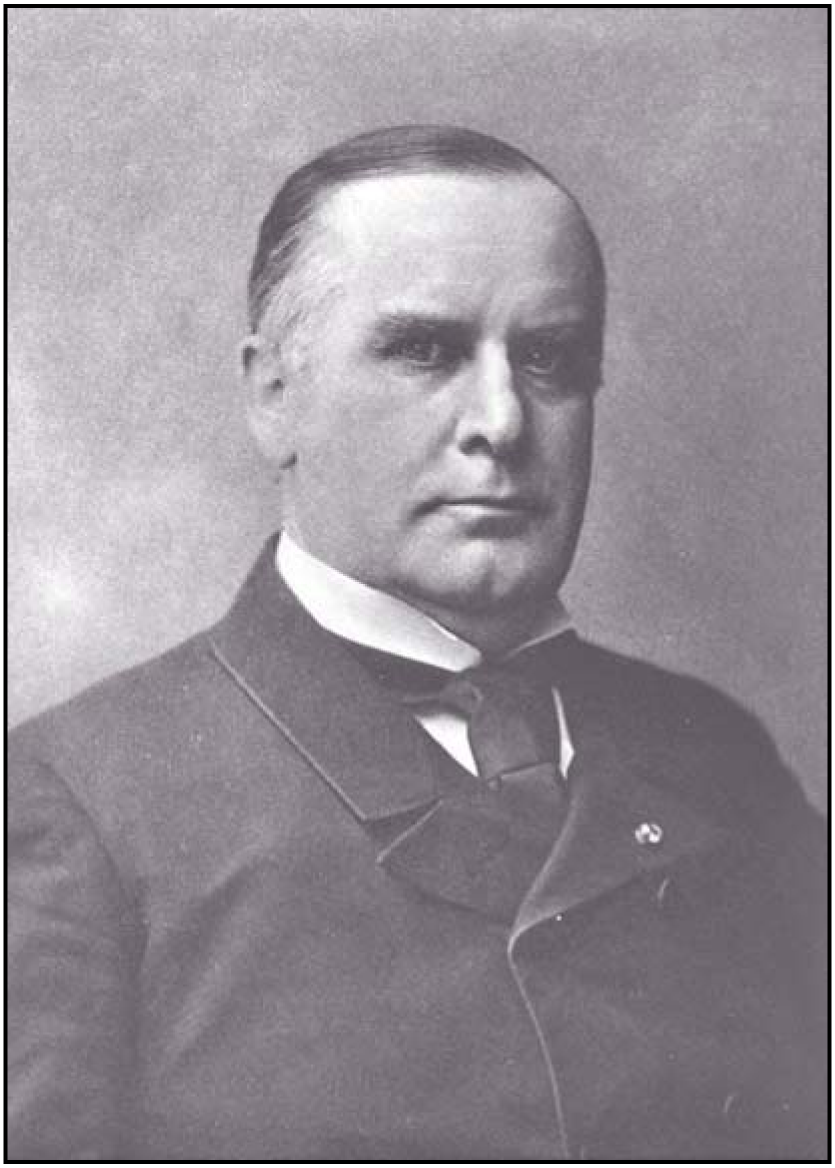
McKinley's Ghost

How the United States Ended Up "Owning" the Philippine Islands and Idealism Came to be Embedded in American Foreign Policy



> The Philippines are not ours to exploit, but to civilize, to educate, to train in the science of self-government. This is the path we must follow or be recreant to a mighty trust committed to us. – William McKinley in 1899

> It has long been a tenet of American foreign policy that other peoples cannot solve their problems and improve their lives unless they go about it in the same way as citizens of the United States." - Rev. Camillus Gott – doctoral dissertation on William Cameron Forbes, Governor General of the Philippines, 1910-1913

William McKinley twenty-fifth President of the United States, died September 14, 1901 from wounds incurred in an assassination attempt eight days earlier. He was only six months into his second term of office. McKinley was quite popular and his death was deeply mourned. For years afterwards he was referred to reverentially as "our martyred President", terms analogous to those applied to Abraham Lincoln, even though his death came at the hands of a clearly deranged and delusional man (although a proclaimed Anarchist.) It is common nowadays to attribute idealism in American foreign policy to Woodrow Wilson. But it should really be laid at the doorstep of McKinley's ghost; a man dead more than a century but whose rhetoric and ideals still seem with us.

As described by Henry Kissinger, two opposing views were present in the American Republic from its beginnings.

> The singularities that America has ascribed to itself throughout its history have produced two contradictory attitudes toward foreign policy. The first is that America serves its values best by perfecting democracy at home, thereby acting as a beacon for the rest of mankind; the second, that America's values impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world... Both schools of thought were products of the American experience.[1]

For almost 120 years American foreign policy, as it was envisioned and practiced, was guided almost solely by national interests and pragmatism; what today we term "realism." The catalyst for change was the Spanish-American War and its agent William McKinley. It was almost solely due to his actions and decisions that the country ended up halfway around the world, attempting to make "wild and savage Mohammedhans" into imitations of Uncle Sam.

William McKinley had been elected President of the United States in November of 1897 and took the oath of office March 4, 1898 at the age of fifty-five. He was a short, solidly-built, handsome, somewhat taciturn, but nevertheless genial and affable man. Born in Ohio, McKinley enlisted in the Union Army at the outset of the Civil War when he was only eighteen. At the bloody battle of Antietam Creek in 1862, he became a minor hero when he drove a mule team pulling a wagon through shot and shell to carry hot meals and coffee to the embattled troops. He became a well-liked and popular politician, despite or perhaps because of a somewhat bland, easy-to-tolerate personality. Reserved and conservative, he was more pragmatic than ideological in his politics. McKinley maintained friendly relations with Democrats as well as fellow Republicans and would be the last member of the Civil War generation to hold the Presidency.

The historian Ernest May described him as "one of the most enigmatic figures ever to occupy the White House". One of his more recent biographers, Lewis Gould, noted, "McKinley has never come into clear historical focus. Gray and dull beside the pinwheel ebullience of Theodore Roosevelt, he remained a catchword for Republican conservatism or an inviting target for scholars who find his Victorian values either cloying or hypocritical."[2] McKinley left very little behind in the way of personal papers, correspondence, or musings to inform scholars and researchers as to his reasoning and motivations, and this may have been a conscious choice on his part. His untimely death by an assassin's bullet prevented any opportunity for memoirs. Gould noted that in recent times he has become "an inviting target", particularly for historians with revisionist tendencies, and has been accorded a wide range of descriptions from villainous to laudatory. Regardless of differing opinions, most historians readily agree that during his tenure it was he alone who made the most important White House decisions. Mediocre as he may have been in the roles of Chief Executive and Commander in Chief he excelled as a party politician and strategist, that is, in the art of gaining, keeping, and wielding power. Over 100 years later, Carl Rove, President George W. Bush's chief political strategist, has held up the often under-estimated McKinley as an inspiration and a model for the art of effective politics.

Whether warranted or not, by early 1898 the majority of Americans had come to genuinely view Spain's brutal oppression of nearby Cuba as an unapologetic assault on some of their most deeply-held and cherished values of self-government and humane behavior. Worse, it was on full view in their own backyard. Often depicted as having been manipulated by the "yellow press", the public had good reasons for their outrage. It was not at all unlike contemporary repugnance for the actions of Serbia in Bosnia or the government of Sudan in Darfur. The American public of 1898 was also not naïve about bloodshed. A large number of families retained vivid first-hand memories of the horrific devastation and deaths of the great Civil War, only one generation removed. Nevertheless, as was stated cogently by the writer Louis J. Halle, "In terms of cold reason the case for a war against Spain was poor. Spain had not violated any engagement with the United States nor dishonored any undertaking to which the United States was a party. It had done no significant injury to our country, nothing to constitute casus belli."[3]

In McKinley's inaugural address, March 4, 1897, he had stated, "We want no wars of conquest... we must avoid the temptation of territorial aggression. War should never be entered upon until every agency of peace has failed; peace is preferable to war in almost every contingency."[4] But following the puzzling destruction of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor, and with the United States lurching towards war with Spain, McKinley demonstrated that, while an able politician, no one was likely to accuse him of behaving like a "statesman". A century earlier, President John Adams had stubbornly stood his ground in the face of public demands that the "undeclared naval war" with France be made a declared one. Adams kept the fragile young democracy out of a war that would have been a disaster, even though knowing it would likely cost him a second-term in office. McKinley was made of less stern stuff. He likely faced political suicide if he vetoed a Congressional ultimatum to Spain, which, as phrased, was tantamount to a declaration of war. McKinley's prominent biographer, Margaret Leech, would note, "The greatest danger to peace lay in the tinderbox of the peace-loving and inflammable American people", and McKinley was not one to buck the popular will, no matter how reckless the course demanded by the public.[5] The march towards war with Spain was driven by inflamed public opinion, which pulled a reluctant Congress into the fray who in turn forced the capitulation of the President. In the words of one prominent historian, McKinley "led his country unwillingly toward a war that he did not want for a cause in which he did not believe."[6]

Unexpected by anyone. the first, most electrifying and unexpected engagement of the conflict that followed took place not in Cuba, origin and objective of the conflict, but in faraway Manila Bay, May 1, 1898. Commodore George Dewey and a small squadron of seven ships (four light "protected" cruisers, three gunboats, and one revenue cutter) engaged and defeated Spanish naval forces under Rear Admiral Montojo y Pasaron near the town of Cavite in Manila Bay. Although slightly more in number, the Spanish ships were smaller, older and greatly inferior in firepower to the American squadron. The battle lasted from 5:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. with a two-hour pause in between. At the end of the action, Montojo's fleet was destroyed; eleven Spanish vessels were sunk or scuttled and several others captured. 161 Spanish sailors were killed, 210 wounded, and the naval station at Cavite captured. The American squadron lost no ships and suffered only nine wounded and one dead (due to heat-stroke--the temperature was close to 100 degrees F).[7] This one-day engagement would end up being the only actual battle that took place between the Americans and the Spanish in the Philippines.

It was not until a few days after the battle that Dewey dispatched a ship to Hong Kong to report his victory to Washington by cable. The message stated simply, "I CONTROL BAY COMPLETELY, AND CAN TAKE CITY (MANILA) AT ANY TIME, BUT I HAVE NOT SUFFICIENT MEN TO HOLD." Dewey then requested 5,000 soldiers to reinforce his position. Dewey's original orders, dispatching him to Hong Kong on the eve of the hostilities, had been both specific and vague. He was to destroy the Spanish fleet, which he had done, blockade Manila Bay, which he had begun, and then, if deemed advantageous, "seize the islands" (although improbable since there were over 7,000 of them.) But five miles across the bay from Cavite, the Spanish still had 15,000 well-armed soldiers and formidable shore batteries defending Manila. Stationed within the large archipelago there were more than double that number. It appears Dewey had no intention of taking all the islands, rather he sought troops to consolidate his gains and hold tight until the inevitable peace talks started. But his message was not clear in this regard.

No one really knows for certain how McKinley interpreted Dewey's request, but rather than wiring back for clarification he immediately issued orders to the War Department to dispatch a large expeditionary force to Manila, for what exact purpose and what end left most unclear. The expedition was urgently assembled in San Francisco, a mixture of regulars and state volunteer units drawn from the militias and national guards of the Western states, under the command of Major General Wesley Merritt. The War Department seems to have interpreted McKinley's terse but non-informative orders and Dewey's request as meaning that their mission was to "seize the islands", and thereby increased the number to more than 20,000 troops, four times the size of Dewey's request. But there were underlying domestic political considerations as well. As the war became imminent, the War Department had requested a doubling of Regular troops, to 60,000 total (the peacetime Army was 28,000), which it believed would be more than enough to take Cuba (it turned out they were right.) But, bowing to pressure from state Governors, McKinley had forced the War Department to mobilize the entire National Guard and militias of all 48 states and territories, about 150,000 men, by enlisting them en masse in newly-formed state "volunteer" regiments. Ending up with almost 200,000 men, the Army had about ten times as many troops as it practically could have been deployed to Cuba, given available sea transport. For both McKinley and the War Department the expedition to the Philippines opened up a new and convenient avenue to respond to the persistent demands of state governors heavily lobbying for their contingents to get their share of the glory before the fighting ended.[8]

Shortly after Dewey's victory, on May 19, the leader of the Katipunan (a secret Filipino society formed to overthrow Spanish authority years earlier), Emilio Aguinaldo, returned from exile in Hong Kong, with Dewey's active help. Aguinaldo quickly revived a previously suspended military insurrection against Spain. Within a few months Aguinaldo and his followers raised a sizeable army, bottled up Spanish forces in Manila, and virtually occupied the most important island, Luzon, while extending their reach to the middle islands, the Visayans. On June 12, 1898 Aguinaldo declared the Philippines independent of Spain, declaring that it was also "under the protection of the mighty and humane" United States.[9] On June 23, the Aguinaldo and the Katipunan proclaimed establishment of the "Philippine Revolutionary Government" (PRG), its constitution patterned after that of the United States, and designated its men under arms as the "Army of Liberation."

The first of Merritt's forces arrived in the Philippines June 30, 1898, seven weeks after Dewey's request. Dewey and Merritt were given joint command. Merritt, a highly-decorated Civil War veteran, after seeing matters first-hand, realized his intended 20,000 man force, even when fully in place, was woefully inadequate for the task of seizing the islands. Although approached by Aguinaldo to join forces, prior to departure Merritt had been specifically enjoined by McKinley from allying with Aguinaldo. He therefore refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the PRG and avoided any overt cooperation. As a result, relations between the Americans and the Filipino rebels soon went from friendly to frigid.

Meanwhile back on the other side of the globe, one of the shortest, least painful, yet most pivotal wars in American history came to an abrupt end. The Spanish-American War only lasted three and one-half months, with the actual fighting covering only a few days. The real determinants of the outcome of the war took place early in two one-day battles at sea rather than on land.[10] The battles at Manila Bay and Santiago in Cuba effectively ended Spanish sea power, cutting the Empire off from its colonies. Ironically, however, the war came to be symbolized and remembered by Americans for the battles of San Juan Hill and El Caney near the city of Santiago, in particular the part played by Colonel Roosevelt and his "Roughriders". Following this defeat, the thoroughly demoralized Spanish sued for peace and an armistice was declared August 12, 1898, freezing all forces in place.

The Spanish-American War had not been a complete "cakewalk". 260 Americans were killed in action and 1,332 wounded in Cuba and Puerto Rico, with the lion's share occurring in the two-day battle for Santiago. But it had been a very short and relatively painless experience for the nation. The swift victory brought new respect for the U.S. (although not love) from Europe. It was broadly popular with the American public, eliciting few protests, and easily produced its share of new national "heroes" and mythology. It is little wonder that Secretary of State John Hay (to his later regret) termed it "A splendid little war". But, something else had happened as well. For the first time in its history, the U.S. had gone to war almost solely for reasons of a perceived "moral imperative" rather than self-defense or an essential national interest. It was universally viewed as a new national duty, the righting a wrong. Most politicians paid close attention to this seismic shift in public attitude, particularly President William McKinley, and drew their own lessons.

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The truce occurred at a particularly crucial time for events in the Philippines. Just prior to the signing of the armistice word of its imminence was cabled to both the Spanish and the Americans. The Spanish forces in the Philippines mostly consisted of Spanish officers and Filipino soldiers. One-by-one those trained soldiers had begun to desert to the PRG, taking their modern rifles with them. The Spanish were deathly afraid of becoming prisoners of the Filipinos and suffering retribution, yet with the loss of their fleet, they were prevented from fleeing. They appealed to the Americans for protection, luridly describing a potential festival of murder, rapine, and destruction by the Katipunan. To save ever-sensitive Spanish face, and gain a stronger bargaining chip for the upcoming peace negotiations, the Merritt and Dewey agreed to a "sham battle" between the two sides, but deliberately failed to inform Aguinaldo. It took place August 13, 1898, only hours before the armistice was signed on the other side of the world (August 12 in that time zone), and became known as the "First Battle of Manila". Because of slow cable traffic, actual confirmation of the armistice in Cuba did not reach the Philippines until August 16.[11]

This resulted in a peculiar, unresolved three-party relationship between the Americans, the Spanish and the Philippine Revolutionary Government. The Spanish and the Americans had stopped shooting at one another, and were now in an uneasy, less-than-cooperative truce, dependent upon the outcome of the pending peace negotiations. The small American force (only 10,946 officers and men had arrived by that date) controlled the city of Manila and its bay, holding half the Spanish Army in the Philippines, 15,000 soldiers, as its prisoners, while Manila was surrounded by the PRG, estimated at anywhere from 15,000 to 40,000[12].

Under terms of the armistice, the U.S., for the time being, continued to recognize the Empire of Spain as the legitimate ruler of all the Philippine Islands. Its Military Governor, General Diego de los Rios, earlier had moved its substantial number of officials and his still potent, remaining army of 15,000 men to Iloilo, on the Visayan island of Panay. From a territorial standpoint, the Philippine Revolutionary Government (PRG) held most of the land mass, but had not been made a part of the armistice agreement and remained unrecognized by the Americans. Soon McKinley would deny them taking part in the very peace negotiations which would determine their future.

The sheer deception involved in the First Battle of Manila and the denial of entry to the city by his forces enraged Aguinaldo. But he decided, for the time being, not to contest it and expected to be a part of the peace negotiations to follow. Having little direct prior experience with the U.S. or knowledge of its politics, he had been led to believe, mistakenly, that there was stronger and more effective opposition within the U.S. Congress to annexation of the islands than was the case. To complicate matters further, General Rios raised and armed local militias in Panay, to counter the PRG and prepare for the possibility of a resumption of hostilities with the Americans. In yet one of many cases of Spanish misjudgment, no sooner had the militias been organized than they rebelled against their masters.[13] Now emerged several smaller insurgent groups, some supporting the PRG, some seeking separate independence for the Visayas. This forced the Spanish to once again relocate further South, to Zamboanga on the island of Mindanao.

Merritt, in poor health, frustrated by McKinley's lack of clear guidelines for his mission and meddling from Washington by the General in Chief of the Army, Nelson Miles, requested to be relieved on August 25. Merritt had come to believe he had been sent on a fool's errand—his means totally inadequate to the objective. He was replaced August 29 by his newly-arrived second-in-command, Major General of U.S. Volunteers Elwell S. Otis.[14] Otis was named Military Governor of Manila and the Army expedition, re-designated as XIII Corps. A steady inflow of the American expedition's remaining troops continued, despite the armistice.

Ironically, despite the favorable outcome of the war, McKinley entered the final peace negotiations with a weak hand. The American public was united in demanding that "villainous" Spain be deprived of Cuba. But there was little consensus on what should follow that act of liberation. The organized rebel movement within Cuba, through its many New York expatriates, had been quite adept at propagandizing its cause before and during the war, but had shown marked incompetence in conducting a coherent military effort. A small but vocal minority in the U.S., primarily within the Republican party, had long pushed for the outright annexation of Cuba if Spain left or was forced out, and for granting it the status of a territory, which could lead to statehood. But there were strong counter-sentiments from Southern and Western States, business interests and organized labor for political, economic, and racial reasons (Cuba's large black population). For less tangible reasons, the "c" word, "colony", was anathema to a large number of foreign policy traditionalists, and cut across partisan lines. Annexing Cuba would "lower" the United States to the very activity the American public had long deplored and viewed with contempt, imperialism. Conversely, Europeans believed it to be the "right" of powerful and advanced nations to subjugate smaller and more backward ones to suit its national interests, and openly welcomed a U.S. slide in that direction, if for no other reason than to put an end to the never-ending self-righteous carping that for years had been coming their way from across the Atlantic.

Just before going to war with Spain, a last-minute compromise had been worked out within Congress to skirt the imperialism issue yet unite on an ultimatum insisting Spain abandon Cuba. It was called the Teller Amendment, after its Congressional author. The Teller Amendment declaimed any intent to annex Cuba, proclaiming the intentions of the U.S. government as limited to expelling Spain and bringing Cuban self-governance to the island. Congress asserted before domestic and world opinion that the U.S. was only righting a wrong, not making a naked grab for territory.

While the Teller Amendment was a popular idea with the public, and the assistance of the insurgents was deemed essential to prosecuting the war, the consensus within the McKinley administration soon became that it would be an absolute disaster and inimical to U.S. interests to hand control over to the disorganized, corrupt, and internally-divided Cuban rebels. Almost no one wished to back that particular horse. Therefore following the outbreak of hostilities, quiet planning began for an interim, U.S.-controlled military government that would have as its mission the transformation of the oldest colony in the Americas into a "representative democracy" along the American governmental model – in two years time and without acceding power to the Cuban rebels. McKinley would give the American public and Congress the war they so badly wanted, but he would at least control the peace and assure the replacement of Spain by a friendly, stable government compatible with U.S. interests and values.

The wordsmiths in the administration, the President being the most capable, began articulating a rationale for what was about to take place. Once hostilities ended, it would be announced that the American nation (1) had an "obligation" to help overthrow the tyrannical regime that had been suppressing the "aspirations" of the Cuban people for free and representative government (which according to the Declaration of Independence was the "right" of all peoples, everywhere), (2) as the liberating power, there existed a "responsibility" by the U.S." to assure" that any new regime would adequately meet those aspirations, and (3) if no such regime, in its judgment, was readily available or suitable for effecting an immediate transfer of power, the United States, as a "guardian nation" would form a "trustee" interim government that would act solely in the "best interests" of the Cuban people and be a "transitional step" to self-government. Purity of intent and action would be preserved.

A complicating factor in negotiating the peace was that McKinley had overruled his generals and the War Department for a number of purely political reasons both just before and during the war, and many of these decisions had come back to haunt him. In gearing up for the conflict, due to pressure from the Governors of the states, McKinley incorporated practically every state National Guardsman and militiaman into a huge, poorly trained and equipped, over-swollen "state volunteer" force rather than relying on a much smaller but more effective increase in the size of the Regular Army. It made an absolute muddle out of the mobilization and more soldiers died from malaria and cholera in hastily-prepared southern training camps than died in combat in Cuba. Then he rushed the invasion of Cuba while public support was still hot, ignoring the pleas of the Army's top medical officer to stay any action until the end of the rainy season. This would have mortal repercussions when typhoid, malaria and yellow fever almost decimated the small force that had fought the major battles in Cuba (only 17,000 troops out of nearly 200,000 mobilized). Nearly one-third contracted a tropical disease soon after the hostilities had been suspended with over 5,000 eventually dying. The newly-minted national hero Theodore Roosevelt, then enraged McKinley by initiating a "round-robin" letter calling for the immediate evacuation of the Army from Cuba to the U.S. mainland as the only feasible way of stopping the mosquito-born carnage, a chorus soon taken up by the state Governors and newspapers. This and other highly-visible scandals forced the administration to evacuate most of its troops from Cuba at the same time it had disbanded much of the recently-mobilized and greatly enlarged army - just as it was entering peace negotiations. If the negotiations failed and the truce ended, the U.S. would have been faced with both re-constituting its Army and re-invading Cuba. What should have been a triumph for the McKinley administration and the Republican Party was quickly turning into a potential flop.

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There is an apocryphal story that has been widely repeated about why McKinley decided to take the Philippines. Supposedly, McKinley met at the White House with a delegation from the Methodist Episcopal Church on November 21, 1898. A reporter present, James F. Rusling claimed a little more than three years later, long after McKinley's death, that just the meeting was about to end the President asked them to wait a minute longer for "just a word about the Philippine business." According to the Rusling account, the President had agonized for weeks over what to do but received "little help" form his advisors.[15]

> I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way—I don't know how it was, but it came. [Giving back the islands to Spain] would be cowardly and dishonorable... [giving them to France or Germany] would be bad business and discreditable.... There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died.

Supposedly, following a then-peaceful sleep McKinley awoke and gave immediate instructions for a map of the Philippines to be appended to his map of the United States in the oval office, "and that there [it] will stay while I am president." As historian and McKinley biographer Lewis Gould notes, few seemed to ever question or verify the authenticity of Rusling's account, despite the fact it almost repeated word-for-word Rusling's memoir of the Civil War and a conversation he claimed he had with Abraham Lincoln just after the Battle of Gettysburg.

Claiming religious conviction before a group of ministers is certainly consistent with McKinley's style of politics. But as an explanation of why he, and he alone, decided to make a conquest of the Philippine Islands, it rings hollow. Despite the weak hand in the peace negotiations, McKinley still had a few things going for him. Better than most politicians, he knew how to keep his ear to the ground and read public opinion. Despite the imbroglios and missteps in management of the war, the relatively low-cost victory had resulted in a national wave of self-congratulation and triumphalism. After all, it was voiced, the Spanish Army had far outnumbered the U.S. and had been better armed (although the U.S. Navy was clearly superior to the Spanish). In his intuitive reading of the "will of the people", a new, highly-confidant and bold public opinion was demanding that the U.S. take its "rightful place" among the world powers, be "justly rewarded" for its actions, and push even further the newly identified moral agenda of propagating American values and philosophy of government where "necessity and justice requires" by force of arms.

Following his death however, an undated note was found in McKinley's personal papers which was apparently written when the war in Cuba was still underway. In a far more *real politick* vein it stated, "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." With Cuba, which should have been the major prize, McKinley's options were seriously limited because of the Teller Amendment. It boiled down to only one real candidate for a dramatic war prize with which to award the American public, justify the spilling of the blood, and minimize the administration's shortcomings and failures; the acquisition of the Philippine Islands.

Unfortunately, McKinley only vaguely knew where the Philippine Islands were located on a map and knew virtually nothing about them. Far more was known about Japan and Korea, the supposed "hermit kingdoms" of Asia than about the Philippine Islands. In fact, despite the popularity of Dewey's victory, there was such a dearth of knowledge that the first widely-read topical article did not appear in an American publication until July, 1898, in an issue of Contemporary Review. It was a 14-page article entitled "Spain and the Philippine Islands", written by John Foreman, an English businessman who had lived for thirteen years in Manila in the 1880's. In 1891, Foreman had written and published what he described as a "comprehensive work descriptive of the colony". Today we would characterize it as more of a personal memoir and travel guide than a work of scholarship. Foreman briefly summarized the 300-plus-year history of the Spanish in the islands, strongly criticized its colonial rule, and unabashedly injected his opinions of both the "natives" and the prospects for a successor to Spain. He characterized the Philippine Islander as:

> likes to be free as a bird, but he is of a pliant nature, and easily managed with just treatment…he promises everything and performs little; his word is not worth a straw, and he does not see lying is a sin…but as a subject he can be easily molded into any fashion which a just, honest, and merciful government would wish.

Foreman spoke well of Emilio Aguinaldo, but prophesied that if the rebels were allowed to take over governance of the Philippines, "complete chaos" would result and that a native Republic "would not be strong enough to protect itself against foreign aggression…. Either Great Britain or America would be equally welcome to the islanders if they [the Filipinos] had not the vanity to think they could govern themselves." Foreman added, "Unless America decided to start on a brand new policy it would hardly suit her [to annex the islands]…. England having ample resources so near at hand, would probably find it a less irksome task." If he had not intended to, Foreman could hardly have said more with this last statement in order to raise an "Oh yeah? Sez you!" from the magazine's American readers. He then went on to paint a picture of the "astonishing" changes and prosperity that could result from the development of the archipelago's natural resources by an "enlightened power". Foreman ended the article on a note certain to resonate with an American audience, that Spain by her "religious despotism and greed" had ceased to merit the title of "sovereign". The Philippine Islanders, in their hearts, were yearning, not for independence, but simply for a new, enlightened colonial ruler who would show them the way forward; "The most loyal colony is that which yearns for nothing at the hands of the Mother Country."

President McKinley's international experience was limited to legislation dealing with tariffs--period. Whether Foreman's article, which was read by McKinley on August 1, changed his thinking or merely provided affirmation is not known for certain, but McKinley strongly recommended his staff and others to read it and obviously relied on many of its arguments. Having seemingly made up his mind early (although not tipping his hand), over the summer and into the early Fall he would wrestle with how much to take and how to structure it--a "protectorate", a territory, direct or indirect control--and how to portray it in a manner that the American public would embrace as clearly a wise, just, moral, and noble, decision. Aside from this, there is precious little evidence that McKinley overtaxed himself before or after having read Foreman's article (nor even bothering to go on to read the entire book) to discover much more about this land of eight million souls whom he was about to add to the map of the Republic. Foreman's article and re-published book, by default, became the definitive authority for the President and those around him. Foreman may have been one of history's most influential travel writers since Marco Polo.

McKinley was also receiving unsolicited input and advice from America's new-found brethren among the great powers of the world. It was not that the major nations were anxious to acquire the Philippines themselves, although Imperial Germany clearly flirted with the idea, but that none wanted any of their rivals to profit from the situation. Great Britain made known through diplomatic channels that they would welcome the U.S. annexation of the islands, but that if the U.S. did not want them, please give Britain a first right of refusal. Japan and Germany signaled very much the same thing. Each saw Spain finished as a world power, and were afraid the bankrupt nation might auction the colony to the highest bidder, which would then end up in a rival's hands. All were dead-set against allowing the Philippine insurgents the reins of government, since it might inspire rebellion in their own colonies, or, if a new state resulted and then failed, create an unstable situation, much like what was then unfolding in China, with the danger of conflict, competition, and possibly warfare between the brotherhood of the civilized world. For all the world's major powers, a takeover by the U.S. was the least worst outcome. The clear message McKinley received from the diplomatic community in Washington, DC was that U.S. acquisition of the Philippines would be unopposed. In turn it provided him with a convenient although suspect rationale, repeated over and over, if the U.S. did not act, the Philippine Islands would become "an apple of discord" among the other powers that in itself would bring on war and instability.

Another major influence on McKinley was Brig. General Francis V. Greene, a New York National Guard officer, who in civilian life was a successful businessman and involved in Republican politics. Greene had only spent six weeks in the Philippines, all of it in Manila, before returning to Washington, DC. He was a highly articulate and persuasive man and represented that he spoke for Otis, Dewey, and many of the other high-ranking military officers on the scene. He persuaded McKinley that the pro-U.S. opinions of the most conservative of the Filipino "illustrados", native aristocracy under the Spanish, were the sole and "true" leanings of the islands' inhabitants. Greene, an out-and-out supporter of annexation even before going to the Philippines, added two additional arguments. First, Aguinaldo and his followers were despotic, incompetent and unrepresentative of the "true" yearnings of the Filipino people--they would fail if allowed to govern (echoing Foreman). Second was the great potential wealth of the islands in agriculture and natural resources if they were "explored with American energy." What he failed or omitted to mention was the clearly-stated belief of General Otis that Aguinaldo and his followers would most certainly fight if denied independence.

It only became known much later that a thorough and serious attempt had been undertaken to gauge the abilities and depth of support for the Philippine Revolutionary Government, with Dewey's permission, by junior officers of the Navy, but ignored by Greene. Paymaster W.B. Wilcox and Naval Cadet L.R. Sargent, both fluent in Spanish, trekked by horse and foot through Northern Luzon for six weeks in October and early November of 1898. The two compiled an impressive and calmly objective report from direct contact and interviews with civic leaders, common people, and Filipino insurgents. They concluded that popular sentiment and support was widespread and that any attempt to take over the islands by the U.S. would most certainly be resisted. Further, that the Filipinos most certainly had the ability and will to wage war, although self-admittedly poorly equipped and woefully inexperienced.

> They all declare they will accept nothing short of independence.... There is much variety of feeling among the Philippines with regard to the debt of gratitude they owe to the United States.... On one point they united, however, that whatever our Government may have done for them it has not gained the right to annex them.... The military spirit pervades in the eastern district, where every town and barrio has organized companies of its children, which are drilled every day.... The officers have had no military education except that which they gained during the insurrection.[16]

Although the Wilcox-Sargent report was probably not in Greene's hands before his return to Washington, he surely was aware of the mission, and it would not have been too late to cable excerpts of the conclusions to Washington in time for it to have had an impact and perhaps averted the war that followed. But whether , even then, the report would have had any impact on McKinley or dampened the enthusiasm of the ardent pro-imperialists surrounding him is itself a good question. From Greene, the Americans in the Philippines, and the *illustrados*, McKinley heard exactly what he wanted to hear.

In any event, by far the most important indicator for McKinley came not from his dubious intelligence sources abroad, but from the opportunity afforded in the off-year Congressional elections to tour the nation's heartland, make speeches, both to the public and within Republican Party councils, and witness the reactions first-hand. Both Gould and Margaret Leach, perhaps McKinley's most astute biographers, vividly describe these speeches and their results. What seems evident is that McKinley, speaking in generalities, was not seeking to probe the issues nor engage in a dialogue. He focused instead on attempting to draw out and test where the electorate's emotions lay. In his speeches and his conversations with the press, McKinley seized on every opportunity to exaggerate and glorify the victory over Spain, even though to any rational observer it was Spain's mushy resolve and incompetence in waging war which was the primary factor in why it ended so quickly and favorably for the U.S. After orating the "great" victory of arms in speech, he would pose the statement:

> Shall we deny ourselves what the rest of the world so freely and so justly accords to us?... Should we proclaim to the world our inability to give kind government to oppressed peoples?

Inevitably, wild and tumultuous applause would follow. There would be the same enthusiastic response to,

> Territory sometimes comes to us when we go to war in a holy cause, and whenever it does the banner of liberty will float over it and bring, I trust, blessings and benefits to all the people.

The "civilizing" of the Philippines could be the "great enterprise" that would allow McKinley and the Republican Party to appropriate the moralistic urges unleashed by the liberation of Cuba and tap into a new vein in the American body politic, the latent "missionary zeal" that was always below the surface for molding another people in the republic's own image. And, if Foreman and Greene were right, the Filipinos were not only perfectly suited to such a grand mission but would enthusiastically embrace it. There was some grumblings both within and outside of government, but, at first, little active dissent. The multi-hued opposition movement that later became known as the "anti-imperialists" were not well-organized, in part, because McKinley had been keeping his true aims to himself. The Democratic Party was of divided opinion over the issue, as it would remain.

In reality, unlike its feelings toward Cuba, the American public, was, at best, ambivalent towards the Philippines. Crusading for democracy was an abstract concept, to which most would readily nod their heads in agreement, as long as they did not have to come face-to-face with the true cost and scant benefit of such an effort. Within a few months, the outbreak of fighting would provide incontrovertible evidence that Greene's calm assurances and Foreman's assessments of the Filipinos ready acquiescence had been quite in error, but even before the peace talks to forge a treaty to end the state of war between the U.S. and Spain was had begun, it was too late to change course.[17]

In the early Fall of 1898, as the Paris Peace talks got underway, fortune also proved to be on McKinley's side. The Spanish hand was even weaker than the American, and their government in greater disarray. Spain had failed to recognize that the old entente dedicated to maintaining the status quo in Europe, the "preserving of the balance of power", had largely evaporated over the prior decade. Spanish diplomats were universally rebuffed in lining up European support behind their negotiating position. The existing world powers had quickly recognized the *real politick* outcome, that the U.S. was destined to assume Spain's chair at the great power table. Instead each was busily competing for U.S. favor and hoping to create a new ally. The defeat also caused a political domestic backlash in Madrid, the government being accused of ignoring reality and futilely attempting to prop up the doddering old empire.

The Paris Peace Talks began September 29, 1898, and McKinley pointedly snubbed a delegation from the Katipunan, refusing it participation. Within days, Spain readily acceded to the principal demands of the Americans that it withdraw its remaining forces from Cuba and Puerto Rico and give up all claims to the islands. For the next two months, the sole point of disputation was the future status of the Philippines. Spain desperately clung to the illusion that they would be allowed to continue in possession of the islands and the Americans would withdraw. For the American delegation, and McKinley in contact by cable from Washington, the only issue was how much they would keep and what to do with the rest. Soon the American Peace Commissioners arrived at a consensus to either establish a naval base and annex only Manila and its environs, or, at most, the entire Island of Luzon.

It was about this time that the American delegation began to hear about the existence of a strange, wild, violent people that resided in the southern islands. They were informed by the Spanish delegates that these incorrigible people were "fanatical" Muslims, utterly debased and "placing no value on life". It was a little too reminiscent of the nation's brief and ugly experience with the famed Barbary Pirates one hundred years earlier, and the battles with the American Indian tribes. Three out of the five delegates went out of their way to strongly express the opinion to the President that any annexation should specifically exclude all territories of the "wild Moros" from any final deal. But the proud Spanish themselves unwittingly undermined this position, at least with President McKinley. The Spanish took at face value the American protestations of reluctance for assuming responsibility for the islands. They thought that they could prove to the Americans that, unlike in Cuba, they had been good and successful stewards in the Philippines. They produced maps of their Philippine colony that prominently included Mindanao and Sulu, insisting that they had long been an integral part of the Philippines and that the Moros, though sometimes troublesome, had long been defeated, pacified and “tamed”. They also took pains to characterize Aguinaldo and the PRG as inconsequential, weak, and unrepresentative of the true sentiments of the Philippine people. Their protestations and bragging had the opposite effect from that intended. To the contrary, the idea of a fully-pacified, easy to manage country only served to further whet the appetite of the American President, though not all of his peace treaty delegates, for full possession.

On October 26, after a pre-election swing through the Midwest and Great Plains states that featured even stronger applause for his vague and oblique references to “retaining” the Philippine Islands, McKinley unexpectedly cabled new orders to the Paris delegates, “THE CESSION MUST BE OF THE WHOLE ARCHIPELAGO OR NONE. THE LATTER IS WHOLLY INADMISSABLE, AND THE FORMER MUST THEREFORE BE REQUIRED.” The justifications delivered by the American delegates to the Spanish for giving up all the islands, although stated in many different ways, simply boiled down to only one they understood--“right of conquest”. Bowing to threats to resume the war--they were not much better prepared for a restart of fighting than the Americans--the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War was signed on December 10, 1898, subject to ratification by the legislatures of both countries. Its terms included the “cession” of the entire Philippine Islands to the United States, concurrent with the payment of $20 million by the U.S. to Spain, vaguely characterized as a sort of “unrelated” indemnity (equal to $450 Million in 2007 dollars). Thomas B. Reed, the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, who was adamantly against the annexation, wryly noted, “We have bought ten million Malays at $2.00 a head unpicked, and nobody knows what it will cost to pick them.”[18]

Throughout the negotiations, Congress had played little role, nor seemed anxious to participate. McKinley, seeking little input from others, had made all of the decisions and guided the American negotiations. But belatedly, the United States Senate, which had to ratify the treaty, finally woke up to its import and implications. Ratification of the treaty unexpectedly morphed into an incendiary and divisive partisan issue (at this time the Senate was not popularly elected--most members owed their positions to their respective state legislatures, some of whom were not happy.) A brief stalemate ensued. McKinley, counting probable votes and sensing potential defeat, then decided on a very bold but uncharacteristically risky political maneuver. By an “executive letter of instruction” to the Secretary of War on December 21, 1898, [19], relayed to General Otis on December 27, McKinley proclaimed American sovereignty as fact throughout the Philippine Islands based on his interpretation of the situation on the ground, and the yet un-ratified Treaty of Paris. He proclaimed that Dewey’s naval victory and the sham first Battle of Manila had,

> practically effected the conquest of the Philippine Islands and the suspension of Spanish sovereignty therein.... With the signature of the treaty of peace...and as the result of the victories of American arms, the future control, disposition, and government of the Philippine Islands are ceded to the United States.

He went on further to translate this into executive action,

> In the fulfillment of the rights of sovereignty thus acquired, and the responsible obligations of government thus assumed, the actual occupation and administration of the entire group of the Philippine Islands becomes immediately necessary, and the military government...is to be extended with all possible dispatch to the whole of the ceded territory.

McKinley added a number of points giving guidelines to the “occupying authorities” on how their governance was to be conducted, and stressed that the military authorities must give equal weight and protection to the interests of the Filipino people as an integral part of the military mission. He ended with a statement that would be quoted and reprinted again and again and accepted by many of his fellow Americans as evidence of the best of intentions of the President and the people of United States,

> Finally it should be the earnest and paramount aim of the military administration to win the confidence, respect, and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines by assuring them in every possible way that full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of free peoples, and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule.
>
> In the fulfillment of this high mission, supporting the temperate administration of affairs for the greatest good of the governed, there must be sedulously maintained the strong arm of authority to repress disturbance, and to overcome all obstacles to the bestowal of the blessings of good and stable government upon the people of the Philippine Islands under the free flag of the United States.

In this brief, two-page document the President had made a nervy assertion and a historic new claim of executive authority. First, that the sinking of a small naval squadron and possession of one city constituted the complete conquest of a territory larger than the British Isles (United Kingdom and Ireland together.) Further, by defining the nation's new jurisdiction as extending to the entire archipelago, he implicitly recognized the shaky claims of the Spanish to prior ownership of Sulu and Mindanao, nearly one-third of the total territory. Second, McKinley had exercised a new executive prerogative which appeared on its face to be in direct opposition to the U.S. Constitution and a clear challenge to the doctrine of separation of powers--that a treaty could become legally operative solely by Presidential fiat prior to obtaining Senate ratification. His follow up "executive instruction" had articulated, although with considerable ambiguity, the mission for and guiding principles of the U.S. military force based on that assertion: to do whatever was needed to take full control of all the Philippine Islands, including use of force, while convincing the inhabitants our motives were selfless. McKinley envisioned and later described it as an olive branch carried in one hand and a sword in the other and that the nobility of such conduct and the purity of its intent would ultimately win the day. A number of historians have cited his guidelines to the military contained in his December 21 statement as an important statement of "policy", but it was really not much more than an expression of American values and a heart-felt wish for a happy ending.

McKinley's bold end run around the Senate succeeded. He had placed them in an impossible position, no longer able to approve or disapprove the treaty based on its own merits. According to analysis by the historian Richard E. Welch, Jr., "The Senate was faced not with a decision to acquire the islands or even just a part of them but with an up or down decision of whether or not to repeal their annexation. To reject the treaty would be an act not of abstention but of renunciation; to confirm was but to accept the status quo."[20] And, rejection carried the stigma of rebuking a popular President, the peace commissioners, all prominent men, and giving the appearance of not supporting the troops (who would, by the time of the Senate vote, be under fire). To reject ratification risked a backlash from the American people, even though, in hindsight, there is ample evidence that public enthusiasm for possession of the Philippines was a mile wide and an inch deep. Although a bitter struggle would continue to rage over ratification for almost three months, in the end the Senate would cave. What McKinley did not know or seem to have even conceived of as a remote possibility was that, by this action he had effectively rejected the claims to legitimacy of the PRG (Philippine Revolutionary Government), and placed the nation on a certain road to a new war.

* * * *

February 6, 1899 one war ended for the U.S. just as another was begun, both decided unilaterally by the President of the United States, not the Congress. Although there are a number of different versions, it is generally agreed that the first shots were fired just after dark on February 4, 1899. Two troopers of the 1st Nebraska Volunteer Regiment, Privates Walter Grayson and Orville Miller, were on sentry duty. They encountered four armed Filipinos in the vicinity of their post. Words, threats, and eventually bullets were exchanged. Before the night was over fighting had broken out in Manila and much blood was shed. It is almost irrelevant why and even how it happened. It was certainly not ordered or initiated by Otis or Aguinaldo, although neither had worked actively to avoid it. The outbreak of hostilities assured the ratification of the treaty with Spain forty hours later, although even then ratification, requiring a two-thirds majority, passed by only one vote, 57 to 37. The nays only occurred when the measure was assured of passage.[21]

Until very recently, Americans referred to it as "The Philippine Insurrection", based upon the premise that there was no question as to the legitimacy of the U.S. assertion of sovereign power over the islands, making those in opposition in an illegal insurgency. History books still insistently group it with the Spanish-American War (as are the Moro Campaigns) and designate it a "small war." But, in recent years it has come to be re-designated more aptly dignified as "The Philippine-American War."

It still ranks among historians, academics and students of history as one of the nation's more controversial and disputed conflicts. Officially the war lasted from February 4, 1899 until July 4, 1902, but substantial fighting, unrest and further casualties occurred for four to six years longer depending on by whom and how the score is kept. During its official duration of almost 3 ½ years, ten times the length of the Spanish-American War and almost equal to the length of American involvement in World War II, 4,234 American soldiers died in the field and 2,818 were wounded at a time when the U.S. population was one-fifth what it is today.[22] This did not include a substantial number either dying later or permanently invalided because of the lingering effects of tropical diseases and an abnormally high number of suicides and "self-inflicted" wounds. Given a total number of 126,468 troops "cycled through" the Philippines during the official duration of the conflict[23] (there were a total of 71,528 at its peak in late 1900), it gives it the dubious distinction of having one of the higher "death rates" for this country, that is troops committed to troops dying, half-again higher than the decade-long Vietnam War.[24]. Even though fighting occurred in less than half of the Philippine provinces, it is estimated that some 34,000 Filipino soldiers lost their lives and as many as 200,000 civilians may have died directly or indirectly as a result of the war, most due to a major cholera epidemic that broke out near its end.[25] Paradoxically, its estimated cost to the U.S. national treasury, $600 Million, seems like a bargain by today's budgets for even lesser foreign interventions.[26] Unlike most of America's other "forgotten" wars and conflicts, it has suffered the additional indignities of being among the most disrespected, misunderstood, and distorted.

In the parlance of business, the U.S. had "acquired the assets" of an enterprise from a failing conglomerate, the Empire of Spain, without making an examination of the books. Inheriting an active rebellion would not be the only consequence of McKinley's bold approach to the nation's first significant foreign policy decision following its debut as a world power. The second fall-out would become the assumption of a major "undisclosed future liability", the as yet insoluble 330 year-old "Moro Problem", by accepting as valid the questionable Spanish claims to sovereignty over the "Land of the Moros". It too would become a part of the legacy left by McKinley's ghost.

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1 Dr. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 18.

2 Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), 112.

Lewis L Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 2.

3 Louis Joseph Halle, *The United States Acquires the Philippines: Consensus vs. Reality*, (Hanlan, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 5

4 Leech, Margaret, *In the Days of McKinley*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 119.

5 Ibid., 148.

6 May, *Imperial Democracy; the Emergence of America as a Great Power*, 159.

7 Michael J. Crawford, Mark L. Hayes, & Michael D. Sessions, "The Spanish-American War – Historical Overview and Select Bibliography", Naval Historical Center, www.history.navy.mil.

8 In 1898, there was no Office of the Secretary of Defense, uniting the military services under one cabinet officer. The Secretaries of the War Department (Army) and the Navy Department (Navy and Marine Corps) reported directly to the President.

9 How Aguinaldo came to believe that the Americans supported the rebellion against Spain and recognized the legitimacy of the Revolutionary Government, is one of many contentious and unresolved controversies surrounding this war.

10 Crawford, Hayes, & Sessions, 1-15

11 Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire; the United States Army in the Spanish-American War*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 243. The basic agreement, brokered by Admiral Dewey, was that there would be a lot of firing, the semblance of a battle, to preserve Spanish honor, and then a surrender. However, Merritt's command did a poor job of communicating this down the line, and as a result some actual fighting took place between American and Spanish soldiers. But, it had no effect on the pre-ordained outcome.

12 Brian M. Linn, *The Philippine War, 1898 – 1902*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2000), 42.

13 Ibid., 37.

14 Ibid., 27.

15 Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley*, 107-108.

16 Senate Doc. 196, 56th Cong., 1st Sess. 1900, "The Report of W.B. Wilcox and L.R. Sargent." This makes fascinating reading and certainly supports the notion that McKinley and his top officers simply filtered out any intelligence that contradicted their preconceived biases.

17 Much has been made by historians of the influence on the American public's appetite for acquisition of the Philippines by Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "*The White Man's Burden*". But it was not even published until after the cession of the islands and all of the principal decisions had been made. It simply affirmed what the choir had already sung.

18 Barbara Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World before the War: 1890-1914*, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1962), 183.

19 US Army, Adjutant-General's Office, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain… Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands…1899 – 1902*, 858-9.

20 Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902*, (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1979), 19.

21 This "coincidence", particularly since the Senate had previously scheduled the vote for that day, led many then and later to conclude the fighting had been engineered by McKinley in order to assure ratification. However, no evidence of this has ever been found and most respected historians have concluded there was no relationship. The Spanish Cortes was deadlocked, and eventually had to be overruled by the Queen Regent, but this was largely irrelevant as Senate ratification effectively ended the war.

22 William T. Sexton, *Soldiers in the Sun: An Adventure in Imperialism*, (Harrisburg PA: The Military Service Pub. Co., 1939)19,20.

23 Ibid., 19.

24 The military historian John M. Gates estimates it as 32 deaths per 1,000 combatants. "The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare", jgates@acs.wooster.edu.

25 Ibid., Chapter 3, p. 1. It should be noted that total Filipino casualties was at the time and still is a highly-debated, argued, and politicized number. An excellent discussion and analysis of this is contained in John S. Gates, "War-Related Deaths in the Philippines", *Pacific Historical Review* , v. 53, No. 3 (August, 1984), 367-378.

26 Roughly equal to $25 Billion as a percentage of today's Gross Domestic Product. In contrast, as of September, 2005, the markedly similar Iraq War was estimated to be costing $1.5 Billion per week, or roughly 15 times more on a comparable, inflation-adjusted basis.In the early 20th century, due to huge tariff revenues the government regularly ran large annual surpluses, not deficits, and had little problem absorbing the amount.