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Mark D. Van Ells

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Assuming the White Man's Burden: The Seizure of the Philippines, 1898–1902

Mark D. Van Ells



Perhaps no theme dominates the history of American colonialism in the Philippines—at least in its early stages—more than race. Written accounts by white Americans during their years of colonial dominance in the Philippines are fraught with examples of condescending and bigoted racial attitudes toward the nonwhite peoples of the archipelago. Indeed, the Western world's most famous literary expression of the colonialist impulse was written in an effort to persuade the United States to join the imperial club and seize the Philippines. Briton Rudyard Kipling urged Americans to

Take up the White Man's Burden—
Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on freedom
To cloke your weariness.
By all ye will or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your God and you.

Most scholars of Philippine-American relations have recognized that racist attitudes impacted upon U.S. behavior in the islands. However, few have systematically examined the quality and character of turn-of-the-century American race thinking and assessed how Americans translated this ideology into specific actions and policies in their Far Eastern colony.

This article is an examination of American racist thought and how it shaped U.S. conduct in the Philippines during the first five years of American involvement in the affairs of the islands. Although the Philippines constituted America's first major overseas colonial

venture, Americans had had a long history of contact with peoples of different races. This history was a tragic one. Bolstered by a deep-seated belief in white supremacy, it entailed the slavery of one race and the near extermination of another. In taking their very first steps into Philippine life, white Americans referred back to familiar perceptions of other nonwhite peoples and implemented time-tested policies and practices of racial control. As a result, white Americans recreated the lamentable climate of North American race relations half a world away in their new Asian colony.

Based on the impressive body of scholarly literature already written on American colonialism in the Philippines, this article is not meant to be a comprehensive account of Philippine history between 1898 and 1902. Rather, its purpose is exploratory and interpretive, and intended to add new dimension and stimulate new discussion of a topic well-studied by scholars on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

American Race Ideology

By the end of the nineteenth century, American westward expansion had reached the eastern shore of Asia. In 1898, the United States declared war on Spain over disagreements in Cuba. As a second front to the Caribbean war, the U.S. Pacific Fleet under Commodore George E. Dewey steamed into Manila Bay in the Philippines on 1 May 1898, destroyed the Spanish fleet there, and besieged the Spanish army in Manila. In the Philippine campaign against the Spaniards, the Americans found indispensable the assistance of Philippine revolutionaries, led by Emilio Aguinaldo.

The population of the Philippine archipelago was remarkably diverse ethnically, composed mainly of Malays of various linguistic groups (including Muslims in the South), but also significant populations of Melanesians, and dominated by a Chinese-mestizo (mixed-race) class. The peoples of the Philippines had the extreme misfortune of coming under American influence during a time of particularly strong racist sentiment in the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, traditional American racism had combined with the misapplication of modern science to produce an especially virulent current of racism in American life. At the dawn of the twentieth century, race relations in the United States had devolved into what may well have been their lowest point in all of American history.

African Americans had been enslaved, and freed just forty years

prior to the Spanish-American War, only after the bloodiest and most divisive conflict in American history. During the postwar Reconstruction period, radical Republican lawmakers attempted to equalize race relations, perhaps best exemplified by the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed national citizenship and equal protection of the law to all Americans. But long-held white racist stereotypes of African Americans severely undermined these attempts. Many whites believed blacks to be inherently inferior in intelligence and moral character. Blacks, many whites maintained, had uncontrollable sexual appetites which threatened the "purity" of white women and the white race. Although naturally lazy, childlike, and docile, blacks might become "uppity," white racists believed, if exposed to "demoralizing" ideas like political rights and racial equality. Only subjugation and force, the racists reasoned, could control African Americans. By the 1890s, a system of legally-sanctified racial segregation emerged in the American south (where most blacks lived), which purported "separate but equal" treatment of the races but in reality cemented racial inequality into southern society. By 1898, African Americans had lost most of the human rights they had won during the American Civil War (Foner 1988; Newby 1965).

The native inhabitants of North America, the American Indians, also suffered in the hostile racial environment. From the time whites first settled in the area now known as the United States, whites and native American Indians fought along the frontiers of those settlements. Whites viewed the Indians as uncivilized "savages" who impeded the "progress" and "enlightenment" of Euro-American civilization. White Americans believed it their "manifest destiny" to spread their civilization across North America, and felt justified in destroying—sometimes to the point of genocide—the "backward" race that stood in their way. As the frontier drew to a close at the end of the nineteenth century, many white reformers hoped to convince the surviving native American Indians to disregard their traditional cultures and integrate themselves into white society. Reformers instituted a broad program to "civilize" the "savages," largely through educational efforts like Richard Pratt's Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. But after 1900, racism led white reformers to lower their expectations of Indian assimilation. Once promised equality in white society, native Americans were relegated to the margins of American life, there to await their expected extinction as a defeated and degraded race (Drinnon 1980; Hoxie 1984).

Race also influenced U.S. immigration policies. While immigration from Europe in the 1890s was virtually unrestricted, it generated considerable controversy. Significant numbers of immigrants were Roman Catholics. Many Protestant Americans believed that as followers of a dictatorial "foreign potentate" (the pope), Catholics were incapable of functioning in a democratic society. As more immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived, many old-stock Americans began to fear the "mongrelization" of the Anglo-Saxon population by Italians, Jews, and other "swarthy" peoples. Although immigration restriction for Europeans was more than twenty years away in 1898, for Asians it was already a reality. Chinese immigrants first arrived in California in the 1840s and 1850s as merchants, gold prospectors, and railroad workers. The Chinese soon experienced the race prejudice of the white population, especially after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Whites believed Asians to be intelligent but treacherous, scheming, and deceitful. In 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the first of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, effectively barring immigration from the Middle Kingdom. Japanese immigrants arrived around 1900, resulting in a "Gentleman's Agreement" between the American and Japanese governments which halted that flow. Those Asians already in the United States suffered from race prejudice (such as vigilante attacks) and legal discrimination (such as anti-miscegenation laws) much like other nonwhites (Archdeacon 1983; Higham 1955; Chan 1991).

Feeding this long history of racist thought and action during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the development of modern science. Many white scholars in Europe and America began to apply Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to human affairs. According to these scholars, the races of mankind competed like animals in nature, resulting in the "survival of the fittest." Europe and America had come to dominate the planet, they asserted, because the white race had beaten the other races and proven its superiority. Some scholars even argued that Africans and native Americans were deviant and inferior evolutionary branches of the human species. Many scientists ranked the races; Asians, for example, were superior to blacks and Indians, but inferior to whites. Scientific method was often used to "prove" white supremacy. Craniometry (the measurement of skull size), for example, was a popular scientific technique used during the late nineteenth century to "demonstrate" the superior intelligence of whites. For Europeans and white Americans, slanted applications of modern science gave added weight to already

existing notions about race. "[One] reason for analyzing quantitative data," explains scientist and historian Stephen J. Gould (1981),

arises from the special status that numbers enjoy. The mystique of science proclaims that numbers are the ultimate test of objectivity. Surely we can weigh a brain or score an intelligence test without recording our social preferences. If ranks are displayed in hard numbers obtained by rigorous and standardized procedures, then they must reflect reality, even if they confirm what we wanted to believe from the start.

Grounded in scientific "fact," the aura of white supremacy seemed unassailable to many, if not most, white Americans at the end of the nineteenth century (Archdeacon 1983, 143-73; Daniels 1990, 265-86; Gould 1981).

American Attitudes Towards the Philippines

Prior to Dewey's arrival in Manila Bay in 1898, very few Americans had any direct knowledge of the Philippines and its people. America's most renowned "expert" on the Philippines was University of Michigan zoologist Dean C. Worcester, who had performed field research in the archipelago during the 1880s. Worcester's perceptions of the Philippine people reflected classic American notions of white supremacy. He noted, for example, the "childlike" nature of Filipinos, as well as their "oriental" traits such as deceit and treachery; "honesty among Filipinos is a theme for the humorist" he once wrote. Worcester, an admirer and avid reader of Kipling, claimed to have "discovered" over eighty ethnic tribes in the islands, which he categorized into three broad groups: Malayans, Indonesians, and "wooly headed, black, savage dwarf" Negritos, whom he later removed from the human category altogether (Drinnon 1980, 283-306; Sullivan 1991).

More extensive contact with Filipinos after 1898 changed American racial attitudes remarkably little. Americans in the Philippines "observed" first hand the "laziness" and "childlike" qualities of the Filipinos. Army General Robert Hughes, for example, testified before Congress that the Filipinos' only concerns were to "go to cock fights, gamble, and whet their bolos." Americans often made explicit comparisons between the Filipinos and more familiar non-white peoples. American soldiers in the islands, for example, routinely referred to

Filipinos as "niggers." Comparisons with American Indians were also common; a native female companion was a "squaw," and U.S. Army General Charles King claimed that the Filipinos were "utterly without conscience and as full of treachery as our Arizona Apache." Americans invented a new hate word for the Filipinos, "gugu" or "goo-goo," forerunner of the term "gook" (Drinnon 1980, 279-306; Miller 1982, 31-57, 88).

Americans also disparaged Filipino culture and society. They viewed the archipelago's wealthy and literate mestizo elite—many of whom had been educated in Spanish universities—as only slightly less inferior than the masses. William Howard Taft, for example, explained that Filipino elites were "glib" and "able to run off phrases," but had difficulty "understanding concepts." Roman Catholicism, controversial as it was in the United States, was even more appalling to Protestant Americans when blended with indigenous Filipino traditions. Many Americans denied that there was a Philippine culture at all, including Theodore Roosevelt, who dismissed the entire archipelago's population as a "jumble of savage tribes" (Drinnon 1980, 279-306; May 1980, 10-12).

The American public viewed the peoples of the Philippines with a combination of fascination and dread. Filipinos, for example, were prominently featured in ethnological exhibitions at the various World Fairs that took place across the United States in the early twentieth century, particularly the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. Fairgoers marvelled at the diversity of exotic peoples from the Philippines, including the islands' mestizo class, the "high and more intelligent" Visayans, the "fierce followers of Mohammed," and "monkey-like" Negrito people. At the same time, however, many Americans feared the racial implications of widespread contact with the Philippine people. One southern Senator, for example, characterized Filipinos as "inferior but akin to the Negro." "A mongrel and semibarbarous population," claimed another. The large mixed-race population appalled many Americans, including Mrs. Jefferson Davis, who pointed out how "everybody knows the trouble mulattoes have caused in the South" (Rydell 1984, 142-44, 160-78; Miller 1982, 123-25).

Thus, when confronted with new groups of nonwhite people in the Philippines, white Americans viewed them in light of their existing perceptions of other nonwhites. They surveyed the Philippines in much the same way they did the North American frontier just a few decades before, as one of the world's "dark" places awaiting

Euro-American "civilization" and "enlightenment." Similarly, they saw the Philippine people much as they had the American Indians, as a backward, inferior race which had to either yield to progress or face extermination.

Annexation and War

The combined Philippine and American forces quickly defeated the Spaniards. Not wanting to surrender to the Filipinos, the Spaniards arranged a sham battle with the Americans, after which Spain could surrender to a Western power with honor. The Americans had defeated Spanish forces in the Caribbean as well, and the United States found itself in the position of determining the fate of Spain's overseas empire. During late 1898 and early 1899, Americans debated the merits of acquiring the Spanish empire for themselves. Imperialists, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, strongly favored "keeping" the islands and making the United States a European-style world power complete with overseas territories. Anti-imperialists argued against acquisition, believing it would weaken America's moral position as an example of freedom, democracy, and self-determination to the world. The wishes of the Filipinos themselves were seldom considered. When the subject of Filipino people entered the discussion at all, racist attitudes often dominated the debate, perceptions which ultimately had great impact on the decision to take an empire (Welch 1979, 3-23).

Both imperialists and anti-imperialists expressed racist views and assumptions about the Filipino people. But as historian Stuart C. Miller has discerned, the character of their racism was somewhat different. Imperialists, asserts Miller, were more strongly paternalistic in their racism. Part of America's role in world power, according to the imperialists, included "civilizing" the world's "dark places." These Americans saw it as their duty to "uplift the child races everywhere." Protestant missionaries were particularly excited about "Christianizing" the Filipinos (including the Roman Catholics). God had called America to do its duty, one missionary contended, by "laying these naked foundlings at our door." To them, relinquishing control of the islands would be "utter blasphemy." The United States owed it to the Filipinos, as well as all of humanity, to carry the gift of Western civilization to yet another semibarbarous, sometimes savage land (Clymer 1984, 117-42; Miller 1982, 122-28; Welch 1979, 43-57).

Anti-imperialists were a varied group, often united only in their opposition to annexation. But in general these people, according to Miller, were more traditional "race haters." Most prominent among the anti-imperialists were southern Democrats, who opposed annexation largely due to racist fears. Southern leaders, perceiving themselves as already burdened by a "race problem," objected to bringing yet another "inferior" race under the American flag. "We understand what it is to have two races side by side that cannot mix or mingle," complained South Carolina Senator "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman. Mrs. Jefferson Davis opposed annexation because "three quarters of the population is made up of negroes." Southern race haters were joined, oddly enough, by several liberal Republicans from northern states, such as Senators Carl Schurz of Missouri and George Frisbee Hoar of Massachusetts, who traced their intellectual roots to abolitionism. While their brand of anti-imperialism was mostly concerned with the moral questions raised by colonialism and American democratic values, racism also tinged their views. For example, Schurz—a German immigrant, one-time Free Soiler, and Civil War Union General—warned that "Malays and other unspeakable Asiatics by the tens of millions!" might come to the United States if the islands were annexed (Miller 1982, 122–28; Welch 1979, 43–57).

The possibility of millions of Filipinos gaining suffrage and citizenship was anathema to imperialists and anti-imperialists alike. Newspaper editor Whitelaw Reid observed that "the chief aversion to. . . accessions of territory . . . springs from the fear that they must be admitted to the union as states." Missouri Representative Champ Clark's defiant denunciation of potential "almond-eyed, brown-skinned United States Senators" brought him cheers from the House gallery, as did his assertion that "no matter whether they are fit to govern themselves they are not fit to govern us." But imperialists had no intention of granting Filipinos American citizenship, and they moved quickly to address the racist concerns of the anti-imperialists. A State Department official, for example, explained that imperialists would not grant citizenship to a "half-civilized people . . . so averse to social order." Secretary of War Elihu Root tried to assuage racist fears by arguing that "the Constitution follows that flag, but doesn't quite catch up with it." Senator Henry Cabot Lodge stated flatly, "we have full power and are absolutely free to do with the islands as we please" (Miller 1982, 122–28; Welch 1979, 43–57).

While Americans debated the future of the Philippines, the Filipinos took matters into their own hands. Independence had for years been

the goal of Philippine revolutionaries, and remained so after the defeat of the Spaniards; "they will have nothing short of it," reported one American military official. On 12 June 1898, Aguinaldo declared Philippine independence. In Malolos, the archipelago's elite drew up a constitution and created an assembly. By January 1899, Aguinaldo headed a popularly elected government controlling large areas of the Philippine archipelago. Indeed, the only territory controlled by the Americans in early 1899 was the city of Manila. But blinded by racist assumptions, the Americans believed the Filipinos incapable of self-government. William Howard Taft, for example, argued that "unquestionably chaos would follow self-government," since "even the educated Filipinos are below par" (Miller 1982, 167; Salamanca 1968, 6-25).

American officials ignored the Philippine Republic at home and abroad. No American representatives attended Philippine government functions, and federal officials in Washington snubbed its ambassador there. The American military in the islands did not grant Philippine forces basic military courtesies, even though they had been recent allies against the Spaniards. When a Filipino ship "dared" to fly the Philippine colors, for example, the U.S. Navy confiscated the ship's flag and guns, and the American captain verbally abused the Philippine officers. In fact, Americans were incredulous over the Philippine failure to "appreciate" the U.S. presence in the islands. Referring back to familiar racist stereotypes, American officials argued that the "Asiatics" acted as insolent children who could be brought into line only by force (Miller 1982, 50-51).

In December 1898, the United States and Spain signed the peace treaty ending the Spanish-American War. In the treaty, Spain ceded the Philippines and other colonial territories to the United States, ignoring the Philippine Republic. With Senate ratification of the treaty in February 1899, the imperialists had won the debate over annexation. But the Filipinos were determined to resist, and U.S. and Filipino forces soon faced off. President McKinley expressed his hopes for the growing American military presence in the Philippines:

The earnest and paramount aim of the military administration [should be] to win the confidence, respect, and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines by assuring them in every possible way that full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of free peoples, and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice for arbitrary rule.

McKinley and other imperialists no doubt believed such lofty rhetoric, and genuinely saw their actions in the Philippines as humanitarian and magnanimous. But American racial attitudes and preconceptions of the Filipinos helped such sentiment devolve into a cruel race war. Only in such a mindset could Americans brag about having to "civilize them with a Krag" and sincerely mean it (McKinley's quote is taken from Salamanca [1968, 27]).

The Philippine-American War

By early 1899, tensions between American and Philippine forces reached the boiling point; Filipinos taunted American troops, and the U.S. soldiers were "just itching to get at the niggers." On 4 February, a skirmish erupted outside Manila, in which U.S. Army Private William Grayson boasted of shooting his "first nigger." The skirmish soon escalated into a full-scale war. Poorly-trained and ill-supplied, the Philippine Army proved no match for the Americans. "As long as they aim at us," boasted one American Cavalry officer, "we're all right." By the autumn, the U.S. Army had routed the Filipino regular forces, and captured much of Luzon. The initial success of American forces brought overconfidence. General Elwell Otis, commander of American troops in the archipelago, believed the war was all but won and refused War Department offers of more troops. President McKinley also thought the war won, and turned down offers from several states of National Guard units. Theodore Roosevelt quipped that there "wasn't enough war to go around." In fact, the American government did not even recognize the conflict as a war at all, but an "insurrection" against legitimate American authority (Linn 1989, 1-28; Welch 1979, 24-42).

But Aguinaldo was not defeated; Filipino "insurrectos" disappeared into the mountains and villages all across the archipelago and engaged their new colonizers in a fierce guerrilla war. Virtually no Americans believed that the war would last four years and involve 126,000 American soldiers, over 4,500 of whom were killed. But Aguinaldo's guerrilla campaign vexed American military leaders. By the summer of 1900, Otis was critically short of men. Half of his force of 60,000 troops recruited to fight the Spaniards were due to be discharged, and some state governors now began to demand the return of their National Guard units. McKinley scrambled to recruit new troops for the war (Miller 1982, 67-90). Interestingly, the U.S. Army

sent several regiments of African American troops to fight in the Philippines. Although the topic is beyond the immediate focus of this essay, those interested should see Gatewood (1975).

Americans complained bitterly about the "uncivilized" nature of Aguinaldo's guerrilla campaign, but they were actually quite experienced in its conduct. Most high-ranking military officers, as well as many other officers and men, were veterans of the Indian Wars in the American West. Army Colonel Jacob Smith, for example, who had participated in the "battle" of Wounded Knee in 1890, described fighting the Filipinos as "worse than fighting Indians." On the American frontier, the U.S. Army fought the native American Indians with "savage" methods of their own—scorched earth policies, refusal to take prisoners, attacks on civilians as well as military forces—methods which made a frightening reappearance in the Philippine Islands. The tactics that worked so well on the old frontier were adapted to the new. In fact, American soldiers often referred to combat with the "savage" Filipinos as "Injun warfare" (Miller 1982, 150–76, 190–218; Roth 1981, 15–35).

Race prejudice was an implicit but strong element of "Injun warfare." As in the Indian Wars, U.S. troops fought an enemy of a different race. The supposed racial inferiority of the enemy led many American soldiers to perceive their opponents as less than human. As historian John Dower argues so persuasively in *War Without Mercy* (a study of the relationship between race and combat in the Pacific Theater during World War II), a strong connection exists between race hatred and war atrocities. "Dehumanization of the Other," writes Dower, "contributes immeasurably to the psychological distancing that facilitates killing . . . and surely facilitates the decisions to make civilian populations the targets of concentrated attacks." American military personnel in the Philippines, from the highest ranking officers to the lowliest privates in the field, felt no obligation to wage what they themselves termed a "civilized" military campaign. "It is not civilized warfare," explained an American journalist, "but we are not dealing with a civilized people. The only thing they know and fear is force, violence, and brutality, and we give it to them" (Dower 1986, 11; Miller 1982, 211).

American soldiers committed what can only be described as the most horrible of war atrocities in the Philippines, actions derived to a great extent from the racist attitudes the American soldiers held about the Philippine people. The troops often spoke of the Filipinos in animal-like, nonhuman terms. For example, soldiers often referred

to patrols into the Philippine countryside as "gugu hunts." A Washington State soldier recounted one such expedition,

. . . our fighting blood was up, and we wanted to kill "niggers." This shooting of human beings is a "hot game," and beats rabbit hunting all to pieces. We charged them and such a slaughter you never saw. We killed them like rabbits; hundreds, yes thousands of them. Every one was crazy.

Another soldier once noted how after a battle dead Filipinos were piled "thicker than buffalo chips." While a few soldiers actually revelled in the killing of other human beings, most saw such tactics as distasteful but necessary. "I am probably growing hard-hearted," wrote one soldier back to his family, "for I am in my glory when I can sight my gun on some dark skin and pull the trigger." Soldiers who disapproved of such attitudes and argued that "we came here to help, not slaughter," were branded "nigger lovers" by their comrades (Miller 1982, 176-218).

Filipino prisoners were frequently tortured. The most notorious treatment was known as the "water cure." A prisoner had water forcibly poured down his throat, which was then forcefully expelled by pouncing upon the victim. A worse fate sometimes befell Filipino captives. A group of Tennessee soldiers, ordered to escort some captured Filipinos to a hospital, arrived with "thirty chickens and no prisoners." Some U.S. commanders gave orders that no prisoners, wounded or otherwise, be taken at all. One officer, for example, ordered Filipino captives to "kneel and repent their sins," and they were then clubbed and stabbed to death. "When we find that [a wounded Filipino soldier] is not dead, we have our bayonets," explained one soldier because the Filipinos were "so treacherous." Asked about the extraordinarily low rate of captives, General Arthur MacArthur, Otis's successor, explained that "inferior races" were more likely to succumb to battlefield wounds than Anglo-Saxons (Miller 1982, 150-95).

Civilian populations were often attacked with equal ferocity. Military officials justified these tactics on the grounds that villages harbored guerrilla fighters. But American forces had systematically destroyed Philippine villages long before the guerrilla phase of the war began. Pursuing Filipino regular forces along the coastline during the first days of the war, the U.S. Navy indiscriminately flattened coastal villages. Such attacks grew worse as the war dragged on. An

Army artilleryman wrote home that "we bombarded a place called Malabon, then we killed every native we met, men, women, children." The list of depredations by Americans against Filipinos seems endless: the raping of women, the burning of villages, the desecration of churches. "The boys will say there is no cruelty too severe for these brainless monkeys . . ." declared one soldier (Miller 1982, 176-95).

By 1901, the "Philippine Insurrection" was effectively broken. That March, General Frederick Funston captured Aguinaldo. The Philippine leader swore allegiance to the United States, and the surrender of most prominent Filipino military leaders soon followed. But two main pockets of resistance remained; to crush them, the U.S. Army unleashed its most brutal campaigns of the war. In Batangas Province, residents were herded into concentration camps, the surrounding countryside becoming a killing zone for U.S. troops where anything and anyone was subject to attack. American military leaders justified the policy not only on military grounds, but also on its "positive" effect on the "primitive nature" of Philippine life. "The hardship of the Filipinos in Batangas," wrote one American commander,

is not the mere leaving of their homes, which are structures of mere straw and branches, only a little more elaborate than Indian wigwams. They can endure that, and perhaps profit by compulsory removal from abodes that long use and neglect have made unwholesome.

In perhaps the most vicious campaign of the war, Col. Jacob Smith vowed to make the island of Samar, sight of a recent massacre of U.S. soldiers, "howl." Smith ordered a Marine officer to "kill and burn, the more you kill and burn the better it will please me. I want all people killed who are capable of bearing arms. . . ." He believed anyone over ten years of age to be "capable" (May 1984; Miller 1982, 219-52).

American race hatred brought American forces in the Philippines to the brink of genocide. While no official policy of race extermination existed, many Americans expressed an almost unbelievable nonchalance about the deaths of thousands of Filipinos. General William Shafter, for example, once argued that it might be necessary to kill half of the Philippine people in order to bring "perfect justice" to the other half. Many noted the parallels between the Filipinos and the fate of the American Indians. One Kansas National Guardsman, for example, flatly stated that "the country won't be pacified until the niggers are killed off like the Indians." Another wrote that

we exterminated the American Indians, and I guess most of us are proud of it, or, at least, believe the end justifies the means; and we have no scruples about exterminating this other race standing in the way of progress and enlightenment, if that is necessary.

Some were even more frank. One soldier adapted a well-known phrase from the Indian Wars, "the only good Filipino is a dead Filipino. Take no prisoners. Lead is cheaper than rice" (Miller 1982, 176-95).

Not all Americans, of course, held such attitudes toward the Filipinos. One American soldier wrote that "when you hear of our people sending missionaries here, tell them they had better put their missionaries to work in New York." And Americans were not the only combatants in the war to commit atrocities. The American-organized Philippine Scouts, for example, composed largely of Macabebes, had a reputation for brutality against their Tagalog enemies; "word reaches a place that the Macabebes are coming and every Tagalog hunts his hole," reported one American officer. The war was cruel and barbarous for all parties involved. The cruelties inflicted by Americans derived to a large degree from the dehumanized racial perceptions the U.S. troops had about the people they were sent there to benevolently assimilate into the "civilized" world (Miller 1982, 180-88).

In July 1902, arch-imperialist Theodore Roosevelt, now President of the United States, declared the "Philippine Insurrection" over. American colonial policies reflected American racial prejudices long after the end of the Philippine-American War. The United States now concentrated on remaking Filipino society in the American image, through educational programs and economic development. However well-intentioned, race prejudice limited the scope and effectiveness of these programs. Educators, for example, stressed an education befitting a "backward" race. Fred Atkinson, first educational coordinator for the new colony, wrote that

In this system we must be aware of the possibility of overdoing the matter of higher education and unfitting the Filipino for practical work. We should heed the lesson taught us in our reconstruction period when we started to educate the negro. The education of the masses here must be an agricultural and industrial one, after the pattern of our Tuskegee at home.

Americans also extended their "civilizing" mission—both military and social—to those not yet under their sway, such as the Moros of the

south and the various highland peoples of the islands (May 1980; Gowing 1977; Jenista 1987).

Conclusion

United States behavior in the Philippines cannot be properly understood without reference to American history and culture. In race relations, white Americans—by accident and design—recreated the racial climate of North America in Asia. Race permeated the debate among Americans over annexing the Philippines, and the nation ultimately did so in order to continue its “manifest destiny” to spread Western civilization to “backward” peoples. Native resistance to U.S. expansion, believed Americans, derived not from nationalism or a desire for peace, but the “insolence” of ungrateful children. Reasoning that “uncivilized” people only understood force, “civilized” Americans suspended their own rules of warfare when fighting the “savages” on their frontier. In many ways, Luzon in 1900 resembled the Arizona or Dakota Territories just decades before.

Clearly, Americans were not the only colonizers in history to express racist sentiments about those subjected to their rule; indeed, colonialism was based largely on racist assumptions. But as this essay attempts to show, the character of American racism had a strong impact on U.S. policy in the Philippines between 1898 and 1902. Further research focused specifically on the issue of race will likely reveal even more. How did race affect the development and implementation of American educational, political, and economic policies in the archipelago after 1902? How did the Philippine experience differ from that of Hawaii or Puerto Rico? How did a colonial empire change white American attitudes toward race? Scholars of Philippine-American relations have already noted *that* race affected American colonialism; scholars may now want to explore specifically *how* it did.

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