

Expanding Empire Chapter 2: Times haven't changed much

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When Mark Twain exposed the ruthless extermination campaign of the U.S. in China during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, Theodore Roosevelt said that Twain had “airily announced that both the problem and the solution were absolutely simple.”

“In objecting to our establishing an orderly government in the Philippines by putting down the rebellion, [the critics] were continuing the bloodshed,” Roosevelt charged at about the same time, and were “responsible for the cruelties of warfare in the Philippines.”

He also said, “The bullets that slay our men in Luzon are inspired by the denouncers of America here [in the United States].” (Quotes from “Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power” by Howard K. Beale, page 70.)

The remarkable similarity of Lyndon Johnson to Theodore Roosevelt in uttering such sentiments is not due to any special similarity in personalities, but due to the similarity in the political situation in the United States—and to the revulsion against imperialist practice, which is again asserting itself, even though the practice went on constantly in the intervening decades.

While big business was much less powerful in 1898 than it is today, it operated a much more wide-open land office, franchise-dispenser and public looting instrument in Congress then than now.

Unlike the case of Vietnam, it did actually have Congress declare war, rather than let the president do it by himself. But as Ferdinand Lundberg described the process

in his “America’s Sixty Families,” it was only more obvious and not less revolting than the case of Vietnam.

“Rockefeller’s paid henchmen on the floor of Congress wanted the war; Hearst and Pulitzer demanded it; McKinley and Hanna acquiesced in it; and the Rockefeller-Stillman National City Bank [now Citibank—VC] benefited most directly from it, for Cuba, the Philippines and, indeed, all of Latin America soon afterward became dotted with National City branches, and the Cuban sugar industry gravitated into National City’s hands. The most evil role was played by McKinley himself, for he withheld from Congress knowledge that Spain at the last hour before war was declared had capitulated to every single American demand.” (“America’s Sixty Families,” page 62.)

Thus the Spanish-American War opened the way to the conquest of the whole of Latin America by U.S. big business. But it also opened the way to the conquest of Asia by the plunder of the Philippine islands, under cover of the war with Spain.

The Filipino revolution at that time, led by the patriot Aguinaldo, was crushed with the death of 25 times as many U.S. soldiers as were killed in Cuba—385 U.S. soldiers fell in Cuba; over 9,000 in the Philippines—and an untold number of Filipinos.

Why the big struggle in the Philippines?

What was involved here besides the obvious field for more investments, banks, plantations, etc., was this:

The Philippines, 7,000 miles from California, were only 700 miles from China. They were important for the whole China trade, for a huge military base in Asia and the Pacific, and U.S. possession changed the whole balance of power in the Far East.

The “visionaries” of big business dreamed of China becoming “dotted with National City banks” and other banks as well. The Philippines were considered to be the

opening wedge into the treasure chests of the whole of Asia, for the further expansion of U.S. business.

In the light of these facts, it is also easier to understand why the U.S. fought so hard against the Hukbalahap freedom movement after the phony Philippine “independence” of 1947.

The Philippines: U.S. wedge into Asia

Two-thirds of a century ago, big business carefully planned to take the Asian market, Asian resources and the products of Asian labor for itself. And it poured the blood and treasure of the American people into the tropical soil to accomplish this, although on a much smaller scale than it is doing today.

“Small” as it may have been, however, the Philippine takeover was of importance to U.S. business and rightly regarded as the indispensable beginning for a much greater conquest.

As then U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Frank A. Vanderlip—later president of the National City Bank—said in 1900:

“It is as a base for commercial operations that the islands seem to possess the greatest importance. They occupy a favored location not with reference to any part of any particular country of the Orient, but to all parts. Together with the islands of the Japanese Empire, since the acquirement of Formosa [Taiwan] by Japan, the Philippines are the pickets of the Pacific, standing guard at the entrance to trade with the millions of China, Korea, French Indo-China, the Malay Peninsula and the Islands of Indonesia to the south.” (Quoted in “Bases and Empire,” by George Marion, pp. 84-85.)

Thus it can readily be understood why Theodore Roosevelt as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1898 sent his famous “premature” telegram to Admiral Dewey to steam

into Manila Bay on the other side of the world the moment the inevitable war with Spain—over Cuba—should be declared.

It can be understood why the U.S. would not let Japan take the Philippines in 1941. And it can be understood why there are more U.S. bases per square mile in these islands than in the U.S. itself.

The Spanish-American War, like the Vietnam War, was not merely a display of greed, corruption and brutality. It is important to emphasize that unlovely as businessmen are, and cruel and callous as they can be with those who produce their wealth for them, it is not primarily their greed that compels them to expand; it is their system.

One of the minor plunderers during the Spanish-American War, Chauncey Depew—a payoff agent for Cornelius Vanderbilt of the New York Central and later a less parochial representative of the whole financial fraternity as a U.S. senator—explained this, in his way, at a Republican National Convention in 1904:

“The American people now produce \$2 billion worth more than they can consume [that is, consume with a profit to big business—VC] and we have met the emergency, and by the providence of God, by the statesmanship of William McKinley, and by the valor of Roosevelt and his associates, we have our market in Cuba ... in Puerto Rico, in Hawaii ... in the Philippines, and we stand in the presence of 800 million people, with the Pacific as an American lake, and the American artisans producing better and cheaper goods than any country in the world. ... Let production go on ... let the factories do their best, let labor be employed at the highest wages, because the world is ours.” (Quoted by Beale, p. 76.)

Actually, the U.S. plutocracy had only just begun to take over the world at that time. But it was already producing more than any other country and would soon have to try for a much bigger takeover to maintain its industrial position, much less expand it.

But Depew's little lecture on economics, although crude and, as many of the professors say, "oversimplified," did correctly state the problem of U.S. big business—even if the acquisition of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines had not yet solved it.

Nor was it Depew's ignorance that caused him to speak in terms of producing and consuming, as though it were just a matter of selling surplus shoes and stockings to the newly-taken islands. He understood quite well that the main export to Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines would be capital goods—that is, machinery, mining equipment, railroads, etc. But he was also making an appeal for the votes of "American artisans" and trying to convince them that they were real partners of their now imperialist bosses.

[Index](#) CHAPTERS [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#)