"To carry 'the Black Man's Burden': T. Thomas Fortune's Vision of African American Colonization of the Philippines in 1902 and 1903"

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For those interested in the study of U.S. imperialism Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden," reads as almost a liturgical hymn signaling the birth of U.S. intentions of empire. In general, the impact of White hegemony on indigenous peoples spanning territories from the Caribbean to the South Pacific acquired shortly after the Spanish-American War preoccupies imperial studies. However, few scholars in the field have yet to fully uncover the role African Americans played in advancing U.S. interests abroad. That is, in the example of early-twentieth-century U.S.-Philippine relations, African Americans are often cast as sympathetic figures who begrudgingly helped subdue Emilio Aguinaldo's army of Filipino insurgents. Clearly, Black soldiers did not fail to notice the parallel between their oppression and that of the Filipinos, nor did they escape the sting of racist rhetoric spit from the mouths of old Confederates now serving in Admiral Dewey's Navy. There is no doubt that soldiers who filled the ranks of all-Black regiments sent to the Philippines came to see the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) as unjust.

This sentiment, however, was not universal. Just as they had on domestic issues, Americans of African descent maintained diverse interests when it came to foreign ventures. In fact, nearly 1,000 African American soldiers remained in the Philippines after 1903, among them included infamous defector, David Fagen.ⁱⁱⁱ In order to better appreciate Black participation in the American colonial project it is useful to recall that Black writers published their own versions of Kipling's attempt to support, if you will, his American cousins. H.T. Johnson, a Black clergyman and editor of the *Christian Recorder*, wrote one such version in February of 1899, just two months after *McClure's* original. Just a few lines from Johnson's "The Black Man's Burden" provides a sense of African American investment in American imperialism. Johnson wrote: "Pile on the Black Man's Burden. 'Tis nearest at your door; why heed long bleeding Cuba, or dark Hawaii's shore? Pile on the Black Man's Burden. His wail with laughter drown[s]. You've sealed the Red Man's problem and will take up the Brown..."

My work owes a great debt to those scholars who previously considered African American attitudes toward American imperialism. Most recently, Michele Mitchell in *Righteous Propagation* observed the link between American imperialism and increased opportunities for African American leaders. She argued that "black men swept up in the rhetoric of empire overlooked how their own desires for domination had the potential to oppress other people of color." There emerged a relationship between imperialism, Black masculinity, and upward mobility that revealed a potential framework out of which African Americans might secure upward mobility, while they subverted domestic racism. Some years earlier Willard B. Gatewood in "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire" argued a similar position. By the end of the nineteenth century, he concluded, "Black Americans, like other citizens, manifested an extraordinary interest in the imperialistic ventures of the United States...."

However, support for American expansionism at the turn of the twentieth century never remained consistent. Although cognizant of the horrors of oppression, African American leaders' attitudes toward imperialism waxed and waned according to the presence of conspicuous opportunity for themselves. The point is that there existed no single, consistent Black position. For example, the emergence of anti-imperialist institutions founded by African Americans made the ideological divide over imperialism apparent. Organizations like the *National Negro Anti-Imperial, Anti-Expansion, and Anti-Trust League* and the *Black Man's Burden Association* emerged to officially oppose U.S. imperialism. By 1899, Black support for annexation shifted from "reluctant acceptance" to "belligerent opposition."

Yet by the following year Black protest of American imperialism retreated in acquiescence to an emerging American colonial order. It is quite plausible that growing concern over immigrant labor competition might have trumped anti-imperialistic commitments. In an attempt to explain the motive underlying shifting attitudes among African Americans, both Gatewood and Mitchell recognized class distinctions as the final arbiter in the opposition or support for imperialism. I find that a purely class-based interpretation obscures the tension and divergence of opinions held between mixed-race Americans of African descent and monoracially-identified African Americans. That is, the significant distinction lied not only in class position, but in perceived racial composition. Mixed-race, yet Black-identified leaders supported neither expansion nor emigration as escapees of the American racial order, but rather looked to new opportunities to rule over island inhabitants, while they positioned darker, African American laborers in a sort of intermediary tier. Mixed-race leaders recognized that in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century, U.S. imperialism could remove Whites from the equation of social mobility all-together. Xii

This essay directly confronts the notion that African Americans at the turn of the 20th century consistently or necessarily sympathized with indigenous peoples. In "Black Americans" Gatewood alluded to an essentially empathetic Black-Philippine alliance. xiii I believe this conclusion to be incomplete. Indeed, some Black Americans supported Filipino independence, but they also took pride in the service Black soldiers provided in subduing Filipinos in the Spanish-American War. xiv

For example, in an editorial published in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* in 1899, Theophile T. Allain, another mixed-race, Reconstruction-era politician and Louisiana entrepreneur, offered his support concerning the use of Black troops in the Philippines. He wrote, "let us make every white mother in the land our friend by offering our services." Others among the ranks of mixed-race, African American leaders also believed that support for American imperialism would help showcase Black patriotism. Some believed that defeating a common enemy as national patriots, rather than as members of a racial group, could more successfully bind the country, uplift Black Americans, and bridge the gap between Black and White.

After the Spanish-American War another mixed-race leader in the African American community, Josiah T. Settle voiced similar sentiments. Settle, also a Reconstruction-era activist turned Assistant Attorney-General of Shelby County, Tennessee, gave the opening address for Admiral George Dewey's visit to Tennessee on May 7, 1900. Settle proudly proclaimed:

Through bravery... our flag has been planted in the Orient, and the inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago awakened from a semi-civilized lethargy.... These islands will...become a market for our fleecy staples.... They will become our store-house of the east....^{xvi}

Settle also spoke to the loyalty Black Americans exhibited. He continued:

We will treasure this hour as a bright...epoch in the history of our race.... We assure you that nowhere in this patriotic land of ours and among no element of our *composite nationality*, will you find a more loyal devotion to the flag, a broader, deeper or more genuine patriots, than among colored citizens....^{xvii}

These are not the anecdotal sentiments of a few opportunistic members of the Black elite. While conducting research regarding mixed-race political leadership in African America from 1862 to 1916, I found that many more than previously envisaged heretofore supported imperialistic ventures. In fact, they envisioned themselves as potential colonial administrators. Bolstered by the popular eugenic aesthetic of the early-twentieth century, which associated their white ancestry with civility and generative progress, they identified themselves and were recognized as African America's most natural leaders at home and abroad. The mixed-race dimension of Black leadership, which favored American imperialism, is an important feature of the larger racial uplift movement because it reveals yet another strategy mixed-race African Americans employed to secure economic opportunities, while they secured positions of leadership. I found that those leaders who supported imperialistic ventures were mostly from the same pool of mixed-race politicians, university professors, and writers who led as Republican politicians after Reconstruction. The mixed-race politicians after Reconstruction.

By reviewing early-twentieth-century periodicals, the congressional record, and popular Black anthologies scholars of the American colonial project may now present a more complete understanding of Black participation.

In an attempt to subvert racism, or to adjust for the lack of social mobility in an increasingly hostile America, mixed-race, Black-identified leaders attempted to position themselves and their communities in newly-acquired island possessions, as members of a potential master class. They sought to accomplish this by emphasizing their American citizenship, while they perpetuated eugenically-inspired understandings of racial hierarchy.

Patriotic performance for the sake of socio-economic mobility was not limited to the Philippines. For a time, it looked as if Black America would help colonize the indigenous populations of the Philippines, Cuba, Liberia, and many other nations within the greater continent of Africa. Richard T. Greener, mixed-race leader of African and Puerto Rican descent, Reconstruction-era politician and U.S. Agent to Vladivostok, Russia, on the subject of African colonization explained, "To civilize Africa [was] to exalt the Negro race." Despite having taken the anti-imperialistic view "that the Philippines should be given the opportunity to govern themselves," by 1901 Booker T. Washington completely reversed course:

I think with the experience we... gained in the Philippines, we could administer and self-develop Liberia...with the aid of trained African mestizos from Puerto Rico... some Filipinos and...some fine full-blooded South Africans....However, we would have to assume [a] protectorate.... xxii

For the Philippine case specifically T. Thomas Fortune's ambition serves as a clear example of the imperialistic impulse prominent among mixed-race leaders in African America. Fortune served as Special Agent to the Philippines and envoy to Hawaii from 1902 to 1903. Fortune, the mixed-race, Black-identified editor of the New York Age, and founder of the Afro-American Business League enjoyed considerable prominence in the African American community. He not only supported the American colonial project but advocated African American emigration to territories from the Caribbean to the South Pacific. Fortune endorsed a scenario whereby Black emigrants would serve as middle-men between the U.S. government and Filipinos, while mixed-race leaders administered over both indigenous Filipinos and Black American emigrants. According to Fortune, African Americans in the Philippines would receive a "respite from their oppression" in the U.S., while they assisted "the natives in developing the resources of their county." Fortune contended that "if the American flag remained in the Philippines, 'the Afro-American will have to be drafted to hold it up in civil and military establishments. [I]n...labor, [according to Fortune, African Americans were] necessary to develop resources of the country and put it on a paying basis." The New York Times in 1903 echoed Fortune's convictions. The paper reported, "Negro labor with American capital... [would] make a success of our occupation of the islands." Fortune found himself in the position, on the one hand, of solving the so-called "Negro Problem" in the U.S. while, on the other hand, of having to assess the feasibility of colonizing the Philippines. xxv This proposition is dramatically different from the usual anti-imperialistic portrayals of empathetic Black soldiers who identified with "their darker brothers."xxvi

While on a trip to assess the conditions of Luzon, Fortune published his observations in a popular periodical of the day, the *Voice of the Negro*. In a detailed expose he explained how Black migration to the Philippines would both help Black Americans, specifically, and capital interests, in general. He wrote, "The land is rich, producing the finest tobacco in the world. [O]ther valuable crops can be produced; but the natives have no knowledge of farming, and do not seem to care to work.... [T]here is industrial prostration everywhere...." Here Fortune reverberates the all-too-familiar characterization of indigenous, colonized people as lazy. Fortune continued:

The Negro and Filipino get along splendidly together, and I am convinced that if, under proper arrangement, 5,000,000 Negroes could be located in the island, taken out of the Southern States, where they are wronged and robbed, and where the [W]hite man claims that they are in the way. [I]t would be good for them, good for the Filipinos, who badly need rejuvenation of blood, and good for the United States...."xxvii

More important than Philippine cultivation of land or "blood" to Fortune was what Philippine colonization could mean to African Americans, mixed or otherwise. Fortune was convinced that "the Philippines [need]...a competent labor population, and naturally the Negro should be placed in position to supply it, *as the Republic owes him a...chance* to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness..."*xxviii

Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt considered sending Black Americans en masse to its "new island possessions." However, for Congress, the utility of Black labor in the Philippines was still undecided. Some members considered alternatives.

For example, Kansas Senator, Joseph R. Burton, who expressed concern over the use of Black labor overseas proposed the "bonded importation of Chinese [laborers]...[since in his view] the [N]egro had too long a taste of independence, and [was] not as docile and abject as the coolie." He argued that because Blacks were U.S. citizens they were likely to be less manageable than "the Chinese [who did] not possess the boon of citizenship, and [were] not likely to have it conferred on them."

In contrast, Fortune expressed his reluctance to employ Chinese laborers in Philippines primarily because in his estimation, "American sentiment is against it and the Filipino people will have none of it." Concerned with extending African American interests, Fortune contended that the "American Negro [just needed] a chance... if he want[ed] to go there."xxx

The debate over the merits of one ethnicity or race over another for the purpose of labor continued. As a self-appointed spokesperson for African American interests, Fortune's tenure as Special Agent to the Philippines exemplified how mixed-race leaders, in particular, saw imperialism from the vantage point of self-interest. In his capacity as a federally-appointee he completed an ethnographic study to assess the feasibility of maintaining an African American-led, Filipino colony. His description of an African American medical doctor, already living in the Philippines, offers insight into the role race or color consciousness played in the decision to colonize the Philippines. He wrote, "Like all the Negroes we had so far met in our journey, he was coal black, and seemed to be perfectly at home. He was happy and making money and never expected to return to the United States." Fortune's observation of the doctor's darker complexion reveals the distinction he made between himself and darker-skinned African Americans. More importantly, his observations of skin tone variation pointed to the potential, the increased opportunity a man with 'coal black' skin might have in the Philippines when compared to the United States. Fortune also believed that Filipinos favored Blacks over Whites and that Filipinos would "never learn to love him [the White man]...."

By the end of 1903, the Roosevelt administration all but abandoned the idea of Black emigration, and supplanted Fortune's proposal with the employ of *pensionados*, indigenous Filipinos who were educated in the U.S. and returned home to essentially carry the colonial project, otherwise known as U.S. education, culture and mores, back to the Philippines. Nonetheless, there did continue a flow of Black educators who lived and taught English in the Philippines. The most prominent among them was Carter G. Woodson, the well-known father of Black history. Woodson taught English and Health in the provinces of *Nueva Ecija* and *Pangasinan* from 1903 to 1906. Trom 1906 through 1907 the potential of Black emigration to the Philippines resurfaced temporarily, as a rebellion in *Mindanao* necessitated the movement of U.S. troops back to the Philippines. Among those troops was former Reconstruction-era Congressman John R. Lynch of Mississippi. At the time, Army Major Lynch was serving a two-year tour from 1906 to 1908. While he supported the American colonization of the Philippines, Lynch was against Black emigration because of his desire for Black Americans to achieve full citizen rights within the United States.

Clearly, support for black emigration waned. Perhaps, news of Fortune's debauchery and bar-room brawls in the Philippines reported by *The New York Times* was for the Roosevelt administration cause for pause. No matter the reason, Roosevelt clearly lost confidence in Fortune's long-term leadership potential as evidenced by the shift toward *pensionado* "leadership." It is also likely that other factions within African-American leadership circles, concerned with black land ownership in the US, or those who demanded the manifestation of full civil rights guaranteed by their American citizenship, simply tipped the balance in favor of African Americans remaining in the US. Each of these factors influenced the shift of colonial leadership. Ultimately, however, geopolitical considerations may have sealed the fate of an actualized African-American led Philippine colony. Specifically, Japan's ever-growing imperialistic reach in mainland China, Korea and S.E. Asia most likely lessened US willingness to place African Americans at the helm of the American colonial project. One might consider that the American colonial project was not some mere experiment. The American colonial project became a defining policy objective whereby the country would bank its economic position in the world. Standing before Congress in 1900, Senator Albert J. Beveridge's economic rationale for Filipino annexation represented an early indication of just how important to America the colonization of Asia by way of the Philippines remained. He explained:

Our largest trade henceforth must be with Asia. The Pacific is our ocean. More and more Europe will manufacture most of its needs; secure from its colonies the most it con-sumes. Where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus? Geography answers the question. China is our natural customer. She is nearer to us than to England, Germany, or Russia, the commercial powers of the present and the future. They have moved nearer to China by securing permanent bases on her borders. The Philippines give us a base at the door of all the East. xxxvi

His speech to congress did more than emphasize the economic importance of Philippine annexation. It spelled out the cementing of a racial order that placed, in his words, "English speaking and Teutonic peoples," in the position "to become the master organizers of the world." Standing atop a eugenic platform, he explained:

> Senators [we] must remember that we are not dealing with Americans or Europeans. We are dealing with Orientals. We are dealing with Orientals who are Malays. We are Malays instructed in Spanish methods. They mistake kindness for weakness.... It could not be otherwise unless you could erase hundreds of years of savagery, other hundreds of years of Orientalism, and still other hundreds of years of Spanish character and custom. xxxviii

Beveridge also expressed serious concern with colonial administration: "They [the Filipinos] are not capable of self-government. How could they be? They are not of a self-governing race. They are Orientals, Malays, instructed by Spaniards in the latter's worst estate." As if to foreshadow Fortune's public failure to demonstrate a consistent ability to organize and manage the colonial project, Beveridge warned:

> The men we send to administer civilized government in the Philippines must be themselves the highest examples of our civilization. I use the word 'examples,' for examples they must be in that word's most absolute sense. They must be men of the world and of affairs, students of their fellowmen, not theorists nor dreamers. They must be brave men, physically as well as morally. They must be as incorruptible as honor, as stainless as purity, men whom no force can frighten, no influence coerce, no money buy. Such men come high, even here in America. But they must be had.xxxix

Given the authority eugenics held in early twentieth-century American legal and social policy, the goal of solidifying a permanent racial order may have been considered too important of a job to be relegated to African Americans, mixed or not. Beveridge pleaded:

> Mr. President, this question is deeper than any question of party politics; deeper than any question of the isolated policy of our country...; deeper even than any question of constitutional power. It is elemental. *It is racial*.xl

¹ As a member of the panel, "Gender and the Transpacific World," I originally delivered this paper at the Pacific Coast Branch – American Historical Association Conference in August 2012.

ii Herbert Shapiro, White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 88; William E. Alt and Betty Sowers Alt, Black Soldiers, White Wars: Black Warriors from Antiquity to the Present (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 64.

For an interpretation of African American defectors like David Fagen see David J. Silbey, A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902 (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 128-131.

iv H.T. Johnson, "The Black Man's Burden," Voice of Missions, VII (Atlanta: April 1899), 1. Reprinted in Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Black Americans," 183-184. For a thorough discussion of the morass of published responses to Kipling see Patrick Brantlinger, "Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden and its Afterlives," in English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920, 50:2 (2007): 172 and 191.

V Willard B. Gatewood, "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898-1903," The Journal of Southern History 38:4 (Nov. 1972): 545-566; Colored American (Washington) 19 March 1898.

vi Michele Mitchell, Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 15; 56; Willard B. Gatewood, "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898-1903," The Journal of Southern History 38:4 (Nov. 1972): 545-566; Colored American (Washington) 19 March 1898.

Mitchell, 56; Gatewood, 557-559.

viii For a particular careful consideration of anti-imperialistic attitudes among the Black leadership see Gatewood, "A Negro Editor on Imperialism: John Mitchell, 1898-1901," Journalism Quarterly 69 (Spring 1972): 43-50.

ix Gatewood, "Black Americans," 557. x Gatewood, "Black Americans," 583.

xi See, for example, Carl Degler, Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) or Naomi Zack, Race and Mixed-Race (Philadelphia: temple University Press, 1993).

- xii Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly, By the Least Bit of Blood: The Allure of Blackness among Mixed-Race Americans, 1862-1919 (forthcoming, 2015) or Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly, "Mixed-Race Leadership in African American: The Regalia of Race and National Identity in the United States, 1862-1916," (Diss:UCSB, 2009), Chapter 3.
- xiii Gatewood, "Black Americans," 546.
- xiv Gatewood, "Black Americans," 547 and 551.
- xv "Theophile T. Allain, "The Negro in War," 30 June 1899, Turnball-Allain Family Papers, Mss. 4261,
- b.15: f. 10. See also Sally P. Power, "Investing in the Past: Letters of Charles Henry Stocker, African-American
- Businessman of New Orleans, 1868-1874," The Journal of Negro History 82:1 (winter 1997): 20.
- xvi Josiah T. Settle, "Address of Hon. Josiah T. Settle, May 7, 1900," *Daniel Murray Pamphlet Collection*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- xvii Settle, "Address," Emphasis added.
- xviii Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly, By the Least Bit of Blood: The Allure of Blackness among Mixed-Race Americans of African Descent, 1862-1935 (forthcoming, 2015).
- xix "T. Thomas Fortune's Philippine Appointment: Negro Republicans in New Jersey Criticize the President," The New York Times, 30 November 1902. Dr. Roundtree, a political contemporary of Fortune, was said to be "very much put out over the...appointment...." Reportedly, Roundtree believed that giving a conspicuously mixed-race man the position would "discourage" other "[N]egroes who have worked so hard."
- xx George W. Williams, History of Negroes in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes as Slaves, as Soldiers and as Citizens Together with a Preliminary Consideration of the Unity of the Human Family, and Historical Sketch of African, and an Account of the Negro Governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia, vol. 2 1800-1880 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 419-444; Dineen-Wimberly, "Mixed-Race Leadership," chapter 3.
- xxi Richard T. Greener, "The Future of the Negro," *North American Review*, 138 (July 1884):88-93. Also see Dineen-Wimberly, "Mixed-Race Leadership in African America," chapter 3.
- xxii See Dineen-Wimberly, "Mixed-Race Leadership in African American," chapter 3. For a discussion on Booker T. Washington's position on colonization and its relationship to African Americans see Raymond Smock, ed., *Booker T. Washington in Perspective: Essays of Louis R. Harlan* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).
- xxiii T. Thomas Fortune, "Politics in the Philippine Islands," *The Independent*, LV (24 Sept. 1903): 2206-2208; T. Thomas Fortune, "The Filipino," *Voice of the Negro*, I (May, 1904): 202; 242-243.
- xxiv Fortune, "The Filipino," 200-203. Quoted in Gatewood, "Black Americans," 315.
- xxv "T. Thomas Fortune in Row with Police': Negro Labor Commissioner Involved in a Free Fight in Manila," *The New York Times*, 15 May 1903.
- xxvi See for example, David J. Silbey, A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902 (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 107-112.
- xxviii T. Thomas Fortune, "The Filipino: Some Incidents of a Trip through the Island of Luzon," *Voice of the Negro* 1:6 (June 1901): 243
- xxix "Negro Colony in the Far East: Experiments Planned in Hawaii and the Philippines" *The New York Times*, 12 December 1902. Also see T. Thomas Fortune, "The Filipino: A Social Study in Three Parts," *The Voice of the Negro*, 1:4 (March 1904): 200-201; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).
- xxx Fortune, "Luzon," 243.
- xxxi Ibid.
- xxxii Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 252-255 and 306-309; Paul Alexander Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 204; Scot Ngozi-Brown, "African-American Soldiers and Filipinos: Racial Imperialism, Jim Crow, and Social Relations," *The Journal of Negro History* 82:1 (Winter 1997): 42-53.
- xxxiii Jacqueline Goggin, Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History (Baton Rouge: Louisianan State University, 1993), 20-25; Scot Ngozi-Brown, 49; Jonathan Zimmerman, Innocents Abroad: American Teachers in the American Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13 and 125.
- xxxiiv John Hope Franklin, "Lynch, John Roy," in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 407-409. Hon. Lynch also served tours of duty in Cuba from 1900 to 1903 and in Hawaii from 1897 to 1899.
- xxxv "T. Thomas Fortune in Row with Police': Negro Labor Commissioner Involved in a Free Fight in Manila," *The New York Times* 15 May 1903.
- xxxvi Albert J. Beveridge, "In Support of an American Empire," Record, 56 Cong., Session I, 704-712.
- xxxvii Kramer, The Blood of Government, 2.
- xxxviii Beveridge, "In Support," 704-712.
- xxxix Ibid.
- xl Ibid. Emphasis added.