

Introduction

In the summer of 1901, the United States Army Transport *Thomas* traversed the Pacific Ocean, bearing over 500 American teachers from San Francisco to Manila. In a panegyric written on board, journalist Adeline Knapp hailed the voyage of the “white ship in mid-ocean, her forefoot set toward the Philippines, her deck thronged with young men and women actuated for the most part by high ideals and a genuine desire to be helpful.”¹ The *Thomas* and its voyage became one of the most enduring icons of American colonization of the Philippines. The men and women who traveled to the Philippines on the *Thomas* styled themselves “Thomasites,” imbuing their own journey with missionary-style purpose, and this moniker came to refer to all of the thousands of American teachers in the early years of colonization.² The *Thomas* loomed large on the imperial horizon for two reasons: first, as Knapp’s writing

¹ Adeline Knapp, “A Notable Educational Expedition,” *The Log of the Thomas*, Ronald P. Gleason, ed. (Manila: NP, 1901), 11.

² There is no definite count of the exact number of American teachers who worked in the Philippines. From the annual reports of the General Superintendents of Public Instruction (later called Directors of Education) from 1901 to 1912, it appears that there were close to 2,000 American teachers employed during this period, though the highest number of teachers employed at any one time was 926 in May of 1902. While the number of American teachers dropped from this point onward, it seems reasonable to estimate that during the American colonial period, there would have been several thousand teachers employed overall. See *Reports of the Director of Education, 1901–1912*, in Library Materials, Record Group 350, National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter NARA], College Park; and *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Director of Education, For the Calendar Year 1928* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1929), in Library Materials, RG 350, NARA.

demonstrates, the colonial state and its employees engaged in a sustained propaganda campaign to promote the educational mission as the truest emblem of America's engagement with the Philippines; second, and equally important, the American teachers were an immediate point of contact between Filipinos and the colonial state. Individual interactions between American teachers and Filipinos deeply colored the experience and memory of colonialism, and contributed to the ambivalent legacy of colonialism in the Philippines.

The establishment of an educational system in the Philippines created a model for colonial education that was used to justify America's presence abroad and demonstrate that American empire was inherently "benevolent." Yet the implementation and consequences of education in the islands did not conform to the expectations of the colonial state. The teachers had their own set of imperial expectations and desires, which at different times led them to uphold, adapt, circumvent, or entirely disregard colonial policy. For many, participation in empire meant the chance to have an adventure, to travel around the world, or to earn a better wage or advance professionally beyond what was possible at home. A colonial position also gave teachers the opportunity to construct new identities for themselves. The American teachers in the Philippines were not just instructors, they were social emissaries, health inspectors, imperial officials, ethnographers, and important members of the community in which they were stationed. Their official positions within empire enabled American teachers to act out their own imperial fantasies, and to make claims to power and authority that would have been impossible at home. At the same time, American teachers confronted local populations with their own fears and hopes regarding colonial education. Teachers were forced to negotiate between their own understandings of American education and empire, and those of Filipino communities and the colonial state.

Employees of the United States government, these teachers were part of a wider justification of empire, most notably articulated by Theodore Roosevelt in his 1899 address on "The Strenuous Life," in which white American men were honor-bound to lift the people of the Philippines out of savagery and into civilization. This work of empire was intimately linked with notions of manly duty, masculine endeavor, and the innate superiority of Anglo-Saxon whiteness. Despite the language of white masculinity that imbued imperial discourse, white women and black men and women also gained positions as teachers. For them especially, an official position within empire offered new economic and social opportunities, and the chance to see themselves as a vital part of the extension of

American power and civilization on the far side of the world. All of the American teachers headed for the Philippines, male and female, black and white, engaged with ideas of strenuous living and imperial duty in their writings, viewing themselves as personally adventurous, as well as integral members of the imperial project. Thomasite Mary Helen Fee recalled that the departure for Manila “was momentous. I was going to see the world, and I was one of an army of enthusiasts enlisted to instruct our little brown brother, and to pass the torch of Occidental knowledge several degrees east of the international date-line.”³

More so than any other group, American teachers were positioned in between the colonial administration and the Filipino population. The teachers were part of a wave of American labor that flooded into the Philippines after 1899, which included soldiers, missionaries, bureaucrats, public-health inspectors, engineers, and agricultural specialists. There was a significant difference, however, between the role of the teachers and other Americans. The teachers were the only civilian officials, representatives of the US government, who both came into close and sustained contact with Filipinos and who were expected to win hearts and minds, and thus local support for the colonial state. Especially in the early years of education, teachers lived in communities all over the archipelago, sometimes with no other Americans present, and interacted not only with their students in the schools, but socialized with local elites in their homes, served as local health inspectors, and became imbricated into the life of their town. The number of teachers sent to the islands, moreover, was far higher than any other type of civilian official. Finally, it was the teachers who were often responsible for implementing colonial policies on a daily basis, who represented American governance to the native population, and who interpreted the beliefs, capacities, and desires of Filipinos for the civil administration. While teachers often adopted and coopted the official depiction of themselves as benevolent educators and agents of racial uplift, they also used their nationality, gender, race, class, and position within empire in order to assert their own understandings of empire and claims to power and authority.

Teachers’ positions as imperial mediators also forced them to adapt to local conditions, negotiate their understanding of what colonial education would mean, and compromise with the Filipinos in their stations, especially elite members of the community. Civil officials might set colonial

³ Mary H. Fee, *A Woman’s Impressions of the Philippines* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 12.

policy in Manila, but it was the teachers who were primarily responsible for achieving success in schoolwork and convincing local populations to “Americanize.” Filipinos used the American educational system to articulate their own understandings of empire, which often challenged the narrative of benevolent tutelage cultivated by the colonial state and American teachers. In this context, the politics of the schoolhouse were particularly fraught. Schools were a microcosm for the colonial state, with negotiations and contestations over colonial education often standing in for struggles over the colonial relationship itself.

The colonial state was constructed through both collaboration and conflict, and the schools were at the heart of this process. The relationships between teachers and students highlight this crucial point – colonization intermingled contestation, cooperation, and adaptation together in the same communities, schools, and even sometimes within the same individuals. This is part of why the legacy of colonial education and the US presence in the Philippines itself can be so ambivalent. Empire was not simply a process of power inflicted from above or resisted from below. It was a complex matrix of various actors with different agendas and unequal ability to enact their visions of the colonial relationship, all operating on the same field at once.

The colonial relationship caught teachers and students alike in the paradox of empire. In theory, the colonial relationship was defined by a “politics of recognition” in which Filipinos were faced with either accepting the terms of “civilization” as outlined by the United States, or rejecting them and being branded as “savage” and therefore unworthy of self-government.⁴ If Filipinos accepted the terms of the colonial relationship, they would be granted inclusion within the notion of civilized citizenry, once they had achieved certain vague benchmarks. However, at the same time that teachers adopted the language of benevolent reform, they often used their roles as arbiters of Filipino progress to implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) deny Filipino capacity for self-rule and racial progress. To do otherwise would be to negate the need for their presence in empire, and to undermine the justification for colonization. Filipinos, then, were caught in a cycle of inequality. If they rejected the goals of Americanization (couched in the language of modernity), or questioned the capacity of Americans to judge their progress, their teachers labeled

⁴ For more on the politics of recognition, see Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18.

them ungrateful children, and unworthy of self-government. If they did attempt to fully Americanize, they were labeled second-class citizens – inferior models of a superior civilization. Both the colonial state and the teachers, however, attempted to walk the fine line between withholding full recognition while not pushing their colonial charges into open opposition.

Depicting colonial education as completely distinct from military pacification was part of this process. Schools were presented by the US government, the colonial state, and the teachers themselves as separate from war and violence. A November 1901 issue of *Puck* included a cartoon titled “It’s Up to Them,” with Uncle Sam holding out a soldier and a female schoolteacher in either hand to recalcitrant Filipinos.⁵ The message was that the Philippines could choose violence or suasion, and that collaboration with the colonial state, including colonial education, was an alternative to war. In reality, of course, colonization was a process of both violence and suasion, with colonial schools inextricably linked to the coercion of American military might. Public education was intended from the beginning to act as a complement to warfare, as a tool of pacification and colonial control.

The implicit (and sometimes explicit) premise of colonial education was that it would forestall or end Filipino demands for independence. Once Filipinos realized the benefits that would accrue to them under the colonial state, once they Americanized, the thinking went, they would be content to remain under the American flag. Of course, this logic failed to recognize that Filipinos could both seize opportunities offered by empire and still desire and work for national sovereignty.

This book is fundamentally interested in examining how education contributed to the creation of US empire in the Philippines, and the ways that this colonial project was formed through the contests and collaboration of a variety of actors with different goals and desires, which in turn indelibly shaped the contours of colonization. In so doing, I hope that this work will make two primary contributions, to the field of the United States in the world and to the histories of race and gender. First, by examining the experiences of those actually responsible for implementing a vital aspect of the American colonial state in the Philippines, the American teachers, this book moves past traditional narratives of empire to reveal the ways in which the colonial state was worked out on the ground.

⁵ “It’s Up to Them,” *Puck*, November 20, 1901, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010651486/> [accessed June 20, 2018].

This illuminates the gulf between colonial theory and praxis, and how individual actors influenced and altered the colonial state. While there has been no monograph entirely on American colonial education in the Philippines, most works touching on this history have either focused primarily on the perspectives of government and educational officials and the imperial policies they created or have examined colonial education through a comparative and transnational lens.⁶ Contests and negotiations in schoolhouses and in private homes shed light on the creation of colonial authority, but also on its boundaries and limitations.

By juxtaposing the letters, diaries, and articles of over two dozen teachers, scattered in archives across the United States, my work delves into the ways in which teachers experienced and understood their roles within empire, and the complex positions they held between war and peace, coercion and suasion. In addition, comparing these sources to official records, periodicals, and the personal papers of imperial administrators reveals the gulf between official policies and the day-to-day functioning of empire, demonstrating how the implementation of empire on the ground often deviated from the expectations of the colonial state. Finally, I have read across these sources, utilized archival records in the Philippines, and mined newspapers published in Manila and in the provinces in order to understand the experiences, perspectives, and challenges of the Filipinos who came into contact with American teachers. This approach reveals how and why the Thomasites' own visions of empire diverged from the views of those above and below their authority in crucial ways.

This book, then, is located at the junction of the best-laid plans of the colonial state and what actually happened. Colonization was a contested and negotiated process for all its participants, and colonial policymakers and officials could never fully dictate the shape and contours of American control. Who was supposed to be hired for colonial positions versus who

⁶ See, for example, Glenn A. May, *Social Engineering: The Aims, Execution and Impact of American Colonial Policy, 1900–1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Kramer, *The Blood of Government*; Julian Go and Anne L. Foster, ed., *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Jonathan Zimmerman, *Innocents Abroad: American Teachers in the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). Some notable exceptions include Peter J. Tarr, “The Education of the Thomasites” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2006); and Kimberly A. Alidio, “Between Civilizing Mission and Ethnic Assimilation: Racial Discourse, U.S. Colonial Education and Filipino Ethnicity, 1901–1946” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2001).

actually was, what students were supposed to learn versus what they actually took away from their lessons, how employees were supposed to behave versus what they chose to do – while the power of individual actors was limited, they nevertheless had the ability to shape the process of colonization. The differing and often conflicting desires of these imperial actors led to the creation of a somewhat ad hoc system of colonial education, with policies enacted and altered in response to conditions on the ground.

What happened in the schools was central to the colonial state because education was located at the heart of the imperial project. Colonial officials used the educational mission as a primary justification of empire. Beyond this, presenting colonial schools as part of a mythic narrative of benevolence helped the US and insular governments to define the entire colonial state through the metaphor of tutelage and assimilation. Virtually every interaction between the colonial government and the Filipino people was cast as part of a civilizing mission, paving the way for eventual self-government.⁷ Promoting the idea of colonial governance as a school allowed the insular state not only to justify the colonial project as benevolent, but also to deemphasize the coercive aspects of colonial “education.”

At the same time as the schools were central to the narrative of the colonial state, an organizing metaphor for the American presence in the islands, the language of education and instruction became the primary grounds on which Filipinos could challenge US authority. The schools functioned as a stress test of the colonial project, highlighting its strengths and fractures. The interactions between American teachers and Filipino students and community members reveal the ways that Filipinos could utilize the logic of tutelage and colonialism as they attempted to redefine the colonial relationship. Even as colonial officials used the metaphor of instruction to justify empire and withhold independence, then, these micro-collaborations and contests in schoolhouses and homes throughout the islands indelibly shaped the colonial state.

The system of education created in the Philippines is particularly worthy of focus as one fully integrated into state power. Unlike other imperial powers, which relied on missionaries and nongovernmental actors, secular education was incorporated as a central piece of the colonial state. The educational project in the Philippines, moreover, was the largest in American empire. The islands’ large population enabled

⁷ Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 201.

colonial officials to justify the use English as the sole language of instruction and necessitated the importation of more American teachers. Thousands of Americans teachers were sent to the Philippines in the first decades of the twentieth century, compared to hundreds sent to Puerto Rico during the same period, and only a handful of educational administrators and specialists sent to Cuba.⁸ Moreover, the islands were the only site of overseas empire engaged in an active rebellion against US authority, which made education doubly important as a tool of pacification and rationalization of colonization. The location of the islands provided a crucial foothold in Asian markets, and thus made an effective colonial state particularly important. Finally, elite Filipinos may have had less control over the inauguration of an educational system than did Puerto Ricans and Cubans, but because of the desire to secure elite collaboration, they retained more leverage over the framework of the schools than was common in schools for Native American and even African American children.⁹

Second, by focusing on the ways in which understandings of hierarchy and markers of privilege evolved in the Philippines, this book attempts to reframe the histories of race and gender in empire. Foregrounding the teachers' own voices and the language they used to describe themselves, the people around them, and the events in which they participated, illuminates the ways in which colonial actors expressed, utilized, and constructed notions of race and gender. A primary source of conflict in the educational system revolved around the issue of fitness – the attempts of colonial officials to define the ideal teacher, American teachers' claims to be the best colonizers, and Filipino assertions of the capacity for self-rule. These battles over fitness, often expressed in the language of race and gender, were fundamentally about defining what empire and the colonial

⁸ For an examination of American education in Puerto Rico, see Solsiree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898–1912* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). There was no mass importation of American teachers to Cuba by the military government, as such a step was strenuously opposed by the Cuban people, though Cuban teachers were brought to the United States for instruction. See Marial Iglesias Utset, *A Cultural History of Cuba during the U.S. Occupation, 1898–1902*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, orig. pub. *Las Metáforas del cambio en las vida cotidiana: Cuba, 1898–1902*, Ediciones Unión, Havana, Cuba, 2003), 75.

⁹ For more on education in the US and the ways that it prepared white and nonwhite students for separate and unequal notions of citizenship, see Clif Stratton, *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

relationship was and should be. Examining the gulf between official policy and practice, and the way different actors claimed positions in empire, reveals the fractures in colonial hierarchies.

At the same time that gendered and racialized notions of fitness were being used to articulate visions of the colonial state, these categories of difference were evolving in the context of empire. Previous histories of empire have examined how white men, amid growing fears of white racial degeneracy and over-civilization, looked to empire as a vehicle to reassert their virile masculinity and racial supremacy. However, the presence of white women and black men and women as government teachers, official agents of civilization, disrupts this narrative. Rather than construing their experiences as expressions of maternalism or domesticity – which many scholars argue was the linchpin of women’s Progressive Era politics – white female teachers in the Philippines engaged with traditionally masculine notions of colonial power, constructing identities as adventurers, imperial officials and professionals.¹⁰ White women appealed to race and nationality to claim positions in empire and as arbiters of Filipino progress. Locating themselves between American notions of femininity and masculinity, white women’s identities in empire fluctuated as they navigated different circumstances. Indeed, even presenting these two narratives as at different ends of a spectrum obscures the ways in which they were intertwined and informed each other. This is, perhaps, the most

¹⁰ See, for example, Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920,” in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000); and Kramer, *The Blood of Government*. Several scholars of the British Empire have also provided useful comparisons. See Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (New York: Verso, 1992); Tracey Jean Boisseau, *White Queen: May French-Sheldon and the Imperial Origins of American Feminist Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

crucial point. Rather than having to choose between the ideas of maternalism and the strenuous life, it was possible for women to engage with and understand themselves through both discourses to varying degrees.¹¹

Understandings of race were also in flux in the colonial Philippines as American and Filipino notions of hierarchy and social position came into conflict. Much has already been written about the contested process of racial formation in the early twentieth century, including both the creation of whiteness in the United States and the racialization of Filipinos that was central to colonization.¹² In the context of US empire in the Philippines, however, the boundaries of whiteness also shifted. The desire to draw a clear line between colonizers and colonized, between Americans and Filipinos, created an imperial conundrum: how to preserve colonial hierarchies, which typically conflated racial and national identities, when faced with nonwhite or liminally white Americans? For at least some Americans, the answer meant broadening the definition of, or at least the prerogatives of, whiteness.

Understandings of blackness and color were also evolving in the colonial Philippines. The history of African American participation in empire remains largely understudied. While scholars have begun to pay more attention to the black experience of American empire, most of the focus has been on African American soldiers.¹³ This is understandable, given that soldiers made up by far the largest segment of the black

¹¹ As the work of Laurie B. Green demonstrates, women's appeals to universal notions of manhood were not limited to the context of American empire. In *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, Green argues that invoking manhood enabled black women to "assert their own courage, claim equality rather than subservience, and even challenge men." Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 261.

¹² See, for example, David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Vicente L. Raphael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Kramer, *The Blood of Government*; Richard Chu, *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila: Family, Identity, and Culture, 1860s–1930s* (Boston: Brill, 2010); Michael C. Hawkins, *Making Moros: Imperial Historicism and American Military Rule in the Philippines' Muslim South* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, new edition 2014); and Natalie Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹³ For some examples of scholarly work on African Americans and empire, see Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro