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“Missionaries of ordered liberty”:

U.S. Colonial Sponsorship of Self-Government in the Wake of the Spanish-American War,
1899-1904

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April 2, 2012

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Introduction

Elihu Root was flustered. President William McKinley was in a heated fight for reelection. Williams Jennings Bryan, the Democratic challenger, had declared that he would run against the McKinley administration's preferred foreign policy of imperialism. Yet Root was not enamored with the premise that the McKinley administration, and he especially in his role as Secretary of War, had commissioned such a foreign policy in the diplomatic aftermath of the Spanish-American War.

It was in this spirit that Root delivered a campaign address on October 24, 1900. Before a Canton, Ohio audience, he excoriated the anti-imperialists. Bryan and his associates, Root claimed, had "invented a new issue which they call 'imperialism'...the cheapest and most threadbare of the demagogue's stock, always certain to produce a sensation among a people alert for the protection of their liberties."¹ Like Jefferson, Lincoln, and Grant, "all three...great and liberty-loving men,"² McKinley had been accused of attempting to strangle liberty with military force and jeopardize the genuine character of America's republican institutions with an Old World imperial policy. Root challenged the demagogic voices of the Democratic Party by posing a simple question: "What has President McKinley done?"³

For Root, the evidence read plain as day. First, American soldiers in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines were succeeding in building nations that had bowed beneath the weight of imperial oppression. The U.S. had performed a great humanitarian mission:

Our soldiers...have been administering the civil law with justice and moderation. They have been feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and protecting the weak and

¹ Elihu Root, "The United States and the Philippines in 1900: Address at Canton, Ohio, October 24, 1900," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States: Addresses and Reports*, ed. Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 34.

² Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 35.

³ Ibid.

cleaning the foul cities and establishing hospitals and organizing and opening schools and building roads and encouraging commerce.⁴ Beyond this humanitarian service, Root outlined a second and more prominent feature of the administration's diplomacy. Root defined imperialism as the willed suppression of a people, "capable and willing to maintain just government, to make free, intelligent, and efficacious decisions as to who shall govern."⁵ In the secretary's eyes, circumstances had not bestowed such a capacity within the Spanish islands. Internal dysfunction and external strategic concerns had rendered national self-determination a non-viable option. Even Cuba, which bore the criteria for independence, could not stand without leaning on the shoulder of an American protector. Here, before the people of Canton, Root rejected Bryan's imperialist allegation and pronounced in its place the doctrine of ordered liberty:

When I consider the myriads of human beings who have lived in subjection to the rule of force, ignorant of any other lot, knowing life only as the beast of the field knows it...I cannot believe that, for the external forces of civilization to replace the brutal and oppressive government...by ordered liberty and individual freedom and a rule that shall start and lead them along the path of political and social progress, is a violation of the principle of Jefferson, or false to the highest dictates of liberty and humanity.⁶

For Root, "ordered liberty" was not a new concept, but instead characteristic of the government that had prevailed since the earliest days of America's westward expansion. The secretary appealed to Thomas Jefferson's authoritative direction of Louisiana, which that president had deemed incapable of self-government. Continuing in that line, Root asserted, was Abraham Lincoln, who had deemed it necessary to subdue a Southern desire for national self-determination in order to preserve a consistent spirit of law and liberty throughout a united American nation. A similar policy of ordered liberty later brought America to expand beyond its coasts and train Hawaii and Alaska for republican statehood. Indeed, Root considered all of

⁴ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 59.

⁵ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 42.

⁶ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 43.

American federalism a grand project in ordered liberty, with autonomous self-government granted to individual states and the final ordered authority and capacity to intervene preserved within the federal government.

Root's doctrine was unique, however, in that ordered liberty would now be undertaken as a diplomatic project for foreign entities that lay definitively outside the mandate of American statehood. The United States would serve as the democratic sponsor of self-governing nations and not an imperial master of subject nations. With McKinley's reelection, Root's diplomatic incarnation of ordered liberty had been vindicated.

Elihu Root's August 1, 1899 appointment as Secretary of War culminated an eventful year. Following America's triumph in the Spanish-American War and Congressional approval of the April 11, 1899 Treaty of Paris, the United States had risen to indisputable great power status. Yet in the spring of 1899, America appeared a naïve giant on the international stage. The U.S. had premised its war with Spain on the basis of Cuban appeals for humanitarian assistance and national independence. Fighting concluded in 1898 with a sympathetic U.S. military holding together the seams of that island, an abrasive military government directing the affairs of "Porto Rico," and an American flag planted in a newly annexed Philippines. Although President McKinley marshaled public opinion behind him through a speaking tour that summer, he spoke only superficially of America's intentions for the islands. Meanwhile, a fierce battle raged in Congress between expansionists and a growing contingent of anti-imperialists. This unresolved diplomacy landed on Root's desk in August 1899 and was joined by the further challenge of

modernizing an outmoded military ill-equipped for providing the legal and humanitarian assistance critical to self-government.⁷

Root was also tasked with crafting a policy that accounted for the vastly discrepant political, economic, and strategic conditions among the three key islands. Cuba had a longstanding history of democratic insurgency. The Cuban Junta had assiduously exposed General Valeriano Weyler and his devastating reconcentration of agricultural lands before the American Congress. There appeared a stable Cuban nationalism soon capable of achieving self-government. Puerto Rico, although a Spanish colony, lacked the spirit of “Cuba Libre.” Puerto Ricans were mostly satisfied with the autonomy conferred from Spain’s 1897 Autonomous Charter, and embraced the protections afforded by external American order, so long as they maintained majority control of their insular affairs. American intervention became all the more necessary following a hurricane that struck the island in August 1899, a humanitarian disaster on par with Weyler’s reconcentration. The Philippines, like Cuba, possessed an insurgent movement demanding freedom from Spanish tyranny. Yet American military officers and McKinley’s diplomats did not trust its leader, Emilio Aguinaldo. It was uniformly believed that Aguinaldo’s regime would devolve into military dictatorship. At a deeper level, countless tribes, tongues, and ethnicities spanned the islands, lacking a national unity that would prove critical to self-government. Beyond these internal tensions, the U.S. feared that simply abandoning the Philippines would concede all economic and strategic leverage to France, Germany, or some other great power waiting to pounce.

Out of this crucible of the Spanish-American War, with no coherent foreign policy binding America’s presence in foreign lands and with manifold voices claiming to represent the

⁷ For a good summary of Secretary Russell A. Alger’s disorganization at the War Department, see Warren Zimmerman, *First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 367.

McKinley administration's legitimate intentions, Elihu Root ushered in a new incarnation of that same ordered liberty that had prevailed since Jefferson. Root's study of the British Empire led him to reject imperialism.⁸ The U.S. committed itself to nothing more than a colonial holding of the Spanish islands and implemented a modified American constitutional model to account for local eccentricities. Without Root's quelling the appeals of American expansionists, U.S. foreign policy may have taken a drastically different direction in 1899.

Of course, colonial instruction in self-government would face its challenges. Tensions surfaced as Root sought to resolve a discomfiting paradox: America was to sponsor self-governing nations, while simultaneously serving as the final arbiter for each island. In order to construct his elaborate insular designs, Root relied on reports that inevitably mischaracterized local sentiments. Especially in the Philippines, soldiers at times ridiculed natives and failed to meet their greater civic duty. Nonetheless, Root ended his tour as secretary in February 1904 having successfully fortified a double-barreled design for order in all of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines: first, where the U.S. had charted the natives on a course to self-government premised on the constitutional idea of ordered liberty, and second, the order that came with America reserving the right to intervene in insular affairs, an expanded Monroe Doctrine that put America at the center of world order.

Despite the significance of Elihu Root's diplomatic watershed between Manifest Destiny and a nascent democratic internationalism, three historiographical trends have obstructed an adequate assessment of its implementation on the Spanish Islands. First, superfluous voices often obscure Root's own in the diplomatic narrative. Historians delve into the yellow press, the treaty fight between imperialists and anti-imperialists, and the rhetoric of social Darwinists bent on

⁸ For a discussion of Root's extensive reading on the British Empire, see Zimmerman, 368.

imposing American civilization on “backwards savages.” Such voices can be detrimental to an authentic diplomatic history of American sponsorship of self-government. Theodore Roosevelt, at the height of his jocular and jingoistic days, played a minimal role in Root’s schemes. Anti-imperialists mostly misunderstood Root’s intentions and sparred with expansionists also out of the secretary’s earshot.⁹ Second, narratives of self-government often restrict their focus to only one of the three islands. A comprehensive diplomatic history of Root’s watershed policy must consider his attempts to install ordered liberty on all of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.¹⁰ Finally, the idea of American imperialism has gone unchallenged. At worst, historians use the Spanish-American War as the basis for political agendas that reflect condemningly on contemporary American “imperial engagements” abroad.¹¹

⁹ Among the vast expanse of Spanish-American War diplomatic histories, almost all neglect Elihu Root in preference for a tumult of more vocal players. To reference but a few hallmark histories that confine Root to a discussion of, at most, a few pages: Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad, 1750 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), “Turning Point: The McKinley Years,” 193-230; Thomas Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), “An Empire among Empires,” 182-246; Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), “America’s Imperialism,” 243-263; and Foster Rhea Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power, 1898-1954* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), “Imperialist Adventure,” 40-58. Even Julius W. Pratt’s admirable study of American sponsorship of self-government on the Spanish islands only mentions Root in passing. See Pratt, *America’s Colonial Experiment: How the United States Gained, Governed, and in Part Gave Away a Colonial Empire* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950), “The Government of Overseas Possessions: The Evolution of Territorial Self-Government,” 171-239. My qualms with Warren Zimmerman’s study can be found in the conclusion to this essay.

¹⁰ It should come as no surprise to the reader that studies of American sponsorship of self-government on the individual islands often cast aspersions on American colonial policy. For Cuba, see most especially Louis A. Pérez, jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Louis A Pérez, *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), “The Imperial Transfer,” 29-55; and Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States & Cuba: Hegemony and Dependent Development, 1880-1934* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), “The Origins of Hegemony, 1880-1902,” 3-12. For Puerto Rico, see Edward J. Berbusse, S.J., *The United States in Puerto Rico, 1898-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966) and Raymond Carr, *Puerto Rico: A Colonial Experiment* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), “Colonial Ties,” 17-72. For a few highlights among the many histories of America’s first fraught years on the Philippines, see especially Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989); Peter W. Stanley, *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), “Nation Building,” 81-113; and Glenn Anthony May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines: The Aims, Execution, and Impact of American Colonial Policy, 1900-1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), “American Policy-Makers and Policies,” 3-21.

¹¹ For an extended discussion of this problem, see the “Bibliographical Essay” that concludes this text. Daniel B. Schirmer is one such historian who has politicized Spanish-American War history to an extravagant degree: in his

Calling American foreign policy in the wake of the Spanish-American War imperialistic does a disservice to the exceptional case that Root made in his October 1900 Canton address. Root's diplomacy must be viewed not as the muscle flexing of a nascent American empire, but instead, the international extension of the ordered liberty that had defined American government since independence. The Spanish-American War marked the birth of *international Americanism* – Root's two conceptions of ordered liberty undergirding a new American foreign policy.

This argument will be substantiated in a two-part study. This essay first considers the political theory that motivated Root's conception of ordered liberty as a distinctly "American idea" and the changes that idea engendered within the aim and mission of the U.S. military. The second part employs Root's War Department reports to discuss his trial diplomacy on each of the three islands, which has been supplemented with material from Congressional reports and testimonies of the island governors and generals who served as Root's subordinates from August 1899 through February 1904.

Elihu Root's American Idea: Ordered Liberty and the New American Great Power

In order to properly assess American sponsorship of self-government in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the historian must first consider the outlook of the man who made it all possible. There have been surprisingly few biographies of Elihu Root. This essay relies principally on the works of Richard Leopold, Philip Jessup, and Warren Zimmerman.¹² Each duly recounts Root's attempts to cultivate self-government in the Spanish islands. However,

case, to draw a parallel with American guerilla warfare in Vietnam. See Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1972).

¹² For background on Elihu Root and his years at the War Department, see Zimmerman, "A Lawyer's Duty," 123-148; Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root: Volume 1, 1845-1909* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, Inc. 1938), "Secretary of War," 215-407; Richard W. Leopold, *Elihu Root and the Conservative Tradition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1954), "Imperialism," 24-46; and Richard Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), "Elihu Root: A World of Order and Progress," 144-158.

none offers a definitive understanding of the man's political philosophy or how Root's direction of America's colonies derived from that philosophy. Zimmerman identifies Root as a "founder of American imperialism."¹³ Likewise, Leopold titles his chapter on Root's years as Secretary of War with the blunt "Imperialism."¹⁴

However, for Elihu Root, U.S. sponsorship of self-government in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines was not an imperial affair in the slightest. Root's public statements, most delivered in retrospect after his retirement from government, shed light on his understanding of ordered liberty as a distinctly American idea – an idea that he considered a diplomatic alternative to imperialism and would guide U.S. sponsorship of self-government in the Spanish islands.

In its basic form, Elihu Root's American idea constituted a federalist hybrid of central order and devolved liberty in national government. In 1907, Root lectured before Yale University on "The Citizen's Part in Government." Root argued that American government entailed two mindsets: "One tends to carry the independence of local self-government to an extreme; the other tends to carry the centralization of national government to an extreme."¹⁵ Both central and local outlooks formed necessary points of reference in the conduct of American government. At existential moments, the national government took command and subdued local autonomy, from "the extinction of slavery; to establish a national bank; to charter Pacific railroads...to acquire and incorporate in the United States additional territory; to acquire and govern so-called colonial possessions."¹⁶

¹³ Zimmerman, 482.

¹⁴ Leopold, 24.

¹⁵ Elihu Root, "The Citizen's Part in Government: Lecture delivered May 14, 1907 at Yale University," in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, ed. Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 27.

¹⁶ Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 28.

A flexible use of order, a tightening of the reins every so often, was needed to preserve local liberty. Root first cautioned against the regular imposition of central order, which could deteriorate civic consciousness. “Interference with individual liberty by government should be jealously watched and restrained, because the habit of undue interference destroys that independence of character without which in its citizens no free government can endure.”¹⁷ The punitive imposition of order made the executive who overstepped his bounds “a trespasser, a despoiler, a lawbreaker.”¹⁸ Excessive direction from the center softened a civic body’s capacity for self-advancement. “Weaken individual character among a people by comfortable reliance upon paternal government and a nation soon becomes incapable of free self-government and fit only to be governed.”¹⁹

Beyond the individual citizen, when the autonomy of local self-government proved stable, there was little need for a pervasive intrusion from the center. Root touched on his municipal theory in a January 1909 address. “This country is too large, its people are too numerous, its interests are too varied and its activity too great for one central government at Washington to carry the burden of governing all of the country in its local concerns, doing justice to the rights of the individual in every section.”²⁰ This was a point that distinguished Americanism from Old World imperialism: greater trust and a greater willingness to devolve responsibility to local government. Without this trust came the risk of “breaking down the local self-government of the states.”²¹ Yet, Root also professed the critical place for central direction. He identified himself as an “uncompromising nationalist of the school of Alexander Hamilton,”

¹⁷ Elihu Root, “Experiments in Government and the Essentials of the Constitution: The Stafford Little Lectures delivered April 15 and 16, 1913 at Princeton University,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 86.

¹⁸ Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 101.

¹⁹ Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 86.

²⁰ Elihu Root, “Acceptance of the New York Senatorship: Address to the Legislature of New York, January 28, 1909,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 251.

²¹ *Ibid.*

and expressed his belief in “the exercise of the executive, the legislative and the judicial powers of the national Government to the full limit of the constitutional grants.”²²

If such a template had been so successful for domestic American government, why should it not serve as a template for other nations? Root blurred domestic and international lines in his 1907 Yale lectures, claiming that ordered liberty should be heralded as an exemplar ideal in American foreign policy. “We find that our system of government which has been built up in this practical way through so many centuries...has done more to preserve liberty, justice, security, and freedom of opportunity for many people for a long period and over a great portion of the earth, than any other system of government ever devised by man.”²³ The American idea’s international dimension would be reemphasized in an October 1914 speech, entitled “The Spirit which Makes a Nation Live.” It was America’s obligation, “To set for the world a standard of true liberty and true justice...to teach our friends and neighbors the secret of the great judgment of our free democracy, that they may reverence it and preserve it always.”²⁴

Root believed in the American idea’s transferability because he was also a practitioner in conservative revolution. The constitutional contours of ordered liberty shifted subtly with the times to meet the exigencies of national interest. Root captured this concept through his fall 1914 lectures as President of the New York State constitutional committee. Root implored that the committee, “preserve as well as improve. While we seek to adapt the machinery of government to changing conditions, we are still to preserve the great body of rights and liberties which has grown through many centuries of political and juridical development.”²⁵ Root advocated an

²² Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 254.

²³ Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 88.

²⁴ Elihu Root, “The Spirit which Makes a Nation Live: Address at the Dinner of the American Bar Association, October 22, 1914,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 501-502.

²⁵ Elihu Root, “Opening Address as President of the Constitutional Convention, State of New York, April 6, 1915,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 165.

evolution of governmental responsibilities that maintained the core philosophical precepts of American constitutional government. “Where changes are needed they should be made fearlessly and thoroughly but in such a manner, with such relation to existing custom and opinion as to be natural developments from the life of the people of the state.”²⁶ Root stressed that the committee’s work remain mindful of the distinctly American idea: “The test of capacity for self-government is to be found in the people’s ability to create institutions which will at once preserve liberty and maintain order.”²⁷

Root had always believed the American lawyer a uniquely adept practitioner of conservative revolution. In a June 1904 address, he noted that, “In all this field of the law regulating the relations of citizens to each other, the proper function of the lawyer is to promote rational progress; to maintain stability against all fads and crude innovations and at the same time to keep the development of the law moving with equal step abreast of the progress of the age.” The lawyer possessed an eye for flexible accommodation to local circumstance: “Lessons are to be learned from other countries. Practical common sense is to be applied to outworn rules.”²⁸ It was his own legal background that drove Root to believe himself capable of instilling ordered liberty in the Spanish islands. Root’s religious passion for the federal American constitution and his articulation of the need for conservative revolution from time to time – modifying the periphery without disabusing the core – were critical to his new American diplomacy.

²⁶ Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 166.

²⁷ Elihu Root, “A Study of the Proposed Constitution: Address at a Dinner of the Republican Club of New York, October 18, 1915,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 214.

²⁸ Elihu Root, “Some Duties of American Lawyers to American Law: Commencement Address before the Yale Law School, New Haven, June 27, 1904,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 422.

Root intended to fuse ordered liberty with conservative revolution in sponsoring self-government in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Root reflected in a June 27, 1904 address that American law could never transpose itself perfectly in a foreign context. In August 1899,

There were those who thought it our duty to give to the people of Cuba, of Porto Rico, and the Philippines the blessings of the common law. A careful study of the subject, however, soon led to the conclusion that these people already had in force an admirable body of municipal law, regulating their rights and obligations, and far better adapted to their needs than the system of rules which we prize so highly for our own conduct.²⁹

Root noted that his designs for the islands had derived from his study of America's "adapting the laws of Louisiana to the new condition following the cession of that territory to the United States from Spain."³⁰ Conservative revolution in American constitutional government had played out through Manifest Destiny and would continue to serve as a model for America's insular sponsorship of self-government.

Root's March 13, 1915 address, "The Lawyer of Today," presented perhaps the most salient glimpse into his vision for the islands. Root project was "the work of applying to some ten millions of people in Cuba and Porto Rico and the Philippines, the principles of American liberty."³¹ The key difficulty was tailoring the basic constitutional framework to account for local circumstance. Root reflected that, "The problem was to match those principles which are declared in our constitutions...to the customs and the laws of peoples which had come down from the Spain of Philip the Second and the Inquisition." Root could not act alone. As chief pastor, he required missionaries of the American idea to make ordered liberty a reality. He relied on three, in particular:

Through the strong and sagacious control of Governor Taft in the Philippines; through the sound administrative instincts and devotion to duty of Leonard Wood in Cuba;

²⁹ Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 420.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Elihu Root, "The Lawyer of Today: Address before the New York County Lawyers Association, New York City, March 13, 1915," in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 504.

through the loyalty of George W. Davis, and his successors in Porto Rico, those principles of justice, principles of state morality, which we have embodied in our constitutions, constitutions which are but the expression of the conception of individual liberty that has grown through a thousand years of Anglo-Saxon freedom, proved still to be vital.³²

Consummating their work would be a new model American military, no longer simply a force for self-defense, but now engineers of humanitarian stability. Root's reforms of the War Department included enhanced provisions for military education, which the secretary hoped would better soldierly conduct on the islands.³³ Root noted in his tribute to "The American Soldier" that the soldier remained always "an American citizen...He carries with him not the traditions of a military empire, but the traditions of a self-governing people. He comes from a land...where every citizen has learned that obedience to law, and respect for the results of popular elections, is a part of the order of nature."³⁴ Perhaps, Root hoped, these men could serve as exemplars before the inspired islanders.

There remained a second way of conceiving Root's American idea. Ordered liberty would shape not only America's sponsorship of self-government, but also prove the theoretical framework for a new American diplomacy. Root believed that, just as order and liberty should maintain stasis within republican societies, so the U.S. reserved the right to maintain a loose order over a community of otherwise autonomous nations. When it became a matter of U.S. geostrategic interest to intervene in a troubled nation, America had every right to do so.

Root expanded on this notion in his April 1914 retrospective, "The Real Monroe Doctrine." President James Monroe's 1823 doctrine had proclaimed an anti-imperial dictate:

³² Root, *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, 505.

³³ See Elihu Root, "Military Education: West Point and the Army War College," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 387-400.

³⁴ Elihu Root, "The American Soldier: Address by the Secretary of War at the Marquette Club in Chicago, October 7, 1899," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 11.

“The American Continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European Powers.”³⁵ The implication was that America maintained a responsibility to guarantee self-determination in the New World.

It is impossible that the allied Powers should extend their political system to any portion of either continent without endangering our peace and happiness; nor can any one believe that our southern brethren, if left to themselves, would adopt it of their own accord. It is equally impossible, therefore, that we should behold such interposition, in any form, with indifference.³⁶

The times mandated an updating of the Monroe Doctrine to account for a nascent American great power. The outdated doctrine “concerned itself only with the occupation of territory in the New World to the subversion or exclusion of a pre-existing American government. It has not otherwise any relation to the affairs of either American or European states.”³⁷ Root proposed a corollary. Although the U.S. would sponsor self-governing nations, it reserved the right to intervene and inhibit self-determination.

It cannot be claimed that great and powerful states shall forego their just rights against smaller and less powerful states...the great state ought to be especially considerate and gentle in the assertion and maintenance of its position; ought always to base its acts not upon a superiority of force, but upon reason and law; and ought to assert no rights against a small state because of its weakness...in all this the Monroe Doctrine is not concerned at all.³⁸

Root grew miffed at critics who accused the U.S., “of playing the role of school master, of assuming the superiority of guardianship,”³⁹ much as he condemned Bryan’s associates for leveling the imperial allegation against McKinley in 1900. He conceived the issue as instead a matter of the natural responsibilities that came with America residing at the center of world

³⁵ Elihu Root, “The Real Monroe Doctrine: Presidential Address at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law, Washington, April 22, 1914,” in *Addresses on International Subjects*, ed. Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 105.

³⁶ Root, *Addresses on International Subjects*, 106.

³⁷ Root, *Addresses on International Subjects*, 117.

³⁸ Root, *Addresses on International Subjects*, 116-117.

³⁹ Root, *Addresses on International Subjects*, 119.

order. Intervention did not constitute imperial aggression; the U.S. would “intervene by force to prevent or end an occupation of territory”⁴⁰ only to restore order within the family of nations.

American sponsorship of self-government in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines formed the crucible through which Elihu Root redefined the Monroe Doctrine for an American great power on the basis of ordered liberty: the United States serving as the foundation of order in a community of otherwise self-governing nations. Root’s new American diplomacy would later be codified with President Theodore Roosevelt’s December 1904 corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. “All that this country desires is that the other republics on this continent shall be happy and prosperous; and they cannot be happy and prosperous unless they maintain order within their boundaries and behave with a just regard for their obligations toward outsiders.”⁴¹ Roosevelt argued in a subsequent address that an American preserver of order was not imperialistic. “An idea had become prevalent that our assertion of the Monroe Doctrine implied or carried with it an assumption of superiority and of a right to exercise some kind of protectorate over the countries to whose territory that doctrine applies. Nothing could be further from the truth.”⁴² The roughrider had learned a thing or two from Root’s meticulous insular designs. Roosevelt’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine was but one critical byproduct of America’s successful sponsorship of self-government in the wake of the Spanish-American War.

Cuba: The Intuitive Application of Root’s American Idea

Of all the islands that fell under U.S. auspices, Cuba was by far the easiest in which to implement ordered liberty. Local sentiments, and the response to those sentiments coordinated by the preceding department under Russell Alger, played to Root’s American idea before he

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Theodore Roosevelt, "Fourth Annual Message to Congress," December 6, 1904, in *The American Presidency Project*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woodley, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29545>.

⁴² Root, *Addresses on International Subjects*, 114.

even took office as Secretary of War. Root did not have to deal in Cuba, as he would in the Philippines, with the jarring paradox of sponsoring self-government by passing through the intersection of annexation, a symbolic affront that cast America in the same light as imperial Spain. Instead, Congress had passed on April 20, 1898 a “Joint Resolution for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba.” The island’s abhorrent conditions “shocked the moral sense of the people of the United States” and formed “a disgrace to Christian civilization.” The Congress thus ruled per an amendment proposed by Senator Henry M. Teller,

That the people of Cuba are, and of right to be, free and independent...that the Government of Spain at once relinquish its authority in the island of Cuba...that the United States...disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said Island except for the Pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the Island to its people.⁴³

Cuba maintained an active representation in American public opinion and Congressional lobbying. Most assertive was the Cuban Junta, whose handbook *Cuba at a Glance* described the effects of General Valeriano Weyler’s disastrous reconcentration policy. “Since October, 1896, 800,000 peaceful Cubans, country people, have been driven from their homes and herded in the adjacent towns and cities, their dwellings burnt behind them.”⁴⁴ Weyler’s brutes had uprooted Cuban families and separated farmers from their crops. “Four hundred thousand of them have died by starvation. The others are living skeletons, walking through the towns begging.”⁴⁵ Human suffering poured through the yellow press, detailing even “babies with the skin drawn so tightly over their little bodies that the bones showed through as plain as the rings under a glove...protesting as loudly as they could against the treatment which the world was giving

⁴³ *Recognition of the Independence of the People of Cuba*, Joint R 24, 55th Cong., 2d sess. (April 20, 1898), in *Compilation of the Acts of Congress, Treaties, and Proclamations Relating to Insular and Military Affairs from March 4 1897 to March 3 1903* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 115.

⁴⁴ A. O’Hagan and E.B. Kaufman, *Cuba at a Glance* (New York: R.H. Russell, 1898), 20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

them.”⁴⁶ Major-General J.M. Rodriguez remarked in correspondence that, “The relation of the pictures of misery and horror which we have witnessed would be never ending were we to narrate them all.”⁴⁷ The message was clear: inaction would have made the U.S. an abettor to crimes against humanity.

However, the Cuban Junta had intentions that transcended mere humanitarian assistance. Their secondary aim was anti-colonial self-determination. Surrogates cast the cause of “Cuba Libre” in the same mold as the American Revolution. *Cuba at a Glance* described a history of colonial chafing that dated back 30 years. “In 1868, when it was proposed still further to tax them, they rose in arms...Carlos M. de Cespedes, a lawyer of Bayamo, with 128 poorly equipped men, issued a declaration of independence on the plantation of Yara, and within a few weeks he was at the head of 10,000 men, badly armed but determined.”⁴⁸ The ragtag band of guerilla fighters soon turned their eyes to self-government. “By April, 1869, a constitution for a republican form of government was drawn up. It provided for a president, vice president, cabinet and a legislature. It abolished slavery, and under it Cespedes was elected president, Francisco Aguilero vice president, and a legislature convened.”⁴⁹

T. Estrada Palma, President of the Cuban Junta, fronted the 1898 publication with a convincing riposte. “History proves that the independence of a people has always been born of sacrifice. In no instance, however, has there been such suffering, sacrifice, and abnegation as was demanded of the Cuban people.”⁵⁰ Palma knew that Cuba’s historical commitment to republicanism would captivate the McKinley Administration. From the ash heap of Spanish

⁴⁶ O’Hagan and Kaufman, 23.

⁴⁷ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Report Relative to Affairs in Cuba*, 55th Cong., 2d sess., April 13, 1898, S. Rep. 885, 10, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/>.

⁴⁸ O’Hagan and Kaufman, 62.

⁴⁹ O’Hagan and Kaufman, 63. Beyond the parallels in government, the remark on the abolition of slavery stands out: only a few years stood between the conclusion of America’s second domestic revolution and the revolutionary venture of the Cuban dissidents in 1868.

⁵⁰ T. Estrada Palma, “Introduction,” in *Cuba at a Glance*, 5.

misrule, “they would form a new nation, ruled by the highest type of government – of, for, and by the people...one more republic is added to the American nations.”⁵¹ Elihu Root would have found General Ramon Blanco’s republicanism especially compelling. The Cuban-American victory had “offered to the world, as a special case of history, one of the most beautiful triumphs of liberty, united with the cause of order.”⁵²

The Cuban revolutionaries acknowledged the debt they incurred to the United States. Following McKinley’s declaration of war after the February 16 sinking of the *Maine*, General-in-Chief Maximo Gomez relayed a flourishing tribute. “The people who are saved from extinction and whose evils your gifts assuage are the people for whose liberty we daily shed our blood on the fields of battle...I am so deeply moved at the wave of compassion which agitates your noble country.”⁵³ Palma acknowledged simply that, “Only in the United States was there sympathy for the oppressed and the outraged.”⁵⁴

Elihu Root believed that the insurgents’ trust could facilitate the imposition of ordered liberty in Cuba. Root recognized that for Cuba, independence could never really concern self-determination – at least, when self-determination was correctly defined as a truly independent demonstration. Cuba had won independence only with American support. Given Weyler’s humanitarian disaster, the U.S. was also in no position to leave the island in its aggrieved state. Palma was more temperate than revolutionaries like the radical self-determinationist José Martí and requested U.S. assistance. Circumstances could not have been more fortuitous for Root to implement his double-barreled design for ordered liberty: fortifying self-governing institutions

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Report Relative to Affairs in Cuba*, 5.

⁵³ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Report Relative to Affairs in Cuba*, 25.

⁵⁴ Palma, *Cuba at a Glance*, 7.

upon a stable humanitarian basis, and with the 1902 Platt Amendment, codifying America's exclusive right to intervene and preserve order should an external threat menace Cuba's war-won liberties.

Root outlined his plans for Cuban self-government in his 1899 "Principles of Colonial Policy." He first stressed that America's insular presence was only temporary. "The control which we are exercising in trust for the people of Cuba should not be, and of course will not be, continued any longer than is necessary to enable that people to establish a suitable government to which the control shall be transferred."⁵⁵ Root feared America's image as a 'trespasser and despoiler' and sought an end game whereby government was transferred to a Cuban people, "able to maintain order and discharge international obligations."⁵⁶ Root delineated U.S. obligations: "Our present duty is limited to giving every assistance in our power to the establishment of such a government, and to maintaining order and promoting the welfare of the people of Cuba during the period necessarily required for that process."⁵⁷ The U.S. would tighten the reins of order only so as to fortify the foundation on which an autonomous Cuban republic could stand.

Even in Cuba, such a mission would not be easy. Major General M.C. Butler believed that the Cuban rebels' independent streak would chafe under American colonization. "Our real trouble is going to be with the insurgents and their sympathizers...They have been conducting a desperate struggle for three years against the direst tyranny and oppression that ever afflicted mankind, and, although they did not achieve their independence and get relief by their unaided efforts, they feel that they made a gallant struggle for liberty and are entitled to consideration on

⁵⁵ Elihu Root, "The Principles of Colonial Policy: Porto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1899," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 171.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

that account.”⁵⁸ Gratitude would only go so far through a protracted American occupation. The amount of control that Root and his subordinates exercised would require great finesse. Too much of a punitive order would cultivate animosity; too much autonomy could breed instability.

Although Cuban surrogates appealed to the island’s rich republican intellectual history, Root did not want to rush the transition given the island’s complementary history of subjection. Palma was exceptional; training a population that had known only empire for republican civic life would prove a heftier enterprise. “The fact...that probably two-thirds of the people of the island are unable to read and write; that the people in general have had no experience in any real self-government, but have been for centuries under the dominion of arbitrary power...make it necessary to proceed somewhat slowly in the formation of a government.”⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, Root was selling the Cuban people a bit short. Yet this was not the rhetoric of a diplomat bent on subjecting an inferior civilization to American imperial dictates. The U.S. would not confer administrative authority to a Weyler. American civil and military authorities hoped to expedite a governmental transition per the April 1898 resolution. President McKinley was now a vocal advocate of Root’s policy, delivering public addresses that conspicuously adopted the rhetoric of ordered liberty.⁶⁰

Elihu Root’s sponsorship of Cuban self-government would comprise a play of three acts: first, providing humanitarian assistance, civic education, and measures for economic stability;

⁵⁸ Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing Regarding Civil and Military Affairs in Cuba*, 55th Cong., 3d sess., January 30, 1899, 27, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/>.

⁵⁹ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 172.

⁶⁰ William McKinley, "Message of the President," December 5, 1899, 56th Cong., 1st sess, in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1899*, U.S. Department of State (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), xxix. “The full re-establishment of peace found the relinquished territory held by us in trust for the inhabitants, maintaining, under the direction of the Executive, such government and control therein as should conserve public order, restore the productive conditions of peace so long disturbed by the instability and disorder which prevailed for the greater part of the preceding three decades, and build up that tranquil development of the domestic state whereby alone can be realized the high purpose, as proclaimed in the joint resolution adopted by the Congress on the 19th of April, 1898.”

second, implementing a constitution by which Cuban authorities could maintain internal order; and finally, preserving America's right to intervene through the 1902 Platt Amendment.

Ordered liberty could not prevail in Cuba without first shoring up the welfare of the island's devastated people. Major General Leonard Wood adeptly commandeered this humanitarian mission. Wood described his first projects of January 1899: "My instructions...were to make roads, clean up the towns, feed the people, establish municipal courts, and to send...men freely and in a widespread manner among the people, and to assure them that we were among them to help them and not harm them."⁶¹ Establishing this basic trust would prove critical in the early phase of American intervention. Root further enhanced public works in his first months as secretary. "Thorough and systematic inspections were made, sanitary corps were organized, streets were cleaned, sewers were opened, cesspools and sinks were emptied, and public and private buildings were disinfected."⁶² Deaths from Yellow fever plummeted in 1899.⁶³

In 1900, Root turned his attention to primary education. Thanks to Superintendent Alex E. Frye's committed work, Root could soon report that, "All over the island the old Spanish barracks and barracks occupied by American troops, which have been withdrawn are being turned into schoolrooms after thorough renovation. The pressure for education is earnest and universal."⁶⁴ The insular treasury appropriated over four million dollars, and 1,281 Cuban teachers received formal training.⁶⁵ Root also implemented measures to shore up Cuba's

⁶¹ Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing Regarding Civil and Military Affairs in Cuba*, 55th Cong., 3d sess., January 18, 1899, 5, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/>.

⁶² Elihu Root, "Conditions in Cuba: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1899," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 190-191.

⁶³ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 191. Only 63 died from the disease in 1899, compared to 134 in 1898 and 991 in 1897.

⁶⁴ Elihu Root, "The Organization of the Civil Government of Cuba: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1900," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 198.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

economy. He was the lead driver of the 1901 reciprocal treaties that leveled tariff rates between Cuba and the United States. Cuban farmers boosted their sugar exports and made up for missed yields. Economic stability was tied to public order: “More than half of the people of the island are depending directly or indirectly upon the success of that industry. If it succeeds we may expect peace, plenty, domestic order...If it fails...poverty and starvation, disorder and anarchy will ensue.”⁶⁶ American and Cuban trade cooperation enhanced agricultural and economic stability, and hence, paved a stronger foundation for Cuban self-government.

Following these humanitarian successes, Root turned to constitutional government. The U.S. would preserve those institutions adaptable to America’s own, and in others, institute reforms, “as shall serve to put the business of government in fairly good condition when a complete Cuban administration finally assumes control of the island.”⁶⁷ On June 16, 1900, elections were held to determine Cuba’s municipal officers. Root proudly recounted that, “The boards of registration and election were composed of Cubans selected by the Cubans themselves. No United States soldier or officer was present at or in the neighborhood of any polling place. There was no disturbance.”⁶⁸ The U.S. still closely monitored preparations for national self-government. Prior to the November 1900 constitutional convention, on Root’s orders, Wood reminded the Cuban delegates that, “The constitution must be adequate to secure a stable,

⁶⁶ Elihu Root, “Further Progress in Civil Government: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1901,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 217.

⁶⁷ Elihu Root, “Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1900,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 193.

⁶⁸ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 194. The U.S. still played a major role in the elections, having conducted the previous year’s census that determined the number of legislators to be elected per district.

orderly, and free government.”⁶⁹ Time and again emerged Root’s federal idea: Cubans driving forward self-government, with only subtle U.S. encouragement.

Meanwhile, Root tempered the second barrel of order that would shape the future course of Cuban-American diplomacy. The ideal Cuba would be self-governing, but never truly self-determining. In his February 1901 War Department Report, Root outlined the critical premises by which the U.S. would reserve the right to intervene in the island should some existential threat emerge. In accordance with the tradition of “Jefferson and Monroe and John Quincy Adams,” Root wrote that, “The United States has, and will always have, the most vital interest in the preservation of the independence which she has secured for Cuba, and in preserving the people of that island from the domination and control of any foreign power whatever.”⁷⁰ Americans had become, “the guarantors of a stable and orderly government in that island.”⁷¹ This set the foreground for Senator Oliver Platt’s amendment to a March 2, 1901 military appropriations act:

The government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States.⁷²

Root’s provisions for ensuring America’s standing as the final arbiter of Cuban order were not limited to the Platt Amendment. Wood’s subsequent diplomacy produced optical concessions to a seemingly autonomous Cuban government and military guarantees for a U.S. protector. Following Palma’s February 24, 1902 election as president, Root clarified to Wood the limits of American withdrawal: “In the instructions already communicated to you as to the

⁶⁹ Clarence R. Edwards, *Establishment of Free Government in Cuba*, compiled in the Bureau of Insular Affairs from records of the War Department, presented by Senator Platt of Connecticut to Committee on Foreign Relations, 58th Cong., 2d sess., S. Doc. 312, April 27, 1904, 8, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no. 4592.

⁷⁰ Elihu Root, “Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1901,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 210.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 213.

withdrawal of the army from Cuba there is a provision that you may have a small force of artillery troops...The posts to be thus provisionally garrisoned by the military forces of the United States will be designated to you.”⁷³ Root had Wood secure America’s right to free transit. “You will obtain the necessary assurances that the right of transit of individuals, detachments, or military organizations to and from the United States...shall not be denied, impeded, or interfered with.”⁷⁴

Simultaneously, Root crafted the optics of a truly free and independent Cuba. “Impress upon the commander of the artillery forces...the importance of refraining from even the appearance of interference in governmental or political affairs.” Root provided for a number of cultural tributes symbolizing a conclusive transition from American rule to Cuban self-government. “He will render appropriate military honors to the Cuban flag and to all officers of the Cuban Government who are entitled thereto, and will treat its representatives with whom he may come into personal or official contact with the greatest courtesy and consideration upon all occasions.”⁷⁵ Cuba embodied the American idea of ordered liberty perfected in its diplomatic application. While America reserved the right to intervene, she would in no way impose on an otherwise self-governing Cuba, with internal order now predicated on a republican constitution.

The United States ended its colonial mission with the withdrawal of American forces from Cuba on June 10, 1902. Leonard Wood described the spirited festivities that brought together more than 150,000 people of the sister republics: “The Cuban flag was hoisted...the national anthem was played and our troops saluted the flag...There was immense interest and enthusiasm displayed in the transfer, and it would have been impossible for any people to have

⁷³ Clarence R. Edwards, *Establishment of Free Government in Cuba*, 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Clarence R. Edwards, *Establishment of Free Government in Cuba*, 16.

shown more friendship and cordiality to the representatives of another nation.”⁷⁶ Elihu Root wished his friend Palma well. “Believe in my heartfelt congratulations upon the inauguration of the Republic which the people of Cuba and the people of the United States have fought and labored together to establish...I bid you godspeed and on this happy day wish for Cuba for all time liberty and order, peace and prosperity.”⁷⁷ Palma reciprocated his gratitude to all of Root, Wood, and President Roosevelt.⁷⁸

Decades later, the U.S. would be condemned as the imperial aggressor that kept Cuba from greatness. Yet at its inception in the summer of 1902, Cuba embodied an indisputable success story in ordered liberty. Leland Hamilton Jenks, an avid anti-imperialist historian, conceded in his 1928 *Our Cuban Colony* that Elihu Root was no imperialist. On the contrary, he had tied the virtues of American government to the diplomacy of a nascent American great power. “There can be no serious question that the United States, under the leadership of Roosevelt and Root, intended the Republic of Cuba to be an honest attempt of state-building. When one has said that, he has placed Root and Roosevelt...as statesmen who in an age of imperialism encouraged self-government.”⁷⁹

Puerto Rico: “To become Americanos”

Puerto Rico was an island lost in the shadow of its eminently more popular Caribbean neighbor. It did not have as its lobby a force comparable to the Cuban Junta, urging the United States to fulfill her Christian duty to a republican disciple. In Washington, Muñoz Rivera and Mariano Abril were the chief surrogates on behalf of Puerto Rican interests.⁸⁰ Following

⁷⁶ Clarence R. Edwards, *Establishment of Free Government in Cuba*, 20.

⁷⁷ Clarence R. Edwards, *Establishment of Free Government in Cuba*, 19.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Leland Hamilton Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony: A Study in Sugar* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928), 85.

⁸⁰ Berbusse, *The United States in Puerto Rico, 1898-1900*, 117.

America's April 1899 signing of the Paris Peace Treaty, Abril described the pair's primary work as "breaking the wall of ice formed by the indifference with which these politicians look upon our affairs."⁸¹ Rivera communicated his interests bluntly: Puerto Rico aspired to secure its own government with minimal outside control from the United States; the people desired the termination of American military government on the island; and Puerto Rico did not favor outright independence, but instead, union with the American people under a territorial form of government.⁸² Whereas Cuba requested assistance to secure national independence, Puerto Rico accepted its semi-colonial relation to the U.S. with hopes of statehood lying in the wait.

Secretary Alger's subordinates had no interest in conferring self-governing autonomy to Puerto Rico. While the cause of "Cuba Libre" tugged at the republican heartstrings of McKinley's generals, Puerto Rico was treated as a nominal conquest. For the first two years of American rule there, self-government constituted nothing more than a few farcical handouts from America's military "czars." Upon becoming governor in October 1898, General Nelson A. Miles instructed his field commanders that, "It becomes their [Puerto Rico's] duty to yield obedience to the authority of the United States, the power of the military occupant being absolute and supreme and immediately operating upon the political conditions of the inhabitants."⁸³ General M.C. Butler dismissed Puerto Rico as the prize won for liberating Cuba. "The conditions in Puerto Rico are very different, and much more easy of control and solution. We are there by right of conquest, pure and simple. The territory and people are ours. Here we are conquerors in one sense, and another not."⁸⁴ The American military that had set about building humanitarian

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Brig. Gen. George W. Davis, *Report on the Civil Affairs of Porto Rico, 1899-1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), 20.

⁸⁴ Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing Regarding Civil and Military Affairs in Cuba*, January 30, 1899, 29.

stability in Cuba assumed a different guise in Puerto Rico. In early 1899, a flood of irate editorials poured through Puerto Rican newspapers, condemning American soldiers for drunken brawling and harassing the natives.⁸⁵

Dr. Henry K. Carroll, commissioned by Alger to observe the island, concluded in the fall of 1899 that change was in order. Although the island's populace had embraced American order, Carroll asserted, it was time to give them a level of insular responsibility that at least matched the concessions conferred by Spain's 1897 Autonomous Charter. Serving in the Spanish Cortes had equipped Puerto Ricans with the capacity for self-government. The islanders were "better prepared than were the people of Mexico, or of the colonies in Central and South America, which have one after another emancipated themselves and entered upon the duties and privileges of self-government." Their affinity for the U.S. made them a reliable student, for "they will not foment revolutions or insurrections." Carroll prescribed a policy that made for a watershed from Manifest Destiny: "Let Porto Rico have local self-government after the pattern of our Territories and she will gain by her blunders, just as cities and States in our own glorious Republic are constantly learning."⁸⁶

Elihu Root sought to reverse the military czars' direction and implant a local autonomy in Puerto Rico that did justice to the American idea of ordered liberty, mostly affirming Carroll's recommendations. Rather than explore Root's design for Puerto Rico, historians have traditionally focused more on the hair-splitting constitutional debates then playing out in Congress. Root was never interested in debating the merits of statehood versus territorial autonomy and deferred to Congress on all constitutional matters. He was solely interested in

⁸⁵ Berbusse, 87.

⁸⁶ Henry K. Carroll, *Report on the Island of Porto Rico: Its Population, Civil Government, Commerce, Industries, Productions, Roads, Tariff, and Currency* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 58.

making ordered liberty a reality, both in sponsoring Puerto Rican self-government and ensuring that America maintained the reins of diplomatic order.

Root believed that ordered liberty would come easily to Puerto Rico. He began his 1899 report by noting, “The problem of civil government in the islands yielded or ceded by Spain presents in the simplest form in the case of Porto Rico.”⁸⁷ The critical tasks of cultivating insular self-government and ensuring America’s right to intervene came smoothly with “the cheerful and unanimous desire of its people, who are peaceful and loyal and eager for the benefits to be derived from the application of American ideas of government...There is no obstacle.”⁸⁸ Although the islanders had embraced American order, Root did not believe that they were ready for unrestricted self-government. Education was lacking. As with Cuba, Root concluded that, “it is impossible that a people with this history – only ten percent of whom can read or write – should ever have acquired any real understanding of the way to conduct a popular government.”⁸⁹ Puerto Rico also endured a humanitarian disaster comparable to Weyler’s reconcentration with a hurricane that struck the island on August 8, 1899. The U.S. amplified its presence to restore stability, for “the result of the disaster was the loss of about three thousand lives...Over one hundred thousand people were reduced to absolute destitution, without homes or food or means to obtain food.”⁹⁰ Root ordered \$392,342 in emergency food provisions, and subsequently, “the entire army in Porto Rico became a relief corps.”⁹¹ As with Cuba, Root urged Congress to remove customs duties to restore depressed sugar and tobacco commodities.⁹²

⁸⁷ Elihu Root, “The Principles of Colonial Policy: Porto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1899,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 163.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 164-165.

⁹⁰ Elihu Root, “Conditions in Porto Rico: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1899,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 177-178.

⁹¹ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 178.

⁹² Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 171.

Rivera and Abril, members of Puerto Rico's republican faction, grew frustrated at an American-sponsored civil government that conferred fewer liberties than Spain's 1897 Autonomous Charter. However, Root had deemed the charter an inadequate template for republican self-government. Intellectuals like Rivera and Abril were, "highly educated and able men, public-spirited and patriotic...but there are not enough of them to make a working government which would be anything but an oligarchy."⁹³ Educated Puerto Ricans had to learn to cope with legislation unruly to their sensibilities and concede to majority rule. "Porto Ricans, as a people, have never learned the fundamental and essential lesson of obedience to the decision of the majority...before the people of Porto Rico can be fully intrusted with self-government they must first learn the lesson of self-control and respect for the principles of constitutional government, which require acceptance of its peaceful decisions."⁹⁴ The secretary provided an arena by which the Puerto Ricans could demonstrate their capacity for self-government. "A form of government should be provided for Porto Rico which will assure the kind of administration to which we are accustomed, with just as much participation on the part of Porto Ricans as is possible without enabling their inexperience to make it ineffective, and with opportunity for them to demonstrate their increasing capacity to govern themselves with less and less assistance."⁹⁵ The Puerto Rican and Cuban blueprints for self-government had begun to align, despite one island seeking independence and the other a permanent connection to the U.S.

Although Root bypassed constitutional specifics, he did not neglect the institutional path that would transition the island from military to civil government. Root's 1899 prospectus outlined a model for civil government that came just a hair's breath from the full law codified with the April 1900 Foraker Act. There would be a governor, appointed by the president; a

⁹³ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 165.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

legislature, also appointed by the president, and a minority of delegates selected by the people; a supreme court and trial courts grounded in American law; and municipal mayors and councils left free to administer local government.⁹⁶ Naturally, the reins of American order would slacken over time. Root ultimately intended for the Puerto Ricans to assume a degree of federated autonomy that more than matched the Autonomous Charter. He mandated that there should be, “no greater number of Americans from the United States than are necessary for the introduction of the methods of the administration in which Americans have been trained and Porto Ricans have not.”⁹⁷

Root also built from the virtuous elements left outstanding from Spain’s Autonomous Charter. He wrote that, “The civil code established by Spain...in force at the time of the cession, is an excellent body of laws, adequate in the main, and adapted to the customs and conditions of the people. It should be continued in force, with such gradual modification as experience from time to time suggests.”⁹⁸ This proved a salient manifestation of Root’s skill in conservative revolution: tweaking the periphery and accommodating local circumstance, but never so as to diminish the first principles of American government.

In May 1899, President McKinley appointed General George W. Davis Governor of Puerto Rico. Davis would preside over the transition from military to civil rule on the island. He would also become one of Elihu Root’s three most trusted missionaries of ordered liberty, along with Leonard Wood in Cuba and William Howard Taft in the Philippines.

⁹⁶ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 166. The esteemed Puerto Rican historian Pedro Capó Rodríguez claimed that, as with the Platt Amendment, Root had shadow drafted the original Foraker Act. See Berbusse, 151.

⁹⁷ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 168.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Davis was the first military governor to credit the Puerto Ricans' intelligence and acknowledge their capacity for self-government. He expressed this sentiment before the House Committee on Insular Affairs on February 5, 1900. "The Puerto Rican is quick to learn, has an acute mind, and good perceptive faculties...I have known no more apt pupils anywhere than those native Puerto Ricans, both white and black."⁹⁹ This was not the conquest language of Miles or Butler, nor the rhetoric of a racist or social Darwinist. Davis was inspired by the natives, who "rendered...very cordial assistance, and have anticipations of great benefits yet to come which have not materialized."¹⁰⁰ As with Wood in Cuba, Davis sought to earn the peoples' trust by feeding their insight into his administration. Davis reflected that, upon arriving in Puerto Rico, "I found myself embarrassed in many cases by my lack of acquaintance with the people, their laws, customs and institutions." He therefore determined "to constitute an advisory council, all natives of the islands."¹⁰¹

Davis saw eye to eye with Root in believing that, although the islanders certainly had the potential for self-government, Puerto Rico was not yet ready. When asked how they would rule independently, Davis responded with a terse "Very badly."¹⁰² During the previous elections for the legislature's lower chamber, only 30,000 votes were cast to represent a population of almost 500,000. That was with "general interest in the election and no failure to register."¹⁰³ Davis echoed Root's point regarding the need for universal civic competency before empowering a national republican government. "The people generally have no conception of political rights

⁹⁹ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico, and for Other Purposes*, Sen. Bill 2264, 56 Cong., 1st sess, January 13-22, 1900, 49, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no. 3851.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 59

¹⁰² Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 50.

¹⁰³ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 51.

combined with political responsibilities. Privileges they all desire, but they seem to have very little conception of political responsibility and the obligation of all to bow to the will of the majority.”¹⁰⁴ Davis remained confident that through work “in the municipalities, and, in a certain degree, in this legislative council,”¹⁰⁵ the people of Puerto Rico would develop a capacity for territorial self-government with limited American oversight.

Davis’s remarks may have rankled the likes of Rivera and Abril, but they were in no way unfounded or premised on the arbitrary muscle flexing of an imperial America. Lucas Amadeo, president of the Puerto Rican agricultural society, testified that same month to the virtues of joint rule: “There exists in Puerto Rico every element for self-government, but of course they would prefer to have somebody more accustomed to it to initiate them – to show them and give them the benefit of their experience – and then the Puerto Ricans could very well govern themselves.”¹⁰⁶ Further testimonials reflected the trust that Puerto Ricans conferred in American institutions. Tulio Larrinaga, a San Juan civil engineer, stated on January 20, 1900 that although he believed “nothing short of a Territorial government will fully satisfy the people of the island,” the people were yet willing to “accept whatever the United States Government will do in the matter, as we feel assured the Government will do us justice.”¹⁰⁷ Major Azel Ames, a sanitary inspector for the U.S. army who had lived in Puerto Rico through the Spanish-American transition, remarked on the islanders’ potential and understanding:

Considering that they have been under four hundred years of oppression, they exhibit a remarkable degree of resiliency, or ‘rebound,’ a most remarkable individuality considering they have been under the heel of a brutal taskmaster all these years...they

¹⁰⁴ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 129.

¹⁰⁷ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 178.

have a great desire to learn...that is a typical thing of the earnestness in the island – to become Americanos.¹⁰⁸

At any rate, the residual humanitarian aid injected by American peacekeepers following the August 1899 hurricane, along with Root's periodic attempts to halt Spanish creditor demands, made it clear that the United States was not inclined to leave the islanders to their own devices.¹⁰⁹

Even before the Foraker Act enabled Puerto Rico's official transition to civil government on May 1, 1900, Davis and Root had performed the same three-act play yet proceeding in Cuba. The U.S. had met humanitarian needs and stabilized the insular economy. Root had drafted a blueprint for civil government that provided for a progressive expansion of the island's autonomy and a slow ebbing of American order. There was no need for a Puerto Rican Platt Amendment. Given that the islanders desired either territorial government or statehood, the U.S. was ensured *carte blanche* access in the event some existential threat menaced the island.

Elihu Root's successful translation of Puerto Rico's Spanish constitution into Americanized ordered liberty did not satiate many frustrated islanders desiring clarity on their constitutional status. However, it would be a mistake to cast Root and his colonial policy under the imperial brand. Elihu Root and George Davis prevented Puerto Rico from being reduced to an imperial token. The ordered liberty that prevailed there was more similar than different to that effected in Cuba. Rather than flesh out the constitutional question in a way that satisfied all parties, Root shifted his attention to a more pressing matter: the insurgency greeting America's

¹⁰⁸ Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 189.

¹⁰⁹ Enrique Gonzalez, a Puerto Rican agriculturalist, verified the need for American assistance on these fronts in a January 20, 1900 testimony. "Since the hurricane, 90 percent of the coffee estates have had to be abandoned...and as a consequence, the neglected plants are rapidly dying under the tropical weeds, which cause more damage than the hurricane itself." He noted further, "The transferring of a plantation from the creditor's to the debtor's hands for the third part of its value is a common occurrence in our islands, and in the present state of crisis would have become universal therein unless General Henry had not interfered." Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, *Hearing to Provide a Government for the Island of Porto Rico*, 222-223.

military in the Philippines and the fraught challenge of developing self-government on those islands.

The Philippines: The Indomitable Idea of Ordered Liberty

President William McKinley presents a complex figure in the narrative of American sponsorship of self-government, most especially in the case of the Philippines. Did McKinley pursue an imperial course for America? Or was Philippine annexation simply the last option on the table, to be renounced within several decades of insular stability? McKinley's retrospective account on the Philippine question stands as the most-oft repeated anecdote in Spanish-American War historiography:

When I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confess I did not know what to do with them...I walked the floor of the White house night after night until midnight...I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance...we could not leave them to themselves – they were unfit for self-government...there was nothing left for us to do but to take them...and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them...And then I went to bed, and went to sleep, and slept soundly.¹¹⁰

More than any other insular colony, the Philippines have served as the most critical plank substantiating histories that contend for America's imperial course in the wake of the Spanish-American War.

During his cross-country speaking tour through the winter of 1899, McKinley sold America's new colonial course without articulating concrete plans for insular government. His February 16, 1899 Home Market Club speech in Boston highlighted one of two principles consistently invoked in his addresses: Philippine annexation stood as the natural consequence of America's humanitarian duty. "Did we need their consent to perform a great act for humanity?...Did we ask their consent to liberate them from Spanish sovereignty, or to enter

¹¹⁰ Bender, *A Nation among Nations*, 221.

Manila Bay and destroy the Spanish sea-power there? We did not ask these things; we were obeying a higher moral obligation.”¹¹¹ A December 15, 1898 speech in Atlanta presented McKinley’s second refrain: the war brought unity to a nation yet suffering from the residual wounds of disunion. “Under hostile fire on a foreign soil, fighting in a common cause, the memory of old disagreements has faded into history. From camp and campaign there comes the magic healing which has closed ancient wounds and effaced their scars...no small indemnity for the cost of the war.”¹¹² Humanity and reunion were emotive themes that generated much applause and exempted McKinley from discussing the hairier questions of government.

McKinley did, however, offer a few scant insights into what sort of government should take shape in the Philippines. He guaranteed in his February Home Market Club speech, “That they will have a kindlier government under our guidance, and that they will be aided in every possible way to be a self-respecting and self-governing people, is as true as that the American people love liberty and have an abiding faith in their own government and in their own institutions.” McKinley disavowed any sort of ulterior imperial intention. “No imperial designs lurk in the American mind. They are alien to American sentiment, thought, and purpose. Our priceless principles undergo no change under a tropical sun. They go with the flag.”¹¹³ Such were the enigmatic McKinley’s paradoxes: celebrating America’s new domains, but rejecting imperialism; heralding a common cause abroad to heal lingering sectional tensions, but refusing to articulate what that cause constituted beyond vague notions of “duty and humanity.”

¹¹¹ William McKinley, “Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899,” in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From March 1, 1897 to May 30, 1900* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1900), 189.

¹¹² William McKinley, “Speech at the Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia, December 15, 1898” in *Speeches and Addresses*, 160.

¹¹³ McKinley, *Speeches and Addresses*, 192.

McKinley's speaking tour helped secure passage of the Treaty of Paris. But it did not articulate a viable foreign policy for a new American great power.

Although the question of insular self-government was beyond his own understanding, McKinley determined that Elihu Root, merely a soft-spoken New York City lawyer, would be the best man to reconcile Philippine annexation with Cuban independence and the Puerto Rican open question under a consistent postwar diplomacy. The Philippines would prove Root's toughest challenge yet. Contemporary circumstances did not accommodate U.S. intervention. The Philippines had neither the republican history of Cuba nor Puerto Rico's desire for a close bond with the U.S. The islands were a mix of countless ethnicities. A critical open door to the Far East, the archipelago was a strategic venue that could not be vacated. Nevertheless, Root believed that ordered liberty could overcome even these least accommodating of insular circumstances. In doing so, Root would confront a critical challenge to his American idea: Was there such a thing as American order so punitive, a military commitment so draining, that it simply was not worth the long-term costs to the U.S.? Root answered no, given his ideological conviction in the republican idea and given the responsibilities that came with America's new position at the fulcrum of diplomatic order.

Root was well aware of the challenges heading his way. In his October 1899 "American Soldier" speech, the secretary elaborated on a first obstacle: there was no consistent nationality on the islands. Cuba projected a strident republican nationalism that had built on a thirty-year independence movement. Although politically confused, Puerto Rico maintained a consistent Spanish-speaking nationality. Neither could be said for the Philippines. "Are we fighting the

Philippine nation? No. There is none. There are hundreds of islands, inhabited by more than sixty tribes, speaking more than sixty different languages.”¹¹⁴

The second critical challenge came with the Philippines having endured a particularly illiberal Spanish dominion. Cuba had its longstanding history of republican intellectualism. Puerto Rico embraced external order, yet also controlled its local situation through the 1897 Autonomous Charter. Spain’s imperial dominion had facilitated neither in the Philippines. Root expanded on this predicament at the beginning of his 1900 War Department report: “Spanish authority had for centuries furnished the only controlling force for the maintenance of order in the Philippine Islands, and upon the destruction of the Spanish power the existing administration completely ceased to perform its functions and disappeared, leaving a great body of inhabitants, without training or capacity to organize for self-control, absolutely without government.”¹¹⁵ Felipe Buencamino, a former Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the insurgent government, noted the dearth of civic education. “With regard to political education, we have absolutely none. We have never been politicians, and if it did take place at some time it has been with arms in hand.”¹¹⁶ Root’s designs also distinguished more advanced towns like Manila and Mindanao from remote tribes that exhibited an underwhelming level of advancement, and consequently made “civil society thoroughly disorganized.”¹¹⁷

Root’s final challenge was defeating an opponent who represented the antithesis to his American idea: Emilio Aguinaldo. Congressional Democrats portrayed Aguinaldo as a martyr

¹¹⁴ Elihu Root, “The American Soldier,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Elihu Root, “The Beginnings of the Civil Government: Extract from the Report of the Secretary for 1900,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 239-240.

¹¹⁶ House Committee on Insular Affairs, *Committee Reports, Hearings, and Acts of Congress Corresponding Thereto*, ed. R.B. Horton, 57th Cong., 1st, 2d sess, 1901-1903, 248, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/>.

¹¹⁷ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 240.

for Philippine independence, a characterization that especially frustrated Root.¹¹⁸ Root found Aguinaldo even more disconcerting than either the Puerto Rican republican Muñoz Rivera or the Cuban self-determinationist José Martí. Whereas Rivera and Martí had commenced a disordered rush to self-government, the secretary believed that Aguinaldo had his sights set on military autocracy. Aguinaldo's militant nationalism presented an even greater threat than anarchy to his American idea: "We are fighting against the selfish ambition of a military dictator...who was permitted to gather all the forces of disorder, all the men who prefer a life of brigandage to a life of industry...when America was prevented by her international obligations and the faith of her protocol from interfering."¹¹⁹

Root substantiated his condemnation of the insurgent government by relying on his trusted generals' reports. General Ewell Otis, who served as America's first military governor of the islands, reported that, "Under Tagalog domination, which was really the irresponsible dictatorship of Aguinaldo...there was no rule by which the right or wrong of personal action could be determined, nor indeed did individual liberty of any kind exist. The so-called insurgent government...degenerated into a military despotism of low order."¹²⁰ Admiral George Dewey assured in a February 1902 hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he had never guaranteed Aguinaldo any right to form an insurgent government. Dewey recalled seeing a group of insurgents hoist a Filipino flag. "I said, 'It is not a flag; they have no government' ...There was a sort of reign of terror; there was no government."¹²¹ Undoubtedly

¹¹⁸ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 84. "The Democrats in Congress declared that we ought not to succeed because the Filipinos were competent to govern themselves. We know that in fact their pretense of constitutional government disappeared at the first symptom of dissent from Aguinaldo's will, and he became an absolute military dictator."

¹¹⁹ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 10.

¹²⁰ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 240.

¹²¹ "Testimony of George Dewey," in Henry F. Graffe, ed., *American Imperialism and the Philippine Insurrection: Testimony taken from Hearings on Affairs in the Philippine Islands before the Senate Committee on the Philippines - 1902* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and company, 1969), 4.

mislead by biased reporting, and generally a bit green with only two months of experience in pouring over military matters, Root described the military predicament as a small-scale insurgency centered on Aguinaldo's Tagalogs. "Many of them are already engaged in learning the rudiments of government under the tuition of the American soldier. We are opposed by only the single tribe of the Tagalogs."¹²²

The imposition of American order in the Philippines would appear far different from American endeavors in Puerto Rico and Cuba. Whereas in the latter islands the American military built order as a humanitarian task force, in the Philippines, U.S. soldiers commenced military operations against Aguinaldo's insurgents. The foreignness of the islands created a tense relationship between anxious American soldiers and wary Filipinos, regardless of their association with Aguinaldo. None of this mattered to Root, who yet believed that a finessed balance of liberty and order could make self-government attainable in the Philippines.

Root's 1899 report mostly traced the military's attempts to halt Aguinaldo, a critical stumbling block to achieving local order. He tallied the military gains that earned a small degree of trust from the Filipinos. In November, American troops near Manila received support from the Pampangos, just one of many "northerly tribes...unfriendly to the Tagalogs." The friendly natives allowed American soldiers and their animals to feed upon the country.¹²³ On November 29, Aguinaldo's government in central Luzon was destroyed, with the principal civil and military leaders taking to guerilla warfare.¹²⁴ Root ordered General Otis to leave a suitable foundation in place for the government that was to come. "As rapidly as we have occupied territory, the policy of inviting inhabitants to return to their peaceful vocations, and aiding them in the

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Elihu Root, "Continued Military Operations in the Philippines: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1900," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 234.

¹²⁴ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 235.

reestablishment of their local governments, has been followed, and the protection of the United States has been promised to them.”¹²⁵

Root’s report also noted the preliminary advancements toward orderly civil government that poked through an otherwise lurid military landscape. In jurisprudence, “courts have been organized and the most learned and competent native lawyers have been appointed to preside over them.” A system of education was introduced to the islands. “It is believed that in the city of Manila, a greater number of good schools...exist today than at any previous time in the history of the city.”¹²⁶ Root was already thinking to the reduction of America’s military presence and highlighted the value of public works. Roads and trains would “lessen the number of posts and consequently the number of troops necessary.” Root never averred from his belief that “the benefits of our control and the sincerity of our professions of good intention...will naturally follow the benefits of good civil government,”¹²⁷ and hence, even through the worst days of guerilla warfare, his mind turned to civic planning.

Only in 1900 could Root begin to truly set the trappings for Filipino self-government. Root left the task of military clean up to Generals Otis and Arthur MacArthur and pieced together a set of nascent constitutional principles premised on ordered liberty. Root first sought to establish common judicial rights and practice throughout the islands, discarding the unworkable Spanish model. “The Spanish criminal procedure in the islands had been exceedingly oppressive and regardless of personal rights, and native representatives in the new courts were very desirous to introduce as speedily as possible the privileges accorded by the laws

¹²⁵ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 238.

¹²⁶ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 234.

¹²⁷ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 239.

of the United States to its citizens.”¹²⁸ With the help of interim Filipino attorney-general Don Florentino Torres, Root prepared a code of criminal procedure on April 23 that “for the first time affords real protection to the personal rights of persons charged with crime in the Philippine Islands.”¹²⁹

Beyond judicial procedure, Root laid a framework for municipal government. National self-government would be a long-term project, far more difficult to concretize than in the Caribbean islands. Root thus sought to build self-government on a local basis, creating small bastions of ordered liberty that would educate a civic body capable of commandeering a larger national government. Employing Filipino insight, Root issued a March 29 report on his legislative plan. “For the first time the Philippine people are to exercise the right of suffrage in the election of municipal officers...With the new municipalities a really autonomous and decentralized municipal government will be established in the towns.”¹³⁰ Root hoped to train the Filipinos with a model for municipal government that made for autonomous local government with only nominal oversight. “The statute...places in the hands of the municipal practically the entire administration of the ordinary affairs of government, reserving to the central authority only such power of supervision and intervention as might be necessary to require the powers vested in the municipal officers to be exercised with loyalty and good faith.”¹³¹

Root conferred to William Howard Taft’s Second Philippine Commission the bigger task of directing order on the composite archipelago. Root’s instructions to the commission provide the clearest insight into his blueprint for Filipino self-government. He first asked the Commission to prioritize municipal government, transferring his own report on that matter

¹²⁸ Root, “The Beginnings of the Civil Government: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1900,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 241.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 242.

¹³¹ Ibid.

verbatim to the instructions.¹³² The Commission's second priority was the organization of "larger administrative divisions, corresponding to counties, departments, or provinces, in which the common interests of many or several municipalities falling within the same tribal lines...may best be subserved by a common administration."¹³³ In communicating as much, Root ensured that provincial government would not join disparate nationalities or Filipinos with starkly divergent understandings of republican administration. The Commission began directing affairs for the collective archipelago in September and nation built from the top-down. Burdensome Spanish taxes were abolished; a quarantine law was enforced; customs and insular revenues were increased; and standardized public education was funded throughout the islands.¹³⁴

Root implored the Commission to follow an important standard: that whenever order was assured, civil government must constitute self-government by native Filipinos. "Wherever officers of more extended jurisdiction are to be selected in any way, natives of the islands are to be preferred."¹³⁵ The Commission would only step in where this self-governing capacity was lacking, and only with the intent of buttressing a foundation for Filipino national government. Conservative revolution again played into Root's urging of local accommodation. He asked that the measures "conform to their customs, their habits, and even their prejudices...consistent with the accomplishment of the indispensable requisites of just and effective government."¹³⁶ Root even deferred to the eccentric customs of isolated tribes, referencing America's domestic policy

¹³² Elihu Root, "Instructions to the Philippine Commission: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War of 1900," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 288. "The natives of the islands, both in the cities and in the rural communities, shall be afforded the opportunity to manage their own local affairs to the fullest extent of which they are capable, and subject to the least degree of supervision and control...consistent with the maintenance of law, order, and loyalty."

¹³³ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 288-289.

¹³⁴ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 242-244.

¹³⁵ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 291.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

of accommodating Native Americans.¹³⁷ He concluded by emphasizing that America had intervened for Filipino interests and not American interests. “The commission should bear in mind that the government which they are establishing is designed...for the happiness, peace, and prosperity of the people of the Philippine Islands.”¹³⁸

Root read verbatim from these instructions in his October 1900 address to the people of Canton, Ohio. He challenged the Congressional Democrats then pointing to Philippine annexation as proof-positive evidence of McKinley’s imperial intentions. Root contended that the commission’s structured path to self-government indicated otherwise. “Is that imperialism? Will giving that kind of government to these poor people who have suffered so long under Spanish tyranny degrade the character of this Republic? No.”¹³⁹ America was only imposing order to enable the Philippines to maintain its affairs without untoward intervention by any Old World power. Should Root’s plans come to fruition, the U.S. would no longer require the commission’s services: the less the external imposition of order, and the more devolved that liberty was, the better. With enough time and tutelage, the Philippines would master their own affairs.

Root’s Canton speech neglected the lurid military underbelly residing beneath this otherwise optimistic picture of a Philippines en route to self-government. MacArthur had determined to lay down his military arm hard in guerilla fighting. Whereas trust between islanders and Americans progressively grew in civil government, animosity escalated with the

¹³⁷ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 293. “In dealing with the uncivilized tribes...the commission should adopt the same course followed by Congress in permitting the tribes of our North American Indians to maintain their tribal organization and government, under which many of these tribes are now living in peace and contentment, surrounded by a civilization to which they are unable or unwilling to conform.”

¹³⁸ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 194.

¹³⁹ Elihu Root, “The United States and the Philippines in 1900,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 50.

growing casualties of war. Root deferred to his generals, and in particular MacArthur, who insisted on tightening the reins on the Filipinos. Root determined to, “apply more rigidly to the residents of the archipelago the laws of war touching the government of occupied places.”¹⁴⁰ He ordered the deportation of “sympathizers and agitators.” Root even mandated that Filipinos perform an oath of loyalty.¹⁴¹ This tightening vice of American military order undermined Root’s self-governing ideal. For countless Filipinos, the American military appeared nothing more than imperial Spain’s replacement.

Various reports commissioned by the 57th Congress revealed a mounting distrust among the islanders then straining beneath American military order. One February 27, 1901 report transmitted countless petitions against American rule in Cebu Island. For objecting to the oath of allegiance, residents of Danno province “were thrown into prison and were obliged to work in an objectionable and mortifying way.”¹⁴² The oath frustrated Filipinos who desired to know their ultimate constitutional relation to the United States. Citizens of the town of Pilar wrote, “We are forced to take the oath of allegiance, which is most repulsive, not knowing the form of government to be granted to them by Congress.” The town desired “a suspension of the hostilities and of a reestablishment of peace, order, and tranquility, but by honorable means.”¹⁴³ Through the summer of 1900, protest constitutions emerged in villages spanning the whole

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ The oath of allegiance was sworn by Filipinos of all stripes: from suspect citizens, to former insurgents, to even the most trusted candidates for municipal office. “I do solemnly swear...that I recognize and accept the supreme authority of the United States of America and will maintain true faith and allegiance thereto; that I will obey the laws, legal orders, and decrees promulgated by its duly constituted authorities; that I impose upon myself this obligation voluntarily without mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will recall and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am to enter. So help me God.” House Committee on Insular Affairs, *Letter from Elihu Root, Secretary of War, transmitting a copy of the general order made by the military governor of the Philippine Islands providing for a system of municipal government*, 56 Cong., 1st sess, vol. 100, May 5, 1900, 6, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no 3977.

¹⁴² Sen. Richard Franklin Pettigrew (S.D.), trans., *Translation of the Proceedings of the Municipal Government of the Island of Cebu, Philippine Islands, Protesting Against the Establishment of American Civil Governance therein*, 56 Cong., 2d sess., S. Doc. 234, February 27, 1901, 1, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no. 4043.

¹⁴³ Pettigrew, *Proceedings of the Municipal Government of the Island of Cebu*, 4-5.

archipelago, with 25 mentioned in this one report alone. Each repudiated the oath and demanded greater governing responsibility.¹⁴⁴ Dissent from the War Department's tightened strictures certainly extended beyond Aguinaldo's Tagalogs.

American public relations were also weak in the Philippines. Spanish propaganda maligned American intentions, as the native Ramon Reyes Lala described in his February 1901 testimony before the War Department's Division of Insular Affairs.

Dread...was intensified against the Americans in the accounts given the natives by the Spanish. The native in the interior, when approached by the American soldier, fell down upon his knees and begged for mercy, expecting to be at once put to death...When sick they could not be induced to take medicine from the hands of the American soldier until convinced that the surgeon did not mean to poison them...When our soldiers would approach a native mother with her children she would gather them around her, the whole group fall down trembling and close their eyes that they might meet death without seeing their supposed murderers.¹⁴⁵

The American journalist T.W. Noyes corroborated many of the rumors in a June 1900 piece published in Washington's *Evening Star*. "One of the hardest factors to overcome in the real pacification of the Filipinos, which is to follow the war, is their resentment of contemptuous treatment by many of our soldiers, who adopting the term from English residents in Manila, have systematically spoken of the Filipinos and treated them as 'niggers.'"¹⁴⁶ This scene especially contrasted with America's humanitarian task forces contemporaneously endearing themselves to the Cuban people.

The war's atrocities and deaths only exacerbated Philippine antagonisms in those first fraught years as an American colony. MacArthur elaborated on his new hard line policy in a

¹⁴⁴ The list of towns included all of Tudela, San Francisco, Balambán, Alcántara, Ronda, Catmón, Barili, Sogod, Radián, Moalboal, Santa Rosa, Borbón, Mandaue, Liloan, Tabogón, Buburan, Madrdejos, Talísay, El Pardo, Minglanilla, San Nicolás, and San Fernando.

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Department of War, *Letter from Elihu Root, Secretary of War, transmitting an article compiled in the Division of Insular Affairs of the War Department*, 56 Cong. 2d sess., February 15, 1901, 17, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection no: 4043.

¹⁴⁶ Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, *Conditions in the Philippines*, correspondence of Theodore W. Noyes, 56th Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 432, June 4, 1900, 16, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no. 3878.

December 1900 report to Root. In the armed struggle, “frequent violations of important provisions of the laws of war have recently manifested themselves, rendering it imperative...that exemplary punishments attach to the infringement thereof.”¹⁴⁷ While the archipelago moved toward civil government, it remained “necessarily under the rigid restraints of martial law.”¹⁴⁸ MacArthur cynically denounced the softness that had for too long characterized U.S. attempts to bring order to the Philippines. “The fact that such men have not heretofore been held responsible for their actions is simply an evidence of the solicitude of the United States to avoid all appearance of harshness in pacifying the islands.”¹⁴⁹ MacArthur’s hard line brought about Aguinaldo’s capture on March 23, 1901. But the annual toll would prove staggering for Filipinos and Americans alike. At the war’s peak, 70,000 U.S. soldiers were involved, and by the time of Root’s 1901 report, at least 200,000 natives had been killed.¹⁵⁰ The U.S. suffered 4,234 casualties at a \$600 million expense.¹⁵¹

Arthur MacArthur merits a moment of deeper consideration in the narrative of Philippine self-government. His punitive efforts to impose order did more to foster an impression of American imperialism in Filipino minds than any comparable policy. However, this did not make MacArthur an imperial agent. Although his tactics to impose order may have done more harm than good to the cause of Filipino self-government, MacArthur was nonetheless a committed missionary of ordered liberty.

¹⁴⁷ Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Letter from Secretary of War transmitting response to resolution of the Senate, February 8, 1901, a copy of Major General MacArthur's Proclamation outlining a more rigid policy, 56th Cong., 2d sess., February 13, 1901*, 2, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no. 4042.

¹⁴⁸ Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *General MacArthur's Proclamation*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *General MacArthur's proclamation*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁰ Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines*, 12.

¹⁵¹ Karnow, 186.

General MacArthur reflected in a January 1902 Senate testimony on American intentions in the Philippines. Like Root, MacArthur described America's international mission as an outgrowth of its own constitution and government. He noted that the distinctly American idea, "our conception of right, justice, freedom, and personal liberty...self-government regulated by law," needed translation into a new American foreign policy. "We must regard ourselves simply as the custodians of imperishable ideas held in trust for the general benefit of mankind...we had attained a moral and intellectual height from which we were bound to proclaim to all as the occasion arose the true message of humanity as embodied in the principles of our own institutions."¹⁵² The U.S. had embarked on a different policy from the imperial powers of the Old World. "The contrasting idea with our occupation is this: In planting our ideas we plant something that cannot be destroyed. To my mind the archipelago is a fertile soil upon which to plant republicanism. Once planted it can never be eradicated...and therefrom will radiate an influence the appreciation of which it is hard to estimate."¹⁵³

Although circumstances were not conducive to self-government, MacArthur echoed Root's confidence in the American idea's transferability. "It is the prerogative of self-government that it adapts itself to every circumstance which can arise. Its institutions, although sometimes defective, are always appropriate and strong, for they exactly represent the living conditions of human life."¹⁵⁴ MacArthur also elaborated on the need for a lasting U.S. presence in the Philippines, given the geostrategic great power game that would play out in the event of a rushed American departure. "Many nations are looking...with longing eyes. The islands in case

¹⁵² "Testimony of Arthur MacArthur" in *American Imperialism and the Philippine Insurrection: Testimony Taken from Hearings on Affairs in the Philippine Islands before the Seante Committee on the Philippines – 1902*, ed. Henry F. Graff (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 137.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Graff, 138.

of our withdrawal would unquestionably become the theater of gigantic political and warlike operations.”¹⁵⁵

MacArthur believed that, in converting the archipelago to the doctrine of ordered liberty, countless other nations would follow. For MacArthur, this implication took precedence before the economic benefits of a Far Eastern open door.¹⁵⁶ In associating with the American “great Republic,” the Philippines had become, “a chosen people to carry not only American commerce but also republican institutions and the principles of personal liberty throughout Asia.”¹⁵⁷ MacArthur’s vision touched Root’s own: Future leaders of a republican Philippines would themselves become missionaries of ordered liberty, the new drivers of a cascading republican evangelism initiated by an American great power.

As casualties subsided into the summer months of 1901, Root recommended that William Howard Taft, president of the Second Philippine Commission, be appointed civil governor of the islands. Taft had opposed MacArthur’s tactics. A self-described anti-imperialist, he watched as casualties built with a deep internal compunction. Root had reserved for MacArthur as commander of the military division the ability to exercise authority in areas where the insurrection persisted.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, with Taft carrying jurisdiction for 70% of the population, considerable steps were taken toward Philippine self-government.¹⁵⁹ Taft commenced an assiduous project of nation building. He oversaw the establishment of a regular police force, the creation of a department of public instruction that administered schools in every pueblo, and the

¹⁵⁵ Graff, 141.

¹⁵⁶ Graff, 137. “Although the idea of developing our material interests in the East is indescribably attractive to the speculative investigator, the considerations which arise from the psychological inquiry are vastly more interesting and instructive, as far as I am personally concerned.”

¹⁵⁷ Graff, 136.

¹⁵⁸ Elihu Root, “The Civil Government of the Philippines: Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1901,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 262.

¹⁵⁹ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 264-265.

initial purchase and redistribution of lands from religious orders that had previously impeded private land claims.¹⁶⁰

Whereas MacArthur was inclined to a hard imposition of order, Taft hoped to earn the trust of and empower the Filipinos. He elaborated on his brand of soft diplomacy in a February 25, 1902 hearing before the House Committee on Insular Affairs. “We were always requested to, and always did, attend banquets in the evening and subsequently a baile or dance...The Commission regarded these entertainments, however, as considerably more than a mere social importance. We were anxious to inspire confidence and to show the people that we had confidence in their good intentions.”¹⁶¹ Where MacArthur hammered order into dissident Filipinos, Taft used liberty as an incentive to inspire republican potential. With Filipinos participating in autonomous municipal governments and serving in provincial offices, “the dual form of government has put the civil government more or less in contrast with the military army, and has produced that feeling of welcome toward the civil arm.”¹⁶² Between MacArthur and Taft, the first two acts of Root’s three-part play in self-government – stability on the ground and republican government actuated on a local basis – played out simultaneously in the Philippines through the fall of 1901.

Although they were tasked with managing different extremes of Root’s American idea, like MacArthur, Taft grasped its deeper implications for a new American foreign policy. The issue at hand did not concern the ultimate constitutional relation between the U.S. and the Philippines. Taft bristled at the anti-imperialists’ extended questioning on this point. “With reference to the question whether the territorial form of government...shall be a preparation for

¹⁶⁰ Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 263-267.

¹⁶¹ House Committee on Insular Affairs, *Committee Reports, Hearings, and Acts of Congress Corresponding Thereto*, ed. R.B. Horton, 57th Cong., 1st, 2d sess, 1901-1903, 84, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/>.

¹⁶² House Committee on Insular Affairs, *Committee Reports, Hearings, And Acts of Congress Corresponding Thereto*, 79.

statehood, or a preparation for independence ultimately, or a preparation for a quasi independence...I do not think it is now the time to make a definite declaration...it will take a generation, probably longer, to found a stable and strictly popular government in those islands.”¹⁶³ America’s priority was to see ordered liberty manifested in Filipino self-government, under the continued oversight of an American benefactor. “The guidance and control of the American element in that government must continue...until practice and example under the government now to be formed shall develop in those people a knowledge of what self-government is, and a self-restraint, without which self-government is impossible.”¹⁶⁴ Immediate independence, which the anti-imperialists of the Democratic Party advocated, would only “consign the 90 percent of uneducated people largely to the same condition that they occupied under Spanish rule.”¹⁶⁵

For Taft, turning the Philippines loose could result in military dictatorship, anarchy, or colonial subjection to an illiberal power like Spain. Only American sponsorship of self-government and patience on the constitutional question could make for a credible international mission. It was remarkable that Elihu Root had commissioned men of starkly opposing outlooks, yet played to their complementary strengths, in advancing the common cause of ordered liberty.

While Taft and MacArthur administered ordered liberty, Root looked to ensure America’s lasting right to preserve order in the Philippines. The vehicle for this was the March 2, 1901 “Spooner Amendment.” The amendment, which Root had initially drafted, provided that, “All military, civil and judicial powers necessary to govern the Philippine Islands...shall be

¹⁶³ House Committee on Insular Affairs, *Committee Reports, Hearings, And Acts of Congress Corresponding Thereto*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ House Committee on Insular Affairs, *Committee Reports, Hearings, And Acts of Congress Corresponding Thereto*, 333.

exercised in such manner as the President of the United States shall direct for the establishment of civil government and for maintaining and protecting the inhabitants of said islands.”¹⁶⁶

Roosevelt now held an extended lease to moderate affairs above the griping Congressional anti-imperialists.

Theodore Roosevelt had himself become a subscriber to Root’s American idea. The president’s annual message of December 3, 1901 revealed his commitment to Filipino self-government. “Our earnest effort is to help these people upward along the stony and difficult path that leads to self-government. We hope to make our administration of the islands honorable to our Nation by making it of the highest benefit to the Filipinos themselves.”¹⁶⁷ Although America’s sustained commitment on the islands would require time and patience, with occasionally profound military blunders, the long view looked far brighter than the disordered alternatives. “What has taken us thirty generations to achieve, we cannot expect to see another race accomplish out of hands...In dealing with the Philippine people we must show both patience and strength, forbearance and steadfast resolution.”¹⁶⁸ Roosevelt distinguished U.S. sponsorship of self-government from Old World imperialism. “Our aim is high. We do not desire to do for the islanders merely what has elsewhere been done for tropic peoples by even the best foreign governments. We hope to do for them what has never been done for any people of the tropics – to make them fit for self-government after the fashion of the really free nations.”¹⁶⁹

Yes, the United States had annexed the Philippines per the terms of the Treaty of Paris. True, liberal tariff rates and Far Eastern markets invigorated a faltering American economy. And

¹⁶⁶ Elihu Root, “Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1902: The ‘Spooner Amendment,’” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 295.

¹⁶⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, “First Annual Message to Congress,” December 3, 1901, in *The American Presidency Project*, ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woodley, XXXII, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29542>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

indeed, the constitutional relation of the archipelago to the United States remained ambiguous. All of these considerations were peripheral to a more central point. By the time a formal constitution was drafted and approved for the Philippines in June 1902, the United States had created self-government, consummated with the complete termination of military rule on the archipelago.

The project remained far from complete, and the toll of guerilla warfare was unquestionable. Yet it would be disingenuous to understate the transformation that civic life had undergone in just three years of American direction. The 1902 constitution outlined individual liberties premised on the American Bill of Rights. It created a popular legislature, the Philippine assembly, to work in conjunction with the American-directed Philippine Commission. It halted the landlord-tenant system that had traditionally tied laborers to friars' lands.¹⁷⁰ It was no wonder that Democratic anti-imperialists then proclaiming the Philippines a black scar on the American Constitution so flustered Root. Root condemned them in a September 24, 1902 address in Peoria, Illinois.

The Democrats declared that we had no right to succeed because our assertion of sovereignty was a violation of the Declaration of Independence, which declares that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed...(That maxim's) unqualified application without regard to the rule and progress of humanity and ordered liberty among men, is contrary to the whole course of American history.¹⁷¹

Ordered liberty took precedence before autonomous independence. What had occurred in the Philippines was a natural outgrowth of America's domestic governmental tradition.

Elihu Root's experiment in ordered liberty was succeeding and would persist beyond his term. "Filipinization" further diminished America's commitment and put the Filipinos in charge

¹⁷⁰ Representative Henry Allen Cooper of Wisconsin, speaking to the Committee on Insular Affairs on "Civil Government for the Philippine Islands," 57th Cong., 1st sess., June 19, 1902, Lexis Nexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection: no. 4407.

¹⁷¹ Elihu Root, "American Policies in the Philippines in 1902: Address of the Secretary of War at Peoria, Illinois," in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 87-88.

of their own affairs for three decades of U.S. oversight. In 1935, true to the promises of Root, Taft, MacArthur, and Roosevelt, the United States granted the Philippines internal autonomy under a commonwealth government, with independence to follow ten years later.¹⁷²

Conclusion

In his cornerstone history *First Great Triumph*, Warren Zimmerman contends that America's imperial moment during and in the immediate wake of the Spanish-American War made possible an American century. He identifies his book as "a book about imperialism,"¹⁷³ and concludes by noting, "The imperial initiation at the end of the nineteenth-century had prepared Americans for the great power role that, in the twentieth-century, only they could play."¹⁷⁴ Zimmerman's text, despite its balanced appraisal of what he sees as a mix of "darkness and light" in America's conduct on Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, perhaps best represents the pitfalls of the present landscape of Spanish-American War historiography. His work is premised on "five Americans who made their country a great power." What results is a blender history that obfuscates Elihu Root, an actor who has received astonishingly little recognition for his exceptional role in shaping a new American diplomacy.

Elihu Root did not believe that an imperial moment was necessary to make the U.S. a great power. Since independence, the distinct idea of American government – the idea of ordered liberty – had reaped providential successes for the United States. That idea in practice took the form of a sliding scale between local autonomy and collective order. With the stable conduct of local self-government, there was no need for Washington's central order to do anything more than administer government at its natural course. Yet at critical existential moments, the

¹⁷² Karnow, 15.

¹⁷³ Zimmerman, 13.

¹⁷⁴ Zimmerman, 482.

American constitution provided for a just intervention from the center: collecting a national debt, affirming the Louisiana Purchase, and crushing Confederate rebels represented but a few such moments. Root figured that American foreign policy at the turn of the twentieth-century should be characterized not by imperial expansionism, but by *international Americanism*: sponsoring self-governing nations with a flexible use of American order to achieve a lasting liberty for these peoples, while ensuring America's right to intervene in sister republics when tremors shook the family of nations.

Not all of the projects were success stories in the long term. Ironically, Cuba, the only island to truly unite America behind the cause of humanitarian intervention, would fall decades later under the most oppressive regime of any of the islands that Root administered. There are forces in international politics that can undermine even the most virtuous of diplomatic models; Root would have readily conceded that his idea was not infallible.

Having completed the narrative of Root's attempts to foster self-government in the Spanish islands, two conclusions seem salient. First, at its inception, self-government in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines was not the product of an "imperial America." Imperialism is characterized by a master nation's suppression of a people willing and capable of self-government. Root's policy at times verged on an excessively punitive order, as it did in the Philippines. Yet Root and his colleagues always maintained an overriding desire to slacken the reins of American order once the local situation stabilized. Root's tariff policies were more geared to shoring up insular economic stability than padding the coffers of an economic empire. America's armies functioned more as humanitarian task forces than militant soldiers. Although American generals countered guerilla warfare in the Philippines with excessive force, this was

not an imperial tactic. It was instead the unfortunate byproduct of an altruistic desire to crush an illiberal force like Aguinaldo, just as Lincoln had done the American Confederacy.

Second, Elihu Root's new American diplomacy premised on ordered liberty would carry resonances through the duration of the twentieth-century. In February 1904, as he prepared to step down from the War Department, Root argued that his work on the islands should serve as a lasting precedent for American foreign relations. In his February 3 "Tribute to Theodore Roosevelt," Root reflected, "The problems that seemed to hang over us at the close of the war with Spain have gone far towards solution. We, of America, have discovered that we, too, possess the supreme governing capacity, capacity not merely to govern ourselves at home, but that great power that in all ages has made the difference between the great and the small nations, the capacity to govern men wherever they were found."¹⁷⁵ With provisions like the Platt and Spooner Amendments, and later decrees like Roosevelt's corollary, the U.S. had secured its place at the center of world order. On a nation-by-nation basis, the American army had become "teachers of the art of self-government; and in Porto Rico and Cuba and the Philippines they have proved themselves by the score...to be simply American citizens."¹⁷⁶

The impassioned Root desired ordered liberty to become the cornerstone of a twentieth-century international Americanism. The Spanish-American War had defined America's mission abroad as, singularly, "the great onward march of American institutions."¹⁷⁷ In a February 22 address in Chicago on "The Preservation of American Ideals," Root outlined the implications of America's new international presence. "Going through our period of isolation, passing beyond the time of selfishness where we were making our government for ourselves and thinking only of

¹⁷⁵ Elihu Root, "A Tribute to Theodore Roosevelt: Address at a Banquet in Honor of the Secretary of War, Union League Club, New York," in *Miscellaneous Addresses*, ed. Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 220.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Root, *Miscellaneous Addresses*, 223.

our own interests, there is opening before us the vista of missionary life.”¹⁷⁸ He commenced a rhetorical crescendo:

If we believe what we say; if we believe that the free institutions under which we live are adapted to lift up the masses of mankind out of the hard and degraded conditions under which they have lived in all human history; if we believe that the liberty and justice that prevail under this flag of ours are competent to bless mankind and bring in a day of loftier and happier life for all the world, there opens before us now the opportunity to testify to our belief.¹⁷⁹

Can it be denied that Root’s tenure at the War Department made for a lasting influence on American diplomacy? The idea of ordered liberty has served as the most salient force behind more than a century of American international relations: from American intervention in the First World War, through U.S. attempts to build self-government in Japan and Germany following the Second World War, and in the past decade, to America’s sponsorship of ordered liberty on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the conclusion of Root’s tour as Secretary of War, what had been an ambiguous understanding of America’s role abroad was now clarified. America’s military mission was no longer relegated to a mere defense of borders, but now included the international sponsorship of ordered self-government, with the soul of America’s constitution tied to the nations it had sponsored. Speaking once more in Canton, Ohio in January 1903, Elihu Root affirmed the new role that America’s military would serve in the world:

They embody and act upon the traditions of the farewell address, the traditions of Grant’s dying message to his countrymen, ‘Let us have peace.’ They are an engine not of war for war’s sake, but of peace, and war for the sake of peace...They are missionaries of ordered liberty, and wherever they go ordered liberty follows. ‘By their fruits, ye shall know them.’¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Elihu Root, “The Preservation of American Ideals: Address at a Dinner of the Union League Club, Chicago, Illinois, in Commemoration of the Birthday of Washington,” in *Miscellaneous Addresses*, 264.

¹⁷⁹ Root, *Miscellaneous Addresses*, 265.

¹⁸⁰ Elihu Root, “The Character and Office of the American Army: An Address at a Banquet at Canton, Ohio in Honor of the Birthday of the late President McKinley,” in *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*, 19.
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Bibliographical Essay

When placed among the wide expanse of Spanish-American War histories, this essay's point of departure may be considered unique. I began this project intending to discern a moment between the conclusion of the American Civil War and America's decision to intervene in the First World War, when American diplomacy first witnessed the emergence of a foreign policy in some way premised on national self-determination. Erez Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2007) provided the necessary impetus for this investigation. Manela argues that through the course of a six-month window from the fall of 1918 to the spring of 1919, Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" appeal for self-determination became a worldwide phenomenon. Surely, I reasoned, this "Wilsonian moment" had not sprung from nowhere; perhaps there existed an earlier precedent for self-determination in American foreign policy, possibly tied to Confederate romanticism (Wilson was himself a proud son of Dixie).

In setting about this research question, I consulted several survey histories of modern American diplomacy that begin with the Civil War's resolution at Appomattox. Among the most illuminating were Robert H. Wiebe's *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (1967), Charles S. Campbell's *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900* (1976), and Jackson Lears's *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (2009). It became increasingly clear with each perusal that the Spanish-American War might provide the context for such a "pre-Wilsonian moment." Cuba seemed an especially salient influence for an American foreign policy premised in some way on anti-colonial self-determination. For the first time in its history, a definitive American great power had commissioned a war for another

nation's independence against the tyranny of imperial misrule. At face value, this sounded quite similar to the appeal that Wilson had made in 1918.

However, American diplomacy was not so well defined during and in the immediate wake of the Spanish-American War. True, the United States had entered the conflict on humanitarian grounds and succeeded in liberating Cuba from imperial Spain. Yet there was a key difference between 1918 and 1898: in 1918, President Wilson appealed to national self-determination as an attempt to derive some sort of meaning from the otherwise meaningless devastation wrought in the First World War; in 1898, appeals for Cuban independence were spurred on by an excited spectrum of motives and agendas, with no agenda emerging the clear victor in driving a new American diplomacy abroad.

I still persisted with my original hunch that the nest egg of modern American self-determinationist sentiment lay in the Spanish-American War. The anti-imperialists captivated my attention. Upon completing E. Berkeley Tompkins's excellent survey history, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (1970), which contains a whole chapter devoted to "Cuba Libre," and Robert L. Beisner's exploration of the lead cast of characters behind the movement, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (1968), I raced to Yale's Sterling Memorial Library to grab the published letters of Mark Twain, the speeches of William Graham Sumner, and the texts of Stanford President David Jordan Starr. Perhaps, I thought, these dissidents may have lost the short-term fight against American empire, yet won the long-term struggle for the soul of American foreign policy with the Wilsonian moment in 1918. I even sketched a rough research itinerary that would have had me visiting several of the same archives that Beisner had explored.

Yet, after a short time, my anti-imperialist kick began to seem disingenuous to my lofty research question. Although Woodrow Wilson referenced the Spanish-American War in his *History of the American People* (1901), he never once invoked the anti-imperialists. Wilson's contemporary writings painted the Spanish-American War as a watershed in American foreign policy, but not on the basis of self-determination. He spoke more in general terms about the rise of a new American great power seated for the first time at the center of world order – more like President Theodore Roosevelt than anti-imperialists like Sumner. My attempt to decipher some sort of link between the Spanish-American War and Wilsonian self-determination thus reached an impasse. However, in its place emerged new and invigorating research questions. If not self-determination, what did the Spanish-American War *mean*? Was it simply victory that made America a preeminent force on the international stage, or was there perhaps a deeper theoretical significance to the conflict as it concerned American diplomacy? Had the U.S. experimented with imperialism in a way comparable to the powers of the Old World, or was there something distinct to America's colonization of the Spanish islands?

My exploration of the relevant historiography revealed an overwhelmingly consistent opinion: that America's "imperial moment" during and after the conflict had made the U.S. a force to be reckoned with on the international stage. This argument is crafted by histories that approach the conflict through many diverse lenses. H. Wayne Morgan's *America's Road to Empire: The War with Spain and Overseas Expansion* (1965) is a standard bearer among the histories that rattle off the pivotal moments of the military narrative that led from Cuban pacification, to Philippine annexation, and ultimately, to America's "imperial possession" of several overseas colonies. Such histories, including Morgan's own, often confine U.S. sponsorship of self-government on the islands to an "Epilogue" following what they deem to be

the eminently more significant events of 1898. Other histories I would cast into this first category are Frank Freidel's illustrative *The Splendid Little War* (1958) Brian P. Damiani's *Advocates of Empire: William McKinley, the Senate and American Expansionism, 1898-1899* (1987) and John A. Corry's *1898: Prelude to a Century* (1998).

A second group of histories discusses America's "imperial moment" as a constructivist byproduct of contemporaneous American economic considerations and intellectual currents on the U.S. homefront. Both Walter LaFeber's *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (1963) and William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy, 1750-1955* (1959) highlight American economic and business interests as the inspiration for U.S. century-end advances into the Caribbean. Richard Hofstadter's essay "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines" (1971) shifts the focus from economic interests abroad to economic challenges at home. He discusses what he terms "the psychic crisis of the 1890s" that resulted from economic depression in 1893 and the free silver Populist agitation of 1896. Taken in concert with his noteworthy *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (1949), Hofstadter contends that American unsettlement in the 1890s made for an Anglo-Saxon jingoism that sought to extend American Manifest Destiny beyond the limits posed by coastal borders.

Contrasting these histories of the Spanish-American War that emphasize economics are those that confer more significance to nationalism and ideology. Julius W. Pratt's *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands* (1936) serves as the standard bearer of this historical line. Pratt's examination of financial journals and newspapers leads him to conclude that businessmen were negative to war and did everything to prevent it. The war in 1898, according to Pratt, was instead driven by idealistic and humanitarian arguments. We see Pratt's influence in histories that view the Spanish-American War as the genesis of an American

mission abroad. Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation* (2006) views American intervention in Cuba as a lasting humanitarian precedent for American great power diplomacy. Tony Smith's *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth-Century* (1994) describes the Philippines as America's first of many attempts at democratic nation building in a foreign land. Paul T. McCartney's *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (2006) discusses at length the parallels between American conduct in the Spanish-American War and the interventionist foreign policy of George W. Bush.

I was struck by how histories of such differing contentions and vantage points all accepted the idea of an "American imperialism" with hardly any debate. I thus determined to engage studies that deal more in theoretical considerations of American imperialism. Among the many noted in my bibliography, the text that most impacted my research was Göran Rystad's *Ambiguous Imperialism: American Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics at the Turn of the Century*. (1975) Rystad concludes that it is impossible to identify a single motivating force behind American territorial expansion from Manifest Destiny through American colonization after the Spanish-American War. He runs through a timeline of political theories pertaining to specific periods of American expansion: from early American "continentalism," to ideological "informalism," to the "hemispherism" that followed the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, to "globalism," or a conscious imperialism. Rystad's text was, for me, the most salient demonstration of the excessive tendency of American diplomatic historians to reduce U.S. foreign policy to rigid, sectioned off periods. Such a tendency has made for an unquestioned branding of the Spanish-American War as the primordial moment when an American great power tried her hand at imperialism for the first time. America's humanitarian conduct in Cuba, and McKinley's

retrospective consternation over the U.S. taking of the Philippines, seemed to indicate that the imperial question was not so simple.

In setting about a new research plan, I first determined to shift focus from 1898 to the fall of 1899. Spanish-American War historiography emphasizes 1898 to a fault. Reading through several of Secretary Russell A. Alger's reports, along with the addresses of William McKinley, revealed no concrete foreign policy, be it imperialism or otherwise. The U.S. had mostly flown by the seat of its pants, going along with what seemed the most pragmatic course available at the time and establishing vastly discrepant policies for each island suddenly taken on as a colony. This did not seem to me like the appropriate nexus for a thoughtful history of how the conflict may have shaped the future course of American diplomacy.

The turning point in my research came with my obtaining Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott's collected War Department reports of Secretary Elihu Root, *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States* (1916). I instantly knew that Root was the key to a more nuanced, theoretical treatment of the greater diplomatic resonances that carried from the Spanish-American War. Needed was not a reassessment of the war itself, but instead, American sponsorship of self-government on Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in the war's aftermath. What started out with one volume of war reports quickly snowballed into a much bigger project. I obtained Bacon and Scott's three supplemental volumes of Elihu Root's collected speeches and addresses. I discerned Root's vision for the islands – the first such vision to emerge amidst the wider tumult of the Spanish-American War – and saw how it carried down the hierarchy of the War Department to his generals and diplomats, most especially Leonard Wood in Cuba, George W. Davis in Puerto Rico, and William Howard Taft in the Philippines. American sponsorship of self-government would paint a *tabula rasa* over the quasi-imperial colonization that the U.S. had

undertaken before ratifying the April 11, 1899 Treaty of Paris. Root intended to quell this imperial notion once and for all and substitute in its place a true American diplomacy premised on the distinctly American idea of ordered liberty.