SECULAR MISSIONARIES: THE EARLY AMERICAN TEACHERS IN THE PHILIPPINES William Edward Ezzell DeKalb Community College

God has not been preparing the English-speaking... peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns...[The Filipinos] are a barbarous race modified by three centuries of contact with a decadent race.

Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, 1900

In exchange for a smattering of English, we yielded our souls.

Renato Constantino, Filipino scholar, 1966

If few Americans in May, 1898, had ever heard of the Philippine Islands or knew where they were, practically none would have imagined that by April of the following year they would belong to the United States. It would have seemed absolutely incredible that within four years some one thousand American teachers would be teaching the English language and the "American way of life" to Filipino children. Such an attempt to establish a system of mass education among a colonial people of an alien culture was unprecedented. Most of the older imperial powers, particularly the British and the Dutch, thought the American idea of mass education in the Philippines ridiculous.

What was the purpose of this attempt? What were the attitudes of the American teachers in the Philippines who carried out the program? What were its material results? What effects did it have on the Filipinos? This paper attempts to

furnish some insight into these questions.

During much of their period of occupation, the Spanish gave little attention to public education in the Philippines, although they converted the vast majority of the Filipinos to Christianity. In 1634 a royal edict ordered the clergy to take steps toward educating the Filipinos in the Spanish language and Christian doctrine. However, the Crown provided no support until 1792. The first institution of advanced learning, the College of San Jose, was founded in 1601, and the University of Santo Tomas was founded in 1619. Most instruction in these schools was limited to religious instruction, and the number who attended remained relatively small.

The first real step toward primary education was not taken until 1863 when an act ordered the establishment of schools for the young throughout the islands. By 1866 there were 1600 elementary and secondary schools in the islands, with 135,000 boys and 12,000 girls in attendance. In 1820 a nautical school had been established, and 19 years later a school of commerce and languages and an academy of drawing and printing were set up. The first normal school did not open until 1893. The system was not poorly planned, but it developed slowly and was

never fully put into operation.

In 1896 open hostilities between the Philippines and Spain broke out, and very shortly thereafter most schools were closed. During the rest of the war against Spain and the first year or so of the war against the United States, most

schoolhouses were used for barracks, prisons, or hospitals.3 In 1899 there was no educational system in operation in the Philippines, but as soon as areas were pacified, American soldiers started to teach Filipino children. Schools were makeshift, and books, paper, and pencils were almost nonexistent, but Americans made attempts to teach English and sometimes the rudiments of American government. The military had opened seven schools in Manila within three weeks after the capture of the city. 4 Out of ignorance, the military authorities ordered large quantities of textbooks in the Spanish language, believing that to be the common language of the islands. At that time, however, less that 5 per cent of the population could speak Spanish, and these books generally proved useless outside Manila.

As a result of recommendations of the Schurman Commission of 1899 and the Taft Commission the following year, the United States established a civil government for the Philippines. That government was not designed for "our satisfaction or for the expression of our theoretical views, but for the happiness, peace, and prosperity of the people of the Philippine Islands." 6 Neither the government which was organized nor the educational system established as an important part of it lived up to these idealistic phrases. The Philippine educational system did, however, grow out of the recommendations and plans

of these commissions.

In July 1900, Fred W. Atkinson, who became the first general superintendent of education in the Philippines, arrived and assisted in planning a centralized school system, authorized on January 21, 1901, in Act Number 74 of the Philippine Commission. 7 Under the secretary of public instruction there would be a general superintendent, eighteen divisions (usually comprised of two provinces) with division superintendents, and one deputy division superintendent for each organized province (there were thirty-six). The provinces were divided into areas (pueblos) over which there would be supervising teachers. There were to be local school boards composed of four to six members plus the town presidente as ex officio member. The act authorized the general superintendent to hire a thousand trained teachers from the United States. After the act went into effect, each transport from the United States brought a few teachers, but never more than sixty. But with the arrival of the transport <u>Thomas</u> on August 23, 1901, a total of six hundred teachers landed at Manila.⁸ Eventually the thousand teachers called for in the act were hired and brought to the Philippines. Although only six hundred of the so-called pioneer American teachers came to the Philippines on the Thomas all of them came to be known as the "Thomasites" after the name of that ship.

The act establishing the school system also provided that no teacher or other person was to teach or criticize the doctrines of any religious group in the public schools. Any teacher convicted of doing so would be dismissed from public service. A priest or minister, if he requested to do so, could teach religion in the public schools for three one-half-hour periods per week, but only to those pupils whose parents or guardians expressed in writing their desire for their children to attend such instruction.

Due to the diversity of languages and according to one observer, because English was the language of Anglo-Saxon democracy and the heritage of liberty, 10 English became the

medium of instruction. Schools emphasized good citizenship and individual ambition. 11

The American teachers had hoped that education could be made compulsory and universal, but this aim proved impossible for several reasons: the scattered nature of the population, the conservatism of many of the rural families, and especially the limitations of finance.

Americans designed the curriculum largely to correct what they considered faults in the character of the Filipino.

According to the Report of the Philippine Commission:

Larger place is given to science work than is usual in the public schools of America. ... Education in the Philippines is concerned with a people whose lack of exactness, especially in their mental processes, is a conspicuous racial fault. The Filipino has an instinctive and intense reluctance to admit ignorance. This characteristic has often earned him an otherwise undeserved reputation for unreliability or dishonesty. He fails to appreciate the desirability of accuracy. Training in science, properly given, will develop a new respect for exactness and a conception of the inexpediency of misstatement, proving perhaps, a better corrective than methods which meet this fault by more direct attack.

The plant and animal studies place emphasis upon economic values. They give to all students information and expansion of agriculture in the islands....Their pedagogical purpose on the other hand is to induce accurate first-hand observation and reasoning about facts observed. Especial difficulty lies in overcoming the tendency of the Filipino pupil to learn merely by rote. The science studies largely eliminate the use of this method in that they require answers as a fruit of reasoning rather than of memory. Filipino boys and girls are quite alike in their enthusiasm for work which is out of doors, away from the printed page, and concerns things which they can handle, which they have seen every day, and which have very considerable economic importance for them....

If we are to look forward to the time when the Filipino people are to be, at least in large part, self-governing, certainly the obligation exists to supply the best possible training to that end. Hence, special emphasis is placed upon the teaching of methods and ethics of government, of the social relations and obligations of the individual, of fundamental political economy, and especially of the rights and use of the elective franchise. There are in the public schools at present 12,000 male pupils, who, within the next three years, will

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reach the age of twenty-three and will attain elective franchise through possessing the educational qualifications. Within six years upward of 60,000 will similarly attain the franchise. The necessity for giving these pupils, without delay, adequate instruction in civics and politics is manifest. 12

From 1901-1914 Americans made a number of important changes in the organization, structure, and emphasis of the Philippine school system. During the school year 1903-1904 the title of general superintendent was changed to director of education, and he was given two assistants. His department was divided into seven branches concerned with records, accounting, buildings, property, academics, industrial instruction, and publications. A branch chief headed each of these. Thirtyfour school divisions were established corresponding, except in cases, to the provinces and administered by superintendents. Each division was subdivided into districts with a supervising teacher for each. 13

The system was also expanded structurally, with the establishment in 1906 of a school for the deaf and blind. 14 A legislative act on June 18, 1908, founded the University of the Philippines. By 1913, within the university, there were colleges of liberal arts, law, veterinary science, medicine and surgery, engineering, agriculture, and a school of fine arts. A training school for nurses was also established and proved to be quite successful. 15 By 1910, 587,000 students, or 8 per cent of the total population, were in school. (One writer claimed that this figure compared favorably with statistics from some sections of the southern United states at that time. 16) In 1914 there were 35 high schools, although only 12 offered the full four-year course, 245 intermediate schools, 4,121 primary schools, 6 schools of arts and trades, 23 manual training shops, a school for the deaf and blind, a school of household industries (training adult women in embroidery, lacemaking, etc.), a commercial school, the Philippine Normal School, and the University of the Philippines. 17

In regard to American efforts to instruct the Filipinos, one British official reportedly exclaimed, "Educate them! My word! Spain Christianized them three centuries ago, and now United States is going to educate them. Why doesn't someone show them how to make a living, and earn something to eat?"18 Given that this statement may say as much about the British concept of education as it does about the folly of American plans for educating the Filipinos, it does point out the misplaced emphasis of the early American teachers in the Philippines. Some teachers soon recognized the need for something more than academic training, but few made sufficient

effort to meet that need.

Most of the teachers who came to the Philippines had been trained to teach elementary school subjects or traditional high school subjects such as English, history, or science. They knew little or nothing about agricultural or industrial education, and their first efforts in these areas were impractical. They assigned each pupil a small plot, about three feet by six feet, near the school where he could grow three or four stalks of corn and a few other plants. Students cultivated these plots during part of the school day. 19 While work on these small plots provided good exercise, it taught the

young Filipinos little about practical agriculture -- growing food crops in sufficient quantity to meet existing needs. schools continued to emphasize academic subjects and the virtues of American civilization.

By 1910 this situation had changed somewhat, due mainly to the influence of Dean C. Worcester, a member of the Zoology Department at the University of Michigan who became a member of the Philippine Commission. Worcester promoted swine and chicken production and encouraged home gardens. Schools enlarged their gardens. Americans set up special farm schools in the provinces where students grew such crops as camotes (Philippine sweet potatoes), upland rice, corn, bananas, cowpeas, beans, pineapples, eggplants, arrowroot, and, in some areas, cacao and coffee. 20 In 1912 and 1913 the Department of Public Instruction carried out an extensive corn campaign. holding competitions to grow and cook corn. Thirty thousand boys participated in corn growing contests. 21

One of the first trades to receive attention was woodworking, and by 1913 it was taught in eighteen trade schools. 22 Home industries, such as lacemaking, were developed, and in the summer normal school institutes taught such skills as sawsharpening. The Bureau of bookbinding and other trades. 23 Printing taught printing,

One barrier to the introduction of "practical" subjects was that many Filipinos held manual labor in contempt. They believed that when one was "educated," he did not work with his hands. Most wanted to become public servants or "little lawyers." According to Worcester, this attitude had changed to a great extent by 1913, 24 but Nicholas Roosevelt, writing in 1925 and citing the Report of the Monroe Commission, reported that the Filipinos continued to be averse to manual labor. 25

Cockfighting was the main pastime of the Filipinos. For the most part, they did not engage in athletic sports, and there was no tradition of physical training in the schools. However, they became interested in the games played by the American soldiers. Early American teachers introduced physical education and, through their influence, the Filipinos started playing baseball and participating in olympic type field events. 26 One teacher, William B. Freer, happily reported in 1905 that baseball was widely played, not only in the Philippines, but in the major port cities of China and Japan as well. He further commented, "Who knows but that this fine, manly game may not yet be the means of westernizing the Orient.!" (italics added)²⁷

Division superintendents advised American teachers going into the provinces to treat the Filipinos as "fellow citizens," to respect the institutions of the people and their religious traditions, to work with and respect the village presidente, and to keep their personal religious feelings out of their work. (President McKinley's earlier comment to the contrary notwithstanding.) Above all they were advised to avoid conflict with the local padre, for to do otherwise would be to

incur the ill will of the entire community. 28

There were few restricting regulations from headquarters. and each teacher had freedom to solve problems as best he saw fit. In many of the villages there had never been any school buildings, and in others the schools had been destroyed. In these villages the teacher had first to secure a place to hold school and help arrange to have a schoolhouse built. School was sometimes held in the home of the $\frac{presidente}{100}$ or in the home

of the teacher if there was space enough. In some of the older and richer towns, there were existing school buildings of stone or brick, outfitted with crude wooden benches and small blackboards. In the early years especially, books were scarce. Some were in English, some in Spanish, and some had been crudely translated into the native vernacular. Many books made reference to such things as apples and snow, which the Filipinos knew nothing about. According to Dean C. Worcester of the Philippine Commission, by 1913 a comprehensive series of textbooks, adapted to the needs of Filipinos, had been developed for the primary schools, but in the high schools, American textbooks were still in general use.29

One area that lacked proper attention during much of the early period of American occupation of the Philippines was sanitation. Even though so-called modern buildings had been built by 1913, there were no sanitary facilities, and the islands were still menaced by epidemic diseases. Worcester and others believed that the Department of Public Instruction would be the most likely agency for dealing with this problem and that perhaps American teachers could provide some guidance by way of example. According to Worcester, however, school facilities and those on the private premises of American teachers were often in a more unsanitary state than any others in the towns. 30

American teachers never numbered much over one thousand, and this, or course, was not nearly enough to reach all parts of the islands directly. As soon as possible, instruction was given over to native Filipino teachers, and most of the American teachers in the provinces became supervisors. American teachers visited the schools and critized the native teachers, telling them what to do to improve their instruction. William B. Freer, who taught in the town of Solano in northern Luzon, spent four days a week, Monday through Thursday, supervising native teachers. He put much faith in what he called "object lessons." He also taught English to adults at night school. On Fridays all the teachers of the province gathered at Solano for instruction in English and methods of teaching. 31 In 1913 there were 8,500 Filipino teachers, 32 and by 1925 there were 25,000 Filipino teachers. 33 American teachers not only affected and shaped public education in the Philippines, they influenced education in the private schools as well. Private schools employed many graduates of the Philippine Normal School who had been taught by American teachers. Convent schools and other private schools adopted some American methods and started to teach English. By 1913, 275 of the 440 teachers in private schools could speak English. 34 Also by 1913, 25 private schools had been recognized and approved by the Department of Public Instruction and had introduced physical education and manual training to their curriculums. 35 The University of Santo Tomas, the oldest educational institution then in the Philippines and at that time the oldest university under the American flag, adopted more modern and scientific methods in both teaching and research in the fields of science and medicine, largely due to the influence of American educators. 36

According to William B. Freer, teachers, native and American, were usually respected by students and members of the community. The students were eager to learn, and very little time had to be taken for discipline. (At this point he expressed the wish that the Filipinos not become

Americanized.") 37 The Philippine Commission in 1904 reported that many instances of "physical harm" occurred due to the "overzealous" efforts of students, particularly the more advanced ones; some students studied until two o'clock a.m. and got up at six o'clock a.m. to continue for several days in a row. 38 Again according to Freer, in view of the needs and the attitudes of the Filipino people, who were cooperative, the American teachers believed in what they were doing -- establishing a free public school system where none had existed before. They enjoyed their work and were, for the most part, satisfied with its results. 39

Teachers often had great difficulty in reaching their stations. They traveled by train, boat, carabao cart, on ponyback, and on foot; occasionally they had to cross rivers by sliding in a sling over a rope stretched across the river. 40 sometimes took them weeks to reach their destination, and once there, they often remained isolated for several months. It took Freer, for example, five weeks and two days to reach the first school to which he was assigned. Upon reaching their stations, the lot of the American teachers was not so bad. They usually got one of the best houses in the barrio and paid very low rent for it. Sometimes members of the community brought them food (some would not accept gifts). They often had three or more servants who worked for a very low wage and sometimes for nothing more than food and lodging. According to Freer, some simply wanted to be near the American teacher in order to learn English. 41 American teachers were paid on the basis of education, experience, and position. Their pay during the early period ranged from \$75.00 to \$125.00 per month. 42 Most American teachers became accustomed to life in the Philippines, but a few could not stand the strain of the new environment. For instance, Robert J. McLaughlin of New York seems to have lived in perpetual fear of the people he was supposed to be teaching. In his letters he reported that he got very little sleep, often sitting up all night with a pistol in his hand. He told wild tales about ladrones (bandits) coming about his house, even breaking in, and threatening his life nightly. Upon investigation these stories proved to be nothing more than the products of McLaughlin's rather active imagination. He did not remain in the islands very long. 43 Although the attitudes of American teachers were varied in

their degree of tolerance for Philippine culture, most teachers, like those who had set up the school system, were severely critical of the value system of the Filipinos. They complained that Filipinos would not work if given an education and generally blamed this attitude on the Spainiards. 44 What of the example set by teachers and other Americans? Though they lifted books and did other small manual tasks, most of the teachers acquired several servants and did little manual labor themselves. Was the example of the "Anglo-Saxon" that different from the example of the Spaniard? It probably was

Many Americans spoke of the Filipinos as compulsive liars. They criticized them for having too many holidays and for not understanding the "honor of labor." 45 American teachers often viewed Filipino customs as amusing, as they might consider child's play amusing (this though without the scorn displayed by many Protestant missionaries). They saw little in Filipino culture of any real value. They sought to replace all ideas and customs brought to the Philippines by the Spanish, except 102

religion (the Protestant missionaries tried to replace that, but failed), with "those of Anglo-Saxon origin." They taught the children songs of British and American origin, having them memorize such patriotic songs as "America." 46 The teachers paid little attention to Filipino culture (with the exception of replacing the word "apple" with the word "coconot" in a child's reader), and seem to have been very sure that they were doing a great service by erasing as much as possible of the Malay-Spanish culture existing in the Philippines and replacing it, as quickly as possible, with an entirely alien culture of

Anglo-American origin.

American teachers were greatly influenced by the thencurrent concepts of Social Darwinism and the ideas expressed in Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden." They saw a natural pecking order among what was termed the "five races of mankind," with the Caucasian in front and the Anglo-Saxon at the head of that division. They believed that it was the mission of the Anglo-Saxon, in this case the American Anglo-Saxon, to give the world the benefits of his superior culture. Writing in 1905, William B. Freer quoted a verse from Kipling's "White Man's Burden" as an epigraph for his book, The Philippine Experiences of an American Teacher. In his foreword, he advised against giving the Filipinos any greater degree of self-government, "at this time," i.e., not until they had become properly Americanized. The New York Times used quotes from Kipling's poem as subheadings for each of the fifteen chapters in his book, The Philippines, A Treasure and a Problem. 48

One American scholar should receive special mention even though he did not go to the Philippines, strictly speaking, as a teacher. Dean C. Worcester was one of the few Americans who had been to the Philippines prior to 1898 and who had developed an appreciation of Filipino culture. By background he was a stern New Englander who demanded perfection, and he was often controversial. As noted above he was interested agricultural education and sanitation. He wrote two books on the Philippines, <u>The Philippine Islands and Their Peoples</u> and <u>The Philippines Past and Present</u>. For twelve years he was Secretary of the Interior for the Philippines and was deeply interested in the islands' non-Malay tribes. He made extensive ethnological and anthropological studies of them and condemned the Christian Malay-Filipinos for exploiting and discriminating against them. He got anti-slavery legislation passed, even though Malay-Filipinos claimed it was ridiculous since slavery did not exist in the Philippines. Many prominent Malay-Filipino leaders hated Worcester. He is the only American whose prominence is due solely to his career as a colonial administrator. 49

What were the material results of American educational involvement in the Philippines? The first systematic attempt to answer this question came in 1925 when the Board of Educational Survey, under Professor Paul Monroe of Columbia University, was commissioned. It was found that 37 per cent of the Filipinos were literate (in any language), that about 1,000,000 could speak English, that about 40 percent of the school age population was in school, 50 and, as noted previously, that there were about 25,000 English speaking teachers. The report of the Monroe Commission, as it was commonly called, was, in general, quite critical of the

Philippine educational system. It noted that teacher training was inadequate, that 82 per cent of the pupils did not go beyond the fourth grade, that the schools were overly academic in character and not well adapted to Philippine society, and that there was a low standard of honesty among the students. Further, it said that English was poorly taught and that many Filipino teachers of English did not use the language correctly. In the decade from 1913 to 1923, the civil service examined 190,191 candidates in English. Almost all of these had had English instruction in schools established by American teachers. Only 23 per cent passed the examination.51

In reply to the Monroe Commission a joint legislative committee headed by Manuel Quezon denied the charges and criticisms of the report and charged that the commission had been unfair in its evaluation. Ironically, however, this same committee approved of twenty-one of the twenty-eight recommendations which the Board of Educational Survey made. 52

Nicholas Roosevelt of the New York Times was in the Philippines during the winter of $\overline{1925-26}$. In his opinion the Philippine curriculum placed too much emphasis on the academic and political aspects of learning at the expense of utilitarian subject matter. "The Americans," he said, "have apparently allowed their idealism and inexperience to get the better of their common sense." 53

A Dutch director of education in Java, Roosevelt reported, made the observation that American teachers in the Philippines were trying to make Americans out of Malays, which, he said, was impossible. The Dutch generally agreed that the Americans had overly stressed academic disciplines at the expense of practical economic instruction, and that in attempting to force alien ideals upon the Filipinos, they had destroyed native culture without substituting one that the Filipinos could really understand. 54

It is relevant to consider the attitudes of two Filipino leaders who studied under American teachers, directly and indirectly. One is General Carlos P. Romulo, a close friend of General Douglas MacArthur, author and world traveler. The other is Luis Taruc, former leader of the Huk movement, who was imprisoned for a number of years. In his book, Mother America, Romulo says that the American teachers were "missionaries of democracy" and that they never took advantage of his position, though he lived in the "upper stratum" of society. Romulo points out that truth is relative and that to understand the Asian, the Westerner must understand his ways of speech and thought. The Asian rarely used the absolute negative, for it might be insulting. "There are," he says, "not only shadings in speech and idiom but nuances in Oriental courtesy as well that make the Oriental out a liar to the Occidental The Oriental prefers avoiding pain at the moment." Could it not be that when American teachers accused Filipinos of being liars and cheaters, the Filipinos were frequently simply reacting to an alien influence in the only way that their culture had taught them? "More than all else," Romulo writes, "the Oriental has come to resent patronizing manners and condescension. ... Little wounds are kept open by the best intentioned of Americans. $^{"55}$

Luis Taruc "was educated in schools established as part of the colonial rule of American imperialism." In his autobiography, Born of the People, he points out that the United States boasted that it educated the Filipinos, but at the time of independence almost half were illiterate. He

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asserts that the Filipino had been made almost completely dependent upon the United States through education. All the books used in Filipino schools came from America and explained "science, economics, history, and politics" from the American point of view. Moreover he says that the process of training to govern consisted only in the training of Filipinos of the upper classes to govern in the interests of American imperialism. Always, American methods, customs, and traditions were stressed. The emphasis on English and American literature did not allow the growth of a native Filipino literature. The Filipino was made to feel ashamed and unworthy. 56

Taruc's views are more extreme than those of most Filipinos. He was born in a nipa shack, the son of a peasant. With difficulty, he acquired some formal education, but his education was mainly through experience. He saw the extreme poverty of the many and the wealth of the few. He saw the wealthy Filipinos as friends and accomplices of the Americans. He fought the Japanese as a Huk, but the American treated him as an armed and dangerous civilian. He was elected to the Philippine legislature, but was denied his seat by the establishment. He became a Communist. On the other hand, Romulo was born into a wealthy family and received a university education. He became a friend and ally of the Americans, a member of the establishment.

Yet, both men had something in common: both were aware of the condescending attitude that the westerner held toward Asians in general and Filipinos in particular. Though most of the American teachers went to the Philippines for humanitarian reasons, they held the same attitudes that other westerners held. The American teachers undertook an unprecedented task, one for which they were ill-prepared. They did establish an extensive public education system. Many suffered hardships and sincerely tried to help their "little brown brothers." They saw themselves as "missionaries of democracy," but as Romulo has pointed out, "Little wounds are kept open by the best intentioned of Americans."

NOTES

This paper was originally begun during a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar at Yale University subsequently read at a meeting of the Southeast Conference of the Association for Asian studies.

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⁷Fred W. Atkinson, <u>The Philippine Islands</u> (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1905), p. 384.

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32Worcester, The Philippines, p. 507.
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