

William McKinley, "Decision on the Philippines" (1900)

In this speech to a group of ministers, President William McKinley outlined his rationale for annexing the Philippines in a treaty of 1898, paying the Spanish (under duress) \$20 million for the privilege. It was a difficult decision, and it foreshadowed the path of U.S. foreign policy for much of the next century.

When next I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps, I confess I did not know what to do with them. I sought counsel from all sides - Democrats as well as Republican - but got little help. I thought first we would take only Manila; then Luzon; then other islands, perhaps, also.

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 them back to Spain - that would be cowardly and dishonorable;
- (2) That we could not turn them over to France or 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 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 fellow men for whom Christ also died.

And then I went to bed and went to sleep, and slept soundly, and the next morning I sent for the chief engineer of the War Department (our map-maker), and I told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United States [pointing to a large map on the wall of his office], and there they are and there they will stay while I am President!

Document Analysis

1. According to McKinley's speech, why couldn't the Filipinos rule themselves?
2. Why and how did McKinley believe that U.S. rule would benefit the Filipinos?