

The Spanish American War and Images of Imperialism

During the last years of the nineteenth century, the American government embarked upon a chain of events that led to the conquest of multiple foreign nations. America had employed imperialist policies against Native American lands for over two centuries by the turn of the century, but it had never attempted to colonize nations outside of the North American mainland. This changed on April 25, 1898, after President William McKinley, with the approval of the U.S. Congress, declared war on Spain.¹ A rebellion in Cuba, one of Spain's colonies, had brought war to the small island nation which lays a mere one hundred miles from the coast of Florida.

After an American ship, the *USS Maine*, sank in the Havana Harbor, killing over two hundred American servicemen, the American media quickly blamed Spain and subsequently called for war. The war lasted less than four months, ending with an American victory. Both countries then signed the Treaty of Paris on August 13, 1898, in which Spain ceded control of their former colonies Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States of America.² American newspapers then began to question whether or not the country should become an imperialist nation and colonize Spain's former lands, or if they should give the people their freedom. However, America's imperialist intentions were made relatively clear during the war, after the American government took advantage of the rampant nationalism that had taken hold of the public and successfully passed a resolution for the annexation of Hawaii.

During the contentious public debate about imperialism, an uprising in the Philippines began, which aimed to fight back against American colonization. The American government

¹ "U.S. Senate: H.R. 10086 Declaration Of War With Spain, 1898," April 25, 1898. Senate.Gov. Accessed Feb. 22, 2019. https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/image/HR10086_Spanish-American-War.htm.

² "Treaty of Paris," August 13, 1898. Loc.Gov. Accessed Feb 22,2019. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/treaty.html>.

then engaged in another war, this time against the Philippines. Effectively, the last years of the nineteenth century were filled with constant conflict, which inspired American media sources to engage in a consistent conversation about American imperialism and the country's role in the world. Within this public discourse, both pro and anti-imperialist American newspapers and political cartoonists appropriated the imagery of foreign cultures that had been popularized in the commercialized entertainment industry to argue for their respective positions. At the forefront of these arguments was a discussion of the various cultures' 'civilization:' a topic that had been the foundation of P.T. Barnum's racial displays decades before the outbreak of war in 1898. In this section, I will analyze pro and anti-imperialist political cartoons to shed light on how their messaging and imagery was built upon the work of P.T. Barnum and his public entertainments.

According to Miller, between 1896 and 1898, the American discourse regarding the conflict in Cuba shifted from supporting Cuba's liberation to calling for the conquest of all of Spain's former colonies.³ The catalyst for the Spanish American War was the Cuban War of Independence in which Cuban revolutionaries were fighting for freedom against their Spanish colonizers. The war began in 1895 when rebel groups around the country fighting against the Spanish, but American interest in the struggle increased in 1896 after the Spanish General Valeriano Weyler began instituting policies to combat the rebellion that ultimately led to the deaths of over four hundred thousand Cuban citizens.⁴ As atrocious as Weyler's "Reconcentration Policy" was, these events did not wholly capture the attention of the American public. This is not to say that the American press was ignorant of the situation-there were

³ Miller, 156.

⁴ General Weyler's "Reconcentration Policy," refers to military tactics by the Spanish general in which he declared that all Cuban citizens leave their homes and live in what were effectively concentration camps. He instituted this policy to combat guerilla warfare in the country, however, he did not plan for how to feed or house the hundreds of thousands of people that would be populating the camps. As a result, hundreds of thousands died from disease and hunger.

journalists covering the events in Cuba at the time- just that there was not an outpouring of support for military intervention directly following the mass deaths of Cuban citizens.

Although the atrocities in Cuba had not gained much national attention by 1896, two newspaper publishers in New York City, Joseph Pulitzer, and William Randolph Hearst, began to see the events as a perfect chance to sell more papers.⁵ By 1896, Pulitzer's *New York World* and Hearst's *New York Journal* began covering the events in Cuba extensively, often remarking on the brutal policies of the Spanish military. However, regarding the media's coverage of the Cuban conflict, media historians David and Judith Spencer state: "The fine line between fantasy and fact has more than once been blurred in the pursuit of material gain. Nowhere was this more evident than in the New York press wars that broke out in the closing years of the nineteenth century."⁶ Spencer goes on to discuss Hearst and Pulitzer, arguing that the two publishers engaged in a campaign of sensationalized news coverage of the events in Cuba as a way to increase profits.

Hearst and Pulitzer are unequivocally the most famous people regarding the sensationalized coverage of the events in Cuba, however, "they did not hold a monopoly on the sensationalistic conventions of the 'yellow' brand" states Miller.⁷ Hundreds of newspapers across the country began discussing the conflict, often presenting Cubans as patriotic people who were in search of freedom and liberty. For example, the *San Francisco Call* published an article

⁵ Miller, "Spectacle of Endangered Bodies," 19-55.

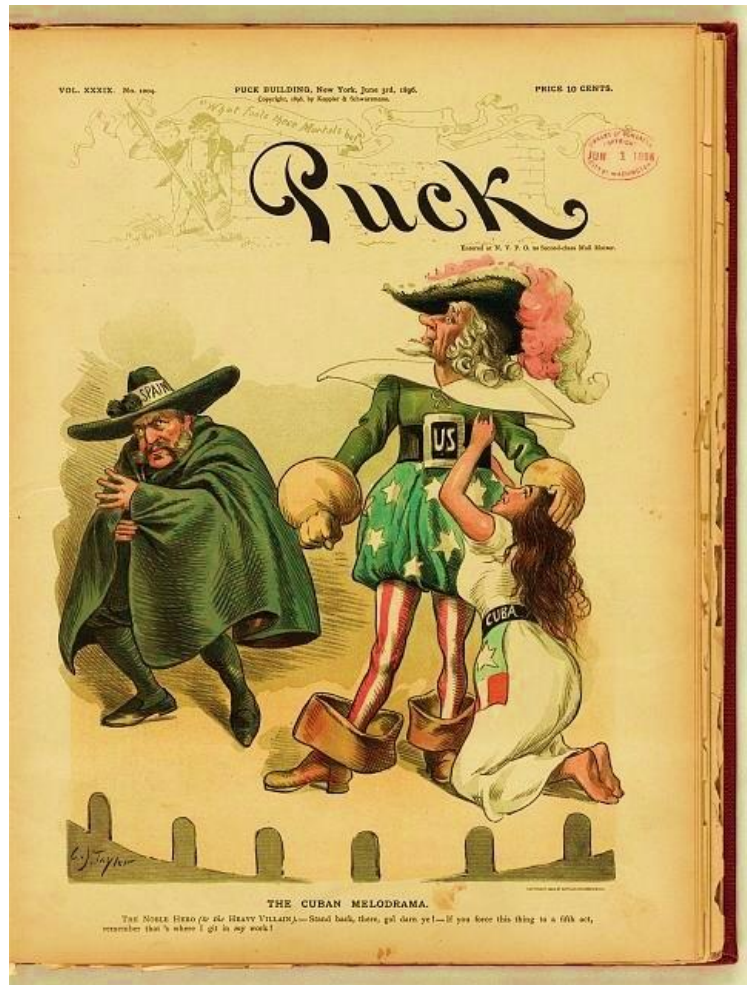
⁶ David Ralph Spencer, Judith Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 123: Hearst and Pulitzer are most often referred to as the founders of 'Yellow journalism.' The term 'yellow journalism' or 'yellow press' is an adage given to sensationalized newspapers who overstated facts in order to rile up the public and garner support for war. Yellow journalism was a latent function of technological advancement in printing, for during the late nineteenth century it became much cheaper to print a paper or magazine, leading to an explosion in the amount of periodicals that were available to the public. Some of the newly established penny papers would print sensational content in order to sell more papers. Hearst and Pulitzer both owned penny papers.

⁷ Miller, 11.

in 1897, entitled “Thousands Came at Freedom’s Call,” states that the American people need to realize their “duty in helping by their moral support and by material aid the patriots of Cuba to regain their freedom and their liberty.”⁸ Further, the author claimed that during the meeting, the band played the “Star Spangled Banner,” “America,” and “Marching Through Georgia” which “recall the names of patriots and the acts of heroes.”⁹ Many other newspapers covered the topic of “Cuba Libre;” all with patriotic language that exploited American nationalism through the invocation of language reminiscent to the American Revolution. In short, the American media painted the Cuban’s as similar to themselves in their fight against the English.

⁸ “Thousands came at freedoms call,” *The San Francisco Call*. March 21, 1897. 1.

⁹ Ibid



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Political cartoonists also covered the events in Cuba with a similar message as the newspapers: it was America's duty to help Cubans in their struggle for independence. According to Miller, newspapers, and cartoonists framed "U.S. actions as a riveting tale of dashing heroes, dark villains, and alluring damsels in distress."¹¹ This cartoon from *Puck* magazine, entitled "The Cuban Melodrama," perfectly exemplifies Miller's assessment. In the cartoon, Cuba is represented as a helpless woman who is being protected by Uncle Sam (America) from the sinister looking representation of Spain. "Cuba" is on her knees as if she is begging for

¹⁰ Charles Taylor Jay. "The Cuban Melodrama." Print. NYC: Keppler and Schwarzmann. *Puck Magazine*. June 3, 1898. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

¹¹ Miller 20

protection, and Uncle Sam is standing tall with his chest puffed and his fist clenched, clearly ready to protect the fallen woman. The man representing Spain is dressed in all black, implying that he is evil, and he is hunched over, effectively suggesting that he is scared of Uncle Sam. Essentially, this cartoon projects a message of Cuban, feminized weakness, juxtaposed against masculine, American strength. Just like the various newspaper articles covering the subject, this cartoon presents the viewer with a call to action; to help the Cubans gain their freedom from the oppressive Spanish.

American newspapers and political cartoonists were clearly calling for intervention into the Cuban conflict by 1896, but the American government did not declare war on Spain until 1898. There may have been some public support for intervention, but not enough to get Congress to declare war. However, on February 15, 1898, the *U.S.S Maine* was destroyed in the Havana harbor, killing 266 American sailors. The *Maine* was deployed to protect American interests in Cuba during the conflict between Spain and Cuban rebels, and its destruction was immediately used by newspaper publishers to garner public support for American intervention in Cuba's rebellion. Pulitzer and Hearst quickly blamed the Spanish for the destruction of the *Maine* despite having zero evidence to support their claims.¹² The headline for Hearst's Journal on February 16, read "CRISIS AT HAND...GROWING BELIEF IN SPANISH TREACHERY!"¹³ No hard evidence was ever found to link the sinking of the *Maine* to the Spanish, but the explosion of the American battleship proved to be the perfect catalyst for burgeoning American interest in the Spanish-Cuban conflict. After the *Maine*'s explosion, the jingoistic, sensational style of coverage popularized by Hearst and Pulitzer spread to newspapers

¹² Yellow Journalism

¹³ "Crisis at Hand" New York Journal. Feb 16, 1898 p1.

across the country. According to Miller, “The *Maine* explosion set in motion a consolidation of support for the Cuban cause across American print, visual, and popular media that transformed audience engagement with events in Cuba.”¹⁴ Less than three months after the sinking of the *Maine*, the United States government officially declared war against Spain.

The destruction of the *Maine* and the media’s dramatic representation of the Cuban conflict led to almost unanimous support for intervention from the American media and populace, however, in the rush to show support for liberating Cuba, newspapers did not explicitly question the imperialist implications of military intervention.¹⁵ The message was simply that it was America’s duty to help the Cubans gain their freedom. This changed in what Miller calls the “Last Phase” of the war. After two months of war, it became clear that victory for the Americans was all but assured, causing Americans to question what America’s role would be with regard to Spain’s colonies. Would they free the Filipinos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, or would they become colonizers? After the United States’ Congress passed a resolution for the annexation of Hawaii on July 12, 1898, the imperialism question was all but answered.¹⁶ This move by Congress showed that the United States government was interested in obtaining land overseas, thereby providing stark evidence of imperialist intentions with regard to Spain’s colonies. Newspapers around the country soon began discussing whether or not America should become an imperialist nation. In December of 1898, *The New York Herald* did a national survey of 470 newspapers that all included arguments about imperialism, finding that 288 supported colonial rule of Spain’s former colonies, and 182 opposed imperialism.¹⁷

¹⁴ Miller 55

¹⁵ Miller 154

¹⁶ <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hawaii-petition>

¹⁷ Miller 139

Within the discussion about American imperialism, both the pro and anti-imperialist political cartoonists appropriated Barnumesque racial imagery to remark upon the uncivilized nature of the people in Cuba, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. According to Miller, using imagery of foreign people that was similar to the popular exhibitions in the circus allowed the artists to draw their cartoons with myriad non-verbal messages that their audience would understand. As such, using Barnumesque imagery allowed for the artists to produce cartoons quickly that got across their message effectively. For the pro-imperialist, the people in Spain's former colonies were uncivilized and, thus, needed guidance from a Western nation to become civilized. For the anti-imperialist, the foreign nations were too uncivilized to ever accept Western civilization, and it was, therefore, a fools errand to try and civilize them. The anti-imperialists also argued that the uncivilized nature of the foreign nations would become a threat to white, American civilization.

By choosing to build their argument upon the same racist foundation as the pro-imperialists, the anti-imperialists effectively gave their opposition the moral high ground.¹⁸ Both sides were claiming that the people in Cuba, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico were uncivilized, but it was only the pro-imperialists who were claiming that America should shoulder the burden of bringing them into Western civilization. Though this is extremely pedantic and condescending, it was seen as more moral and good than simply abandoning people who "could not govern themselves."¹⁹ For Miller, had the anti-imperialists argued that the foreign nations were fully capable of self-governance, then they may have been able to encapsulate many of the same people who viewed Cuba's rebellion positively as a patriotic fight for liberty. Instead, they

¹⁸ Miller find

¹⁹ Newspaper article about Philippines 1899

chose to accept the racist premise that the foreign nations were uncivilized and helpless, so the only way that they could support their argument was by framing colonization as a waste of time, or as a danger to American civilization. In a way, the anti-imperialists accepted the pro-imperialists' racist foundation, and the only way they could combat the pro-imperialist argument was with a more dramatic form of racism.

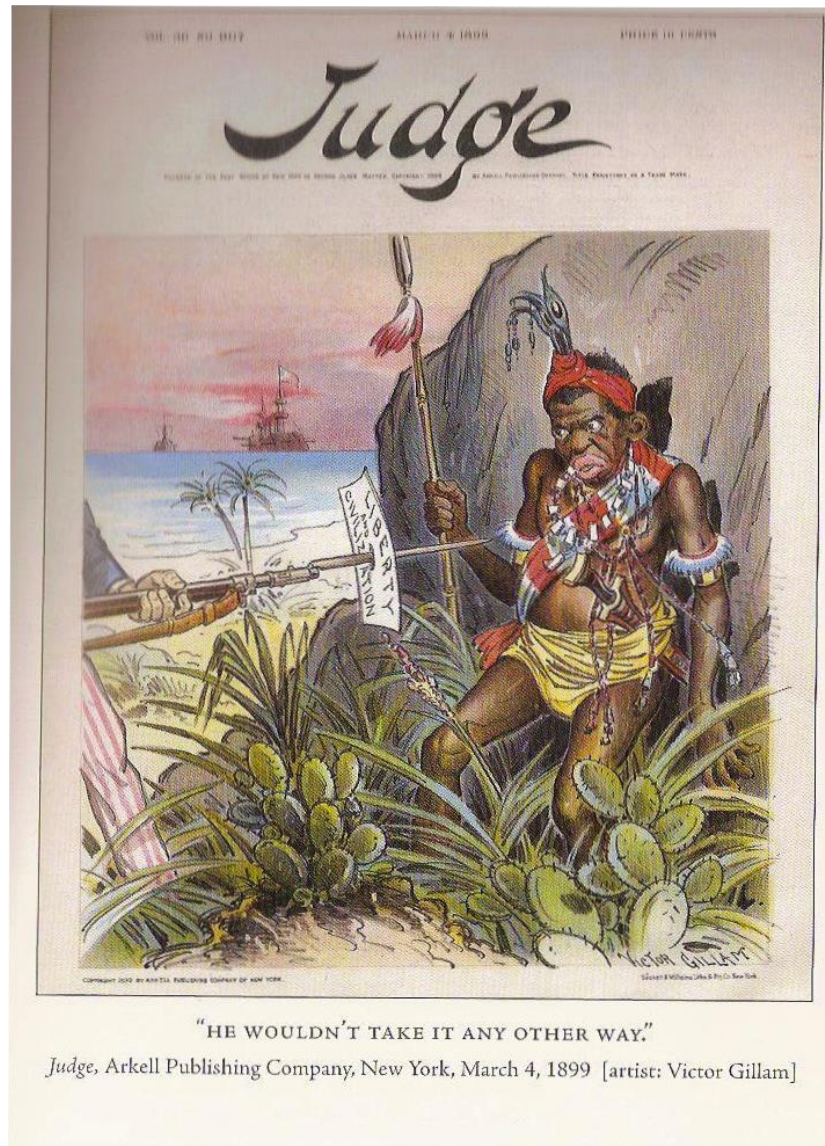
The following are several pro-imperialist political cartoons that exemplify the 'civilizing' message of those in favor of imperialism:



<https://www.loc.gov/item/2012647459/>

This cartoon, entitled "School Begins," was published in January of 1899 and it represents America's duty to 'civilize' the people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines. The foreign nations are represented as children, and America is represented as the adult teacher in the form of Uncle Sam. The artist's use of small children for the foreign nations

implies that they were not as developed as the civilized Americans. Though there are white children in the back of the class that represent white Americans and their 'superior' civilization, they are merely included in this cartoon to juxtapose the 'uncivilized' children. On the chalkboard behind the children, their lesson is written: "England has governed her colonies whether they consented or not. By not waiting for their consent she has greatly advanced the world's civilization. The U.S. must govern its new territories with or without their consent until they can govern themselves." In the background, a black child is in the background washing windows, a Native American child is sitting by the door reading a book upside down, and a Chinese child is outside the door waiting to come in. The inclusion of the black and Native American children serves as an implicit warning of what will come of America's new territories if they do not accept Uncle Sam's teachings: they will become servants, or they will fail to become educated and, thus, be shunned. The Chinese child waiting outside implies that the artist believed that the American government would soon expand into China, so the Chinese child is simply waiting for a seat in the classroom.



In this cartoon, published in March of 1899, the U.S. is represented by what one can assume is Uncle Sam who is holding a gun to a native Filipino with the words “Liberty and Civilization” at the end of a bayonet. The figure that represents the Philippines is black, thereby playing on American’s sense of superiority over black people, and he is dressed what the artist considered native Filipino clothing.²⁰ This depiction of the Philippines invokes Barnum’s ethnological congress as the Filipino is essentially a caricature of what white Americans

²⁰ Discuss minstrel images and how these cartoons exploit that type of imagery. For further reading, Lott

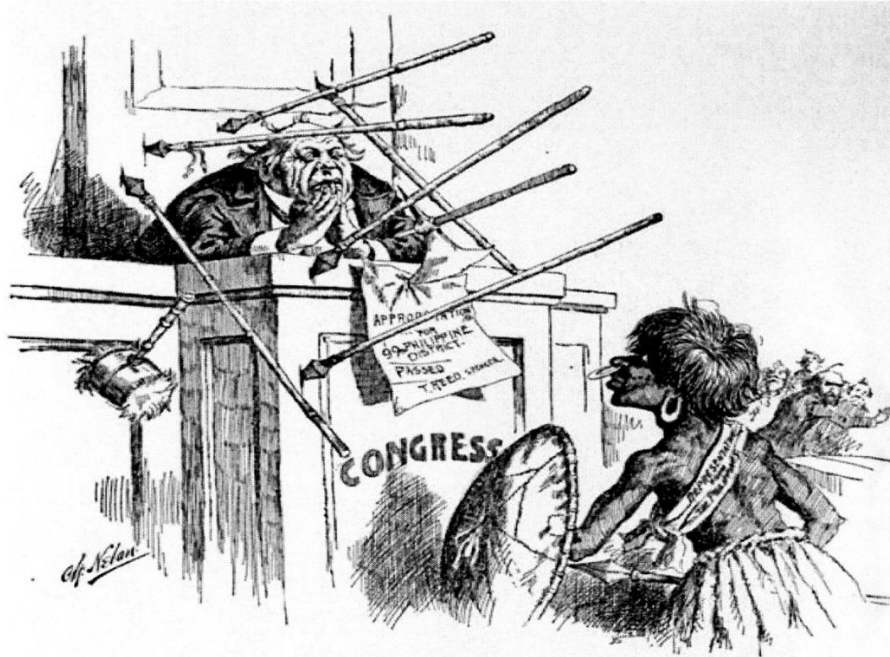
envisioned native Filipinos looked and dressed like, complete with a costume and weapons that imply an inferior form of culture. The title of the cartoon, “He Wouldn’t Take It Any Other Way,” suggests that the Filipinos were uncivilized and would only accept civilization through force. This cartoon is another example of the pro-imperialist argument as it implies that American conquest was going to bring civilization to the uncivilized, even if the native population doesn’t consent.



This cartoon, published in April of 1899, represents the pro-imperialist concept of “The White Man’s Burden,” which is also the title of the piece. “The White Man’s Burden,” was a poem written by Rudyard Kipling in February 1899 which called for the American government

to take up the burden of ‘civilizing’ foreign peoples, just as England had done with its colonies. This cartoon is simply a visual representation of Kipling’s original poem. In the cartoon, England and the U.S. are carrying childlike representations of their respective colonies, climbing rocks labeled Vice, Oppression, Superstition, Barbarism, Ignorance, Brutality, and Slavery on their way toward “Civilization.” The foreign nations in this cartoon, much like the previously discussed cartoon, are Barnumesque depictions of foreign peoples. Each country is dressed in clothes that represent that country according to the Western fantasy of the ‘other.’ For example, the Chinese man has a rice hat on, the Indian a turban, and the Filipino is barely dressed and wielding a primitive weapon. Just like the “Ethnological Congress” each country is represented by a caricature of what Westerners believed to be the appropriate cultural artifacts. Further, this cartoon engages with the pro-imperialist discourse by invoking the idea that was the white man’s duty to bring the conquered into Western civilization.

The following are a few political cartoons that exemplify the way anti-imperialists used race, and the concept of civilization to argue against colonization.



TROUBLES WHICH MAY FOLLOW AN IMPERIAL POLICY.

This cartoon, published by Charles Nelan, depicts a native Filipino who has apparently thrown several spears at a member of Congress. The Filipino is depicted with a large nose ring, a grass skirt, and black skin. Much like the pro-imperialist imagery, the Filipino is depicted as a savage barbarian, however, the message of the cartoon differs in that it serves as a warning of what might happen if America continues on its path toward colonizing so-called ‘uncivilized’ people: the colonized may bring down the civilized institutions within the United States’ government. The cartoon clearly invokes the ethnological imagery of the uncivilized barbarian, however, the message of the cartoon employs said imagery to suggest that the ‘uncivilized’ natives pose a threat to American civilization.

IMAGE MILLER 226

This cartoon, published in September of 1898, presents the viewer with an image of apelike men who have taken over “Congress.” The “men” in the cartoon are holding up signs calling to “abolish all work,” and “investigate cannibalism.”²¹ According to Miller, this cartoon “echoed one of Barnum’s well-known exhibits in the late-nineteenth century, the ‘Ethnological Congress of Savage and Barbarous Tribes.’”²² Just like the previous example, the message of this cartoon is a warning against what may come to pass if America continued to colonize ‘uncivilized’ lands and people. The artist makes this warning explicit through the cartoon’s title “A Glimpse into the Halls of Congress a Few Years Hence (If we go on annexing islands).” By representing foreign ‘other’ as an existential threat to American civilization, both of these cartoons rely on the same strategy of using the supposed lack of civilization among island natives to suggest that America could become a conquered culture.

IMAGE MILLER 205

In this cartoon, published in *Life* magazine in April of 1899, the artist depicts an American who has essentially forgone Western civilization and started living as an island native. Instead of Western clothes, the man is dressed in a grass skirt. Instead of a rifle, the man is

²¹ Mention how cannibalism started showing up in newspaper articles again, claiming Puerto Ricans and Filipinos to be cannibals.

²² Miller 225

holding a shield and spear. To his left is an island woman, and what can only be assumed to be the man's child. Behind the family is a small hut and some farm animals, suggesting that the American man has completely 'gone native' and chose to live among the native islanders. *Life* magazine was ardently anti-imperialist, and this cartoon, much like the others, serves as a warning of what may happen if America continued colonizing 'inferior' cultures. In this version, the artist is suggesting that if Americans send their people over to colonize island nations, they will instead be seduced by 'uncivilized' life.

Though all of these cartoons are different, they all clearly employ the same message and use similar imagery. According to Miller, "The racialized spectacle of colonialism arising from the cultural production of empire on both sides of the [imperialism] debate made use of popular imagery that circulated widely in mass entertainments, including the attractions of P.T. Barnum."²³ She goes on to state: "By presenting the terms of overseas imperialism through the lens of American popular culture, cultural producers embedded messages of imperialist and racial ideologies in a framework that could be widely recognized and had mass appeal."²⁴ Political cartooning is, thus, the perfect example of Miller's argument. In all of these cartoons, the artists were building upon the same xenophobic ideas about the lack of civilization among foreign island cultures. Thus, the messages of the cartoons all share a foundation in P.T. Barnum's public exhibition of foreign peoples as uncivilized savages. In fact, some artists even made this connection directly. For example, in this cartoon, entitled "Phillipina," the artist depicts Uncle Sam as a circus showman who is exhibiting people from America's newly acquired territories.

²³ Miller 189

²⁴ IBID

IMAGE MILLER 227

The main attraction is “Phillipina,” who is advertised as the “Monstrous Aggregate,” and then sarcastically referred to as the “\$20,000,000 Belle of the Antipodes.” The figure is black, with disheveled clothing and extremely unkempt hair. The money is a reference to the amount of money that the American government spent on the war in the Philippines. Next to the advertisement for “Phillipina” is an ad for the “Island Beauties” from Cuba, Hawaii, and Guam. This cartoon was printed in the pro-imperialist *Boston Herald*, and, thus, presents the reader with a celebration of American imperialism. Uncle Sam is simply showing off the spoils of war that he had obtained through conquest. By using the imagery of the circus, the artist was making the connection between human exhibition in commercialized entertainments and the way Americans viewed people from ‘uncivilized’ island nations. Whether he intended to or not, the artist effectively employed a connection between the act of human exhibition in public entertainment and the act of imperialism that had inundated popular culture for decades previous.

Within all of the political cartoons provided here, there is a clear and obvious message out the uncivilized, and, thus, the inferior nature of Cubans, Filipinos, Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans. Despite their disparate opinions on imperialism, all of the artists basically employ the same foundational idea to get their point across. It would seem, as Miller has suggested, that using the same kind of imagery that P.T. Barnum developed in his entertainments made the process quicker and easier for the artist to get their point across. They did not need to spend a lot of time figuring out how to depict their subjects as inferior, they simply needed to put them in grass skirts, or clothes that coded the figures as foreign, thereby invoking the message of the

ethnological congress: that white people were more civilized and, thus, superior to the multitude of non-white citizens from underdeveloped nations.

Conclusion

Obviously, there was a multitude of reasons why the American government ultimately decided to wage war against Spain, and then subsequently colonize Spain's former colonies. As such, there is a litany of work discussing the various causes for the Spanish American and Philippine American Wars. It has not been my intention to add to that scholarship by arguing that the representation of foreign peoples in commercialized entertainments *caused* American imperialism. Instead, this work serves to draw connections between how foreign island cultures were represented in late-nineteenth-century political cartooning, and how that representation draws upon a much older tradition of human exhibition in the public entertainment industry. Though it was a war that facilitated this connection, the act of imperialism actually serves as a side note to what I have been attempting to uncover.

The interest in the 'other,' the stranger, the foreigner, has been prevalent in most societies throughout the history of the world. People have always been fascinated by those who

chose to live in a different manner than themselves. The field of Cultural Anthropology is based on understanding this inherent human interest. However, intellectual analysis, and respectful, accurate assessment of foreign cultures is often only consumed by a small percentage of any population. Millions of people a year do not go out and read the grand academic works of Edward Said or Michel Foucault. What they do is watch television, movies, and some still go to the theater for a play. Thus, even in today's age with the internet and endless amounts of scholarly knowledge at our fingertips, popular culture succeeds where academia fails. Popular culture reaches the masses in numbers that academics could only dream of. And that is why entertainment culture is so important. It is through entertainment that millions of people are introduced to the world outside their own. As such, we must better understand how our popular culture and entertainment industries have influenced the way American citizens view people who do not live like them.

In order to properly understand the tendency of Americans to create fantasies of foreign people in their popular culture, it is vital to look at the way fantasy and spectacle became a part of the popular entertainment industry. As Neil Harris has argued, the 1840s were really the "formative years" of American popular culture, and the exploitation of foreignness started to inundate performances around this time period. Thus, creating fantasies of the uncivilized 'other' has been a part of American entertainment culture since its inception. And the practice is still alive today. Whatever country America is currently at war with, or will be soon, is often quickly included in new movies as the dangerous villain, ready to destroy everything America stands for.

Further, it was not James O'Connell who created the interest in the 'uncivilized' nature of peoples around the world. People have always called 'other' people uncivilized. O'Connell was

just a man who took advantage of the public's interest in the foreign and brought the exploitation of that interest into the burgeoning industry of commercialized entertainment. With his tattoos and his story of captivity, O'Connell was a living adventure story, ready to tell white Americans about life in a far-away land. However, following his seminal performances, other showmen, like P.T. Barnum, understood that it wasn't just James O'Connell that the audience wanted to see, but anything or anyone that could reveal the mysteries of exotic lands. Following O'Connell's performance, Barnum basically made a career out of exploiting this interest, turning what was originally considered a sideshow for 'freaks' into a mainstream entertainment for the masses. When it came time for America to engage in military conquest of exotic, distant lands, image makers simply adapted what Barnum had built and sold to his white, working-class audience: a need to feel superior.

Moreover, it is important to note that this work is not built on the idea that Western civilization is full of evil people, and the foreign cultures discussed here lived utopian lives. It is anachronistic to look at the imperialist, Christian, Americans as cartoonish, evil people who just wanted to take everyone else's land. These were deeply religious people who saw indigenous peoples as savage heathens who needed to be brought into civilization so that their souls could be saved by God. They also thought that they were destined by God to overtake lands and bring it into 'civilization.' Looking back, these ideas were clearly predicated on deeply flawed presumptions about race and culture, but what else were they supposed to believe? All of their institutions and contemporary knowledge was built upon the idea that they were spiritually, scientifically, racially, and culturally, and, in every other way, superior to the people who did not live under the benefits of capitalism and Western civilization. Luckily, over time these ideas

have dissipated, but they are nowhere near eradicated from American society. The last American to die while trying to convert a foreign culture to Christianity was in November of 2018.²⁵

Further, it is inarguable that the indigenous people in the Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Cuba did lead hard lives that could have benefitted from technological developments that were being made in so-called Western countries at the time. However, the idea that they needed to be brought into civilization, whether they consented or not, is a completely Western concept. Islanders were people who were simply living their lives according to the traditions of their culture, and it is irrelevant that white-Western peoples believed that they should be living a different way. This is why for the majority of this paper I have put the verb civilization in single quotation marks, in order to reflect that this was contemporary Americans' views of what it meant to civilize people and not my own understanding of the word. The concept of civilization, and how one becomes civilized, is entirely culturally relevant. Therefore, it would mean very different things for a white Westerner to attempt to civilize someone as opposed to, say, an ex-slave from the deep south. For the latter, they might argue that the American's treatment of African Americans was uncivil and proved that their culture was barbaric. For an island nation, the indigenous people would probably consider an outsider uncivilized for not knowing the proper customs of the island. Thus, it is necessary to take the idea of 'civilization' into account when reading any sort of argument for imperialism or conquest. It is often not about actually 'civilizing' anything, but rather wiping away a traditional culture and instilling something different.

²⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/john-allen-chau-killed-tribe-north-sentinel-island-andaman-christian-missionary-a8646201.html>

As American museums and circuses discussed 'civilization' throughout the late-nineteenth century, they were effectively implying that foreign, non-white nations were unlike the West, and so they were inferior. Using this method of representation, show managers turned foreignness into a spectacle that effectively dehumanized foreign people to the point where American citizens, who claimed to love liberty, were calling for the wanton domination of foreign lands. This dehumanization happened through the process of image making. When men like Barnum were curating their shows, they were not attempting to accurately and respectfully exhibit people from another culture, they were intent upon exhibiting what made the foreign people different than the white audience. In essence, they were creating a caricature of foreignness that implied inferiority among foreign people. As such the imagery of the theater, museum, circus, world fair, and political cartooning was inherently similar in that it played upon its audiences' sense of superiority. Every time Barnum put a "Cannibal" on stage, the masses were 'learning' about the savage and primitive nature of the outside world. It is unsurprising that, when the opportunity arose to 'civilize' the foreigner, political cartoonists relied upon imagery that had been specifically developed to exemplify the uncivilized nature of non-white cultures. Political cartoonists, like O'Connell and Barnum, merely exploited the idea of civilization to imply a sense of superiority regarding Western civilization. However, with political cartoons, the artists dropped the implication and directly called for violent 'civilization.'