



The Blessings of Civilization: The Roots of American Imperialism

An Online Professional Development Seminar

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from the National Humanities Center



The Blessings of Civilization: The Roots of American Imperialism



GOALS

- To deepen understanding of American nation-building and empire-building in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- To provide fresh primary resources and instructional approaches for use with students



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FROM THE FORUM Challenges, Issues, Questions

- What were some of the underlying causes of overseas U. S. colonialism during and after 1898?
- What were Americans' main arguments for and against the occupation of overseas territories?
- How were these arguments shaped by U.S. racial politics?
- On what grounds did Filipino leaders oppose U.S. conquest of the Philippines?
- How did American imperialism affect smaller, weaker countries?
- To what extent, if at all, was the American imperialism of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries an extension of Manifest Destiny?



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FROM THE FORUM Challenges, Issues, Questions

- What role did religion play in America's colonizing efforts?
- How well did the phrase "white man's burden" resonate with the American public? How widespread was its use?
- How did average Americans feel about our involvements abroad, especially given the nation's long history of avoiding foreign entanglements?
- How did the colonized view America's colonizing efforts?
- Did American imperialism differ from that practiced by other imperial powers? Were we more enlightened or philanthropic?
- What role did Social Darwinism play in our foreign policies?
- How, if at all, did our imperialistic policies benefit us? How, if at all, did they benefit our colonial subjects?



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Research Interests
Modern U. S. transnational, imperial, and global
histories

*The Blood of Government:
Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines*
2006

Awarded the OAH's James A. Rawley Prize and the
Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations'
Stuart L. Bernath Book Prize, and was a finalist for the
Philippines' National Book Award in the Social Science
category.

Named Top Young Historian by History News
Network.



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Joseph Fry, Imperialism American Style: 1890-1916

- What are some of the main ways historians have explained U. S. colonialism during and after 1898?
- How have they differed over the role of economic and cultural forces?
- How have they differed over whether the events of 1898 were unique or exceptional within US history?



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Aguinaldo's Case

You have been greatly deceived in the personality of my countrymen. You went to the Philippines under the impression that their inhabitants were ignorant savages... The Filipinos have been described in serious American journals as akin to the hordes of the Khalifa; and the idea has prevailed that it required only some unknown American Kitchener to march triumphantly from north to south to make the military occupation complete. We have been represented by your popular press as if we were Africans or Mohawk Indians. We smile, and deplore the want of ethnographical knowledge on the part of our literary friends.

Here you had a people who placed themselves at your feet, who welcomed you as their savior, who wished you to govern them and protect them. In combination with the genius of our countrymen and their local knowledge, methods and priestcraft, into an enlightened republic, with America as its guide--a happy and contented people--and that in the short space of a few months, without the sacrifice of a single American life.

Discussion Questions

- What connection does the author draw between U. S. justifications for the invasion and racial imagery about Filipinos? In what ways can the document itself be seen as an effort to counter these images before the American people?
- Does the document completely reject the idea of U. S. influence or even U. S. power over the Philippines? Why do you think the author includes this passage?



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“The White Man’s Burden,” *New York Age*, T. Thomas Fortune, editor (April 1899)

“Nobody has asked the white races to rob and enslave the black and yellow races of the earth. The burden, if such it be, was assumed voluntarily and without the consent and desire of the victims, who preferred and still prefer their land and liberty and freedom from the tyranny of white men. They do not thank them for the assumption of the alleged burden and the alleged sacrifices. From Warren Hastings and Lord Clive in India to Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, the despoiled native has hated his despoiler and groaned under the load of foreign rule and taxation forced upon him.”

Discussion Questions

- Why is the “white man’s burden” an invalid term for Fortune?
- What is the true “burden” of colonialism, and who carries it?
- What examples does he use and why?



“The Black Man’s Burden,” by H.T. Johnson, Editor *The Christian Recorder*



Pile on the Black Man’s burden,
’Tis nearest at your door;
Why heed long-bleeding Cuba
Or dark Hawaii’s shore?
Halt ye your fearless armies
Which menace feeble folks,
Who fight with clubs and arrows
And brook your rifles’ smoke.

Pile on the Black Man’s burden,
His wail with laughter drown,
You’ve sealed the Red Man’s problem
And now deal with the Brown.
In vain you seek to end it
With bullet, blood or death—
Better by far defend it
With honor’s holy breath.

Pile on the Black Man’s burden,
His back is broad though sore;
What though the weight oppress him,
He’s borne the like before.
Your Jim-Crow laws and customs,
And fiendish midnight deed,
Though winked at by the nation,
Will some day trouble breed.

Pile on the Black Man’s burden,
At length ’twill Heaven pierce;
Then on you or your children
Will reign God’s judgments fierce.
Your battleships and armies
May weaker ones appall.
But God Almighty’s justice
They’ll not disturb at all.

Discussion Questions

- Why does the author decide to use Kipling’s format?
- What connection does the author draw between domestic and imperial racial politics?



“The White Man’s Duty,” *The American Missionary*



The white man has a burden to bear. There are and always have been in the ethnological classifications dominant and subordinate races... Not the most fertile nor the most comfortably situated nations have led in the civilization of the world... It was not the appointment of providence or nature but the character of the people themselves which has kept them a prey of other peoples and races.”

If crimes similar to those that are committed in the South were committed by the Indians of the prairie, it would be deemed sufficient for the wiping out of the whole tribe. But how much greater is the disgrace, the shame, the crime, when these outrages are committed by the white race, who should be the dominant factor in civilization?

Discussion Questions

- How does the author revise the notion of the “white man’s burden”?
- What “duties” come with dominance?
- If this is an argument against lynching, is it also anti-racist?



“The March of the Flag,” by Albert J. Beveridge



“It is a mighty people that He [God] has planted on this soil; a people sprung from the most masterful blood of history; a people perpetually revitalized by the virile, man-producing womanfolk of all the earth; a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven-directed purposes—the propagandists and not the misers of liberty.”

“The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent.”

“It means opportunity for all the glorious young manhood of the republic—the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen. It means that the resources and the commerce of these immensely rich dominions will be increased as much as American energy is greater than Spanish sloth; for Americans henceforth will monopolize those resources and that commerce...”

Discussion Questions

- What types of justifications does Beveridge provide for U. S. colonization of the Philippines?
- How does he counter the argument about “self-government”? What use does he make of comparisons?



“Will it Pay?” by William Jennings Bryan, *New York Journal*

While the American people are endeavoring to extend an unsolicited sovereignty over remote peoples, foreign financiers will be able to complete the conquest of our own country. Labor’s protest against the black-list and government by injunction, and its plea for arbitration, shorter hours and a fair share of the wealth which it creates, will be drowned in noisy disputes over new boundary lines and in the clash of conflicting authority.

It is not strange that the laboring men should look with undisguised alarm upon the prospect of oriental competition upon the farms and in the factories of the United States. Our people have legislated against Chinese emigration, but to exclude a few Chinese and admit many Filipinos is like straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel.

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the costs Bryan thinks colonizing the Philippines will involve for the United States?
- What does he prophesy the impact of colonialism will be on American politics and society?



Address to the US Senate by Benjamin R. Tillman

“... I wish to call attention to a fact which may have escaped the attention of Senators thus far, that with five exceptions every man in this Chamber who has had to do with the colored race in this country voted against the ratification of the treaty. It was not because we are Democrats, but because we understand and realize what it is to have two races side by side that can not mix or mingle without deterioration and injury to both and the ultimate destruction of the civilization of the higher.”

“Why not tell these people [the Filipinos] now before further blood is shed?... We bought you from Spain and have title. We only want enough of your territory to give us a harbor of refuge, a naval station, the right to protect you from outsider interlopers, and to get such commercial advantages as you of right ought to give us. Pass a resolution of that kind, and then if those people will not listen to reason and continue to fire on the flag, I for one will say the blood will be on their own heads. Let slip the dogs of war and teach them to respect the Stars and Stripes.”

Discussion Questions

- In what ways is Tillman's anti-colonialist argument also racist?
- What alternative means of controlling the Philippines, short of invasion, does Tillman propose?



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“A TRIFLE EMBARRASSED.”

“Uncle Sam – ‘Gosh! I wish they wouldn’t come quite so many in a bunch; but, if I’ve got to take them, I guess I can do as well by them as I’ve done by the others!’”



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"THE FLAG THAT DEWEY HOISTS ON MANILA SHALL NEVER COME DOWN."

Judge, Arckell Publishing Company, New York, August 20, 1898 [artist: Victor Gillam]



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"IF THEY'LL ONLY BE GOOD."
"Uncle Sam.—You have seen what my sons can do in battle;—now see what my daughters can do in peace."

Puck, Keppler & Schwarzmann, New York, January 31, 1900 [artist: Samuel Ehrhart]



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"THE IDOL OF THE AUNTIES." 8

Puck, Keppler & Schwarzmann, New York, May 10, 1899 [artist: Louis Dalrymple]



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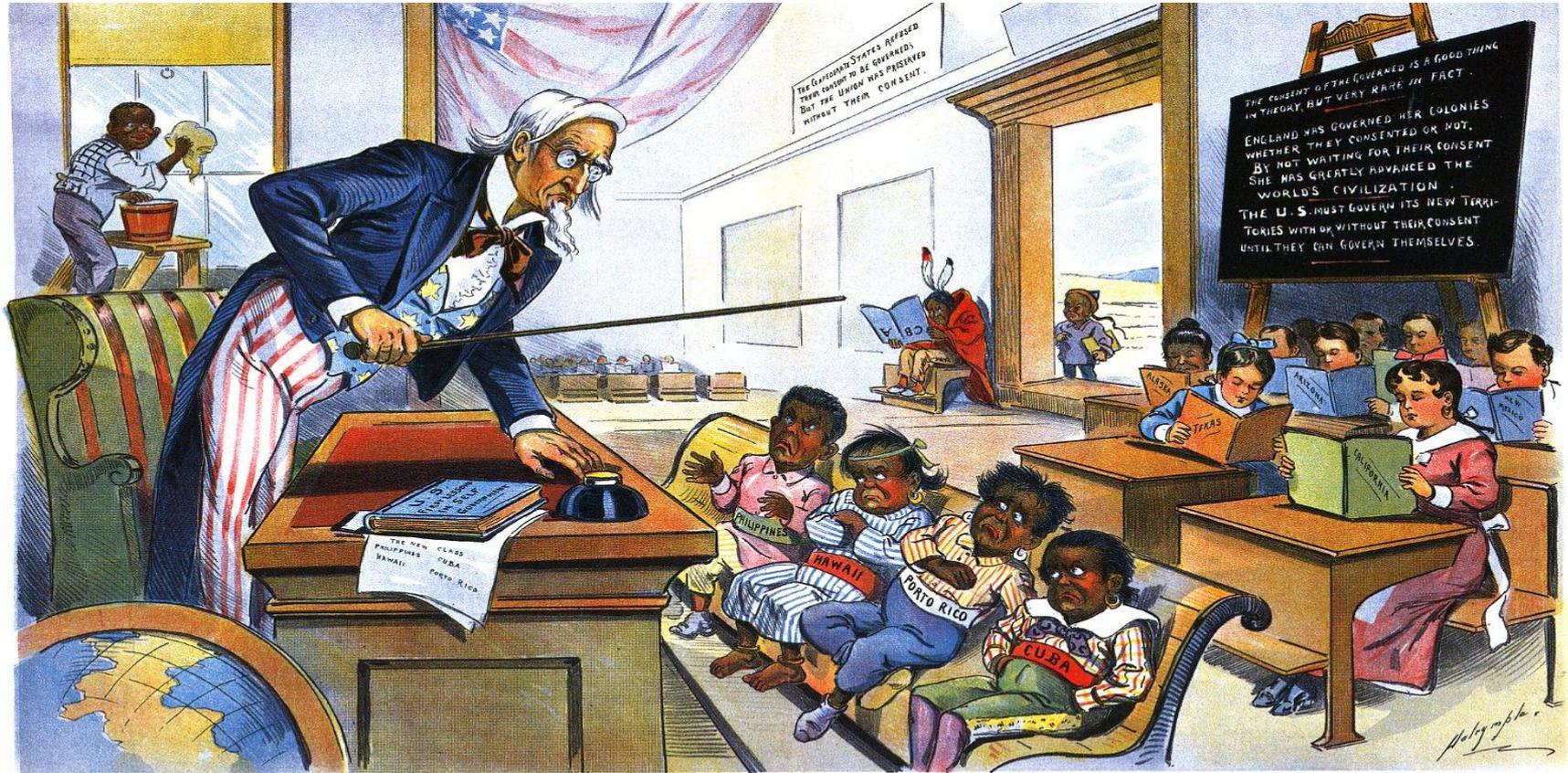


"FOR ONE NEGRO AND AGAINST THE OTHER. DR. JEKYLL 'BRYAN' AND MR. HYDE 'BRYAN.' This political Dr. Jekyll professes to love and would give enfranchisement and liberty to the Filipino negro, while as Mr. Hyde he would destroy and disenfranchise our southern negro."

Judge, Judge Company, New York, November 3, 1900 [artist: Victor Gillam]



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“SCHOOL BEGINS.”

“Uncle Sam (to his new class in Civilization)—Now, children, you’ve got to learn these lessons whether you want to or not! But just take a look at the class ahead of you, and remember that, in a little while, you will feel glad to be here as they are!”

Puck, Keppler & Schwarzmann, New York, January 25, 1899 [artist: Louis Dalrymple]



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Thank You