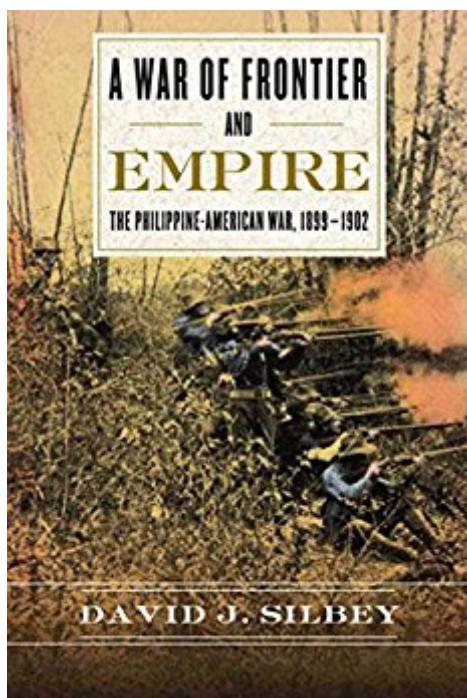


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A War Of Frontier And Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902



Synopsis

It has been termed an insurgency, a revolution, a guerrilla war, and a conventional war. As David J. Silbey demonstrates in this taut, compelling history, the 1899 Philippine-American War was in fact all of these. Played out over three distinct conflicts—“one fought between the Spanish and the allied United States and Filipino forces; one fought between the United States and the Philippine Army of Liberation; and one fought between occupying American troops and an insurgent alliance of often divided Filipinos—the war marked America’s first steps as a global power and produced a wealth of lessons learned and forgotten. In *A War of Frontier and Empire*, Silbey traces the rise and fall of President Emilio Aguinaldo, as Aguinaldo tries to liberate the Philippines from colonial rule only to fail, devastatingly, before a relentless American army. He tracks President McKinley’s decision to commit troops and fulfill a divinely inspired injunction to “uplift and civilize” despite the protests of many Americans. Most important, Silbey provides a clear lens to view the Philippines as, in the crucible of war, it transforms itself from a territory divided by race, ethnicity, and warring clans into a cohesive nation on the path to independence.

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Customer Reviews

Previously, historians have framed the American-Philippine War in the context of an insurgency. David Silbey, however, argues that even though "at the time of the conflict, the Philippine nation was barely formed," to label the war as an insurgency disregards the fact that "the two sides were both states substantially sovereign, using conventional armies, fighting conventional battles, with conventional lines and weapons" (xvi, 215). It was indeed a war of revolution and freedom from imperial rule from the Philippine perspective and a war that inaugurated the United States as a "Pacific power" under the auspices of "a new manifest destiny that saw the United States as too powerful to confine itself to one continent or hemisphere" (213, 215). Silbey's tome provides a brief military and political analysis of the American-Philippine War, arguing that the war itself can be separated into three separate conflicts: The Filipino struggle against Spanish rule, the formal struggle against the U.S. military and the ensuing guerrilla war. Moreover, Silbey argues that the U.S. was not as brutal in the conflict or as an imperial power as is often portrayed. The transition to Philippine independence following WWII was eased due to the relationships that formed with Filipino elites who "came to an accommodation with the Americans," and "in essence agreeing to integration rather than submission" (208). Filipinos, although still viewed as "inferior" in American eyes, were still held in higher esteem than other races. Overall, Silbey's book provides a solid introduction and overview of the war. In his first two chapters, Silbey lays out the relationship between the Philippines and their centuries old colonial masters, the Spanish, by the dawn of the twentieth century. He indicates the Spanish economic priority given to Manila, as well as the regional trade networks, while briefly discussing the role of the Catholic Church in the remaining islands. Furthermore, he details his "first conflict" in which Filipino forces unite, although loosely, under the leadership of the elitist Emilio Aguinaldo, throwing off Spanish control with the assistance of U.S. forces during the Spanish-American War. He also sets the stage for U.S. Pacific imperialism with the build-up of its naval forces (after the publishing of Mahan's groundbreaking book on naval power) and the "continuing sense of American exceptionalism" that demanded a "new frontier" (23-24). Silbey introduces, arguably, the first "imperial president," William McKinley and the push toward war with Spain due to perceived Spanish mistreatment of Cubans, yellow journalism and the explosion of the USS Maine in his second chapter. Silbey informs the reader of McKinley's main rationales for keeping the Philippines as well as the key reasons for why war finally broke out between Filipino and American military forces. Throughout his book, Silbey also provides decent descriptions of the ambitions, relative to their roles in the war, of major U.S. political and military leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, George Dewey, Arthur MacArthur, William McKinley and others. He also delves into the role of Emilio Aguinaldo and his struggles to unite the various

generals and elites who represent the Filipino army and insurectos. In the second conflict, Silbey accounts for the defeat of the Filipino army (the Army of Liberation), pointing out that it was predominantly a "patron army," whose leadership lacked unity. Key Filipino generals sought their own empowerment, including Aguinaldo who had at least one of his generals assassinated. Furthermore, following U.S. victory in 1899 (although this was in reality a perceived victory), the U.S. Senate, torn between imperialists and anti-imperialists, engaged in a heated debate over ratification of a treaty to annex the Philippines. Silbey indicates a critical transition in the conflict in his fifth chapter. Here, he describes the impact of the Filipino decision to transition to guerrilla warfare. By turning to guerrilla warfare, Silbey contends, the populace was convinced that the hope for an independent nation was lost. Moreover, generals and other Filipino elites increasingly acquiesced to the Americans, taking government roles in the new U.S. administration. The U.S. established Western law codes (a supreme court, for example) as well as taxation systems under the guidance of local elites. However, by 1900, guerrilla attacks on U.S. forces in the Philippines were increasing while political (Taft) and military (MacArthur) officials "butted heads." Silbey's account of the guerrilla warfare of this period is eerily similar to the Vietnam War. Although Silbey's account is militarily and politically focused, he does mention, in various chapters, issues of racial perceptions amongst American citizens and soldiers. Moreover, his comparisons between African-American and Filipino treatment by the U.S. is brief, but certainly appropriate. However, this played a larger role in the conflict than Silbey cares to admit. U.S. atrocities are barely mentioned. This book is, at best, a superficial analysis. I highly recommend Paul Kramer's *Blood in Government* rather than this work.

The links of history within the War are impressive. Its expression in strategic policies and the implementation qualified by the wisdom of combat give this a history with a soul. It is a shame that this war could have added lessons learned so as to have our soldiers of wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, not just Vietnam have the insights for dealing with the guilt and suffering of PTSD, while not being avoided, but better understood.

The interaction of military and political aspects of this forgotten war is well detailed. The difficulties surmounted by the American soldier in the Philippines were more than those of any other war. The American victory should be better remembered. There should have been more emphasis on the civic action side.

A well told story regarding a war little known much less understood. Well organized and detailed. A solid read for the historian and student of America's " little wars " You get a good overview as well as solid detail, warts and all.

A very descriptive narration of the somewhat controversial conflict. Listing the units and where they were based and the areas of operation did help pinpoint historical facts. The concepts and ideas and execution of planned policy shed light on how events developed as they did. Well written. >>

Very informative

I found this very readable and it also confirmed my thoughts of the American occupation of the Philippines.

I sent it to the Bacolod Public Library, Bacolod City, Negros. Philippines.

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