

Chapter 2

The Philippines

It has been said that President McKinley did not know whether they were islands or canned goods. While this comment was probably not directed at the President's knowledge of geography, it illustrated just how little people knew about the Philippines when it suddenly grabbed America's attention.

Indeed, the Philippines was composed of islands located deep in the Pacific and inhabited by some nine million people. Like Cuba, the Philippines had been under Spanish control for some 300 years. In addition to bringing their language and religion to the Philippines, Spain established its capital city, Manila, at the site of a pre-European 12 century port. Most of the islanders, however, lived in rural isolation scratching a living from the soil of the many small and remote islands.

Even though the Philippines were not well known, Americans had been trading in the Far East even before the US had gained its independence. Since the 1840's, U.S. clipper ships in China had been guaranteed free access (an "Open Door") to this ancient kingdom. During the last few years of the 19th century, European interest in China had increased. Countries like England, France, Germany, Russia and Japan) created "spheres of influence" for themselves. In one case a country would get exclusive rights to use a port, another would get the right to build a railroad. Americans feared that these countries would deny the United States its traditional access to the China trade so the U.S. asked each of these countries to endorse the principle of the "Open Door," even while it contemplated keeping the Philippines islands for itself. In this chapter you will learn how the U.S. acquired the Philippines, and you will be asked whether we should have kept them

How the U.S. Acquired the Philippines⁶



On April 25, 1898, the U.S. declared war on Spain for the purpose of freeing Cuba. America's first hostile act, however, was to launch an attack on the Spanish fleet in the Philippines, about 13,000 miles from Cuba. Why, one might ask, would the US begin a war to free Cuba by attacking a country 13,000 miles away? The answer is that Assistant Secretary of the Navy and future President, Theodore Roosevelt, had telegraphed orders to Admiral George Dewey, who was stationed in Hong Kong on the China coast, instructing him to destroy the Spanish fleet in the Philippines as soon as war with Spain was declared. According to these orders, Dewey left Hong Kong and arrived in Manila on April 20, 1898. There he maneuvered with great skill through a bay seeded

⁶ ©2003 General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

with mines, and prepared to do battle with the ten-ship Spanish fleet. Badly outgunned, the Spanish commander ordered his vessels away from Manila shore batteries to prevent stray shells from hitting the city, and he stationed them in shallow water, so his sailors could wade ashore after their ships were sunk.

You may fire when ready, Gridley," was the famous command Dewey had given to start the battle. The Americans then proceeded at a leisurely pace, taking time off to eat breakfast. By late afternoon, 381 Spanish sailors had been killed. Dewey destroyed or disabled the entire Spanish fleet and their Admiral surrendered. Only one American lost his life in this one-sided battle, and he died from heat exhaustion in the 170-degree temperature of his ship's boiler room.

The Conquest of the Philippines

Admiral Dewey had no army at his command in Manila. He therefore could not follow up on his decisive naval victory with an attack on Spanish forces in the capital. However, when he left Hong Kong for Manila he had brought Emilio Aguinaldo, a Philippine patriot, with him. Aguinaldo had tried to overthrow the Spanish government but he was caught and exiled. Dewey brought Aguinaldo back in the hopes that he could help the U.S. beat Spain. Aguinaldo organized an effective armed force that started to encircle Spanish forces in Manila. But when 11,000 American soldiers arrived six weeks later, they replaced the Filipino army commanded by Aguinaldo. Subsequently, the Americans and not the Filipinos accepted the surrender of the Spanish and proceeded to occupy Manila. The U.S. did not allow Filipino troops in the capital city of their own country thereby creating a serious problem between the Filipinos who were fighting for their own freedom and the Americans who supposedly had come to free them.

By this time, the U.S. had also succeeded in battles on land and sea to take control of Cuba and Puerto Rico. (See Chapter 3.), and the U.S. needed to decide what to do with them. It was generally agreed that the U.S. would honor its promise under the Teller Resolution and free Cuba. America had already decided to keep Puerto Rico, and after much hesitation, and even prayer, President McKinley decided the U.S. should keep the Philippines as well. He therefore bought the islands, along with Guam, from Spain for \$20,000,000. The treaty with Spain was completed in December 1899 and then sent to the U.S. Senate to be ratified. A debate in the US Senate soon followed on the issue of whether the US should keep the Philippines: Among the most important questions the Senate was asked to consider were:

Did/does the U.S. have a right and/or a duty to rule other countries, or does owning colonies violate the principles upon which the U.S. was founded?

Would the U.S. benefit economically from keeping the Philippines, or would these islands offer little chance for profit and cost a great deal to defend?

Would possessing the Philippines (some 8,000 miles from California) contribute to the defense of the United States, or just create a burden for taxpayers and increase the chance of the US going to war.

Senator Teller Sees a Moral Obligation:

I do not want to give [the Philippines] up because to give them up would be to leave those people in a worse condition than they were when we took away the power of Spain. We may not leave them a prey to their own vices. We leave them to be a prey of all Europe. We must stand up for them. We have put up our flag, There it is going to stay.

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*It is going to stay there, Mr. President, for their protection and our glory. There can be no greater glory than taking eight or ten million men, and lifting them up and putting them on the plane of citizenship in a great nation. That does not mean that you make states of them. It does mean that you give them the protection of the flag. It means you shall stand between them and foreign powers; that you give them moral aid, and the moral encouragement, which will enable them to take care of themselves.*⁷

Senator McLaurin Does Not Want to Pursue a Career of Conquests

*It is not in obedience with God's will that we are allowing a career of conquest in the Philippines. Conquest has never been the handmaid of our civilization, or the Christian religion. The sword established the religion of Mohammed, but it will never spread the religion of Jesus Christ or Moses. I am in favor of the United States continuing as a peaceful country, not as a conquering empire. We shall not become entangled in the rivalries of European nations, but be content with the banishment of European tyranny from this hemisphere. I would not sell the principles upon which our Republic is founded for a mess of pottage in the Philippines. Why should we run after "strange gods?" Let this Government move along in the same orbit that changed a few scattered colonies, into a great nation. Let us continue to fan a feeble spark into a beacon of light among the nations of the earth.*⁸

Senator Lodge Sees Profits from Empire

I believe, we shall find arguments in favor of keeping the Philippines as valuable possessions, and the source of great profit.

First, as to the islands themselves. From them comes now the best hemp in the world, and there is no tropical product which cannot be raised there. Their forests are untouched and include numerous hard woods of great value. There are regions containing great and valuable deposits of copper. But the chief mineral of these islands is their undeveloped coal beds which are believed to exist everywhere. To a naval and commercial power the coal will be a source of great strength

*With the development of these islands and increase of commerce and business activity, the consumption of foreign imports (notably from the US.) would rapidly advance. We shall also find great profit in the work of developing the islands. They require railroads everywhere. Those railroads would be planned by American engineers, the rails and bridges would come from American mills, the locomotives and cars from American workshops. The same would hold true in regard to electric railways, electric lighting, telegraphs, telephones, and steamships for the local business. It will also be seen that our exports to China, Kong, and Japan in 1899 over 1889 was 246%, and it almost all came in the last years of the decade.*⁹

⁷Quoted from, Edmund Traverso., *The Spanish American War A Study in Policy Change*, Unpublished Amherst Project Unit, pp. 123 – 24

⁸ Quoted in op. cit. p., 126 – 27.

⁹ Quoted in Theodore P. Greene, ed. *American Imperialism in 1898.*, (Boston: D.C. Heath Heath Company, 1955), pp. 70 – 77

Senator Caffery Believes Costs Will Outstrip Profits

Do we want this territory as a means of power? It is a source of weakness. Do we want it as an avenue of trade? Sir, the idea is combined. Nine-tenths of our exports go to our neighbors in western Europe. And sir, it is obvious, that if we want markets for our surplus absurd. We are capturing the markets of civilized man. Five-sixth of the enormous exports of the United States go to Great Britain. The statistics show that not one-tenth of the exports of the United States go to Asia, Africa, and South America manufactures, our surplus cereals, all that we can not consume, we must send them to people who will consume them.

What do the dwellers near the equator consume? A half-civilized man wants little. Such people always export more than they import. Their wants are very few. It requires little to clothe them. They feed at home and the balance of trade is always in their favor.

Sir, those distant possessions would cost more in ten years for bases than they could yield profit to the United States in a century. They would be the graveyard of our youth. What an avenue they would open for the exploiter,

the promoter, and the soldiers of fortune! What an opening for piling up taxes to keep up bases, standing armies, and war vessels!¹⁰

Suggested Student Exercises:

1. Describe the events leading to the introduction of American troops in the Philippines.
2. Contrast the conflicting viewpoints over keeping the Philippines on at least two of the three issues raised in the chapter: ideals, profits, and/or defense.
3. Do you think the U.S. should keep the Philippines? Why or why not? Your answer should include the thinking of at least two of the Senators in the excerpts from their debates.

Epilogue

About the same time the Senate voted to keep the Philippines, Emilio Aguinaldo started a rebellion against US occupying forces in his country. Aguinaldo did not want simply to replace his Spanish rulers with American officials. Officially the fighting lasted for three years; unofficially, for six. The guerrillas conducted surprise attacks against the Americans and then disappeared into peaceful villages. Unable to capture their elusive enemy, US soldiers began herding men, women, and children into camps, similar to the reconcentrados in Cuba. Anyone outside these camps, ten years and older, was considered hostile and, if captured, could be tortured, killed or both. American officers competed among one another in the cruelties committed against Filipino civilians. Entire villages were burned to the ground, food was confiscated and destroyed, domestic animals were killed, and crops were uprooted. Though the official figure recognized by the U.S. government is far less, some have estimated that over 1/4 million Filipinos, including victims of starvation and disease, died in the fight for their independence. The U.S. used 70,000 American soldiers, mostly former Indian fighters, to put down the rebellion at the cost to the American

10. Quoted in Edmund Traverso, ed. op. cit. pp. 128–29.

taxpayer of \$175,000,000. The fighting ended only after Aguinaldo was captured under a flag of truce and he urged his countrymen to give up their resistance.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Even while U.S. troops were pursuing Filipino nationalists in remote islands, the US showed a much different side of its relations with the Filipinos. The U.S. restored public buildings, repaired roads and bridges, built railroads, and strung telegraph lines. The US provided the Philippines with a government using the American constitution as a model. Filipinos were allowed to elect a House of Representatives, but the US appointed governors who could veto all acts by the Filipino Congress, and they appointed Senators whose powers were equal to the House of Representatives. Over the ensuing years the U.S. granted more power to the Filipinos, culminating with a grant of independence on July 4th, 1946, a year after the U.S. drove the Japanese occupying forces out of the islands. Thus, the Philippines received their independence 47 years after the US concluded its war with Spain for the sole purpose

Filipino dead

of freeing Cuba.

Student Exercises:

1. Does the information in the Epilogue change your thinking about the US deciding to keep the Philippines? Why or why not?