

Photography & Power in the Colonial Philippines – I

The U.S. Conquest & Occupation (1898-1902)

by Christopher Capozzola

Snapshots

Conquest
by Camera

A "Civilizing
Mission"

Uncivilized
Behavior

Sources
& Credits



Between 1898 and 1902, the United States invaded, conquered, and colonized the Philippines. The Philippine-American War suppressed an indigenous movement for national independence, turned a former Spanish outpost into the centerpiece of a new American empire, and set the United States on a path of global engagement at the dawn of the 20th century.

Cameras were there from the beginning, as American soldiers, colonial officials, and journalists used photography as a tool of colonial conquest. But, just as the Americans found they could not completely control the Filipinos who were their new colonial subjects, they discovered that photographic images were not easily controlled either.

This unit uses the turn of the century's explosion of photographic material—snapshots, stereoviews, illustrated books—to explore the relationship between photography and power in the colonial Philippines. Most of the images in this unit come from archival repositories such as the Library of Congress or university collections, as well as from illustrated books and albums published at the time.

"Photography & Power in the Colonial Philippines—I" depicts both the patriotic imagery of American engagement in a "civilizing mission" and the harsh imagery of uncivilized wartime conduct that provoked criticism among anti-imperialist activists in the United States and the Philippines. The unit also reveals how other visual materials such as illustrations and political cartoons opened a window on controversial areas that were frequently excluded from the photographic record in the United States.

Photographic images from the Philippines circulated widely in illustrated books. The "Sources & Credits" section of this unit links to more than two dozen books available online in full-text digital formats.

Companion unit:
*Photography & Power in the
Colonial Philippines II*

SNAPSHOTS

As American soldiers, politicians, and journalists entered the Philippines in the first days of the 20th century—or observed the war from across the Pacific—they used photographic images to come to terms with their new surroundings in Southeast Asia.

There was much to make sense of. The Philippines was, for most, an unfamiliar landscape, a destination determined for Americans by another war half the world away in the Caribbean. Political unrest in the 1890s in the Spanish colony of Cuba—including the February 1898 explosion of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor under mysterious circumstances—prompted the United States to launch a war on Spain two months later. Begun in late April 1898, the war with Spain was over by August. Only 460 Americans died in battle or of wounds—although more than 5,000 died of disease in the field.

A decade after Kodak introduced the easily developed film roll in 1888, cameras were clicking all over the Philippines. American soldiers tucked photographs into the letters they sent home; other images were reproduced on postcards or stereographs for commercial distribution.

Ordinary soldiers took photographs to document their daily lives and the unfamiliar world around them. Their officers turned to the camera as a tool of surveillance and documentation that they believed would quell the Philippine revolution. Politicians hoped that images of uplift and progress would sell the war to a skeptical public, and plenty of journalists cooperated—knowing that illustrated books on the Philippines were sure sellers to an American public curious about its new far-flung empire.



Original caption on stereograph: “Dearest Annie,—to-morrow we move on toward Santiago where we expect a hard battle,” ca. 1899. American soldiers tucked photographs into the letters they sent home; other images were reproduced on postcards or stereographs.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[1899_LOC_3c11748u_dearestAnnie]

Soon after the Spanish-American War ended, U.S. Secretary of State John Hay made passing reference to the conflict as “a splendid little war.” It was not splendid. It was not little. And it was not simply a war with Spain. The war in the Philippines was larger in scale and waged against a different enemy; in May 1898 U.S. sailors had been dispatched—under the orders of acting Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt—from Hong Kong to Manila.

In Manila, the Americans met and conquered a fragment of the Spanish navy, but they also encountered a mass national movement for Philippine independence that rejected the transfer of imperial power from Spain to the U.S.



A print titled "Battle of Manila" depicts the battle at Manila Bay, fought May 1, 1898. The USS Olympia (left foreground) and the U.S. Asiatic Squadron under the command of Rear Admiral George Dewey (portrayed in the left corner) engaged in a battle that destroyed Spain's Pacific fleet during the Spanish-American War (1898).

Source: U.S. Naval History & Heritage Command Photograph [\[view\]](#)

U.S. Naval History & Heritage Command Photograph
[ph009_1899_NH91881-KN]



Album caption: "Admiral Dewey's flagship 'Olympia' Manila Bay—1899"

Source: Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan [\[view\]](#)

Courtesy of the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan
[ph220a_1899_phla815SID_UMich]

Relations with the fledgling Philippine Republic and its leader Emilio Aguinaldo quickly deteriorated. By February 1899, the United States found itself engaged in a violent and protracted war that sent more than 100,000 soldiers across the Pacific and bitterly divided the American population at home.



Original caption: "The Flag must 'Stay Put.' The American Filipinos and the native Filipinos will have to submit."

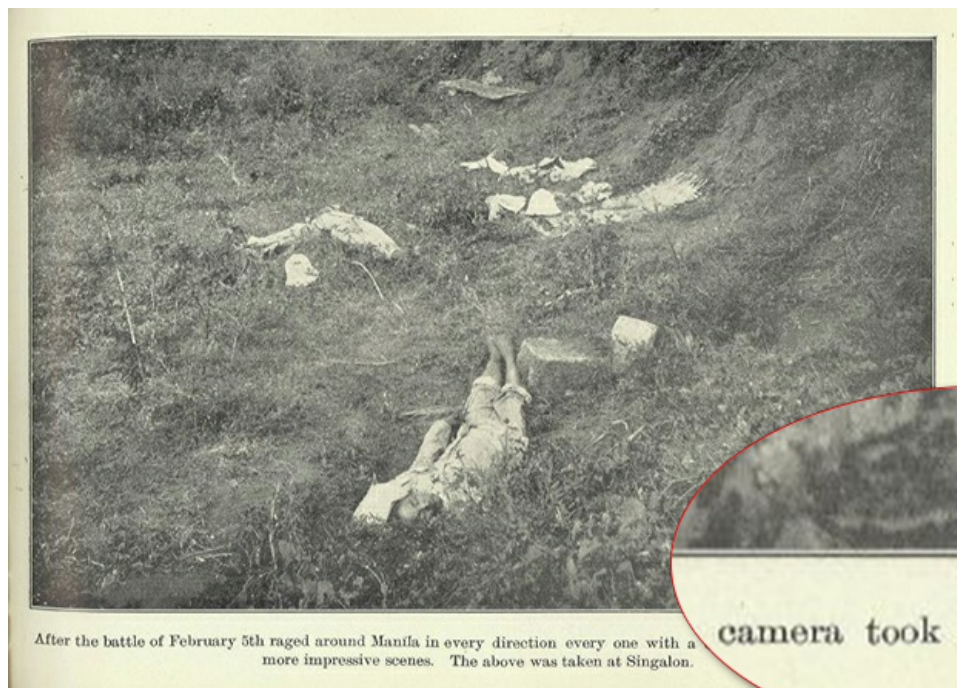
This 1902 two-page graphic in the American magazine Puck depicted the U.S. conquest of the Philippines in a heroic light. On the left, prominent U.S. anti-imperialists (dismissed by the magazine as "American Filipinos") protest American actions in the Philippines. Puck 51 (June 4, 1902).

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph173_1902_4June_HOAR_lcpp_25641u_loc]

The next four years of protracted guerrilla warfare devastated the Philippines. Scholars estimate that in a population of about 10 million people, at least 400,000 Filipinos died of war, disease, and starvation. By contrast, American fatalities numbered slightly over 4,000, three-quarters of whom died of disease.

From the earliest days of the war, that destruction was captured by the camera and communicated to Americans at home. Soon after the first battle of the war, one American observer noted that "after the battle of February 5th raged around Manila in every direction every one with a camera took snapshots of the more impressive scenes." It should come as no surprise that Americans made sense of this war-torn landscape with "snapshots": the word, after all, had by 1898 already migrated from its original meaning denoting a sharpshooter's rifle work to a description of the rapid-fire click of the photographic shutter.



After the battle of February 5th raged around Manila in every direction every one with a more impressive scenes. The above was taken at Singalon.

camera took snapshots of the

Photo and caption from an 1899 album published in Chicago and titled Fighting in the Philippines: Authentic Original Photographs (F. Tennyson Neely Company, 1899).


Caption published with the photograph: "After the battle of February 5th raged around Manila in every direction every one with a camera took snapshots of the more impressive scenes. The above was taken at Singalon."

The majority of photos of this nature focused on enemy corpses rather than American fatalities.

[\[View the album in full\]](#)

[ph037_1899_PIPH002]

On viewing images of a potentially disturbing nature: click here.

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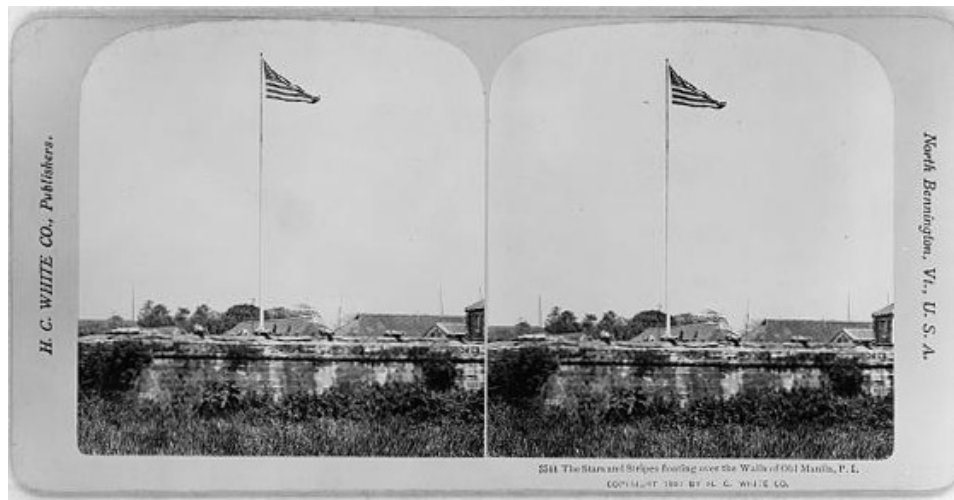
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CONQUEST BY CAMERA

After their rapid military defeat of Spanish forces in the Philippines in August 1898, Americans raised their flag over territory that was more than 8,000 miles away from Washington.



Original caption on stereograph: “The Stars and Stripes Floating over the Walls of Old Manila, P.I.,” stereograph, 1901

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph117_1901_LOC_3c37903u]

Soon, however, the Americans found themselves confronting the Philippine Revolutionary Army—men and women who had been fighting against Spain since 1896, had declared an independent Philippine Republic in June 1898, and were unwilling now to be handed over as a prize of war from Spain to the United States. By February 1899, tensions turned to all-out war, which would continue at least until 1902, with sporadic violence for a decade to come.

The camera was one of the many weapons that American soldiers wielded. It helped the military map the terrain, identify the enemy, and document their destruction.

While the photographic apparatus of 1898 may look slow and cumbersome to our eyes, the camera was among the most technologically advanced and complex portable technologies that American soldiers carried into battle, and the Army understood that mastering the photographic image would be key to waging war. The Philippines was almost completely unknown to the U.S. military when they arrived in 1898. With few maps and uncertainty about the reliability of native informants, photographs offered a rapid means of understanding the terrain of battle, and within months the Army had compiled dossiers of photographs of key fortifications, roads, and bridges, using this information to trace the transportation and communication networks of the Spanish and Philippine armies.

Of greatest popular interest both then and today, however, the camera captured the American forces and their Filipino adversaries and allies in a great range of poses and situations.

American Soldiers

Photographs of the U.S. forces range from posed groups to battlefield scenes, although high-speed action shots were not yet technologically possible. Such photos show the American soldiers at rest, mixing with Filipinos, poised for battle behind walls and in trenches, and immersed in rural and jungle warfare. They also reveal the mixture of African-American and white U.S. troops who fought in the Philippine-American War, as well as the advanced weaponry (such as artillery and the Gatling machine gun) that accounted for the huge discrepancy between deaths on the American and opposing sides.



*Original caption on stereograph: "A group of the 10th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the destroyed church at Bacoor,"
Stereograph published in 1900 by B. W. Kilburn.*

Source: *Antique Photographics* [\[view\]](#)

[ph103_1900_kilburn002]

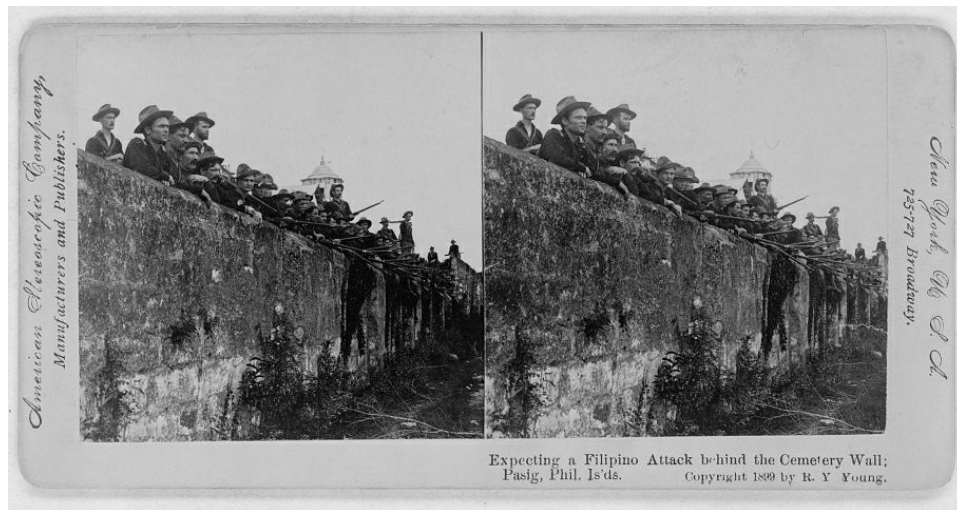


Original caption on stereograph: "'Quanto Valo' scene in camp of the 10th Infantry, P.I."

1900 stereograph published by B. W. Kilburn

Source: *Antique Photographics* [\[view\]](#)

[ph106_1900_kilburn016]



Original caption on stereograph: "Expecting a Filipino Attack behind the Cemetery Wall, Pasig, Phil. Is'ls," stereograph, 1899.

Source: *Library of Congress* [\[view\]](#)

[ph029_1899_LOC_3c36147u]



Photo caption: "Taking it easy during a lull, 20th KS"

*Soldiers of the 20th Kansas Infantry during the
Philippine-American War, ca. 1899*

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph224_1899_3a16807u]



U.S. soldiers during the Philippine-American War, ca. 1899

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph223_1899_3a02720u]



U.S. soldiers ford a river during the Philippine-American War, ca. 1899

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph225_1899_3a02721u]



*Caption with source: "Black and white U.S. troops with Signal Corps flag,"
1899-1902*

*Source: Library of Congress and
University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries [\[view\]](#)*

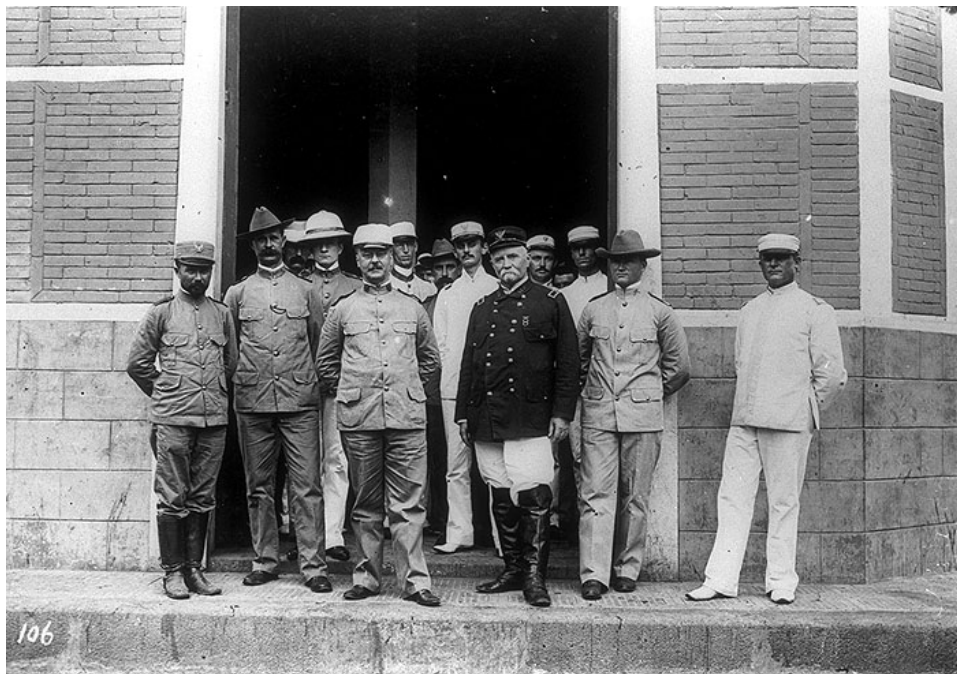
*& University of Wisconsin
[ph222_1899-1902_SignalCorps_UWisc]*



Caption with source: "American soldiers with mobile Gatling gun," 1899

Source: University of Wisconsin [\[view\]](#)

*University of Wisconsin
[ph228_1899]*



General Arthur MacArthur and General Elwell Stephen Otis (center left and right) with other U.S. officers, ca. 1900.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph229_1899_3a02725u]

Aguinaldo and the “Philippine Insurrection”

The U.S. public was bitterly divided over the American conquest of the Philippines. While “anti-imperialist” critics denounced the invasion, supporters of the war defended it in terms of America’s destiny to spread civilization and progress to backward peoples and nations. In the rhetoric of the pro-war camp, the independence movement led by Emilio Aguinaldo, which began against Spain and was redirected against the American invaders after Spain’s defeat, was commonly referred to as an “insurrection.”

The prevailing pejorative view of Aguinaldo and the “insurrection” of his Filipino supporters came through strongly in the political cartoons that emanated from the pro-war camp, as seen in the following two graphics by the famous American cartoonist Clifford Berryman. Aguinaldo’s opposition was ridiculed as puny and pretentious when set against America’s irresistible advance. Filipinos engaged in the resistance were routinely depicted in racist terms as dark-skinned and primitive. This latter imagery was commonplace in contemporary American cartoon renderings of peoples of color in general, whether African Americans in the United States or the native peoples of Mexico, the Caribbean, or Latin America.

Cartoon Politics

Political cartoons by the prolific artist Clifford Berryman—who continued to produce commentary through World War II—appeared in the Washington Post during the war. The cartoons reflect the racial and cultural condescension, as well as great-power arrogance, that permeated much of the pro-war camp in the American press.



Clifford Berryman's cartoon depicts Aguinaldo's futile attempt to oust the U.S. from the Philippines. The sign in the background reads:
 "Notice. The U.S. is requested to withdraw P.D.Q. (signed) Aguinaldo."

Source: National Archives

[ph015_1899_2-4-O-067_46_Berryman]



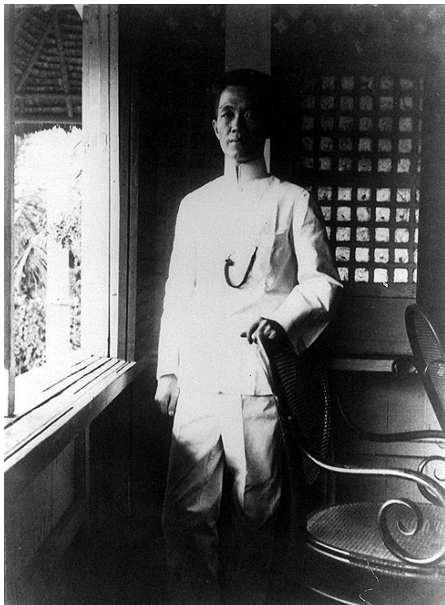
This flagrantly racist 1899 Berryman cartoon is captioned “Uncle Sam is not in a position to give up the chase.” International politics enter in the form of major European powers (standing in the background) observing the U.S. fight to take over the Philippines.

National Archives
[ph019_1899_5-1-W-013_46_Berryman]

*[Clifford K. Berryman Political Cartoon Collection,
Center for Legislative Archives]*

The Americans also used the camera to document their enemies, breaking new ground for the use of photography in counterinsurgency that would be repeated over the course of the 20th century. After the outbreak of the Filipino resistance in February 1899, and particularly after Aguinaldo's decision in the fall of 1899 to abandon uniforms and battle formations and adopt guerrilla war tactics, American military officials rapidly grew frustrated by the difficulty of knowing whom they were fighting against.

Photo portraits of Aguinaldo himself that appeared during the U.S. conquest commonly conveyed the thirty-year-old's youthfulness and charisma. His loosely organized forces occasionally posed for the camera or were photographed preparing for battle, but more often entered the photographic record as “insurgent prisoners.”

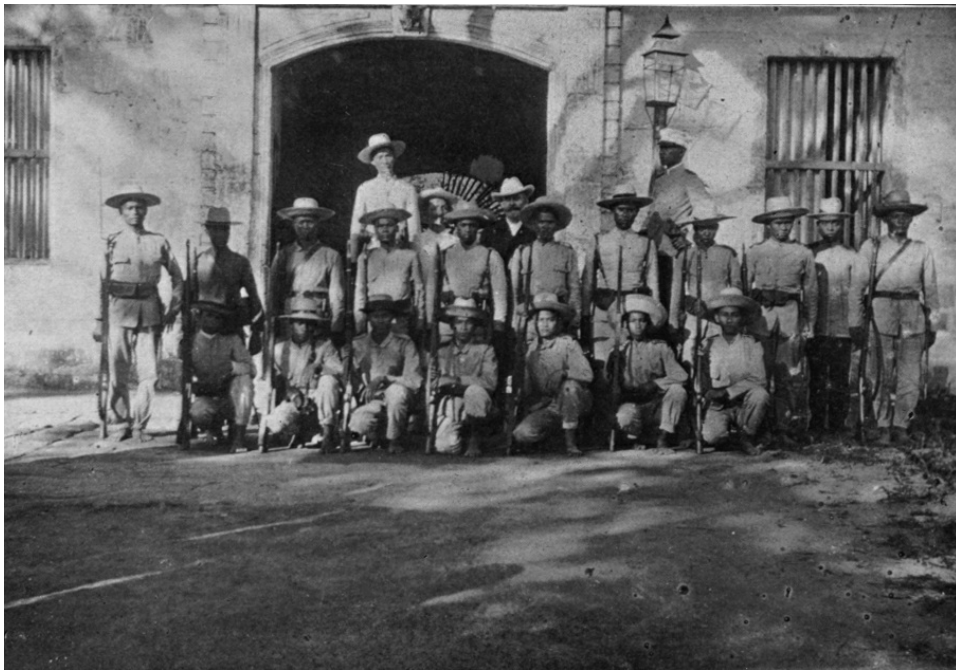


*Two portraits of Emilio Aguinaldo, the charismatic and youthful
Filipino independence leader, 1899-1901.*

left: National Archives [\[view\]](#)

right: University of Wisconsin [\[view\]](#)

[ph013_1899-1901_UWisc] [ph101_1900_UWisc]



Caption with source: "Philippine insurgents were mostly from the Tagalo [sic] race which inhabited northern Luzon," P. Fremont Rockett, Our Boys in the Philippines: A Pictorial History of the War (1899).

Source: University of Wisconsin [\[view\]](#)

[ph043_1899_UWisc]



Caption with source: "Philippine insurgent troops in the suburbs of Manila," from Francis Davis Millett, The Expedition to the Philippines (1899).

Source: Library of Congress Photo Gallery of Philippine Insurgents [\[view\]](#)

[ph206_insurmn1_insurgents_millet]



[To face page 25.]

Insurgent Troops in the Trenches.

(From a Photograph taken during an Action, by an English Telegraph Clerk.)

The caption published with this photograph reads: "Insurgent Troops in the Trenches. (From a Photograph taken during an Action, by an English Telegraph Clerk.)," from Francis Davis Millet, The Expedition to the Philippines (1899).

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph113_1900c_InsurgTrps]

Captured & Imprisoned Insurgents

By officially labeling the war the "Philippine Insurrection," the Americans turned the struggle for national independence led by Aguinaldo into a criminal rebellion against U.S. authority. "Insurrection" was a legal term that freed U.S. troops from following the laws of war that had emerged at the turn of the century. The word was also a public relations move meant to convince Americans that they weren't really fighting a war of imperial conquest but were suppressing banditry and bringing law and order to a faraway uncivilized place. But with the vocabulary of crime came its imagery, reactions in the mind's eye that summoned ideas of criminology and brought its photographic practices from the streets and jails of New York and Chicago to the alleys of Manila and the jungles of Luzon.

Arrested by military police or the rapidly expanding municipal force of Manila, supporters of Philippine independence were photographed, and their photographs were filed away for future reference. The detective branch of Manila's police filed "about 3,000 photographs of convicted criminals of all classes and nationalities." Some were hardened criminals; others were captured in citywide sweeps or convicted of political crimes that ranged from staging nationalist theatrical productions to displaying the banned Philippine flag. [\[1\]](#)



Original caption on stereograph: "Filipino Prisoners of War at Pasig, Philippine Islands," stereograph, 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph001_00353u]



Captured Filipinos at Pasay and Paranaque, Manila, 1899

Source: University of Wisconsin [\[view\]](#)

University of Wisconsin [ph047_1899_UWisc]



Insurgent Troops in the Trenches.

(From a Photograph taken during an Action, by an English Telegraph Clerk.)

[To face page 25.]

The caption published with this photograph reads: "Insurgent Troops in the Trenches. (From a Photograph taken during an Action, by an English Telegraph Clerk.)," from Francis Davis Millet, The Expedition to the Philippines (1899).

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

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Original caption on stereograph: "Officers of the Insurgent Army, Prisoners in Postigo Prison, Manila, Philippine Islands," stereograph, 1901. (detail)

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph120_1901c_LOC_3c37901u]



*Group of prisoners posed in a courtyard,
from The Philippines through a Camera by George C. Dotter (1899).*

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph018_1899_3c21607u]

Bilibid Prison

Bilibid was a nexus in the relationship between photography and power: thousands of photographs of Bilibid prisoners filled the archives of the U.S. military as they kept watch on Filipino revolutionaries. Documenting Filipino prisoners also gave American officials the opportunity to study them. In the United States, the emerging science of criminology used photography to document the physical features of the “criminal element”; at the same time, anthropologists were using bodily measurements to classify so-called “primitive” societies.



Bilibid Prison, from William Dickson Boyce, The Philippine Islands (1899).

[ph232_1899_bilibid_prison_Boyce]



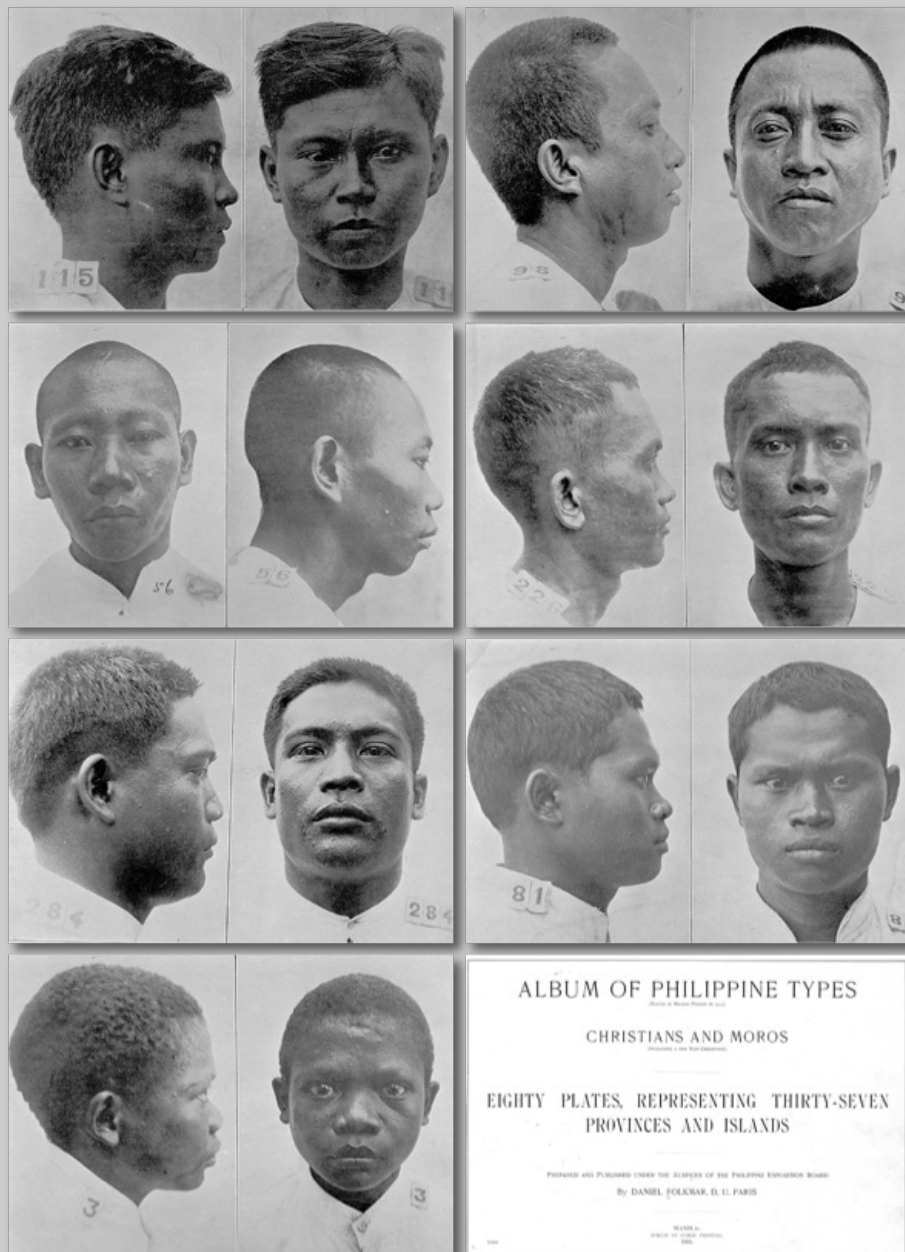
1899 photo of prisoners in Bilibid Prison by G. C. Doherty.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph041_1899_UWisc]

Daniel Folkmar, a lieutenant governor in the colonial bureaucracy and a self-educated anthropologist, began systematically photographing Bilibid prisoners almost as soon as he arrived in the Philippines in 1903. As the repression of the Philippine independence movement reached nearly every corner of the Philippines, Folkmar saw an opportunity to document the ethnic diversity of Bilibid's prisoners. In 1903, using the front and side views that were common both in ethnographic photography and the criminal mug shot, Folkmar photographed every one of Bilibid's 3000 inmates—carefully framing the men's distance from the camera lens to allow for precise comparison—then recorded their birthplaces and measured their bodies. More than 1000 of the photographs made their way into an exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair; a smaller group found publication in an Album of Philippine Types.

Published in 1904, the images in Folkmar's album are both criminal mug shots and anthropological studies, and they show that unequal power relations were the foundation for the photographic practices that scrutinized prisoners and primitives alike. At Bilibid, one exercise of power amplified the other.



Mug shots of Bilibid Prison inmates from Album of Philippine Types
(found in Bilibid Prison in 1903) Christians and Moros
by Daniel Folkmar, 1904.

Source: University of Michigan [[View full album online](#)]

[ph124 – ph132]

Dead Insurgents

Finally, the Americans also used cameras to document the enemy's destruction. Whether taken for official military records or as souvenirs, images of battle deaths proliferated from the very beginning of the war. Such images typically showed a battle scene strewn with dead bodies, captioned in popular publications with a cautionary tale of the nefarious Filipino "insurrectionists" who had just come to their ends at American hands: "Insurgents Dead as They Fall," read the caption of an 1899 photograph. Others boasted that the corpses depicted were the "Work of the Kansas Boys" or "Work of Minnesota Men." [2] Some were taken for military purposes by Army photographers; others were snapped by a handful of photojournalists who reached the front lines.

Most of the images of battlefield fatalities that were circulated depicted Filipino forces. The vastly greater number of Filipino noncombatants who were killed do not appear, and photos of dead American soldiers were extremely rare.

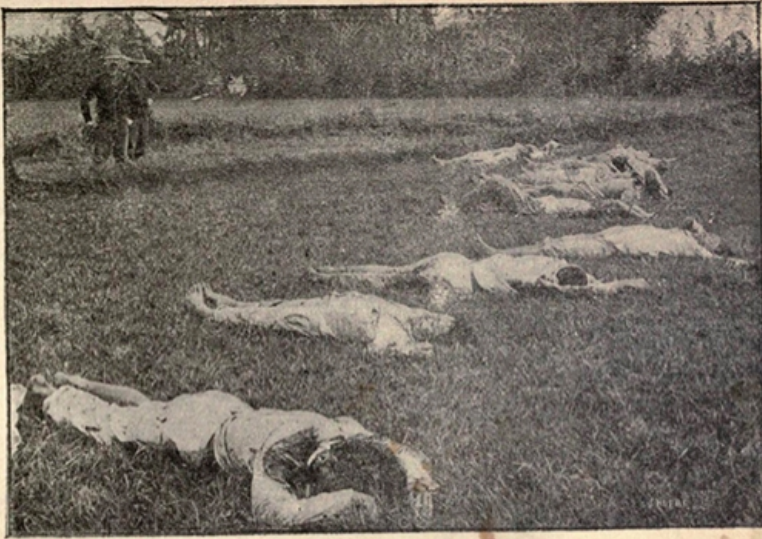


Caption with source: "Dead Filipino Soldiers Lie Where They Fell," 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [[view](#)]

University of Wisconsin [[view](#)]

& University of Wisconsin
[ph233_1899]



War is Hell: And there is no denying it. These men, though our self constituted enemies, had loved ones, mothers, sweethearts and wives, who will wait long but in vain for their homecoming. They demonstrate the effectiveness of the American volley firing.


Printed caption: "War is Hell: And there is no denying it. These men, though our self constituted enemies, had loved ones, mothers, sweethearts and wives, who will wait long but in vain for their homecoming. They demonstrate the effectiveness of the American volley firing."

Page from Souvenir of the 8th Army Corps, Philippine Expedition. A Pictorial History of the Philippine Campaign, 1899.

[\[view complete album online\]](#)

[ph082_1899_neely_Souv8thArmy_0115]

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MIT VISUALIZING CULTURES

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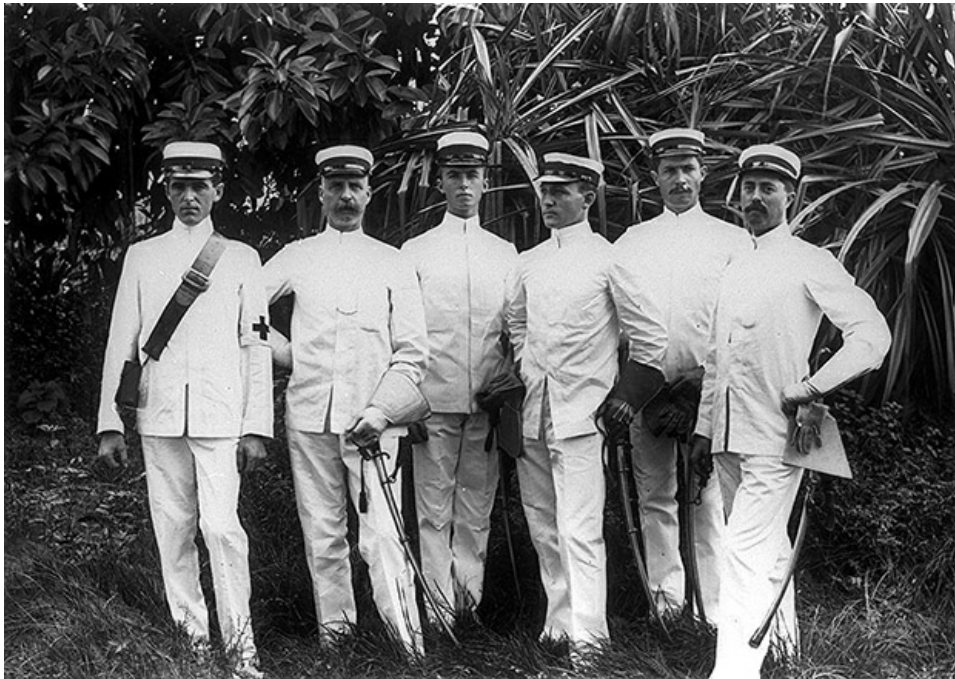
A “Civilizing
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Uncivilized
Behavior

Sources
& Credits

A “CIVILIZING MISSION”

For American soldiers—many of whom had never been outside their hometowns before the Philippine-American War drew them thousands of miles across the ocean—photography offered a way to make sense of the new colonial project. It did so in two ways. Photographs depicting the amusing and domestic aspects of military life reassured family members back home—and presumably the soldiers themselves—that tropical conquest had not sapped young American men’s civilizational vigor. And second, photographs allowed Americans to document unfamiliar surroundings and cultural practices. New technologies conveyed that knowledge to audiences at home, turning a strange place into something much more familiar, and selling it to audiences in the United States.



This group photo of U.S. Army officers depicts a sense of confidence in the American mission in the Philippines. Circa 1899-1901.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph012_1899-1901_UWisc]

Through their photographs and descriptions in letters sent home, soldiers depicted themselves as honorable, vigorously manly, and innocently domestic. Many Americans prided themselves on not being an imperial power, but a nation distinct from the empires of the Old World. At the same time, turn-of-the-century doctors warned that extended stays in tropical environments could lead to both physical and moral degradation. Reassuring images of ordinary American masculinity conveyed to viewers at home—who might have received these images in the mail or seen them in magazines—that service in the Philippines had neither weakened Americans nor turned them into European-style imperialists.



T. Enami

*Manila
P.I.*

This ca. 1900 studio photo of a baseball team in the Philippines conveyed a reassuring aura of normalcy for those worried about the well-being of American forces in the Philippines.

T. Enami Studio, Manila

Source: Flickr [\[view\]](#)

[ph089_1899c_StuEnami_AmBaseball_fldr]

Click to read Kipling's 1899 poem
"The White Man's Burden"

Speech Text: Roosevelt, "The
Strenuous Life," April 10, 1899

The White Man's Burden

However important Americans may have felt it was to get to know the Philippines, they also felt it important to understand why Americans were there. As often as not, they drew on notions of civilization and uplift that British poet Rudyard Kipling had conveyed in his famous 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden," in which Kipling urged Americans to "Take up the White Man's burden" in the Philippines and "bind your sons to exile / To serve your captives' need."^[1]

Soldiers posed for the camera with visages serious and calm. Some appeared as visual embodiments of President Theodore Roosevelt's Kipling-esque call in an 1899 speech urging young American men to undertake "The Strenuous Life." T.R. explained,

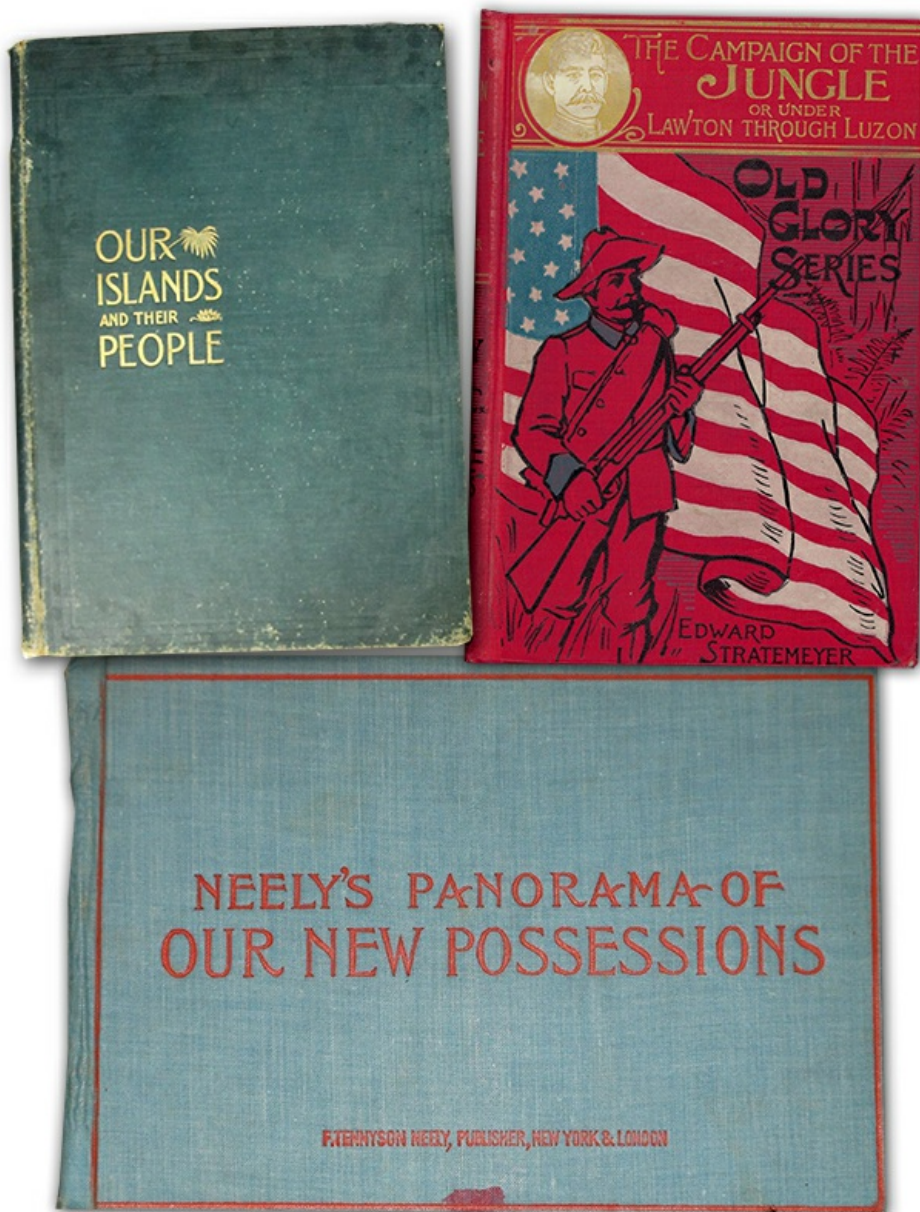
Above all, let us shrink from no strife, moral or physical, within or without the nation, for it is only through strife, through hard and dangerous endeavor, that we shall ultimately win the goal of true national greatness.

^[2]

Full text: *The Campaign of the Jungle*
by Edward Stratemeyer, 1900

Americans in the Philippines understood colonial conquest as a burden to be carried by soldiers, missionaries, doctors, and teachers, and they frequently documented their personal sacrifices in images sent back home.

Americans who would never travel to the Philippines as soldiers, teachers, missionaries, or journalists had the opportunity to learn about the place from an explosion of books sold around the country during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and in the years that followed. The books promised an easily digestible introduction to the war's campaigns, along with maps of the physical and cultural landscapes of America's new island territories, all lavishly illustrated with photographs that took advantage of their status as honest guides to a far-off reality that most readers would never experience directly. "There is truth-telling that should be prized in photography," explained the author of one popular guide published as early as 1898 under the title *The Story of the Philippines, The El Dorado of the Orient*, "and our picture gallery is one of the most remarkable that has been assembled." Another album titled *Our New Possessions*, put out that same year by a publisher of mass entertainments, mystery novels, and children's books, interspersed images of war, destruction, and enemy corpses with landscapes and cozy scenes of camp life—as if to reassure Victorian Americans that their sons and brothers were upholding the standards of civilization.



The voluminous illustrated popular literature supporting the conquest of the Philippines included pocket-sized photo albums, massive encyclopedic tomes, and children's literature. A sampling includes:.

(1) *Our Islands and Their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil* (N. C. Thompson, 1899), William S. Bryan, ed.

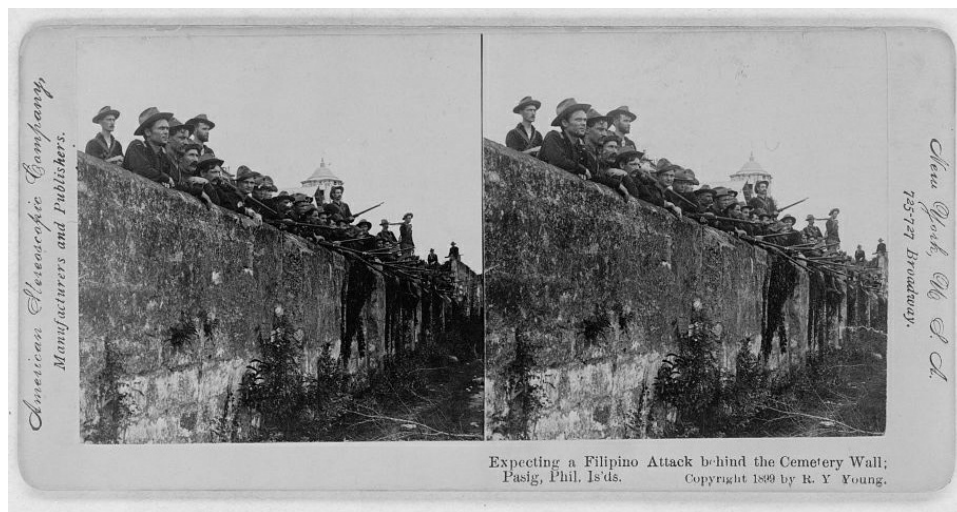
(2) *Neely's Panorama of Our New Island Possessions*
(F. Tennyson Neely Publishers, 1898) [[view full album online](#)]

(3) *The Campaign of the Jungle: Or, Under Lawton through Luzon*, by Edward Stratemeyer (Lee and Shepard, 1900), a volume in a children's series titled Old Glory Series.

[ph035_1899_Our_Island] [ph053_1899_neely_AmNewPoss] [ph108_1900_stratemeyer]

Stereographic Visions

At the turn of the century, stereographs offered a seemingly authentic experience of war and colonialism. By peering at a double photographic image through a special lens, viewers would see an optical illusion of three-dimensional depth that gave a you-are-there experience. The stereograph was the first visual mass medium, and—along with postcards—were the most widely circulated images of the Philippines. By 1900, half of American households had a stereoviewer and they purchased nearly 10 million stereoview cards every year through mail-order catalogues or from traveling salesmen. Consumers were so eager to obtain images of America's new colony that stereoview companies sent photographers to the Philippines to collect images. Their stereographs of the Philippines blended education and entertainment as they told stories of American benevolence in their new colony.



Original caption on stereograph: "Expecting a Filipino Attack behind the Cemetery Wall, Pasig, Phil. Is'ds," stereograph, 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph029_1899_LOC_3c36147u]



Original caption on stereograph: "A welcome to Uncle Sam's protection—three Filipinos entering American lines, Pasay, P.I.," stereograph, ca. 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

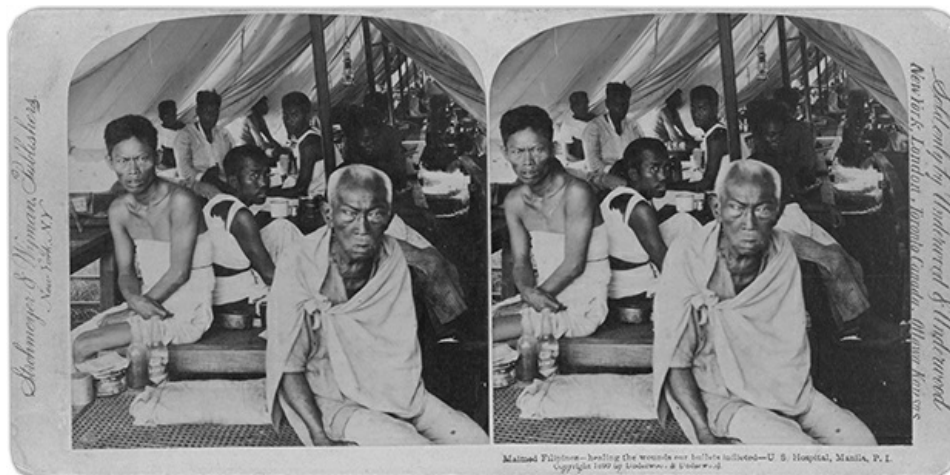
[ph022_1899_LOC3b36587u]



Original caption on stereograph: "Filipino Women Seeking Help from American Soldiers," stereograph, ca. 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph085_1899c_LOC3c13594u]



Original caption on stereograph: "Manila, Philippine Islands: Maimed Filipinos—Healing the Wounds Our Bullets Inflicted—U.S. Hospital," stereograph, ca. 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph052_1899_kilburn024]



Original caption on stereograph: "Old woman shot through the leg while carrying ammunition to the insurgents. In hospital, Manila," stereograph, 1899. (detail)

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

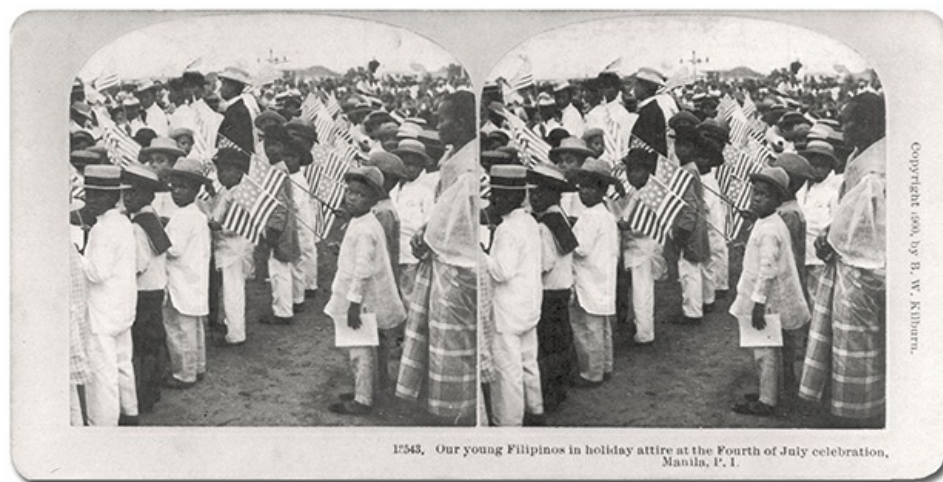
& University of Wisconsin
[ph040_1899_UWisc]



Original caption on stereograph: "The right way to Filipino Freedom—Boys in Normal High School, Manila, Philippine Islands." stereograph, 1900.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

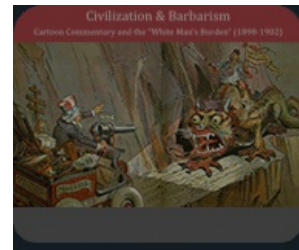
[ph102_1900_UWisc]



Original caption on stereograph: "Our young Filipinos in holiday attire at the Fourth of July celebration, Manila, P.I.," stereograph, ca. 1900.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph096_1900_LOC_3b27481u]



For more cartoon commentary on turn-of-the-century expansionism: VC unit "Civilization & Barbarism"

Selling Civilization

The U.S. public was bitterly divided over the American conquest of the Philippines. While "anti-imperialist" critics denounced the invasion, supporters of the war defended it in terms of America's destiny to spread civilization and progress to backward peoples and nations. In the rhetoric of the pro-war camp, the independence movement led by Emilio Aguinaldo, which began against Spain and was redirected against the American invaders after Spain's defeat, was commonly referred to as an "insurrection."

Even more vividly than in photographs, poems, and prose, the mystique of the white man's burden found expression in a flood of colorful cartoons depicting the global spread of the Western world's superior material as well as spiritual civilization. As seen in the two samples below, the military invasion was depicted as paving the way for an invasion of secular as well as religious white missionaries—and acquisition of the Philippines was depicted as a stepping-stone through which U.S. manufactured products would eventually make their way into the vast potential markets of China.



IF THEY 'LL ONLY BE GOOD.

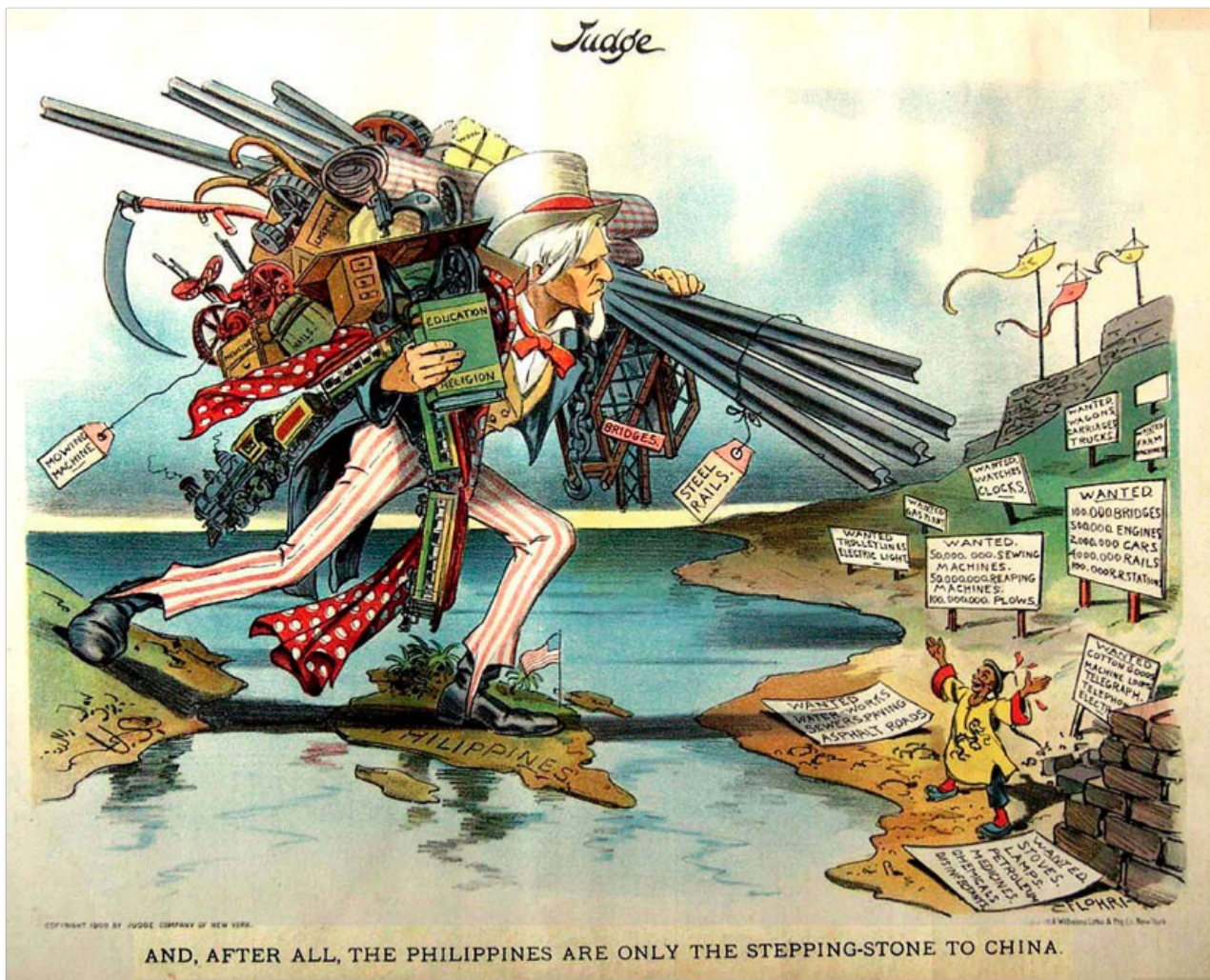
UNCLE SAM.—You have seen what my sons can do in battle;—now see what my daughters can do in peace.

This graphic by S.D. Erhart, published in 1900 in the popular magazine Puck, depicts American colonialism as a benevolent form of uplift. As U.S. soldiers depart, Uncle Sam introduces a group of female teachers to the Filipinos, depicted in typical caricatures—here as childlike and half-naked—that suggested they were in need of education and civilization. The U.S. government did send small numbers of teachers to the Philippines soon after acquiring the colony, but in reality, American troops outnumbered teachers throughout the military occupation.

Caption on print: "If they'll only be good. 'You have seen what my sons can do in war—now see what my daughters can do in peace.'" Puck 46 (January 31, 1900)

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph211_puck_1900_739_yale]



Supporters of U.S. policy in the Philippines frequently reminded the American public that acquisition of a colony in Asia could open the door toward trade opportunities in China. This 1900 cartoon by Emil Flohri shows Uncle Sam bringing not only “education” and “religion” but a vast array of consumer goods to an eager Chinese population. The many signs on the Chinese shore itemize all the goods that presumably will find a market in China. The tiny Chinese figure dressed in traditional clothing follows the condescending stereotype demeaning non-Western, non-Caucasian peoples.

Caption on print: “And, after all, the Philippines are only the stepping-stone to China.” Judge (March 21, 1900).

Source: [Wikimedia Commons \[view\]](#)

[ph100_1900_Mar21_Judge]

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Snapshots

Conquest
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Mission”

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Photography & Power in the Colonial Philippines – 1

The U.S. Conquest & Occupation (1898-1902)

by Christopher Capozzola

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UNCIVILIZED BEHAVIOR

There was indeed a civilizing mission in the Philippines, but haunting the undertaking was the uncivilized behavior that accompanied it. Americans initially believed that Filipinos would welcome them peacefully, but as the Philippine independence movement became a war of resistance against the Americans, U.S. tactics became more violent in turn.

The tension between American ideals and military realities—between the civilizing mission and uncivilized behavior—was not lost on Filipinos fighting for their national sovereignty, on anti-imperialist critics at home, nor even on some of the soldiers themselves. Witting or not, a photographer captured some of that tension in a stereoscopic view taken in 1899 in Malabon, just north of Manila. On an illegible, almost otherworldly landscape lie the bodies of two Filipino soldiers. Their deaths, described in a caption as "a sacrifice to Aguinaldo's ambition," suggest the Philippine independence movement was the work of its ambitious and manipulative leader rather than a broadly popular movement. Horizontal mounds of earth divide the photograph in two; above sit three American soldiers, two cut off from our view, and one in a puzzling state of reflection. Not more than a few weeks into this coda to Uncle Sam's "splendid little war," some of the young Americans who found themselves in the Philippines may already have begun to question the motives and purposes of the undertaking.



This haunting image from the very early period of the Philippine-American War demonstrates its human costs. A Filipino soldier lies in a trench; the American soldier looking on may convey a sense of unease with the war that had just begun.

Original caption on stereograph: "A Sacrifice to Aguinaldo's Ambition—Behind the Filipino Trenches after the Battle of Malabon, P.I.," stereograph, 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph213_1899c_3b04927u]

Anti-imperialists in the United States—a motley coalition that included starched-collar religious pacifists and blue-collar workers, bleeding-heart Northerners and racist Southerners, self-proclaimed "Friends of the Indian" and die-hard enemies of President William McKinley—sought to get their hands on some of the more gruesome images. They hoped that simple publicity of war's violence would mobilize opposition to an imperial undertaking that they felt violated America's core principles. But despite interviewing returned soldiers, activists turned up no reliable images. "I think it would be absolutely impossible to get any pictures from subjects undergoing torture," reported Arthur Parker, a disillusioned veteran who had become an anti-war activist. "[O]f course no one would ever have a chance to be allowed to photograph the 'water cure' operation, or any of the other tortures as being administered." [1]

Arthur Parker's reference to the "water cure" pointed to the most controversial instance of violence during the Philippine-American War, and one in which photography played a key role. The water cure was a gruesome interrogation method in which captives were forced to consume approximately five gallons of water, at which point their captors pressed their bloated stomachs until the water came out, and the process began again—ending only with the victim's confession. The method's first mention in the U.S. press appeared in a letter by a Nebraska private published in the *Omaha World-Herald* in May 1900, but few paid much attention until journalist George Kennan, Sr., provided a lengthy and lurid description in the March 9, 1901, issue of *The Outlook*, a national news weekly. Kennan decried counterinsurgency's degrading impact on American morality, having observed in the Philippines "a tendency toward greater severity—not to say cruelty—in our dealings with the natives." The problem, Kennan argued, was not the confusing nature of guerrilla warfare but the fact that

Soldiers of civilized nations, in dealing with an inferior race, do not observe the laws of honorable warfare as they would observe them were they dealing with equals and fighting fellow-Christians. [2]

Such images and criticism prompted a Congressional investigation. In Washington, an ambitious young Ohio judge named William Howard Taft, then head of the commission that governed the islands, acknowledged to the senators "that cruelties have been inflicted [and] that there have been in individual instances of water cure. ... I am told—all these things are true." But if anti-imperialists felt assured that oral testimony and photographs would damn the Army, they were about to learn another lesson. Secretary of War Elihu Root issued a report insisting that "charges in the public press of cruelty" were "unfounded or grossly exaggerated," and launched a publicity campaign to question the motives of the anti-imperialists by doubting the veracity of their photographs. Root also blamed the press: "yellow journal hypocrites," he complained, had convinced "millions of good people that we have turned Manila into a veritable hell."

Photographs of the water cure were not published in the U.S. during the war, making it harder for opponents of the practice to prove that it was happening, and easier for officials to deny. But years later, images of the torture practiced on both sides of the conflict began to surface, and have become iconic images of the war's brutality.

It remains unclear whether an authentic photograph of the water cure has survived—or if one was ever taken. Three images from the historical record give a sense of the practice. In one, soldiers of the 35th U.S. Volunteer Infantry Regiment depict the water cure. As far as we can tell, this is a staged image rather than a record of the actual interrogation of a prisoner. A more historically convincing image—even if less compelling as a photograph—was purportedly taken in Sual in the province of Pangasinan in May, 1901.

Even without photographic evidence, though, images of the water cure circulated widely in American visual culture through illustrations and cartoons, including an artist's striking rendering on the cover of *Life* magazine in 1902.



This ca. 1901 photograph of American soldiers administering the “water cure” is likely a staged rather than authentic scene, but has become an iconic image of the war’s atrocities. The “water cure” torture employed by both sides during the Philippine-American War was much discussed, but rarely documented by the camera.

Source: “1899-1902: Fil-American War” [\[view\]](#)

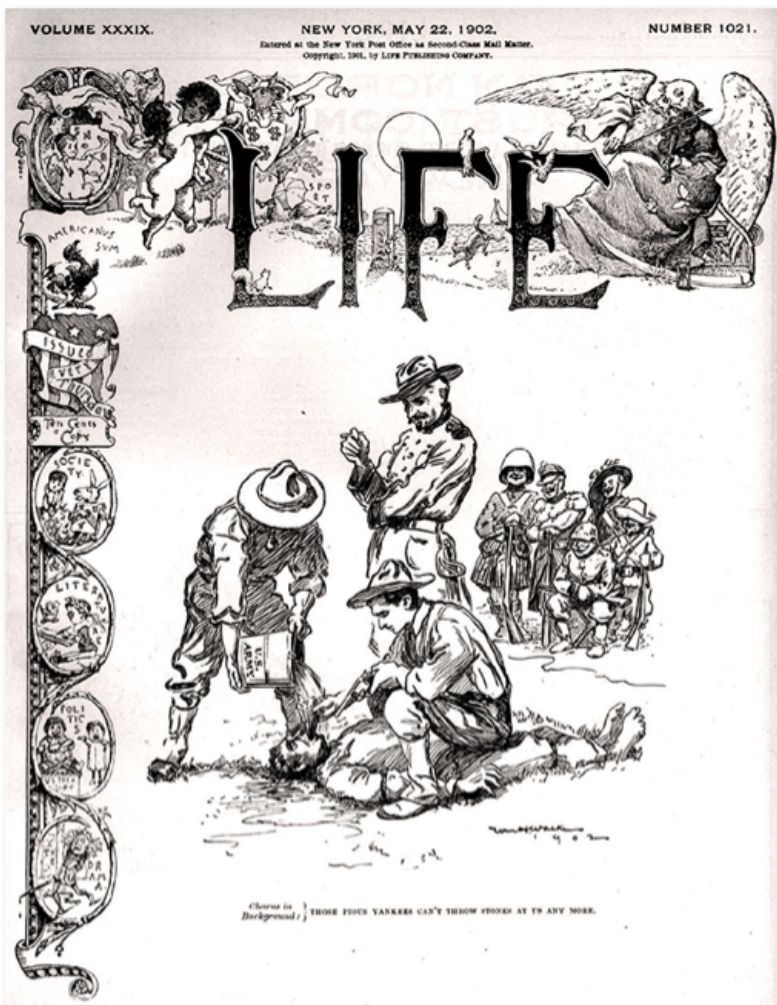
[ph214 _1901]



This grainy snapshot, reportedly taken in Pangasinan province in May 1901, may be the most authentic evidence of the administration of the water cure. This image did not circulate in the U.S. during the Philippine-American War.

Source: “Philippine-American War, 1899-1902” [\[view\]](#)

[ph215]



Photographs of the water cure did not circulate in the U.S. during the war, but illustrations did. In this graphic cover of the May 22, 1902 issue of *Life* (a precursor to the illustrated news magazine that came later), a smiling chorus of European figures observing the "U.S. Army" inflicting the water torture on a Filipino prisoner intones that "Those pious Yankees can't throw stones at us any more." The blunt message was that by their atrocious conduct in the Philippines, the Americans, who often criticized European imperialists for their cruel excesses, had shown themselves to be hypocrites.

Life Magazine, #39 (May 22, 1902)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons \[view\]](#)

[ph216_1902_May22]

The Despoilation of War

Depictions of the water cure were the most extreme—and most hotly debated—aspect of this bloody conflict. But other issues could create controversy as well. At home, President William McKinley explained America's colonial responsibilities to a visiting delegation of ministers:

To educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died. [3]

McKinley's claim that Americans were "Christianizing" the Philippines—a country that was already overwhelmingly Christian—created new conflicts over U.S. colonial policy. So did the actions of ordinary soldiers, who sent home images and objects as souvenirs of their wartime service. Among the items that soldiers sent back to the United States were images of their encampments in town squares and village churches, photographs of the bombed-out shells of old Spanish cathedrals, and even the plundered relics of the colonial clergy. Such were the spoils of war—but in the midst of a controversial conflict, one person's memento could seem to another viewer to be evidence of desecration. At home in the United States, a violent war that was devastating Catholic sites prompted outcries from leading American Catholics, showing that photographic images could have many meanings.

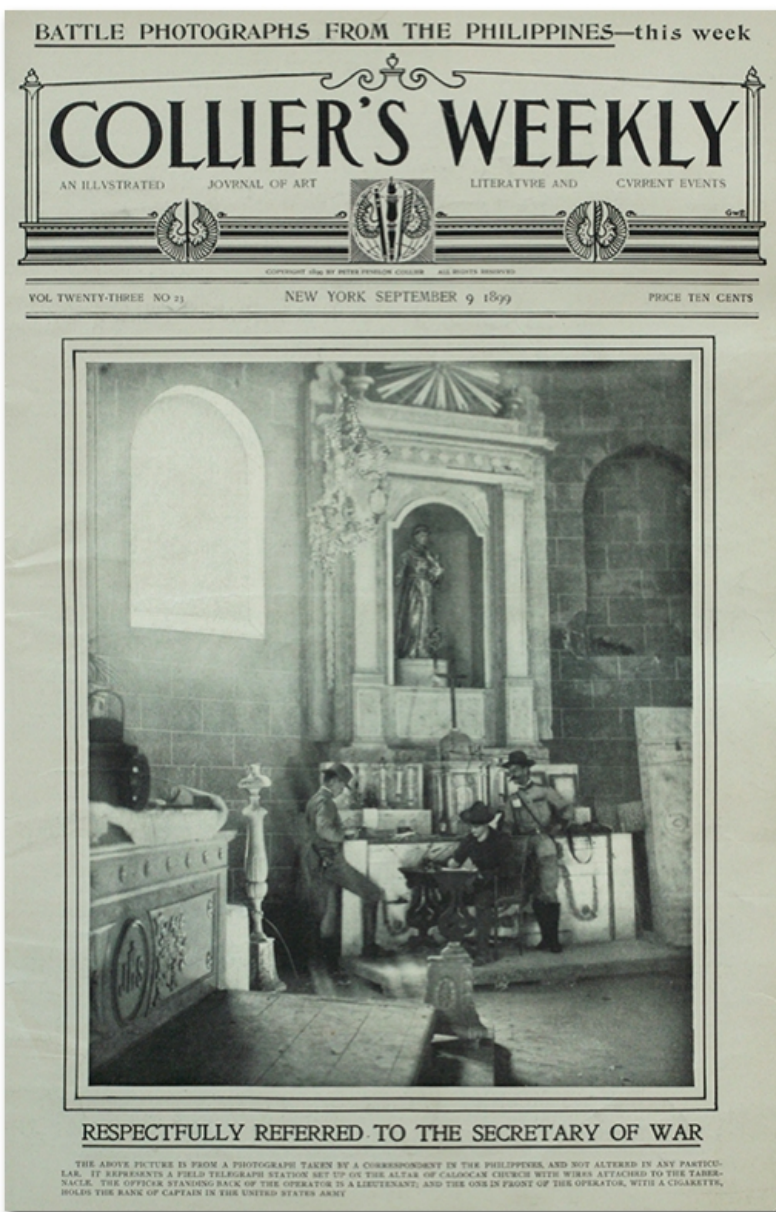


Both American and Filipino soldiers used churches as forts and hospitals during the Philippine-American War. But at home in the United States, images of destroyed churches and looted altars prompted outcries, particularly from American Catholics.

Original caption on stereograph: "Interior Santa Ana Church—our Field Hospital during the fight, Philippines," stereograph, ca. 1899.

Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph088_1899c_LOC_3g04645u]



When this image of American soldiers operating a field station out of a church in the city of Caloocan appeared in Collier's Weekly in September 1899, it generated a firestorm of protest from religious leaders and a debate in the U.S. about the contradiction between imperial conquest and Christian civilization.

Original caption: "The above is from a photograph taken by a correspondent in the Philippines, and not altered in any particular. It represents a field telegraph station set up on the altar of Caloocan Church with wires attached to the tabernacle. The officer standing back of the operator is a lieutenant, and the one in front of the officer, with a cigarette, holds the rank of Captain in the United States Army."

Collier's Weekly 23 (September 9, 1899)

[ph036_1899]



Postwar Hostilities

While the photographic record carries evidence of the brutal nature of the Philippine-American War, it fails to convey the war's most striking devastation: the fact that by far most of the Filipino deaths during the conflict were among the civilian population. The U.S. Army recorded 4,200 American soldiers killed. Among Filipinos, between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers died, but far more civilians—between 100,000 and 300,000—were either killed or sent to early graves by the scorched-earth tactics that starved many out of their homes and destroyed their livelihoods.

[View the complete article from
The Literary Digest](#)

All parties to the conflict—the American forces, Aguinaldo's guerrilla insurgents, and Filipino soldiers attached to the U.S. military—committed atrocities. American troops burned and destroyed villages. Rural inhabitants were forced into concentration camps known as "protected zones," with surrounding territory designated a free-fire zone. Violence disrupted harvests and killed off livestock. War-related disease, especially cholera, became widespread. Summary executions were routine.

Antiwar critics back in the United States learned of these enormities through letters and reports by a handful of critical journalists, but the censored and self-censored visual record provided them with little evidence. Indeed it was not until May 5, 1902—a mere two months before the U.S. government declared that the insurrection had ended—that the most graphic depiction of the slaughter of civilians appeared in a now-famous cartoon in the *New York Evening Journal*, a newspaper owned by publisher William Randolph Hearst. Published in the midst of a Senate investigation of alleged U.S. war crimes, the cartoon derived from a notorious order reportedly issued by Brigadier General Jacob H. Smith to kill every male over the age of ten in retaliation for a September 1901 surprise attack that killed some 40 U.S. troops at Balangiga on the island of Samar.

The island, General Smith told a subordinate, was to be destroyed. "I wish you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn, the better you will please me. ... The interior of Samar must be made a howling wilderness." Faced with the human suffering of civilians, not all American soldiers obeyed Smith's orders. But twice—once verbally and once in writing—Smith conveyed those words or ones much like them, and in the end, he got the results he sought. [4]



"KILL EVERY ONE OVER TEN."
Criminals because they were born ten years before we took the Philippines.
—*The New York Evening Journal*.

The heading of this 1902 cartoon quotes Brigadier General Jacob H. Smith's notorious order to kill every male over ten years old in retaliation for a surprise attack on U.S. troops. The caption at the bottom reads "Criminals Because They Were Born Ten Years Before We Took the Philippines." A vulture, rather than the noble American eagle, perches on the flags and shield above an American firing squad. General Smith was eventually court-martialed for issuing the order. Without photographs to document the violence in Samar, antiwar critics relied on graphic illustrations, but their opponents easily dismissed these drawings as inauthentic and exaggerated.

Originally published in The New York Evening Journal (May 5, 1902), this version appeared in The Literary Digest (May 17, 1902, p. 667).

Source: Google Books [\[view\]](#)

[ph218_1902_May17_Literary_Digest_p667]

After the formal end of hostilities in 1902, violence continued, and one event that was captured on film generated a final controversy over U.S. military policy in the Philippines. In 1905, the attempt of the U.S. colonial administration to institute a head tax prompted a mass rebellion, and several hundred Muslim Filipinos (known in the Philippines as "Moros") retreated to an armed camp atop a mountain known as Bud Dajo on Jolo Island.

In a two-day battle in March, 1906 some 400 American soldiers destroyed the camp, killing more than 600 men, women, and children—and prompting, once again, intense debate when news of the event reach the United States. "Brutality has been rewarded, humanity has been punished," moaned Moorfield Storey, a prominent critic. But Major General Leonard Wood, who led the Bud Dajo attack, earned a commendation, and Rowland Thomas, an American soldier, told readers in Boston that Bud Dajo "was merely a piece of public work such as the army has had to do many times in our own West." [5]



American soldiers observe the corpses of men, women, and children killed in a counterinsurgency operation against Muslim Filipinos in 1906. Commonly known as the Moro Crater Massacre, the Moros, armed mostly with traditional swords and spears, were decimated after withdrawing to an extinct volcano called Bud Dajo.

This photograph—which first appeared in print in Johnstown, Pennsylvania's Weekly Democrat on January 25, 1907—was described by one critic as "the most hideous Philippine picture published in the United States during the subjugation of the islands." It was also extremely rare: even though civilian fatalities far outnumbered the deaths of active guerrillas, they were rarely documented on film. It was left to graphic artists and journalists to call these events to public attention.


Source: Library of Congress [\[view\]](#)

[ph217_1906]

Throughout the controversy surrounding the Moro Massacre, officials repeatedly asserted that muckraking journalists had distorted the facts and were circulating sensational stories to sell newspapers. Photographic evidence, however, made such denials difficult to defend. Military officials who had made the camera into a weapon of war found that it could be wielded against them by antiwar critics. But the war's opponents—who assumed that visual documentation of atrocities would suffice to mobilize public opinion against the war—learned that images were difficult to control.

In the end, the camera was a powerful weapon, wielded by American officials in the service of colonial conquest, and—whenever they could—by their opponents as well. But colonial officials exercised greater control over when photographs were taken and how they circulated, giving them power to control the story those images told. The visual history of the Philippine-American War, therefore, cannot be recounted solely by looking at the images that remain, but must be told through its absences as well.

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1. To come
2. To come
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