In the spring and summer of 1898 the United States went to war with Spain. In the hills of Cuba and on the waters of the Philippines, the Americans were victorious. The announced reason for the war was the bad treatment of the Cuban people by their Spanish masters. There was, of course, more to the story, but the quick victory left most Americans proud and excited. The United States had suddenly become a major world power.

But what should America do with these newly acquired islands? In the next few years Cuba was granted a kind of semi-independence. The Philippine Islands were another matter. Located across the Pacific Ocean, some 7,000 miles from Washington DC, many Americans, including President McKinley, had trouble finding the Philippines on a map. After the destruction of the Spanish fleet by Admiral George Dewey in Manila Bay, 11,000 American sailors and soldiers marched into Manila. It was not clear whether they had come to liberate or occupy the Filipino people.

Filipino insurgents had been fighting for independence against the Spanish for several years. These Filipinos believed that the Americans were coming to liberate. Their general, Emilio Aguinaldo, expected to march into Manila hand-in-hand with the US troops. When the Americans would not allow this, Aguinaldo felt betrayed.

In October 1898 a conference was held in Paris to write a peace treaty. Because America had won the war with Spain, America held most of the cards. The US had three choices regarding the Philippines - hand the islands back to Spain, give the Philippines its independence, or annex the Philippines under some kind of American government. The United States decided that it would annex.

A treaty was hammered out and signed. On February 6, 1899, it went before the US Senate for ratification. Needing a two-thirds majority, the treaty passed by one vote. The decision by the US to annex the Philippines was not popular with the insurgents in Manila. Aguinaldo and his men now turned their guns on the Americans.

Back home, some Americans were equally unhappy. Anti-imperialists like Andrew Carnegie, ex-President Grover Cleveland, and author Mark Twain spoke out strongly against the decision. They feared taking the Philippines was a step towards creating an American empire. Others, led by President William McKinley and war hero Teddy Roosevelt, argued strongly that the US had no choice but to annex.

Now for your task. The date is February 7, 1899, the day after the Senate vote to annex. You are a member that Senate and want your ideas to be on record. Examine the four documents that follow as well as the cartoon in the Hook Exercise. Prepare a short speech to be delivered on the Senate floor in which you address the question: Should the United States have annexed the Philippines?
Document A

Source: Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League, October 1899.

Note: A platform is a series of positions or beliefs that a group or political party fights for.

We earnestly condemn the policy of the present national administration in the Philippines. It seeks to extinguish the spirit of 1776 in those islands. We deplore the sacrifice of our soldiers and sailors, whose bravery deserves admiration even in an unjust war. We denounce the slaughter of the Filipinos as a needless horror. We protest against the extension of American sovereignty by Spanish methods....

We hold with Abraham Lincoln, that "no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. When the white man governs himself, that is self-government, but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government - that is despotism (rule by a tyrant)."

Document Analysis

1. Generally speaking, what does an anti-imperialist believe?

2. This platform fears that the American governors in the Philippines want to get rid of "the spirit of 1776" in the islands. What does this mean?

3. Does the Anti-Imperialist League believe Abraham Lincoln would have supported the annexation of the Philippines? Explain.

4. How does this document help you answer the question, "Should the United States have annexed the Philippines?"
Document B

Source: Albert J. Beveridge, "The March of the Flag." Campaign speech while running for US Senate in Indiana, September 16, 1898.

The opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, The rule ... that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent.... Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, human, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody (Spanish) rule ... from which we have rescued them?

... (D)o 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, with Germany, England, Japan hungering for them?...

Wonderfully has God guided us.... We can not retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save ... for liberty and civilization.

Document Analysis

1. What does Albert Beveridge say about governing people without their approval?

2. Beveridge says America should not give back the Philippines to "the reeking hands from which we have taken them." What are "reeking hands" and whose hands were they?

3. According to Beveridge, if we let the Philippines go, who will gobble them up?

4. What is Providence, and, according to Beveridge, what does Providence have to do with America and the Philippines? (Hint: When Providence is capitalized it has a special meaning.)
Document C


I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed (to) Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way— I don’t know how it was but it came:

(1) that we could not give (the Philippines) back to Spain— that would be cowardly and dishonorable;  
(2) that we could not turn them over to France and Germany— our commercial rivals in the Orient— that would be bad business and discreditable;  
(3) that we could not leave them to themselves— they were unfit for self-government— and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain’s was;  
and  
(4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellowmen for whom Christ also died.

And then I went to bed, and went to sleep and slept soundly.

Document Analysis

1. In your own words, what reasons does McKinley give for keeping the Philippines?

2. Which reason do you think makes the most sense?

3. Which reason do you think makes the least sense?
What is our title to the Philippine Islands?... When we made allies of the Filipinos and armed them to fight against Spain, we disputed Spain's title.... There can be no doubt that ... we had full knowledge that they were fighting for their own independence....

Some argue that American rule in the Philippine Islands will result in the better education of the Filipinos. Be not deceived.... (We) dare not educate them lest they learn to read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States and mock us for our inconsistency.

... (A) war of conquest is as unwise as it is unrighteous.... It is not necessary to own people in order to trade with them....

Imperialism finds no warrant in the Bible. The command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," has no Gatling gun attachment....

Document Analysis

1. What is William Jennings Bryan's general position on annexing the Philippines?

2. Why does Bryan say "we dare not educate" the Filipinos?

3. Some Americans argued that it was necessary to take colonies in order to get rich. How does Bryan answer this?

4. What does Bryan mean when he says there is "no Gatling gun attachment" to preaching the Bible?