

## “Imperialism in the Philippines”

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Summarized by Timothy Doran

Why, Professor Choy asks, does the Philippines send nurses to the United States of America? The Philippines had already been colonized for three centuries by Spain until 1898 when the United States took it. Her book *Empire of Care* describes Filipino migration to America. This book argued that U.S. imperialism in the Philippines created a foundation and pre-condition for the mass migration of its nurses to the United States. The curriculum of these Filipina nurses was modeled after American nursing schools. Nurses in 1915 – 1916 learned operating-room techniques from Philippine General Hospital.

One popular narrative shows United States colonialism in the Philippines as benevolent: for it was less stratified than the Spanish version of imperialism. Dr. Jose Rizal is a major hero in the Philippines. The United States gave active encouragement of Filipina women to become nurses, but actively discouraged Filipino men from this profession. One dominant way of economic mobility was, for Filipino men, being a doctor; and nursing for Filipina women.

The general Filipino perspective to the Spanish-American war is anti-imperialist. It takes as an object of consideration both the Spanish-American War in 1898 as well as the Philippine-American war (1899 – 1902), whose end-date may be extended to 1914. There was also an American anti-imperialist perspective. In general, Professor Choy finds that in the introductory class on Asian American history, the students hear an anti-colonial perspective for the first time. This is true for both Filipino/a students in her classroom as well as non-Filipino/a students in her classroom.

In 1898, the Spanish-American War occurred after a specific catalyst on the USS Maine. Admiral George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in May 1898. It cost relatively few American lives lost: 2,446. The war has been remembered over time in a particular way. It was remembered as “a splendid little war” and recognized as a triumph of *manifest destiny*, the divine right and mission of the United States to extend itself Westward. The liberation of Cuba from its brutal Spanish conquerors was also thought of positively. “Benevolent Assimilation” is used to describe US colonialism in the Philippines. William McKinley in 1898 proclaimed that the United States was coming to the Philippines as friends, not as conquerors or invaders. Benevolence is one of the ways that, in terms of history and memory, the United States has distinguished itself: “American exceptionalism.” One way the United States might be exceptional or distinct from European imperialism is that it is not as brutal – or so has it been celebrated.

The Spanish-American War has been remembered partly because of landmarks and memorials: a landmark commemorating liberation in the Philippines at the national cemetery. The Dewey Monument in Union Square, San Francisco commemorates it too: it was dedicated in 1903 and commemorates the 1898 his success against Spanish forces in Manila Bay.

There are forgotten impacts of the Spanish-American War. On June 12, 1898 the Filipinos declared independence from Spain. They did not necessarily want another colonizer coming

in. July 4, 1946 is used by the US government as the official date of Philippine independence. A constitutional convention in Manila was created. In January of 1899, the Philippines inaugurated Emilio Aguinaldo as president of Philippine Republic. "Why should the Filipinos not be masters of their own destiny and arbiters of their own fate?" asks one primary source of the period.

Americans were deeply divided about the Philippine-American War and the United States' annexation and colonization of the Philippines. Senator George Hoar of Massachusetts opposed the imposition of United States rule in Philippines. Mark Twain wrote the War Prayer around 1905 to express his outrage over United States actions in the US-Philippine War. He was the head of the United States Anti-Imperialist League. Through satire he warned Americans to be cautious about victory in war. War inflicts death and tremendous suffering. The War Prayer was found among Twain's unpublished writings in 1910. He had sent it to Harper's Bazaar but they had considered it too radical. Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" was published in *McClure's* in 1899, urging Europe and the United States to take up the White Man's Burden to colonize places and people like the Philippines and Filipinos. But this poem provoked outrage from Filipinos and Americans. Sixto Lopez was sent in 1898 on a mission to seek recognition of Philippine independence. He refused to take Pledge of Allegiance into the USA. In 1904 he wrote "the Filipinos will not take up the White Man's Burden. They prefer to let him take it up himself." The African American activist Bruce Grit wrote in 1899 that the white man's burden had been shared by the black man. In 1899 Anna Marie Comfort wrote another rejoinder in poetry, telling the white man not to pose as reformer. Some lively and deep debate, then, did occur around United States colonialism and The White Man's Burden.

On December 10, 1898, the United States and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris ending the war and ceding to the United States the Philippines in return for twenty million dollars.

Also faded from popular consciousness is the Philippine-American War. Conflicts over Philippine sovereignty led to this war, as mentioned. It is knowledge of wars like this war that powerfully criticize the understanding of United States colonialism in the Philippines as being benevolent. A number of different Asian groups in the United States were invested in, and participated in, many movements opposing United States imperialism and Japanese imperialism in Korea. Often, Japanese imperialism and British imperialism are regarded as particularly violent; however, the Philippine-American War ended 100,000 Filipino lives, and perhaps 1,000,000 when we include famine. Filipinos were thought of as savages in need of United States colonial rule; but the Americans themselves committed savage acts.

The United States military retaliated by making Samar into a "howling wilderness" after anti-imperialist Filipinos attacked US troops. The "water cure" was enacted on resistant Filipinos. A half-hour film entitled *Savage Acts* chronicles this. The history of United States imperialism leading to the colonization of the Philippines is a curious one. Empire is rare among democratic-republic forms of government.

A history of race and racism in the United States lent a certain legitimacy to U.S. colonial violence in the Philippines. There is a relation between the white treatment of African Americans and United States' treatment of Filipinos and Filipinas. A legal precedent was created from the white treatment of non-white Americans to allow certain aspects of United

States policy in Philippines. The idea of African Americans as citizens, but as second-class citizens, allowed this sort of status to exist for Filipinos and Filipinas. Theodore Roosevelt gave justification for U.S. treatment of Philippines by noting that in 1803 from Jefferson the greatest single geographical gain was taken in the United States by the Louisiana Purchase. Since the idea of willingness of the annexed was not taken into consideration at that time why should it be taken now, especially (it was argued) since the Filipinos, like the Native Americans and Negroes, are childish? He argued that the United States was effecting no new departure in policy.

These contradictions can be partially explained. Popular culture explains popular history very well, such as World's Fairs like that at St Louis in 1904, famous from Judy Garland singing about it. Another mode of American popular culture was expressed in political cartoons. There is a whole resource on political cartoons concerning US activity in the Philippines. An 1899 cartoon shows a Native American telling a Philippine native over wireless Marconi telegraphy, "Be good, or you will be dead." In the background is a sign reading "Hawaii." The Philippines' inhabitants are depicted as somewhat African American, somewhat Native American. The journal *The Judge* shows the "white man's burden": Figures representing England and the United States carry their respected colonized peoples. Uncle Sam is carrying a Filipino. The character representing England is carries Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani people. *Savage Acts: Wars, Fairs, and Empires* is a film that shows us a Philippine anti-imperialist perspective as well as a US anti-imperialist perspective.

Filipina nurses have not always received the same kind of professional respect here as native nurses have received. And most Filipino men in the United States Navy were employed in traditionally feminine-gendered work such as cleaning. In many naval bases in the USA, you will find a Filipino-American community. On a Philippine national level after 1946, there is a visible relationship between the United States and the Philippines as neo-colonial. It does not feature true independence. A 99-year lease was put into place after 1946. There are economic examples of the United States' receipt of benefits that are colonial in character. A movement for independence in the southern Philippines centered around Mindanao. The idea of a Philippine Nation is an outgrowth of Spanish imperialism.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Filipinos who worked as stewards in the US Navy gained the possibility of becoming United States citizens. This was only possible after 1946. Before that point, they were regarded as United States "nationals." Immigration from Asia was restricted in the early twentieth century and this affected Filipinos. The immigration act of 1924 abolished Asian immigration, which banned people from entering the country if they could not become citizens.

After the Spanish-American war, the Filipinos causing problems were called "rebels," and one reason why people today do not hear much about the Philippine-American War is that it is remembered as an "insurrection" rather than as a "war." Even in the Library of Congress' entry, it is called an insurrection rather than a war. It serves imperialism to portray the war as a smaller kind of insurrection, supported by rebels, rather than something that was sustained by the Philippine people. At this point in time, however, we see more and more reference to a war rather than to an insurrection.