

# philippine studies

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## **Conspiracy for Empire, by Francisco and Fast**

Review Author: Maria Josefina Dalupan

*Philippine Studies* vol. 35, no. 3 (1987) 385–386

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

CONSPIRACY FOR EMPIRE: BIG BUSINESS, CORRUPTION AND THE POLITICS OF IMPERIALISM IN AMERICA, 1876-1907. By Luzviminda Bartolome Francisco and Jonathan Shepard Fast. Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1985. 428 pages.

The birth of American imperialism at the turn of the century has long been the subject of intense and lively scholarly debate. Much of the controversy has been concerned with arriving at a more accurate understanding of the factors that led the United States to cross oceans in the quest for colonial possessions. The literature on the subject is as vast as it is varied, giving a fairly good indication of the complexities inherent in America's imperial beginnings.

The discussion of motivations revolves around four general themes: manifest destiny, military expansionism, Protestant zeal and economic expansion. For a number of authors the idea of manifest destiny was not mere rhetoric, but a conviction among Americans that it was their divinely-ordained duty to uplift the uncivilized races of the world and bring them to the level of American progress. Other authors have presented America's colonial ambitions as part of a larger plan by key members of the military establishment to develop the American navy, thus paving the way for America's rise as a world power. A third aspect was the desire of certain Protestant sects to expand their missionary activity to the Far East. The quest for empire was viewed as having been supported by those business interests that sought new sources of raw materials and new markets for American manufactured goods.

While the sheer volume of published works on America's rise as a colonial power may suggest that the subject has been exhaustively studied, the publication of *Conspiracy for Empire: Big Business, Corruption and the Politics of Imperialism in America, 1876-1907* only shows that much still awaits the historian's attention. While many pieces have been fitted into the jigsaw puzzle that is American imperialism, many other pieces are still missing.

Francisco and Fast have not, however, only added to what is already known about America's motives for empire. They have also seriously challenged what were previously considered historical truths concerning this subject. Like many other studies that came before theirs, Francisco and Fast analyze the economic motivations for American expansionism. Unlike their predecessors, however, they refuse to accept the common interpretation that business interest in colonial adventures came after the fact, and instead submit that commercial and economic factors had provided the principal impetus and the direction for American imperialism.

Previous histories of the period have neglected that which Francisco and Fast consider a determining factor in the rise of American imperialism: the American Sugar Refining Company. This book then is about the sugar manufacturers of America and how they fit into the movement toward imperialism. Conversely, it is also about the beginnings of American imperialism and how

this fits within the realities of American political and economic developments at the turn of the century. The authors then attempt to "examine the inter-relationships between policy formulation, domestic political and economic concerns and the corporate requirements of the sugar trust." (p. x)

The study of the American Sugar Refining Company is divided into two sections. Book One covers the period between the 1860s and 1898 during which the United States Congress passed several tariff laws. Business interests had come to realize the power that tariffs possessed in the shaping of supplies and markets. Understandably then, it became the dominant political and economic issue of the late nineteenth century. It was within these conditions that the American Sugar Refining Company (called the sugar trust) was formed, thus leading to the virtual monopolization of the sugar refining business under one man: Henry Havemeyer.

To ensure the privileged position of the trust, key government officials supported – and were supported by – the ASRC. Among them, Senator Nelson Aldrich and Congressman (later President) William McKinley proved to be the most important. A major threat, however, to the trust's hegemony was the infant beet sugar industry which not only could provide the entire domestic requirement of the United States, but also received government support from the favorable provisions of the Dingley Tariff of 1897. With the spectre of losing his privileged position in the sugar industry, Havemeyer decided to look elsewhere for a solution.

Book Two of *Conspiracy for Empire* discusses the scramble for colonial possessions that resulted in the extension of American control over four major sugar-producing areas. For Havemeyer, the surest way by which he could keep the beet sugar industry in check was to bring Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines within the American tariff wall. Francisco and Fast relate how President McKinley deliberately altered his foreign policy to suit the needs of the sugar trust. Other motivations (specifically the appeal to the moral obligations of the American people to "uncivilized races") was used by McKinley to win public support for his imperial designs. Simultaneous with the congressional discussions on the future of America as an imperial power, the sugar trust began to extend its control into direct investment in the sugar lands of Cuba. Finally, the beet sugar factories of the Midwest were purchased by Havemeyer.

The authors of *Conspiracy for Empire* have written a powerful account of how a small circle of people, driven by lust for power and wealth, changed the course of American history. It is an account that challenges the validity of what has been considered the staple of history textbooks. For example, McKinley's previously perceived indecision regarding the fate of the Philippines was, in the writers' view, only logical when viewed in the context of the politics of the sugar trust. Other contentions, such as the belated interest of American business in the opportunities of imperialism are also debunked.

*Conspiracy for Empire* thus serves to remind us that our understanding of history cannot remain static. Instead, we must constantly reevaluate the findings and conclusions of past historians in the light of new research such as this.

Before we discard, however, our previously held notions on this subject, a few things about the work under review should be kept in mind. First, in his introduction to the book, Renato Constantino states that Francisco and Fast "provide us with a new analysis, using corporate records and other primary source material heretofore undiscovered or otherwise unavailable" (p. iii). However, in the bibliography at the end of the book, no primary sources save newspaper and journal articles of the period are listed. Reading through the end notes, one will realize that very few citations come from such sources as the Aldrich and the McKinley Papers. Even statements attributed to key figures in the study (Aldrich, Havemeyer, etc.) were lifted from secondary sources. It also appears that the major source used in this study was the congressional records and not corporate records as Constantino claims.

The question of sources is of course vital in determining the quality of conclusions made by the authors. The observations made regarding sources might help to explain why, as the authors themselves admit in several parts of the book, a number of conclusions were drawn on the basis of circumstantial evidence, and thus require additional documented evidence before they can be confirmed.

Despite these shortcomings, Fast and Francisco have come up with a fascinating account of how economic power can be translated into political leverage. *Conspiracy for Empire* also provides very serious implications for our own history. Realizing the immense social, economic and political influence that our sugar planters and millers wielded when we were a colony of the United States, one can appreciate the relevance of this study. And when one looks back at how this powerful sector responded to such issues as free trade and early Philippine independence, one cannot help but be saddened by the implications that their actions have borne out.

Maria Josefina G. Dahupan  
Department of History  
Ateneo de Manila University

THE PILIPINOS IN AMERICA. By Antonio J.A. Pido. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1986. x, 151 pages.

The subtitle of this newest book on Filipinos as immigrants, *Macro-Micro Dimensions of Immigration and Integration*, serves to give the reader a clear idea of the framework from which Dr. Pido considers his subject — that is to