

2016

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Andrew Clem

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Recommended Citation

Clem, Andrew (2016) "The Filipino Genocide," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II*: Vol. 21 , Article 6.

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol21/iss1/6>

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The Filipino Genocide Andrew Clem

My grandfather, born in 1931, was raised in the Philippines during the 1930s and 1940s. Before his immigration to the United States in 1946 he lived through the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. He remembers how the Japanese soldiers burned schools and marched through his town of Culasi Antique, on the island of Panay, causing the entire village to flee into the mountains. Fear of the Japanese army drove my grandfather to withdraw from school at a young age; he remembers very little about his education there, except learning about the great heroes of the Philippines: José Rizal and Emilio Aguinaldo. While these heroes, nationalists, and revolutionaries exemplify aspects of Filipino history, other parts have been omitted entirely from the identity of Filipinos. The generation that educated my grandfather experienced and lived through Spanish colonialism, a brief age of independence, and eventually American occupation and imperialism. What my grandfather never learned was that Emilio Aguinaldo campaigned against the United States army as the Philippine National Government. He did not know that the United States army burned villages just as the Japanese burned schools during World War II. In reality, the atrocities committed on the Philippine archipelago during the Philippine-American war (1899-1902) suggest that the United States was interested in furthering American imperialism and attempting to “civilize” savages, ultimately necessitating the cleansing of a lesser race. The reasons behind the war and the conduct in which it was carried out makes one question if the war was actually a war, or rather a modern twentieth century genocide.

The Philippine Islands, with their lush agricultural potential, have historically been used as a stepping stone to the vast resources of East Asia. The Spanish Empire, before the Americans, used the Philippines to fulfill their dream to create an empire that expanded across the world. They had ruled over a Catholic Empire and one that fulfilled their “grandiose commercial ambitions of exploiting the riches of the Orient” since 1565.¹ This belief fueled by religious fervor of the post *Reconquista* age motivated the Spanish to explore the world and to bring Catholicism to those they encountered. The Philippine Islands, with their rich soil, deposits of various metals, and access to fisheries proved to be an excellent location for the

¹ John Leddy Phelan, *Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 4, 8, 94.

Spanish to begin their colonization in the Far East.² Manila Bay also had tremendous potential for a port and a naval base. Finally, the proximity of the archipelago to China and Japan allowed for quick interactions with those East Asian powers. The Spanish and other western powers desired the Philippines Islands as a part of their colonial empire.

As Spanish power on the archipelago faded, and Americans sought to grow their new imperial power, the belief in Manifest Destiny expanded to locations around the Pacific Rim, and the Philippine Islands proved to be the ideal candidate for annexation. A cartoon from *Judge*, exemplifies how the United States laid claim to Hawaii, Alaska, and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War.³ Uncle Sam with his feet on the United States (with Alaska and Hawaii) reaches for the Philippines to stake his possession and colonize the island nation. The United States' desire to expand and bring American industriousness, ingenuity, and intelligence to the world directly resulted in the claiming of the Philippines and other Pacific Islands. The Americans after their victory over a proud European Empire in 1898 had the ability to become a major player on the international stage, and nothing highlights this better than the American occupation in the Philippines. Victory and expansion in turn fueled Americans' sense of pride, and their racial superiority over other groups, and furthered nativist sentiments and bigotry at home.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century racism and nativism plagued the United States. As the reconstruction period ended and African-Americans supposedly became politically, socially, and economically "equal," many nativists sought another group to demonstrate their superiority. For those residing on the Philippine archipelago, the small, yellow, Catholic (in some cases Muslim or other belief system) population became the new scapegoat. The veterans of the various battles against Native-Americans in the nineteenth century treated the Filipinos as savages, similarly to the "Indians" they had previously fought, and as members of a distinct outgroup. Labelling showcased the simplest form of racism against the Filipinos. "Niggers" and other racial slurs were used to equate them to the slaves of the American past. It became common to refer to Filipinos as

² George E. Taylor, *The Philippines and the United States: Problems of Partnership* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publisher, 1964), 23.

³ Eugene Zimmerman, "The Game of Grab, Uncle Sam (to European Powers)-'Grab anything in sight gentlemen, but don't tread on my feet!'" *Judge* (New York: Judge Publishing Company, 1903), found in Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio, *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (San Francisco: T'Boli Publishing and Distribution, 2004), 52.

“niggers” or “monkey men”.⁴ At the outset of the conflict between the United States and the Philippines, an American soldier, Willy Grayson of the Nebraska Volunteers, refers to Filipinos as “niggers” as he shot at a Filipino man.⁵ Furthering the notion of their inferiority, Filipinos were constantly referred to as “monkeys” or “gugus,”⁶ The first derogatory term dehumanizes Filipinos by comparing them to animals and implies they possess less than human qualities while “gugus” is a reference to the Tagalog word “*gago*,” meaning fool, hijacking one of the major Filipino languages and turning it against its own people. On the mainland, feelings of superiority towards Filipinos remained similar, depicted in political cartoons, such as “The Little Filipino and The Chick,” where a bird outsmarts a small, negro-skinned Filipino child.⁷ The political cartoon highlights how whites in mainstream American society, not just those residing on the archipelago, truly believed in the lesser mental capacity of the Filipino people. Furthermore, images of Filipinos as animals, or displaying animalistic qualities were common in popular magazines in the United States like: *Harper’s Weekly* or *Judge*. Images of Filipinos as dogs, mosquitos, or trained monkeys underscore the qualities associated with Filipinos: trophies, an annoyance, or as pets.⁸ These qualities only begin to express how Filipinos were seen by Americans, that is distinctly different from and inferior to anyone in the United States.

The effects of American opinions of Filipinos were not limited to caricatures in cartoons, but also had serious implications for the real world. Being depicted as animals, children, or even devils, was unfortunately reflected in American action against Filipinos. In the poem “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippines” written in 1899, Filipinos are referred to as “captives” and described with statements including things like “new-caught...half devil and half child”.⁹ The reference

⁴ Richard E. Welch, Jr., *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 101.

⁵ Luis H. Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2014), 144.

⁶ Ignacio, et. al., *The Forbidden Book*, 81.

⁷ Anderson, “The Little Filipino and the Chick,” *The World* (New York: 1903), found in Ignacio, et al., *The Forbidden Book*, 88.

⁸ Ignacio, et. al., *The Forbidden Book*, 89, 92, 93.

⁹ Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands, 1899.” *Rudyard Kipling’s Verse: Definitive Edition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1929). 10 February 1899 edition of the New York Sun.

to being “half devil” led many, especially the white men, to feel threatened or endangered when facing Filipinos. This belief was used to justify the use of force and hostile actions towards the island population.

This hostility existed simultaneously and paradoxically with the concept of the “half child” and the jejune blank slate which could be molded into something new. As a result, education was considered a way to civilize Filipinos and make them more like Americans. After the war, this idea became reality. Scads of white teachers, particularly women, would come to the Philippines to educate the next generation of Filipinos.¹⁰ Either by eliminating the Filipino “half devil” or educating the “half child,” the United States had discovered a method of cleansing the savagery of the Filipino peoples: through violence or an American education. The magazine, *Puck*, clearly illustrates this concept in a cartoon named “It’s ‘up to’ Them,” in which Uncle Sam holds out his hands, giving the native Filipinos a choice.¹¹ In one hand is a white, female schoolteacher and in the other an American soldier brandishing a rifle. This image exhibits the options for civilizing the Filipino tribes, through educating the child inside in an American education system or by killing off the inner devil of the Filipinos.

The ideas about racial differences were ideally suited for the goal of annexing the Philippines: the United States needed to either bring the Filipinos into the fold or remove them from the islands. Needless to say, Filipinos had no desire to be annexed and resistance to these aggressions soon manifested. Emilio Aguinaldo, the President of the makeshift revolutionary Filipino government, led the battle against the United States Army. The outgunned and undermanned Filipino army unsurprisingly lost battles of conventional warfare to the experienced American military. As a result, in November of 1899, Aguinaldo dissolved the army into various guerilla bands.¹² The purpose of this strategy was to wear down the will of the enemy, use the superior knowledge of the environment, and the goodwill of the common folk to instigate an early exit by the Americans. This strategy, while probably the only means of fighting the superior American forces, also resulted in various atrocities. Because in the eyes of the

¹⁰ “Cordilleran school children with U.S. teachers known as Thomasites, General Leonard Wood (center rear), and William Howard Taft (left rear)” (1903), *American Historical Collection*, Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University, in Francia, *A History of the Philippines*.

¹¹Udo J. Keppler, “It’s “up to” them.” Illustration. *Puck*, v. 50, no. 1290 (November 20, 1901), centerfold. N.Y.: J. Ottmann Lith. Co., Puck Bldg, 1901. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010651486/>.

¹² Welch, *Response to Imperialism*, 25.

American military, combatting the Filipinos was not fighting a war but merely quelling an “insurrection,” the American military was not constrained by the typical rules of warfare.¹³ The strategies used to counter the guerrilla tactics of the disbanded Filipino military included the use of torture, killing prisoners, targeting of civilians, and other genocidal tendencies.¹⁴

As fighting continued across the Philippines, the American soldiers continued to slaughter the poorly equipped Filipino revolutionaries. Filipino casualties were sometimes ten times greater than that of the American forces.¹⁵ This ratio, while absurd, is easily attributed to superior warfare tactics and strength. Unfortunately, because of the Americans’ racial prejudices, the minor damage inflicted by the resistance, from a supposedly lesser race, demanded an extreme response. From the beginning of the war some American military leaders estimated that “It may be necessary to kill half of the Filipinos” so that the rest could live in a more civilized society.¹⁶ This is demonstrated by General Smith, who after an attack on American troops, responded with a terror campaign of killing and burning, without the option of taking prisoners. He noted that anyone over the age of ten was “fair game”.¹⁷ The normal rules of warfare were abandoned, and the job of suppressing an insurrection quickly evolved into a strategy of total war and the targeting of the youth and the future generation of Filipinos. *The New York Evening Journal* comments on General Smith’s words with a cartoon “Kill Everyone Over Ten” displaying a firing squad about to execute a group of young Filipino boys. The caption to this cartoon sardonically comments that the boys were “criminals because they were born ten years before we took the Philippines.”¹⁸ The comments imply that because children over ten years old did not grow up in a society with American influence, they would be unable to adapt to American culture. If the Filipinos were unable to become a part of an American based society, they would be exterminated.

¹³ United States Senate, Committee on the Philippines, *Affairs in the Philippine Islands: Hearings before the Committee on the Philippines of the United States Senate* (Serial ID: 4244 S.doc.331 Part 3) April 8th, 1902, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 2097.

¹⁴ Francia, *A History of the Philippines*, 146.

¹⁵ Leroy E. Hallock, “Testimony to the United States Senate, Committee on the Philippines,” in *Affairs in the Philippine Islands*, 1977.

¹⁶ Francia, *A History of the Philippines*, 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁸ Ignacio, et. al., *The Forbidden Book*, 102.

Other elements of the Filipino population were targeted as well, regardless of age or gender. This was done through the burning of villages and the forced relocation of the native Filipino population. In his testimony to the US Senate Committee on the Philippines, Leroy E. Hallock, a former soldier stationed in the Philippines, stated for the record that he had knowledge of the burning of half a dozen villages and that he had even taken part in one of the burnings. This act resulted in the displacement of three to four thousand Filipinos who were forced to abandon their homes and possessions and flee without any idea of where to go next. In addition to the forced relocation via the destruction of villages, American soldiers were some of the first to develop and use concentration camps in their “war” against the Filipinos.¹⁹ The resources necessary to construct concentration camps demonstrates the extreme measures that the Americans were willing to take against the Filipinos. Additionally, the “dead line” surrounding the camp kept all the natives in check and prevented them from leaving the camp on the threat of death.²⁰ Ostensibly used to counter the tactics of the Filipino guerilla forces, the practices of relocation and restricting mobility forced Filipinos to move, either forfeit their homes or watch them burn. They were the victims of a total war, which, when coupled with the extreme racism against Filipinos, bordered on genocide.

The most significant example of the mass murder of the Filipino people by the Americans was the use of torture. It became essential for the American forces to obtain knowledge of the guerillas’ movements and Filipinos often became the victims of these interrogations. In this way the conflict in the Philippines at the turn of the century proved to be among the most violent and frightening conflicts that the United States has been engaged in. One of the most notorious torture methods that was developed by the American soldiers was the water cure technique. This torture method involved the forced pouring of water down an individual’s throat and into one’s stomach until their belly ballooned. Once full of water the handlers of the torture would forcibly expel the water from the prisoner’s body either through punching or using the butt of a rifle. The water cure on many occasions was administered out in the open, without fear of consequences.²¹ This process could be repeated for hours on end without respite, until

¹⁹ Hallock, *Affairs in the Philippine Islands*, 1969.

²⁰ Arthur Wagner, “Testimony to the United States Senate, Committee on the Philippines,” in *Affairs in the Philippine Islands*, 2849.

²¹ Mike Evans, “Testimony to the United States Senate, Committee on the Philippines,” in *Affairs in the Philippine Islands*, 2882.

information was given up. What is interesting to note about the torture is the name. To “cure” someone with water suggests that they are sick or impure; when coupled with the discrimination that many Filipinos faced, this technique symbolizes a way of combining both atrocious war crimes and efforts to completely alter the Filipino way of thought, in hopes to purify victims of their dirtiness. The use of the water cure on Filipinos was openly and casually discussed throughout the South-Pacific and even made its way back to the United States. This is exemplified during a Senate hearing where the water cure was a recurring subject; many soldiers confessed to witnessing the water cure inflicted upon Filipino prisoners. Additionally, the torture was by no means a secret from the American public; the magazine *Life* contained information about the new way of extracting information.²² In a cartoon United States soldiers are visibly administering the water cure; in the background the other European nations are chuckling, observing that the young country that had been shy on the international stage in the past had finally grown up. The water cure is only one example of the tortures used in the Philippines, but it is infamous because it highlighted both the cruelty of the Americans as well as the hope of “curing” the Filipinos.

American empire building coupled with widespread racism and the excuse of total war which permitted the use of extreme measures such as relocation, concentration camps, and torture set the conditions for and inevitably resulted in the genocide of the people residing on the Philippine Islands, regardless of tribe. *Life* magazine highlights early on the destruction wreaked by 1900 saying that the Americans “burnt villages, destroyed considerable property and incidentally slaughtered a few thousand of their sons and brothers, husbands, and fathers.”²³ Not only were these atrocities committed by soldiers, but the American people were aware of this and permitted it to continue for another two years. The severity of the situation is best displayed in the cartoon “The Harvest in the Philippines,” which depicts a belligerent Uncle Sam standing in front of a cannon, equipped with a bolo, pistol, and rifle. In the background lie rows and rows of dead Filipinos, stretching for as far as the eye can see.²⁴

The Philippine-American War, from 1899 to 1902, was the first war to occur in the twentieth century, with twentieth century weapons, in a

²² Ignacio, et. al., *The Forbidden Book*, 100.

²³ “Lucky Filipinos,” *Life* (New York: Life Publishing Company, 1900), found in *The Forbidden Book*, 105.

²⁴ Frederick Thompson Richards, “Harvest in the Philippines,” *Life* (New York: Life Publishing Company, 1899), found in *The Forbidden Book*, 109.

context in which the two regions had not had a great level of interaction. The United States sought to colonize the Philippine Islands and indoctrinated the American populace into believing that the Filipino people needed to change or to be eliminated. When taking the degree of racism and violence as well as the attempts to re-educate and re-locate the population into consideration, there is no question that the Philippine-American War was a genocide, a genocide which predates the first official genocide of the 20th century, the Armenian Genocide, which occurred in 1915. The population of the islands, upon the conclusion of the Spanish-American War and the purchase of the Philippines by the Americans was estimated to be seven million people.²⁵ While the number of casualties vary, it is estimated that over 4,000 United States soldiers, 20,000 Filipino combatants, and at least 250,000 to a million Filipino non-combatants died during this three year conflict.²⁶ This range is quite large, but given the 7,107 islands that make up the Philippine Archipelago, variance is understandable. It would be easy to hide a camp, prison, or base across an island nation covered in densely-wooded forests and these numbers could possibly be an underestimate of the truth.

Even when considering the lower estimates, this war is barely mentioned in American schools. My grandfather never learned about these atrocities, and I am unsure that if he did, he would look at the United States government, which gave him so much, the same way. The shame brought about by the American soldiers during the war is reason enough to attempt to hide the truth of this war from the future and the world. Even without the crimes committed on the island nation between the years 1899 and 1902, techniques and practices that were developed during the Philippine-American War were imitated by other societies that committed genocide. Author Eric Weitz mentions that strategies used by American forces in the Philippine Islands—concentration camps in particular—were used again in other twentieth century genocides.²⁷ The use of modern techniques, the high proportion of Filipino deaths, and the intent of the United States to erase the pre-Americanized population can only be described with one word: genocide.

²⁵ Francia, *A History of the Philippines*, 141.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁷ Eric Weitz, “The Modernity of Genocide” Found in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, edited by Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.