

Citations noting the importance of Walter L. Williams, "United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism," *Journal of American History* (1980)

Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire
by Katharine Bjork Book description by the University of Pennsylvania Press 2019.

Popular accounts of the War of 1898 and its aftermath in the Philippines, Cuba, and the other colonies of Spain that became American protectorates or outright possessions in 1898 tend to stress the novelty of the moment when the United States landed troops overseas and installed its first colonial regimes abroad. According to the textbook view, the Spanish-American War represents the moment the United States emerged on the world stage and began to grapple with the challenges and contradictions of having an empire. In contrast to this view of U.S. colonies as an aberration or afterthought in the nation's course of development, there is another well-developed strain in the history of U.S. empire that focuses on continuity, rather than disjuncture, in American territorial expansion at the end of the nineteenth century. It is this tradition of examining the legacies and transformations of ongoing practices of American empire that I follow in this book.

Of particular significance for my analysis of how colonial relations abroad were patterned on domestic Indian policy is an oft-cited but little heeded article published by **Walter L. Williams** in 1980. Williams's article, "United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*, made a compelling case for considering U.S. relations with Indians as a form of domestic colonialism. He demonstrated that turn-of-the-century politicians on both sides of the annexation question, as well as leaders in the fields of religion, philanthropy, and the military, all invoked the precedent of U.S. relations with Indian wards as a model for overseas colonial relations. Nineteenth-century Indian policy, wrote Williams, "served as a precedent for imperialist domination over the Philippines and other islands occupied during the Spanish-American War."

Among the institutions surveyed in Williams's article—Congress, the Supreme Court, religious denominations, and philanthropic Friends of the Indians—the frontier army receives some attention. Williams spends a few pages analyzing continuities between the army's most recent experience of Indian Wars in the West and the idea that American soldiers abroad viewed—and fought—the 1899-1902 insurrection in the Philippines as more of the same.

Although Williams focused his analysis on the Philippines, his observations on the continuity of personnel and the saliency of their recent Indian fighting for subsequent colonial policy making applies equally to the U.S. military enterprise in Cuba and Puerto Rico. In one sense, none of this is remarkable. In the three decades following the Civil War, the army's main function was to support the westward course of territorial expansion, a task that involved policing Indians and enforcing Grant's Peace Policy of confining them to reservations and defining as hostile those who resisted. In a calculation of the cost of the nation's Indian Wars, the U.S. Census Office reported in 1894 that the government had spent \$800 million on military actions against indigenous people since independence. Excepting the War of 1812, the U.S.-Mexican War, and the Civil War, "at least three-fourths of the total expense of the army is chargeable, directly or indirectly, to the Indians," the report found. The army sent overseas in 1898 was preeminently an Indian-fighting army.