

TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of
American Public Life
from 1870 to 1920

By

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Printed by THE ACADEMY PRESS
112 Fourth Avenue, New York City

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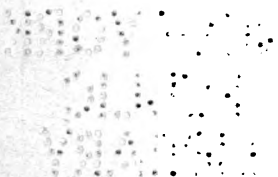
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Published January 1, 1922.



XXIV. CRIMINAL AGGRESSION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The annexation of Hawaii and the Spanish Treaty, which provided for the acquisition by the United States of Porto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, started this country definitely on the course of empire. From that point—the years 1898 and 1899—we were committed to an imperial policy.

“Imperial policy” is a phrase with a pleasant sound and a dismal echo—dismal for the rights of man and women. The moment we adopted an imperial policy we committed ourselves to certain lines of national conduct that are as far from the principles of the Declaration of Independence as the east is from the west. In our new possessions it was necessary:

First, to beat into submission any of the native population which displays a spirit of independence;

Second, to extend the imperial boundaries in order to have more opportunity for exploitation;

Third, to establish measures that will insure the effective exploitation of the native population.

Our first imperial duty—that of beating the native population into submission—was presented only in the Philippines. The Cubans were nominally self-governing; the inhabitants of Porto Rico had welcomed the Americans as saviors.

The Filipinos had followed the same course at first, but, when they found that they were not to be free, they turned about and fought as stubbornly for their independence of American rule as they had fought during the preceding century for their independence of Spanish rule. It was the strength of the American army, not the justice of the American cause, that reduced the Filipinos to submission.

Perhaps nowhere in American history is there a record so black as that which describes our dealings with the Filipinos. Before the seizure of the islands by Admiral Dewey, McKinley had taken a high moral stand on the subject of forcible annexation. In his

message to Congress (April 11, 1898) he had said: "I speak not of forcible annexation, for that cannot be thought of. That, by our code of morals, would be criminal aggression." So it would, but we practiced it toward the Filipinos with the same zest that the British have displayed in India or the Japanese in Korea.

When we decided to attack Spain, when Dewey was ordered to sail from Hongkong and to destroy the Spanish fleet, a rebellion was going on in the Philippine Islands. The inhabitants of those islands were trying to throw off the Spanish yoke. Knowing that at Singapore there was a man, the most capable among the Filipinos, who had led a former revolt, our officers in the East induced this man to go back to Manila and organize the insurgent forces. Aguinaldo arrived on the 17th day of May, 1898. He immediately organized the insurgent forces. He purchased arms in Hongkong. Admiral Dewey furnished him with arms taken from the Spanish forces, and he attacked the Spanish garrisons all over the province of Cavite and secured arms from his prisoners. He pursued this course during the summer of 1898, until he had captured the entire island of Luzon except two Spanish garrisons—very small ones—and before winter he captured those. Dewey, in his report, says his progress was wonderful. He took 9,000 prisoners. After having captured the entire island, he set up a government, which was a peaceful government, a government suitable to those people, a government which protected life and property throughout the entire area of that country. He also captured the Southern Islands, the Island of Panay, of Cebu, and Negros, and organized governments there.

He assembled an army of 30,000 men and surrounded Manila. His army was intrenched. He invested the city on the land side while our navy blockaded the port on the ocean side. We acted in absolute concert with each other, consulted together, and, when Manila was finally taken, our troops landed, asking the insurgents

to give up about a quarter of a mile of their trenches. They marched out and allowed our troops to occupy a portion of their works. They believed that they were to act in concert with us in the attack upon Manila. When the attack was ordered their troops marched into the city along with ours. They took the principal suburb of Manila. We took and occupied the walled city. When they came to the walled city, which contained less than one-fifth of the population of the city of Manila, they found our bayonets turned against them. They were told that they could not enter. They had lost thousands of lives in their contest with Spain; they were in possession of that entire country, and yet, although in the assault upon the city they had lost more men than we did, they were denied admittance to the city, and they yielded and occupied the suburbs for some time.

Finally, we requested that they retire from the suburbs and they retired. Aguinaldo asked that he might be permitted to retire slowly, as it was difficult to govern his people and convince them that it was right that they should surrender possession of territory which they had conquered and for which many of their comrades had laid down their lives. He also asked that, in case we made a treaty with Spain, the territory which he had conquered should be restored to him; and this we refused. So we did not conquer the islands from Spain, for Spain had been conquered and driven out by the government of Aguinaldo. We had simply helped to take the city of Manila. Therefore, we took no title by conquest from Spain, for, at the time of making the treaty with Spain, we had not conquered any territory from her.

We did not acquire title by purchase, because title by purchase required delivery of possession and, as Spain was not in possession, she could not and did not deliver the islands to us. By what right are we there? By no right in morals or law; by no right that can be defended before God or man. We are there as conquer-

ors; we are there as armed banditti that would enter your premises in daytime, and we have no more right to be there than the bandit has to enter and despoil your home.

If our title is by conquest, then it is as yet incomplete. If our title is by conquest, we did not acquire it from Spain, and it is nearly two years since the war with Spain has ceased, and yet the conquest is in progress.

In October Aguinaldo was again asked to give up more territory. He was again asked to retire his troops beyond not only the city of Manila, but the adjoining towns. Then he called the attention of General Otis to the fact that the towns which Otis desired him to surrender were not a part of Manila—you will find it on pages 20 and 21 of General Otis' report. General Otis said, "You are right; the territory which I now demand I cannot find as embraced in the city of Manila or its suburbs, but," he said, "that makes no difference; I insist on the possession of the territory anyway." So our lines were pushed out constantly, creating irritation and bad feeling.

Finally Dewey seized the ships of the Filipinos in the harbor. Was not that an act of war? Why talk longer about who commenced the war in the Philippines, when in October we seized the vessels of our allies—and they were vessels of war—dismissed the men who manned them, took down the Filipino flag, and removed it from the sea?

On the 24th of November, Otis again wrote to Aguinaldo, saying that he must retire beyond the village of Santa Mesa, and that if he did not he would attack him. On the 21st of December the President sent a proclamation to be published in the Philippines, telling the inhabitants that the United States has assumed sovereignty over the islands—a proclamation which was a clear declaration of war—a declaration that we would extend our military control, then existing in

the city of Manila, throughout the entire area of the group.

This proclamation was published in the Philippines on the 4th of January, 1899. We seized their ships in October; we drove them beyond the territorial limits of the city of Manila—the only country we had occupied or had any right to occupy under the protocol with Spain; we, on the 4th day of February, attacked their forces and fired the first and second shots, and killed three of their people. After that, on the 5th day of February, the day after hostilities were inaugurated, Aguinaldo asked to have hostilities cease, and said that he had no notion of making an attack on our people and had not done so. The reply was that fighting having once commenced, it should go on to the grim end.

Under these circumstances, we are precluded from taking any other position than that we betrayed and attacked an ally; that we conquered and reduced to subjection an unwilling people; that because we are mighty and because our army is strong enough to destroy the independence of an ally, we have deliberately taken possession of territory that was desired by our big business men for their enrichment.

By our "code of morals" our very presence in the Philippines, after the natives had established their own government, was an offense. By the same code, our greatest crime in the Philippines was the denial by the Washington administration, backed by the army and navy, of the right of self-government. The Filipinos not only desired self-government, but they actually established it before the American army began the conquest of the islands.

One of Lincoln's most famous remarks is as follows:

"Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and under the rule of a just God cannot long retain it."

I believe that is true. I believe the reflex action upon our own people of the conquest of other peoples and their government, against their will, has undermined

the free institutions of this country, and has already resulted in the destruction of the republic.

President McKinley urged the conquest of the Philippines because he said they were not fit for self-government. I believe that there are no people fit for any other form of government. Governments are instituted, not bestowed, and therefore derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Any nation of people is capable of maintaining as good a government as they are entitled to have. When people can maintain a better government they will evolve it. It is impossible to give them a better government than they can maintain for themselves. A form of government will be as good as the average of the individuals composing the community are willing to have. The American Indians maintained a government and, for them, a better one than we have been able to bestow upon them. The Esquimeaux in the arctic region maintain a government of their own suited to their condition and their circumstances, and it is a better government than anybody else can give them. Would their condition be improved by sending them foreign governors and a foreign council to enact laws and direct their course and method in life and to guide them in their civic and civil affairs? So it is with every other people the world around. There is nothing in the history of the colonies of the so-called Christian nations of the world to encourage the idea that we can give to this people a better government than they can maintain by themselves.

The old doctrine of the divine right of kings, of the hereditary right to rule, is a doctrine that we Americans disputed and controverted when we established our government, and when we announced the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence. So proud have we been of that discovery that each year we have celebrated the birth into the world of a new theory, a new doctrine with regard to governments; and four hundred

constitutions have been framed after ours. So powerful has been our example throughout the world that nation after nation, struggling to be free, has adopted our form of government.

No nation, no people, in all time and in all history ever impressed such a powerful influence upon the human race as this republic, and for this reason alone. Empires have been established; since history began a trail of blood has been drawn across the world, and a vast aggregation of people has been brought under the rule of an emperor or monarch, but no people in the history of the world has ever produced such a powerful effect for good upon the human race as this great republic, and simply because of the doctrine laid down by our forefathers in the Declaration of Independence.

Is it an old doctrine that all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed? Some have said that it was a nurse's rhyme sung around the cradle of the republic. The doctrine is new. It was announced little more than a century ago, a day in the birth and life of nations, and yet this great republic deliberately abandoned it for the old doctrine and the old theory and the old idea of selfishness.

Lincoln, in his speech at Springfield on June 26, 1857, thus defined his notions of the Declaration of Independence:

"In those days our Declaration of Independence was held sacred by all and thought to include all; but now, to aid in making the bondage of the negro universal and eternal, it is assailed and sneered at, and construed, and hawked at, and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not at all recognize it. All the powers of earth seem rapidly combining against him, mammon is after him, ambition follows, philosophy follows, and the theology is fast joining the cry. . . .

"I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men; they did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral develop-

ment or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men created equal—equal with “certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” This they said, and this they meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth that all were actually then enjoying that equality, not yet that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact, they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit.

“They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all, constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and, even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere. The assertion that “all men are created equal” was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain, and it was placed in the Declaration not for that, but for future use. Its authors meant it to be as, thank God, it now is proving itself, a stumbling block to all those who, in after times, might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant that when such should reappear in this fair land and commence their vocation they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack.”

It seems to me that Lincoln, with his prophetic vision, must have foreseen this day when prosperity, breeding tyrants, should undertake to declare that the Declaration of Independence no longer applies to anybody but the people whom we decide are capable of self-government.

The holding of tropical countries, the conquest of unwilling people, their retention in subjugation by a standing army, means of necessity not a republic where

all the people must be consulted, but a despotism where the will of one man can march armies, declare war and act with great rapidity. A republic is naturally slow in action, because the people must be considered and must be consulted.

We took on many of the semblances of monarchy and of imperialism during the McKinley administration—concealment of facts from the people, denial of news and information, no knowledge of what is going on, no announcement of policy and purpose; and the excuse for it all was that if we should allow the people to know the facts there was danger of creating disapproval of the course of our monarch, and if the enemy should secure these facts it would be of some assistance to them. This is necessary in a monarchy. Press censorship too is a necessary adjunct of imperialism—one of the things our forefathers would not have tolerated for a day. And yet our people are becoming so numb that they are willing to accept it, and even criticize men who protest.

We annexed the Philippines forcibly. That, according to the principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence, is criminal aggression. We departed from the foundation principles of this country; violated its most sacred obligations to the world, and pursued the same brutal, unjustified policy that Great Britain has pursued wherever her conquering armies have mowed down naked savages with machine guns.