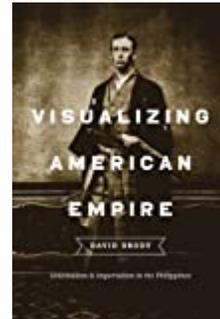




David Brody. *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. 213 S. ISBN 978-0-226-07530-3; \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-07533-4; \$27.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-07534-1.



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D. Brody: Visualizing American Empire

David Brody's *Visualizing American Empire* is another publication that enriches further the historical materials dealing with Philippine-American relations. The book may be considered non-traditional because it moves away from political themes and focuses instead on the cultural and visual aspects of the colonial relationship. It is commendable because it discusses side by side the cultural and social impact of American culture on Filipinos and the orientalism and Filipinization that happened in the American society. It only shows that colonialism is a two-way process that affects the colonized country and the colonizing power as well. If this trend will continue, students of Philippine and American history will find this topic more meaningful, insightful and less repetitive.

Many of the existing literature dealing with the same period approached the topic from political and economic viewpoint. They based their narrative on the official reports of the colonial officials assigned in the Philippines. Others got their information from travel accounts, correspondences and memoirs of private individuals. Since they were concerned with the grand narrative, they ended up writing stories about the policies of the colo-

nial government and how it affected Philippine society as a whole. They also discussed the economic transformations that happened in the colony after it was subjected to colonial rule. For the past one hundred years this was the general trend of history books dealing with the American period of Philippine history.

Brody's latest work may be considered pioneering because it discusses another aspect of the same historical period but uses another set of sources which were not extensively used in previous studies. His work is also distinct because his analysis was based not only on written documents but also on creative outputs like home decors, body ornaments, photographs, furniture, maps, utensils, architectural designs and other artistic works. Moreover, his study may also be considered a balanced approach because half of the book dealt with the cultural transformation of Philippines and the other half was devoted to the impact of oriental and Filipino culture on some Americans. These aspects of the colonial landscape have been there for several decades but were not given that much attention by scholars because of other priorities.

Like any other works, Brody's book is not free from

shortcomings and criticism. In terms of coverage and content, there are other historical realities that should have been included in the study that could have strengthened further his main points. For instance, Brody was silent on the merchandises that the Manila galleon brought to Mexico. Galleon trade was in existence for more than two hundred years and the goods that Asian traders shipped to America were plenty. The chance that these goods ended up in American homes is very high because of the proximity of Mexico to California and Cuba to Florida. It is just unfortunate that Brody did not take this into consideration in his study.

Brody did not also mention that many American soldiers enlisted during the Filipino American War brought with them a lot of valuable works of art when they went home after their tour of duty in the Philippines. These include sanctuary lamps, ivory crucifixes, gold chalices, velvet robes, altar cover laces, and other precious religious paraphernalia. The volume of these is significant because according to the claims of the Catholic Church, the amount of goods that American soldiers allegedly took from the churches were worth more than two million dollars. This figure covers only what the Church lost and does not include the valuable items taken from private homes. Many of these ended up in the hands of antique collectors who subsequently used them as home decors. The non-inclusion of this historical reality in Brody's book is understandable because American authors would rather not delve with this topic because it damages the image of the American military.

The pro-American bias of the book is also evident in the pictures presented to portray the excesses of the Americans and the Filipinos during the war. Brody seems to imply that Americans were justified in using water cure against the Filipinos because the latter also committed similar non-conventional tactics against the American soldiers. He repeatedly referred to the picture showing some Filipinos injecting leprosy bacteria on a captured American soldier. Both incidents indeed happened but recent studies have uncovered several other abominable cases that American soldiers committed against the Filipinos. The indiscriminate killings in Samar in retaliation for the Balangiga massacre and the reconcentration in Batangas should have been included in the discussion. Attention should be given also to the fact that there were more Filipinos who died during the

three-year Filipino American war than during the Spanish period that lasted 333 years. If ever the Filipinos committed atrocities against the American soldiers, their number and the level of brutality were no match to the excesses that American soldiers committed during the war.

The book also contains very long discussion of the St. Louis exposition wherein Filipino uplanders, also referred to as ethnic groups, were presented in the discussion. Brody was right in saying that they were used as evidence to prove that Filipinos were primitive, savage and uncivilized and therefore need American intervention. Indeed it is true that they truly exist but their number is very small compared with the lowlanders and the civilized and educated Filipinos. A more truthful presentation of the Philippines in the exposition should have focused on the likes of Jose Rizal and other members of the local elite who were comparable or even better than ordinary Americans at that time. In fact the scholars who were sent to American universities during the early American period were able to earn their respective degrees like any other American student. It only shows that the level of civilization of Filipinos were not that low as portrayed by American propagandists.

Examining the sources of Brody, it is noticeable that he based his narrative and analysis mostly on American authors. The only Filipino scholar whom he quoted is Vicente Rafael, but he could not be considered a representative of the Filipino point of view because he is American-educated and practices his profession in the United States. There are already a number of Filipino nationalist historians who have written about the Filipino-American War and the early American period of Philippine history. They offer a lot of data which are not articulated by American authors and they also present different interpretations of the topics that Brody discussed in his book. The likes of Teodoro Agoncillo, Renato Constantino, Reynaldo Ileto and Milagros Guerrero are only some of the authors who offer a non-American perspective of the topic. The tone of the discussion would have been balanced and objective if Brody considered them in his analysis. Moreover, many of the criticisms mentioned above would have been avoided if only the author went beyond the existing books in American libraries and archives.

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