

The Energy of Empire



Part 1. The Eagle Spreads
its Wings

The Energy of Empire

Part One:
The Eagle Spreads its Wings

Contents

Poem: The Indian Wars

1. Introduction, The Black Iron Prison

2. Hawaii, The Bayonet Constitution

3. Cuba, 'A Splendid Little War'

4. Puerto Rico, 'Belonging to, but not part of'

5. The Philippines, 'Nothing left to do but take them all'

6. 'Unhung Traitors', The Anti Imperialist League

7. Japan, 'Honorary Aryans'

8. Panama, 'A Just Cause'

9. Nicaragua, 'When history is written, the Contras will be folk heroes'

10. Honduras, The Banana Republic

Concluding Thoughts: Where Next?

The Indian Wars

With the Indians vanquished at Wounded Knee
The Empire shone from sea to sea
But we could not rest
Let salt stop this quest
For in far off lands there were more Indians to free

We needed to liberate Cuban Indians from Spain
Lucky for us—a travesty on the Maine!
We promised them freedom
But that's not for heathens
So their new masters we became

Far away in the Philippines
We dispatched a squadron of Marines
The Indians of Manila
Turned into Guerrillas
And forced us to liberate them by any means

South of the border, Indians got out of line
Thinking owning their own land was just fine!
So we set up a school
To teach them who rules
And sent them a Condor to ensure they're supine

In Vietnam the Indians resisted
Through a Phoenix the bad ones were listed
Three million lay dead
Three countries in shreds
Orange and Napalm greatly assisted

In Iraq we had global remit
Sanctions were harsh we have to admit
The price was steep
Indian life not cheap
But we think the half-million definitely worth it

Now the Great Plains are Afghanistan
The new Indian we call Taliban
Why we're there no one remembers
Didn't something happen once in September?

One thing for sure—it won't end in our lifespan

But the last war is yet to be fought
As empires collapse and lose their support
When the average man finds out we're bankrupt
Trillions in debt—his temper will erupt
When austerity starts to be felt
With instructions from Washington to tighten one's belt
The people of these United States you'll see
Are the final Indians we'll have to set free

One. Introduction, The Black Iron Prison

Emperor Palpatine: 'In order to ensure our security and continuing stability, the Republic will be reorganised into the first Galactic Empire, for a safe and secure society'

Padmé Amidala: 'So, this is how Liberty dies... with thunderous applause?'

This book consists of the edited transcripts of the first season of a podcast series titled: *The Energy of Empire*. The subtitle, *The Eagle Spreads its Wings*, is specific to this initial season, as it covers the US Empire's expansion overseas between the years 1893 and 1912. I attempt to both provide the historical context necessary to understand current events, and demonstrate continuity between that previous age and our own.

This endeavour grows out of two podcast series I previously produced: *The Essence of Anarchy* and *Contemplating Conspiracy* (both of these were also transformed into books of the same names).

If *anarchy* is the absence of rulers, a state where all relationships are consensual, *empire* is the exact opposite. It is coercion and control imposed over a vast area.

Why do imperial structures arise? What forces play into them? Are they internally harmonious, or do they contain different factions fighting against each other? And do we still live in the age of empires now, or have we evolved beyond such a primitive way of operating?

If we do live in such an age, what can be done to resist imperial tyranny? How does liberty die and what can we do to resurrect it?

This series is called *The Energy of Empire*, as in contrast to some of the more extravagant conspiracy theories—and without claiming they are necessarily wrong—I am not proposing that one secret society has been behind all the great powers going back to Babylon. I am suggesting that a certain pattern—or *energy*—continuously recreates itself in the form of *empire*. There's something in the collective human psyche that replicates this over and over again. Mythicaly, it is this structure that science fiction writer Philip K. Dick refers to as the *Black Iron Prison*.

In every age there are those who cynically seek to profit from empire. From big business seeking monopolies on resources in far away lands, to media men figuring out wars are a good way to sell papers. There are also those who want empire for empire's sake; the ideologues who feel called by destiny to remake the world in their image. Whilst we may not be dealing with one monolithic conspiracy, conspiracies

certainly play their role too, with deliberate distortions and false flag operations bringing the public onboard.

Even conspiracy theories themselves can be weaponised by empire. The fear of a communist octopus encircling the globe for example, provided cover during the cold war for the expansion of US imperial power, under the guise of resisting it.

Empire's also have their humanitarians, or at least those who profess to be. Those who champion doctrines of *humanitarian intervention* or *responsibility to protect*, bringing the more caring portions of the population onboard.

In every generation new imperialists emerge believing that they have risen above the sins of the past and are now in a *post imperial age*, where we operate for these humanitarian reasons.

US President William McKinley believed this in 1898—at least he professed to—when declaring the United States could not possibly tyrannise faraway lands as the European powers did, because ‘the tyrannical impulse is foreign to America’s character and tradition.’ ‘No imperial designs lurk in the American mind’, he said, just prior to instigating a brutal invasion and occupation of the Philippines.

From our vantage point in history we can clearly see Mr McKinley was wrong. The United States had not then escaped the *energy of empire*. But has it ever? Has any country ever, and if so when? When did we move into a post imperial age? And if we haven’t, why should we trust our governments when they promise that—in exchange for civil liberties—they will protect us from such threats as terrorism and viruses? Why should we trust them when they tell us that in exchange for our money they will educate our children and look after us in old age?

To examine these questions, I’m going to principally look at the empire of the United States. I’m not doing so because it is uniquely bad, but rather because in the modern era it has been uniquely powerful. To get started I’m going to commit what is known as the *Salt Water Fallacy*. This fallacy states that an empire only becomes such when it crosses an ocean. Clearly the United States was an expansionist power going right back into the 19th century, with the Indian Wars and invasion of Mexico (and you could argue the war against the seceding South too). I’m going to begin however when this empire goes overseas in search of new lands—new Indians to conquer.

Even at this time the concept of ‘empire’ was out of fashion. That was something Europeans did, not liberty loving Americans. The euphemism, ‘the Large Policy’, was employed to dress imperial ambitions up as expansive thinking. The word ‘Internationalism’ serves the same purpose today.

Examining this history will provide a narrative from which I will draw out the different energies that have gone into the empire, from the very well intentioned to the utterly self serving. It will also allow for the opening up of deeper questions of conspiracy. Are we really living in the age of the United States Empire, or is this ultimately a cover for a globalist empire of international finance, one which knows no allegiance to any flag?

Should the World Economic Forum's declaration that by 2030 we'll own nothing and be happy send shivers down our spines? Does global dictatorship loom? Or is this just a Danish politician making silly videos and we're all getting carried away? Ascertaining who or what is really pulling the levers of power in this world is impossibly challenging. My contention is that by examining what we can say for sure about empire, we will be in a much better position to ask those deeper questions about just how far the rabbit hole goes.

At the outset of this project I did not intend to publish the transcripts of the podcasts. I now regret not being more mindful of this possibility, as I would have taken the time to tie the sources into the text in a more helpful manner. Instead, they are simply listed at the end of each chapter.

This work is far from my own. I am heavily indebted to the writing of Stephen Kinzer for most of the turn of the 20th century history, and James Bradley for the chapter on Japan. As I progress forward in time, I have drawn on the writing of William Blum and Murray Rothbard, and the documentary work of John Pilger and Abby Martin.

There is a playlist for the podcast series on both [YouTube](#) and [Odysee](#), and it can be found on a variety of platforms from my [podcast page](#).

Two. Hawaii, The Bayonet Constitution

News reader: 'At the White House yesterday President Clinton signed a formal letter of apology to the people of Hawaii. He was apologising on behalf of the US Government for the Government's involvement a hundred years ago in removing the independent Hawaiian Monarchy by force.'

Hawaiian activist: 'Say it in your heart, say it when you sleep: we are not American, we will die as Hawaiians, we will never be Americans.'

News reader: 'Once Hawaii was an Independent nation recognized by foreign countries including the United States, then in 1893 American sugar barons with help from US Marines illegally overthrew the Hawaiian Queen and took over.'

I remember being around eight years old and learning all about the United States in school. We were taught that there were fifty states, but only forty-nine of them were on the main American continent. The island chain of Hawaii, over two thousand miles away, became the fiftieth and final state as late as 1959. I'm sure I didn't see anything sinister in this. America seemed great, why wouldn't you want to be a part of it? It's where Hulk Hogan, Bart Simpson and Baywatch came from after all. As we heard in the opening newsclip from 1993 however, Hawaiian's weren't necessarily so easily impressed. The takeover of their country one hundred years prior was arguably the US's first act of overseas empire building.

This all began on the night of January 14th 1893, with a plot by sugar barrons to overthrow Queen Liliuokalani and make Hawaii a part of the United States. To understand how we got there, we'll have to go back a few years into the Island's history.

The Hawaiian islands were, incredibly, settled by Polynesian people sometime during the first millennium. It staggers belief such a thing is even possible, but there they are. The Islands had around a five hundred year period of isolation, until British explorer James Cook rocked up in 1778. It's possible Spanish sailors knew of the Islands over two hundred years before that, as they sailed between their colonies of Mexico and the Philippines. Cook named them the Sandwich Islands, not because he liked sandwiches, but rather in honour of his sponsor, the Earl of Sandwich.

Within five years of Cook's arrival, European military technology helped King Kamehameha the 1st to conquer and unify the Islands for the first time, establishing the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1795.

Much like the Native Americans, the population succumbed to diseases brought by the Europeans (particularly smallpox), declining from three hundred thousand in the 1770s, to sixty thousand in the 1850s, to just twenty four thousand by 1920.

Between 1820 and 1850 nearly two hundred Christian missionaries from New England moved to the Islands, which caused something of a clash of cultures, with one missionary writing the natives were:

'exceedingly ignorant; stupid to all that is lovely, grand and awful [inspiring] in the works of God; low, naked, filthy, vile and sensual; covered with every abomination, stained with blood and black with crime.'

I can only assume the Hawaiians were none too fond of their new neighbours either, as the puritanical types took over and banned singing, dancing and games of all kinds.

As the years passed missionaries and their descendants sought out commercial opportunities and found Hawaii's climate conducive to the growth of sugar cane. This enterprise required land, and lots of it. Acquiring it was complicated by the fact that Hawaiians did not hold to European style property norms of owning land in the first place. They did not understand how a transaction could deprive them of it.

In the 1840s missionary school master turned planter, Amos Starr Cooke (no relation to James), persuaded King Kamehameha the 3rd to enact land reform similar to the Enclosures Act taking place in Britain. Large tracts of communal land were divided into small parcels and sold off to sugar planters. Incidentally Cooke's company, Castle & Cooke, founded with Samuel Castle, became one of the biggest sugar producers in the world and remains active till this day.

The major obstacle then facing the planters were the tariffs protecting sugar growers inside the United States. Tariffs of a different kind would be a factor in the still to come secessionist war between the states. After this war, with the United States increasingly looking outwards, the planters arranged for the US military to construct bases in Hawaii in exchange for a free trade agreement. It was in the renewal of this agreement eight years later that the US came to control the famous Pearl Harbour.

The sugar industry boomed throughout the 1880s, but many disenfranchised Hawaiians were hostile to the loss of their land. Hawaii was also filling up with immigrant workers from Japan and China. The ruling class acted to sustain their power through what became known as the *Bayonet Constitution*, due to the threat of armed force that lay behind it. The authority of the monarch was diminished whilst voting was restricted to the land owning class.

The boom period came to an abrupt end in 1890, when the United States dropped its sugar tariffs altogether, whilst at the same time directly compensating domestic producers. The planters' puppet monarch, King Kalakaua, died in 1891, leaving his more independent-minded sister, Queen Liliuokalani, to succeed him. These two factors combined to create the *Hawaiian Annexation Club*, with the goal of bringing the Islands into the United States.

And so we come round to the 14th of January 1893, when Queen Liliuokalani attempted to abrogate the Bayonet Constitution and promulgate a new one. She had laid the ground by touring several islands on horseback, talking to the people about her ideas and collecting a lengthy petition in support. This new constitution would have extended suffrage by reducing property requirements for voting. Given that there were forty thousand native Hawaiians on the Islands, twenty-seven thousand Asians and just six thousand Europeans, this was never going to be popular with the ruling class.

And popular it wasn't! Founder of the Annexation Club, Lorrin Thurston, organised a 'Committee of Safety' to overthrow the Queen. Crucial to this effort was the presence of the USS Boston and one hundred and sixty two American Marines, who came ashore ostensibly to protect US citizens, but in reality ensuring the coup would be a success.

With the monarchy quickly deposed, a provisional Government of Hawaii was established under President Sanford B. Dole of the later Dole fruit Family.

Queen Liliuokalani refused to yield, issuing the following written statement:

'I, Liliuokalani, by the Grace of God under the Constitution of the Kingdom, Queen, do hereby solemnly protest against any and all acts done against myself and the constitutional Government of the Hawaiian Kingdom by certain persons claiming to have established a provisional government of and for this Kingdom.

'That I yield to the superior force of the United States of America, whose minister plenipotentiary, John L. Stevens, has caused the United States troops to land at Honolulu and declared that he would support the said provisional government.

'Now, to avoid any collision of armed forces and perhaps the loss of life, I do under this protest, and impelled by said force, yield my authority until such time as the Government of the United States shall, upon the facts being presented to it, undo the action of its representatives and reinstate me in the authority which I claim as the constitutional sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands.'

The coup would never have been possible without the support of the American diplomat Queen Liliuokalani mentions, John Stevens. Although Stevens did not receive specific orders, he was dispatched by President Benjamin Harrison with annexation in mind. By the time the dust settled however, anti-imperialist Grover Cleveland was in the White House and furious about the whole affair. He declared that most Americans rejected the seizure of faraway lands as:

‘not only opposed to our national policy, but as a perversion of our national mission’.

President Cleveland came down hard on the coup plotters, instigating an investigation into what exactly had taken place. *The Blount Report*, delivered in July of 1893, claimed improper US backing for the overthrow had been responsible for its success, and concluded that the Provisional Government lacked popular support. Cleveland recalled Ambassador Stevens, had the military commander in Hawaii resign and ordered the dissolution of the Provisional Government and the restoration of the monarch. The Provisional Government simply refused. Cleveland went so far as to threaten an invasion of Hawaii, with two warships directing their guns toward the capital, however his bluff was called.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, composed mostly of Senators in favour of annexation, then initiated their own investigation to discredit *The Blount report*. *The Morgan Report* muddied the waters sufficiently to move Cleveland into a recognition of the Provisional Government and ultimately the Republic of Hawaii.

In 1895 Hawaiians staged an armed revolution, but the effort was quickly shut down. Queen Liliuokalani was arrested along with the coup plotters and accused of not stopping the revolt. This allowed the government to pressure her into signing a document of abdication to save men from execution. She ended up spending two years in prison.

Between 1893 and 1898 Hawaii was an oligarchical republic. The government had to wait until the Cleveland administration gave way to the Presidency of the more imperialistic William McKinley. Hawaii took on another level of geostrategic importance due to the impending invasions of Guam and the Philippines, and so McKinley acted to make it a territory of the United States.

And so the United States overthrew its first foreign government and took territory. It wouldn't be the last. I do wonder if Grover Cleveland had foreseen the implications of this event, that far from being a one off misstep, it signalled the death of the Republic and the rise of the American Empire, perhaps his invasion of Hawaii

wouldn't have been a mock one. Would that have turned the tide, or was America destined to become the global empire of the 20th century? We shall never know.

As Hawaii moved into the 20th century the Republic and later American Governments employed similar strategies to deal with the Native Hawaiians as had been used with the Native Americans. They used the schooling system to eradicate their culture, insisting all lessons would be carried out only in English. In 1920 it was declared that to be considered Native Hawaiian a person must have at least fifty percent native blood.

Returning to the point where we started then, Bill Clinton's apology came with no promise of returning the Islands or any land reform or compensation. Hawaii remains geostrategically essential to the US Military, which is the largest aspect of the Hawaiian economy as the Army uses the island's varied terrain as a training ground. This leads to the serious contamination of hundreds of sites, a common theme of US imperial expansion.

There was an Hawaiian cultural renaissance, beginning in the 1960s, around the same time the American Indian Movement (AIM) was marching on Washington DC and retaking Wounded Knee. There are now land rights and secessionist movements in Hawaii and I will hand the last word to Henry Noah of the Lawful Hawaiian Government:

'My name is Henry Noah. I'm the elected Prime Minister for the reinstated Lawful Hawaiian Government. The Lawful Hawaiian Government was formed on March 13th, 1999, and it actually reinstated the former government offices that were in existence prior to January 17th, 1893, the day our government was overthrown. What has happened from that day till now is that actions have been taken by the conspirators, who are the United States Government, to try to justify or even validate their existence here and their authority that they exercise here in Hawaii. We realised that we would have to be able to get our people to unite under this government, so we've done a lot of educational programs to get our own people to understand the government still exists. It's been absent all these years, all we needed to do was bring it back. We need to put power to the government and the only way that can happen is if we as a people participate in that government and begin to build the functional bodies of that government.'

[Quote slightly abridged]

Notes

[Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[Hawaii: The Stolen Paradise](#), documentary film

Three. Cuba, 'A Splendid Little War'

'McKinley called for volunteers
Then I got my gun
First Spaniard I saw coming
I shot him on the run
It was all about that battleship of Maine'

Battleship of Maine

In this chapter I'm going to look at the Spanish American War and the 1898 invasion of Cuba during the Republican Presidency of William Mckinley.

In the last chapter I presented the previous president, Grover Cleveland, as an anti-imperialist. Cleveland was so outraged at American forces overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy, that he went so far as to bluff an invasion to restore Queen Liliuokalani. That's all true, but not quite the whole story. Unfortunately it presents an altogether too rosy picture of Cleveland's anti-imperialism. In fact it can be said that his Presidency was crucial in America's embrace of overseas empire.

Grover Cleveland succeeded Benjamin Harrison in 1893 to take up his second term as President. He remains the only man to have held the office non-consecutively, being considered both the 22nd and 24th President of the United States. Cleveland was a Democrat and his first term, beginning in 1885, marked the end of a twenty year post 'Civil War' run by the Republican Party.

The historian Murray Rothbard informs us that Wall Street in general, and the House of Morgan in particular, held substantial influence in Cleveland's administration. This was at a time when bankers were extolling the benefits of wresting South American markets away from European powers and Cleveland was willing to oblige them. Here are some examples taken from Rothbard's work:

In 1894, the United States Navy broke a blockade of Rio de Janeiro by a British-backed rebellion aiming to restore the Brazilian monarchy. To insure that the rebellion was broken, the US Navy stationed warships in Rio harbour for several months.

During the same period, the US Navy dispatched Marines into Nicaragua to oust the British, display the Mosquito Indians and pressure the government to proceed with a planned canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

A US warship was dispatched to Santo Domingo—now the Dominican Republic—to protect New York banking investments from French calls for reparations after a French citizen was murdered there.

In 1895 the US nearly went to war with Great Britain over a territorial dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana. The boundary dispute had been raging for forty years, but Venezuela shrewdly attracted American interest by granting concessions to Americans in gold fields in the disputed area. Britain ultimately yielded due to its emerging problems in South Africa. Absent that there really could have been a war just twenty years before the two countries were allied against Germany.

It's also in the Cleveland administration that we find the origins of America's invasion of Cuba.

Spain had occupied Cuba for hundreds of years. The year 1895 brought the latest in a long line of rebellions against that Spanish rule. The US initially responded by supporting a modified rule that allowed for some Cuban autonomy to pacify their desires for independence. They pursued this route as there were substantial American commercial interests in Cuba, mostly agricultural and in railways, totaling around one and a half billion dollars in today's money. Cuban rebels were talking about that most dreaded of things: *land redistribution*. Cleveland's imperialism was limited to supporting commercial interests, so this solution suited him fine. Spanish rule was acceptable—*Cuban independence was not*.

There exist differing opinions amongst historians as to whether the Cuban rebels were right on the verge of expelling the Spanish forces, or whether this was just the latest in a long line of failures to do so. What does seem certain however, is that Americans with commercial interests in Cuba came to believe the game was up for Spain. They started advocating for a change in policy.

This commercial necessity met with a rising tide of jingoism that sought imperial conquest and war for little more than war's sake. I'm not exaggerating here; there were a number of reasons for it.

Firstly America had gone through an economic downturn in the 1890s, giving rise to socialist and anarchist movements. It was felt a war might redirect attention away from internal problems. This includes the division felt after the so-called Civil War. External wars could be used to bind the still fragile Union together.

Secondly, I mentioned the traditionally anti-expansionist Republic party had recently lost its first election in twenty years, and lost it badly. Republicans then sought to redefine the party as being an embodiment of America's national destiny to take colonies overseas.

We also have the role of the media, with newspaper men like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst realising war was a damn good way to sell papers.

Finally, we have the position held by an increasing number of Americans and personified in Theodore Roosevelt, that war was a manly virtue, essential to the character of a nation.

Roosevelt would of course go on to become one of the more famous Presidents of the United States, eventually even starring alongside Ben Stiller in the comedy film, *Night at the Museum*. That's all to come however, in 1898 he was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. During the Trump years we heard from a lot of psychologists coming out with claims that *The Donald* was unfit to rule. America, for the first time, had a pathological President. I have two issues with this: firstly a lot of US Presidents have clearly had a higher than average degree of psychopathology—as evidenced by their easy going attitude to murder. Secondly, anyone making this claim is clearly not familiar with Theodore Roosevelt—because *he was nuts*.

Roosevelt was an unabashed imperialist. He was the Empire unmasked, absent the filter that imperialists today find it necessary to hide their true views behind. In this sense he is very helpful to us in understanding the imperialist mentality. I would suggest that maybe, if you want to know what people like Dick Cheney are really thinking, you could do worse than listen to what Theodore Roosevelt was saying.

Things such as:

'I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one.'

Psychologist William James wrote that Roosevelt:

'Gushes over war as the ideal condition of human society, for the manly strenuousness which it involves, and treats peace as a condition of blubberlike and swollen ignobility, fit only for huckstering weaklings, dwelling in grey twilight and heedless of the higher life.'

And he wasn't exaggerating.

Roosevelt was a game hunter, one of his Harvard friends wrote of him:

'He would like above all to go to war with someone ... he wants to be killing something all the time.'

Mark Twain, who came to personify the anti-imperialist position as Roosevelt did the imperialist one, considered his opposite number to be 'clearly insane' and 'the most formidable disaster that has befallen the country since the Civil War.' In turn, Roosevelt said he would like to 'skin Mark Twain alive' and considered anti-imperialists to be:

'Futile sentimentalists of the international arbitration type' who exhibited 'a flabby type of character which eats away at the great fighting features of our race. Unhung traitors.'

In perhaps his most revealing letter he wrote:

'Frankly I don't know that I should be sorry to see a bit of a spar with Germany. The burning of New York and a few other seacoast cities would be a good object lesson in the need of an adequate system of coastal defences.'

It's worth dwelling on that for a moment. The burning of New York with the massive loss of civilian life it would entail would be a price worth paying for 'a lesson in coastal defences.' Wow!

Yet there is no doubt Roosevelt considered himself a patriot of the highest order. He stated that:

'A man who loves other countries as much as he does his own is quite as noxious as a man who loves other women as much as he loves his wife.'

How do we square this circle? How can a man love his country yet be willing to see it burn?

I would suggest that the very word patriot takes on a different meaning when emanating from a man like Roosevelt's mouth. For many of us, loyalty to our country is indistinguishable from loyalty to the people of our country. Surely they are the country, what else could it be? This is not the way ardent imperialists think. For them the individual is an expendable unit, their love and loyalty is directed towards an abstract construct of *the Nation* and its glory. To subdue this imagined national interest for the wellbeing of individuals is sentimental rot. It is the attitude normal people only

adopt when they are playing computer games, building empires of pixels. This is how I suggest Roosevelt and the imperialists see the world: they are the game players.

This is the rebuttal to that sense we all have of: *well they just wouldn't do such a thing*, when confronting state crimes. *They* do not think like us. Their fundamental values are not the same. The most extreme manifestation of this mentality, coupled with an ability to manifest it, is found in people like Adolf Hitler and Mao Ze Tung. Mao did not fear the loss of two hundred million Chinese lives nuclear war with the United States would bring, because China had plenty of people and could produce more. To him it was a simple logistics issue.

I would contend that imperialists are deluded in thinking they pursue an imaginary sense of national glory. Abstract concepts like a *nation* cannot experience glory or anything else, it is only individuals who do. Imperialists seek to satisfy their own individual glory at the expense of others and simply use the concept of a nation to justify this.

Anyway, back to Cuba.

The conflict raging there provided the imperialists with the expansionist war they were seeking. The newspapers whipped up a frenzy with stories of Spanish forces committing atrocities. Two things seem to be true about this:

The Spanish occupation was brutal, involving sapping support for the rebels by relocating the civilian population into concentration camps where there was mass hunger and disease. This seems not incomparable to what the United States Government had recently done to the Native Americans, placing them on reservations, and highly comparable to what the British were doing in South Africa around the same time.

It is also the case that many journalists found it easier to stay home and fabricate stories of atrocities rather than venture into a war zone to report. Stories of Catholic priests being roasted alive, or Cubans being fed to sharks. I would suggest searching for 'Spanish American war propaganda' as the images are incredible and prefigure what's coming for the Germans twenty years later.

The media knew to play on the male instinct to protect women, with headlines about refined young women being stripped and searched by brutal Spaniards, who were presented as subhuman apes. This tried and true tactic has been rolled out again and again, recently with stories of Colonel Gaddafi supplying his troops with viagra being used to justify bombing Libya into reopening their slave markets.

And so this was the first deployment of the doctrine that would become known as: *Responsibility to Protect*, one of the Empire's major tools. It has two effects; the first is to inspire general support for a war and encourage lots of young fighting men to sign up, the second is to perform an *end run* around an anti-war movement. The same people who are sufficiently moral to oppose *wars of conquest* will be open to a *war for protection*. Indeed, their logic seems to demand it of them.

The tactic worked on both counts.

After the war began arch anti-imperialist Mark Twain said:

'this [war] is the worthiest one that was ever fought, [so far as my knowledge goes]. It is a worthy thing to fight for one's freedom; it is another sight finer to fight for another man's. And I think this is the first time this has been done.'

Twain was momentarily convinced the United States had escaped the *energy of empire*.

William McKinley dispatched the warship Maine to Havana harbour. It arrived on January 25th 1898. This was a clear provocation, an invitation for something to go wrong. And go wrong something did: on February 15th the Maine exploded, killing two hundred and sixty eight men.

America's so called 'Yellow press' didn't wait for any investigation, instantly blaming either a mine or torpedo. They were later supported by a naval investigation. The press coined the rhyme 'Remember the Maine, to Hell with Spain.' Other experts said that neither mine nor torpedo could inflict the level of damage observed, positing that the most likely cause was munitions being set off by an adjacent coal bunker, a design flaw on this ship. Later investigations in the 20th century seem to have confirmed this.

Media baron William Randolph Hearst referred to the sinking of the Maine as 'a great thing'. Prior to the destruction, he also rather cryptically said: 'There may be an explosion any day in Cuba which would settle a great many things.'

If it was an accident, it was the most amazingly consequential accident in all history—to the point of being hard to believe. I am entirely open to the possibility of foul play, not by Spain, who had everything to lose, but by American or Cuban forces, or some combination of the two.

There is however no proof of this, but this incident does set up something of an archetypal pattern for how America goes to war. An imperial agenda is in the air with

no way to get the public sufficiently on board. Then, out of nowhere, an incident happens. A dramatic traumatising event which incites red blooded Americans and silences critics. The media provides a narrative at impossible speed and the government provides a fraudulent investigation. We are left to marvel at yet another amazing coincidence and wonder how they keep arising. See Pearl Harbour, the Gulf of Tonkin and the 9/11 attacks as just a few examples.

The sinking of the Maine didn't spark a war straight away. President McKinley, unlike the younger generation of imperialists, had seen massive loss of life during the Civil War. He seemed to truly desire a diplomatic solution where Spain would withdraw from Cuba.

Either because of Spain's intransigence or continued reports of atrocities, McKinley ultimately yielded to the jingoists. Imperialist Senator Henry Cabot Lodge proposed a Senate resolution declaring that if Spain did not withdraw from Cuba, the United States would declare war.

This passed, but with an amendment that the US would not seek to colonise Cuba after the war. The *Teller Amendment* stated:

'The United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said Island except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the Island to its people.'

And so on April the 24th the United States and Spain went to war. There was no need for the US to enact conscription, as it would do in later wars. Spurred on by a belief that Spain had murdered Americans on the Maine, hundreds of thousands, maybe up to a million young men volunteered. Not wanting to miss out, Theodore Roosevelt resigned from his post as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, to raise and lead a fighting unit.

After Cuban rebels cleared the beaches, the US Army performed its first amphibious landing. With regard to the war being an effort to bind North and South together, McKinley appointed elderly ex-Confederates and Unionists Generals to lead the campaign. Three hundred and eighty five Americans died in combat, but many times this number succumbed to disease, making the land campaign ineffective. The war was entirely won at sea, with the modern US Navy smashing the decrepit Spanish fleet in both Havana and Manila harbours.

In one of those moments that makes you wonder if you're living in a movie, the very last Spanish ship to be sunk was named *The Columbus*. Its sinking signified the ending of Spanish presence in the new world.

Hostilities came to an end in August. Through peace negotiations, the United States gained control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Secretary of State John Hay declared it had been 'a splendid little war.'

The imperialists now moved to disavow the *Teller Amendment* and keep possession of Cuba. Whilst the amendment succeeded in preventing full annexation, such agreements are always fudgeable and Cuba became a protectorate run for American business interests. This did help Cuba develop, but at the cost of a loss of control of land and natural resources.

There was a period of military governance lasting till 1902, after which Cuba gained a pseudo-independence with the establishment of a civilian government supporting a land owning elite. Cuba was forbidden from entering into any treaties with foreign governments or allowing them to control any portion of the island. The US also established a *de facto* perpetual lease of the now infamous Guantánamo Bay—and reserved the right to intervene in the country at any time.

The US Army did re-enter Cuba three times over the following fifteen years, to protect American business interests when governance broke down. This was often at the request of the elite Cuban government, who on one occasion, and with US support, killed up to six thousand Afro-Cubans veterans after banning their political movement.

In 1933 there was what was known as the *Sergeant's Revolt*, leading to Cuba being taken over by a coalition of activists, students, middle-class intellectuals, and disgruntled lower-rank soldiers. This Provisional Government granted women the right to vote, decreed an eight-hour working day, a minimum wage and promised peasants legal title to their lands. This first truly independent Cuban government lasted just one hundred days before being overthrown by Fulgencio Batista, with support from the United States. Batista had been one of the sergeants plotting the initial revolution. He'd proceeded to prompt himself to head of the whole army. To cut a long story short, he remained the power on or behind the throne in Cuba for the next twenty-five years, drawing ever closer to the United States and ever further from the Cuban people.

Batista essentially enriched himself by selling the country out to foreign land owners, who came to control seventy percent of the arable land in Cuba. He revoked the right to strike, made deals with the Mafia and awarded lucrative contracts to American

corporations. The repression necessary to keep this regime in place led to torture and executions becoming common, with estimates of deaths reaching into the thousands.

All of this set up the next Cuban revolution in 1959, bringing Communist Fidel Castro to power and ending US control of the Island anywhere outside of Guantanamo Bay.

That's a history I'll get into at a future point. The CIA made countless attempts to bump Castro off and regain the Island, all of which failed. These included working with Mafia hitmen (the mob had lost their casinos in Cuba), organising a full scale invasion (the infamous *Bay of Pigs*) and arranging acts of sabotage and terrorism. For good or ill, Cuba remains under control of its Communist Party and outside of the US Empire till this day.

Notes

[*Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change*](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[*Wall Street, Banks, and American Foreign Policy*](#), by Murray Rothbard

[*Crucible of Empire: The Spanish American War*](#) (documentary film)

[*Remember the Maine*](#), by Adam Graham

[*The Politics of War*](#), by Walter Karp

Four. Puerto Rico, 'Belonging to, but not part of'

'Puerto Rico is facing a seventy billion dollar public debt amid a ten year economic crisis.'

'The poverty rate is a staggering forty five percent. Last year alone, over eight thousand people left for the mainland United States'

'Puerto Rico has already shut down more than one hundred and fifty schools in the last few years.'

'Puerto Rico's debt problem has gotten so dire the power authority cut off a hospital that's behind on its bill. The electric power authority did at least wait until surgeries were done for the day today before pulling the plug.'

Various news reports on Puerto Rico

In this chapter I'll move west of Cuba to look at the US invasion and occupation of the Islands of Puerto Rico. After one hundred and twenty years of that occupation, how have the three and a half million residents of this tropical paradise ended up on the hook for seventy two billion dollars? To understand that, we have to go back to 1898.

'Do not make peace until we get Porto Rico.' That's what Theodore Roosevelt wrote to his partner in imperial crime, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, as Roosevelt was preparing to personally invade Cuba. 'Porto Rico is not forgotten and we mean to have it', Lodge replied.

And have it they did! After occupying Cuba and destroying the Spanish navy, a force of sixteen thousand American soldiers landed on July 25th 1898. The United States took formal possession of the Islands during peace negotiations with Spain later that summer. Unlike Cuba, Puerto Rico had no Congressional protection from annexation, and therefore could become a territory of the U.S. 'Belonging to, but not a part of,' is how it was described.

Spain had already granted Puerto Rico a *Charter of Autonomy* the previous year, so the justification for invading Cuba, aiding a war of independence against brutal occupiers, did not apply. The US invasion came just eight days after the first elected government began to function. In other words; Puerto Rico has enjoyed exactly eight days of independence in the past five hundred years.

The motivations for this conquest were commercial, imperial and geo-strategic.

Commercially, Puerto Rico had wealthy sugar growing lands and later became an offshore tax haven.

Imperialistically, Roosevelt and Lodge most likely wanted them just because they were there.

Geo-strategically, the Islands are the most westerly substantial land mass in the Americas, hence why Columbus bumped into them four hundred years before. They are exactly the Islands you would want to own if you have further imperialistic ambitions in Central and South America. Indeed Puerto Rico was pivotal in future US invasions of the Dominican Republic and Panama.

Puerto Rico's fortunes went from bad to worse, as one of the most devastating hurricanes in recorded history landed in 1899, killing three and a half thousand people and destroying the entire coffee crop. Incidentally, the word *hurricane* comes to English via Spanish from the indigenous Arawak people of the Caribbean. The Spanish needed a new word to describe storms of such intensity.

The United States then replaced the Spanish Peso with the US Dollar. In spite of their equal value, the US Government would only exchange each peso for sixty cents—a forty percent currency devaluation. This forced farmers into debt allowing American banks to foreclose and take ownership of their land.

Over the ensuing decades a small number of mostly US owned corporations took over the majority of arable land, with just four corporations owning over fifty percent. By some estimations, Puerto Ricans earned just half of what they had done under the Spanish. To give a sense of the revolving door, Puerto Rico's first civilian governor, Charles Herbert Allen, went on to become president of the American Sugar Refining Company, one of the major players on the Island.

Puerto Ricans rejected offers of US citizenship until it was imposed upon them in 1917. I'll invite you to pause for a minute and consider what else happened in 1917 that might be related to this. Unfortunately, yes, you've gotten it right. President Woodrow Wilson imposed citizenship upon the Puerto Ricans in order to conscript them into fighting his war in Europe.

This gives the lie to the idea that the United States abolished slavery in 1865. If you have trouble with this, imagine the Roman Empire marching into a territory and conscripting the people there at gun (or gladio) point to fight in a far off war. Would anyone doubt those people had been taken as slaves?

Puerto Ricans went on to be drafted into World War II and the Korean and Vietnamese wars.

To resist this takeover of the Islands, a nationalist movement spearheaded by Pedro Albizu Campos came about in the 1930s. Through studying at Harvard University, Campos came into contact with the Indian and Irish independence movements. He actually met Éamon de Valera and was consulted over drafting the constitution of the Irish Free State. This, in combination with the racist treatment he received in the military, turned him into an advocate for Puerto Rican independence.

Campos created a series of bonds that were registered on Wall Street. These bonds were an investment in the Republic of Puerto Rico, redeemable from the island's treasury on the day it became independent. The first bond offering was for two hundred thousand dollars, in increments of ten, fifty and one hundred dollar bonds.

In 1933 Campos led a strike against the railway and power companies, in protest of monopolistic practices. The following year an island wide strike of agricultural workers extracted wage concessions from the sugar syndicates. This was the first time Puerto Ricans experienced victory over the United States—more were to come.

After this, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI employed its illegal CounterIntelligence Program, *COINTELPRO*, to disrupt the independence movement. Campos began receiving death threats and having shots fired at his home.

A series of massacres and executions took place during the mid 1930s, as well as retaliatory killings of police. This led US Congressman Vito Marcantonio to denounce the American governor Blanton Winship, saying:

'In his five years as Governor of Puerto Rico, Mr. Blanton Winship destroyed the last vestige of civil rights in Puerto Rico. Patriots were framed in the very executive mansion and railroaded to prison. Men, women, and children were massacred in the streets of the island simply because they dared to express their opinion or attempted to meet in free assemblage.'

In 1936 a Federal Grand Jury submitted an indictment against Albizu Campos and eight other men. They were charged with sedition and other violations of Federal law, proscribing subversive activities and accused of attempting to overthrow the Government of the United States. They were actually acquitted at trial, but the judge did not approve and ordered a retrial where convictions were obtained through a stacked jury. Campos would end up spending twenty five of his remaining twenty nine years behind bars, where he seems to have been tortured in human radiation experiments.

Campos commented on his arrest that:

'The Americans knew what they were doing—they needed me off this island right away. Six more months in 1936, and we'd have gotten our independence.'

In 1948 the Puerto Rican Senate passed a *gag law*. This was actually timed to coincide with one of Albizu Campos' releases from prison. The law made it illegal to own a Puerto Rican flag. They couldn't be displayed anywhere, not even in a person's own home. It limited speech against the United States government or in favour of Puerto Rican independence, as well as any organising along those lines. The penalty for disobedience was anything up to ten years imprisonment and a ten thousand dollar fine. This is open facism inside a United States territory, aimed at people who had recently been conscripted to fight fascists in Europe.

The 1950s saw substantial uprisings, with gunfights breaking out, police stations being burnt down and even an assassination attempt against President Harry Truman. The United States declared martial law and three thousand Puerto Ricans were arrested.

The last major attempt by the Puerto Rican Nationalists to draw world attention to the colonial situation occurred in 1954. Nationalists attacked the United States Capitol Building, wounding five representatives. It's surprising we've not heard more about this since the 'insurrection' of January 6th, 2020, but I suppose it doesn't fit the narrative now. Puerto Rico became a tax haven for US corporations. The idea, at least on paper, was to attract inward investment with temporary tax breaks. Due to loopholes such as companies being able to change their names, many end up just never paying tax over a period of decades. This transition away from a sugar based economy meant that less Puerto Ricans were needed, and a sterilisation program was pushed that, at its peak, saw one third of women of childbearing age sterilised. A smaller percentage of men were too. This campaign ran on into the 1970s and, whilst some women might have chosen it as a form of contraception after already having children, it is also clear that it was carried out by deceptive and coercive means.

And so we arrive in the present day where Puerto Rico's poverty rate is double that of the poorest states in the US and the islands are unable to fund their public services.

The small island of Vieques was used as a target range by the US Air Force from the 1940s onwards. Over a trillion pounds of explosives were dropped, with the chemicals they released being the most likely reason Vieques has a thirty percent higher cancer rate than the rest of Puerto Rico. A separatist group in the 1980s

actually managed to destroy eleven US fighter planes, causing forty million dollars of damage.

This is one area where the Puerto Rican people did win a victory over their imperial occupiers. After anger was focused by the accidental killing of a local security guard during an exercise, the people led a campaign that forced the bombing to stop. To explain that I'll quote to Robert Rabin of the *Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques*:

'That death shook everybody into action like no other event had ever done in Vieques and throughout Puerto Rico. Almost immediately we occupied the Navy's bombing range. Over a couple of months thousands of people were in their encampments around the eastern end of Vieques. The Navy couldn't bomb for a year, we controlled that space.

'Finally, on May 4th 2000, the Navy came and arrested about two hundred and fifty of us and took back their bombing range and started bombing again. Then we began the second phase of civil disobedience to stop the bombing. In that phase over fifteen hundred people were arrested. We had brought in a lot of high profile people; Bobby Kennedy Jnr was arrested with us, Reverend Al Sharpton was arrested with us, Jesse Jackson, Edward Eames Olmos the actor, several congress people, lots of ministers, priests and pastors were arrested with us. The bishops of every church in Puerto Rico, every single one, created the *Ecumenical Council for Peace of Vieques*. Union groups, student groups, women's groups, environmental groups, cultural groups, singer-songwriters, theatre people, everybody got together.

'The Puerto Rican diaspora, millions of Puerto Ricans in New York, people jumped into the Yankees stadium in the middle of the game with a flag saying 'Stop the Bombing'. Finally this got to be the biggest political issue for Puerto Rican and Latino voters in the US. The politicians wanted their votes because it's more money for them and their families and more stuff they could steal, so they eventually were forced to do the right thing. It worked and it worked without firing a single shot. This small community defeated the most powerful military force in the history of humanity.' [Full quote linked to in Notes]

Notes

[War Against all Puerto Ricans](#), by Nelson Denis

[Fantasy Island](#), by Ed Morales.

[America's Backyard: Puerto Rico](#) (documentary film)

[The History of Vieques in 10 Minutes](#), by Robert Rabin

[Puerto Rico and the Legacy of Jim Crow](#), a lecture by Professor Jose Luis Morin

Five. The Philippines, 'Nothing left to do but take them all'

'A squadron lay at break of day with enemy in view,
Each boat and tar had sailed afar a glorious deed to do.
American each ship and man, fought that eventful fray!
'Twas Dewey's fleet the foe did meet down at Manila Bay.'

Brave Dewey and His Men (Down at Manila Bay)

In this chapter I'll turn my attention towards the Pacific side of the Spanish American War, examining the invasion and conquest of the Philippines.

In June of 1898 the US Fleet departed Hawaii to engage the Spanish in Manila Bay. On the way there the USS Charleston detoured to take possession of the island of Guam. Situated thirteen hundred miles East of the Philippines, it was the ideal site for a coaling station and later airfield. Neither the Spanish nor the native inhabitants resisted, and Guam became a US territory in a similar fashion to Puerto Rico. Due to the extreme brutality of the later Japanese occupation of the Islands, a lot of the older native people are highly supportive of the American presence to this day. That presence is not without its problems however, the US Military stole thousands of acres of land for its airfields, without ever paying any meaningful compensation.

Moving on to the Philippines, this is where things get really dark for America's new imperial project.

The Philippines had been ruled by Spain for over three hundred years, with the collective name of the seven thousand islands coming from *King Philip*. Long held aspirations of independence boiled over into open revolution in 1896. Two years later, when the Spanish American war broke out, Theodore Roosevelt ordered the destruction of Spain's fleet in Manila Bay. This was accomplished without the loss of a single American ship. The United States then facilitated the return of exiled revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo to the islands, supplying him with two thousand rifles to drive the Spanish out. Aguinaldo was under the impression his new friends were supportive of his liberation movement.

The revolutionary forces quickly liberated much of the country from Spanish control and Aguinaldo presented terms of surrender to the Governor. He initially refused them, believing more troops would be sent to lift the siege. To this end, Spain did dispatch sixteen warships. When they were diverted to Cuba however, it became clear the game was up. The Spanish parliament then blocked the Governor from surrendering to Filipinos, as they found this too disgraceful an option to contemplate. A new governor contacted the American Admiral George Dewey and proposed what became known as *The Mock Battle of Manila*. The Spanish and Americans would

have a pretend fight, where the former would surrender to the latter. This is what happened, although not everyone got the memo and fifty five people were killed. American forces took the city of Manila. The Spanish later profited to the tune of twenty million dollars for this arrangement.

Much like in Cuba, the writing for the revolutionaries was on the wall when Emilio Aguinaldo was not invited to the surrender ceremony and his fighters were refused permission to parade through the city. As far as the imperialists were concerned, they had served their role.

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, a great debate was raging between imperialist and anti-imperialist factions. The justification that sucked so many into support for the invasion of Cuba, to oust their barbarous oppressors, was just not applicable to the Philippines. The Spanish had already gone and Filipinos were hard at work drafting a constitution, forming a congress and establishing the *First Philippine Republic*. Who were they to be liberated from?

Themselves! It turns out! The argument was laid out that as an uncivilised people the Filipinos would be 'unfit for self-government', as President William McKinley put it, going on to say:

'There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.'

It's probably worth noting that the vast majority of Filipinos were Catholic and McKinley admitted to not being able to find the Islands to within a thousand miles when dispatching the fleet there.

There was also a concern that the islands would be taken by another imperial power. In fairness, it's not that either of these concerns were entirely without merit. It's not known how the Philippines would have progressed left to their own devices. There had already been violence between independence factions, with Andrés Bonifacio, the father of the Philippine Revolution, having been assassinated by Emilio Aguinaldo's forces.

The German Navy moved eight ships into Manila Bay right after the American victory. What their intentions were isn't entirely clear but it's not likely they would have left the Filipinos to their own devices.

It is not the case then that a total American withdrawal would have offered a guarantee of life, liberty and happiness for everyone in the Philippines. The question

is however, could an American presence possibly improve matters? Many at the time contended so. To quote President McKinley:

'No imperial designs lurk in the American mind. They are alien to American sentiment, thought, and purpose. Our priceless principles undergo no change under a tropical sun. They go with the flag. If we can benefit these remote peoples, who will object?... Who will regret our perils and sacrifices? Who will not rejoice in our heroism and humanity?... [The Filipinos'] children and children's children shall for ages hence bless the American republic because it emancipated and redeemed their fatherland, and set them in the pathway of the world's best civilization.'

McKinley, if we take his words as being a true reflection of his thoughts, simply couldn't believe that Americans could be the bad guys. Others came to see things more cynically, Mark Twain, realising he'd been had, wrote:

'I left these shores, at Vancouver, a red-hot imperialist, I wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific. It seemed tiresome and tame for it to content itself with the Rockies. Why not spread its wings over the Philippines, I asked myself? And I thought it would be a real good thing to do. I said to myself, "Here are a people who have suffered for three centuries. We can make them as free as ourselves, give them a government and country of their own, put a miniature of the American constitution afloat in the Pacific, start a brand new republic to take its place among the free nations of the world!" It seemed to me a great task to which we had addressed ourselves. But I have thought some more since then, and I have read carefully the Treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem.... And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.'

This period led to the formation of the *Anti-Imperialist League*, of which Twain was a member alongside industrialist Andrew Carnegie. I want to focus on the Philippines here, so I'll devote an episode to that movement next time. I'll just say for now that they believed they were in a battle for the soul of America: was she a republic, or just another cynical European imperial power?

As is often the case, the situation was influenced by a change in the facts on the ground. As a Senate vote over the future of the Islands approached, Senator Henry Teller commented that:

'As soon as one American soldier fell in an attack from the natives of the Philippines, sentiment would vanish and the American people would stand behind their army as they had always done.'

This tried and true tactic of initiating war had been used to get hostilities with Mexico going during the 1840s. This time, American commanders ordered their soldiers to patrol aggressively, with the intention of sparking violence. When that violence inevitably came, sixty expendable Americans and three thousand Filipinos died in the initial clash.

The New York Times reported the clash as 'an insane attack of these people upon their liberators.' Combined with the usual corruption and backstabbing it was enough to have the Senate ratify the *Treaty of Paris* and let the American occupation begin.

Anti-imperialist Carl Schurz described the obvious flaw in the idea of a occupation for liberation:

'The people of those islands will either peaceably submit to our rule or they will not. If they do not, and we must conquer them by force of arms, we shall at once have war on our hands.... Now, if they resist, what shall we do? Kill them? Let soldiers marching under the Stars and Stripes shoot them down? Shoot them down because they stand up for their independence?...'

Open conflict broke out in February of 1899. Tens of thousands of American soldiers flooded into the country whilst a naval blockade prevented the Filipinos from acquiring weapons. They therefore employed guerrilla tactics of setting snares and booby traps and torturing prisoners. This rebuke of the imperialist's pseudo-humanitarian efforts sparked the darkest aspects of the psyche, as violence spiralled into massive destruction of villages and wholesale slaughter of civilians.

Theodore Roosevelt's humanitarian impulse turned to:

'Resistance must be stamped out! The first and all-important work to be done is to establish the supremacy of our flag. We must put down armed resistance before we can accomplish anything else, and there should be no parleying, no faltering, in dealing with our foe.'

I'll quote Linda Oalican of the Filipino charity the *Damayran Migrant Workers Association*:

'There was a time you know, I think it was in 1904 or 1905, where the United States had to kill all the male population in a big island, named Samar, from ten

years old and above. Why? Because they were outmanoeuvred by the Filipino guerrillas. Many Americans were killed and so the US Commander ordered the killing of all male inhabitants of the island from ten years old and above'

The brutality of the conflict became defined by the *water cure*. This could be said to be the origin of waterboarding, made famous one hundred years later in Guantánamo Bay. It actually came from the Spanish Inquisition, via the Filipinos, to the Americans. Water would be forced down a victim's throat, then interrogators would jump on his stomach until he talked or died. The futility of such a practice as a means of acquiring information was observed by Mark Twain at the time:

'To make them confess—to what? Truth? Or lies? How can one know which it is they are telling? For under unendurable pain a man confesses anything that is required of him, true or false, and his evidence is worthless.'

I will leave it to you to decide how realistic you find it that what was obvious to Twain in 1901 was unknown to the CIA in 2001.

When reports of such activities eventually reached the United States they did cause uproar in the press. The whole humanitarian justification for the war was now in shreds. The imperialists responded by having one of their own, Henry Cabot Lodge, chair the demanded inquiry. Lodge acknowledged isolated cases of abuse but concluded almost all such reports to be 'unfounded or grossly exaggerated.'

The parallels with later American wars in Vietnam and Iraq are astounding. Throw a few soldiers under the bus whilst giving the system itself a clean bill of health. The inability of imperialists to see evil within themselves is again astounding, with one prosecutor asking Filipino governor William Taft:

'When war is conducted by a superior race against those whom they consider inferior in the scale of civilization, is it not the experience of the world that the superior race will almost involuntarily practise inhuman conduct?'

With Taft responding:

'There is much greater danger in such a case than dealing with whites, there is no doubt about that.'

American cruelty, unlike the cruelty of all those other empires, was involuntary and really the fault of the Filipinos.

The conflict raged for two years, until resistance leader Emilio Aguinaldo was captured in March 1901. Convinced of the futility of further resistance, he swore allegiance to the United States and called on his compatriots to lay down their arms. This officially ended the war, however, resistance continued in parts for another ten years.

In total four thousand three hundred and seventy four American soldiers were killed. About sixteen thousand guerrillas and at least twenty thousand civilians were also killed. To quote author Stephen Kinzer:

'Filipinos remember those years as some of the bloodiest in their history. Americans quickly forgot that the war ever happened.'

With the Islands pacified the United States proceeded to rule the Philippines as a colony over the ensuing decades, with Filipinos progressively taking a larger role in governance. The Spanish had created a land owning class whose interests now allied with the new colonisers.

American reformers initially passed land acts with the stated intention of facilitating landless peasants owning their own farms. The actuality was a bit different, all lands not publicly owned were declared to be private, which meant hundreds of thousands of small farmers without official titles were designated as being squatters. They were then required to pay all sorts of costs, fees and taxes for the state to recognise ownership of their own land.

The general movement over the colonial period was to exacerbate inequalities in wealth and land ownership. The Philippines was transformed into an export economy with the population working on large sugar and tobacco plantations whilst US corporations set up mining and logging operations. There were forces within the United States pushing for Filipino independence. Sugar and labour interests didn't like the competition and a date was set for July 4th 1945.

Of course the Japanese invaded and occupied the Islands from 1942 till 45. The Filipinos weren't particularly impressed by this, as the United States had essentially involved them in a war then done next to nothing to defend them. The Japanese invasion was as brutal as the US one had been forty years earlier, and on a much greater scale. An estimated one million Filipinos were killed, taking half a million Japanese soldiers with them.

The United States then invaded and reoccupied the Islands and a pseudo-independence was granted on July 4th 1946. To quote Linda Oalican once more:

'There was a period where the Philippines was a direct colony of the United States. The United States also experimented with something very new in the Philippines: *neo-colonialism*. Controlling a country not by direct force, not by having Americans rule the country, but by training the elite in the country. Training them, educating them about how America wants and needs the Philippines to be to support their imperial design around the globe. That's what happened to the Philippines beginning in 1946. We were given, so-called given, our independence after the United States has controlled the economy, the military, the foreign relations and education. Everything that is critical and strategic for the country, they control.'

In addition to the The Philippine Army, the Japanese occupation had resisted by around one hundred and eighty thousand guerrillas. Around thirty thousand of these belonged to the *Hukbalahap*, the *People's Army Against Japan*, or *Huk*, for short. As well as expelling the Japanese, Huk fighters sought land reform.

In collaboration with the Filipino elite, American forces disarmed many Huk units whilst the war was still going on, branding them as a part of an international communist conspiracy. Incidentally this is the same thing the British were doing in Greece at the same time. After the war concluded, the US trained and equipped fifty thousand Filipino soldiers to maintain internal order. When Huk candidates were denied seats won in elections, a full scale rebellion broke out.

This rebellion provided cover for the government to drive villagers off their land in favour of the logging industry.

Interestingly, General Douglas MacArthur, who liberated the Philippines from the Japanese, refused to lead a counter insurgency against the Huk, believing their grievances to be entirely legitimate. Given that MacArthur was an anti-communist zealot, this says a lot.

It was in the Philippines that a lot of the counter insurgency tactics later deployed in Vietnam and then across Central America would be developed. This included the use of False Flag terror, where government soldiers would attack villages whilst pretending to be Huks.

Other psychological techniques developed by Lt. Col. Edward Lansdale included playing on Filipino beliefs in vampires. They would abduct and kill a Huk rebel, puncture his neck and drain his blood, then leave him to be found. This was apparently successful in discouraging the Huks from operating in that area.

The US imposed a trade deal which granted parity rights to American corporations exploiting Filipino resources. They also acquired ninety nine year leases for twenty three military bases and forbade the Filipino military from acting independently or purchasing goods from any other country. The bases were instrumental in the coming wars in Korea and Vietnam. There has been some back and forth on this issue with many bases closing in the 1990s, only to reopen during the Obama years.

The CIA managed the country, funding their preferred political candidates whilst moving to discredit or even making plans to assassinate unacceptable ones. The country went through a democratic period until Ferdinand Marcos came to power in the mid sixties and used a series of, what the CIA concluded were, false flag bombings to declare a state of emergency and rule as a dictator.

The US supported the Filipino military through the Marcos years, thereby propping up his dictatorship. It was however an uneasy relationship and when revolution came in 1986 they supported his overthrow having lost faith in him to hold the country.

Marcos was actually a convicted murderer prior to becoming President. During his time as dictator he ran the Philippines as a thieftom, enriching himself and his family to the tune of billions. I'll quote from John Pilger's documentary, *War by Other Means*. It illustrates how imperial control becomes more subtle over time, switching from overt military occupations to enslavement through debt:

'The world's oldest Human Rights organisation, the *Anti-Slavery Society*, has declared debt a contemporary form of slavery. Nowhere is this more vividly demonstrated than here in the Philippines, where forty four percent of the national budget is given to paying interest charges to foreign banks, compared with just three percent for health services. Moreover, billions of dollars continue to leave this country just to meet the interest on money borrowed by the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in deals that were often secret and fraudulent.

'There is perhaps no greater example of the burden of debt than one notorious project in the Philippines. It sits on Bataan Peninsula, and is potentially as dangerous as Chernobyl. Built less than 60 miles from the city of Manila, on three earthquake faults, near two live volcanoes, one of which recently erupted, this is the *Bataan Nuclear Power Station*. In the Philippines, it's known as "the big scam."

'The scam almost certainly began here at the Whack Whack Golf Club in Manila, where Ferdinand Marcos used to play with his cousin and chief crony, Herminio Disini. In 1974 the American company General Electric applied to build the Bataan Nuclear Power Station, but Disini urged his pal Marcos to

accept the highest bidder, the Westinghouse Company. Moreover, the deal would be underwritten by the American Government through the Export-Import Bank and a clutch of private American banks. Everybody would make a buck, except the Filipino people.

'By 1977 President Carter had stopped the building of nuclear power plants because of their inefficiency and faulty design, but he did nothing to stop the same plants being built in Third World countries like the Philippines. Moreover, the State Department, which had to approve Westinghouse's export licence, knew the Bataan Power Station was to be built in an earthquake zone, but still it was encouraged to go ahead.

'To make the story even more dubious, the US government enters in. William Casey, later the director of the CIA, then head of the Export-Import Bank, goes to Manila. Casey recommends that the US Government give an initial loan that opens the gate for all these other banks to come in and give loans and they start building. Westinghouse at this time does the usual thing; you have delays, you have problems, the price goes up and up and up, first to 1.1 billion, finally to 2.2 billion. Some estimate that the final cost of the Philippines will be 2.6 billion dollars. So you have a 2.6 billion dollar fiasco that will never produce one watt of electricity which now the Filipino people have to repay.

'When Marcos was overthrown in 1986, President Aquino declared the Bataan Power Station unsafe and it was closed forever. At the same time, her government began legal action in the United States against Westinghouse. Last year the American judge found ample evidence of bribery. On the day before the case was due to be heard in March, it was settled out of court. Westinghouse agreed to pay the Philippines one hundred million dollars, but remarkably the Aquino Government agreed to give Westinghouse four hundred million dollars just to make the power station work, regardless of its position in an earthquake zone. And this four hundred million dollars will be borrowed from the same American Export-Import Bank and will have to be repaid by the Filipino people, most of whom live in poverty.'

One of the effects of this impoverishment is that Filipino people have to travel overseas to find work. This was something Marcos established to get young people, who might otherwise rebel, out of the country. It's not an exaggeration to say this debt burden creates a kind of modern slave trade, with a pool of low cost workers.

I'll finish by quoting Riya Ortiz, also from the *Damayan Migrant Workers Association*, speaking in Abby Martin's documentary; *Buying a Slave - The Hidden World of US/Philippines Trafficking*:

'In 2007 we met our first trafficking survivor, she was the domestic worker for the Philippine Ambassador to the United Nations. She worked as a nurse in the Philippines and she was promised that she would be able to work as a nurse when she comes here, so she was asked to sign a contract basically that she would pay five thousand dollars, and she would be able to come here and work. When she came here she didn't know that she would work as a domestic worker for the diplomat, so she ended up cleaning a house with three floors. She was serving the diplomat and his family, including the grandchildren. Her passport was taken, she was not allowed to leave the house. The house was locked from the inside, she had no phone, she had no contact with her family, to the point that she was suicidal.

'They wouldn't even give her access to the landline, so one time it rang, she picked it up there was a Filipino on the other line and she said 'help me, help me!' The woman on the call knew of our charity, so that's how she was connected to us.

'We've been doing this work since 2007 and until recently most of the cases that we're handling are domestic workers of diplomats. We've handled cases of diplomats from Japan, from Peru, from Germany. The UN is just right here, it's like buying a slave for them. You would think these people, with their degrees and their titles, would treat another human being with dignity and respect. They're supposed to be human rights defenders, but they're the very ones who are abusing these workers, who are taking care of their homes and their children. It's mind-boggling!'

Notes

[*The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain and the Birth of American Empire*](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[*From Small Farms to Progressive Plantations: The Trajectory of Land Reform in the American Colonial Philippines, 1900–1916*](#), by Theresa Ventura

[*Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*](#), by William Blum

[*Buying a Slave and The Roots of the Philippines Trafficking Epidemic*](#), documentary by Abbey Martin

[*War by Other Means*](#), documentary by John Pilger

[*The Roots of the Philippines Trafficking Epidemic*](#), documentary by Abbey Martin

[*Damayan Migrant Workers Association*](#)

Six. 'Unhung Traitors', The Anti Imperialist League

'We've been fighting a long time and we have all lost so very much, so many loved ones gone. You are not alone, there are pockets of resistance all around the planet, we are at the brink. Above all stay alive, you have no idea how important you are. If you're listening to this; you are the resistance.

John Connor, *Terminator Salvation*

The quotation above is of John Connor, forming the resistance to Skynet and its empire of machines in the, I think quite underrated film, *Terminator Salvation*. I like the film because it poses questions about the nature of resistance and examines the conflicts that arise from different ideological positions that can split a movement apart. In this chapter I'm going to look at the resistance that grew to America's emergence as an overseas empire in the 1890s: *The Anti-Imperialist League*.

I'll look at where the League failed *and* succeeded, what became of it and what parallels exist with anti-imperialism today. Are we running into the same problems over and over again? Just as empires have patterns they continually recreate, does anti-imperialism too?

The Anti-Imperialist League was founded in Boston's Faneuil Hall in June of 1898, during the Spanish American War. This is the venue where colonists had gathered to protest the Boston Massacre and plot to overthrow British rule, and later where abolitionists had given talks denouncing slavery.

The League was dedicated to spreading an anti-imperialist message through lectures, public meetings and pamphleteering. They principally sought to prevent any occupation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

The League cut across political and ideological divides. Its members included steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, one of the world's richest men, prominent Labour leader, Samuel Gompers and civil rights advocate Booker T. Washington. It encompassed the leader of the Democratic Party, William Jennings Bryan, a co-founder of the Republican Party, George Boutwell, as well as the previous two presidents, Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison. Whilst Cleveland and Harrison had been happy with some level of imperialism for commercial purposes, they did not want to see the US become a full fledged overseas power.

Its founding members included those who had been both for and against the Spanish American War. That might sound odd, but there had been plenty of people who genuinely saw that war as a mission of liberation which was now in danger of being corrupted.

I'll read a few excerpts of speeches made at the time to give a sense of the League members' sentiments. Many members were concerned that the transition to empire would fundamentally change the character of the United States.

Charles Ames, a theologian and Unitarian pastor wrote:

'The policy of imperialism threatens to change the temper of our people, and to put us into a permanent attitude of arrogance, testiness, and defiance towards other nations.... Once we enter the field of international conflict as a great military and naval power, we shall be one more bully among bullies. We shall only add one more to the list of oppressors of mankind.... Poor Christian as I am, it grieves and shames me to see a generation instructed by the Prince of Peace proposing to set him on a dunce's stool and to crown him with a fool's cap'

Congressman Adolph Meyer warned:

'With monarchical governments, or governments only nominally republican but really despotic or monarchical, this system of colonies, however burdensome, however tending to conflict, may be pursued without a shock to their systems of government. But with us the case is different. Our whole system is founded on the right of the people—all the people—to participate in the Government.... Take this first fatal step and you cannot recall it. Much error we have corrected. Much that may hereafter be you can correct. But when this step is taken, you are irrevocably pledged to a system of colonialism and empire. There are no footsteps backward'

William Jennings Bryan proclaimed:

'The flag is a national emblem and is obedient to the national will.... When the American people want it raised, they raise it, and when they want it hauled down, they haul it down.... Shall we keep the Philippines and amend our flag?... Shall we add a new star—the blood star, Mars—to indicate that we have entered upon a career of conquest?... Or shall we adorn our flag with a milky way composed of a multitude of minor stars representing remote and insignificant dependencies? No, a thousand times better to haul down the Stars and Stripes and substitute the flag of an independent republic than to surrender the doctrines that gave glory to Old Glory.'

Beyond concern for the American Republic, there was the direct moral question of occupation. Labour leader Samuel Gompers wrote:

'If we attempt to force upon the natives of the Philippines our rule, and compel them to conform to our more or less rigid mold of government, how many lives shall we take? Of course, they will seem cheap, because they are poor laborers. They will be members of the majority in the Philippines, but they will be ruled and killed at the convenience of the very small minority there, backed up by our land and sea forces. The dominant class in the islands will ease its conscience because the victims will be poor, ignorant, and weak'

One of the most eloquent anti-imperialists, Carl Schurz, so impressed Andrew Carnegie with his speech that Carnegie paid for it to be printed on a pamphlet, saying 'You have brains and I have dollars,' he wrote. 'I can devote some of my dollars to spreading your brains.' Schurz wrote:

'The people of those islands will either peaceably submit to our rule or they will not. If they do not, and we must conquer them by force of arms, we shall at once have war on our hands.... Now, if they resist, what shall we do? Kill them? Let soldiers marching under the Stars and Stripes shoot them down? Shoot them down because they stand up for their independence?...

'Let us relax no effort in this, the greatest crisis the Republic has ever seen.... Let us raise high the flag of our country—not as an emblem of reckless adventure and greedy conquest, of betrayed professions and broken pledges, of criminal aggressions and arbitrary rule over subject populations—but the old, the true flag, the flag of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, the flag of the government of, for, and by the people; the flag of national faith held sacred and of national honor unsullied; the flag of human rights and of good example to all nations; the flag of true civilization, peace, and good will to all men.'

Andrew Carnegie himself published an essay pointing out the hypocrisy inherent in the United States possessing overseas colonies:

'Is it possible that the Republic is to be placed in the position of the suppressor of the Philippine struggle for independence? Surely that is impossible. With what face shall we hang in the schoolhouses of the Philippines our own Declaration of Independence, and yet deny independence to them? What response will the heart of the Philippine Islander make as he reads Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation? Are we to practice independence and preach subordination, to teach rebellion in our books yet stamp it out with our swords, to sow the seed of revolt and expect the harvest of loyalty?...

'Tires the Republic so soon of its mission, that it must, perforce, discard it to undertake the impossible task of establishing Triumphant Despotism, the rule of the foreigner over the people? And must the millions of the Philippines who have been asserting their God-given right to govern themselves be the first victims of Americans, whose proudest boast is that they conquered independence for themselves?'

The League's initial goal of defeating the *Treaty of Paris* failed when William Jennings Bryan effectively switched sides and voted to ratify it. Bryan's public position was that the quickest way to liberate the Philippines was to annex them first, however it's more than likely he had his eye on the Democratic nomination for the Presidency. This is a trend that continues through history. In most recent years, Barack Obama and Donald Trump campaigned on *ending the wars* rhetoric, only to have an apparent change of heart once in power. Antiwar efforts are more often derailed by those ostensibly on the team rather than the opposition.

After the invasion, the League sought to expose the abuses, such as massacres and systematic torture being carried out by US troops. They published a letter by A.F. Miller, a soldier serving in the Philippines:

'Now, this is the way we give them the water cure. Lay them on their backs, a man standing on each hand and each foot, then put a round stick in the mouth and pour a pail of water in the mouth and nose, and if they don't give up pour in another pail. They swell up like toads. I'll tell you it is a terrible torture.'

There was certainly hostility to the League. The title of this chapter, 'unhung traitors', is how Theodore Roosevelt referred to its members. There's no particular reason to think he was being hyperbolic.

The commander of the New York chapter of the *Grand Army of the Republic*, declared that

'All League members should have their citizenship stripped from them and be 'denied the protection of the flag they dishonor.'

Doesn't this all sound reminiscent of FOX News one hundred years later during the Iraq War? I'll quote an interaction between FOX host Bill O'Reilly and Geoff Millard, co-founder of *Iraq Veterans Against the War*:

Geoff Millard: 'Most of what the truth and recruitment movement right now is doing is trying to give potential recruits a full view of what military service is; whether it's exposure to depleted uranium, or the fact that nearly a third of

female veterans report some form of military sexual violence, or if it's the upwards of eighty percent of post-traumatic stress that is happening right now with returning veterans. So to give potential recruits that full view of what the military life is like...'

Bill O'Reilly: 'I don't mind those things being... I don't think they're facts I think they're propaganda by an anti-military crew which you're sounding more and more like. And I hope that's not the case, I mean I hope you're just against the war not against the military, but you are sounding like an anti-military person here.'

Millard: 'Well as a veteran of nine years I think that it's preposterous to think that I would be anti-military. I want to take care of our veterans. Things like depleted uranium, military sexual violence, that I think should never happen...'

O'Reilly: 'Of course it should never happen, I mean everybody knows it should never happen...'

Millard: 'But it does happen, and we need to make our children aware of that.'

O'Reilly: 'But in any organisation you're going to have things that aren't what they should be. But the basic theme here is "starve the military, starve them" by Mr Copeland and the *Seattle Post* intelligentsia. "Don't give them any recruits, force the military back, from Iraq and other theatres", and that puts us all in danger Mr Millard and you know it.'

Millard: 'Well I think that the Iraq War puts us all in danger, and if we limit the amount of recruits, then yeah, it quite possibly does have a big potential in ending the Iraq War, because we do need to protect American soil, we do need to protect America.'

O'Reilly: 'So you do want to limit the recruits, you do want to hurt the military, that's what you want to do sir.'

Millard: 'Well, I don't want to hurt the military whatsoever.'

O'Reilly: 'Well, by limiting recruits you would be hurting them, and you know it.'

Millard: 'As a nine year veteran of the military I'd like to see our veterans taken care of when they come home, which just doesn't happen.'

O'Reilly: 'I think every American wants to see them taken care of, and we on this program give hundreds of thousands of dollars so that may take place. But again I think you're being a little sly here, let me ask you one more question, if the thing turns around in Iraq, and it's a big 'if' because of the Iraqi Government's incompetence and corruption, but things are getting better by most viewpoints over there, would you be disappointed?'

Throughout the ages, the state has claimed to provide protection that you must be willing to kill or be killed for, *no questions asked*. In its most modern incarnation, it is manifesting in an *imperial medical cult*, with calls to strip health care from those who do not accept vaccines manufactured by, frankly, criminal cartels. This very obviously goes beyond being a practical measure, and is a way of punishing people for refusing to join the cult.

We also see people losing their jobs because of anti-imperialism, in the year 1900, the President of Northwestern University, Henry Wade Rogers, was fired by the school's trustees.

I'm sure lots of people's livelihoods were threatened over the Iraq war, The Dixie Chicks being blacklisted by thousands of country radio stations remains in my mind. Today doctors can be struck off for dissenting from the COVID narrative, I shall quote from Tom Woods' interview with Dr. Jon Ward:

Tom Woods: 'Well I was particularly interested in something that you've been working on, and that has to do with this whole matter of the threats against physicians. If they say the wrong thing, in particular about these vaccines, if they're accused of spreading medical misinformation, *quote unquote*, it is conceivable that they can have their licences taken away, is that right?'

Jon Ward: 'That is absolutely right. So this was inconceivable two years ago, that you would have your certification or licence threatened for doing anything other than poor practice of medicine or criminal activity that had something to do with substance abuse or if you were having inappropriate relations with patients or something like that. Obviously all of those actions are absolutely heinous and would warrant licence suspension or revocation. But this idea that if you have a different, valid, medical opinion than the CDC or the National Institute of Health, and speaking that opinion out loud, having an adverse impact on your ability to earn a living as a physician, has been unheard of. But it is being actively advocated and promoted and I know people who have been adversely impacted by it.'

Economic divisions also fractured the League. Just as today there is a Left and Libertarian split in the anti-war movement, so it was a hundred years ago, with many League members being reluctant to support the Presidential candidacy of Williams Jennings Bryan, due to his views on silver as currency. Monetary policy was apparently a big issue back then.

One weakness of the League that pro-imperialists could exploit was that they committed the same fallacy I said I would be committing in Chapter One: *the Salt Water Fallacy*. If you recall, this fallacy is to believe an empire only becomes such when its forces cross an ocean. Imperialism was in no way a new thing for the United States in the 1890s, the only novelty was the use of ships to carry it out. The policy was simply an extension of the Indian Wars overseas. Anti-imperialists were forced to present this as a break with history, not just an extension of business as usual, otherwise they would be in the position of criticising potentially all of American history. Pro-imperialist Senator Orville Platt exploited this weakness saying:

‘The literal application of the Senator’s doctrine would have turned back the Mayflower from our coast and would have prevented our expansion westward to the Pacific Ocean.’

And he had at least half a point.

There are aspects I don’t find parallels with today. For example, modern anti-imperialist efforts are often split over questions of conspiracy. Resistance to the Iraq and Afghani wars included a substantial number of people who believed 9/11 was an inside job—designed at bringing these wars about. Whatever else this is, it can be highly divisive, with those adopting such a position seeing more reticent anti-war types as either timid or complicit, whilst those opposed see the conspiracists as discrediting the movement. This problem is then exacerbated by there being an infinite number of conspiracy theories, from the quite mundane through to the planes that hit the towers being holograms.

I don’t see this situation arising in the 1890s. This could be because either it simply didn’t, or history hasn’t recorded it. There is however no sign of anyone chanting ‘*The destruction of the Maine was an inside job!*’ I’m willing to be corrected on this, but conspiracy theorising seems to be more of a late 20th century phenomenon.

The League obviously ultimately failed in its mission to prevent the occupation of either Puerto Rico or Philippines, and the United States’ lurch into Empire. In the same way, the anti-war movement a hundred years later failed to stop the destruction of Iraq.

It's hard to judge their success however, had they not been throwing wrenches in the gears of the machine, who knows how accelerated the US's imperial ambitions would have become? In the same way, were it not for the anti-war movement of our own era, perhaps we would have seen war with Iran by now.

Notes

[*The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain and the Birth of American Empire*](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[*We Who Dared to Say No to War*](#), by Murray Polner and Thomas E. Woods, Jr

[*FOX News*](#), Bill O'Reilly and Geoff Millard

[*Tom Woods Show Ep. 2054 Let Doctors Speak Freely*](#)

Seven. Japan, Honorary Aryans

'Yesterday, December 7th, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.'

Franklin D Roosevelt

The above quotation is from the speech Franklin D. Roosevelt gave after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, which brought the United States into World War II. But how did they get there? What's the deeper history, stretching back not to Franklin's, but Theodore Roosevelt's administration, that set up this collision course?

That's what I'm going to examine in this chapter. Before I begin, there's a further important historical event to look at.

On September the 6th 1901, the 25th President of the United States, William McKinley, was shot in Buffalo New York. He died eight days later. Vice President Theodore Roosevelt, perhaps the major driving force behind US imperial expansion, then became President.

McKinley's was the third assassination of a President inside forty years. Theories about Franklin Delano Roosevelt aside, there's only been one successful attempt in the hundred and twenty years since. His death led to the Secret Service, up until then an agency that investigated counterfeiting, taking on the role of protecting the President.

McKinley's assassin was a Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist, who in his last words declared:

'I killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people—the good working people.'

The period of roughly 1870 to 1920 saw a considerable amount of anarchist violence. With bombings across Europe and the United States and assassinations of Monarchs and government officials. Czolgosz was particularly inspired by the then recent killing of King Umberto I of Italy.

In some ways the anarchists were the radical Islamists of their day, and the war on their terror contained all the same complexity of its modern incarnation. With hundreds of thousands subscribing to their publications, anarchist ideology was far more threatening to the ruling class than a few bombs and assassinations. After McKinley's assassinsation, Theodore Roosevelt declared:

'When compared with the suppression of anarchy, every other question sinks into insignificance.'

Movements were heavily infiltrated with agent provocateurs leading groups in the direction of violence. Indeed Czolgosz himself had raised sufficient suspicion for a warning pertaining to him to be published in the *Free Society* newspaper, writing that:

'His demeanour is of the usual sort, pretending to be greatly interested in the cause, asking for names or soliciting aid for acts of contemplated violence.'

If Czolgosz was part of a larger plot, directed by anarchists groups or agents of some state, he went to his grave without talking. After his execution his body was dissolved in sulfuric acid to remove all traces of him from this world.

At the time of Theodore Roosevelt's nomination to the Vice Presidency, a position he'd been in part given to keep him out of the way, Senator Mark Hanna angrily declared:

'Don't any of you realise that there's only one life between this madman and the presidency?'

That possibility had now become a reality, and the 'madman' sat in the Oval Office.

Turning our attention to Japan:

After the conclusion of the *Sengoku* or *Warring States* period around 1615, Japan entered about a two hundred and fifty year period of relative peace and stability. This was also a period of isolation, with the Japanese forbidden from travelling abroad and foreigners banned from the country. Only a small number of Dutch ships were given access to the country for trade.

Japan's Rulers, the *Shogunate*, had become suspicious of European intentions and of Christianity's role as a tool of empire and moved to suppress the religion. The Japanese scholar Seishisai Aizawa wrote in the 1820s:

'The European powers endeavour to attack all nations in the world. The wicked doctrine of Jesus is an aid in this endeavour. Under the pretext of trade or whatever, they approach and become friendly with people in all areas, secretly probing to see which countries are strong and which are weak. If a nation's defences are weak, they seize it by force. But if there are no weaknesses to

pounce on, they take it over by leading the people's minds astray with the wicked doctrine of [Christianity].'

After an uprising by Christians in 1637, Japan began its two hundred and fifty year isolation.

Between 1790 and 1853 the Japanese turned away at least twenty visiting US vessels. By the 1840s, Americans wanted to use Japan as a coaling station, a stopping off point for the major prize, the markets of China. US ships could sail from the West coast to Hawaii, but not make the remainder of the distance to China.

Expansionists of that time faced a problem, in that the US Declaration of Independence stated that each nation had the right to determine its interactions with other nations. This was philosophically overcome by thinking of the Japanese as being akin to the Native Americans in their level of development, living outside of the law of nations and not knowing what was good for them.

In 1853 Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Harbour and demanded Japan open its ports to American ships. If they refused, Perry threatened instantaneous war, and told them one hundred American ships would attack within twenty days.

Although I'm not sure how they read them, Perry gave the Japanese two books on the recent war with Mexico, emphasising his personal role in the amphibious assault on that country.

Under further threat of gunships, Japanese leaders signed the *United States–Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce* in 1858. In 1861 Russia briefly invaded the island of Tsushima, located between Japan and Korea, and were only evicted with British assistance.

The Western powers imposed what became known as 'unequal treaties' on Japan which stipulated that the Japanese must allow citizens of these countries to visit or reside on Japanese territory and must not levy tariffs on their imports or try them in Japanese courts.

Over the following two years the British and US navies shelled Japanese civilians to discipline the Japanese for firing on their ships.

The Japanese isolationist strategy, which had been successful at preventing the kind of imperial conquest so many other countries had suffered, had now completely backfired, leaving Japan two hundred years behind Europe and the USA

technologically. This once great military power was now entirely unable to defend itself.

The Japanese saw the fate of China, India, Indonesia and Indochina, all falling to European Imperial powers. Certain Japanese came to see that radical action was necessary if they were to stand any chance of evading the same fate.

Dissatisfaction with this situation led to a brief civil war in which the two hundred and fifty year *Tokugawa Shogunate* was overthrown, replaced by restoration of the Emperor to a place of prominent power. Known as the *Meiji Restoration*, Meiji means 'Enlightened Rule'.

If you've seen the film, *The Last Samurai*, this is where the scenes of men with swords on horseback being cut down by gatling guns are taken from, it was a meeting of two entirely different worlds.

Although the revolutionaries were incited by the intrusion of foreigners into Japan, they quickly realised they had no way of expelling them and made an about turn in tactics. Rather ingeniously, they fully embraced not only Western technology, which would have been understandable, but also Western cultural practices too.

The Meiji Government repudiated violence against foreigners and lifted the centuries old ban on Christianity. It introduced railways, telegraph lines, a universal education system and hired hundreds of advisers from Western nations, with expertise in such fields as mining, banking, law, military affairs, and transportation. The Japanese adopted the Gregorian calendar and Western fashions and hairstyles.

One tactical reason for this was the Japanese coming to understand how Westerners saw the world: in terms of racial and civilisational hierarchies. They sought to stave off colonisation by presenting themselves as Westerners in the East—to be adopted as *honorary arians*.

One leading advocate of Westernisation was the popular writer Fukuzawa Yukichi, who today appears on the ten thousand Japanese yen note. He wrote:

'We cannot wait for neighbouring countries to become enlightened and unite to make Asia strong. We must rather break out of formation and join the civilised countries of the West on the path of progress.'

The Japanese leadership also saw the need to reform religion, turning Shintoism into a state cult and declaring the emperor to be a living god. A substantial portion of the

state budget was dedicated to enshrining this cult into the public mind, with schools being used as centres to indoctrinate the youth.

As an aside, there's a comparison here to what is going on in Britain at the same time. There's a perception in the United Kingdom that royal weddings and coronations are majestic and timeless ceremonies, stretching back for a thousand years. In reality they are an invention of the 19th century, a way to implicate the public with royalty after an upswell of republican sentiment upon the demise of the debauched and unpopular monarch, George the IV.

In the 1870s, with Japanese students studying in American universities, some US expansionists started to see Japan as a potential imperial partner, a proxy force through which they could extend greater influence into East Asia.

In 1871, Okinawan sailors heading for China were blown off course onto the island of Taiwan. In what became known as the *Mudan Incident*, fifty four of the sixty six who made it to shore were massacred by Taiwanese natives. Initially the Taiwanese provided hospitality and it's not entirely clear why the massacre occurred. There are actually reconciliatory efforts between the two Islands going on till this day.

Okinawa and the wider Ryukyu Island chain, linking Japan with Taiwan, were over the following eight years annexed by Japan. The Japanese followed a similar course to the Americans in Hawaii and Puerto Rico, attempting to eliminate the Ryukyuan language, culture and religion. Public education was introduced that permitted only the use of standard Japanese, while shaming students who used their own language by forcing them to wear plaques around their necks.

The US Minister to Japan, Charles De Long, suggested that Japan dispatch a military expedition to discipline the Taiwanese and lay the groundwork for the takeover of the island nation. Minister De Long assured the Japanese that the United States was:

'partial to its friends who desired to occupy such territory for the purposes of expansion.'

The Japanese found an advisor in Civil War veteran Charles LeGendre. LeGendre had served as a US diplomat in China, and had tried and failed to encourage the Chinese to invade Taiwan and civilise its tribal inhabitants. Unable to do so, he saw another opportunity with the Japanese, who willingly bought his military expertise.

LeGendre hoped to become governor of the island. He wrote to a friend in the United States that he took the job after:

'It was proved to me that, in doing so, I was but aiding in the carrying out of certain views which our government looked upon with extreme favour.'

LeGendre proposed the Japanese adopt a 'Monroe Doctrine for Asia', In 1823, President James Monroe had declared that only the United States could meddle in the Americas; the United States would view European actions in the Western Hemisphere as aggression requiring US military intervention.

LeGendre recommended Anglo-Saxon methods:

'Pacify and civilise them if possible, and if not... exterminate them or otherwise deal with them as the United States and England have dealt with the barbarians.'

The Japanese government created a *Bureau of Savage Affairs* and incorporated new Western words like *koronii*—colony—into the Japanese language. Japanese newspapers *otherized* the Taiwanese aborigines, calling them cruel and inhuman, and spoke of Japan's responsibility to civilise the savages. In early May of 1873, Japan invaded Taiwan with US military advisers supporting the operation. Within two months, the Taiwanese submitted to Japanese military force.

Instead of holding the island as a colony however, fearful of provoking war with China, Japan withdrew after extorting an indemnity of around eighteen tonnes of silver. The invasion also allowed Japan to break any Chinese claim over the Ryukyuan islands and served as a trial run for future imperial ambitions. When Japan and China did go to war twenty years later, Japan emerged with Taiwan as a colony. This could be pegged as the start of problems which exist with Taiwan today, as one of the world's hot points that could spark a nuclear war.

This might sound strange today, as China is supposed to be taking over the world any minute now, but at the turn of the twentieth century Theodore Roosevelt did not see the Chinese as a future world power. This in spite of the country's size, historical civilisation and immense population. He believed China would be contested between the Anglo Saxon and the Slav, in a great battle for civilisation. It was imperative then that the Russians did not gain a foothold in China, something they had a massive geographic advantage to do.

At the same time, the Japanese felt the Russian bear breathing down their necks. They had ceded territory back to China at the insistence of European powers, only to watch Russia come in and take Dalian (also known as Port Arthur), by acquiring a twenty five year lease from the Chinese. If Russia occupied the Eastern Chinese

province of Manchuria, then moved down into Korea, it would become the central player in East Asia, blocking any further Japanese imperial ambitions.

On the far side of the world, British imperialists also wished to prevent Russia's march into Manchuria. They had other concerns with the 'Russian menace' too. For twenty years they had been at loggerheads over territorial claims in Iran, Afghanistan and China. The British feared that Russia would one day try to take India off them, and they knew they did not have the troop numbers to stop them.

In 1902 Britain and Japan signed the *Anglo-Japanese Treaty*, which stated that if any nation became allied with Russia during a war with Japan, Britain would enter the war on Japan's side. This was actually controversial and caused debates in Parliament, as Britain had traditionally avoided entangling alliances. A series of rebellions across the Empire however, caused British imperialists to seek out new strategies. British shipyards also supplied the Japanese with its navy and when war broke out, pressured the French and German governments to not supply the Russians with coal for their fleet.

Whilst such treaties were controversial in the British Parliament, at this time it would have been impossible for a US President to get such an agreement past the Senate. Theodore Roosevelt therefore engaged in secret diplomacy, making handshake style agreements with the Japanese. Seeing the Japanese as embodying Anglo Saxon values, he also encouraged them to adopt a Monroe Doctrine for East Asia.

Japan attacked the Russian fleet in February of 1904, then moved to occupy Korea. Like the British, Roosevelt notified Germany and France that if they assisted Russia he would:

'Promptly side with Japan and proceed to whatever length was necessary on her behalf.'

In May of 1905 Japan won a stunning naval victory. In spite of the perception that victory was at hand however, the war was bleeding the Japanese economy, whilst Russia had inexhaustible man-power to draw upon. Whilst the Russians couldn't win the war in the East, there was no possibility of Japanese soldiers marching on St Petersburg.

Not wanting to sue for peace directly and thereby appear weak in negotiations, the Japanese approached Roosevelt and asked him to go to the Russians on their behalf—without the Tzar knowing he was acting for them.

This ultimately led to the signing of the *Treaty of Portsmouth*, for which Roosevelt would, *ironically*, receive a Nobel Peace Prize.

Roosevelt initially supported Japanese demands that Russia pay the costs of the war, but ultimately pressured the Japanese to drop this condition. Russia simply recognised Korea as part of the Japanese sphere of influence and agreed to evacuate Manchuria. This led to substantial anti-American rioting in Tokyo. When Theodore Roosevelt's daughter, Alice, visited the country, she was advised to say she was English.

In 1882 the Korean King Gojong had signed a treaty with the United States, which declared that there:

'Shall be perpetual peace and friendship between Korea and the United States. If a third power acted unjustly or oppressively with either country, the United States and Korea promised to exert their "good offices, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.'

The Koreans therefore assumed the United States would offer them some form of protection against Japanese encroachment. Twenty three years later, wanting Japan to take Korea, Theodore Roosevelt ignored their pleas and turned over the US legation building in Seoul.

Roosevelt later justified his abandonment of the treaty by saying:

'The treaty rested on the false assumption that Korea could govern herself well.... [Korea was] utterly impotent either for self government or self-defence.'

Japan thus laid claim to Korea as a protectorate in 1905, followed by full annexation in 1910, thus beginning its imperial stride onto the Asian mainland.

You might recall from the chapter on Cuba, I pointed out the synchronicity of the last Spanish ship to be sunk by the US fleet was named *Columbus*. Well, Secretary of War William Howard Taft, who had been instrumental in the secret diplomacy with Japan, returned to the United States on a ship called *Korea*—named after a country whose existence he had just terminated.

Japan set out to suppress many traditional Korean customs, including eventually even the Korean language itself. The Japanese occupation lasted until 1945, and set up the conditions by which Korea remains divided into two countries to this day.

After the First World War, Britain and France negotiated a series of secret treaties with the Japanese, transferring parts of China to them, in return for Japanese recognition of European spheres of influence in Asia. President Woodrow Wilson accepted Japan's control of a part of China, in order to keep the Japanese in his proposed League of Nations.

These are the events that put Japan and the United States on a collision course, resulting in the *day of infamy* and war. Japan transitioned from being a junior partner, to an imperial rival in the Pacific. The reassurances Theodore Roosevelt had received regarding Japan having no interest in the Philippines turned to a full blown occupation.

There are multiple perspectives that are worth exploring on why the United States and Japan ultimately went to war. There is also of course the question of Pearl Harbour, and whether the US Military had advanced knowledge of the attack or not. I'll have to content myself with having covered this early period of history today, and return to those at a later point.

My purpose here has not been to take the blame of Japanese imperialists for the arising of the Japanese Empire, rather it is to demonstrate the role that the British and American actions (or perhaps better to say British and Roosevelt actions) played in bringing it about.

After World War Two Japan ended up being something less than a junior partner, with the Islands being a home to more US Military bases than anywhere else in the world. Ironically, a disproportionate number of bases are on the Island of Okinawa, not historically a part of Japan, but annexed with American encouragement. There is certainly a sense in which the American occupation of Japan has been continuous since 1945. As I write this, the media is reporting on a potential doubling of Japanese defence spending, as the United States looks to use the island nation as a counterweight to China once more. I wonder to what extent history is repeating.

Notes

[*The Imperial Cruise: A Secret History of Empire and War*](#), by James Bradley

[*Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War*](#), by Gerry Docherty and Jim Macgregor

[*The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*](#), by Charlmers Johnson

Eight. Panama, 'A Just Cause'

'On December 19th 1989, while Panamanians were getting ready for the Christmas holidays, the United States was secretly mobilising twenty six thousand troops for a midnight attack. When it was over thousands lay dead and wounded and the country was in shambles. Big questions remain; what exactly happened during the invasion of Panama, and why?'

The Panama Deception

In chapter I'll be looking at perhaps the most geostrategically important region of the Americas: Panama.

Up to fourteen thousand ships pass through Panama's canal annually, with each one cutting several thousand miles out of its journey. Yet prior to the canal's construction, Panama as a country didn't even exist, and Nicuagrua looked like it would provide a home for the project. The usual corrupt jostling from vested interests secured Panama as the location, with construction beginning in 1902.

This was President Theodore Roosevelt's pet project. Panama was then a province of Columbia, albeit one with an active separatist movement. Columbia was reluctant to give the United States the kind of control it wanted over the canal zone, requesting ten million dollars to cede sovereignty. Rather than pay up, Roosevelt had a different solution in mind.

Drawing on lessons learned in Hawaii, he encouraged Panamanian revolutionaries to proclaim independence. He then granted them diplomatic recognition and positioned American forces to block the Columbian army from interceding. A few gunboats prevented landfall and it was a *fait-accomplie*. Panama became a nation state.

The question arises; why did Theodore go about things this way? Was he trying to save the US taxpayer some money? Well, not exactly. According to Murray Rothbard in his essay *The Treaty That Wall Street Wrote*, the US Government paid forty million dollars to the French Panama Canal Company, and the ten million for Columbia would have come from that—not from the taxpayer. The Canal Company however had been bought by a syndicate of Wall Street bankers, headed by JP Morgan and Company. Roosevelt's own brother in law was even involved. So Panama wasn't carved out of Columbia to build a canal, so much as it was to ensure maximum return for New York financiers.

The canal project is a story in itself, with the importation of workers changing the demographic makeup of Panama. Over five thousand of them died during the US phase of construction, mostly from yellow fever and malaria.

As an interesting aside: a Dr. William Gorgas, building on approaches he'd developed in Cuba, managed to practically eliminate these diseases and must have saved thousands of lives in doing so.

The canal was completed in 1912. By 1920, the United States had already intervened in Panama four times. Over the decades hostility towards the US presence grew. Technically no Panamanian had signed the treaty ceding control over territory, and the US came to control ports never mentioned in it.

Through the fifties and sixties student protests were erupting into violence, threatening the long term security of the waterway. Now there emerged a real split with the American Empire as to how to deal with this problem.

In 1977 President Jimmy Carter signed the *Torrijos-Carter Treaties* with Panamanian dictator General Omar Torrijos. This established that the canal and fourteen US Army bases would be transferred to Panama by 1999. The US however maintained a perpetual right of military intervention.

Not everyone in Panama was exactly delighted by the treaty, seeing it, quite accurately, as leaving the US ultimately in control. For different reasons, the American political Right was incensed by it, with Ronald Reagan leading the charge:

'The Panama Canal Zone is sovereign United States territory just as much as Alaska is as well as the states carved from the Louisiana purchase. We bought it, we paid for it and General Torrijos should be told we're going to keep it.'

Murray Rothbard describes the liberal US media framing this as a morality play, where:

'Reactionaries and jingoists, emotionally and irrationally devoted to the mystique of American "sovereignty" in a foreign land; faced off against moderate internationalists, people who believe in friendly cooperation between the United States and Third-World nations.'

Rothbard goes on to reveal a deeper reason behind the treaty, and just like seventy-five years earlier, one that is inspired by bankers.

During his years ruling Panama, Omar Torrijos had run up a staggering level of debt, much of which was owed to New York Banks. Gaining control of the Canal would allow Panama to pay off these debts. Writing as far back as the seventies, Rothbard suggests these banks poured money into Panama as part of a plan to set up a tax

haven. We saw the manifestation of this revealed in the infamous *Panama Papers* of 2016.

Twice in the 20th century decisions by US Presidents regarding Panama were determined by the interests of New York financial houses. In case you're wondering if that's a happy coincidence, these same New York banks had been busy pouring hundreds of thousands of dollars into lobbying for the treaty.

Then in 1980 staunch treaty opponent Ronald Reagan became President. Omar Torrijos died in a suspicious plane crash in 1981 and was replaced by General Manuel Noriega. Noriega was a CIA asset who assisted the Agency's proxy war in Nicaragua. In exchange, he was allowed to traffic drugs into the United States unmolested. This relationship had been managed by now Vice President, George Bush.

Noriega wasn't happy being an American puppet however, and the relationship broke down during the 80s. By his own account, the major reason for this was his refusal to negotiate the canal treaty:

'General Noriega told us that there were a number of demands placed on him directly, both through John Poindexter and other meetings where the State Department pressured him to change the Panamanian Government's policy on several issues. He said that by far the most pressing was the demand by the United States was that Noriega and the Panamanian Government allow the US to expand their military presence in Panama and to renegotiate the treaties to allow them to keep control over the fourteen military bases that presently exist in Panama.'

Gavrielle Gemma, *The Panama Deception*

The United States froze economic aid to Panama in 1987. In 1988 Noriega was indicted in US courts for drug-trafficking. Ronald Reagan then froze Panamanian Government assets in US banks, withheld fees for using the canal, and prohibited payments by US agencies, firms, and individuals to the Noriega regime. This obviously sent the country spiralling into complete turmoil.

The US then funded Noriega's political opponents in an election. When it became clear during the counting that Noriega was going to lose, the military halted the process and violence ensued.

In a repeat of the way the United States provoked a war with the Philippines ninety years earlier, US soldiers began provocative actions intended to spark an incident to

justify an invasion. This happened when the Panamanians shot and killed a US Lieutenant under disputed circumstances:

'There were numerous actions undertaken by that Delta Force team which were reported in the United States press as provocations undertaken by Panamanians against the United States. Infiltrations of the United States positions, shots fired in the direction of the United States perimeters and positions, roughing up of United States citizens in the streets.'

David MacMichael, former CIA Analyst, *The Panama Deception*

'Provocations against the Panamanian people by United States Military troops were very frequent in Panama and they had several results, in my opinion—probably a couple of different intents. One I think was to create an international incident, was to have United States troops just hassle the Panamanian people until an incident resulted and from that incident the United States could then say that they were going into Panama for the protection of American life—which is in fact exactly what happened.'

Sabina Virgo, US National Labour Organizer, *The Panama Deception*

In December 1989, with George Bush now in the Whitehouse, an invasion of Panama: *Operation Just Cause*, was launched. Critics labelled it, *Operation 'Just 'Cuz'*, as in 'just because President Bush felt like it.'

This was the first post-cold war overthrow of a foreign government—the Berlin Wall had come down just a month earlier. Whereas anti-communism had provided a justification for regime change operations for almost fifty years, now the doctrine of *Humanitarian Intervention* was resurrected. This would be a staple throughout the 90s, until the *War on Terror* allowed National Security to come to the forefront once more.

The civilian casualty numbers vary wildly, from a few hundred to over four thousand, with mass graves still being exhumed to this day. It's also clear that the US Forces targets civilian areas. Here are some quotations from Panamanians, speaking in *The Panama Deception* documentary:

'According to witnesses, many of the surrounding residential neighbourhoods were deliberately attacked and destroyed.'

'The helicopters were heavily armed, firing powerful machine guns and rockets and they were firing indiscriminately. They weren't just looking for military targets, they were firing at many civilians. People were running all over trying to escape.'

'They shot at everything that moved, without mercy and without thinking whether they were children, women or people fighting. Instead everything that moved they shot.'

'We all thought that they would just take Noriega. They said that's what they wanted. They would take him and would respect everyone else.'

'After the bombing had been going on for a few hours, the soldier says 'tell everybody to come out with their hands on their head', and they directed us to the church. When we were in a church, about six o'clock in the morning, all of a sudden the building started to burn in front of the church. The people know the only thing they have was inside that place, they try to run out to get water to halt it, and the American soldiers tell them to get out. Some people are stubborn, they try to go in, and American soldiers shot up into the air, and the people get scared and they run back.'

'We saw that the North Americans were denying people access to their homes. They sent people back and threatened them with their machine guns and forbid anyone to get close to the houses, or walk in or around the alleys leading to the houses. Then they began to set the houses on fire.'

'The Panamanian soldiers know each alley; how to go in and how to come out and where to go and come from, one street to another. I think the only way the American soldiers could get rid of that danger was to burn down the buildings there, that way the Panamanian soldiers couldn't have nowhere to hide.'

Eighteen thousand people were held in detention centres by US Forces, with some of them remaining in refugee camps for over a year. The United Nations adopted a resolution condemning the invasion as: 'a flagrant violation of international law.'

Within hours of the invasion beginning, the presumptive winner of the May 1989 election, Guillermo Endara, was sworn in as President of Panama at a US Military installation in the Canal Zone. In 1991 he proposed a constitutional amendment that would abolish Panama's right to have an army. If Panama could not defend the canal, the US military would have to remain. Endara then offered to renegotiate the treaty.

Republicans however lost power. With Democrats back in Office, the US did withdraw from Panama in 1999. Militarists continue to make efforts to get a base back there to this day.

Notes

[Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[The Treaty That Wall Street Wrote](#), by Murray N Rothbard

[The Panama Deception](#) (Documentary)

[Panama Warns of Disguised Attempt to Instal Military Bases](#), teleSUR

Nine. Nicaragua, 'When history is written, the Contras will be folk heroes'

'Nicaragua is days away from holding an election that the US Government calls a sham. President Daniel Ortega is seeking a fourth consecutive term and silencing the opposition before the first vote is cast.'

Judy Woodruff, *PBS NewsHour*

Julio Martinez Ellsberg: 'Daniel Ortega betrayed the Sandinista Revolution many years ago, and this has been an alert that the Nicaraguan Progressives have been giving for many years. Everyone that you know from the 1980s, anyone that's famous, has already turned against him, because they can see that he is not Progressive, is not left-wing and right now he's gone full-on dictator the same way that Somoza was.'

Camilo Mejía: 'It's really hard to see where Julio is coming from when you have 74% of the electorate in Nicaragua voting for Ortega and you have all these social uplift programs and the safety and this economic growth that is even recognised by the IMF and the World Bank. The Nicaraguan people are not unsatisfied with the Ortega Administration, they are very happy with the Ortega Administration and I think the elections are a testament to that'

Debate on Nicaragua, *Democracy Now!*

In this chapter I'm going to look at the Central American country of Nicaragua. At the time of writing, Daniel Ortega has recently been returned as Nicaragua's President for his fourth term. The United States is calling the election fraudulent and threatening further sanctions. How did we get to this situation? To understand that, we'll have to go back to 1908.

After centuries of Spanish rule, and a brief period as part of the United Provinces of Central America, Nicaragua became an independent country in 1838. The British Empire maintained a presence on its Eastern coast. An American pirate called William Walker took over the country for a brief period in the 1850s, invading with an army of privateers and declaring himself President. It didn't end well.

At the turn of the 20th century, José Santos Zelaya was President and enjoyed good relations with the United States. It looked likely that Nicaragua would be the home of the canal that ended up in Panama. This seems counterintuitive, given the relative width of the two countries, but Nicaragua's terrain was more suitable and a large lake cut down on the necessary size. Indeed, the country may become home to such a canal yet, with the Chinese currently involved in a project there.

Panama's choice as the location did not diminish the strategic importance of Nicaragua, on the contrary, it heightened it. It now became imperative to ensure Nicaragua, backed by a European power, did not construct an alternative to the United States' canal in Panama.

Zelaya had unified the Nicaraguan nation, getting the British to withdraw from their Eastern ports. This caused a vacuum that American business interests sought to fill, with companies purchasing exclusive logging and mining agreements. When some of these companies inevitably fell out with the government, they went to the US State Department seeking help.

During the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, who seemed to like Zelaya, these complaints fell on deaf ears. They found greater reception during the succeeding administration of William Howard Taft. Taft was not an ideological imperialist the way Roosevelt had been. A bit like Grover Cleveland, he was influenced by American business interests and willing to take action abroad to support them.

Taft's Secretary of State, Philander Knox, had been a corporate lawyer and represented the La Luz and Los Angeles Mining Company, which held a gold mining concession in Nicaragua, which Zelaya threatened to revoke.

Another American businessman who got into conflict with Zelaya was lumber merchant George Emery. Emery violated the terms of his agreement by neglecting to build a railway line or replenish the trees he was cutting down. When the State Department protested on his behalf, Zelaya settled the matter amicably, revoking the concession and compensating Emery.

Zelaya then committed the sin of borrowing money from European banks to finance a railroad project—an action totally unacceptable to the United States Government. Philander Knox initiated a propaganda campaign in the media to turn Americans against Zelaya by painting him as 'a mediaeval despot', to quote President Taft.

American businessmen then orchestrated a revolution, declaring provincial governor, General Juan Jose Estrada to be the new President. They funded a militia which unsuccessfully marched on the capital of Managua.

Just as had been the case a generation before, with the privateer William Walker seeking glory in Nicaragua, this revolution also attracted mercenaries from the United States. Two of these mercenaries, Lee Roy Cannon and Leonard Groce, were captured after attempting to blow up a ship full of Nicaraguan soldiers. They were duly executed by firing squad.

Secretary of State Knox seized this incident to paint Zelaya as a war criminal, issuing a legal opinion that because Estrada's rebellion had given his men the 'stature' of belligerents, Cannon and Groce had been entitled to prisoner-of-war status. He then attempted to convince the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Costa Rica to invade and topple Zelaya, with no success. The United States then broke diplomatic relations with the Nicaraguan government and assembled Marines in Panama; the first use of the country as an overseas staging area to project imperial power.

Unable to negotiate, Zelaya resigned and went into exile. In his farewell speech he said he hoped his departure would:

'Produce peace and above all, the suspension of the hostility shown by the United States, to which I wish to give no pretext that will allow it to continue intervening in any way with the destiny of this country.'

The United States now moved to block the Nicaraguan government from putting down the rebellion. They employed the same tactic that had been used in Hawaii twenty seven years earlier, forbidding the Nicaraguan soldiers from firing on the rebels for fear they might hit American civilians. US Warships then deployed Marines to enforce this order.

Incidentally their Commander was Major Smedley Butler, who would later go on to pen the famous anti-imperialism book, *War is a Racket*, where he described himself as:

'A high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers...a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism'

Also unable to negotiate, the new President, Jose Madriz, also resigned and followed Zelaya into exile. This allowed General Estrada to march unopposed to Managua, establishing himself as President. *The New York Times* reported that:

'On that day began the American rule of Nicaragua, political and economic.'

New York banking houses lent Nicaragua fifteen million dollars and took over the country's customs agency to guarantee repayment. By 1912, Americans were also running the country's national bank, steamship line, and railway.

President Estrada was, understandably, unpopular, and forced to resign in 1912. His replacement, vice president Adolfo Díaz. Díaz wasn't much of an improvement, he had been the chief accountant of the La Luz mining, with Minister of War General Luis accusing him of 'selling out the nation to New York bankers.' A rebellion broke

out, leading to hundreds of US Marines occupying the country to protect America's growing business interests there. This direct occupation would last for over twenty years.

Civil war broke out in 1926. This is when Liberal commander, Augusto César Sandino, rose to prominence. Sandino raised a guerrilla army which, combined with the Great Depression, forced the US out of the country in 1933. Prior to departing, US Forces established a Nicaraguan National Guard, a combined military and police force designed to be loyal to US interests. It was led by Anastasio Somoza García, who had close ties to the US Government.

A peace agreement was reached with Sandino, leading to him becoming one of three rulers of the country. Somoza then had Sandino assassinated and massacred his followers, including their children.

By 1937 Somoza had taken full control of Nicaragua, and ruled until 1956, when he was shot dead by a poet (never underestimate the poets). His sons then ruled until the revolution in 1979.

To give a sense of US Corporate involvement: from 1945 to 1960, the US owned Nicaraguan Long Leaf Pine Company (NIPCO) directly paid the Somoza family millions of dollars in exchange for favourable benefits to the company, such as not having to re-forest clear cut areas. By 1961, NIPCO had cut all of the commercially viable coastal pines in northeast Nicaragua.

Peasants were forced off their land to make way for cotton plantations and cattle ranches. Some were forced by the National Guard to relocate into colonisation projects in the rainforest.

Nicaraguan workers earned as little as a dollar a day. Anastasio 'Tachito' Somoza Debayle, who ruled at the time of the revolution is said to have said:

'I don't want an educated population; I want oxen.'

To give more of a sense of what Somoza's rule was like, I'll quote journalist John Pilger from his documentary, *Nicaragua: A Nation's Right to Survive*:

'There was a calypso sung in American nightclubs in the 1940s, that began like this: a guy asked the dictator if he had any farms, the dictator said he had only one, it was Nicaragua.'

'Anastasio Somoza founded a dynasty that ran Nicaragua like a family business for forty four years. The Samozas owned almost half of all the arable land in Nicaragua, they controlled the coffee, sugar and beef industries. Nothing was overlooked. They owned the national airline outright. If you bought a Mercedes car you bought it from a Somoza company. Even the paving stones in the streets were made by a Somoza cement factory, which got the contract from a Somoza Ministry and of course the profits went to *El Presidente*. The Somozas were protected by a private army called the National Guard, which the United States created, paid and armed. Somoza called them 'his boys' and they tortured almost as a sport.

'One of the delights of Somoza's boys was to drop his opponents from helicopters into the Masaya Volcano. The official American attitude to Somoza was best summed up by President Franklin Roosevelt: "that guy" he said, "may be a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch."

In 1972 an earthquake devastated Managua, killing over ten thousand people and leaving fifty thousand homeless. The National Guard embezzled much of the international aid that flowed into the country to assist in reconstruction, whilst Somoza gave reconstruction contracts preferentially to family and friends, thereby profiting from the quake and increasing his control of the country.

This corruption also signalled the beginning of the end for the Somoza dynasty. People who no longer had anything else to lose swelled the ranks of the opposition Sandinista National Liberation Front. The group, who took their name from Augusto César Sandino, had formed over the previous ten years as part of the independence movements sweeping the world at that time.

After Sandinista guerrillas took government officials hostage (killing one along with his three guards in the process), Somoza declared martial law. The National Guard began to raze villages and massacre civilians suspected of supporting the rebels. Human rights groups condemned these actions, but US President Gerald Ford refused to break the alliance with Somoza.

The country tipped into full-scale civil war with the 1978 murder of Pedro Chamorro, a journalist who had been critical of the regime. Ironically, a businessman who Chamorro had criticised was later tried and convicted in absentia for the murder, so it might not actually have been Somoza behind it.

There was a particular incident where a National Guardsman was caught on camera cold bloodedly executing ABC journalist Bill Stewart. This, combined with Somaza's

general brutality and increasing loss of control of the country, caused Jimmy Carter's Administration to withdraw military aid.

When Somoza fled the country he authored a book called *Nicaragua Betrayed*. It's surprisingly hard to get a copy of, so I haven't read it, but from what I can ascertain Somoza blamed Jimmy Carter for his downfall, along with a US State Department he believed to be packed full of closeted communists. This narrative was picked upon by right wing conspiracists in the United States, who believe in the narrative of a Moscow centred Communist octopus spreading its tentacles across the globe. It found a place on their shelves next to similar apologetic efforts for Iran's Reza Pahlavi Shah and Chile's Augusto Pinochet.

In reality the Carter administration did not welcome the Left wing Sandinistas in coming to power. Carter authorised covert CIA support for the press and labour unions in Nicaragua in an attempt to create a 'moderate' alternative to them. They wanted to keep some elements of Somoza's wider political party involved in government, and keep the National Guard, Somoza's instrument of torture and murder, intact.

After the Sandinistas took power in 1979, Carter authorised the CIA to provide support to their opponents. This was nothing however, as to what was to come after Ronald Regan was elected President. Regan threw US support behind the counter revolutionaries, or *Contras*, composed of ex-members of Somoza's National Guard.

I'll quote from the Frontline documentary, *War on Nicaragua*, describing how the Contras acted:

'They are our brothers, these freedom fighters and we owe them our help. You know the truth about them, you know who they're fighting and why. They are the moral equal of our founding fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance. We cannot turn away from them, no evil is inevitable unless we make it so. We cannot have the United States walk away from one of the greatest moral challenges in post-war history. We will fight on and we'll win this struggle for peace.'

Ronald Reagan

'Just six weeks after his inaugural on March 9th 1981, President Reagan signs a secret directive. Nicaragua is declared a threat to el Salvador and ultimately to the United States. On authority of the President's signature, the CIA sends its operatives into the field. In the countries on Nicaragua's borders small rebel armies have formed, financed by wealthy exiles and composed largely of veterans of Somoza's dreaded National Guard. The CIA will secretly organise

among the scattered groups, attempting to unify them into one opposition force to confront the Sandinistas. The war is fought in places like Miraflores, a mountaintop cooperative in Northern Nicaragua. Here, when they are planting beans or working the cornfields, one peasant must always stand guard. From the cover of mountain mist the Contras often attack.'

Narrator

'When the Contras came, the women were confused and afraid and thought that they were our own people. One of the Contras looked into a window in the house where the women were hiding. He probably thought that the guards were inside, so he threw a grenade through the window. He killed five people altogether, including two children. The child who died was my son, and the teacher my sister.'

Nicaraguan villager, *War on Nicaragua*

'Within six months, by the summer of 1982, the nature of this war is clear. The proxy army does not confront the Sandinista Army in open battles, its targets are mostly peasant villagers.'

Narrator

'They took our men away, all of them, they took them by force. They took them with their hands tied behind them and a rifle right here. "Oh you're crying", the Contra said, "We'll give you something to cry about."

Nicaraguan villager

My baby was in the nursery. And the one who was taking care of her was wounded. And when they tried to kill her, they killed the baby. That's the worst part of what they're doing, killing innocent children who don't know anything.'

Nicaraguan villager

'How can anyone believe they're committing these horrible crimes here. Burning our farmlands, killing our children, killing our friends.'

Nicaraguan villager

'In Washington this is called *Low-intensity Warfare*. It is quite different from the way the US fought in Vietnam. The targets of the attacks include rural health clinics, schools and farm cooperatives. Nicaragua now recognises it is at war with the United States, although there are no American soldiers in the field and no declaration of war by the US Congress. Nicaragua and its army cannot be allowed to win, so the CIA escalates the war, taking a direct role in the aggression. From a mother ship off the coast the Agency conducts its own attacks. As detailed in this classified CIA document, dozens of sabotage

missions are launched by the Agency's own employees, a special force of Latin mercenaries. They are called *Unilaterally Controlled Latino Assets*.'

Narrator

'The missions were always controlled by the CIA. Those of us who fought, who were so to speak the canon fodder, were Honduran, but we were controlled by the Gringos. They gave us the orders, we were at their disposal. We sabotaged harbours, refineries, shipyards, bridges. We never use our own uniforms, we use Contra uniforms, so that the foreign press will think the Contras we're doing all the work and the Americans could walk away with their hands clean.'

Honduran CIA Mercenary

I've come across conspiracy theorists who claim the world's elite put coded messages in their public speeches, that their true intent emerges when you interpret their statements differently. With that in mind it's interesting to hear Ronald Regan say:

'No evil is inevitable unless we make it so.'

Did he mean that he intended to create evil? Or did he truly suppose the sponsoring death squads was a just and noble thing? Or maybe such questions are simply of no interest to him whatsoever, and he just knows what his audience needs to hear.

Let's look at some of the effects of the US war on Nicaragua. These examples are taken from William Blum's book *Killing Hope*:

Nicaragua was excluded from US government programs which promote American investment and trade; sugar imports were slashed by ninety percent.

Washington pressured the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the European Common Market to withhold loans to Nicaragua.

The US opposed a loan to aid Nicaraguan fishermen on the grounds that the country did not have adequate fuel for their boats. At the same time CIA sponsored saboteurs were busy blowing up a major Nicaraguan fuel depot.

CIA operations emanating in Honduras also blew up oil pipelines, mined the waters of oil-unloading ports, and threatened to blow up any approaching oil tankers. At least seven foreign ships were damaged by the mines, including a Soviet tanker with five crewmen reported to be badly injured.

Nicaragua's ports were under siege: mortar shelling from high-speed motor launches, aerial bombing and rocket and machine-gun attacks were designed to blockade Nicaragua's exports as well as to starve the country of imports by frightening away foreign shipping.¹⁸ In October 1983, Esso announced that its tankers would no longer carry crude oil to Nicaragua from Mexico, the country's leading supplier.

Agriculture was another prime target. Raids by contras caused extensive damage to crops and demolished tobacco-drying barns, grain silos, irrigation projects, farm houses and machinery; roads, bridges and trucks were destroyed to prevent produce from being moved; numerous state farms and cooperatives were incapacitated and harvesting was prevented; other farms still intact were abandoned because of the danger.

The Standard Fruit Company suspended all its banana operations in Nicaragua and the marketing of the fruit in the United States. The American multinational, after a century of enriching itself in the country, left behind the uncertainty of employment for some four thousand workers and approximately six million cases of bananas to harvest with neither transport nor market.

Nicaragua's fishing industry suffered not only from lack of fuel for its boats. The fishing fleet was decimated by mines and attacks, its trawlers idled for want of spare parts due to the US credit blockade. The country lost millions of dollars from reduced shrimp exports.

The CIA actually produced a manual, entitled *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare*, which advocated for such activities political assassination, blackmailing ordinary citizens, mob violence, kidnapping, and the blowing up of public buildings.

Nicaragua won a case against the United States at the International Court of Justice in 1986, where the US was ordered to pay the country twelve billion dollars in reparations for waging war against it. The US simply withdrew its acceptance of the Court and refused to pay. It argued that Cuba and the Soviet Union had committed the same violations against Nicaraguan sovereignty by providing training and ammunition to the Sandinistas against the Somoza regime—which was true, although not exactly a defence.

When the US Congress eventually did refuse to provide military support for the Contras, the Reagan administration worked around this by having other nations supply them. They also raised funds by orchestrating a covert deal selling weapons to Iran, engaged in a war with US supported Iraq at the time. The Iran Contra affair

was exposed and became one of the biggest scandals ever to rock a US administration.

Further funding was acquired by facilitating the Contras flying cocaine into the United States. This coincides with the 1980 crack epidemic. It's such a big topic I'll have to cover it and wider narco-imperialism another time, just to say it does bring in the Clinton family, as a lot of this cocaine was coming in through an airstrip in Mena Arkansas, when Bill was governor there.

The Sandinistas took over a country devastated by a revolutionary war. Nicaragua was plagued by malnutrition, disease, and pesticide contaminations. Lake Managua was considered dead because of decades of pesticide runoff, toxic chemical pollution from lakeside factories, and untreated sewage. Soil erosion and dust storms were also a problem in Nicaragua at the time due to deforestation.

The Sandinistas received international recognition for gains in healthcare, education, the development of unions, and land and environmental reform.

A ceasefire agreement was reached with the contras in 1988, coupled with an effort to reintegrate them into society.

General elections were held in 1990 in which there was a shock victory for the National Opposition Union, with Violeta Chamorro, the wife of the murdered journalist Pedro Chamorro, becoming President.

The Sandanists were not full blown communists; they repossessed Somaza's farmland, but then distributed it to peasants to manage, in contrast to the centrally planned state farms of Cuba, for example. They did however certainly engage in less than helpful central economic planning. Not everyone felt like a winner in the new Nicaragua.

Perhaps the major factor in their defeat however was that no country could sustain the economic and military warfare waged against them by the world's superpower. Whilst a ceasefire with the Contras had been signed, the United States economic embargo remained. Nicaraguans felt the war would never end whilst Sandinistas remained in power. It is perhaps also a factor that the US invaded Panama just two months prior to the election. It's hard to think that wouldn't have influenced Nicaraguans not wanting to see such a 'humanitarian intervention' in their own country.

Sure enough, the embargo was lifted one month after their election defeat.

This led to sixteen years of what's described as 'centre right' rule, where a lot of nationalised industries were privatised again. Sandanista Daniel Ortega returned to the Presidency in 2006, where he remains till this day.

This is where things become challenging to decipher. Ortega is denounced across the media spectrum as an oppressive dictator. He's abolished term limits, frauded elections and enacted massive violence (leading the hundreds of deaths) against protestors. It seems like a classic case of power corrupting and a man becoming that which he once fought against.

On the other hand, there are left wing journalists who point to Ortega's overwhelming popularity, and blame the violence of recent years not on the regime, but rather a reemergence of US backed Contra force. Given the history of the country, who could at least take these claims seriously?

And that brings us back to the start, where I played quoted from a *Democracy Now* debate between Julio Martinez Ellsberg and Camilo Mejía. I'm not going to attempt to resolve Nicaragua's current condition here, but hope I've laid out the historical context necessary to begin to understand.

Notes

[*Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change*](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[*Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua*](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[*William Walker's Wars: How One Man's Private American Army Tried to Conquer Mexico, Nicaragua, and Honduras*](#), by Scott Martelle

[*Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*](#), by William Blum

[*Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare*](#)

[*Nicaragua, a Nation's Right to Survive*](#), documentary by John Pilger

[*War on Nicaragua*](#), Frontline documentary

[*Debate on Political Crisis & Violent Deaths in Nicaragua*](#), Democracy Now!

'When history is written, the Contras will be folk heroes', is a quote from Elliott Abrams, then Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs

10. Honduras, The Banana Republic

'We think that Honduras has taken important and necessary steps that deserve the recognition and the normalisation of relations. I have just sent a letter to the Congress of the United States notifying them that we will be restoring aid to Honduras. Other countries in the region say that they want to wait a while. I don't know what they're waiting for, but that's their right to wait.'

Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton

'We're coming out of a coup that we can't put behind us. We can't reverse it, it just kept going. And after there was the issue of the elections. The same Hillary Clinton, in her book, *Hard Choices*, practically said what was going to happen in Honduras. This demonstrates the meddling of North Americans in our country. The return of the President Manuel Zelaya became a secondary issue. There were going to be elections in Honduras, and Clinton recognised that they didn't permit Manuel Zelaya's return to the Presidency. There were going to be elections, and the International Community officials, the Government, the grand majority accepted this, even though we warned this was going to be very dangerous and that it would permit a barbarity, not only in Honduras but in the rest of the continent, and we've been witnesses to this.'

Berta Cáceres

The first quote above is of Hillary Clinton, justifying her actions concerning the 2009 Honduran military coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya. The second quote was environmental activist Berta Cáceres, talking of witnessing a barbarity descend upon Honduras and the rest of the continent as a result of this coup.

Not long after making these comments, Ms Cáceres was murdered by assassins trained at the United States infamous *School of the Americas*, and acting on behalf of the energy company DESA.

To examine the origins of the US relationship with Honduras, we'll need to go back a hundred years, once more to the Presidency of William Howard Taft.

Honduras declared independence from Spain in 1821, adopting a highly dysfunctional democratic model of government. By the turn of the twentieth century, and much as with Nicaragua, American corporations were consolidating large landholdings, and lobbied the US Government to protect their investments as they ran into conflict over issues such as peasants rights.

The first US Military incursion took place in 1903 and occurred consistently over the succeeding decades. Because the country was effectively controlled by American fruit corporations, it was the original inspiration for the term *banana republic*.

To give a sense of the importance of bananas; prior to 1870 the fruit (or herb, depending who you listen to), was virtually unknown in the United States. By the turn of the 20th century Americans were consuming over sixteen million bunches a year.

One of the titans of this industry was Samuel 'Sam the Banana Man' Zemurray, who had arrived in the United States as a penniless immigrant in 1891 and proceeded to make a fortune by improving on banana distribution methods.

Zemurray disliked Honduran President Miguel Dávila. Dávila insisted American businessmen pay taxes and abide by laws and regulations. He was also campaigning to limit the amount of land foreigners could own in Honduras. Zemurray, along with other opponents, initiated a failed attempt to overthrow him in 1908.

Dávila then granted a railroad concession to one of Zemurray's competitors, leading to another coup effort. For this one, Zemurray hired privateers, including such colourful sounding characters as Lee Christmas and the notorious New Orleans gangster, George 'Machine Gun' Molony.

The mercenaries initially took control of the small Honduran Island of Utila, about twenty miles off the coast. They then sailed to and seized the port of Trujillo. At this point they were detained by an American gunboat for violating US neutrality laws.

At this time the United States Government also had issues with President Dávila. Honduras was in substantial debt to British banks. President Taft disapproved of this and thought such debt contributed to Honduran instability. The US Government requested Dávila transfer Honduras' debt to the American banking firm J.P. Morgan. To guarantee repayment, Morgan would take control of the Honduran railroad and manage its customs and treasury, effectively turning the country into a protectorate.

This was, understandably, not popular in Honduras, and Dávila could not have gotten support for such an agreement. The arrival of mercenaries on Honduran shores however, must have convinced him there was no choice as the Americans were seeking his overthrow.

Lee Christmas then convinced Captain George Cooper, the officer detaining him, that his band of mercenaries were acting with approval from Washington. Cooper contacted the State Department to confirm and received no reply. This he took to be

diplomatic code; the Department had not contradicted Christmas' claim, but neither had they confirmed it and thereby implicated themselves.

Cooper then released the mercenaries and contacted the local army commander to declare the town of La Ceiba a 'neutral zone', ensuring they were unable to utilise their defensive positions without involving the US Navy.

La Ceiba fell to the onslaught of hundreds of mercenaries. Dávila, unable to get the bankers' treaty past Honduran legislature, offered to step down. The United States then issued an order forbidding any more fighting in Honduras, meaning that Davila could no longer use his army. US Marines then landed and forced both sides to negotiate. Zemurray had chosen previous president Manuel Bonilla as a figurehead to justify military action.

The Honduran government agreed to a new provisional President, to be selected by the United States. The following year Zemurray's man, Manuel Bonilla, was elected President once more.

President Bonilla proceeded to award Zemurray twenty thousand hectares of banana growing land, granted him a permit to make imports duty free and gifted him half a million dollars to cover his costs in organising the coup.

Zemurray became known as 'the uncrowned king of Central America', and continued to wield influence in Honduras over decades to come, securing exclusive lumbering rights to a region covering one-tenth of Honduran territory. I shall return to him at a future point, when he pulls a similar trick in 1950s Guatemala, then backed by an agency dedicated to supporting US corporate interests abroad: the CIA.

As labour movements emerged in Honduras to push back against the banana companies, strikes were put down by the Honduran military, with support from the US Navy when necessary. The US also periodically intervened due to the enormous amount of coups in the country.

Just after the Second World War the US Army founded the institution most famously known as *The School of the Americas* (SOA). Over the following decades, the school trained tens of thousands of Latin American army officers, including around three and a half thousand in Honduras.

Officers were trained in such activities as kidnapping, extortion, torture and assassination. The idea was to take a hands off approach to controlling Latin American, simply facilitating their own militaries in doing the dirty work. This has two

aspects; propping up despotic regimes by liquidating opposition, and also removing governments not conducive to US interests in military coups.

I'll quote from the 2003 documentary *Hidden in Plain Sight The School of the Americas*, to give a sense of it:

'Originally the School of the Americas was founded because many of the Central and South American nations were dictatorships. They were having coups and there was a lack of democracy all through Central and South America. As a result, we have every country in Central and South America being a democracy with the exception of Cuba, which of course does not send students to the School of Americas.'

Stanford Bishop Jr, Democratic Congressman, Georgia

'I know a lot of people do not know about the School of the Americas and what it stands for. And people here, I found out, believe that we are protecting democracy and promoting democracy and that's not what we had done for the last fifty years.'

Hector Aristizabal, Columbian Children's Peace Fund

Founded in Panama in 1946, the School of the Americas trained American soldiers in jungle warfare and counterinsurgency tactics, so they could more effectively protect and expand US political, economic and strategic interests in Latin America. The goal of post-World War II US foreign policy was expressed by George Kennan, who said "we the United States represent only 6.3% of the world's population, but we control 50 to 60% of the world's resources. Our responsibility in this new era must be to maintain the disparity" Part of this responsibility was assigned to the Latin American military and police. In the 1950s the School of the Americas was transformed into a training centre for Latin Americans, with all courses conducted in Spanish. Then came the Cuban Revolution of 1959. An alarmed Kennedy Administration responded by mandating the SOA to play a leading role in suppressing Cuban-inspired wars of national liberation in the Western Hemisphere.

Narrator

'In 1962 the Kennedy Administration shifted the mission of the Latin American military from hemispheric defence to 'internal security'. Internal security means war against the population. The internal security doctrine meant that the mass of the population must be disciplined. depoliticized, marginalised and suppressed in the interests of elite groups. Head of Counter-insurgency during the Kennedy years, Charles Maechling, pointed out that the effect of this

doctrine was to turn the Latin American military into something that resembled the SS Troops of Himmler.'

Noam Chomsky

'As the SOA carried out its counter-insurgency or anti-guerrilla campaign, Latin Americans began calling it the *School of Coups*, the *School of Assassins* and the *School for Dictators*.'

Narrator

'The School of the Americas is one of many instruments which the United States uses to impose the status quo upon other countries—using force and violence. The important question is why would US leaders be doing that sort of thing. They say they do it for democracy. to fight communism, to stop terrorism, to secure American lives or to defend American interests. Now when they say defending American interests they're getting a little closer to the truth, but whose American interests? Not the interests of me or you or the taxpayer, it's the interest of large corporate investors. So the goal, and this is seen in the kinds of countries and regimes they support and in the kinds that they attack, the goal is very rational and very persistent and very consistent, and it is to make the world safe for that one or two percent at the top who own most of the world.'

Michael Parenti

'The first beneficiaries of the country's resources, human and material, must be what's called US interests. If people in the country think the first beneficiaries should be the people of that country, well they're known communist proponents and you got to do something about them. What you do about them is a lot of things but if nothing else works, you kill them.'

Noam Chomsky

'I think that the School of the Americas reminds people in a very blunt way, that Americans too, can be collectively responsible for torture for murder for dictatorship. Not just for defending these things or covering them up or being complicit with them, but actually teaching people how to do them which is more than complicity, it's direct responsibility. And of course one would expect there would have to be a headquarters of it somewhere, it's not paranoid to think that a policy that relied so much upon repression would need a training school, there would have to be one. And now we know where it is, and the extraordinary thing is, the astonishing thing is, that everybody knows where it is: and it's still there. You would have hoped that an attempt would be made to keep such an institution secret, if only out of embarrassment, but no, the decision is to flaunt it, to say 'yeah you bet we do this, you bet we do.

'A manual on interrogation and on torture was published by the School of the Americas. A manual on sabotage and assassination and the recruiting of criminal elements for counter-revolution was published and distributed in the case of Nicaragua by the US Government. They openly said what it was they hoped to do. The Guatemalan death squads have said, and all the evidence that has been uncovered in Guatemala proves, that they didn't make a move without running it by the local CIA Station Chief. He didn't just know who the torturers were, he picked them and trained them.

'The striking thing as ever is that the dirty secret is not a dirty secret, it's hidden in plain sight. They almost boast about it, and in a way, that's part of the operation I think. It's supposed to frighten people, it's supposed to be terroristic, it's supposed to let people know 'yeah we will come and get you we will cut off your face we will make your children disappear or have them tortured in front of your wife. All of that we will do and we know how.'

Christopher Hitchens

'This is not a monastery, a seminary, a peace academy, This is a combat school. And that's why they're coming here to get those skills and they're going back to defend that system. Who's the enemy? They're the poor, they are who they've always been. Where's the enemy? Located outside of the borders of their countries? No, no, they're within their borders. They are the poor who threaten the army, who threaten that socio-economic system there, who call for reform, just wages, adequate housing, schools, hospitals.'

Father Roy Bourgeois

During the 1980s, with the loss of Nicaragua to the leftist Sandinistas and active guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras became a stable base of operations for the United States in Central America. Ronald Reagan's military assistance increased from four million dollars in 1981, to over seventy seven million by 1984.

The operations killed tens of thousands outside of the country, whilst internally any dissent was quashed by the infamous *Battalion 3-16*. This military unit, containing many members trained at the School of the Americas, worked closely with the CIA to abduct, torture and execute hundreds of suspected dissidents. One State Department official later acknowledge there was 'a green light on killing commies.'

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the war in Nicaragua wound down in 1988. Counter revolutionary armies stopped operating out of Honduras and a civilian

government sought to reign in the military. By the 90s there were calls to pursue those responsible for the human right abuses of just a few years prior.

Battalion 3-16 didn't go away however, they simply integrated into the police and government. In 2009 many former members initiated a coup against President Manuel Zelaya, ultimately deporting him to Costa Rica. This was sparked after Zelaya called for a constitutional referendum which would have allowed a President to serve more than one term. Whilst this is of course a standard dictator move, it doesn't seem any changes would have affected Zelaya himself, as his term was close to ending. The one term limit rule is also a way the Honduran military prevents the civilian government from becoming too powerful. Constitutional reform would have had further implications, potentially weakening the power of the military and threatening the massive US military bases in the country.

Zelaya contended that the United States was involved in the coup. No direct evidence of that emerged, but with many of the coup plotters being graduates of the School of the Americas, it's questionable whether there exists a meaningful distinction. The coup's leader, General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, was himself a graduate of the School.

And this brings us back to the opening quotations. Then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton essentially supported the coup by not condemning it, and instead calling for new elections which led to Zelaya's political opponent coming to power. The level of violence surrounding them suggests they were far from legitimate. The *Organisation of American States* drafted a resolution that would have refused to recognize Honduran elections carried out under the dictatorship, but the State Department blocked its adoption.

Clinton justified all this by implying Zelaya was a budding tyrant and opposing the coup could have sparked a civil war. Honduras sank back into the darkness of the 1980s. The homicide rate shot up and the murder of opposition political candidates and activists became normal. This is the barbarity Berta Cáceres spoke of prior to her own murder.

The United States has fully supported the Honduran military and police throughout.

This sparked the Honduran refugee crisis with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the country and ending up on the US border. The major factor in this is the chaos brought by narcotics trafficking, this isn't a separate issue however, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández has been implicated in the drugs trade, with his brother currently serving a life sentence in the United States.

Ironically, the refugee crisis is one of the issues that lost Hilary Clinton the election to Donald Trump in 2016.

To end on what is *possibly* a positive, right now is an interesting time in Honduras: in January of 2022 the wife of deposed President Manuel Zelaya, Xiomara Castro, won an election to herself become President. We can hear on Democracy now what it's hoped this will herald for the country:

'We begin today's show in Honduras where leftist presidential candidate Xiomara Castro appears poised to become the country's first woman president, putting an end to over a decade of right-wing neo-liberal rule. While the official vote count has not been released, Castro holds a commanding lead over Nasry Asfura of the right-wing National Party, which has ruled Honduras for twelve years, following the 2009 US backed coup which ousted Castro's husband, Manuel Zelaya. Xiomara Castro claimed victory Sunday night. Castro's apparent victory in Honduras is seen as a blow to Washington, which has embraced successive right-wing governments despite widespread accusations that Honduras has become a narco-military regime.'

Amy Goodman, host of *Democracy Now*

'We are going to build a new era. Out with the death squads, out with corruption, out with drug trafficking and organised crime. No more poverty and misery. To victory the people will always be united. Together we are going to transform this Country.'

Xiomara Castro

Notes

[Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change](#), by Stephen Kinzer

[Hidden in Plain Sight The School of the Americas](#), documentary

[Before Her Assassination, Berta Cáceres Singled Out Hillary Clinton for Backing Honduran Coup](#), Democracy Now

["A Moment of Hope": Xiomara Castro's Likely Win in Honduras Ends Years of Right-Wing Rule After Coup](#), Democracy Now

[Will Congress Act to Stop US Support for Honduras' Death Squad Regime?](#) Mark Weisbrot,

[The US Role in the Honduras Coup and Subsequent Violence](#), Stephen Zunes

Concluding Thoughts: Where next?

This concludes Part One of the *Energy of Empire* series, where I have covered the overseas expansion of the US Empire, between the years 1893 to 1912. In Part Two I will be crossing the Atlantic to examine the British Empire, the world's dominant imperial force at this time. After a brief summary of the British Empire's origins, I plan to run through a history of the Boer War, before examining Europe's descent into World War I. I'm particularly keen to focus on the marginalised *Perfidious Albion* theory—that elements within the British Government played a substantially larger role in bringing that war about than is generally recognised. I'll also be examining the concept of an Anglo-American Establishment emerging at this time and becoming the dominant global force of the 20th century.

If you have enjoyed this book I would be most pleased to check out the continuing *Energy of Empire* podcast series, as well as my other podcasting and writing. All of it can be found at:

Deepstateconsciousness.com