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A Southerner in the Philippines, 1901-1903   by Walter L. Williams

By the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States, to the delight of such expansionists as Theodore Roosevelt and Albert J. Beveridge, had entered an age of imperialism which carried the flag around the world. This type of international activity was prompted in part by Europe's "New Imperialism." The end of overriding domestic problems brought on by the Civil War and of the last major Indian resistance to continental expansion also played a significant role in the activation of American imperialism. The American public was inflamed by sensational journalism and ideological fervor to support the proponents of world involvement. Yet, while America's stumbling into acquisition of foreign territories has been examined in great detail, little research has concentrated on how individual Americans in the new colonies reacted to participation in an overseas empire. George Devereaux Jarrett was personally involved in the establishment of American rule in the Philippine Islands during the Filipino insurrection. An analysis of his attitudes toward his own position as an instrument of United States foreign policy and his feelings toward the culturally different Filipinos reveal important aspects of American imperialism.

Of particular contemporary interest also is the fact that the situation of the United States army in the Philippines was in some respects similar to that in the Vietnam War, in which large numbers of American troops were exposed to the cultural patterns of a non-Western society. Vietnam of the 1960's and the Philippines of the 1900's are also similar in that both had experienced a long colonial period, and, in reaction, both had strong native nationalist movements which struggled to unite the former colony under culturally indigenous rule. Both faced a technologically superior foreign power, which happened to be the United States. Despite the different diplomatic background for American intervention, much of the experience of individual American soldiers in these two regions was similar.

George D. Jarrett was born on June 4, 1873, at Tugalo, Georgia, where his grandfather had operated his house as a "Traveler's Rest" since the 1830's. Although George's was a wealthy upland farm family, the financial situation of the Jarretts steadily deteriorated after the death of his father, Charles Kennedy Jarrett, in 1877. Mrs. Elizabeth Lucas Jarrett became the head of her family, consisting of four children: George, Charles Patten who died in 1898, Sarah Grace who was nicknamed "Daughter," and Mary Elizabeth. Mary Jarrett, called "Little Sister," became a leader in the women's rights movement in Georgia during the early twentieth century and was the last family owner of Jarrett Manor.[1]

Elizabeth Jarrett attempted to manage the farm herself, but the family situation, combined with the general agricultural economic troubles at the turn of the century, brought about a further decline. She often complained about her difficulties in letters to George.[2] Thus, in 1900 she wrote: Some folks [are] running around trying to sell cotton & many to get corn—we have corn & have about sold what we can, but so little money."[3] Similarly, George's mother later complained that, "The old home looks real desolate—place all run down & worn out & not much money."[4] Perhaps her most poignant words expressed the dream that, "We wish we had thousands of dollars."[5]

Elizabeth Jarrett had a great emotional attachment to her son, which was reciprocated by George's feelings for her, and this attachment was reenforced by ambitious plans for her son. Even though it contributed significantly to the family financial decline, she insisted that George fulfill his desire for an appointment to the United States Military Academy. In the

military-oriented South it was a matter of great prestige to have a family member graduate from West Point. Accordingly, George was admitted to the academy on June 15, 1894, and graduated fifty-second in his class on February 13, 1899. Although he remained at West Point until after the close of the Spanish-American War, George accepted a commission as a second lieutenant in the United States army.

George's army career from 1899 to 1904 was, in a military sense, not significant.[6] He was first assigned to the Tenth United States Infantry Regiment with the American occupation forces in Cuba. In 1901 he was transferred to the Second United States Infantry Regiment in the Philippine Islands. Thus, he served in both of the major regions of United States overseas expansion at the turn of the century. In both Cuba and the Philippines, however, he arrived on the scene at the end of the fighting. In Cuba, the Spanish had surrendered over three months before George's arrival, and in the Philippines the backbone of the Filipino insurrection had been broken by the capture of Emilio Aguinaldo a month before Jarrett's transfer.

George Jarrett, while contributing little to the military history of the United States, reflected in the letters exchanged with his family his views of America's involvement. By examining the opinions expressed over George's being in foreign areas, and by his attitudes toward both the native inhabitants Of Cuba and the Philippines, one can gain an idea of the feelings with which American soldiers greeted an era of colonial occupation.

As expected, there is little evidence of direct opinion on United States imperialism as a whole, either in George's letters or in the letters of his family. What is most significant is the total lack of any great patriotic feeling about the current foreign policies of the United States. Compared with the letters of American soldiers in previous wars, the Jarrett letters express none of the flag-waving sentiment that George (or for that matter, the United States) should be doing what he was doing. In a letter written while he was in Cuba, George's mother made a cutting remark about American ideals versus American actions:

We can't tell from the papers much if anything about the military affairs —but we look for terrible things as they are mixing up valor & politics. Wan though we want peace—we want it in a big nice piece [of territory] .[7]

Concerning the Filipino insurrection Mama wrote: "Wonder when this foolish *war will be over*, soon I hope & then we will have a happy time at home all of us together."[8]

Most of the sentiments expressed by the Jarretts, however, were not in terms of broad national policies, but of George's personal condition and safety. Thus, a cousin in Athens, Georgia, wrote to George in Cuba in 1900: "I hope however that your stay of the Island may be short and that you may be located near us when you get back to God's country."[9] The family frequently admonished George to watch his health while in tropical areas. The pleas ranged from one end of the disease spectrum to the other, and cannot fail to be humorous in their rhetoric:

You must take extra care of your self for our sakes for you are all we have and we are so anxious for you to keep well Be careful about eating fruit.[10]

Jarrett was evidently satisfied with his condition in Cuba, because in a letter from his sister she stated: "It does us all good to know that our darling has such a desirable position."ll Probably the greatest event in George's service in Cuba was his courtship and marriage to

Victorene Paillett, the daughter of a French diplomatic official turned Cuban plantation owner. Victo, as she was called, seems to have been received well by the Jarrett family. When George and his new wife visited Georgia while George was on a month's leave in 1901, Mama wrote that Victo was "quite an artist. . . She is [a] sweet little girl & is learning english right well & fast They [George and Victo] seem devoted to each other."[12]
Despite George's good fortune in Cuba, Mama remained essentially pessimistic. "I hope & pray," she wrote, "you will all go on quietly without more war & fuss."13 By January, 1901, it was apparent that George would be transferred from Cuba, but he did not know where. Mama wrote nervously that, "If sent off from Cuba [I] don't want you sent to a cold climate."14 George's little sister worried about his being sent to China, since the Boxer Rebellion was creating an international crisis there. She wrote:

I am so uneasy about the news from China. I know the news-papers exagerate [*sic*] things, but I'm so afraid they will send you there. Make your arrangements to transfer or do some way to keep from going.[15]

However, his family definitely did not want George ordered to the war in the Philippines. He felt the need to write back reassuringly that:

Victo says tell you she takes good care of me and that she was not going to let me go to the Phillippincs [*sic*]. Her people write almost the same as you all about us going.[16]

Nevertheless, by March it was clear that George would be ordered to the Philippines. He left San Francisco, California, with his regiment on March 18, 1901, and, after a brief stop in Hawaii, he arrived in Manila on April 17. Within a month George was assigned to a post in the extreme southwest Philippines, not far from Borneo. Since the major part of the insurrection was taking place in the northern end of the islands, George was pleased with his assignment. He wrote his family on June 5, 1901:

I am located at Zamboanga in the island of Mindanao, and find it a very pleasant place indeed…. When we were told in Manila to come here everyone congratulated us and told us that it was the best place in the islands, and we have found it all that we could wish, excepting, of course, the disadvantage that all the places in the islands have of being a long ways from “The States." …
Zamboanga is a right pretty little place; it is the largest town in the island and is at present the headquarters of the military department of Mindanao and Jolo; it is on almost the extreme Southwest corner there of the island…. Zamboanga was formerly a place of considerable importance; there was a colony of Spaniards who had nice homes a few miles back from the shore and there was a garrison here also; but when the Spanish troops left the other Spaniards all left also. As soon as they had gone their houses were burned, the Spaniards say by the Filipinos the Filipinos say by the Spaniards. In any case they were burnt. The buildings now standing were owned by the Chinese; they made up a purse of three thousand dollars I have been told, and paid it to the people who were doing the burning to let their houses alone.[17]

That the relative peaceful environment of Zamboanga seems to have been quite attractive to the Americans was apparent in George's remark that:

All the officers who are on duty here are trying to stay here, and out of about a thousand volunteers who were here about a hundred and seventy five got their discharges here rather than go back to the States.[18]

From George's peaceful vantage point, the Filipino insurrection seemed little more than a name. By March, 1901, a month before George arrived in the Philippines, the revolt was weakened by the capture of Aguinaldo. The insurrection was declared officially closed by the United States army in July, 1902. However, as early as June, 1901, more than a year before the "end" of the war, George stated, “There is no place in the islands where there is a war going on.”[19]

Despite the peace and calm of George's assignment, as the months passed he became anxious to leave the Philippines. His letters tend to reflect an increasing disgust with the military. His wife Victo, who accompanied him to the Philippines, was "becoming somewhat debilitated from her long stay in this climate and like the rest of us she wants to go to a cooler one Daughter wrote that (she] wanted me to get a position in civil life in the states. If I could get a good one I would gladly accept it."[20]

It is thus easy to understand why in June, 1902, George was excited by rumors that his regiment would soon be returned to the United States. But the months dragged on, and George was unable to leave the Philippines until May, 1903, almost a year after the declared termination of the military government over the Philippines. The last few months of the occupation seem to have been marked by low morale among the American troops, since George commented that, “There is always a court martial going on.”[21]

The opinions of George and his family toward United States involvement in overseas expansion were mainly expressed in terms of George's safety and good fortune in avoiding the areas of armed conflict. The total lack of any patriotic encouragement or justification for the imperialist movement, plus a few negative comments against United States foreign activities, indicates that the Jarretts were not in favor of the United States continuing or extending its military role in foreign affairs. However, crucial to an understanding of George's view of his position is an analysis of his attitudes toward the natives of the areas under his control. The period immediately following the Spanish American War was noted for its flamboyant defense of imperialism, ostensibly to help the natives of the regions controlled by the United States. The “little brown brother” philosophy was voiced from the pulpits and the political soap boxes across the nation. The question then arises: Was this philosophy carried out by the persons who would be most closely in contact with the natives (*i.e.*, the soldiers in the occupation forces), or was it a mere rhetorical device that was not translated into action in the colonial areas?

At least as far as George Jarrett was concerned, a definite picture emerges, similar to something out of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, that the benevolent philosophy warranted only derision. George's impressions on contact with non-Western primitives tell us much more about his own prejudices than they do about the natives he was discussing. The superior Anglo-Saxon ideal emerged triumphant, and the biases shared by Americans prevented George from seeing the conditions and the people as they were.

While George was in Cuba he spoke decisively of the Cubans. He was ready to assume the worst about some native farmers without attempting to find any reason for their actions. In early 1901 George wrote of Victo's father and his dealings with neighboring Cubans:

They are making sugar on her father's plantation and she wants to go out there too. She wants to see the sugar making etc. and will have to go to the plantation to see her father as he does not dare leave there during this season of the year for there is no one that can be found in Cuba who is honest enough to leave things like that under and the country is always full of rogues and dead beats.

His crop is very fine this year but he is rather disappointed on the whole because the neighboring planters some of them sent their cane to the other mills after they had promised him and had him prepare for their cane. They probably had no reason for changing but are simply unreliable like most all Cubans.[22]

George assumed that there was no reason for the actions of the farmers, such as being offered a cheaper price for milling the cane or a better mill at another area, and he was content to judge this situation as inbred unreliability.

When George got to the Philippines in 1901 he became somewhat interested in the natives around Zamboanga. In a letter he gives a fairly good ethnographic description of a chieftain-centered society:

A good many of the people here are not the ordinary Filipinos but are what are called Moros. They are divided into tribes like the Indians in America, and each tribe is ruled by a man who is called a Datto. The different dattoes have absolute power over their tribes even to life and death. Whenever a Moro finds a pearl above a certain size it belongs to the datto, and if the Moro sells it to anyone else the datto takes the pearl back and puts the Moro in prison. In return for the things they take the dattoes give spears and etc., to the men they govern. The datto here and all his subjects are and have always been very peaceable and well disposed towards the white people.[23]

George was describing a culture where the chieftain, or datto, was the center for redistribution of goods to the differing elements of the population. This form of exchange is quite common among primitive peoples who do not operate in a money economy. The redistribution system had probably broken down somewhat with the imposition Of a money economy on the area, and it was obviously affected with the concentration on pearls as things valued by the whites. This description is one of the few times that George dispassionately discussed any native group with which he came in contact.

In general, however, George was even more critical of the Filipinos than he was of the Cubans. VIC did not attempt to understand their social customs, and was therefore annoyed that hc could not understand their behaviour:

The Filipinos arc lazier than the Cubans. I have a number of them employed daily as they are the only laborers obtainable, we pay laborers 25 cents a day and carpenters or masons 50 cents a day. They are nearly all stayed at home today because it is one of their feastdays. This occurs about once a week and you can never tell when they are going to work and when they are not.[24]

Obviously, George could not understand that some people do not operate on an hour-by-hour regular basis, and that they do not see the overwhelming sacredness of money. He found it

difficult to believe that anything constructive could be done by people with a different motivation than money:

The most striking feature of the country right here are [sic] the immense groves of Cocoanuts. They extend for miles along the coast and some that I have heard of have as much as 150 square miles in them. Every tree was planted where it now stands, and it seems almost incredible that people as lazy as those who have always lived here should have done all the work.[25]

He further states that the Filipinos,

… are the biggest fools in the world. Those in the towns are better than those in the country. They are not so lazy. The people who live outside the towns have their little huts among the groves of cocoanuts to provide them with everything…. Each one will have about an acre or two [of cocoanuts] around the house and will depend on this entirely for a living. The Chinamen have large groves but not many of the Filipinos have them.[26]

Without even realizing it, George provided his own answer to explain the poverty of the Filipinos, in that they either had too little land on which to make a living or their native redistribution pattern had been destroyed by the influence of a wage-labor system. George also helps to understand the poverty of the area by remarking, "There were formerly a great many cattle there and the country depended on them entirely. But the greater number of cattle have died of disease within the last few years."[27] It is easy to see that there were numerous reasons for the poverty of the people: breakdown of the indigenous system of exchange, large land holdings by outsiders, insufficient adaptation to a different system of subsistence, and decimation of cattle by disease. But George, while separately mentioning each of these factors, could not put them together to understand their relationship as a whole. The only attribute he could see as the causative factor was laziness.

With this concept, George tended to view the Filipinos as subhuman. This view by itself probably frustrated George even more in his dealings with the natives. "They are just like a number of monkeys or other animals without reasoning powers."[28] George gave further indication that he considered the natives not far from animals by humorously mentioning his native servants as part of his discussion on his pets:

With our two dogs and monkey and ducks and chickens and filipino and chinamen we have quite a menagerie, Haven't we? There is a little bear which General Robbe wanted to give us but we declined with thanks.[29]

One of the most direct indications of George's state of mind concerned the actions of another army officer who evidently took seriously the benevolent philosophy toward the natives. The only explanation George could give was insanity. He and the other officers at his post found the attempts to treat the natives with respect nothing short of incredible:

Maj. Gardiner of the 13th Infantry sent in a sensational report some time ago that there was being cruelty practiced by Americans on the natives. He also stated that the graduates of West Point were not fit to command troops in the field and a whole lot of stuff like that. He is a graduate of West Point himself but he has had a lot of trouble and it seems has become soured on everything. He is in fact mentally unbalanced and has done a number of erratic

things He is the man who in making a speech to soldiers told them not to speak of the Filipinos as "gugus" (a common nickname for them) but as "our little brown brothers."[30]

George's feelings toward the natives were marked by anything but empathy. He was disgusted with them and reacted strongly against the single attempt to apply a paternalistic feeling toward them. If George Jarrett can be taken as an example of the attitudes of American troops in the Philippines, and he seems to have been in general agreement with his fellow soldiers, then it may be safe to conclude that the Filipinos did not always benefit from the benevolent rhetoric that was being broadcast in the United States. George did not go to a foreign land with any ideas of patriotic duty or of uplifting the natives. His major concerns were with his own safety and with returning to America as soon as possible. Unless he is taken to be a lone exception, George's attitudes reflect what may have been the attitudes of many Americans of the imperialist era. While not expressing an isolationist character, George seemed reluctant to lend his sentiment and moral support to a dubious experiment in a far-away land.

Lieutenant George Devereaux Jarrett did not live to fulfill his wishes of getting a good civilian position. He returned from the Philippine Islands in June, 1903, and was transferred to Fort Logan, Colorado. On February 15, 1904, at the age of thirty, he died at Fort Logan of a tropical disease contracted while in the Philippines.

University of North Carolina

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

FOOTNOTES

1 In 1955 Mary Jarrett White sold Jarrett Manor to the State of Georgia to be operated as one of the historic sites of the Georgia Historical Commission. The Commission has conducted historical, architectural, and archaeological research projects at Jarrett Manor. The house is open to the public and is located on U.S. highway 123, six miles east of Toccoa, Georgia.

2 The letters to and from George D. Jarrett are part of the Jarrett family documents located at the Georgia Historical Commission, 116 Mitchell St., S.W., Atlanta, Georgia, in Documents File number forty-six, box number three. The writer wishes to express his thanks to Mrs. Mary Gregory Jewett, Executive Secretary of the Commission, for making these records available for research. The Jarrett Papers of the Georgia Historical Commission will hereinafter be referred to as J. P., with the names of sender and recipient and date of the letter following.

3 J. P., Mama to George, January 25 [ca. 1900-—no date given).

4 J. P., Mama to George, January 13, 1901.

5 J. P., Mama to George, November 4 [1899].

6. I wish to express appreciation to the following for information on George Jarrett's military career: Association of Graduates Of the United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.;

Old Military Records Division of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.; and Miss Mabel Ramsay of Toccoa, Georgia.

7. Underlining original; J. P., Mama to George, August 2 [ca. 1899–no year given].

8 J. P., Mama to George, no date.

9 J. P., John Lucas to George, January 1, 1900.

10 J. P., Little Sister to George, March 27, 1899.

Il J. P., Daughter to George, April 16 [ca. 1899—no year given].

12 J. P., Mama to Little Sister, March 5, 1901.

18 J. P., Mama to George, August 29 [ca. 1900——no year given].

14 J. P., Mama to George, January 13, 1901.

15 J. P., Little Sister to George, July 18, 1900.

16 J. P., George to Little Sister, January 14, 1901.

17 J. P., George to Mama, June 5, 1901.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 J. P., George to Mama [ca. 1902-—no date given].

21 J. P., George to Mama, April 4, 1903.

22. J. P., George to Little Sister, January 14, 1901.

23. J. P., George to Mama, June 5, 1901.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 J. P., George to Mama, August 18, 1901.

27 J. P., George to Mama [ca. 1902——no date given].

28 J. P., George to Mama, August 18, 1901. 29 Ibid.

30 J. P., George to Mama [ca. 1902-—no date given].