

Why Did America Cross the Pacific?

Reconstructing the U.S. Decision
to Take the Philippines, 1898-99



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A closer examination of what led President William McKinley to take the Philippines reveals a series of deliberate and thoughtful choices that have often been overlooked or ignored.

Robin Collingwood, a British historian and philosopher, saw history as a reservoir of knowledge gained through instructive re-enactment. Consider Julius Caesar's decision to "cross the Rubicon" with his army and challenge his Roman Republic. To understand Caesar's choice, "This implies envisaging for himself the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it." The work of the historian in this case is not mere reproduction or description. To offer insight, "this re-enactment is only accomplished ... so far as the historian brings to bear on the problem all the powers of his own mind and all his knowledge of philosophy and politics." Such critical analysis "is not something secondary to tracing the history of it. It is an indispensable condition of the historical knowledge itself."¹

This essay offers a micro-historical reconstruction of a fateful choice made by the United States. Satisfactory reconstructions of this kind are rare. When it comes to historical episodes of import, even those that have been extensively written about and researched, it is often difficult to identify when the critical choices actually occurred. It is even more difficult to reconstruct, with a policymaker's eye, the information available at the time, the institutional context, and the plausibly available alternative courses of action.

This essay analyzes the U.S. decision to take the Philippines. It *was* fateful. Since the decision was followed by an ugly war, it seemed even at the time to symbolize a loss of American innocence, or worse, in the country's dealings with the world. By 1934, when the Philippines seemed to be a strategic millstone and the United States chose a path to full independence for the islands, the majority Democrats in Congress led the way, eager to gain

American "freedom from the colony."²

But before America could gain this "freedom," the American presence in the Philippines became a great pivot point of world history. In 1940 and 1941, Japanese naval planners concluded that any move through the South China Sea into the resource-rich Dutch East Indies and British Malaya had to include an attack on American bases in the Philippines. To the Japanese, this conclusion meant that, if they moved south, war with America was unavoidable. They then developed a war plan that included an opening attack on Pearl Harbor as well as the Philippines.³

After World War II, the American presence across the Pacific was vastly enlarged in every way. During and after the Vietnam War, historians again looked back at the 1898-99 decision to take the Philippines. They viewed it as a sort of original sin, one that now seemed to have foreshadowed all the other sins to come.

As in the story of how America stepped across the Pacific, the grand strategies in U.S. international history usually have had a traumatic birth. Grand strategies do not typically arise from visionary thinking about the future. They arise instead from the collective experience of some great disturbance, looking backward at some catalytic episode that practically everyone remembers. As people try to make sense of what has just happened, they construct quick and understandable rival narratives to explain that past, the present, and maybe the future. The shorthand narratives become entrenched, decaying into shibboleths — until the next trauma displaces them. Meanwhile, historians can slowly try to reconstruct what really did happen in the first place.

Yet the rewards of micro-historical reconstruction of fateful choices can be great. The episodes

1 Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* [1936-1940], edited by Jan van der Dussen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 215; see also William Dray, *History as Re-Enactment: R.G. Collingwood's Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

"In imagining how things might have been different, the restrained counterfactualist tries to understand better what actually did happen." Allan McGill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 153. Following on work by James Fearon more than 20 years ago, there is also growing acceptance in political science that "[c]ounterfactuals can alert us to the possible operation of dynamics and pathways that we would otherwise be prone to ignore," Robert Jervis, "Counterfactuals, Causation, and Complexity," in *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, eds. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 309-16.

2 Frank Hindman Golay, *Face of Empire: United States-Philippine Relations, 1898-1946* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1998), 443. From the 1920s until 1941, the U.S. Army's top strategic planners had been pressing for a withdrawal from the Philippines and adoption of an Alaska-Hawaii-Panama defensive perimeter in the Pacific. Brian McAllister Linn, *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 182-83.

3 On this logic chain in the Japanese war planning, see, for example, Tsunoda Jun, "The Navy's Role in the Southern Strategy," trans. Robert Scalapino, in *The Fateful Choice: Japan's Advance into Southeast Asia, 1939-1941*, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 244-48.

are usually ones that people, including most historians, think they already understand. But in my experience the more one digs, the stranger the stories get. That is, the fateful choices become more lifelike, more interesting, and more truly educational.

The Philippines decision was made, principally, by President William McKinley. For generations, McKinley himself and the way he made this decision have seemed like an opaque blur. Some historians see McKinley as a dupe of clever would-be imperialists such as the young Theodore Roosevelt and his influential friend Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge. Or they see him as driftwood pushed about by domestic politics or by great cultural or economic currents, like an American search for new markets in places like China. Or they regard him as a kind of pious nincompoop who, as one standard work puts it, permitted “missionary and business expansionists to persuade him of what he may already have believed.”⁴

There is a quote, supposedly from McKinley, that is the perfect caricature. It has McKinley describing how he “went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance” until he saw

that there was nothing left to do but take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift 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.

For generation on generation this quotation has been repeated in innumerable accounts, including standard history textbooks. It is catnip for a teacher, a vivid quote to spark up a lecture. Even though the source of the quote, repeating years later what he thought McKinley had said, has long

been suspect, that should hardly get in the way.⁵

In the Philippines case, part of the cartoon is the image of President McKinley himself. There is that dreamy missionary zeal. There is also the view, as another standard work put it, that McKinley “simply lacked ideas as usual, he was bereft of ideas.”⁶

Even those historians who are more sympathetic to McKinley, either seeing him as a hidden mastermind or agreeing that he seems to have had little choice, have not adequately understood his decision-making process in this case. As this article will show, McKinley made, in fact, five distinct sets of choices. In each he went through a fairly involved set of consultations, gathering information and weighing alternative courses of action.

In his first major public address after his decision, in Boston on February 17, 1899, before a huge crowd gathered in a large hall, McKinley’s tone was somber. He gave the crowd not one whit of self-congratulation. “I do not know why in the year 1899 this republic has unexpectedly had placed before it mighty problems which it must face and meet,” McKinley announced. “They have come and are here and they could not be kept away.”

It was the just-concluded war with Spain. “Many who were impatient for the conflict a year ago,” McKinley went on, “apparently heedless of its larger results, are the first to cry out against the far-reaching consequences of their own act.” Here he was referring to the opposition Democrats and Populists — then a third party with a strong following in the rural Midwest and South. In early 1898 the Democrats and Populists, along with many members of his own Republican Party, had joined the clamor for war with Spain. Then, clearly referring to himself and his conservative Republican allies who had been less interested in war or expansion, McKinley reminded his

4 George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 320.

5 The original source is a 1903 article by James Rusling, recounting a meeting with President McKinley in November 1899. “Interview With President McKinley,” *Christian Advocate*, January 22, 1903. Rusling was no official; he had been at the White House with the General Missionary Committee of the Methodist Episcopal Church and years later wrote up what he recalled for a church newspaper. McKinley was a lifelong Methodist. He had hosted a substantial White House reception for the committee the previous evening and this committee of Methodist bishops and church leaders had come to see the president and deliver a formal resolution of thanks. According to Rusling, McKinley asked the committee to play a role helping the Army vet people being appointed as Methodist chaplains (one such had just been court-martialed for misconduct). Since the Philippines issue was then much in the news, McKinley added an explanation of the reasons for his decision, which he had made a year earlier. In Rusling’s account, it is impossible to tell whether the high religiosity and florid prose is Rusling’s gloss (it turns out that Rusling had a characteristic style in these things) or was the style McKinley chose to adopt for this particular group. It is certainly not the way McKinley spoke about these matters to his colleagues in government.

Yet it is, of course, the florid style and the religiosity that have given the quote its persistent allure. There are much more contemporaneous and detailed accounts of McKinley explaining his reasons, displaying quite a mastery of the substance, without any such diverting artifice or haloed color. See Ephraim K. Smith, “A Question From Which We Could Not Escape: William McKinley and the Decision to Acquire the Philippine Islands,” *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 4 (October 1985): 363-75; see also Lewis Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982), 109.

6 Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1989), 108, 113. Karnow’s work is deservedly well-regarded. But, shaped by his own experience with the Vietnam War, Karnow also exemplifies the jaundiced mind-set. For background on the historiographical debate, see James Field Jr., “American Imperialism: The ‘Worst Chapter’ in Almost Any Book,” and comments by Walter LaFeber and Robert Beisner, *American Historical Review* 83 (June 1978): 644-83; and Ephraim Smith, “William McKinley’s Enduring Legacy: The Historiographical Debate on the Taking of the Philippine Islands,” in *Crucible of Empire: The Spanish-American War and Its Aftermath*, ed. James Bradford (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 205-50.

audience, “Those who dreaded war most and whose every effort was directed to prevent it, had fears of new and grave problems that might follow its inauguration.”

McKinley did not offer his audience much optimism. He did not borrow so much as a word from the political or economic arguments that the expansionist jingoes had been making to defend the taking of the Philippines. Instead, his message was that “grave problems come in the life of a nation” and that “the generation on which they are forced cannot avoid the responsibility of honestly striving for their solution.”⁷

It remains then to better understand just how these “grave problems,” seemingly so unavoidable, had actually arisen. Why, in a war to end years of bloody fighting and devastation in nearby Cuba, did the United States end up becoming the ruler of the faraway Philippine Islands? True, the Filipinos, like the nearby Cubans, had also rebelled against Spanish rule. But hardly anyone in the United States had noticed or cared.

Also, the Philippines were really far away. They were a month’s journey by steamship from California. They were a vast chain of thousands of islands. Their population was large, about 10 percent of the population of the entire United States (about 7.5 million at a time when there were 75 million in the United States). Moreover, the United States had no colonial service. Its regular Army was tiny, about 28,000 strong. So, simply on these bare facts, an American conquest of the Philippines would seem absurdly impractical. How and why then did the United States of America take such a fateful step across the Pacific?

Dewey to Manila, April to May 1898

If there was a war with Spain, everyone knew the issue would be Cuba. Since the 1820s, Spain’s only remaining colonies in the Western Hemisphere were Cuba and Puerto Rico. The Cubans had rebelled and fought a “10 years war” from 1868 to 1878. War broke out again in 1895. Years of violence across the island had become a bloody stalemate. Neither side could defeat the other. Spain would not grant independence. The Cubans would not settle for anything less.

It was obvious to Americans at the time that the United States might get pulled in. There was no mystery there. Any administration from that day to

this, confronted with such awful conditions in that enormous neighboring island, would be arguing about whether or how to try to stop it. And back then Cuba was much more important to America than it is today. Many Americans had direct interests of every kind on both sides. The Cuban rebellion was headquartered in New York City. Many of the rebel leaders were American citizens. They called loudly for American intervention to stop the suffering.

In 1898, the opposition Democrats and Populists were united in favor of intervention in Cuba. It is easy to see why. Flip through the pages of the

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Congressional Record of the time. The volume might fall open to remarks such as these, from a Kansas congressman, a Populist, that the past two years have been “years of blood and carnage; two years of nameless atrocities practiced upon the innocent and helpless portion of the Cuban population; two years of waiting and vacillation on the part of our Government; two years of our quiet consent to these butcheries.” The congressman suspected that McKinley stood by because he and other conservatives were “under the powerful influence of bond syndicates” that had loaned money to Spain and were “being controlled more by commercial considerations than by the interests of humanity and the cause of freedom.”⁸

While the Democrats called for war, the majority Republicans were split. Conservative Republicans tended to see the war fever as a press-fueled distraction from more important matters. They thought a war might be bad for business.

President McKinley had little desire for war and little interest in expanding America’s domain. His

⁷ The details of the Boston speech are all from a pamphlet prepared at the time that included photographs of the hall and the text of McKinley’s address as taken down by *The Boston Globe. Souvenir of the Visit of President McKinley and Members of the Cabinet to Boston, February 1899* (Boston: Home Market Club, 1899).

⁸ Rep. Jeremiah Botkin, *Congressional Record*, April 12, 1898, 4149, 5151.

most trusted advisers felt the same way.⁹

McKinley was a private man of relatively modest personal means. He was devoted to his wife, an invalid whose health had broken after the death of their child. He was the last American president whose demeanor and values would now be called Victorian. He was soberly dressed, very concerned for the proprieties of public appearance and behavior, religious, dignified, and virtuous.

Outsiders often misjudged McKinley. Careful, gentle, and conscientious in his personal manner, he was often assumed to be dull and weak. He was neither.

McKinley probably had more personal experience as a front-line combat soldier than any American president in history except for George Washington. The last veteran of the Civil War to serve as president, he had experienced that war from start to finish. He had enlisted as a private

elect. How shall I address you?” “Call me Major;” McKinley replied. “I earned that. I am not so sure of the rest.”¹⁰

Returning after the war to his native Ohio, the major became a lawyer, gaining renown for defending striking miners. As a Republican politician, he was mentored by some of Ohio’s most famous officeholders, including Presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and James Garfield, men who had known McKinley during the war. McKinley’s father had been an ironworker and McKinley’s politics were the politics of economic growth and tariff protection of American business.

McKinley held his seat in Congress in a battleground district of a battleground state. In the tightly matched politics of the 1880s and 1890s, Ohio was usually the crucial swing state (along with New York and Indiana). McKinley held on because he could reach some Democratic and independent

voters. He was known as an honest man. His political style was not fiery or inspiring; it was amiable and deliberate.

One of the great journalists of his generation, William Allen White, recalled an interview with President McKinley. He went to the president’s modest home in Canton, Ohio. By then a heavy man but “never paunchy,” McKinley was clean-shaven and immaculately dressed. He laid his cigar aside so it would not show in a

picture. “We must not let the young men of this country see their President smoking!”

“I was sweating,” White recalled, “for it was a hot day. He was stainless, spotless, apparently inwardly cool and outwardly unruffled. I thought then, and I think now, that he sensed what I was seeking and guarded it from me, maybe consciously.” White recalls that “his mistrust was sweet and friendly and was revealed only by the guarded complacency in what he said. He refused to tousle his hair politically. He was the statue in the park speaking.”¹¹

For McKinley, getting his War Department ready for war was a hard problem.

in a regiment from his native Ohio. He had been promoted after a display of personal heroism on the terrible battlefield of Antietam, driving a supply wagon forward to beleaguered front-line troops under heavy enemy fire, an episode that stayed in the memories of all who witnessed it. Much of his fighting was as a cavalryman in the campaigns of the Shenandoah Valley, ending the war with the rank of major. One old comrade from the war wrote to McKinley after he was elected president, confessing that, “I knew you as a soldier, as a congressman, as a governor, and now as president-

⁹ Another reason the war over Cuba is not mysterious is because the quality of historical work on the events leading to war is now very high. John Offner devoted much of his professional life to a thorough scouring of the evidence on both sides of the Atlantic. His account of the diplomacy and the run-up to the war is definitive. See John Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States & Spain Over Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

¹⁰ H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Kent: Kent State University Press, rev. ed., 2003), 26. The best biographies of McKinley are this one and the knowledgeable, beautifully written evocation by Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959). Nick Kapur has placed McKinley’s character firmly in the Victorian cultural context (including that era’s ethic of exhibiting manliness with rationality and self-restraint, rather than strenuous demonstration) along with other aspects of his values, including the then-common belief in arbitration of international disputes. Nick Kapur, “William McKinley’s Values and the Origins of the Spanish-American War: A Reinterpretation,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 2011): 18-38 (though Kapur can’t resist the silly Rusling quote).

¹¹ William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 333.

That was the McKinley outsiders saw. His path to the presidency had not been easy. The nomination fight inside the Republican Party had been the hardest part. To win, McKinley had taken on his party's leading political bosses.

Through a political adviser, businessman Mark Hanna, McKinley had been offered a deal. If he promised to make one of the bosses the secretary of the Treasury, the boss would help clear the way for McKinley to get the nomination. One of those present remembered that, hearing this offer, "McKinley's face grew serious — in fact, hard." He remained silent for a while and then said, "Mark, some things come too high. If I were to accept the nomination on those terms, the place would be worth nothing to me and less to the people. If those are the terms, I am out of it."

McKinley and his allies had gone on to win the party nomination by beating the party bosses. They had outfought them with an extraordinarily well-organized grass-roots effort among the state party conventions.¹²

McKinley came to the presidency hoping to concentrate on domestic matters, working closely with Congress. Most congressmen liked him. One frequent opponent (Sen. George Hoar of Massachusetts) acknowledged that McKinley's "great wisdom and tact and his delightful individual quality" gave him unusual influence.¹³

The waspish Henry Adams, a longtime White House watcher from his perch on the other side of Lafayette Park, usually reflected the "smart" Washington view that McKinley was little more than an amiable figurehead. Adams got some advice from his longtime friend John Hay, who had been an aide to Lincoln and was then in London as McKinley's ambassador to Britain. Hay warned Adams.

[D]on't you go to making mistakes about McKinley! He is no tenderfoot — he has a habit of getting there. Many among the noble and the pure have had occasion to change their minds about him.¹⁴

Taking office in 1897, McKinley had chosen a Cabinet with carefully balanced political interests. McKinley soon came to regret some of these choices. At the State Department, McKinley had

already been working around his senile secretary, John Sherman. He replaced Sherman as soon as the war with Spain began in April 1898.

For McKinley, getting his War Department ready for war was a hard problem. His secretary of war, Russell Alger, was a former governor of Michigan. The War Department's deputy head (then called the "adjutant-general") was a general named Henry Corbin.

The U.S. Army then had only 28,000 regulars, scattered around the country in 78 posts; the largest had a garrison of fewer than 850. The Army had leveled off at this strength since the mid-1870s. It was about one-twentieth the size of the German army and a good deal smaller even than the army of Mexico. It was not "that there was opposition to a proper military establishment," Corbin recalled later, "but rather that the people as a whole were indifferent about it, fascinated, as they were, with the wonderful growth and development of the country then going on."

Corbin had seen combat both in the Civil War and later skirmishes against Indian tribes. Where he could, he had arranged peace with Indians. He would have preferred peace with Spain. With the Civil War 33 years in the past, Corbin thought most Americans had forgotten what real war was like. "Only the poetry and fiction of war existed; the actual hardships and privations of war our young men knew nothing about."¹⁵

Fortunately for McKinley, the first actions in any war with Spain would fall to the Navy. The Navy would be ready. It had been developing plans for a possible war with Spain for years, after the Cubans began their latest revolt. Naturally its plans mainly focused on operations in the Caribbean.

Also fortunate for McKinley was that Secretary of the Navy John D. Long was the president's close friend. Raised in Maine, Long had made a legal and political career in Massachusetts. An occasional poet and playwright, Long had a gracious style that made him a popular speaker of the Massachusetts House, then governor, then member of Congress. It was in the House of Representatives during the 1880s that Long and then-Rep. McKinley became friends.

Long's deputy at the Navy Department was a young up-and-comer from New York, Theodore Roosevelt. A prolific writer, Roosevelt had written

12 Karl Rove, *The Triumph of William McKinley: Why the Election of 1896 Still Matters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015) offers the most detailed account of McKinley's road to the candidacy, which was a much more challenging path than the one he faced in the general election against Bryan. The quote on McKinley's reaction to the 1895 proposal conveyed by Hanna is on page 134.

13 Morgan, *William McKinley*, 210.

14 Hay to Adams, May 9, 1898, in *Letters of John Hay*, vol. 3 (New York: Gordian Press, 1969) (reprinting a privately printed collection of 1908), 122.

15 On the size of the U.S. Army, see Edward Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898-1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3-4. Corbin quoted from his private autobiography, completed in 1906, 83 and 88, filed in the Corbin Papers, Box 11, Library of Congress.

a good history of the naval War of 1812 and was devoted to naval readiness. McKinley and Long knew that Roosevelt was an outspoken expansionist. They had appointed him as a concession to the lobbying efforts of Roosevelt's similarly inclined friend, Massachusetts Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge.

Long, who was nearly 60, enjoyed Roosevelt, who was about to turn 40. Long regarded his deputy about the way a parent might regard an exceptionally precocious but somewhat wild teenager. To his diary, Long appraised Roosevelt

The months leading to war had taken a toll on McKinley. He seemed visibly careworn and losing sleep.

as a man "so enthusiastic and loyal that he is in certain respects invaluable; yet I lack confidence in his good judgment and discretion. [Roosevelt] goes off very impulsively He has been of great use; a man of unbounded energy and force, and thoroughly honest — which is the main thing, ... His forte is his push. He lacks the serenity of discussion."¹⁶

As the Navy planned for a war in the Caribbean, one of the lesser planning problems among its officers was: In a war with Spain, what should be done with the Navy's Asiatic squadron? Since the 1830s the U.S. Navy had maintained a few warships in Pacific waters to protect American merchantmen from pirates and show the flag. The ships usually called at ports in China and Japan, and occasionally in Korea.

In the Navy's first plans, the Asiatic squadron would go after Spain's ships and its Pacific base in the Philippines, in Manila Bay. That way the

squadron could eliminate the Spanish threat to America's Pacific commerce. Also, any gains in Manila might then become bargaining leverage for peace talks. This sort of logic was familiar to any student of the only recent transoceanic naval wars anyone could study, the wars of the rival empires long ago during the age of sail.

Some naval officers had another idea for the Asiatic squadron: Send it all the way to the Atlantic Ocean to attack Spain's Canary Islands, near the Spanish coast. But this idea seemed too risky and impractical.¹⁷

Long relied on the career officials running the Navy bureaus. A special planning board had junked the Canary Islands attack idea by the summer of 1897. It went back to the Manila Bay objective, which would attack the nearby enemy and might give the Americans "a controlling voice, as to what should become of the islands, when the final settlement was made."¹⁸

Why do anything with the Asiatic squadron at all? Why not just let them keep sailing around doing what they usually did? There were two problems, which can be summarized in shorthand as coal and neutrality.

This was an age in which the steamships ran on hundreds of tons of coal, which had to be regularly resupplied from a place where thousands of tons of coal could be stored and transferred into ship bunkers. Coal was not the only reason for a base or friendly port. The ships also needed access to repair facilities as well as occasional supplies of food and water. But coal was the most complex problem, in part because it was so difficult to store and transfer large amounts of coal at sea and to transfer it between ships. In East Asia, the United States "had no docking or coaling facilities for its handful of vessels and was completely dependent upon the British and the Japanese for these services."¹⁹

If war broke out with Spain, the U.S. squadron on the East Asian coast could sail the 700 miles from Hong Kong to Manila in less than a week, with all the coal its ships could carry. But unless the ships

16 John Davis Long, *America of Yesterday: As Reflected in the Journal of John Davis Long*, ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly, 1923), 168-69, 186, 188 (entries for April 25 and May 5, 1898).

17 The authoritative source is John A.S. Grenville, "American Naval Preparations for War with Spain, 1896-1898," *Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 1968): 33-47; see also John A.S. Grenville & George Berkeley Young, "The Influence of Strategy Upon History: The Acquisition of the Philippines," in *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 267-76. Grenville's 1966 account is useful but was partly superseded once he discovered the work of the 1897 Sicard Board, as recounted in his 1968 article. See also David Trask, *The War With Spain in 1898* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 77-78; and Mark Hayes, "War Plans and Preparations and Their Impact on U.S. Naval Operations in the Spanish-American War," March 1998, available in the online reading room of the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHHC).

18 The quote is from the Sicard Board plan of June 1897. The Philippines operations are treated in just one paragraph in the plan. Grenville, "American Naval Preparations," 43.

19 Seward Livermore, "American Naval-Base Policy in the Far East, 1850-1914," *Pacific Historical Review* 13, no. 2 (June 1944): 113, 116; see also John Maurer, "Coal, Oil, and American Naval Strategy, 1898-1925," *Naval War College Review* 34, no. 6 (November 1981): 60, 62.

could secure a new base, they would have to sail around for a few weeks until the coal and other supplies ran low and then go off to some place where they could put thousands of tons of coal back in their fuel bunkers. The closest American coaling station was in Hawaii, established by agreement with the Hawaiians in 1887.

Then there were the problems of neutral rights. If there was a war with Spain all the usual ports of call for America's Asiatic squadron — Hong Kong, Singapore, and Nagasaki — would be in neutral countries such as Britain and Japan. Under the prevailing understanding of neutral rights, rights the United States had loudly insisted upon during its civil war, a neutral country could not host and supply ships of a power that was at war. If the ships of the belligerent power did not leave, the neutral power would have to intern them and their sailors. That meant that the neutral power would impound the ships and hold the sailors until they could be returned home in some neutral way.

In short, the Asiatic squadron would not be able to stay where it was, based in Hong Kong. The squadron would have to leave. Where could it go after sailing around for a while? The only possible places would be to the nearest American coaling station, which was thousands of miles away in Hawaii, or go all the way home to the nearest U.S. naval base, in California. If that happened the Asiatic squadron might play no useful part in the war at all. Worse, the squadron's withdrawal thousands of miles away would then open up the Asiatic shipping lanes to a potential Spanish attack on American merchantmen, since the Spanish did have an Asiatic base, in Manila Bay.

The only other choice was for the squadron to attack Manila Bay. There it could try to blockade the Spanish for a few weeks, until the American squadron ran short on coal and had to run home. Or, more risky, the squadron could attack the Spanish squadron in Manila Bay and try to seize it to turn it into an American base.

There was then little geopolitics or grand strategy in the paragraph of the Navy plan that dealt with the Asiatic squadron. There was a more banal question: What are we going to do with the Asiatic squadron during a war with Spain? Something had to be found for the ships to do. They could not just hang out in East Asia because of the neutrality problem in the region's ports of call. So, unless they had an object, the handful of warships would have to spend a month sailing home and effectively sit out the war.

If the Navy did not want to bring the ships the long way home, it had to find something for them to do in the Atlantic, like the Canary Islands scheme, or else send them to attack Manila. Of those two options, Manila was judged to be more practical, if risky.

That risky option was therefore what the Navy expected the Asiatic squadron to do. It was led by Commodore George Dewey, a 60 year-old Vermonter who had been in the Navy since he arrived at the Naval Academy at age 17. He had last seen combat in the Civil War. But he had wanted this sea duty and he had an aggressive spirit. That was the spirit needed for this mission, which had a bit of a "win or die" atmosphere about it. If something went badly wrong with his attack, he would be thousands of miles away from any U.S. base to which he could retreat.

When war came, the main U.S. naval forces were concentrated in the Caribbean and the Atlantic to be ready around Cuba. The five remaining battleships were assigned to the Caribbean and Atlantic. So were most of the modern cruisers. Of the 15 modern (armored or protected) cruisers in the Navy, Dewey's squadron had only four.

In principle, Dewey's squadron could still outgun the Spanish ships in Manila Bay. But Dewey's ships had to run through the entrance to the bay, which could easily be covered by shore batteries and mined. Then, even if they ran that gauntlet, Dewey's ships would have to pummel the Spanish vessels that might be supported by shore batteries.

The Spanish understood all of this. They too had expected and planned for possible war with the United States. They had developed the right kind of defensive plans for Manila Bay.

But the Spanish had not implemented those plans. They had not installed enough of the needed artillery, observation posts, or mines. An intrepid American consul in Manila observed the Spanish preparations and kept Dewey informed, escaping Manila to join Dewey just as the war began.²⁰

After a mysterious explosion sank the U.S. battleship *Maine*, then visiting Havana harbor, on February 15, 1898, preparations for a war with Spain quickened. Dewey had been told to gather his squadron in Hong Kong and prepare.

There is an often-repeated story about how Roosevelt and Lodge schemed to send orders to Dewey to attack the Philippines on a day in February while Long was out of the office. The story is a myth that Lodge embellished in a later memoir. In fact, the orders that went out when Long was

out that day had followed up on prior plans. Long reviewed them on his return to the office.²¹

Relations were broken and war began on April 21. That day Long walked over to see President McKinley.

It was a short walk. Back then the White House had no West Wing. Long would have strolled on a short path by some gardens between the State, War and Navy Building over to the door to the executive mansion. He was used to this. He would sometimes go over at night, dropping in on his friend to join a family dinner or while the president was reading the paper in the evening.

The Navy Department, the State Department, and the War Department were housed in the new ornate building completed in 1888, just west of the White House. Called the State, War and Navy Building until after World War II, this is now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (and has been taken over by staff in the Executive Office of the President).

Before walking to the executive mansion Long had discussed the first set of war orders with his Naval War Board. Then he and McKinley strolled for an hour that afternoon through the streets of Washington.

The months leading to war had taken a toll on McKinley. He seemed visibly careworn and losing sleep. Long noted to his diary that the president “opens his heart to me, with reference to the struggle through which he has been and the anxiety it has involved.”

Probably during this walk, Long explained that the Navy’s long-standing plans were to send Dewey on to Manila to attack the Spanish forces there. McKinley took this in. But he “preferred to consider the matter a little longer.”

A couple of days later, there was still no approval from McKinley. There is no evidence about why he hesitated.

Then news arrived from Dewey. As expected, the British governor in Hong Kong had just communicated the order: Dewey and his warships must leave their neutral harbor immediately. Neutral harbors in China and Japan were also expected to be unavailable, except as way stations home to America.

On Sunday, April 24, Long went back to the White House and reviewed the situation with

the president. Now the matter was urgent. What else could Dewey do but go on to Manila Bay, as planned? Long’s staff had drafted the order. The president finally approved it.²²

It took about a week for the Asiatic squadron to reach Manila Bay. On May 1, Dewey’s ships fought their battle. During the night, the Americans slipped into the bay without interference. The Spanish warships were engaged. All were sunk or disabled. Not one American life was lost.

What a victory! From top to bottom the country was relieved and electrified by the news. Now what? What could Dewey’s squadron do next?

The Navy had not planned for this. The Spanish garrison in Manila remained intact. It did not surrender. Dewey could put some Marines ashore at the Cavite Navy Yard, about eight miles from Manila. He could hang around for a while, patrolling the bay and maintaining a blockade. But he could not remain for months unless he could secure control of the port and its facilities. Dewey could not capture Manila.

After hanging around in Manila Bay for a couple of weeks, Dewey cabled home that even if the Spanish surrendered he could not hold Manila without getting some troops. He estimated the Spanish troop strength at about 10,000 men. There were numerous Filipino rebels hemming in the Spanish by land, “although they are inactive and making no demonstrations.” Dewey asked for a “well equipped force of 5000 men.”²³

McKinley had anticipated this request. He had decided to send out an expedition to hold Manila, which Dewey’s victory had not quite placed in U.S. hands. A few months later McKinley would smilingly tell a friend, “If old Dewey had just sailed away when he smashed that Spanish fleet, what a lot of trouble he would have saved us.” But recounting the matter later in 1898 to a more knowledgeable group, McKinley was less airy. The problem, McKinley explained, was that the battle had

taken place at Manilla and not on the high seas[.] Manilla became a question from which we could not escape. Dewey had to go there to find the Spanish fleet. ... [A]nd having destroyed their fleet Dewey found [Manila] to be the safest and indeed the only harbor

21 See Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy*, 276-78; Trask, *The War With Spain*, 80-81. On Long’s review of what Roosevelt had done, see Long, *America of Yesterday*, 168-70.

22 Long, *America of Yesterday*, 184; John Long to Agnes Long, October 9, 1898, Long Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 79, 355-57; Whittlesey to Long, August 22, 1901, Spanish-American War — Battle of Manila Bay, NHHHC (online document collection).

23 Dewey to Long, May 15, 1898, Spanish-American War — Blockade and Siege of Manila, NHHHC (online document collection).

open to him as by laws of neutrality he was excluded from all other countries[?] ports.²⁴

Once the post-battle situation became clear, an expedition was put together to secure American occupation of the port. The Army had no plan whatsoever for the Philippines. It began looking frantically for regiments and officers that could go help hold on at least in Manila until there was a peace conference. The Army made its estimates of how many troops were needed to be sure of defeating a Spanish force of about 10,000 troops. The Army and Navy agreed to send some 15,000 to 20,000 troops, including many of the new volunteers enlisted for the war, to have enough soldiers to outnumber the Spanish.

The Army's commanding general, Nelson Miles, clarified the expedition commander's mission. His orders told the commander, Maj. Gen. Wesley Merritt, that this was not some force "expected to carry on a war to conquer an extensive territory." The expedition was only to establish "a strong garrison to command the harbor of Manila" and to relieve the burden on Dewey's sailors and Marines.²⁵

The expedition went out in three waves as the Navy scrounged ships to carry and escort them.²⁶

For decades Americans had been arguing about how to assert themselves in the world.

The first group sailed at the end of May and arrived in Manila Bay on July 4. The remaining troops, including Maj. Gen. Merritt, arrived later in July.

Waiting for the expedition week after week, Dewey's situation was uneasy. Word spread that

the Spanish were sending a naval force out to recapture Manila and that the force would include battleships that could outgun anything in Dewey's force. Dewey's ships might have to retreat. If American soldiers arrived, they might have to fade into the hills.²⁷

Meanwhile, warships from Germany, Britain, France, and Japan arrived in Manila Bay. All these countries already had nearby bases in East Asia. These four squadrons waited watchfully, like carrion birds circling in the sky over a fallen animal. The German force alone was significantly more powerful than Dewey's squadron and, as I discuss below, it was Germany that had the most ambitious designs for the Philippines.

The potential longer-term significance of American occupation of this port began to dawn on both the McKinley administration and the American public. In the United States, the news of Dewey's victory had set off a whirl of speculation. Some wondered whether the United States should even try to take the islands as a possession.

All sorts of pressures in the United States were building about the future of the Philippines. For decades Americans had been arguing about how to assert themselves in the world. The American population was one of the largest in the world, and the U.S. economy was already the world's largest. But no one was quite sure what being a world power meant.

The 1890s had been a decade of great contrasts of old ways and new machines, as well as all sorts of domestic scars and divisions — old wounds of North and South plus new wounds from battles between labor and management in all the new industries. Amid this division, perhaps because of it, shows of patriotism, parades, and flag-waving were so common and exuberant as to almost seem neurotic, as if a frantic outward display of pride and union was the constant, soothing balm applied to ease so much inward pain and striving.

Some leading Americans had looked for ways the

24 "If old Dewey ...," H.H. Kohlsaatt, *From McKinley to Harding: Personal Recollections of Our Presidents* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 68. Kohlsaatt was an old friend, owner of the *Chicago Times-Herald*. McKinley's more serious explanation was recorded in a detailed handwritten memorandum written by Chandler Anderson immediately after a meeting with President McKinley on November 19, 1898. Anderson was an attorney, secretary to the Anglo-American Joint High Commission, which had recently been appointed to arbitrate various disputes embroiling the United States and Canada. In his meeting with McKinley, Anderson was accompanying one of the commissioners, an influential Boston Republican, Thomas Jefferson Coolidge. Anderson's record of the meeting, in his papers at the Library of Congress, was discovered by Ephraim Smith, who reprinted the memo in full in his article "A Question From Which We Could Not Escape," 368-71 (quote on pages 369-70).

25 On the orders and the estimative process to arrive at troop numbers, see Merritt to McKinley, May 13, 1898; Merritt to Corbin, May 17; Miles to Alger, May 18, all in Department of the Army, *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 643-44, 648-49, 654, 665.

26 The framing of the expedition is handled well in Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 210-11. For the details see War Department memo for Alger for the Cabinet meeting, May 17, 1898, forwarded by Alger to Corbin on May 25; Adey to Alger, May 21 (conveying Dewey information on Spanish strength); Dewey to Long, May 27 (forwarded to Alger); Corbin to Merritt, May 29, in Army, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 654, 665, 675, 680.

27 On the situation in Manila Bay and the danger of the Spanish expedition led by Adm. Camara, see Trask, *The War With Spain*, 372-81.

country could show off, could test its strength. But against whom? For what?²⁸

Meanwhile, for nearly 20 years since the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the great European powers had been racing to expand their empires, competing in a frenzied land grab to include every open scrap of earth in the world. These scrambles had mainly focused on Africa and Asia. By comparison the Americans had seemed passive, preoccupied with what was going on in their own vast country. "As of the early 1880s educated Americans nearly all doubted the value of colonies and regarded efforts to conquer other populations as morally wrong." But, reading the news of an apparent imperialist consensus in Europe, especially among British Liberals, during the 1880s and after the former "unanimity" of American opinion leaders "had begun to break down."²⁹

Some outspoken men believed that the United States had to join this global imperial race and try to catch up. These advocates were called "jingo," a derision to mock such "by jingo" enthusiasms. The jingoes had applauded in 1893 when Hawaii's American planters and professionals had engineered a coup to overthrow Hawaii's native government. The leaders of the new government wanted to bring Hawaii into the United States. As noted earlier, Hawaii had the only U.S. coaling station in the Pacific and it had long been under American protection. But this Hawaiian government's pleas for annexation had been tabled for nearly five years.

The jingoes did not control the Republican Party in Congress or in the White House. McKinley had finally sent a Hawaiian annexation treaty to the Senate. But McKinley did not expect two-thirds of the Senate to ratify the treaty and he did little to press it.³⁰

When the war began, however, Congress immediately moved on the long-simmering Hawaiian question and annexed the islands. A public debate about the Philippine islands had begun. Yet in secret, McKinley wanted to use the Philippine position as a bargaining chip, just as the prewar Navy plans had envisioned. He was prepared to give the islands back to Spain, if that would indeed bring about "an honorable and durable peace." McKinley left in his papers an undated note in which he had jotted: "While we are conducting war and until its conclusion we must keep all we get; when the war is over we must keep what we want."³¹

The Secret Offer, May to June 1898

As spring turned to summer, McKinley's main worry was about how to land troops and win the battles in Cuba. When war came, Alger, the secretary of war, was overwhelmed by his job. The Army had begun the war with no particular plans for how to fight it. To the better-prepared Navy Secretary, Long, it seemed the Army was "ready for nothing at all."³²

As if to underscore this point, just as the war was getting underway the Army's commanding general, Nelson Miles, wrote to McKinley opposing any expedition to Cuba during the summer of 1898. "This letter reached the President two or three days after war had been declared," Corbin later recorded privately. "It shocked him beyond words. Only on one other occasion did I see him show more feeling. Among other things he said, 'God willing and not failing us, we shall end the war before the General would have us begin operations.

28 For example in 1895, during the administration of Grover Cleveland, there had been a brief scare about war with Great Britain because the British Empire was supposed to have been bullying Venezuela over a boundary dispute. The furor, ostensibly an invocation of the Monroe Doctrine, by which the United States opposed European imperial ventures in the Western Hemisphere, was more a complaint about supposed British haughtiness. Business and political leaders on both sides had intervened to calm the situation. But, as much as any other episode, it was the neurotic quality of this Venezuela crisis that caused one perceptive historian of the period, Richard Hofstadter, to shake his head about an apparent sort of national "psychic crisis." Richard Hofstadter, "Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny," in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 145-87.

Kristin Hoganson recasts the psychic crisis as a gender crisis for males seeking martial tests to reaffirm their manhood. She is convincing that gendered insecurities were among the many insecurities of the age. But such insecurities were nonpartisan; they could be found on all sides of the war and expansion issues, and many who supported war in Cuba were against expansion. Her argument does not help much to explain the very specific choices made about the Philippines. Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Hofstadter's essay is still a convincing general scene-setter for the period. The best analysis of American public opinion about imperial expansion in this period remains Ernest May, *American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay* (Chicago, Imprint Publications, rev. ed., 1991). It is a study of the origins and transmission belts for elite opinion. May shows an elite consensus against such expansion before the mid-1890s. The anti-expansionist consensus returned by the early 1900s. In between, the elites were split. This invited the wider public to pick a side.

See also the cultural survey of Gilded Age attitudes toward the world thoroughly canvassed in Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); and the fine period portrait in David Traxel, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Random House, 1998).

29 May, *American Imperialism*, 166.

30 Ernest May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 122-23.

31 "While we are conducting war . . .," Charles Olcott, *The Life of William McKinley*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 165.

32 Long, *America of Yesterday*, 183 (entry for April 20).

He little understands me; no more does he know the temper of our people. I deplore the war, but it must be short and quick to the finish.”³³

With Alger difficult and Miles untrustworthy, McKinley decided to oversee the War Department as directly as he could. He personally supervised the Cuban campaign plan. To help, McKinley relied on Corbin, who was always just a short walk away in the new building west of the executive mansion. At the Navy Department, Long grew wearier as the conflict went on. With his young deputy, Roosevelt, off to the Army, his new deputy turned out to be very competent. But Long himself flagged. By mid-May, a McKinley aide observed,

Secretary Long moves along quietly. He is not sure-footed as his friends would have us believe. He hesitates, questions too much, seems hampered by too great conservatism and often he seems to be in the position of the surgeon who fails of ... ‘nerve’ and decision at the critical moment.³⁴

McKinley ordered the creation of a War Room in the executive mansion. It was staffed with clerks and telegraphers; large maps were hung with pins stuck in to show the positions of troops and ships. McKinley would often be there, reading cables as they came in and studying the maps.³⁵

McKinley’s style of leadership was not charismatic. He did not point the way and rally the troops. Cabinet meetings remained informal. McKinley might open with a story to put others at ease.

His was another kind of leadership style — that of a judge. People would make their arguments. He would hear them out, not revealing his own views until the time for decision. When all had spoken, McKinley would state a decision and go around asking, “You agree?”

To one of McKinley’s aides, the president “is the strong man of the Cabinet, the dominating force; but with it all, is a gentleness and graciousness in

dealing with men that some of his greatest victories have been won apparently without any struggle.” His later secretary of war, Elihu Root, remembered McKinley as a “man of great power because he was absolutely indifferent to credit. His desire was to ‘get it done!’ He cared nothing about the credit, but McKinley always had his way.”³⁶

The new secretary of state, William Day, was used to McKinley’s style. A former judge from Ohio, Day had been the deputy to his aged predecessor in the job, John Sherman. From the start, it was Day who had done most of the foreign policy work for the president. As soon as war began, McKinley pushed Sherman out and Day took over the top job.

A small-framed, thin-faced mustachioed lawyer nearing 50, Day had long been a fact-finder for McKinley on many problems. He was discreet and thorough. McKinley’s secretary noted, “Here is a quiet, one might almost say country, lawyer who has so conducted the foreign affairs of this administration as to win unanimous commendation.”³⁷

As soon as he was elevated, Day named his deputy, picking the best expert on international law that he could find. This was a bearded, stocky former State Department official (and Democrat), a Columbia professor named John Bassett Moore.³⁸ Day and Moore were McKinley’s allies when he made his high-risk move to use the Philippines as a bargaining chip.

After the Spanish defeat at Manila Bay, there was turmoil in Madrid. London got word that the queen regent and key ministers might be ready for a deal, to give up Cuba in exchange for peace. The British came to the U.S. ambassador in London, John Hay, who relayed the private question: What peace terms might America accept?³⁹

Moore promptly drafted an answer. Terms could be generous “if *immediately* proposed by Spain, directly or by some mediator.” Spain would evacuate Cuba. The United States would manage a transition of power to the Cubans. Spain would

33 Corbin added that, after getting this letter, “while treating the General [Miles] with the consideration due his rank and position, [McKinley] never sought his advice and never gave it any weight when offered.” *Autobiography*, Corbin Papers, 88-89.

34 George Cortelyou journal entry, May 15, 1898, George Cortelyou Papers, Library of Congress. Cortelyou was McKinley’s main secretary, preparing and handling correspondence and paperwork. Cortelyou made his journal notes at the time in shorthand; they were typed up much later.

35 Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 232-38.

36 “Strong man,” Cortelyou Journal, Cortelyou Papers, June 17, 1898, Library of Congress. The Root quote is from Morgan, *William McKinley*, 210-11. Cortelyou commented to his diary that “The President is alert and when all the facts are known it will be seen how well he has kept the reins in his own hands.” Cortelyou Papers (entry for August 8).

37 Cortelyou Papers, April 16, 1898; for a contemporary and flattering biographical sketch of Day, see Henry McFarland, “William R. Day: A New Statesman of the First Rank,” *Review of Reviews* (U.S.) (September 1898): 275-79.

38 Moore impressed Long too. “The most accomplished man that has yet been connected with that Department,” he noted in his diary. Long, *America of Yesterday*, 189 (entry for May 6).

39 The question was posed to Hay on May 8 by Joseph Chamberlain, the very pro-American colonial secretary. Hay’s original message relaying the question did not name Chamberlain as the source; Day asked for this clarification and Hay provided it. See May, *Imperial Democracy*, 224; Offner, *An Unwanted War*, 198.

cede Puerto Rico to the United States. If the Spanish did that, then the Philippines would “be allowed to remain with Spain.” In the Pacific the United States would only want “a coaling station,” either in the Philippines or in the neighboring Spanish-held Carolines island group.⁴⁰

On May 11, about a week after news had arrived about Dewey’s naval victory in Manila Bay, Day put this proposal for a deal before the Cabinet. Alger disagreed, but there is no evidence why. There the matter rested for a couple of weeks.

McKinley was preoccupied with plans to launch a large U.S. expedition to eastern Cuba. This expedition was to land near the port of Santiago

to retaining the Philippines, except possibly some coaling station in them, upon any terms.”

Day met with McKinley. They agreed on what to do. Day then instructed Hay, his man in London, to float the deal. The president, “speaking for himself, would be inclined to grant terms of peace” with the Philippines to remain with Spain, ceding only a coaling station, if Spain would give up Cuba. This deal would avoid the need for “further sacrifice and loss of life.” But Day asked Hay to warn that “Prolongation of war may change this materially.”

To help make sure the proposed deal got through to Madrid, Day apparently also privately briefed the British ambassador in Washington. That envoy informed his French, German, and Austrian colleagues. Thus the terms soon became known on the diplomatic circuit, though there was nothing in public that linked the offer directly with McKinley.

Nor is there any evidence that this secret diplomatic move was discussed with other members of McKinley’s Cabinet. No one appears to have known about McKinley’s personal authorization except for Day and Moore in Washington, and

Hay in London. Day reminded Hay to hide McKinley’s hand in this. The proposal to give up the Philippines could not be seen as “coming from us.”⁴²

Secrecy for McKinley was vital; he was taking a great risk by making this offer. Spain was the enemy. Its rule in Cuba was regarded as a loathsome tyranny. Its rule in the Philippines was getting similar attention. The jingoes, like Lodge and Roosevelt (then a colonel helping to lead a volunteer regiment preparing to go to Cuba), already felt strongly that, whoever ended up with them, the Philippine Islands had to be taken from Spain. Roosevelt, writing to Lodge from his Army camp in Texas on May 19, advised: “do not make

The proposal to give up the Philippines could not be seen as "coming from us."

de Cuba, where the Navy had just bottled up the fleet that Spain had sent to Cuba. It was a risky plan, relying on a lot of improvisation and luck. The Americans would try to establish a firm hold in eastern Cuba and put off the huge challenge of trying to take on Havana, where the Spanish had the bulk of their strength.⁴¹

Once that expedition plan was set, the diplomats went back to the peace move. Day’s plan now was to bypass the Cabinet and take the proposed bargain directly to McKinley. He would leave it to the president to “ascertain what his ‘jingoes’ thought about it.” Day was “very strongly opposed

40 John Bassett Moore Papers, Box 192, Library of Congress. In early June, Moore wrote out a private memorandum for the record, preserved in his papers, in which he carefully recounted the chronology of the work on this peace move.

41 See Trask, *The War With Spain*, 172-73.

42 Moore Papers, Library of Congress, quoting from his private memorandum and from his appended copies of the “terms of peace” message from Day to Hay, June 3, 1898; Hay’s reply of June 6; and Day’s explanation to Hay, June 7. Had these terms been shared with other Cabinet members, such as Long, or had there been a Cabinet meeting on it, there would likely have been reference to it in one of the various diaries kept by Long, or by the Cabinet’s de facto secretary, Cortelyou, or by Charles Dawes, among others.

Offner notes how the peace terms were separately provided to, and reported home by, the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Julian Pauncefote. *An Unwanted War*, 200. Offner does not discuss the extraordinary political risk McKinley had undertaken by secretly advancing such terms. Consciousness of this risk is obvious in Day’s June 7 message to Hay.

To counter the image of a weak McKinley and show how assertive he was, Lewis Gould argues that the preparation of the Philippine expedition in May shows that from May 2 onward, McKinley never gave “serious consideration to relinquishing the archipelago.” Gould’s wish to rehabilitate McKinley’s leadership is a good one. But this particular argument is contradicted by the peace terms McKinley secretly outlined to the great powers, via Day, on June 3, and other episodes later. Gould is aware of some of this secret diplomacy but does not reconcile it with his argument. Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley*, 63. That McKinley would undertake such a move, at such risk, validates Gould’s argument about McKinley’s vigor, but in a different way. And McKinley was not nearly done musing about the future of the Philippines.

peace until we get Porto Rico, while Cuba is made independent and the Philippines at any rate taken from the Spaniards.” He repeated this suggestion to Lodge on May 25.⁴³

To many Americans it would already have seemed wrong, even immoral, for America to hand Manila and the Philippine Islands back to Spain under any circumstances. To make it worse, the American president was the one suggesting this. Disclosure of McKinley’s move could have set off a terrific political storm.

Further, Spain had not yet asked for peace or tabled any ideas. The Americans feared that making the first move would signal weakness or unreadiness to fight. So the plan was for the terms to be passed secretly to the Spanish. Then the Spanish would make the proposal, knowing that it was likely to be accepted. The first part worked. The terms were passed to Spain and its friends in Europe.⁴⁴

The second part failed to launch. The Spanish preferred to keep fighting. They had been encouraged by a naval skirmish in May and hopeful that the latest group of ships sent to Cuba might do well. They had belatedly dispatched another squadron to the Philippines.

Instead, during June, Spain’s main diplomatic move was to ask the other great powers to join its fight in the Philippines, to mount a joint military intervention to take over Manila. “Spain,” Hay reported, “was not yet sensible enough to ask for peace, on even the most reasonable terms.”

The secret offer dissipated. Day thanked Hay for his handling of “this most delicate matter.”⁴⁵ The war continued. There were more Spanish defeats. By the end of June, the American expedition to eastern Cuba had landed. The siege of Santiago de Cuba by land and by sea had begun.

In the first days of July, American troops seized the high ground near Santiago in the fights at San Juan Heights and Kettle Hill. The Spanish fleet in Santiago went to sea and accepted battle. On July 3 it was destroyed. The remaining garrison in Santiago de Cuba surrendered.

The other Spanish fleet, the one that had been sent to the Philippines, stopped. As a neutral power,

the British refused to allow the Spanish warships to pass through the Suez Canal. The Spanish recalled the fleet to Spain, now worrying that the Americans might attack Spanish home waters.⁴⁶

From the Philippines came more news. A native Filipino government had declared its independence. Its soldiers were fighting as America’s friends, alongside the troops of the newly arrived U.S. expedition. The option of returning the islands to Spain had become a good deal more complicated.

Terms for an Armistice, July to August

During the summer of 1898 Americans started learning a lot more about the Spanish possessions in the Pacific. At the beginning of June, Albert Shaw, the editor of the *Review of Reviews*, one of the most-read news digests in America, observed, “A few weeks ago the great majority of the people of the United States knew nothing about the Philippines except in the vaguest possible way.” Now a great many American families were becoming aware of it because some of their young men were being deployed across the Pacific in a far-reaching expedition “absolutely without any precedent in our national history.”⁴⁷

Shaw’s digest, like many newspapers, included articles that described the situation in the Philippines. McKinley himself read these and other articles, leaving behind clippings or references to some notable articles in his papers.

Anyone reading the articles in Shaw’s *Review*, or any other major newspaper, would learn that the Philippines was a group of islands with 6 million to 8 million inhabitants. The native racial background was given as “Malay,” with deep hostility among native groups in different portions of the islands (Tagal versus Visayan versus Moro, for example). They would also learn that a substantial number of Chinese and Chinese-descended families dominated the retail trade as well as a handful of foreign trading houses, mainly British.

There were few available experts on the Philippines in the English-speaking or scholarly world. The best account to appear in English that

43 Lodge, replying to Roosevelt’s first letter on May 24, seemed confident that the administration was making due haste to send a large expedition to the Philippines, but Lodge said nothing about the future of the islands. He agreed about Puerto Rico — that is the context for his oft-quoted remark about the administration agreeing with his “large policy.” Henry Cabot Lodge and Charles Redmond, eds., *Selections From the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918*, vol. 1 (New York: Da Capo, 1971, orig. 1925), 298-301.

44 Day to Hay, June 7, in Moore Papers. Hay passed along these cautions to the British prime minister, Lord Salisbury, who had already passed on the American peace terms to the Austrians having relied, Salisbury explained, on the parallel report he had received from Pauncefote about these terms.

45 Hay to McKinley, June 10, 1898, reprinted in Olcott, *Life of McKinley*, vol. 2, 131-32; Offner, *An Unwanted War*, 200-03; Trask, *The War With Spain*, 425-26, 607 note 6.

46 On the war developments in July 1898, the standard account remains Trask, *The War With Spain*.

47 Albert Shaw, “The Progress of the World,” *Review of Reviews* (U.S.) (June 1898): 643, 651-52. See also the articles on the Philippines that Shaw included in that issue.

summer in any source, in or outside of government, was an article from one of those few experts, an Englishman, John Foreman. He had long known Spain and the Philippines as a businessman and explorer, as a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and he knew the Filipino revolutionary leaders too. McKinley read Foreman's article.⁴⁸

Every account, including Foreman's, stressed Spanish misrule. Spanish rule was portrayed as anti-modern and purely predatory. It had added little of value and it had stunted development and education in the islands. Local priests, the friars, routinely abused their authority, answerable to no law but that of their protective bishops, while there was a veneer of mediocre Spanish administrators who were corrupt, lethargic, and cruel.

Therefore, the Filipino revolutionaries were usually portrayed sympathetically. Foreman, for instance, regarded the young rebel leader, Emilio Aguinaldo, as a "smart, intelligent man, of a serious mien" with a real following, especially among the Tagal elite in Luzon. Aguinaldo was a "would-be reformer" who had resorted to force out of necessity.

Yet every account also stressed that the local inhabitants were not nearly ready for or capable of self-government. Spain had created no intermediary institutions — no native assemblies or cadres of trained officials. There was the condition of the population, the absence of any infrastructure for modern government, and the deadly hostility among the different ethnic groups in the islands.

Foreman concluded: "At first, no doubt, the islanders will welcome and co-operate in any arrangement which will rid them of monastic oppression. The Philippine Islands, however, would not remain one year a peaceful united Archipelago under an independent native government. It is an utter impossibility."

Worse, Foreman noted,

If the native Republic did succeed, it would not be strong enough to protect itself against foreign aggression. ... I entertain the firm conviction that an unprotected united Republic would last only until the novelty of the situation had worn off. Then, I think, every principal island would, in turn, declare its independence. Finally, there would be complete chaos, and before that took root America, or some European nation, would probably have interfered.

For the readers of his day, Foreman did not need to do more than gesture at the recent record of what had happened in other lands that had thrown off Spanish rule. Throughout their adult lives, his 1898 readers had read accounts of the revolutions, civil wars, and foreign interventions that tormented Latin America throughout the 19th century, in every liberated province of the former Spanish empire.

The possibility of foreign intervention was not abstract. During the 1880s and 1890s, every habitable rock on Earth had been claimed. Americans could remember having been caught up briefly in a strange little 1888 crisis involving British and German claims over the tiny islands of Samoa. Outside of the Qing Empire in China and the Kingdom of Siam (a kind of demilitarized zone between the British in Burma and the French in Indochina), there were no spots in East Asia and the Pacific that were not in European or Japanese control.

The German, British, French, and Japanese warships were anchored watchfully in Manila Bay. Of these the German squadron was the most intimidating presence. This was no accident. From the outset of the crisis the German navy minister, unbeknownst to the United States, was "firm as a rock in his conviction that we must have Manila and that this would be of enormous advantage to us." Kaiser Wilhelm II considered it "the first task of German diplomacy ... to obtain naval bases in

48 John Foreman, "Spain and the Philippine Islands," *Contemporary Review* (July 1, 1898): 20. There were hardly any books about the Spanish colony, only one comprehensive study having come out in the last 50 years. A few years later Foreman himself remedied this gap, publishing the most comprehensive study of the islands then available. *The Philippine Islands* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 3rd ed., 1906).

Cortelyou recorded getting the full article for McKinley. The president had already been reading excerpts from it and wanted to see the rest. Cortelyou journal, August 1, 1898, in Cortelyou Papers.

Foreman's views were more nuanced and informed than those of American "experts" whose views were in wide circulation that summer. Of these the most prolific was a zoologist named Dean Worcester, who had made a scientific expedition to the Philippines during the early 1890s. Worcester offered vivid and extreme views of Spanish misrule and Filipino incapacity. See "Spanish Rule in the Philippines," *The Cosmopolitan*, October 1897, 587 (written with his traveling companion, Frank Bourns, who would return to the Philippines with the Army expedition in 1898); "Admiral Dewey and the Philippines," *The Independent*, May 12, 1898, 5; "In Manila: First Half," *The Independent*, June 16, 1898, 5; "A Pen Picture of Manila," *New York Daily Tribune*, June 24, 1898. Worcester would later be enlisted into U.S. administration of the islands.

The recently departed, now returned, American consul in Manila, Oscar Williams, had been there only about a month. He also wrote of cruel and "barbarous" Spanish misdeeds and repeatedly extolled America's opportunity to take over the islands. E.g., Williams to Day, May 12, June 16, and July 2, 1898, in U.S. Senate, *Message From the U.S. President Transmitting a Treaty of Peace ... and Accompanying Papers*, 55th Congress, Senate Doc. 62, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 327-31 (hereafter cited as Peace Treaty Papers).

the Far East.”⁴⁹

The Philippines problem had arisen in what, in 1898, was probably the part of the globe most likely to set off a worldwide war. The breakup and possible partition of China seemed imminent. Korean independence was tenuous and near the most volatile spot on Earth, the place where the next general war then seemed most likely to break out. It was, a veteran British leader secretly confided, a crisis “pregnant with possibilities of a disastrous kind; and it might result in an Armageddon between the European Powers struggling for the ruins of the Chinese Empire.”⁵⁰

This was the Far Eastern crisis: the simmering cauldron of Qing, Russian, Japanese, German, and British interests in northeast China and Manchuria. During the spring of 1898 Hay had sent a handwritten letter directly to McKinley, outside of official channels. “The conditions of things in China is to the last degree serious,” he had warned. “[T]he present crisis is considered by English statesmen one of the gravest of our times.”⁵¹

So far, the United States had endeavored to stay clear of this Far Eastern broil. The British secretly asked the Americans if they would consider joint action to protect everyone’s trading rights in China. The McKinley government had turned down the British request. But it obviously did not want to make the situation worse and trigger a possible world war.⁵²

The British ambassador to Germany had confided to Hay the British government’s hope that the United States would just keep the Philippines. There was, he said, “not a power in Europe [that] would seriously object to that disposition of them, while any other [choice] might disturb the peace of the world.”⁵³

Foreman thought a foreign power should establish a protectorate over the Philippines. That power would organize a largely native government while providing overall direction and defense. Foreman did not believe the Americans were up to the job. England, he thought, “would probably find it a less irksome task.” Shaw’s conclusion, in the *Review of Reviews* article mentioned earlier, was similar to Foreman’s, except that he thought America had to assume the burden.⁵⁴

All these considerations also had to account for a new factor. The Filipino insurgents had announced their own government. In late May, Aguinaldo and a number of his colleagues had returned to the Philippines from exile, encouraged by the U.S. consul in Hong Kong and aided by Adm. Dewey.

Digesting all this, officials in Washington realized that the insurgents had to be taken into account. Yet the United States wanted to do nothing to foreclose its options. They cautioned Dewey, the expedition commanders, and their diplomats. All said they had made no compromising pledges to the insurgents. Dewey added: “In my opinion these people are far superior in their intelligence and more capable of self-government than the natives of Cuba, and I am familiar with both races.”⁵⁵

In mid-July, the Spanish were ready to talk about peace, using France as their diplomatic channel. The first step was to arrange terms for an armistice, while a peace treaty could be negotiated.

From his perch in the Senate, Lodge weighed in about what he thought the terms should be. Lodge’s position was intricate. He wanted the United States to take all of the Philippines from Spain but then keep only the island of Luzon. Cede the rest to Britain, he argued, in a deal to get more Caribbean islands. Lodge spent hours in meetings and dinners lobbying

49 On the views of the naval minister, Alfred von Tirpitz, as characterized in the memoir of Foreign Minister (and later Chancellor) Prince Bernhard von Bülow, and the quote from an instruction to the German ambassador in Washington, see May, *Imperial Democracy*, 228-29.

50 Lord Rosebery, 1895, quoted in T.G. Otte, *The China Question: Great Power Rivalry and British Isolation, 1894-1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

51 Hay to McKinley, March 26, 1898, in Day Papers. This and other handwritten letters appear to have been turned over to Day after McKinley read them.

52 The British had made their request for joint action on China in early March 1898, conveyed directly by their ambassador to McKinley. Otte, *The China Question*, 112.

53 Hay to McKinley, June 30, 1898, in Day Papers. In his June 30 letter Hay commented that he was writing to McKinley in this way to avoid making an official record. In that era, all regular reports to the secretary of state (and the secretaries of war and the Navy) were usually published after a short interval. Hay wanted to keep the British request for joint action in China out of the official record so that an American rejection would not become public and thereby embarrass the British.

The issue of American action to keep an open door in China would return to the agenda in 1899 and 1900. At that time — perhaps remembering the Monroe Doctrine example of John Quincy Adams in 1823 — Hay (by then the secretary of state) and McKinley would act unilaterally. They would also stress an interest in preserving an independent China from partition. That latter object was not so important to London.

54 Foreman, “Spain and the Philippine Islands,” 29-30; Shaw, “The Progress of the World,” 652-53.

55 See, e.g., Day to Pratt, June 16, 1898; Dewey to Long, June 27, 1898, both in William Day Papers, Library of Congress.

McKinley and Day. They gave him the impression that they were still making up their minds.⁵⁶

McKinley and Day wanted to hear what John Hay thought, from London. Hay still liked the earlier idea of giving the islands back to Spain if there could be some “strong guarantee of fair treatment of natives” and a ban on Spain selling the islands to some other power (such as Germany). Hay reported that the British did, though, “prefer to have us retain Philippine Islands, or, failing that, insist on option in case of future sale.”

The German government’s interest in getting something was all too evident.⁵⁷ What about Japan? The Japanese ambassador in Washington advised that “the Japanese government would be highly gratified if the United States would occupy the Islands.” The ambassador very politely added that “it would not be as agreeable to the Japanese Government to have them turned over to some other power.”⁵⁸

Hay’s views remained “conservative” (the usual adjective for Republicans not among the jingoes). But he was not sure his position was still workable. Reading that industrialist Andrew Carnegie was against the United States taking the Philippines, Hay wrote to Carnegie, “I am not allowed to say in my present fix, how much I agree with you. The only question in my mind is how far it is now possible for us to withdraw from the Philippines. I am rather thankful it is not given to me to solve that momentous question.”⁵⁹

On a hot July afternoon, McKinley invited his Cabinet members to join him on a Potomac River cruise on the presidential yacht. He wanted them to discuss peace terms. The Cabinet had longer arguments about this topic, mainly about the Philippines, than about any other subject during McKinley’s presidency.

McKinley’s Cabinet, sitting together on the yacht on the Potomac, began its discussion. Day led off. He was still for giving the islands back to Spain,

except for a coaling station. About half the Cabinet (including Navy Secretary Long) agreed with him.

Those on the other side pointed out that returning the islands to Spain would seem appalling, given the sort of Spanish misrule that had led to war over Cuba. One Cabinet member quoted a distinguished senator who was against American expansion but still said he would “as soon turn a redeemed soul over to the devil as give the Philippines back to Spain.”

Opinions wavered. The agriculture secretary wanted to keep all the islands and evangelize them. But he altered his views as he learned more about the Filipino insurgency. War Secretary Alger went back and forth. Another Cabinet member spoke for keeping Luzon and setting up a protectorate for the rest. The interior secretary saw great commercial opportunities and wanted to hold the islands. One of the more capable Cabinet members, the attorney general, also thought the United States should keep them all. The Treasury secretary, on the other hand, argued for complete withdrawal and returning all of the Philippines back to Spain.

Through all this, hour after hour, McKinley offered little comment. He just kept the discussion going. The next day the arguments continued. As they kept going over the problems, several began emphasizing that the government needed more information about the situation, including the advice of people on the scene such as Adm. Dewey. At this point the U.S. government had not yet received a single serious written analysis of the situation in the Philippines, nor any recommendations, from any of its officers posted there.⁶⁰

Humility and caution prevailed. Defer, wait for more information from the field: That was the consensus. Peace commissioners would be appointed. They would sort out the Philippines problem as they got more information back from the islands. Beyond Spanish evacuation of Cuba and Puerto Rico and an island in the Ladrões

56 Lodge to Roosevelt, June 24, July 12, and July 23, 1898 (in the last, Lodge writing that the president’s “imagination is touched by the situation [in the Philippines], and I think he grasps it fully”), in Lodge and Redmond, eds., *Selections From the Correspondence*, 313, 323, 330. Roosevelt replied at one point that “the average New York [political] boss is quite willing to allow you to do what you wish in such trivial matters as war and the acquisition of Porto Rico and Hawaii, provided you don’t interfere with the really vital questions, such as giving out contracts for cartage in the Custom House and interfering with the appointment of street sweepers.” Roosevelt to Lodge, July 31, 1898, *ibid.*, 334. On Lodge’s proposal to keep Luzon and make a deal with Britain for the rest, William Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 115.

57 The naval moves and some of the diplomacy were evident. What the Americans did not know was that, in mid-August, the Germans began secret negotiations with the Spanish that would end with German acquisition of all the islands in the Spanish East Indies that the U.S. did not get under the peace treaty. In this fashion the Germans acquired the Caroline Islands, the Palau Islands, and the Marianas, except for Guam. This added to their already substantial Pacific possessions in New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, and the Bismarck Archipelago. See Pearle Quinn, “The Diplomatic Struggle for the Carolines, 1898,” *Pacific Historical Review* 14, no. 3 (September 1945): 290-302.

58 Day memo for the record, July 15, 1898, in Day Papers.

59 Hay to Day, July 28, 1898, in McKinley Papers, Library of Congress; Hay to Carnegie, August 22, 1898, *Letters of John Hay*, vol. 3, 129-30 (emphasis in original).

60 I do not count, and do not think anyone in Washington counted, the dispatches of Consul Williams (cited above) as a serious analysis of the situation. So far, Dewey had not offered any substantial assessments beyond the military strength of the Spanish forces.

(Marianas) that turned out to be Guam, the cease-fire terms for the Philippines were simple. The United States would occupy “the city, bay, and harbor of Manila pending the conclusion of a treaty of peace which shall determine the control, disposition, and government of the Philippines.”⁶¹

McKinley and Day gave the terms to the French ambassador, Jules Cambon, representing Spain. Cambon complained that the terms were harsh. McKinley replied that Spain could have had a much better deal had it sought peace sooner. The armistice and cease-fire was signed on August 12.

At the end of August, the Americans controlled and protected the city of Manila and surrounding waters. Little more.

Aguinaldo’s revolutionary government was taking control of the rest of the surrounding island of Luzon. It organized a congress to meet in the government’s improvised capital, Malolos. Aguinaldo sent a message to the foreign powers reiterating the new government’s independence. They ignored him. No foreign country would recognize his government.

The Spanish still held the Visayan islands south of Luzon, including Panay. Spain also retained nominal control of the large Muslim “Moro” islands in the south.

Picking the peace commissioners, McKinley immediately put his most trusted aide, Day, in the lead. Moore would be the commission’s secretary. To go to Paris for the negotiations, Day would have to resign as secretary of state. John Hay was asked to come back to Washington and take over the State Department in Day’s place.⁶²

Gen. Greene’s Mission and the Decision to Take the Philippines, August to October 1898

After the July debates, the Cabinet and McKinley agreed it was most important to get information and recommendations from the Americans who were on the scene in the Philippines. Of these men, none turned out to be more influential than a brigadier general named Francis Vinton Greene.

It was an illustrious name. Greene came from one of the most respected military families in America. His grandfather was Nathaniel Greene, one of the most celebrated generals in the Revolution. His father had been a general during the Civil War, commanding a Union brigade at Gettysburg.

Following the family tradition, Francis Greene had graduated from West Point in 1870 at the top of his class. Commissioned in the Corps of Engineers, he had been one of the surveyors on a renowned expedition during the 1870s in the Rocky Mountain West. As a staff officer in the War Department Greene had become close to President Ulysses S. Grant as well as to Gens. William Sherman and Philip Sheridan and other leading officers of the day. In these years, he first met the young naval officer George Dewey.

Greene was assigned to go out and observe the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. He witnessed the principal campaigns and wrote a book about the war that became a standard account, establishing a unique reputation as a soldier-scholar.

Greene left the Army in 1886 to go into business in New York City. Running an asphalt paving company, he became a powerful force in all the civic improvement and road-building issues of

61 On the Cabinet discussions, see Olcott, *Life of William McKinley*, vol. 2, 61-63; Offner, *An Unwanted Peace*, 213-17; Long, *America of Yesterday*, 210 (entry for July 27). Olcott based his account on interviews with several participants in the Cabinet meeting. The quote from the senator is from Olcott, as is the conclusion that the wait-for-more-information view was the one “which finally prevailed.”

The evolution of the draft armistice terms was interesting. On his stationery, McKinley noted the essence of each planned term. For the article on the Philippines he scribbled: “The military possession of Manila city & port until a commission determines the whole matter as to [indecipherable, perhaps “the claims”] insurgents etc.”

Moore then drafted an elaboration of this, saying the commissioners would figure out what the United States was “justly entitled” to have and “taking into consideration the rights and claims of the Philippine insurgents and any duty which the United States may be under to them and the future security and good government of the islands.” The language about U.S. entitlement and insurgent claims was lined out during the next edit. Then, after further discussion, the whole article was simplified to the form finally adopted, except that the word “disposition” was originally proposed as “possession.” The drafting process indicates the thrust of the discussion. Notes are in the Cortelyou Papers.

McKinley’s key aide, Charles Dawes, debriefed by one of the Cabinet members, noted at the time in his diary, “the Philippines situation to be subject of consideration by a commission of Americans and Spaniards. While the President is very conservative in his belief as to the policy of handling the Philippines situation, he wants the facts to be carefully considered, without the consideration involving the loss of any present advantage.” Charles Dawes, *A Journal of the McKinley Years*, ed. Bascom Timmons (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1950), 166.

62 For the other commissioners, McKinley initially started out with a list of conservatives, without any known jingoes already advocating acquisition of the Philippines. McKinley’s initial preferences, on July 31, were to supplement Day with William Allison (leader of the Republican Senate caucus), Supreme Court Justice Henry Brown, George Hoar (Massachusetts senator known to oppose expansion), and either Elihu Root (prominent New York lawyer), Chauncey Depew (a railroad magnate then seeking entry into public life), or a California Republican, George Gorham, to replace Hoar if Hoar was disqualified by his public stance. He was also considering his former ambassador to Spain, Stewart Woodford. Dawes, *Journal*, 167 (entry for July 31).

The president did not fully revise these selections until more than a month later, in early September. It was then that he supplemented Day with three expansionists, though their specific views on the Philippines were still evolving: Whitelaw Reid (prominent editor, former minister to France and the 1892 Republican vice presidential candidate), Cushman Davis (senator and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee), and William Frye (another Republican senator). Then he added a conservative Democratic senator he respected, a known anti-annexationist, George Gray.

that city and beyond. That connected him well to local Republican politics. He was also elected colonel of one of New York's militia regiments, the 71st New York.

As war with Spain threatened, one of Greene's friends, Theodore Roosevelt, pleaded with the colonel to accept him as a deputy in that regiment, a lieutenant colonel, if war came. (Roosevelt ended up finding such a place in a different regiment, commanded by Leonard Wood.)

When the war did come, as Greene and his regiment readied for service in Cuba, Greene was ordered to command one of the brigades being assembled for the Philippines. It was not a hard call for Corbin at the War Department. Corbin would later privately record that he regarded Greene as "one of the most competent soldiers I have ever known."⁶³

After a difficult siege in the rainy season and a brief assault, Greene's brigade and the other American troops had accepted the surrender of Manila. Greene, who could speak Spanish and French, was promptly put in charge of all the finances of the Philippine administration. He met with all the Spanish officials and leading private bankers and took actions to head off a financial crisis.

This was the context when McKinley asked Dewey to provide his best advice about the situation in the Philippines. He asked Dewey to even consider returning to Washington to report directly to him on this vital matter. Dewey sent a brief reply, noting the desirability of Luzon but saying nothing about the revolutionary government that had been created by Aguinaldo. Dewey said he hoped he would not have to go to Washington while matters remained "in present critical condition."

Dewey, Army expedition commander Merritt, and Greene conferred. They decided that Greene should be the man to go to Washington.⁶⁴

News arrived of the armistice with Spain. Outside of official channels, Greene received a telegram from a well-connected associate. It advised him that the war was considered closed. Commissioners would determine the disposition of the Philippines.

Greene's friend thought the Army would just retain a garrison there.

This informal news shocked the commanders in Manila. They feared the United States was planning to withdraw from the islands and thought that leaders in Washington did not understand the "critical" situation. On August 25, Merritt and Greene fired a salvo of telegrams to Washington through official and unofficial channels.

In one, Greene asked his friend to go see Corbin as soon as possible, to even see President McKinley if necessary. He recommended that the president should send for "a competent and responsible person immediately" to come and brief them — either Maj. Gen. Merritt or himself, going to Washington or to Paris (to see the commissioners). Greene also cabled Day and Hay to the same effect.

Washington reacted promptly. Merritt was ordered to turn over his command to a newly arrived major-general, Elwell Otis, and hurry at once to Paris. There he could brief the peace commissioners. Greene was ordered to Washington "by first transport."

Dewey said his views would come back with Greene. He again called for holding on to Luzon. He wrote little about politics or practicalities. The Filipinos, he did add, "are gentle, docile and under just laws and with the benefits of popular education would soon make good citizens" with capacities for self-government superior to the Cubans.

On August 30, the day after he received his order from Washington, Greene boarded a steamship for Hong Kong. Boarding the ship with Greene was Aguinaldo's representative, Felipe Agoncillo, who also hoped to see and influence the American president.

Greene liked and respected Agoncillo. During the weeks of traveling the two men frequently dined together and chatted.

Greene brought with him every book and relevant document he could find. He used the ensuing weeks of travel to draft a detailed report for McKinley, more than 60 pages, on "The Situation

63 On Greene's background, there are various stories in *The New York Times* and other papers, including his obituary published on May 16, 1921. Greene's father was George Sears Greene, whose distinguished Civil War record included a critical role in the defense of Culp's Hill on the second day of the Gettysburg battle. His brothers had distinguished records too; one was the executive officer of the *USS Monitor*. Francis Greene's first book was F.V. Greene, *The Russian Army and Its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878* (New York: D. Appleton, 1879). Greene's correspondence with Roosevelt is in Box 2 of the F.V. Greene Papers, New York Public Library. In one of these letters, Roosevelt wrote to Greene: "I don't want Cuba. But in strict confidence (for to say this publicly would make me look like an Evening Post jingo) I should welcome almost any war, for I think the country needs one" He thought a war might come with Japan and "least improbable" was war with Spain. TR to Greene, September 23, 1897. Corbin's comment on Greene is in the private autobiography, page 90, in Corbin Papers.

64 See Allen to Dewey, August 13, 1898; Dewey to Long, August 20, 1898, in *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Year 1898*, vol. 2: Appendix to the Bureau of Navigation report, 55th Congress, House Doc. No. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 122-23; Greene diary, Box 4, Greene Papers (entry of August 18 discusses the conference with Dewey and Merritt).

in the Philippines.”⁶⁵

Knowing how long his trip would take, Greene sent a preview. On September 5, as he changed ships in Nagasaki, Greene personally encoded an unusual telegram sent outside of standard Army channels. Written in the tightly abbreviated style of telegrams in that era, Greene sent his message directly to Day. It read:

Rep of Aguinaldo with me. Comes solely on his own responsibility. In my opinion Spanish Power Philippines dead. Any attempt revive it will result Civil War, anarchy and foreign intervention.

Once the 13,000 Spanish prisoners already in American hands were sent home, “Aguinaldo’s army will probably dissolve. He cannot maintain independent gov’t without protection of some strong nation.”

Therefore: “Only safe course is for United States to hold islands and not divide them. British sentiment will support this unanimously. Have expressed these views Admiral Dewey. He fully concurs.”⁶⁶

Thus for the first time, in early September, McKinley and Day finally received a very plain statement about what their commanders in the Philippines thought about the points they and their Cabinet colleagues had been debating. In addition to the substance of this advice, McKinley would have realized its political significance. He could presume that eventually such advice would become publicly known. It would not be easy for the president to break with the advice he had received from his men on the spot, including the new national hero (Dewey).

McKinley was still not quite convinced. Later in September, he convened his freshly appointed peace commissioners to discuss their instructions. Out for a carriage ride with one of them, a vigorous expansionist, McKinley seemed (to his companion) to be “timid about the Philippines.” To him,

McKinley seemed “oppressed with the idea that our volunteers were all tired of the service and eager to get home. ‘The whole shooting match wants to quit,’ was the way he expressed it.” McKinley thought the country was in no mood for further military operations, including fights for expansion.

However, McKinley said he could no longer see how to return liberated Manila to Spain.

At the meeting, the expansionist commissioners debated Day, whom McKinley had put in charge of the delegation. Day had not budged from his view that the United States should take as little as possible. To Day, the Americans had only liberated Manila. They had no obligations beyond that. Washington, Day argued, had to place some limit on humanitarian enterprise:

Because we had done good in one place [Cuba], we were not therefore compelled to rush over the whole civilized world, six thousand miles away from home, to undertake tasks of that sort among people about whom we knew nothing, and with whom we had no relation.

McKinley summed up. He could see why many Americans found the acquisition of territory naturally attractive. But he thought these attractions would wear off “when the difficulties, expense and loss of life which it entailed, became more manifest.”

However, McKinley said he could no longer see how to return liberated Manila to Spain. Flowing from that, it also seemed doubtful to hold Manila without holding more of the surrounding island of Luzon.

“Beyond this he did not seem inclined to go.”

65 Greene diary, (entries for August 25, 26, 28, 29, 30 and associated papers), Greene Papers. Greene’s well-connected associate is identified in his diary only as ALB, whom I have not been able to identify. Another source is a detailed private memoir of this part of Greene’s service, which he presented in 1915 as an address on “The Future of the Philippines” to the New York City Republican Club, also in his papers. Other sources: *Army, Correspondence*, vol. 2, 764-65; Dewey to Long, August 29, 1898, in Cortelyou Papers. Initially, Dewey told Greene that he was “greatly disturbed” that Greene would be leaving Manila, given the situation, but that he would ask Washington to place Greene in “supreme command” of the U.S. expedition in the Philippines. Just before Greene left, Dewey told Greene he had decided not to write a cable requesting that Greene be put in command of the Philippines (replacing Otis) “on account creating bad feeling in Army.” Greene diary.

66 Greene to Day, September 5, 1898, with Greene diary, Greene Papers. Greene preserved the original ciphered version, showing his work. It is reasonable to assume the message was received, at least by the recipient telegraph office, given the protocols of transmitting important cables in this era. I have not found this message in Day’s papers, but Day does not appear to have preserved unofficial messages of this kind. Greene had exchanged unofficial messages with Day the week before; those are not preserved in Day’s papers either. Assuming Day did receive the message, he would have shared it with McKinley.

Based on Greene’s later discussions with McKinley at the end of September, Margaret Leech discussed how influential Greene was in her 1959 book, *In the Days of McKinley*, 331, 334-36. But later scholars touched lightly or not at all on his role, and neither she nor others had explored Greene’s papers. So, for example, Leech was not aware of this earlier message of September 5, which McKinley presumably knew about (along with Dewey’s August 29 cable) before he prepared instructions to the peace commissioners on September 16.



He then drafted the commission's instructions accordingly. He privately told Day that, if territory was returned to Spain, it would be good to try to get some guarantees about the treatment of the inhabitants.⁶⁷

After four weeks of travel by ship and railroad, Greene's train steamed into Washington on September 27. Greene went straight to the White House. McKinley practically cleared his schedule for him.

Greene met for two hours with McKinley on the day he arrived. He delivered his report, which the president read and reviewed with him. The report was clear and vividly written. The next day McKinley had a copy of it sent to Paris for the commissioners, commending it to them.

The next morning Greene was back at the White House, now joined by the new secretary of state, Hay. He stayed for lunch. Greene was back yet again in the evening, now joined by his wife, for

⁶⁷ All quotations are from Whitelaw Reid's diary. H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *Making Peace With Spain: The Diary of Whitelaw Reid, September-December 1898* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 25, 28, 30-31 (entries for September 14 and 16). McKinley had recently made a similar comment to Cortelyou, that "the people could be trusted but were hasty and unreasonable some times ... the clamor would soon be for the return of our troops from Porto Rico and Manila." Cortelyou diary (entry for August 23), Cortelyou Papers.

When McKinley put Reid on the peace commission, he may not have realized how expansionist Reid's views had become. His earlier public comments had emphasized "grave apprehensions" and been more ambivalent. Whitelaw Reid, "The Territory with Which We Are Threatened," *Century* (September 1898): 788-794.

In the instructions to commissioners Moore drafted them to say that the U.S. would "be content with" Luzon; Reid intervened to rewrite this as "cannot accept less" than Luzon. McKinley went along with this. But McKinley's typed and annotated further suggestions, passed to Day, also mentioned that if territory were returned to Spain, "a guarantee of kindlier government to the people and of larger civil and religious liberty to the native population is important." Day Papers. Many years later, Moore recalled McKinley's "public spirit, courage, integrity, and delicate sense of honor." Moore to Wilder Spaulding, August 17, 24, 28, 1940, Box 161, Moore Papers.

a visit that mixed business and socializing. Two days later Greene was at the White House for still more discussions.

Greene also arranged for McKinley to meet with his traveling companion, Aguinaldo's representative Agoncillo. Greene joined that meeting too. Agoncillo was received purely as a private traveler since neither the United States nor anyone else had recognized his revolutionary government.

While en route to Washington, Agoncillo had also previewed his position. Meeting with reporters he outlined that, above all, his government wanted absolute independence.

If absolute independence was not possible, the next preference was to become a protectorate of the United States. A third preference was to be an American colony or, worse still, a British one. What they could not accept was any return to Spanish rule.⁶⁸

In their meeting Agoncillo told McKinley about the revolution and the new government. McKinley was noncommittal. Agoncillo's written position was passed along to the commissioners in Paris, Agoncillo's next destination.⁶⁹

In his own meetings with McKinley, in addition to going over his long report, Greene boiled down the options he thought were left to the United States. He wrote these out separately, as follows:

There are five courses open to us in the Philippines:

first, to return them to Spain, which would mean Civil War for we have destroyed Spanish authority in the Philippines; **second**, to hand the Philippines over to the Filipinos, which would mean anarchy for they are at present incapable of self-government; **third**, to hand the Islands over to Germany or Japan, either one of which could probably take them over, but this would be an act of cowardice of which we are incapable;

fourth, to put the Islands under some form of joint protectorate like that which was established [by Britain] for Egypt in 1882, but this has not proved successful and has resulted in one nation taking the whole responsibility; **fifth**, to take all the Islands as possessions of the United States and gradually work out their destiny, and this is the only proper solution.

McKinley read this over and over again, in silence. Then "with that kindly smile which was so characteristic of him," he observed "gently," that: "General Greene, that is very advanced doctrine. I am not prepared for that."

McKinley asked Greene if he knew what instructions he had just given to his peace commissioners. Greene did not. McKinley summarized his instructions as having been "to take the City and Bay of Manila and such additional portions of the Island of Luzon as they think necessary for naval purposes, and to return the rest of the Islands to Spain." This summary by McKinley is somewhat different and narrower than the language he had signed off on September 16. But Greene's account may give a truer sense of what McKinley actually had in mind.⁷⁰

Greene then set out to change McKinley's mind, to persuade him that the United States had to take control of the whole Philippines. He went over all that he had done and learned in his six weeks in the Philippines. He talked about how he had used his Spanish to have long exchanges with all the prominent Filipinos in Manila and how he had spent more time learning from Agoncillo. Therefore he had to disagree, "respectfully but with extreme urgency."

Greene had time to go into great detail about his analysis of the situation during the three extended meetings he had with McKinley, each of which were two to three hours. It was, as Greene had explained in his written report, a situation "without

68 The interview is in "Failure for Agoncillo," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 28, 1898, 7.

As would be evident later, an American protectorate was an idea that Aguinaldo was ready to consider. Agoncillo had been learning from Greene too, during their trip, sharing a sense of mutual respect. But Agoncillo also was urging Aguinaldo to acquire all the arms he could, just in case. Agoncillo's side of the story, including his reports to Aguinaldo, are discussed in the conscientious history later written by a descendant of his family, Teodoro Agoncillo, *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1960), 321-28.

69 Greene diary (entries for September 27, 28, 29, 30; October 1, 3, 4); Greene, "The Future of the Philippines," 11-12, 16, 18-19, Greene Papers. The five-page record of the Agoncillo-McKinley meeting is in the McKinley Papers, along with an accompanying memorandum Agoncillo presented. For Agoncillo's papers forwarded by Greene, see Peace Treaty Papers, 429-31. For a sympathetic portrayal of Agoncillo (but with a number of inaccuracies), see Esteban De Ocampo with Alfredo Saulo, *First Filipino Diplomat: Felipe Agoncillo* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1976), especially 82-87.

70 Greene, "The Future of the Philippines," 17 (emphasis in original). This little memoir/address of 1915 was carefully prepared for a knowledgeable audience. One of McKinley's more influential Cabinet members, former Attorney General John Griggs, was there. It is evident from the text that Greene, a professional engineer and sometime historian, drew from his contemporary notes and other documents in drafting this account. Ephraim Smith quotes the slip of paper where Greene listed these five options, but Smith believed they were part of his full report, which was then amended before being sent on to Paris. Smith, "A Question From Which We Could Not Escape," 372, note 25. Greene's 1915 address explains that this was a separate document he had prepared just for McKinley. He had already cabled the essence of this argument to Day on September 5.

precedent in American history.” There were more than 7 million people in the Philippines. Manila, a city of 400,000, was already under U.S. military rule.

All of this had been ruled by a Spanish officialdom of no more than 30,000, most of whom were now trying to escape back to Spain. “The Spanish officials have intense fear of the Insurgents; and the latter hate them, as well as the friars, with a virulence that can hardly be described.” The Spanish could neither cope with the insurgents nor surrender to them. An attempted restoration of Spanish power would produce “civil war and anarchy, leading inevitably and speedily to intervention by foreign nations whose subjects have property in the Islands which they would not allow to be destroyed.”⁷¹

As for the Revolutionary Government of Aguinaldo, Greene assessed that it would be a “Dictatorship of the familiar South American type a pure despotism.” He saw “no reason to believe that Aguinaldo’s Government has any elements of stability.” Aguinaldo was a young man of 28. Though Greene thought Aguinaldo was able, Greene did not think he could command wide or enduring support.

Also, the insurgents were purely “Tagalo” in ethnic composition. Greene did not assume that the Visayans, more numerous than the Tagalos, would fall in line. There were plenty of fault lines for conflict among “the thirty races in the Philippines, each speaking a different dialect.”

Greene believed the United States could gain the support of the educated and propertied Filipino elite, since they “fully realize that they must have the support of some strong nation for many years before they will be in a position to manage their own affairs alone.” Their ideal for this was a Philippine Republic under American protection, “much as they heard is to be granted to Cuba.” On this desire for a protectorate, “all are agreed” among the Filipino elite. Only Aguinaldo and his inner circle were doubtful.

But, Greene argued, the protectorate option was harder than it might seem. “[I]t is difficult to see how any foreign Government can give this protection without taking such an active part in the management of affairs as is practically equivalent to

governing in its own name and for its own account.”⁷²

Just taking only some portion of Luzon would, Greene had written, be “a terrible mistake” for all, including for McKinley’s presidency. It could embroil the United States in a conflict with another country that later intervened in the other islands.

What if Aguinaldo and the insurgents did not accept U.S. rule, even temporary rule? Greene admired the way the insurgents had fought the Spanish:

Nevertheless from daily contact with them for six weeks I am very confident that no such results could have been obtained against an American Army, which would have driven them back to the hills and reduced them to a petty guerrilla warfare. If they attack the American Army, this will certainly be the result, and while these guerrilla bands might cause some trouble so long as their ammunition lasted, yet with our Navy guarding the coasts and our Army pursuing them on land it would not be long before they were reduced to subjection.

McKinley gave Greene ample time to describe the situation and make his case. At the time, Greene thought that he had not been convincing enough. He thought he had “utterly failed to shake” the president’s reluctance to take the Philippines.

Looking back on it years later, Greene saw that perhaps his seeds had borne fruit after all. He recalled that, as the two men parted at the end of September, McKinley said he intended to start a trip to the West to make a series of speeches about the unexpected results of the war. Smiling, he told Greene, “Perhaps when I come back I may think differently from what I now think.”⁷³

McKinley kept gathering information. During early October, Day and Moore sent him detailed, substantive reports from Paris summarizing what the commissioners had learned from Merritt and other experts, including Foreman.

All of the information gathered in Paris seemed to line up with what McKinley had heard from Greene. A report given great weight by Merritt was the view of the Army’s lead surgeon in the Philippines, Frank Bourns. Bourns had spent years

71 F.V. Greene, “Memoranda Concerning the Situation in the Philippines on August 30, 1898,” September 30, 1898, 35 (typescript with handwritten annotations), Cortelyou Papers. The report was sent to the commissioners and was included with the official documents in McKinley’s report to Congress accompanying the peace treaty. Peace Treaty Papers, 404-29.

72 Greene, “Memoranda,” 38, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46. Greene’s assessment of the views of the Filipino elite appears to have been accurate. See Teodoro Agoncillo, *Malolos*, 317-18, 327, 374-76.

On the question of whether Luzon could be separated from the other islands, McKinley had also sought advice in a meeting with a well-placed shipping executive who knew the Pacific trade. He heard from this source that it was not feasible to take just Manila or Luzon because of Manila’s role as a hub in inter-island trade and tariff collection. Pierre Smith to McKinley, September 15, 1898, in Cortelyou Papers.

73 Greene, “The Future of the Philippines,” 20, Greene Papers.

visiting the islands as a scientist during the early 1890s. Returning with the Army, Bourns had taken charge of public health in the Philippines after the American occupation of Manila. He had worked directly with Filipino leaders to make progress.

From Paris, Bourns was reported as believing that “if a few ambitious insurgent Chieftains could be disposed of, masses of natives could be managed by the United States. Considers natives incapable of self-government because of lack of good examples, lack of union in Luzon and throughout Archipelago, and existence of race, tribal and religious differences.”⁷⁴

Outside of formal channels, McKinley had access to a more unvarnished side of Bourns’ views. Someone had given the president part of a lengthy private letter Bourns had written from Manila.

In this letter Bourns did write that “these people could be managed if properly handled.” Yet Bourns was angry about the attitudes of his fellow Americans. He warned that none of the other American officers, with one exception, “seem to have cared to inform themselves either of the character of the people or their desires, nor do they even care to explain our desires and intentions.”

In his letter, left in McKinley’s papers, Bourns bluntly sized up the situation this way:

Aguinaldo has the whole Philippine population at his beck and call. He is the successful man and has the successful man’s influence. The lower classes have a blind confidence in him. With the middle classes it is an ambitious confidence; that is they do not know quite enough to understand that an independent government cannot long continue to exist and are anxious to see it, because they expect to get the plums. With the well educated and wealthy people it is merely a question of expediency; they support the Philippine Government so that

they may influence it for the best. I venture to say that ninety-five percent of them at heart want to see American protection, and a good many of the most influential want to see annexation, but the masses of the people know nothing about Americans and think we are just like the Spaniards. Our officials take no trouble to educate them; our men simply refuse to have anything to do with them, will not recognize them nor write to them officially, and many of the line officers, such as colonels, majors, and captains, treat them as cattle to be knocked around as suits their pleasure.

Of course, Bourns wrote, “This is all wrong.” If the United States did not do better, Bourns feared that it would find itself in a war with the Filipinos.

Yet Bourns thought the problem was still manageable. With some “tact and patience,” and attention to the Filipinos, “the whole Filipino government could be swung our way without bloodshed.”⁷⁵

In mid-October, having received no further guidance from Washington, Dewey weighed in again. He sent a terse cable pleading for a decision about the Philippines “as soon as possible, and a strong government established.”

In Luzon, Dewey wrote, Spanish authority had been “completely destroyed.” Outside Manila, “general anarchy prevails.” The islands to the south would soon fall into the same state. “Distressing reports have been received of inhuman cruelty practiced on religious and civil authorities in other parts of these islands. The natives appear unable to govern.”⁷⁶

McKinley left Washington for about 10 days in October, traveling around the Midwest to rally support for the upcoming midterm elections. It was during this trip that McKinley began to speak publicly, in vague terms, about American duty and

74 Merritt’s testimony and the expert statements are in *Peace Treaty Papers*, 362-83 (including the separate written statements from Greene, Bourns and Bell), 441-71 (Foreman statement). For the way these views were summarized for McKinley, which is what is quoted in the text, see Day to Hay, October 7 (Commission report no. 3) and October 9, 1898 (Commission report no. 8), in *Hay Papers*, Library of Congress; see also Reid to McKinley, October 4; Reid to Hay, October 16, 1898 (letters that would have arrived at least a week later), in David Contosta and Jessica Hawthorne, eds., *Rise to World Power: Selected Letters of Whitelaw Reid* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1986), 44-46. The reports coming in from Gen. Otis in Manila were also upbeat, more so than Dewey’s October 14 wire, discussed below. E.g., Otis to Corbin, October 19, 1898, in Cortelyou Papers.

75 The undated letter from Maj. Bourns is in the Cortelyou Papers, General Correspondence, quotes are from Pages 2 and 6 of the letter. The name and position of the author is penned on the last page, in what looks like McKinley’s handwriting. The letter opens to its unnamed addressee with the warning, “Will write a bit this morning about things political, but this must all be confidential and not under any circumstances for publication.” It will help to place Bourns a bit by understanding that in this era Army surgeons were major figures in the life of Army posts. They could have influence and relationships with commanders well beyond their formal rank. It is possible that Bourns knew Corbin or one of Corbin’s officers and that the letter was conveyed to McKinley through this back channel.

Bourns had traveled to the Philippines in the early 1890s with Dean Worcester, whose tone in writing about Filipinos was more supercilious. The other Army officer Bourns referred to in his letter as really understanding Filipinos was Maj. J. Franklin Bell. Bell had become Merritt’s chief of intelligence, working beyond American lines and with the insurgents. Bell also provided a statement for the commissioners, cited above, and had worked with Greene. Bell would go on to become a major figure in the Philippine-American war and eventually rise to Army chief of staff.

76 Dewey to Long, October 14, 1898, in McKinley Papers (this appears to have been relayed to McKinley just after his departure on his trip).

unexpected obligation.

At one point some scholarly opinion tended to think McKinley was trying to gauge public opinion. In fact he was deciding how to lead it, and lead it toward the conclusion firming up in his own mind.⁷⁷

By the time he returned to Washington, McKinley had decided that there was no good middle ground. No government had recognized Aguinaldo. With the notable exception of Germany, the other great powers seemed to prefer American control now that Spanish rule was gone.⁷⁸

Back in Washington, Secretary of the Navy Long wrote to his wife,

If I could have had my way, I wouldn't have had the war, and I wouldn't have been burdened with Porto Rico or Cuba or the Philippines. They are an elephant, just as everything else is an elephant that disturbs the even tenor of our national way, but there they are, and my shoulder goes to the wheel.

McKinley cabled the commissioners: "We must either hold [the Philippines] or turn them back to Spain." McKinley now saw "but one plain path of duty — the acceptance of the archipelago. ... Greater difficulties and more serious complications — administrative and international — would follow any other course."⁷⁹

A few weeks later, McKinley talked privately to a colleague about how he had worked through the arguments. The islands could not go back to Spain. If they went to another European power "we should have a war on our hands in fifteen minutes" and the United States would be responsible, having let it happen just to escape responsibility for its actions. McKinley reviewed the geography of the islands. He discussed why it had seemed so difficult to separate them.

His visitor congratulated McKinley on his decision and remarked on what great confidence the people had in him. McKinley was having none of it:

Yes that confidence, that awful confidence. Consider what a burden that imposes on me. I almost wish these questions were not so much left to the decision of any small number. I can foresee for myself and for the people nothing but anxiety for the next two years.⁸⁰

The Attempt to Negotiate a Peaceful Settlement With the Filipinos, January to June 1899

Analysts of the American choice in the autumn of 1898 can easily overlook that there was no ready way the U.S. government could simply turn the Philippines over to the revolutionary Filipino republic, even if it wished to do so. Under international law and in the view of other powers, the Philippines was still sovereign territory of Spain, as was Cuba, until they were lawfully ceded to another recognized government. No foreign government had recognized the Filipino republic or had any plans to do so.

If the United States refused to take the islands, it would be leaving them with Spain. Even U.S. recognition of the Filipino republic, if America had wished to offer it, might not have disturbed other powers' belief in Spain's claim. If tired Spain wanted to give up its territories in the Pacific, the German government was already secretly discussing with Spain its hopes to get them. And Spain did end up selling to Germany all its Pacific territories that were not ceded to the United States — the Caroline, Palau, and Marianas island chains

77 Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley*, 104 and, for more details about this electoral trip and the themes McKinley emphasized, 103-06; see also "Philippines: President Determined to Demand Archipelago," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1898, clipping in McKinley Papers.

78 See John Offner, "Imperialism by International Consensus: The United States and the Philippine Islands," in Daniela Rossini, ed., *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism and Isolationism in American Foreign Policy* (Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1995), 45-54; for more on the Spanish view of the negotiation, also see Offner, "The Philippine Settlement: The United States, Spain, and Great Britain in 1898," in Luis Gonzalez Vales, ed., *1898: Enfoques y Perspectivas* (San Juan: Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 1997), 353-70.

79 Long quoted in Trask, *The War With Spain*, 466. For McKinley's instructions: Hay to Day, October 28, 1898, in State Department reports, *Papers Relating to the Treaty With Spain*, 56th Congress, 2nd session, Senate Doc. No. 148 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 37-38. The instructions had already been drafted by McKinley (a handwritten draft is in his papers) for Hay to send when the cabled recommendations of the commissioners began coming in. Hay held off on sending the instructions until McKinley had read the recommendations. Hay to McKinley, October 27, 1898, in McKinley Papers. But there is no sign that McKinley materially changed the substance of his original draft. A draft October 26 instruction, included mistakenly in the 1898 FRUS volume and often quoted by historians, was in fact not the one that McKinley sent. Richard Leopold, "The Foreign Relations Series: A Centennial Estimate," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49, no. 4 (March 1963): 595, 598-99 no. 12.

Three of the commissioners had recommended taking all the islands. Not knowing his president's wishes, Day had held to the original view of no more than Luzon, but it seems evident that Day's views were evolving to the necessity of taking most of the archipelago. Sen. Gray dissented, arguing that the United States had neither duty nor interests in holding any of the islands. See Peace Commissioners to Hay, October 25, 1898, in State Department reports, *Papers Relating to the Treaty*, 32-36; Morgan, *Making Peace With Spain*, 88-89 (entry for October 19).

80 Interview with President McKinley, November 19, 1898, Anderson Papers, in Smith, "A Question From Which We Could Not Escape," 369-70.

(except for the island of Guam).⁸¹

If the United States wished to grant self-government to the Filipinos it would have to do what it was doing with Cuba: first take legal control of the territory, then decide what to do. That is what McKinley had decided to do. The United States took over sovereignty of the Philippines, paying \$20 million to Spain as compensation. Then President McKinley planned to decide what to do in a negotiation with the Filipinos.

The treaty of peace went to the U.S. Senate for ratification. A two-thirds majority was needed. Opponents fought hard for votes to block ratification. Some opposed taking the Philippines because they were anti-imperialist. Racism influenced arguments all around — “white man’s burden” arguments on one side; “we don’t want to have anything to do with them” on the other. Both sides argued business advantages or disadvantages. Progressive reformers tended to support the treaty.⁸²

As McKinley worked on how to organize governance of the Philippines with the Filipinos, he was working on a similar problem with Cuba. The two cases might seem different since Congress had decreed that Cuba was to be assured independence. But, despite that apparent difference in the legal situation, McKinley appears to have adopted the same basic approach for both cases. Both had been ceded to the United States. In both, McKinley set up interim U.S. military governments. He wanted to then replace these with local self-government.

The new Cuban government took office in 1902. Cuban independence, promised by the Teller Amendment, was granted with conditions imposed by another act of Congress, the Platt Amendment. The new Cuban government agreed that it would not submit to control by another foreign power and that it would not take on unpayable foreign debts (which could lead to such control). It granted America the right to intervene “for the preservation of Cuban independence” and



granted naval basing rights to the United States. Many Cubans found these conditions offensive.

But, seen from Washington, this outcome was a defeat for the hopes of the jingo faction. The jingoes had schemed to maneuver the United States into annexing Cuba. They failed. American military occupation wound up its work in 1902. The United States did have to intervene in civil conflict in 1906 but withdrew after order was restored. The Platt Amendment had ultimately been supported by anti-imperialists such as George Hoar because of a

general recognition that the amendment represented a true compromise. It promised to give the Cubans real internal self-government. ... Besides, no one could find an alternative that had any reasonable chance of acceptance in both Cuba and the United States.⁸³

As with his plans for the Cubans, McKinley hoped to work out a plan of government peacefully

81 Japan took control of these German island possessions as a result of World War I. The United States would face the consequences of Japanese control of these island chains during World War II.

82 On the variety of elite opinion and arguments in the treaty debate, see May, *American Imperialism*, 192-206; David Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970). On the pro-expansion view of many reformers, see William Leuchtenburg, "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898-1916," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39, no. 3 (December 1952): 483-504. An interesting example is the position of Woodrow Wilson, who by 1898 was a prestigious academic commentator on American government. Breaking with some of his fellow Democrats, Wilson publicly argued that the United States had the duty to take the Philippines (and Hawaii) in order to prevent other colonial powers from taking them. In 1901 Wilson argued, in *The Atlantic*, that Americans should help "undeveloped peoples, still in the childhood of their natural growth ... inducting them into the rudiments of justice and freedom." John Milton Cooper Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 75-76.

83 David Healy, *The United States in Cuba 1898-1902* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 167. Paul Holbo had long ago noted that McKinley had headed off would-be Cuban annexationists even before war broke out and that, "The pattern established in Cuba was important. [McKinley] subsequently pursued a virtually identical course in dealing with the Philippine Islands." Paul Holbo, "Presidential Leadership in Foreign Affairs: William McKinley and the Turpie-Foraker Amendment," *American Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (July 1967): 1321, 1334. In his *Cuba Between Empires 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 212-327, 368-70, Louis Perez, Jr. concentrates, convincingly, on the annexationist intentions of key Americans such as Gen. Leonard Wood. But his story also reveals the constant disappointment and frustration of Wood and his annexationist allies. The Cubans had something to do with Wood's disappointment. So did McKinley.

with the Filipinos. As he assembled a commission to do this on his behalf, McKinley issued repeated instructions to his commander in Manila, Gen. Otis, to occupy strategic points in the islands but do everything necessary to avoid conflict with the insurgents. Otis was to be “firm but conciliatory.”

Yet there is not good evidence that such racial views were held by McKinley and his inner circle.

The interim military rulers were to aim at some sort of “benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule” for “the greatest good of the governed.”⁸⁴ This goal was necessarily vague.

To lead his commission, McKinley did not choose an expansionist. He did the opposite. He called on Jacob Gould Schurman, the president of Cornell University. McKinley knew Schurman had been opposed to territorial acquisitions; they had exchanged letters about it in August.

Schurman was startled to be asked to lead such a commission. Meeting McKinley in January 1899, he said straight out, “To be plain, Mr. President ... I am opposed to your Philippine policy: I never wanted the Philippine Islands.”

“Oh,” McKinley answered, “that need not trouble you; I didn’t want the Philippine Islands, either ... but in the end there was no alternative.” McKinley reviewed his reasons.

Now Schurman had to work out what government should come next. He recalled that McKinley’s mind was entirely open on how to settle the governance question. “It was still open to us, in dealing with the Filipinos, to grant them independence, to establish a protectorate over them, to confer upon them a colonial form of government” or even to consider

statehood. “Absolutely nothing was settled.”

Schurman confirmed that his commission would be McKinley’s eyes and ears. He was instructed to heed the aspirations of the Philippine people “en masse” along with the various “tribes and families which compose that heterogeneous population.” Schurman helped select the other commissioners and they left America at the end of January 1899.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, McKinley asked Gen. Greene to give him some more help. He wanted Greene to talk to and reassure Aguinaldo’s envoy, Agoncillo, who had returned to Washington. Getting his instructions from the president, Greene gathered that what McKinley intended for the Philippines was to build up a large system of public education with “a constantly increasing participation in civic rights and duties, starting with local government and then progressing to the governance of all the islands.”

Greene was taken aback by McKinley’s plan. To Greene, it seemed like “a novel experiment” and a risky one: “Englishmen of long experience in colonial affairs doubted its wisdom.” To Greene, McKinley’s ideas seemed unprecedented. “Self-government has hitherto grown up from the bottom; McKinley planned to donate it from the top.”

Despite his doubts, Greene followed orders. He met with Agoncillo in January 1899. He outlined American hopes. Greene urged Agoncillo to wire Aguinaldo and help head off a conflict.

Agoncillo refused to do it. He feared that if he sent such a message the revolutionaries back home would regard him as a traitor. He could do nothing, he said, “unless the United States could grant absolute independence to the Filipinos under American protection against foreign nations.”

It is again worth noting Agoncillo’s language: “absolute independence” yet with “American protection.” There was an obvious tension between these two goals that would have to be worked out, presumably in negotiation. But Greene had no authority to preempt what the Schurman commission might work out.

So Greene argued that, at this stage, Washington could not simply grant independence. The Filipinos should trust the U.S. government “to work out

84 Corbin to Otis, relaying McKinley’s instructions of December 21, sent December 27, 1898, in Army, Correspondence, 858-59. “Although the butt of many a sardonic comment, McKinley’s ‘benevolent assimilation’ policy was of vital importance,” Brian Linn has argued. It “established conciliation as the cornerstone of military policy in the Philippines.” Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 30-31.

85 Jacob Gould Schurman, *Philippine Affairs: A Retrospect and Outlook* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 2-4; Schurman to McKinley, January 11, 1899; Schurman to Alonzo Cornell, January 12, 1899, in Schurman Papers, Cornell University. The other commissioners coming from the United States were Charles Denby, who been the U.S. minister in China for 12 years and Dean Worcester, who had already been writing on the topic, a University of Michigan professor who had lived in the Philippines during the early 1890s. The remaining commissioners would be Dewey and Gen. Otis. For more on Worcester, who had been quite active calling for American acquisition of the Philippines, see Peter Stanley, “The Voice of Worcester Is the Voice of God: How One American Found Fulfillment in the Philippines,” in Stanley, ed., *Reappraising an Empire: New Perspectives on Philippine-American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 117-42.

such a scheme of government as would be most suited to their conditions.” He warned that if the Filipinos attacked the Americans, the results would be disastrous. Agoncillo said that even to relay such a message would be the end of his career.⁸⁶

Readers today should not assume that any negotiated agreement on Filipino self-government in some form of American protectorate was ruled out by the prevalence of racist American attitudes toward the Filipinos. Such attitudes were certainly a serious obstacle to understanding. Some advocates of American expansion were Anglo-Saxon racial exceptionalists, such as Roosevelt, Lodge, and the still-emergent Albert Beveridge, as were some presumed experts on the Philippines. Yet there is not good evidence that such racial views were held by McKinley and his inner circle.

In the context of his party, McKinley himself had been relatively forward on defending the rights of African-Americans in the South and had made news by meeting with African-Americans during the 1896 campaign. Corbin had come from an abolitionist family background, had commanded a “colored” regiment during the Civil War (clashing with another such commander whom Corbin thought had needlessly risked his “colored” troops), and had been critical of officers in the Indian wars who had sought conflict rather than compromise. Long wrote of the Anglo-Saxon character, but he diarized admiringly about black troops in U.S. service and detested Southern racial practices.⁸⁷

Among the presumed experts on the Philippines, Foreman, Greene, and Bourns all made strong, sympathetic connections with many Filipinos. Foreman and Bourns were openly scornful about ignorant Americans who would not take the trouble to understand the Filipinos.⁸⁸

Schurman and his fellow commissioners started

their journey across the Pacific. War started before they arrived.

McKinley can perhaps be excused for not realizing that war in the Philippines might be imminent. He might well have thought he had more time. Again and again he had instructed his field commander, Gen. Otis, to “proceed with great prudence, avoiding conflict if possible ... be kind and tactful, taking time if necessary to accomplish results desired by peaceful means.” Otis was repeatedly also urged to rely on Bourns, whose views had obviously impressed someone in Washington.

Otis had reassuringly reported that “order prevails.” His messages discussed the tension but also conveyed that conditions were “quiet” or “improving.”⁸⁹

It was early in February 1899, while Schurman and his commissioners were on their steamship, that news flashed to Washington that fighting had begun. McKinley had been working on the speech he was to give in Boston in a couple of weeks. His assistant brought in the dispatch with the tragic news. McKinley stopped his work. He read and reread the wire. He sat well back in his chair and finally said,

It is always the unexpected that happens, at least in my case. How foolish those people are. This means the ratification of the treaty; the people will understand now, the people will insist upon its ratification.⁹⁰

Two days after the fighting started, on February 6, the U.S. Senate voted 57-27 to ratify the peace treaty, a margin of only one vote more than the required two-thirds. The Senate debate had been eloquent and well-covered in the nation’s newspapers. Every imaginable argument had been

86 For a similar account, from Agoncillo’s side, see Teodoro Agoncillo, *Malolos*, 357-59. Earlier, in December 1898, Aguinaldo had signaled his openness to an American protectorate of a Filipino republic, without clarifying the inherent tension between the responsibilities of a protectorate and the nature of independence. One Filipino scholar has therefore criticized Agoncillo for not sending along the American assurances he received from Greene, arguing that such assurances could have avoided the outbreak of conflict in February 1899. H.A. Villanueva, “A Chapter of Filipino Diplomacy,” *Philippine Social Science and Humanities Review* 17, no. 2 (June 1952): 121, 123. Teodoro Agoncillo disagreed, regarding such a conflict as inevitable and appropriate. *Malolos*, 710-11 note 97.

By the end of 1898 Greene had been promoted to major-general and put in command of a division in Cuba, but his service there had then not been needed. Greene was very impressed by the difficulty the Americans would have faced if they had assaulted Havana. As Greene returned to civilian life, McKinley had another long meeting with him at the end of December. Greene, “The Future of the Philippines,” 12-15, 20 (reading in part from Greene to Hay, February 3, 1900), in *Greene Papers*. See also “History of Manila Trouble,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 5, 1899, 1.

87 See Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*; Corbin, private autobiography; and Long, *America of Yesterday*.

88 Frank Ninkovich has a thoughtful study of the spectrum of American attitudes at the time about race and foreign cultures in *Global Dawn*, 137-231.

89 On the suggestion to rely on Bourns, see Corbin to Otis, December 30, 1898, at *Army, Correspondence*, 864-65. The reports from Otis had been deceptively reassuring. He reported that the “great majority of men of property desire annexation.” Though many others sought plunder, the insurgents were divided and quarreling. There was much “suppressed excitement,” but Otis was confident his troops “can meet emergencies.” If the excitement could remain suppressed for a few days, “believe that affairs will greatly improve.” Conditions were “improving. Incendiarism and mob violence in city all that is feared.” Otis thought the insurgents wanted “qualified independence under United States protection.” The excitement was diminishing. There was “more moderation in demands.” E.g., Otis to Corbin, December 22, 30, 1898; Alger to Otis, December 30, 1898; Corbin to Otis, January 1, 1899; Otis to Corbin, January 2, 8; Corbin to Otis relaying personal message from McKinley, January 8; Otis to Corbin, January 10, 11, 14, 16, and 27, in *Army, Correspondence*, 860, 864-66, 872-73, 876-80, 888.

90 Cortelyou diary (entry for February 4, 1899), Cortelyou Papers.

made for why America should expand across the Pacific; every argument had been made for why it should not. Now the Senate had decided.

McKinley had spent much of the past month talking to the senators. Between the loud arguments of the imperialists and anti-imperialists, the “truly decisive figures” were the “conservative men” of the Senate. These men had shown no enthusiasm for expansion. Like McKinley himself, these senators had “resisted war with Spain almost to the bitter end” and they had grave doubts about the Philippines. They had finally gone along with this “radical” treaty because they had decided to follow the lead of their president.⁹¹

McKinley continued to remain open-minded about the political future of the Philippines. In his February 17 Boston speech, the one that was so somber in tone, he said:

No one can tell to-day what is best for them or for us. I know no one at this hour who is wise enough or sufficiently informed to determine what form of government will best serve their interests and our interests, their and our well-being.

But his audience should be sure, he added, “No imperial designs lurk in the American mind.” To this at least, the audience applauded.⁹²

The fighting in the Philippines escalated into a full insurgent offensive against Manila. The insurgent attack was bloodily defeated. The campaigning began.

By the time Schurman and his fellow commissioners finally arrived, the war had been underway for a month. Even under these circumstances, there was an episode that showed how close the two sides might have been to a negotiated agreement on a model similar to that which was worked out for Cuba.

Schurman proposed, with McKinley’s approval, that an American governor-general, appointed by the president, would rule with a Cabinet he would select and grant Filipinos “the largest measure of

local self-government consistent with peace and good order.” The Filipino Revolutionary Congress voted unanimously to accept these terms. The revolutionary Cabinet was replaced on May 8 by a new “peace” Cabinet. Aguinaldo sent word to Schurman that his new Cabinet was “more moderate and conciliatory.” His envoy revealed that Aguinaldo was prepared to drop his demand for independence and accept American sovereignty.

Determined to fight the Americans, the violent-tempered commander of Aguinaldo’s revolutionary army, Gen. Antonio Luna, arrested the leaders of this new peace Cabinet. Aguinaldo went along with this. The previous Cabinet returned to power.

Part of this battle was an increasingly bitter struggle among Filipinos in Luzon about who would collect taxes, own land, and wield police power when Spanish colonial rule collapsed. The war continued.

The next month, in June 1899, Aguinaldo, or at least his inner circle, apparently arranged the assassination of Gen. Luna. It was too late.

By this time, Schurman was being challenged within his commission by its other members, which included Otis. Schurman wanted to enlarge guarantees of Filipino participation and was open to a cease-fire while negotiations went on. His colleagues now preferred “prosecution of the war until the insurgents submit.” McKinley was caught between his desire for peace with “kindness and conciliation” and his readiness to send whatever forces were needed to end the fighting if Filipino resistance continued. McKinley ended up deferring to Otis. Schurman returned home toward the end of 1899, his mission a failure.⁹³

That war unfolded over the next three years about the way that Greene had foretold it might in his September 1898 report to McKinley. The Filipinos were soon driven “into the hills.” Conflict quickly degenerated into savage guerrilla fighting. Deprived of access to outside arms by American control of the sea, after a few years practically all resistance collapsed. By this time most of the Filipino elite had decided to work with the American government.

91 On the “conservative men” in the Senate and their decisive role, May, *Imperial Democracy*, 261.

92 *Souvenir of the Visit of President McKinley and Members of the Cabinet to Boston*, February 1899.

93 On the failed peace efforts of March to June 1899 see Agoncillo, *Malolos*, 398-405, 515-18 (describing the strength of Filipino leaders who favored a conciliatory peace based on “autonomy”); Golay, *Face of Empire*, 48-51; see also Karnow, *In Our Image*, 150-53, 156; and, on the quarrels within the Schurman commission, engineered (in his telling) by Dean Worcester, see Stanley, “The Voice of Worcester,” 128-30. Filipino historians tend to interpret the internal Filipino struggles as a class conflict between the land-owning, educated, and privileged class, which wished to get or maintain power, and the frustrations of the illiterate and impoverished peasant masses. The interests of the revolutionary peasant masses are associated by these historians with the more warlike revolutionary leader Apolinario Mabini. Those favoring peace and more willing to work with the Americans are associated with the educated or privileged *ilustrado* elite. Aguinaldo is portrayed trying, impossibly, to balance and lead both factions. From this view, the privileged elite “emerged as the true victors in the Philippine revolution, politically, socially and economically.” Milagros Camayon Guerrero, *Luzon at War: Contradictions in Philippine Society, 1898-1902* (Quezon City: Anvil Publishing, 2015), 164; see also Teodoro Agoncillo (an admirer of Mabini who attacks the “plutocrats” who were willing to settle for autonomy), *Malolos*, 463-64, 483-89.

Filipino soldiers fighting alongside the Americans were key to the U.S. victory.⁹⁴

The war devastated regions, divided Filipinos against each other, and led to many atrocities. Thousands of American soldiers died, as did many more thousands of Filipinos.⁹⁵

After Schurman returned home, McKinley tried again. To lead this second commission McKinley picked a federal appeals judge, one sitting on the same circuit court to which Day (returned from Paris) had been appointed. Day arranged an introduction. All were impressed with this young judge, William Howard Taft.

It was Schurman all over again. McKinley asked Judge Taft to lead the commission. Taft answered, "Why, Mr. President, that would be impossible. I am not in sympathy with your policy. I don't think we ought to take the Philippines."

"Neither do I," McKinley retorted. "But that isn't the question. We've got them. What I want you to do now is to go there and establish civil government."⁹⁶

Taft's work outlived McKinley, who was assassinated in September 1901. The civilian Taft commission clashed with the U.S. military and some jingo sentiment, but it forged a consensus that worked for Americans and a great many Filipinos, especially the much-discussed Filipino elite. That elite class, the *ilustrados*, continued to dominate the country's politics, before and after independence.

U.S. military rule ended in 1901. Taft became a civilian governor. The Philippine Organic Act of 1902 created a Bill of Rights and a process for nationwide elections. This codified an American protectorate with increasingly Filipino self-government. More legislation in 1916 advanced that objective. Advocates on both sides of the Pacific, including Filipinos, argued about whether or when to end the American protectorate and fix the date for full Filipino independence. The argument was settled in

1934. The Philippines transitioned to commonwealth status with full independence set for 1944 — a date delayed until 1946 because of another war.

Alternative Futures?

Studying the exercise of judgment, the main purpose of this essay is to offer a more educational

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"re-enactment" of a fateful choice, in light of the information and possibilities reasonably visible at the time. Carefully reconstructed, without the blinding effect of hindsight, McKinley does seem to have made remarkably deliberate, thoughtful choices at all five stages of his Philippines decisions. At each point he also improvised to get the best information he could from a system that did not naturally provide it.

Whether, in hindsight, these decisions turned out to be "right" or "wrong" is a different question. That question is worth a brief epilogue. After all, historians are like most citizens: They tend to praise ill-judged decisions that they think turned out well and condemn well-judged decisions that they think turned out badly. With the benefit of hindsight, it

94 Although he sides with those who fought for complete independence, Teodoro Agoncillo acknowledges that such a fight had little chance of success, given the divided views among Filipinos themselves. *Malolos*, 662-68.

McKinley soon overhauled the War Department. He dismissed Alger. Greene was put forward as a candidate for secretary of war by Theodore Roosevelt, who advocated for Greene "with all the force characteristic of him." But McKinley had already settled on Elihu Root, a much-admired New York lawyer whom McKinley thought might have the breadth to take on these new tasks in Cuba and the Philippines. Roosevelt later suggested that Greene should replace Otis as commander in the Philippines. But McKinley thought it would undermine the war effort to replace Otis mid-campaign. On the selection of Root, "a man of strangely strong analytical and judicial mind" who "could more thoroughly analyze a problem of government than any man I have ever known," and Roosevelt's push for Greene, see private autobiography of Corbin, 99-101, in Corbin Papers. On the idea of Greene replacing Otis, see Roosevelt to Hay, cc'd to Greene, July 1, 1899; Roosevelt to Greene, July 10, 1899 (McKinley spoke "most warmly" of you, but ...), in Greene Papers. Greene returned to business and history writing. His last major stint in public service was a year as the New York City police commissioner.

95 The most thorough account now is Linn, *The Philippine War*. For an earlier and more negative appraisal see Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

96 Olcott, *Life of McKinley*, vol. 2, 174-75 (based on Olcott's interviews with Taft and Day); see Corbin autobiography, 101, Corbin Papers. In 1902 Schurman came out strongly advocating setting an early fixed date for Philippine independence. See generally Kenneth Hendrickson Jr., "Reluctant Expansionist: Jacob Gould Schurman and the Philippine Question," *Pacific Historical Review* 36, no. 4 (November 1967): 405-21. Day would go on to serve as an associate justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. After becoming president of the United States, Taft would later rejoin Day on the bench when he became the Supreme Court's chief justice.

is easy to argue about McKinley's decisions. Critics can stress the subsequent agony of the Philippine-American war, the legitimacy of Filipino aspirations, and note the patronizing incompetence of many American administrators.

Yet it is still hard to sketch a plausible alternative path, one more peaceful and more prosperous, for an immediately independent Philippines. The self-government concerns were real. Such a Philippines would have had no American shield from other foreign intervention. That danger also was real. The German Empire snapped up all the Spanish Pacific possessions it could get, all that Spain had not ceded to the United States. The Filipinos also would not have had the trade openings to the American market that their business leaders considered vital. Nor would they have had the benefit of later American nation-building efforts and infrastructure investments, which were substantial.⁹⁷

It is not hard to imagine alternative paths that could have been worse, perhaps much worse. The histories of other lands liberated after longtime Spanish rule, from Mexico to Argentina, offer a picture book of tragic examples. And, as in much of Latin American history, arguments about alternative Filipino futures soon focus more attention on the fault lines within Filipino society itself, such as the divide between pro-American *ilustrados* and others. Such fault lines produced a nationwide insurgency after 1946 (the "Huk" insurrection). They remain fault lines in Filipino life today.

Assessing the alternative futures for the United States are another matter. Americans could have shrugged and regarded the future of the islands and its inhabitants as someone else's fault and someone else's problem. The United States would have had little or no Filipino blood directly on its hands. American soldiers would not have engaged in a bitter war, stained by outrages of every kind.

McKinley did not take the Philippine islands because he was confident that America would gain power or profit by it. In every aspect of his public and private life, McKinley was a man, like many then, who tried to live by codes of duty.

In his Boston speech, McKinley explained his conception of America's duty "after freeing the Filipinos from the domination of Spain" to prevent a descent of the islands into violent anarchy. He told his audience, frankly, that "It is sometimes hard to determine what is best to do, and the best thing to do is oftentimes the hardest. The prophet of evil would do nothing because he flinches at sacrifice and effort, and to do nothing is easiest and involves the least cost."

For McKinley, circumstances had placed the United States into a position of responsibility. To him and many of his contemporaries, abandoning the islands to their fate would not have ended that responsibility. It would merely have shirked it.

Was the acquisition of the Philippines good for the United States? The liability side of the ledger is clearest: the horrors of the war and the burdens of occupation. The islands were never great net boons to U.S. trade. Nor was Manila a key to the China trade.

The U.S. position in the Philippines did extend American military power across the Pacific in a new and lasting way. In the short run, the United States used this base to help with the multinational intervention during the Boxer crisis of 1900 in China. But later that year, after the immediate crisis had passed, McKinley pulled most U.S. troops out of China, over the bitter objections of Secretary of State Hay. McKinley did not wish to use those troops as chess pieces in the great game over China's future.⁹⁸

There would come a time, though, when the U.S. military presence in the Philippines did change the course of the history of the world. But no one in 1899 could foresee how the American presence in the islands would figure in the analysis of grand strategists in Tokyo, studying their options during 1941. 

97 For a critical modern appraisal of the U.S. nation-building efforts, see Peter Stanley, *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974). For a somewhat more generous appraisal, though focused only on the period of military government, see John Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898-1902* (New York: Praeger, 1973). Neither book attempts much comparative reflection on the range of possibilities presented by the course of national development in other nations that won liberation from Spanish rule during the 19th century. Historians of Latin American liberation would quickly recognize the familiar patterns of collaboration between American and Filipino elites and the stereotyping of good and "savage" segments of the population by the ruling elites of both countries, which is the pattern portrayed in Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Filipinos ended up constructing "a unique economic system, crony capitalism, that depended on privileged access to United States markets, aid, and multilateral lending." Filipinos did a very good job of figuring out how to manipulate U.S. policies to their advantage. Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippine Relations, 1942-1960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3. Cullather is right, except that such systems of crony capitalism are hardly "unique" to the Philippines case.

98 Betty Talbert, "The Evolution of John Hay's China Policy," unpublished Ph.D. diss., 1974, 304-14; see also Kenton Clymer, *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 151.

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