Filipinos says Bryan’, *Washington Post*, 22 Apr. 1906, p. RA12. For a critical appraisal of Bryan’s racial thought, see Willard H. Smith, ‘William Jennings Bryan and racism’, *Journal of Negro History*, 54 (1969), pp. 127–49.

¹³⁵ ‘Self-government for Filipinos says Bryan’, *Washington Post*, 22 Apr. 1906, p. RA12.

¹³⁶ GB, ‘Notes’, p. 442.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 448–9.

nature in what they interpreted as a tropical 'Eden', sampled unfamiliar fruits such as the mangosteen and rambutan, and collected seeds which they sent back to Fairview, their home in Lincoln, Nebraska.¹³⁸ They were taken to the palace, Grace remembered, in a horse-drawn coach with liveried footmen.¹³⁹ Bryan Sr, however, did not interpret the Dutch colonial system in such fairy-tale terms. He wrote that the Dutch system was exploitative and that its malign objective was to strip as much value from the land and people without any consideration for the improvement of either the environment or the people.¹⁴⁰ Bryan observed in the Dutch empire the coalescence of the two great evils against which he crusaded throughout his political career: monopoly and imperialism. In one of his published letters he quoted an exchange with 'an intelligent Hollander' whom he had asked to tell him what the Dutch had taught the Javanese: 'We have taught them to pay us our money', the Dutchman said.¹⁴¹ 'The Dutch have charged a high price for the services rendered and have given little attention to the intellectual and moral improvement of the people', Bryan concluded.¹⁴²

In Bryan's judgement, British rule in India was no less exploitative or unjust. He had always been unconvinced by the notion – advanced by US expansionists in the approach to the Philippine War – that the British empire set a benign example which the United States might do well to follow. His travels in India, where he met with leading colonial officials (including the viceroy of India, Lord Minto, and provincial governors La Touche, Frazer and Lamington) and was invited to examine the British blue books, confirmed him in this view.¹⁴³ The fundamental problem, he argued, was that the Raj was ruled only for the benefit and profit of the British people and that its colonial administrators were accountable only to the British people, not to 'the natives' of India.¹⁴⁴ This, Bryan wrote, made the government of British India 'as arbitrary and despotic' as that of Russia, except that whereas Russia was ruled by the Russians, India was administered 'by an alien people'.¹⁴⁵

IV

On 31 March 1906, the Bryans left India from Bombay on the P&O steamer *Persia* bound for Cairo, Egypt.¹⁴⁶ They had now completed the most politically charged portion of their tour. What remained of their trip consisted largely of conventional tourism, with only the occasional detour, as when, in mid-June, Bryan dashed from Berlin through Poland to Russia in order to witness the new Russian Duma in session, and to admire St Petersburg's churches, parks and,

¹³⁸ 'Java, grand with nature's beauty is alike productive in vegetation', *Washington Post*, 6 May 1906, p. B4.

¹³⁹ GB, 'Notes', p. 449.

¹⁴⁰ 'Mr. Bryan criticizes Dutch colonial East Indies system', *Washington Post*, 13 May 1906, p. MG5.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Bryan, *Old world*, pp. 296-7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 301.

¹⁴⁶ WJB to CWB, 20 Mar. 1906, world tour correspondence, WJBOC.

especially, its horses, which he considered the best outside the United States.¹⁴⁷ In this period, through the late spring and summer of 1906, Bryan gave the outward impression that he had no interest in his party's presidential nomination contest. But behind the scenes, as he made his way through the Middle East and Europe, he continued to correspond with his brother Charles in order to keep up with political developments at home, as well as to provide updates on his writing and travelling schedule, and to discuss family matters. On 8 April, for example, he wrote that he considered his final letter on India his 'special pet' because it contained 'some arguments against imperialism we can use to our advantage'.¹⁴⁸ Later that same month, he wrote from the Shepherd Hotel in Cairo enclosing cucumber seeds (which he instructed his brother to plant at his Fairview home) and some 4,000-year-old wheat grains from the Nile Valley.¹⁴⁹ In a second letter, he urged Charles to donate up to \$500 to 'help sufferers' from the San Francisco earthquake.¹⁵⁰ Writing from Haifa on 26 April, he complained that Turkish censors had confiscated his copy of the Koran while also rejoicing at the news that his friend and political ally, James Dahlman, had been elected mayor of Omaha.¹⁵¹

The US newspaper press watched Bryan intently as he toured Egypt's tombs, temples, and pyramids in April 1906. Cartoonists took particular delight in his visit to the Great Sphinx at Giza, a subject which gave them the opportunity to speculate as to his intentions and prospects. In truth, however, the Great Commoner made an unconvincing Sphinx. It is hard, in fact, to think of a less inscrutable politician than William Jennings Bryan. But as the cartoon below suggests, detachment from the cut and thrust of domestic party politics did play to his advantage as he manoeuvred himself toward securing his party's presidential nomination for a third time.¹⁵² In February 1906, there had been a brief boom for Woodrow Wilson, but it proved weak and soon dissipated.¹⁵³ Wilson apart, few Democrats posed any serious threat to Bryan. Realizing this, Bryan adopted a studied policy of outward indifference towards domestic political matters while at same time taking cautious steps to shore up cross-party support. In April, for example, he wrote an article for *The Century Magazine* entitled 'Individualism vs. socialism'. Designed to reassure conservatives, it argued that 'the trust magnates' and 'the socialists' were enemies of individualism who were equally at fault for promoting monopoly, though they did so for very different reasons.¹⁵⁴ In June, by which time he was in Norway attending the coronation of King Haakon VII, reporters pressed Bryan to respond to the

¹⁴⁷ Bryan, *Old world*, pp. 417–18.

¹⁴⁸ WJB to CWB, 20 Mar. 1906, world tour correspondence, WJBOC.

¹⁴⁹ WJB to CWB, Apr. 1906, world tour correspondence, WJBOC.

¹⁵⁰ WJB to CWB, Apr. 1906, world tour correspondence, WJBOC.

¹⁵¹ WJB to CWB, 26 Apr. 1906, world tour correspondence, WJBOC.

¹⁵² 'A letter from the home folks', *Sioux City Journal*, 16 May 1906, Scrapbooks, Cartoons, OV2, WJBLC.

¹⁵³ Coletta, *Bryan*, 1, p. 365.

¹⁵⁴ Bryan, 'Individualism vs. socialism', pp. 856–9.



Fig. 2. This cartoon, published in the *Sioux City Journal* on 16 May 1906, shows Bryan seated at the foot of the Great Sphinx at Giza, reading a letter from Miss Democracy and Uncle Sam.

news that a number of states had endorsed him for the 1908 presidency, but he fended them off, pretending that these events were of no particular importance, and insisting that it was in any case too soon to take such things seriously.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Coletta, *Bryan*, I, p. 365.

On the whole, Bryan's tour was politically effective. But it did little to shift the fixed view of a largely hostile press – a view later reinforced by critical historians – that Bryan was an unsophisticated and parochial man. Cartoonists exploited the world tour as an opportunity to contrast a simpleton Bryan – portrayed as the very epitome of rural Midwestern simplicity – hobnobbing with presidents and consorting with emperors, princes, and kings.

The fact that Bryan had never been a farmer did not matter remotely: the juxtaposition of opposites was too rich with comic possibility to resist. In [Figure 3](#), for example, Bryan is depicted in hayseed garb chatting amiably with King Edward VII on an imagined 'return visit' in which the British monarch assesses his new friend's chances of securing the presidential nomination.¹⁵⁶ In [Figure 4](#), Bryan returns from his tour as an exaggerated dandy, his effete gestures and extravagant clothing masking the 'savage' within.¹⁵⁷ Note that his suitcase label describes him as a 'datto', a reference to the Muslim *datus* of Mindanao who had led resistance to both Spanish and US imperial rule.¹⁵⁸

In addition to being ridiculed in these ways by critics at home, Bryan had difficulty convincing some of his foreign hosts that he was a cultivated man. In London, for instance, nearing the end of his tour and moving primarily among aristocrats and elite politicians, he was received with more warmth and seriousness than his political opponents expected, but was still met with routine condescension. Granted an audience with King Edward VII, he was judged to be 'agreeable and intelligent but a little gaseous, you know'.¹⁵⁹ Whitelaw Reid, the US ambassador to the court of St James who took charge of arrangements for Bryan's visit to London, commented that Bryan 'like all half-educated people . . . dogmatized dangerously on a multitude of topics'.¹⁶⁰ (Reid, an Ohio Republican, especially abhorred Bryan's anti-imperialism and currency reform ideas.)¹⁶¹ The minister of foreign affairs, Edward Grey, whose wife had recently been killed in a tragic accident, nevertheless requested a private talk with Bryan. '[H]e does talk interminably', Grey complained.¹⁶²

Bryan did, however, have some defenders among serious observers of the political scene. President Theodore Roosevelt, for example, thought that the world tour had both expanded Bryan's horizons and improved his political prospects. 'I feel that his travels around the world have broadened him immensely', Roosevelt wrote to Whitelaw Reid on 27 July 1906, 'and that for this among other reasons he would be a far less dangerous man now than he would have been ten years ago'.¹⁶³ The president's overall assessment was not entirely positive: he still thought him 'a weak man'. Bryan, he correctly predicted, would be defeated by 'Taft, Root or Cannon'.¹⁶⁴ In November 1908, having

¹⁵⁶ 'The return visit', *Chicago News*, 30 July 1906, Scrapbooks, Cartoons, OV2, WJBLC.

¹⁵⁷ Untitled cartoon, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 June 1906, Scrapbooks, Cartoons, OV2, WJBLC.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Coletta, *Bryan*, I, p. 367.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 366.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 367.

¹⁶³ Theodore Roosevelt to Whitelaw Reid, 27 July 1906, Samuel Eliot Morison, ed., *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (8 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1951–4), v, pp. 338–9.



Fig. 3. A *Chicago News* cartoon imagines a 'The Return Visit' at which Bryan and King Edward VII discuss the former's presidential prospects.

fought a lacklustre campaign which failed to generate the excitement of his previous efforts, Bryan was soundly defeated by William Howard Taft, who won 51.6 per cent of the popular vote to Bryan's 43 per cent, and 321 electoral college votes to Bryan's 162.



Fig. 4. This *Philadelphia Inquirer* cartoon depicts Bryan as a dandy whose refined dress and gestures conceal his inner 'datto'.

V

William Jennings Bryan was not a model cosmopolitan in the mould of Barack Obama, whose early twenty-first-century autobiographical writings set a high bar in terms of their reflective qualities, transnational reach and complex sensibility. He made no great effort to estrange himself from his own culture. Indeed, Bryan's world tour letters can be read in such a way as to support the view – so entertainingly elaborated by Walter Lippmann, H. L. Mencken and Richard Hofstadter in the first half of the twentieth century – that Nebraska's Great Commoner was an uncommonly parochial man. Written in haste, for profit, and to an uninspiring formula, Bryan's letters home do little to burnish his reputation as a world citizen. But that is hardly surprising. After all, he was a product of the nineteenth-century American Midwest, a monoglot for whom

progress connoted not a cosmopolitan ethic by which cultural, religious and other differences are granted equal respect, or at least afforded recognition and as such tolerated, but rather the inexorable advance, wave upon wave, of Christian civilization. An able exponent of moral and political reform, Bryan envisioned the globe as a giant parish to be preached to, enlightened, wondered at, and finally encompassed by Christian love, values, and ideals. As Ian Tyrrell and others have shown, this view was not unusual among late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North American and European reformers.¹⁶⁵

The novelty of Bryan's tour, however, should not be underestimated. He took a bold and at least partially successful step when he decided to become the first politician to campaign for his party's presidential nomination while circumnavigating globe. He won the 1908 nomination, and in the period 1913-15 played an important role in international affairs as Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state. And while his domestic critics and opponents stayed at home to mock his efforts to see more of the world, Bryan was meeting revolutionary leaders in the Philippines, castigating the Dutch and British for the injustices of empire, reading the Koran, and observing the Russian Duma. Furthermore, the globe that emerges from Bryan's letters is not necessarily any more parochial than that of other American politicians who would follow in his pioneering wake.¹⁶⁶ As Daniel T. Rodgers has noted, another defeated Democratic party candidate, Adlai Stevenson, had a more cosmopolitan upbringing than did Bryan, but the reports he issued on returning from his 1953 world tour, with their rhetoric of responsibilities, ordeals, dangers, and burdens, were, if anything, more provincial than Bryan's, reflecting 'the inward-looking globalism of cold-war progressive politics'.¹⁶⁷

The purpose of this article has not been to defend Bryan so much as to examine the 1905-6 world tour in order to present him in a new global and transnational context, and in doing so to complicate historians' understanding of a figure who has been subjected as often to caricature as to serious scholarly scrutiny. The historiography of Bryan—and indeed of the wider populist movement with which he is associated—remains largely confined within the established grooves of a rigidly national historiography, shifting back and forth as it does between those who see in Bryan and his followers the radical potential of the late nineteenth-century agrarian revolt, and those for whom he represents all that the complex, large-scale world of the twentieth century necessarily displaced. The global Bryan we have glimpsed—a man with friends and admirers on many continents—does not sit comfortably within this accepted frame.

Far from rejecting complexity and scale, as Lippmann, Mencken and Hofstadter alleged, Bryan strove in pragmatic fashion to navigate and make sense of the fast-changing world in which he lived. He was not, as Lippmann,

¹⁶⁵ Tyrrell, *Reforming the world*.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

¹⁶⁶ Rodgers, *Crossings*, p. 503-4.

argued, a Don Quixote figure hopelessly out of touch with modern realities. In fact, in some respects he was a peculiarly global figure. The remarkable 1896 presidential campaign made Bryan a worldwide celebrity, a name to conjure with from Moscow to Bombay and Tokyo. What is more, Bryan was in a sense created by global forces: his career took off precisely because it was in the 1890s that a world depression – the first of its kind – created economic conditions ripe for exploitation by politicians capable of harnessing the wave of agrarian discontent which swept across the world in that troubled decade. Historians might profit considerably, it has been argued here, from further investigating the global dimensions not only of the life of Bryan, and other comparable figures both within and without the United States, but also of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century populism. In these ways, historians might unshackle their own village minds. Otherwise they will be the ones tilting at windmills.