

EPILOGUE: IMPERIALISM'S BITTER FRUIT

On February 6, 1899, the U.S. Senate approved the Treaty of Paris of 1898 by a margin of 57 to 27—just one vote more than the required two-thirds majority. An amendment to grant the Philippines independence once a stable government was established was defeated when Vice President Garrett Hobart cast his tie-breaking vote.

The treaty's ratification was due as much to tactical political maneuvering as to long-term strategic thinking. William Jennings Bryan, McKinley's opponent in the 1896 presidential race and a vocal foe of imperialism, urged Democrats to back the agreement. He hoped that his opposition to the annexation of the Philippines would win him votes against the Republicans in his planned campaign for the presidency in 1900.

INSURRECTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Even as the Senate was debating the treaty, many of the worst fears of the anti-imperialists were becoming reality. Two days before the Senate vote, an American soldier fired on a Filipino patrol that refused to halt. Tensions between U.S. and Filipino forces had been building for months. The Filipinos had assumed that they would be granted independence after the departure of the Spanish. Meanwhile, U.S. troops had been ordered to establish control over the islands. Within hours of the shooting incident, fighting had spread to much of the area around Manila.

How did American forces adapt to a new kind of warfare?

Over the next three years, U.S. forces in the Philippines fought one of our country's most brutal and least remembered wars. Before it ended in mid-1902, 4,200 Americans had been killed in battle and by disease—nearly twice the death toll of the Spanish-American War. Among the Filipinos, 20,000 soldiers were killed and as many as 200,000 civilians died

from starvation and disease caused by the war.

The war in the Philippines was far different than any conflict in which Americans had previously fought. Rather than confronting an organized army, as they had in Cuba, U.S. soldiers faced a quick-striking guerrilla movement. The rules of war that generally prevailed in battles involving Western nations were largely ignored. Both sides tortured and executed prisoners and committed other atrocities. As would be the case in the Vietnam War, the Filipino insurgents, known as *insurrectos*, easily melted into the civilian population in the countryside.

The Filipinos were commanded by Emilio Aguinaldo, the same nationalist figure who had led the struggle against Spain and had praised the United States as "the friend of our people." Aguinaldo's capture in March 1901 marked a turning point in the conflict. He agreed to declare his allegiance to the United States and, in turn, the U.S. government awarded him a pension.

The Minneapolis Journal, 1899



"Wonder if he can see the point?"

A U.S. soldier confronts a Filipino insurgent with a "peace" treaty.

By then American tactics had deeply scarred their relations with the Filipinos. To put down the insurrection, the United States adopted many of the same tactics used by the Spanish in Cuba. U.S. commanders routinely punished civilians in response to attacks by Filipino guerrillas. In one of the war's bloodiest episodes, U.S. forces imprisoned virtually the entire population of the small island of Samar after guerrillas had wiped out an American garrison. U.S. troops were given orders to kill all males on the island above the age of ten who had not surrendered. In other areas, Filipino prisoners were executed at random whenever an American soldier was killed.

What was the role of black American soldiers?

As in Cuba, black soldiers played a prominent role in the Philippines. Among the nearly seventy thousand U.S. troops who fought in the conflict were two regiments of black volunteers. In response to demands from the African-American community, the War Department appointed black officers to command the volunteers. In addition, all four of the regular army's all-black regiments saw action in the Philippines.

The conflict in the Philippines, however, generated little of the pride among black soldiers that was evident in Cuba. At home, African-American leaders were at the forefront of the backlash against the war. They were especially critical of the racist attitudes that typified the military's view of the Filipinos. Among white troops, officers and enlisted men alike, the Filipinos were often referred to as "niggers."

"As long as the impression prevailed in this country that the Filipinos were fighting to throw off the Spanish yoke and seek American annexation, they were called patriots and martyrs, but when they demanded pure and unadulterated independence, they became a set of blood-thirsty barbarians."

—*Indianapolis Recorder (black newspaper)*

Moreover, black soldiers in the Philippines were subjected to the same discrimination they faced in the United States. They were barred from restaurants,

barber shops, and other facilities marked "white only." Filipino nationalists openly played on the racial divisions within the U.S. Army. They distributed posters addressed to the "Colored American Soldier" that reminded blacks of the discrimination they suffered. In fact, the rate of desertion among black soldiers in the Philippines was unusually high. Many of the deserters joined the Filipino insurgence. In 1903, a year after the fighting had ended, there were roughly five hundred African-Americans living in the Philippines.

Did imperialism influence the election of 1900?

Although the war in the Philippines was generally unpopular among Americans, anti-imperialism faded as a potent political issue. In the presidential race of 1900, Democratic nominee William Jennings Bryan chose to again emphasize economic issues rather than his commitment to grant independence to the Philippines.

Meanwhile, the Republicans had nominated Theodore Roosevelt as McKinley's running mate. Roosevelt remained an outspoken champion of imperialism. Playing up his reputation as a war hero, he seldom missed a chance during the campaign to boast

Detroit News, 1898



Uncle Sam is shown babysitting his new possessions.

of U.S. achievements overseas. Roosevelt argued that the United States was justified in pressing ahead with the war against the Filipinos “because they were killing Americans.”

In the end, the return of economic prosperity was most important with voters. McKinley again defeated Bryan, slightly increasing his margin of victory over the 1896 elections.

The rejection of their cause left many anti-imperialists bitter. Leading figures in the movement continued to express their views in the press. Among the most effective critics of imperialism was Mark Twain, America’s most famous living writer at the time. Twain used his biting irony and wit to ridicule the stance of the imperialists.

“We have been treacherous, but that was only in order that real good might come out of apparent evil. True, we have crushed and deceived a confiding people [the Filipinos]; we have turned against the weak and the friendless who trusted us; we have stamped out a just and intelligent and well-ordered republic;... We have debauched America’s honor and blackened her face before the world; but each detail was for the best. We know this. The Head of every State and Sovereignty in Christendom...including our Congress and our ...state legislatures, are members not only of the church but also of the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust. This world-girding accumulation of trained morals, high principles, and justice cannot do an unright thing, an unfair thing, an ungenerous thing, an unclean thing.”

—Mark Twain

What legal complications came with new territories?

What neither the imperialists nor the anti-imperialists could foresee was that the age of empire was drawing to a close in the early twentieth century. While the United States established a protectorate over Panama in 1903 to pave the way for building the Panama Canal and acquired several small Pacific is-

land groups after World War I, there was little public support in the United States for repeating America’s experience in the Philippines. Even Theodore Roosevelt came to regret annexing the islands, calling them “America’s Achilles heel” in 1907.

Thorny legal questions about the status of the Philippines and its inhabitants further complicated America’s first steps toward empire. Should the Filipinos be given the same rights of citizenship granted to the inhabitants of the western territories? Should they be protected by the Bill of Rights? Should goods from the Philippines be allowed to enter the United States free of tariffs?

From 1901 to 1904, the Supreme Court addressed these and other questions in fourteen separate decisions known as the “Insular cases.” The court held that the Filipinos, as well as the inhabitants of America’s other overseas possessions, were entitled to the “fundamental rights” of life, liberty, and property, but could not be guaranteed the procedural rights of the Constitution without specific action by Congress. In other words, the local population living in America’s newly won empire and in Hawaii did not enjoy the protection of U.S. law.

How did the Philippines gain independence?

Politically, the Filipinos remained intent on achieving independence even after their insurrection was defeated. At the same time, the United States rapidly lost its appetite for administering a colony. American officials quickly turned over much of the responsibility for governing the islands to Filipinos. By the 1910s, Filipinos formed a solid majority of their country’s bureaucrats. In 1934, the United States granted the Philippines commonwealth status. Under the new arrangement, the Filipinos had nearly complete authority over local issues. Full independence was promised within ten years. Although World War II interrupted the transfer of power, the Philippines finally did gain independence in 1946—fifty years after the outbreak of the revolt against Spain.

DOMINATION OF THE CARIBBEAN

In the Caribbean, the aftermath of the Spanish-

American War produced disappointment among Cubans and Puerto Ricans, but no violence against the United States. The U.S. military occupation of Cuba and Puerto Rico began soon after Spain's surrender. U.S. policy revolved around safeguarding American business and security interests in the Caribbean. At the same time, American technology and administrative expertise contributed to rapid development on the islands. Roads and telegraph lines were built, finances reorganized, schools opened, sanitation improved, and yellow fever stamped out.

In Puerto Rico, local leaders and U.S. officials were often at odds over the extent of self-government on the island. In 1917, Congress made Puerto Rico a territory and granted its people U.S. citizenship, but Puerto Ricans would not win the right to elect their governor and other top officials until 1947. (The Pacific island of Guam, another former Spanish colony transferred to the United States, was administered by a U.S. naval officer until 1950.)

How did the United States limit Cuban independence?

In Cuba, the long nationalist struggle against Spain fueled greater resentment toward U.S. rule. When Cuba's national assembly issued a call for immediate independence in 1900, the McKinley administration sought to slow the momentum of Cuban nationalism. Under a formula crafted largely by the U.S. State Department, Cuba was to receive inde-

pendence only after accepting a number of limitations.

The plan, which formed the basis of the Platt Amendment, gave the United States the right to oversee the Cuban economy, exercise veto power over Cuban foreign policy, and intervene whenever necessary "for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty." The United States was also allowed to build a naval base on the southeastern tip of the island at Guantanamo Bay.

News of the proposed amendment sparked demonstrations and protests in Cuba. Nonetheless, the McKinley administration insisted that the Platt Amendment was the price Cubans would have to pay for ending the U.S. military occupation of their island. In 1901, the amendment passed the Cuban assembly by one vote.

The Platt Amendment opened the door to an upsurge of American investment in Cuba's economy. By 1928, U.S. companies produced 75 percent of Cuba's sugar. Cubans who had fought in the independence struggle found few opportunities in an economy dominated by Americans and recent immigrants from Spain. They came to resent the alliance between foreign businesses and wealthy Cuban plantation owners. Their frustration would later emerge as a powerful force in Cuban politics. Anti-American feelings helped fuel a revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959. Within two years, Castro had seized American businesses in Cuba and established a communist regime.