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Henry Adams's Protean Views of the American Empire, 1890–1905

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Abstract

In the history of the Gilded Age and its geopolitics, Henry Adams has a reputation for being an imperialist. While not universally subscribed to by historians, this characterization has waxed sufficiently as to eclipse Adams's more complex, even contradictory, record on the American Empire. The evidence I will marshal will not prove that Adams was actually an anti-imperialist, but it will reveal the protean nature of Adams's views of the American Empire. To get a grip on this relatively unexamined aspect of Adams's thought, I will analyze his correspondence during the last decade of the nineteenth century in which he criticized the extension of American power across the Pacific, particularly in regard to its political economy, religion, and civilization. With the onset of the American Filipino War, Adams raged at the news of American atrocities. This paper shows that Adams's outrage was part of an incipient civilizational ideology, one that neither materialized into an attachment to the anti-imperialist cause nor accepted the vaunted superiority of the West. Even though Adams possessed no principle to guide his thinking on the empire, his pessimistic evaluation of the extension of American power is enough to reconsider his reputation as an imperialist.

Keywords: Henry Adams; political economy; religion; Philippines; American empire

Introduction

In American historiography of the Gilded Age and its geopolitics, Henry Adams has a reputation for being an imperialist. In 1965, Richard Hofstadter listed Adams alongside genuine imperialists like Theodore Roosevelt, John Hay, and Albert Beveridge in "Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny."[1] Several years later, Henry Graff claimed in *American Imperialism and the Philippine Insurrection* that Adams, like the generation of which he was a part, made the architect of naval power Alfred Mahan his "oracle."[2] In 1996, John Carlos Rowe wrote that "Adams was an active participant in the crucial diplomatic negotiations that established the United States as the leading economic and political power from the end of the Spanish-American War and the annexation of the Philippines to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905."[3] More recently, John Orr has written that "despite awareness of the effects of Western imperialism on native cultures, he [Adams] could not divest himself of his own imperialist mindset."[4] Although some scholars have contravened this image by depicting an Adams more sensitive to the voice

of colonized people, the prevailing view is that Adams either implicitly or explicitly supported the American Empire.[5]

The evidence I will marshal here will not prove that Adams was actually an anti-imperialist, but it will reveal his more complex record on this contested subject. From the late nineteenth century to the eve of World War I, the question of an American Empire divided the public mind: Imperialists, missionaries, and businessmen advocated the acquisition of new territories; professors, novelists, and progressive reformers opposed the creation of new dependencies. Henry Adams straddled these rival tendencies.

In what follows, I examine Adams's critical response to American missionary presence in the Pacific and expansive foreign policy in Cuba, the Philippines, and China around the turn of the twentieth century. While visiting a number of Pacific Islands, Adams responded negatively to Hawaii's Sabbatarian culture. Adams was equally disturbed by the penetration of America's political economy throughout the Pacific, symbolized by Hay's Open Door policy with China.

Encompassing the American religious and economic presence in the Pacific was the influence of Western civilization, which Adams held to be responsible for the depopulation of native societies. Saddened by the extermination of natives throughout the Pacific, Adams was also outraged by atrocities committed by Americans during the Spanish American War in the Philippines. His anti-imperial sentiment is as explicit as Mark Twain's or George Hoar's or William James's. Although Adams did not develop a consistent body of thought on empire, he did advocate for the independence of Cuba and the American withdrawal from the Philippines. In doing so, Adams implicitly recognized the right of Cubans and Filipinos to control their own nation's destiny. The analysis of Adams's rhetoric will help situate him between anti-imperialists like Twain, on the one hand, and imperialists like Roosevelt, on the other. Neither a consistent critic of empire nor its full-throated supporter, Adams will emerge as a moderate, one that was too close to the sources of political power to fully develop an independent geopolitics, but far enough to doubt the superiority of a Western civilization.

Adams's declensionist discourse of civilization placed him outside the bounds of respected opinion. When combined with the anti-civilization rhetoric of Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gauguin (to be explored elsewhere), Adams's writing reveals a perspective that is unique and challenging. It is unique because, as Frank Ninkovich reminds us, most American intellectuals supported empire and the civilization that buttressed it.[6] Adams's challenge consists in his critiquing prominent features of this civilization, such as its political economy and missionary Christianity. Once fully examined, Adams's rhetoric on empire substantially weakens the contention by scholars that he fully supported the extension of American power around the world. This article will show that Adams's geopolitical thinking was burdened by considerable doubts regarding American economic, military, and religious powers.

Adams's skepticism regarding empire adds nuance to the Gilded Age historiography because, to date, scholars have emphasized the voices of imperialists and/or anti-imperialists. Since Adams's views changed according to circumstance, his writing on foreign policy has been largely overlooked because it cannot be easily slotted into either ideological camp. Absent from a body of literature, Adams was an imperialist whose reputation was built upon little more than his personal association with power brokers, implicit support for expansion, and an undisciplined rhetorical style.[7] A serious consideration of Adams's critique of empire resets the scales, producing a thinker whose foreign policy was shaped by his time, but not determined by it. Significantly, Adams's visit to the

places where American power was operative shaped his critical conclusions. His example of an informed commentator with actual experience on the ground is a challenge to anyone wishing to understand imperial might.

In glimpsing an Adams who qualified his views regarding the American Empire, we see how someone close to Secretary of State John Hay and President Theodore Roosevelt, not to mention numerous other high-ranking political and cultural figures, could adopt a foreign policy position that is inconsistent, even contradictory. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the tendency of American historians has been to place Adams squarely on the imperialist side. Since the 1990s, scholarly writing on his geopolitics has gained greater nuance, though Adams remains uncomfortably caught in the web of power; however, his dissent remains, in the words of historian Richard Welch, "more uncertain and sporadic, more complex and diverse, than the publications of the [Anti-Imperialist] League …"[8]

Central to Adams's critique of the American Empire is his rejection of providentialism as a rationale to justify America's war in the Philippines.[9] Here, Adams stands quite apart from imperialists like Beveridge, who was supremely confident that "[God's] power directed Dewey in the East and delivered the Spanish fleet into our hands …"[10] Unlike the senator, Adams did not regard the temporal events of war as literal expressions of divine will. His was a more secular perspective that emphasized human agency, and the myriad of conflicting outcomes that war brings.

Adams's secular understanding of events can be traced back to his youth. In his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, he wrote in third person: "The boy went to church twice every Sunday; he was taught to read his Bible, and he learned religious poetry by heart; he believed in a mild deism; he prayed; he went through all the forms; but neither to him nor to his brothers and sisters was religion real."[11] Adams's retrospective account of his alienation from Unitarianism did not lead him to outright atheism. Following his student days at Harvard, Adams "remained a believer," though one with a most attenuated faith.[12] This perspective led Adams to critique Christian missionaries because they sought to resolutely transform Pacific Islanders into New England Protestants.[13]

"The missionary has worked his wicked will"

The sharp growth of American missionaries and their organizations during the late nineteenth century made Christianity a pervasive, if uneven, reality in many islands throughout the Pacific. "By 1900," writes the historian William Hutchison, "the sixteen American missionary societies of the 1860s had swelled to about ninety."[14] Missionaries from the United States far outnumbered every other sending nation, including Britain. To a great extent, the achievement of 1.5 million Protestant converts worldwide can be attributed to this organizational growth.[15] My own work with the Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions reveals the proliferation of Bibles and other religious material in Hawaii.[16] For example, a missionary official noted in 1872 that "the whole number of pages received for Books, Bibles, and portions of Scripture received into the office and printed the past year is 2,954,330 while the number of pages of the same sold and given away is 1,139,041."[17] While missionaries were not homogeneous—evangelical Protestants differed from Mormons and especially Catholics in their devotional style and theology—Methodists stand out as the most prominent religious denomination among numerous proselytizing groups.[18]

This is the religious context that awaited Henry Adams when in 1890 he sought to escape "civilization"[19] (especially Washington, DC and Boston) and the boredom that followed his recent completion of the multivolume *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison.*[20] Accompanied by the artist John La Farge, Adams ventured out into the Pacific, arriving in Hawaii in late August. Although Adams was impressed with the natural beauty of Hawaii, he found its people lamentably "civilized" or Westernized, seen in their punctilious observance of the Christian Sabbath and the amount of land dedicated to the cultivation of sugar. Adams's negative impression of Hawaii remained with him, for on October 16, 1890, he wrote to his friend John Hay from Samoa: "I am inclined to profanity when I think that religion, political economy and civilization so-called, will certainly work their atrocities here within another generation so that these islands will be as melancholy a spectacle as Hawaii is …"[21] By February of the following year, Adams complained to Hay that "in twenty or thirty years, the Americans will swoop down, and Tahiti will become another Hawaii, populated by sugar-canes and Japanese laborers."[22] In April, Adams wrote to his friend, the geologist Clarence King, that missionaries throughout Polynesia were working their "wicked will."[23] Even though Adams had turned his travels into what historian David Brown has called an "implicit [and explicit] rebuke of Western modernization," part of Adams's pessimistic observations were rooted in his deep longing for home.[24]

While it is true that the proliferation of missions and Bibles does not necessarily equal imperialism—where indigenous forms of culture are wiped out by invading Westerners—these religious conduits were regarded by critics of empire as mutually reinforcing.[25] Adams's disdain for missionaries in Polynesia stemmed from the fact that they were bent on changing the religion and culture of native people.[26] Convinced, however, that these efforts failed to produce many genuine conversions in Samoa, Adams wrote consolingly to Anna Cabot Mills Lodge that a pagan Samoa was still very much alive.[27] Nevertheless, there were aspects of native culture that he believed were in danger of extinction. From Tautira on March 2, 1891, Adams wrote to Hay: "Taitian [sic] native society has gone to pieces like everything else. Foreign influence corrupted the dance till it had to be entirely abolished …. The natives … had forgotten all their dances except the indecency, and could no longer perform the movements."[28] In the Pacific Islands, the "foreign influence" responsible for the virtual extinction of native dances was missionaries. Historian Niel Gunson has written that Islander dancing was judged "of a lascivious kind … conducive to sexual licence [sic]"[29]—and dance was only one cultural form that struggled to survive. "In the islands," notes Gunson, "few indigenous art forms were to survive the impact of Christianity."[30] For Adams, who was fond of native culture in practically all of its forms, missionaries were, in the words of historian Andrew Preston, "advance agents of American imperialism."[31]

"My Cubans have won their fight"[32]

Three years after Adams visited the Pacific Islands, he sought to escape the chill of Washington winters and enjoy some relaxation by traveling to Cuba in 1894. The following year, the decades-old struggle against Spain had spread throughout the island, drawing men into an increasingly sophisticated army. "What began as scattered insurgent bands," writes historian Louis Peréz, "developed into an army of 50,000 officers and men organized into six army corps, distributed into twelve divisions and eighty-five regiments of infantry and cavalry."[33] Adams claimed that Cuba was "'on the verge of social and political dissolution.'"[34] Following these events closely, the House of Representatives and

the Senate released a joint resolution on January 29, 1896: "Resolved, that the President is hereby requested to interpose his friendly offices with the Spanish Government for the recognition of the Independence of Cuba."[35] Adams, who is believed by some to have worked behind the scenes on the resolution, favored its conclusion.

As the war intensified with the destruction of sugar mills and the brutal *reconcentrado* tactics of General Valeriano Weyler, calls for American intervention grew louder. The definitive answer came in April 1898, when Congress granted President McKinley authorization to go to war.

On May 1, a U.S. fleet commanded by Commodore George Dewey sailed into the Manila harbor on the order of Theodore Roosevelt, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and annihilated the antiquated Spanish Pacific fleet. This staggering loss crippled the Spanish effort to retain Cuba, where American forces were overcoming inadequate arms, disorganization, and tropical diseases.[36] On May 26, Adams revealed his complex geopolitical vision in a letter to Hay:

> I want peace, and am willing to concede much. For instance, I would propose an armistice based on liberal terms like these: Spain recognizes the independence of Cuba …. And the entire withdrawal of her military and naval occupation …. The United States shall withdraw her forces from the Philippines, on condition of retaining a harbor of convenient use for a coaling station. In consideration of these concessions, the United States shall not exact a war indemnity …. But they ought to imply of necessity the annexation of Hawaii and the purchase of St. Thomas. These are essentials in a settlement that abandons the idea of conquest.[37]

That Adams was in favor of Cuban independence and wanted the United States to withdraw from the Philippines reveals his distance from imperialists like Roosevelt, who claimed at one point that "'it is for the good of the world that the English-speaking race … should hold as much of the world's surface as possible.'"[38] A further indication of the difference in ideology can be found in a letter that Adams wrote to the statistician Worthington Chauncey Ford on November 26, 1898: "My modest, inherited vision contemplated no more in my life-time than the establishment of our economical supremacy and consequent political influence over the two Americas."[39] Roosevelt, whose order had effectively begun the war in the Philippines, was pursuing a much more expansive conception of empire than Adams.

"I blame no one for opposing imperialism; I am no Napoleon myself"[40]

By 1900, the American War in the Philippines had reached a new, more destructive, stage. Filipinos now practiced guerrilla warfare, and Americans inflicted reprisals far out of proportion to their losses.[41] One American soldier who fought in Marinduque proudly reported to his home paper that "'we burned every house, destroyed every carabao and other animals, all rice and other food.'"[42] This was no accident since General Jacob H. Smith directed subordinates to "'kill and burn'" and turn the interior of Samar into a "'howling wilderness.'"[43] Historian Glenn May has written that in the four months of Smith's command, "Americans destroyed thousands of homes, tons of food, hundreds of cattle, and much additional property."[44]

Upon learning of atrocities in the Philippines, anti-imperialists like William James thundered: "'God damn the US for its vile conduct in the Philippine Isles.'"[45] Speaking to

his colleagues, George Hoar, a prominent anti-imperialist Republican senator from Massachusetts, was equally apoplectic with rage: "'You [America] have devastated provinces,'" he began. "'You have slain uncounted thousands of peoples you desire to benefit. You have established reconcentration camps …. You make the American flag in the eyes of a numerous people the emblem of sacrilege in Christian churches, and of the burning of human dwellings, and of the horror of the water cure.'"[46] More measured but no less outraged was E.L. Godkin: He declared that the war in the Philippines was the "'most savage which was ever known in the history of our republic.'"[47] If not the "most savage," it was savage enough. Richard Welch has documented dozens of cases of atrocities, including murder of prisoners, murder of civilians, rape, administration of the so-called water cure, and other forms of torture.[48]

One of the most enduring critiques of the war was registered by the vice president of the Anti-Imperialist League, Mark Twain, in "To a Person Sitting in Darkness." Although the piece began as a criticism of the missionary William Scott Ament for collecting indemnities from Chinese subjects following the Boxer uprising, it became a flashpoint in the larger debate over imperialism in China, South Africa, and the Philippines.[49] Employing his sharp wit, Twain asked:

> Shall we? That is, shall we go on conferring our Civilization upon the peoples that sit in darkness, or shall we give those poor things a rest? …. Would it not be prudent to get our Civilization-tools together, and see how much stock is left on hand in the way of Glass Beads and Theology, and Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, … and balance the books, and arrive at the profit and loss, so that we may intelligently decide whether to continue the business or sell out the property and start a new Civilization Scheme on the proceeds?[50]

Although Twain conceded that the extension of "Civilization" had proved commercially beneficial to America, he did not believe that the entire effort was worthwhile, especially considering the loss of moral standing that the war entailed.[51]

Less well-known but no less effective a critic was the playwright, George Ade. His play, *The Sultan of Sulu*, and *Stories of Benevolent Assimilation*, mocked America's effort to try and assimilate Filipinos into American culture. In this last work, Ade showed the arbitrary quality of many American habits and cultural conventions through the defiance of the Filipino Kakyak family, who resist the advice and wisdom of the American, Washington Connor. Here, the empire's civilization comes across as ridiculous—not the supremely superior construct that many contemporaries held it to be.[52]

Although the vast majority of Protestant ministers and missionaries supported empire and the American War in the Philippines, religious critics joined their voices to the anti-imperialist chorus.[53] In the *Ministers' Meeting of Protest Against the Atrocities in the Philippines*, the Reverend Francis H. Rowley declared:

> Our army is engaged in reducing to subjection a people who sought no quarrel with us[,] … a people fighting to defend what they hold to be their inalienable rights, and to resist a foreign foe. As we burn their villages and shoot down their struggling inhabitants, or shock the civilized world with our inhumanities, we assure them that we are seeking their larger good, and tell them that it is in the name of a nobler civilization than they have known.[54]

To a certain extent, the anti-imperialist critique resonated with Adams. To his close friend and romantic interest, Elizabeth Cameron, he wrote on November 29, 1898: "The anti-imperialists

are perfectly right in what they see and fear, but one can't grow young again by merely refusing to walk."[55] Adams was not endorsing American assimilationist designs or defending American atrocities; he only recognized that a certain momentum had developed after America's victory in the Caribbean, which made it very difficult for the United States to put on the breaks. In Adams's words: "… the country is big, and our energies are vast, and, sooner or later, to the East we must go, for a situation is always stronger than man's will."[56] After the defeat of the Spanish in Cuba, Adams called for American withdrawal, not the occupation of the island, even less a separate war in the Philippines. On December 4, 1898, Adams wrote to Cameron with evident exasperation that "the Philippines are not, or were not, in my scheme, but the President [McKinley] has taken all and more than all I wanted, and has stuffed in the Philippines on top."[57] Hence, Adams shared with anti-imperialists their loathing for the war in the Philippines, but he could not quite adopt their platform.[58] To Cameron on January 22, 1899, he wrote: "We all dread and abominate the war, but cannot escape it …. If [George] Hoar had suggested any trace of a path to escape, I would jump for it."[59]

"War is always a blunder, necessarily stupid, and usually avoidable"[60]

Although Adams could not find a way out of the imperial quagmire, there is no question where his sympathies lie. Repeatedly in his letters he refers to the war in the Philippines as "madness," complains about the "cruel despotism" the United States is inflicting upon the islands, and is viscerally moved by reports of American atrocities: "I turn green in bed at midnight if I think of the horror of a year's warfare in the Philippines …"[61] It should not surprise therefore that on February 1, 1900, he wrote to his brother Brooks: "I incline now to anti-imperialism, and very strongly to anti-militarism …. I incline to abandon China, [the] Philippines and everything else."[62]

Adams's mention of China makes sense in light of America's overarching ambition in the Pacific. Historian Thomas McCormick has written that "Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines were not taken principally for their own economic worth …. They were obtained, instead, largely in an eclectic effort to construct a system of coaling, cable, and naval stations for an integrated trade route which could help realize America's overriding ambition in the Pacific—the penetration and ultimate domination of the fabled China market."[63] It is a short step from seeing the acquisition of the Philippines being driven largely by the desire for an expansion in trade with China to regarding the war itself in this light. In *Republic or Empire*, Daniel B. Schirmer argues that the war in the Philippines was prosecuted in order to stimulate the American economy.[64] Adams would have agreed. He lamented to Cameron that the war was being fought "in order to give them ["Malays"] the comforts of flannel petticoats and electric railways …"[65]

Adams's views of foreign policy have absorbed and perplexed historians for a long time. In 1915, William Roscoe Thayer asserted that Adams had shaped, albeit indirectly, the foreign policy thinking of Secretary of State John Hay (1898–1905).[66] Although some historians continue to discern the hand of Adams in Hay's policies, it makes more sense to see their respective views as independent and running parallel to each other, rather than as causally related, one way or the other.[67] Nevertheless, by meeting with foreign envoys and passing on these conversations to Hay, Adams enjoyed what David Contosta calls an "insider's view of American foreign policy."[68] This is apparent in Hay's famous Open Door policy (1899) in China, which emphasized freedom of commercial enterprise for American merchants. After the Boxers and imperial troops attacked missionaries and

converts, besieged foreign legations, and cut the railroad between Peking and the coast, Adams wrote to Hay in June from Paris: "'*Your* open door is already off its hinges.'"[69]

"I am a pessimist—dark and deep …"

In criticizing Hay's policy, Adams was also distancing himself from the political economy that supported empire and the missionary work of Christianity that often justified it. These were intricately related threads, and Adams treated them as the rationale for opposing civilization. While calling it a civilizational ideology may be formalizing it too much, there are enough hints in his writings to suggest an inchoate idea of civilization.[70] In the South Seas, Adams's conception of civilization comes through in relation to the demographic devastation experienced by Pacific Islanders. In his book on Tahiti, Adams wrote that "the virulent diseases which had been developed among the struggling masses of Asia and Europe found a rich field of destruction when they were brought to the South Seas …. For this, perhaps, the foreigners were not wholly responsible, although their civilization was …"[71] Of course, Adams did not believe that Western Civilization was literally killing Pacific Islanders (though he did, in another place, use the word "atrocities" to describe what civilization had wrought). Technically, it was the pathogens introduced by Westerners that were "extinguishing the natives." In Hawaii, for example, the precipitous decline of the native population had begun with the arrival of Captain James Cook in the late eighteenth century. From that point, estimates David Stannard, a population of 800,000 dropped to 130,000 in 1830. By 1885, it had ebbed to 44,000.[72] According to Adams, this decline corresponded with the incursion of missionary Christianity in Hawaii and the drastic transformation of its land to suit sugar interests.[73]

As the above makes clear, Adams's conception of civilization was declensionist. Often, Adams's perception that civilization was harming natives or disfiguring their culture led him to judge it as being in decline. For example, in a letter to Cameron from Tahiti, written on February 6, 1891, Adams admitted that his first impressions were "very delicately mixed," but went on to lament that "rum is the only amusement which civilization and religion have left them, and they drink-drink-drink, more and more every year, while cultivation declines, the plantations go to ruin, and disease undermines the race."[74] Adams's declensionist proclivity has not always been taken for what it is, a sign of pessimism. Harold Dean Cater dismissed Adams's pessimism as "not entirely authentic, for usually it was a pose that served to hide his true feelings."[75] My own sense is that for all of Adams's sardonic writerly style, his pessimism concerning civilization can be trusted. To his confidante Cameron, Adams wrote from Paris on July 16, 1905: "I am a pessimist—dark and deep—who always expects the worst, and is never surprised when it comes."[76] Most likely, Adams's pessimism stemmed from his deep reading of human history. Such reading led him to critique his civilization and the "conquest" of people from other cultures.

Most dramatically, Adams believed that the "multiplicity" of modern life was, in the words of David Contosta, "dragging all Western Civilization toward decay and death."[77] A prominent characteristic of modernity, multiplicity was made up of matter, depended on reason, and produced chaos. Multiplicity's foil was "unity," sometimes identified with mind, simplicity, order, and morality.[78] Such a divided conceptual horizon presumably led Adams to relatively "primitive" places like Polynesia. It was here that he could observe unity's traits in bold relief. It was also here where his outlook could reflect back whom he was not, and could not hope to become.[79] There was also disappointment in recognizing that islands like Tahiti did not present the idyllic moral counterpoint to the West that he hoped to find. Once he arrived at this mental cul-de-sac, Adams blamed the carriers of

multiplicity: "What can the European-Aryan race have done to become the low-bred wretches they are!" he exclaimed from Papeete. "Their manners are what they themselves call vulgar, and their minds are more vulgar than their manners. I have never seen a vulgar Polynesian, though some of them come dangerously near it, from associating with Europeans and Americans."[80] According to Adams, civilization had extended its tentacles into the far reaches of the Pacific, and through its varied messengers—missionaries, traders, soldiers, beachcombers—introduced multiplicity, one of modernity's toxins.

To a great extent, Adams's critical assessment of civilization placed him on the fringes of public opinion. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, it was common for cultural custodians to boast of the superior nature of American civilization.[81] Such hubris led many to see the American presence in the Philippines as a boon to civilization. The editors of Chicago's *Times-Herald*, for instance, proclaimed: "'We are … the trustees of civilization and peace throughout the [Philippine] islands.'"[82] Such a congratulatory outlook led Admiral Stephen B. Luce of the U.S. Naval War College to believe that wars were sent in part to spread civilization.[83] Beveridge declared that it was imperative that the United States "'save that soil [of the Philippines] for liberty and civilization.'"[84]

One may very well ask to what purpose was civilization in the Philippines going to be put? According to historian Matthew Jacobson, civilization was essentially an economic concept.[85] In "The Wealth of the Philippines," John Alden Adams enthused that "nowhere else … is there so rich a storehouse of undeveloped wealth, waiting to yield its treasures to the grasp of the strong hand of modern enterprise"—and "modern enterprise" was intimately bound to conceptions of civility and civilization.[86] William Howard Taft, the first President of the pro-business Philippine Commission and later Civil Governor, put it concisely: "'Nothing will civilize them [Filipinos] so much as the introduction of American enterprise and capital …'"[87] Speaking at the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1907, the ethnologist William A. Jones declared that "the wonderful stories that were related as to their [the Philippines'] amazing riches unquestionably served to arouse the commercial spirit and to excite the cupidity of a considerable element of our American citizenship, so that it is safe to affirm that what we call 'Commercialism' was largely responsible for the acquisition of the Philippines."[88] Even though the economic productivity of the Philippines lagged behind the dreams of its early boosters, there is little doubt concerning the strong economic motives for their acquisition.[89]

Conclusion

In sum, Adams did not consider the penetration of America's political economy into the Pacific Islands as contributing to their overall good. Indeed, he was disgusted with sugar plantations because they occupied far too much land in Hawaii and ruined the natural beauty of the islands.[90] He also understood that a plantation economy was exploitive of workers and literally endangered their lives. Adams's writings from the early 1890s reveal a recurrent dread that any of the Pacific Islands would become like Hawaii in this respect. He also trenchantly criticized the American War in the Philippines for its commercial orientation, and went on to lampoon John Hay's Open Door policy when Chinese Boxers reduced it to tatters. True, Adams conceded the annexation of Hawaii in 1898, but mainly because imperialists were calling for war in the Caribbean and the Philippines, and salivating for the conquest of new territory.

Neither did Adams advocate for the war in the Philippines nor for the annexation of the islands. With the war still raging, he wrote to Hay from Paris on November 2, 1901:

"I wish we were out of the Philippines. That is a false start in a wrong direction, which *I never wanted, and have always feared.*"[91] And yet Adams did argue for the retention of a coaling station in the Philippines, which was regarded by many as a necessary node in a long chain of possessions running from the Caribbean, through the isthmus of Panama, and across the broad Pacific to China. Adams's position on the Philippines is weakened further by his openness to something like Cuba's Platt Amendment: Political and economic control of the Philippines—without war.[92]

Foundational to America's political economy and rationale for empire and war was Western Civilization, which Adams critiqued most sharply. Associated closely with missionary Christianity, Adams condemned Westerners for changing native societies and introducing debilitating pathogens.

For all of Adams's complexity, historians suggest he was not all that unusual for his time. William Leuchtenburg argues that after 1898, progressives supported imperialism about as enthusiastically as republicans.[93] "The evidence demonstrates," writes Eric Love, "that the line between imperialist and anti-imperialist was blurry more often than not and it could shift, wildly and unpredictably, from person to person, incident to incident, and even within the same person …"[94] It is this protean quality that is a prominent characteristic of Adams's geopolitics. While there may not be a principle that consistently guided Adams's thinking on empire, his pessimistic turn of mind leaves a rather deep impression on readers of the high cost of America's involvement in foreign lands.

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Notes

1 Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 163.

2 Henry Graff, ed., *American Imperialism and the Philippine Insurrection: Testimony Taken from Hearings on Affairs in the Philippine Islands Before the Senate Committee on the Philippines* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1969), viii.

3 John Carlos Rowe, "Henry Adams's *Education* in the Age of Imperialism" in *New Essays on the Education of Henry Adams*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

4 John C. Orr, "I measured her as they did with pigs" in *Henry Adams and the Need to Know*, eds. William Merrill Decker and Earl N. Harbert (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2005), 276.

5 See Daniel L. Manheim, "The Voice of Arii Taimai: Henry Adams and the Challenge of Empire," *Biography* 22 (Spring 1999): 209–36. For the consistent use of Adams as an anti-imperialist, see David Healy, *US Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), passim.

6 Frank Ninkovich, "The New Empire" in *The Imperial Moment*, ed. Kimberly Kagan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 146. Intellectuals' support of empire included historians. See Gary Marotta, "The Academic Mind and the Rise of US Imperialism: Historians and Economists as Publicists for Ideas of Colonial Expansion," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 42 (April 1983): 217–34.

7 For an opposing view, see Rowe, "Henry Adams's *Education* in the Age of Imperialism," 87–114.

8 Richard Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 43.

9 Pervasive among Protestants, providentialism also distorted how some Catholics thought about war. See Benjamin Wetzel, "A Church Divided: Roman Catholicism, Americanization, and the Spanish-American War," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (July 2015): 348–66.

10 Albert Beveridge, *The Meaning of the Times and Other Speeches* (Washington, DC: Press of Judd and Detweiler, 1908), 56–57. See also Gerald H. Anderson, "Providence and Politics behind Protestant Missionary Beginnings in the Philippines" in *Studies in Philippine Church History*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 279–300.

11 Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: The Modern Library, 1996), 34.
12 Edward Chalfant, *Better in Darkness: A Biography of Henry Adams: His Second Life, 1862-1891* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1994), 69; Representing Adams as adhering to a "philosophy of quasi-idealism" is Ernest Samuels, *The Young Henry Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 17.
13 Much of the Protestant missionary activity in the Pacific originated in New England. See Ernest S. Dodge, *New England and the South Seas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).
14 William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 91.
15 William R. Hutchison, "A Moral Equivalent for Imperialism: Americans and the Promotion of 'Christian Civilization,' 1880-1920" in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era: 1880–1920*, eds. Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison (Denmark: Aros, 1982), 171.
16 See, for example, volume 21 of Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABC 19.1, reel 818, passim). At the time of my research in February 2020, the papers were housed in Harvard's Lamont Library due to the renovation of Houghton Library.
17 ABC 19.1, reel 819, n.p. See also Samuel Colcord Bartlett, *Historical Sketch of the Hawaiian Mission* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1869), 14ff.
18 Kenneth M. MacKenzie, *The Robe and the Sword: The Methodist Church and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1961), 8.
19 At no point does Adams provide a neat definition of civilization, but it appears to refer to the sort of industrialization, commercialization, militarization, and overseas religious expansion seen in the Gilded Age.
20 See Henry Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, July 4, 1890 in *The Letters of Henry Adams, 1886–1892*, vol. 3. eds. J. C. Levenson, Ernest Samuels, Charles Vandersee, and Viola Hopkins Winner (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 248. While Adams continued to mourn the suicide of his wife, these factors combined to impel him to seek the outside world. Further insight on the meaning of Adams's travels can be found in William W. Stowe, "Henry Adams, Traveler," *The New England Quarterly* 64 (June 1991): 179–205; and Pierre Lagayette, "Henry Adams: Travel as Episteme" in *Henry Adams and the Need to Know*, 222–35.
21 Henry Adams to John Hay, Oct. 16, 1890 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:302.
22 Henry Adams to John Hay, Feb. 8, 1891 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:412.
23 Henry Adams to Clarence King, Apr. 22, 1891 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:468.
24 David S. Brown, *The Last American Aristocrat: The Brilliant Life and Improbable Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 256; Patricia O'Toole, *The Five of Hearts: An Intimate Portrait of Henry Adams and His Friends, 1880–1918* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1990), 247.
25 Recently, scholars have pivoted away from "Cultural Imperialism" as an analytical category that signifies the total control of native civilizations by Western powers. See Andrew Porter, "'Cultural Imperialism' and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780–1914," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25:3 (1997): 367–91; and Ryan Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity," *History and Theory* 41 (October 2002): 301–25.
26 This is strikingly true of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). According to a recent study, the ABCFM stood in judgment of the Hawaiian society and was "convinced that profound social change was imperative." Jocelyn Linnekin, "New Political Orders" in *Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, eds. Donald Denoon, Stewart Firth, Jocelyn Linnekin, Malama Meleisea, and Karen Nero (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 194.
27 Henry Adams to Anna Cabot Mills Lodge, Oct. 21, 1890 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:306. Both Adams and John La Farge recognized the hybrid nature of Samoan religion: technically, it was neither purely Samoan nor Anglo-Saxon, but a mixture of the two. For a discussion of syncretism, see John La Farge, *Reminiscences of the South Seas* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1912), 129–30.
28 Henry Adams to John Hay, Mar. 2, 1891 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:431–32.
29 Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 190. For a discussion of Hawaiian dance and music, see Elizabeth Buck, *Paradise Remade: The Politics of Culture and History in Hawaii* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 112ff.
30 Gunson, *Messengers of Grace*, 189.
31 Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 192.

32 Mabel La Farge, ed., *Letters to a Niece: And Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), 96.
33 Louis Peréz, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7.
34 Quoted in Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Major Phase* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 161.
35 Independence of Cuba, United States Congress. Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington, DC, 1896), 2, Massachusetts Historical Society.
36 See Vincent J. Cirillo, "Fever and Reform: The Typhoid Epidemic in the Spanish-American War," *Journal of the History of Medicine and the Allied Sciences* 55 (October 2000): 363–97.
37 Henry Adams to John Hay, May 26, 1898 in *The Letters of Henry Adams, 1892–1899*, vol. 4, eds. J.C. Levenson, Ernest Samuels, Charles Vandersee, and Viola Hopkins Winner (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 594.
38 Quoted in Healy, *US Expansionism*, 33.
39 Henry Adams to Worthington Chauncey Ford, Nov. 26, 1898 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:624.
40 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Jan. 15, 1899 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:661.
41 Moorfield Storey and Julian Codman, *Secretary Root's Record: 'Marked Severities' in Philippine Warfare: An Analysis of the Law and Facts Bearing on the Action and Utterances of President Roosevelt and Secretary Root* (Boston: George H. Ellis Co., 1902), 25.
42 Quoted in Ken De Bevoise, *Agents of Apocalypse: Epidemic Disease in the Colonial Philippines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 64. Such testimony is corroborated by Andrew J. Birtle, "The US Army's Pacification of Marinduque, Philippines Islands, April 1900–April 1901," *Journal of Military History* 61 (April 1997): 255–82.
43 Quoted in Brian McAllister Linn, *Guardians of Empire: The US Army and the Pacific, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 14. Scholars continue to disagree as to how representative Smith's campaign in Samar might have been. One way of answering the question is by looking at the number of officers and enlisted men convicted of offenses against natives. Secretary of War Elihu Root produced a list of 349 American soldiers for the period 1898–1902. "The list included eleven convictions for murder or manslaughter, five attempted murders, ten rapes, twenty-two attempted sexual assaults of various types, four arsons, 102 assaults, 163 robberies or larcenies, twenty-six disturbances not involving physical assaults or thefts, and six misuses of military authority for personal gain." John S. Reed, "External Discipline During Counterinsurgency: A Philippine War Case Study, 1900–1901," *Journal of American East-Asian Relations* 4 (Spring 1995): 43. Also, see the Henry Lodge Committee report: "Charges of Cruelty, etc., to the Natives of the Philippines," 57th Cong., 1 sess. (1902), S Doc. 205, pt. 1; and "Trials of Courts-Martial in the Philippine Islands in Consequence of Certain Instructions," 57th Cong., 2 sess. (1903), S Doc. 213.
44 Glenn Anthony May, "Was the Philippine-American War a 'Total War'?" in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914*, eds. Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 446.
45 Quoted in Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968), 44.
46 Quoted in Richard J. Welch, Jr., "American Atrocities in the Philippines: The Indictment and the Response," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (May 1974): 234.
47 Quoted in Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 78. For a recent study of Godkin, see Myles Beaupre, "'What Are the Philippines Going to Do to Us?' E. L. Godkin on Democracy, Empire and Anti-Imperialism," *Journal of American Studies* 46 (August 2012): 711–27.
48 See Welch, "American Atrocities in the Philippines," 233–53.
49 Twain's criticism of all missionary work is explored by Nathan G. Alexander, "Unclasping the Eagle's Talons: Mark Twain, American Freethought, and the Responses to Imperialism," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17 (July 2018): 524–45.
50 Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," *North American Review* 172 (1901): 164–65.
51 Twain's reservations were typical of freethinkers in the Gilded Age. See Nathan G. Alexander, *Race in a Godless World: Atheism, Race, and Civilization, 1850–1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 84–114.
52 See Perry E. Gianakos, ed., *George Ade's "Stories of 'Benevolent Assimilation'"* (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1985).

53 Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 181–82; Kenton J. Clymer, *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898–1916: An Inquiry into the American Colonial Mentality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 174; See *The Moral and Religious Aspects of the So-called Imperial Policy: Discussed by Representative Clergymen of Many Denominations* (Washington, DC: Anti-Imperialist League, 1899).
54 E. W. Donald and B. F. Trueblood, eds., *Ministers' Meeting of Protest Against the Atrocities in the Philippines* (Boston: Tremont Temple, 1902), 10.
55 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Nov. 29, 1898 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:627.
56 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Feb. 5, 1898 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:680.
57 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Dec. 4, 1898 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:630.
58 That platform regarded the occupation of the Philippines as the denial of American liberty. See Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898–1909* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Many anti-imperialists also worried that once begun, territorial expansion would propel the nation into other adventures and damage its republican ideals. See E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), passim.
59 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Jan. 22, 1898 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:670.
60 Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, Nov. 3, 1901 in *The Letters of Henry Adams, 1899–1905*, vol. 5, eds. J. C. Levenson, Ernest Samuels, Charles Vandersee, and Viola Hopkins Winner (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 305.
61 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Jan. 22, 1899 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:670.
62 Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, Feb. 7, 1901 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 5:194. A few days later, Adams reported to Elizabeth Cameron that he had become an "anti-imperialist." See Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Feb. 11, 1901 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 5:198.
63 Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 107. McCormick's interpretation follows that of Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1963). A more recent elaboration of this school of thought can be found in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), chapter one.
64 Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1972), 45–63. Disagreeing with Schirmer is Welch, *Response to Imperialism*, 84ff.
65 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Jan. 22, 1899 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 4:670.
66 See Brown, *Last American Aristocrat*, 340.
67 See John Hay to Henry Adams, May 27, 1898 in *Letters of John Hay and Extracts from Diary*, vol. 3, ed. Clara S. Hay (Washington, DC, 1908), 126, Rare Books & Special Collections, University of Notre Dame.
68 David R. Contosta, "Henry Adams and the American Century" in *Henry Adams and His World*, eds. David R. Contosta and Robert Muccigrosso (Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1993), 39.
69 Quoted in O'Toole, *Five of Hearts*, 318 (italics added). The Open Door to China appears to have been the subject of ongoing friendly disputation between Hays and Adams: In the spring of 1899, the secretary of state wrote the historian: "You are wrong, as usual, about the open door. It is wider than ever for us." John Hay to Henry Adams, May 18, 1899 in *John Hay Papers*, 1783–1999, reel no. 3, Library of Congress. Hay was genuinely frustrated with how the American press covered the Open Door: He complained to Adams that the policy was regarded as too imperial for some but not imperial enough for others. See John Hay to Henry Adams, Sept. 25, 1900 in *John Hay Papers*, reel no. 3, Library of Congress.
70 A different type of civilizational ideology can be found in Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896). Among secondary sources, see Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); An excellent source on the perils of attributing to writers a theory they do not possess can be found in Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8:1 (1969): 3–53.
71 Henry Adams, *Tahiti* (New York: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1947), 137–38.
72 David E. Stannard, "Disease and Infertility: A New Look at the Demographic Collapse of Native Populations in the Wake of Western Contact," *Journal of American Studies* 24 (December 1990): 336.
73 On this last, see Carol A. MacLennan, *Sovereign Sugar: Industry and Environment in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014).
74 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, Feb. 6, 1891 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:406–-407.

75 Harold Dean Cater, *Henry Adams and His Friends: A Collection of His Unpublished Letters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), lii.
76 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, July 16, 1905 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 5:692.
77 David Contosta, *Henry Adams and the American Experiment* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1980), 133.
78 See Samuels, *Henry Adams: Major Phase*, 289ff.
79 I have benefited from Orr's commentary in "I measured her as they did with pigs," 274ff.
80 Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, May 24, 1891 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:478.
81 Prominent examples include Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1899); Albert Beveridge, *The Meaning of the Times and Other Speeches* (Washington, DC: Press of Judd and Detweiler, 1908).
82 Quoted in Christopher A. Vaughan, "The 'Discovery' of the Philippines by the US Press, 1898–1902," *The Historian* 57 (Winter 1995): 309.
83 John Whiteclay Chambers, "The American Debate on Modern War, 1871–1914" in *Anticipating Total War*, 252.
84 Quoted in Stephen Kinzer, *The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2017), 82.
85 See Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 50–51.
86 John Alden Adams, "The Wealth of the Philippines," *Munsey's Magazine* 19 (1898): 673.
87 Quoted in Glen Anthony May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines: The Aims, Execution, and Impact of American Colonial Policy, 1900–1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 142.
88 W. A. Jones, "Why We Should Withdraw from the Philippines" in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples* (New York: Lake Mohonk Conference, 1907), 91.
89 Stressing the uneven nature of economic progress is Norman G. Owen, *Prosperity Without Progress: Manila Hemp and Material Life in the Colonial Philippines* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984). More pessimistic though no less convincing is Rufus S. Tucker, "A Balance Sheet of the Philippines," *Harvard Business Review* 8 (October 1929): 10–23.
90 See Henry Adams to John Hay, Sept. 15, 1890 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 3:282–83.
91 Henry Adams to John Hay, Nov. 2, 1901 in *Letters*, Levenson et al., 5:304 (italics added).
92 Insight into Adams's "antipathy to war" can be found in Stephen D. Carter, "The Precise Issue: Henry Adams, Global War, and the Role of Force in American History," *The New England Quarterly* 88 (December 2015): 555–81.
93 See William E. Leuchtenburg, "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898–1916," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (December 1952): 483–504. Revising Leuchtenburg is Barton J. Bernstein and Franklin A. Leib, "Progressive Republican Senators and American Imperialism, 1898–1916," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 50:1 (1968): 163–205.
94 Eric T. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and US Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 12.

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