

Philippine Independence in U.S. History: A Car, Not a Train

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Pacific Historical Review, forthcoming
August 2020

The Fourth of July, 1946, was an unusual Independence Day for the United States. On the one hand, it commemorated the thirteen colonies' declaration of independence from the British Empire. But on the other, it was the day when the Philippines, the largest colony the United States had ever held, gained freedom from the U.S. Empire. In Manila, a specially stitched U.S. flag with one star from every Philippine province descended the flagpole. Up the same pole rose the Philippine flag, previously banned by colonial officials. "There were not many dry eyes in the crowd," an observer noted.¹

Independence was a significant turning point, and scholars of Philippine history have been particularly attentive to its character. Did it secure freedom or merely grant "independence without decolonisation," as Alfred W. McCoy has put it?² They have asked, too, about the consequences of independence for domestic politics. There are disagreements, but what no one debates is that independence was a major event, sending large waves crashing in all directions.³

In U.S. historiography, however, the events of 1946 have made hardly a ripple. Discussions of the loss of the country's largest colony, containing approximately 18 million people at the time, rarely feature in the broad narratives about the United States that synthesize the field's findings. The relevant volume in the comprehensive *Penguin History of the United States*, despite being titled *American Empire*, grants only a single clause to Philippine independence.⁴ The corresponding volume in the similarly comprehensive *Oxford History of the United States* does not mention it at all.⁵ Jill Lepore's celebrated recent 955-page survey, *These Truths*, though "chiefly a political history" of the United States and one attentive to nonwhite historical actors, also omits the topic entirely.⁶

Why? One reason for the omission is the disinclination among historians to include the colonies as part of U.S. history beyond 1898 and its immediate aftermath (the only context in which Lepore mentions the Philippines).⁷ This is discernibly waning, but it is still present and worth acknowledging. Another

reason is the assumption that Philippine independence was foreordained. U.S. leaders had spoken for decades of eventually freeing the Philippines. In 1934, Congress passed the Philippine Independence Act, which “resolved the question of independence” by giving it a timetable, the historian Gary Hess has written.⁸ “All that remained was to organize the parades,” is how historian Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman has characterized the post-1934 period.⁹ In this view, the colony’s receipt of independence in 1946, on exactly the planned date, does not seem surprising or noteworthy. It was a train arriving on schedule—a nonevent.

In this article, I will reconsider Philippine independence as seen from Washington, using archival evidence largely located there, and make two related arguments. First, the question of Philippine independence was not “resolved” by the 1930s—the promises made were not binding and, as it happened, the reasons why they were made were entirely different from the reasons why they were kept. The right metaphor is not a train, following the rails of history, but a car, making a purposeful turn when it might not have. This argument differs from most scholarship on the topic in that it asks not about the *terms* of independence—who won, who lost—but why it happened at all. The Philippines’ road to freedom, I will strive to show, was significantly more twisted than has been appreciated.

My second argument is that the bare fact of independence, regardless of its terms, was deeply consequential for the United States. Washington released its largest colony in 1946 chiefly to position itself as a liberator in the Global South. Doing so bought the United States considerable international credibility, which in turn allowed it to broker a key compromise over empire during the establishment of the United Nations. More broadly, Philippine independence served as the enabling condition for the United States’ postwar approach to empire, the start of its own process of decolonization, and a central exhibit in the case for its legitimacy as a global hegemon.

ACCORDING TO THE official story, Philippine freedom had always been the goal. In his independence message, President Harry Truman described the era of U.S. rule as “a period of almost fifty years of cooperation with the Philippines looking toward independence.”¹⁰ In a way, he was right. Policymakers had spoken of independence from early on. The U.S. mission, as President Theodore Roosevelt articulated it, was to help the Philippines “upward along the stony and difficult path that leads to self-government.”¹¹ This was the logic of tutelary

colonialism, which justified empire as form of benevolence through which immature peoples—Woodrow Wilson called Filipinos “children” in political matters—were taught to rule themselves.¹² It was not always clear whether “self-government” entailed full independence or just autonomy over internal affairs, but the concept was not so loose as to be meaningless, and the Philippines was marked as a special colony, slated for freedom in a way that Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, and Guam were not.¹³

Still, Filipinos had cause to wonder how firm the promises of freedom were. When the nationalist Emilio Aguinaldo declared independence in 1898, Washington did not back him, as Aguinaldo had hoped and expected. Instead, the United States insisted on its own sovereignty and launched a bloody war of pacification. That war lasted years and, it now seems, killed more people than the U.S. Civil War.¹⁴

Another reason Filipinos might have doubted the promises of self-government is that their time-scales were often expansive. In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt mused that self-government had taken English-speaking peoples “more than a thousand years” to achieve, and he believed “large portions” of the Filipino “race” to be “very far behind the point which our ancestors had reached even thirty generations ago.”¹⁵ Seven years later, Roosevelt’s successor William Howard Taft, who had been the Philippine governor-general, judged it to be “quite unlikely that the people, because of the dense ignorance of 90 per cent., will be ready for complete self-government and independence before two generations have passed.”¹⁶

Roosevelt and Taft were Republicans, and as such envisioned a long imperial future. Democrats, less enamored of empire and more hostile to prolonged political association with nonwhite peoples, proved willing to talk timelines. The Democratic Party platform in 1912, like previous platforms, denounced “the experiment in imperialism as an inexcusable blunder” and demanded an “immediate” declaration of U.S. intentions to free the islands.¹⁷ Woodrow Wilson won the 1912 election, becoming the first Democratic president to take office since Philippine annexation, and he appeared to support his party’s position. “The Philippines are at present our frontier,” he said shortly after his election, “but I hope we presently are to deprive ourselves of that frontier.” In his first annual message to the U.S. Congress, he insisted that “we must hold steadily in view” the Philippines’ “ultimate independence.”¹⁸

In 1916, Wilson hesitantly supported a measure to set the colony on a four-year countdown to independence. The “scuttling bill,” as the newspapers

derisively called it, cleared the U.S. Senate by the slimmest of margins but ran aground in the House when thirty members of Wilson's party rejected it. It was a principled bill, the *Detroit Free Press* allowed, but its principles were those of "a man who, having agreed to protect and educate a child, tires of his bargain, turns the child out on the street on the plea that the child doesn't like restraint, and leaves it to become the prey of white slavers, thieves, and murderers."¹⁹ In the rejected bill's place, Congress passed and Wilson signed a weaker and vaguer measure, the Jones Act, which declared it the intention of the United States to free the Philippines "as soon as a stable government can be established."²⁰ The critical term "stable government" went undefined, though.

With Democrats divided, the issue subsided during the successive Republican administrations of the 1920s. It was the Depression that revived it. "A reversal of opinion is taking place concerning Philippine independence," observed Calvin Coolidge in 1931.²¹ The reversal had little to do with new estimations of Philippine capacities. Rather, the chief issues were trade and labor. The Philippines had enjoyed largely tariff-free trade with the mainland since 1909, and no laws prevented Filipinos from migrating there, as more than 45,000 had done.²² Yet once the mainland economy faltered, beet farmers (who had to compete with Philippine sugar), West Coast labor unions, and other agricultural interests lobbied for Philippine independence. By redrawing their country's borders, they hoped to make the Philippines foreign, locking out its workers and produce.

The historian Paul Kramer has rightly warned against interpreting this independence push as an "early act of decolonization."²³ Congressional deliberations were inward-looking—concerned with fortifying the mainland against external threats—and featured few of the outward-looking concerns that would characterize the postwar liberation of colonies worldwide. The political scientist Thomas Pepinsky has argued this point persuasively. Had the push for Philippine independence been about dismantling the U.S. Empire or empires in general, Pepinsky argues, Congress would probably have seriously pursued Hawaiian and Puerto Rican independence as well. But it did not, and the reason is that mainlanders largely owned the sugar plantations in those two territories, whereas in the Philippines the relevant agricultural enterprises were more often owned by Filipinos or foreigners, who had less clout in Washington. This made the Philippines an easy target for the beet- and cotton-growing states, which sought to avoid competition from Philippine-grown sugar, coconut, and hemp. Pepinsky shows that these states, especially the beet-growing ones, were

irrespective of party the ones particularly inclined to back Philippine independence.²⁴ “We are not here to-day talking about the liberty and freedom of the Filipinos,” one senator sighed. “We are not interested in the independence of the Philippines. We are interested in the financial and selfish economic interest of the United States.”²⁵

At a House hearing, Manuel Roxas, the future Philippine president, suggested that independence might shine “a ray of hope” into the hearts of the millions in Asia “struggling for their own liberty.”²⁶ Few U.S. congressmen saw it that way, though. What is striking is how rarely they invoked international politics. The threat from Japan was mentioned—it made the Philippines a “sore thumb,” one representative insisted, that would cause “trouble if any unpleasantness comes in the Pacific Ocean.”²⁷ But there was little sense that Philippine independence would be an opening shot in a global liberation campaign. The prevailing spirit was expressed not by Roxas but the president of the National Beet Growers Association: “I believe it is time for the United States to stop acting as a good cousin or a good brother to the whole world, and that the United States ought to stay at home and attend to its own business.”²⁸

“I want our people to keep out of the Orient and I want the Orient to keep out of the United States,” a U.S. senator insisted—the racist overtones were hard to miss.²⁹ “Let’s get rid of the Philippines,” is how FDR made the case to congressional leaders.³⁰ This was a desire less to achieve independence *for* the Philippines than to achieve it *from* the Philippines, as the Philippine Legislature tartly observed.³¹ It was an abandonment of the tutelary colonialism that had animated early U.S. imperial rule in exchange for an exclusionary bigotry that sought simply to cast out a people understood as foreign.³²

The push for Philippine independence, fueled more by lobbying than lofty principles, garnered scant support from the Republican-leaning mainland press. “It would be a mortifying spectacle to see the United States readjust its Philippine policy to fit the balance sheets of a select group of industrial and agricultural interests,” admonished the *Christian Science Monitor*.³³ A survey of nearly three hundred major mainland newspapers in 1931–32 found 92% of them against it, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*.³⁴

Even in Manila, there was hesitation. Manuel Quezon, head of the Nacionalista party and president of the Philippine Senate, had made his reputation by calling for independence, yet he also understood the dangers that separating from the United States might bring. The Philippines had no military capable

of fending off a foreign invasion, and about four-fifths of its trade by the 1930s went to the U.S. mainland. The sudden loss of U.S. military protection and tariff-free access to mainland markets would be catastrophic.

In the past, Quezon had squared the circle by publicly demanding independence while privately assuring his Washington contacts that this was just empty talk—Quezon’s resistance was one reason why the independence bill in 1916 failed. But that ploy only worked so long as the U.S. Congress kept its grip on the Philippines tight. Once mainlanders saw the Philippines as a burden and started seriously talking independence, Quezon could no longer play good cop to Washington’s bad cop. After a bill for Philippine independence passed through the U.S. Congress—over a veto from President Hoover—in 1933, a panicked Quezon had it blocked in the Philippine Legislature. But this was not, ultimately, a tenable stance for the head of the nationalist party. And so, when a similar bill passed in 1934, it did so with Quezon’s blessing and was ratified unanimously in the Philippine Legislature.³⁵

THE PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE ACT, known also as the Tydings-McDuffie Act, became law in March 1934. Once Philippine legislators wrote a constitution that the U.S. president approved and Filipinos accepted, the Philippines would become a “commonwealth”—a British category indicating a territory with some internal autonomy. Ten years after that, the colony would be free.

“If this is accomplished without complications,” wrote the historian Samuel Flagg Bemis, “it will bring to an end the great aberration of 1898.”³⁶ Bemis’s caution about “complications” is worth noting. The Philippine Independence Act provided not certainty but a promise, and promises had been made before. The 1916 Jones Act had promised independence once the Philippines had a “stable government.” Yet although the colony had “succeeded in maintaining a stable government,” as Woodrow Wilson told the U.S. Congress in 1920, and therefore had “fulfilled the condition” set by legislators for independence, nothing had happened.³⁷ Not only was the 1916 pledge not honored, it was superseded and rendered void by the new independence act. Ominously, that 1934 act referred to independence in conditional terms—“if and when the Philippine independence shall have been achieved.” A possibility, in other words, not an eventuality.

There were many potential hitches. As the U.S. Congress had never before deannexed territory, there was a question about whether it had the power to—the Constitution said nothing about this and congressmen were unsure.³⁸

What if the Supreme Court, then dominated by Republican appointees, ruled the independence act unconstitutional? Or what if future legislators amended or rescinded it, as they had done with the 1916 Jones Act? The conjuncture of independence-favoring Democrats and economic depression was likely a transient one, which would fall apart if either prosperity returned or the Republicans did. “If we wait 12 years for the so called ‘fixed date,’” the University of the Philippines’ president warned, “in all probability the Republicans will be back in power . . . and they will indefinitely postpone our independence.”³⁹ Certainly, any politician seeking to retain the Philippines would have had the press’s support.

The Supreme Court and Congress could halt independence. Could the White House? The Philippine Independence Act gave the U.S. president three veto points. First, he had to approve the commonwealth constitution before the ten-year countdown would start. Then, once it was underway, the independence act secured an unrestricted presidential “right to intervene” in the commonwealth to preserve the Philippine government; to protect life, property, and liberty; or to ensure that the Philippines would be in a position to assume the debts owed by the colonial government to bondholders (who were overwhelmingly mainlanders).⁴⁰ This right to intervene was modeled on the notorious Platt Amendment, which had licensed U.S. interference in independent Cuba for the “protection of life, property, and individual liberty” (the same phrase appeared in the Philippine Independence Act) and resulted in Washington sending troops there four times.⁴¹ Finally, even if the commonwealth constitution was approved and the government operated smoothly for ten years, independence was not automatic. It required a presidential proclamation, and the independence act provided no recourse if the president refused to issue one.

The Philippines was to be kept on a tight leash, in other words. To hold the tether, the independence act mandated that a high commissioner be posted in Manila to monitor the new government—to “observe and report directly to the President any matter which indicates the Commonwealth Government’s inability or failure to reach full statehood,” as one high-ranking official put it.⁴² It was not hard to imagine a scenario in which the Philippine commonwealth would “fail to reach full statehood” in Washington’s eyes. The countdown period to independence would inevitably be a tumultuous time—rapid political change, rapid economic change (the independence act cut off Filipino migration to the mainland and gradually raised mainland tariff walls), and a looming

threat of war from Japan. Any of these could easily destabilize the colony enough to prompt a reconsideration of independence.

THESE WERE ABSTRACT worries, yet they became concrete quickly. Two weeks before the Philippine plebiscite in May 1935 that would bring the commonwealth government into existence, thousands of peasants and workers in at least fifteen towns and villages staged an uprising: the Sakdal Rebellion. Shouting “Mabuhay ang Republika Filipina” (Long Live the Philippine Republic), they cut telegraph wires, blocked roads and rail lines, seized government buildings, and tore down the U.S. flag. The Sakdalistas, impatient with the Philippine elite’s temporizing, demanded immediate independence. Their leader, Benigno Ramos, doubting the United States would set the Philippines free in ten years as promised, had called for violent revolution. The uprising lasted for two days, during which police killed 59 rebels. It was the most serious revolt in the U.S. Empire since the Philippine War.⁴³

Sakdalistas rejected the Philippine Independence Act. Many elite Filipinos and colonial officials shared that discontent, though for different reasons. Dissenting murmurs came first from sugar planters who, afraid of losing lucrative mainland markets, launched a “reexamination movement” that gained adherents in the Philippine Assembly. Another serious worry was Japan, which in 1937 widened its war within China. Should the Japanese press south, the Philippines would probably fall in their path. Washington was obliged to protect its colony while the Philippines was still U.S. territory, but what if it were a foreign country? Theodore Roosevelt Jr., the former governor general, shed light on the issue. “As a matter of cold actuality,” he explained to Manuel Quezon after Quezon’s inauguration as the new commonwealth’s president, “the American people will not jeopardize their interest in the future for an independent Philippines any more than they will for any other nation, and most certainly would not engage in a war on their behalf unless the real interests of the United States were involved.”⁴⁴

By 1937, Theodore Roosevelt Jr. had concluded that independence was a mistake. By 1938, the high commissioner, Paul McNutt, agreed. “If our flag comes down, the Philippines will become a bloody ground,” he predicted in a radio broadcast in which he called for a “realistic reexamination” of the independence act.⁴⁵ For the colony’s highest-ranking official to disavow independence was bold, but McNutt felt the wind of change at his back: “Congress thinks we are on our way out, apparently. But the American people are sure to

realize that the situation has changed entirely recently.”⁴⁶ Historian Megan Black describes a “chorus of voices”—military officers, investors—demanding repeal of the independence act once it became clear that the Philippines possessed minerals of strategic value the coming war.⁴⁷ A Gallup poll at the time showed 76 percent of mainlanders opposed immediate independence.⁴⁸

Publicly, most Filipino politicians rejected McNutt’s call to reconsider independence. Yet a State Department memo reported it to be “generally understood that a great many important figures in Philippine political, business, and professional life” were “covertly sympathetic” to the reexamination movement.⁴⁹ For Manuel Quezon, the sympathy was overt. He pronounced McNutt’s “presentation of the facts” to be “unassailable.”⁵⁰

Quezon quickly took it back. As the leading Nacionalista, he could not credibly side with McNutt and ask Washington to rescind its independence promise. Still, he saw the peril his country faced. He made secret overtures to Japan, building on a longstanding Philippine-Japanese ties.⁵¹ He quietly approached the British about annexing the Philippines if the United States abandoned it.⁵² Most importantly of all, he began to hastily build a national defense force capable of repelling a Japanese invasion.

To build his army, Quezon recruited General Douglas MacArthur, one of the few high-ranking U.S. officials with strong ties to the colony—his father, Arthur MacArthur, had been governor. So committed was Douglas MacArthur to Philippine defense that he resigned his generalship in the U.S. Army to serve as field marshal of the Philippine commonwealth. But even MacArthur, architect of the Philippines’ autonomous defense force, opposed independence and was unsure if it would take place. “We may be there ten years—we may even be there indefinitely,” he wrote shortly after the Philippine Independence Act passed.⁵³

BY THE LATE 1930s, Philippine independence was a wobbly proposition: top colonial officials had turned against it, there was little mainland public support, and many Filipino leaders were also opposed, at least privately. The Philippine Independence Act had promised freedom, but that promise was riddled with loopholes.

The wobbles became fully seismic in December 1941, when Japan invaded. Militarily, it was a rout. Japanese forces overran the archipelago, and MacArthur and Quezon retreated, along with the top layer of the commonwealth government, to the island fortress of Corregidor. From there, Quezon demanded

immediate independence. He wanted to declare neutrality—something he could not do while under U.S. sovereignty—and negotiate to have both the United States and Japan withdraw their forces. MacArthur endorsed this idea, but Roosevelt refused. “You have no authority to communicate with the Japanese government,” he scolded Quezon.⁵⁴

Military prospects worsened, and in March 1942 Roosevelt ordered Quezon, MacArthur, and other top officials out. The commonwealth government would henceforth operate in exile. Japan, blaring propaganda about an Asia free from white rule, promised liberation and indeed formally granted it to the Philippines in 1943. Yet Japan’s lofty rhetoric was undercut by the occupation’s brutality. To feed its war machine, Japan ransacked the Philippine economy and forcibly repressed the populace.

In 1944, MacArthur returned to reclaim the islands, and the resulting fight turned the Philippines into a Pacific bloodlands. Japanese troops dug in, butchering Filipinos. U.S. forces destroyed buildings that might shelter the enemy, with little regard for those caught in the crossfire (“It was United States bombs and shells that did most of the damage,” lamented the *New York Times*).⁵⁵ Manila saw around 100,000 of its residents killed in a single month in 1945—Dwight Eisenhower declared it worse than anything he had seen in Europe save Warsaw.⁵⁶ The Philippine government recorded 1,111,938 Filipino fatalities in the war.⁵⁷ Many had died during the furious fight to “liberate” the colony.



The Legislative Building, a seat of the commonwealth government, after being shelled by the U.S. Army’s 37th Infantry Division (American Historical Collection, Ateneo de Manila)

The Philippines was wrecked—“without question the most completely destroyed and dislocated battle ground of the war,” in the words of High

Commissioner McNutt.⁵⁸ U.S. Senator Millard Tydings, one of the Philippine Independence Act's authors, estimated that 10 to 15 percent of the territory's buildings had been destroyed and another 10 percent damaged.⁵⁹ Industry and agriculture had virtually halted. The government, banks, and insurance companies were insolvent, inflation ran rampant, and a shipping logjam threatened to cut off much-needed food imports.

There were political problems, too. Most Filipino politicians remaining in the territory during the war had served Japan's government. Meanwhile, many peasants had joined anti-Japanese guerrilla armies, armies which had begun a social revolution by redistributing landlords' estates. Filipinos had not just fought the Japanese during the war, in other words; they had fought each other, and they were poised to keep fighting.

In principle, Washington sought to purge the collaborators from government, but this was not easily done. Who had collaborated willingly, who reluctantly? The waters were particularly murky around Manuel Roxas, a former aide to MacArthur. Roxas had held a cabinet position in the Japanese-backed government and was "undoubtedly seriously involved" with Japan, according to the U.S. consul general. But, the consul general continued, he had "played safe by helping both sides."⁶⁰

For MacArthur, that sufficed. "Roxas is no collaborationist," he declared, but was one of the "prime factors" in the resistance movement.⁶¹ Acting swiftly, MacArthur exonerated his former aide and reconvened the Philippine Assembly, even though many of its members had worked with Japan. Those legislators then voted Roxas senate president. "Not a single senator can be justly accused of collaboration!" he declared in the senate to great applause.⁶² With some of the most powerful elements in Philippine society behind him, including those who had served Japan, Manuel Roxas was a clear contender for president.⁶³

IT IS USEFUL to step back and assess these events in full. The Philippine Independence Act had provisionally promised independence, but that promise had been predicated on the commonwealth regime protecting life and property and demonstrating its ability to repay mainland bondholders. Should the commonwealth government fail to perform, there were multiple ways that Washington could cancel Philippine independence: by a new law, by a Supreme Court ruling, or by presidential refusal.

Moreover, by the scheduled independence date in 1946, the war had wholly derailed the envisioned preparations. Had the commonwealth

government protected life and property? Absolutely not. It had been forced into exile, watching from afar as more than a million of its people were killed and more than 10 percent of buildings were destroyed. Could it take over the bonded debt—a subject of grave concern to the authors of the Philippine Independence Act? No, it could not, and given the war's economic toll it would be years before bond repayment would be remotely possible.⁶⁴

Not only were the preconditions for independence conspicuously unmet, the underlying logic had changed drastically. In the 1930s, the U.S. Congress had scheduled its colony for independence chiefly to shield the mainland from Philippine produce and labor—a threat often expressed in terms of nativist racism—and to relieve it of the obligation to defend a vulnerable Asian territory. Yet the war had systematically removed those motives. Economically, the mainland was now booming and the war-shattered Philippines posed no threat. Just the opposite: Philippine trade was now more desirable than ever as the interwar sugar glut had given way to a postwar sugar shortage.⁶⁵ Militarily, the situation had also reversed. With Japan defeated and U.S. strategic interest in Asia growing, the Philippines was no longer a military liability but an asset. High Commissioner McNutt described the territory as an “instrument for the maintenance of the peace of the Orient and the world,” and Washington would soon push for 99-year leases on Philippine base sites.⁶⁶ Even the cultural logic had shifted. The exclusionary racism that suffused 1930s debates over independence had been seriously challenged by the war. Numerous wartime Hollywood films depicted Filipinos with sympathy and even heroism.⁶⁷ And the Luce-Celler Act, passed by Congress two days before the Philippines' scheduled independence, made Filipinos racially eligible for U.S. citizenship.⁶⁸

That was how it looked from the mainland. Things had also changed from the Philippine perspective. In January 1946, the high commissioner, McNutt, sent President Harry Truman a desperate cable. “This situation here is critical,” he wrote. The war-ravaged colony was split between “loyalist and enemy collaborators,” and “several sizeable well-armed dissident groups” were “still at large.” McNutt asked whether it was “humanly possible” for Filipinos to cope with independence amid all this.⁶⁹ The *New York Times* reported from Manila that “most Filipinos” no longer wanted “unqualified independence” on the date scheduled.⁷⁰

Maybe they would not have it. Some mainland papers—including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Times-Herald*, the *New York Daily News*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the influential African-American *Amsterdam News*—came

out for Philippine statehood instead. “We would get clear title to a far-Pacific area of enormous size, on which we could plant and maintain all the defense installations deemed necessary for our military and naval leaders,” reasoned the *Times-Herald*.⁷¹ The *Manila Evening News* called the plan “practical,” and the Philippine delegation to the United Nations announced that “if the offer is seriously made we are only too willing to consider it.”⁷²

All of this was just talk and, in the case of statehood, fairly loose talk. Yet scrutiny of the archives reveals that high-ranking U.S. officials were sufficiently nervous about independence to seriously consider interrupting the planned transition. The National Archives in College Park, Maryland, contain three sets of orders, each prepared in response to a different political crisis, to dissolve the commonwealth government. These orders awaited only the president’s signature. Had any been signed, the implications for independence would have been dire, as the process spelled out in the Philippine Independence Act required the continuation of the commonwealth government.

The first order, drafted in 1940 with the approval of the Departments of State, War, Navy, and Interior, addressed the crisis of Philippine fortification. Declaring the archipelago “unable with the means at its disposal to provide adequately for its own preservation or maintenance,” it would have imposed martial law and transferred the functions of colonial government to the U.S. Army.⁷³ The second, prepared by the Interior Department in 1944, dealt with “the death or capture of the President of the Philippines.”⁷⁴ President Quezon had died a few months earlier, leaving his vice president, Sergio Osmeña, as president. But the government was in exile with no means of running elections. What if Osmeña died? This was a real possibility, as Osmeña joined MacArthur in the archipelago’s reconquest. The order resolved the hypothetical constitutional crisis by invoking the U.S. president’s right to intervene and putting the interior department in charge of the Philippines.

The most intriguing order is the third. It was drafted by the high commissioner’s office in January 1945, in the middle of the reconquest of the islands. If signed, it would have liquidated the commonwealth government for its failure to find an “acceptable or legitimate” successor and placed the interior department in charge.⁷⁵ The official who drafted the order, Everett Hester, was a determined retentionist, and he did not regard this scenario as hypothetical.⁷⁶ The close ties between the postwar political elite and the wartime Japan-backed government had, he felt, already shown the Philippines incapable of establishing a satisfactory postcolonial order. By giving the interior department

authority, Hester's order would place the colony in the hands of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, known for his uncompromisingly harsh view of collaboration. Otherwise, Hester warned, "there is little doubt that the United States will be asked on or before July 4, 1946 to grant independence to a Philippine republic which will be in the control of those who served the enemy."⁷⁷

HIGH-RANKING COLONIAL OFFICIALS, particularly those in Manila, kept their fingers on the trigger. Yet they held their fire. They did so because their objections to independence were consistently overruled. When the reexamination issue first arose, President Roosevelt declared that it "should not be within the realm of consideration," and there is no evidence that either he or his successor, Harry Truman, deviated from that position.⁷⁸ In June 1944, the U.S. Congress took up the question of independence and passed new legislation. This confirmed the skeptics' thesis that the Philippine Independence Act was vulnerable to legislative supersession, but Congress did not intervene in order to halt the independence process. Instead, it allowed the president to declare Philippine independence *earlier* than scheduled.⁷⁹

Rather than delay or cancel independence, U.S. leaders seemed eager to push the Philippines out the door. At Manuel Quezon's urging, they placed the Philippine commonwealth on the Pacific War Council and gave it seat in the United Nations alliance, despite its not being a sovereign nation-state. Even if, legally, the Philippines was not yet independent, Washington made an elaborate show of treating it as such. State department officials debated whether there should even *be* a high commissioner appointed after the war, as the Philippine Independence Act required. Maybe "high commissioner" sounded too colonial, maybe it would be better to send a "representative of the United States government," as if the Philippines were a sovereign country receiving an ambassador.⁸⁰

Where was this enthusiasm for Philippine freedom coming from? Certainly, the old motives for independence had lost their force by the 1940s. But the reasons for making the independence promise were not the same as the reasons for keeping it. A novel set of concerns had arisen, to do not with protecting Colorado beet farmers but with establishing a new global order. An early hint of such ambitions came with the 1941 Atlantic Charter, in which Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill elaborated their war aims. The two leaders pinned their "hopes for a better future for the world" on

a set of shared principles, among them “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.”⁸¹

That pledge carried potentially serious implications for empire, and Churchill quickly distanced himself from them. It applied only to “the nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke,” he insisted, not to “the regions and peoples which owe allegiance to the British Crown.”⁸² “I have not become the King’s First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire,” Churchill assured the House of Commons.⁸³ The eyes of the world turned back to Roosevelt. What *had* the Atlantic Charter meant?

Filipinos had some ideas. “The Atlantic Charter is a world-wide charter,” Manuel Quezon insisted in a radio broadcast. “It is a charter of freedom for the peoples of Asia and all the Far East.”⁸⁴ But was it?

Roosevelt clarified his views in major speech two months after Churchill’s House of Commons promise. It was a highly public address, made to some six hundred leaders of the United Nations alliance, broadcast over the four major U.S. radio networks, and sent out worldwide by shortwave.⁸⁵ The occasion was the anniversary of the establishment of the Philippines’ commonwealth government, and FDR placed the Philippines at the center of his global vision. “I like to think that the history of the Philippine Islands in the last forty-four years provides in a very real sense a pattern for the future of other small nations and peoples,” he said. “It is a pattern of what men of good will look forward to in the future—a pattern of global civilization.” The Philippines would soon be independent, Roosevelt continued, but only because it had undergone a “period of training.” Such training, he explained, was “essential to the stability of independence in almost every part of the world.”⁸⁶ Roosevelt thus staked out a middle ground between the immediate abolition of empire and Churchillian conservatism. Empires need not end immediately, but they should end eventually, and the scheduled independence of the Philippines was proof that this was not just another empty promise.

It was this aspect of independence—the Philippines as a model of decolonization—that rose to the fore and settled the question. Harry Truman considered Philippine freedom “a pattern of relationships for all the world to study.”⁸⁷ For Secretary of State Cordell Hull, it offered “a perfect example of how a nation should treat a colony or dependency” in shepherding it to freedom.⁸⁸ His successor, Edward Stettinius, saw it as an “excellent example of what can be achieved.”⁸⁹ MacArthur, who in the early 1930s had opposed independence, picked up the argument and ran with it. History would record Philippine

independence as “foretelling the end of mastery over peoples by power or force alone,” he crowed. It would mark “the end of empire as the political chain which binds the unwilling weak to the unyielding strong.”⁹⁰

Even Paul McNutt, still wary of independence, recognized the importance of this. Japan, while in possession of the Philippines, had granted it formal independence under the larger promise of Asian liberation. This laid down a powerful challenge. Would the United States do less? “The entire Far East is looking to the Philippines,” McNutt noted. “We cannot afford to disappoint the hopes of a billion people.” Independence was no longer a matter of protecting the mainland economy or improving Philippine lives. It was “a major tenet of our international policy,” the model of U.S. designs for the world.⁹¹ Setting the largest U.S. colony free, Truman agreed, would “have world-wide effect.”⁹²

The global significance of Philippine freedom had been far from legislators’ minds in the 1930s; few had cared what the “Far East” thought. But now Asian demands for freedom were hard to ignore. Colonized Asians had seen their white overlords defeated by Japan, they had endured a brutal war, and they were unwilling to return to the status quo ante. What is more, they had armies—from the Red Army in China to the Viet Minh in Indochina—operating beyond any outside control.⁹³ For the United States to operate as a global power, it would need legitimacy in tumultuous Asia, and that is what liberating the Philippines offered. The colony had been scheduled for independence mainly because of economic protectionism. But it was freed on schedule—despite the many opportunities and reasons to retain it—to position the United States at the cutting edge of world decolonization.

CONCERNS ABOUT the United States’ international legitimacy mattered, and nowhere more than at the 1945 conference in San Francisco to establish the United Nations Organization. One of the most contentious issues there, carrying the potential to disrupt the proceedings altogether, was the fate of colonies—both colonies in general and, more specifically and pressingly, the former Axis territories. Possible solutions ranged widely: the worldwide abolition of empire, the placement of all colonies under international supervision, the management of dependent areas by multinational regional commissions, or the status quo, though with the defeated powers’ territories confiscated. Not surprisingly, Britain, France, and the Netherlands favored conservative approaches, whereas the Soviet Union and China favored bolder ones, as did less powerful nations such

as Guatemala, Egypt, Iraq, and Argentina. Threading the needle—arriving at a widely accepted arrangement that would preserve the legitimacy of U.S. leadership—was crucial to the postwar peace.⁹⁴

Washington was not an impartial umpire here. On the one hand, both its economy and security, wartime planners believed, were best served by a relatively open international society in which foreign powers were unable to use imperial privilege to block out U.S. trade. On the other, the United States itself had (after the dismantling of Japan's empire in 1945), the world's fourth-largest empire by population, comprising the Philippines, Guam, American Samoa, Hawai'i, Alaska, the Panama Canal Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.⁹⁵ And its military leaders were determined to hold onto the Micronesian islands that the United States had seized at great military cost from Japan. A 1944 poll found that 69 percent of the U.S. public wanted to annex those islands outright.⁹⁶

An aggressive strategy would have been to retain all existing territory and annex Japan's conquered islands. This was, from a narrowly military perspective, both feasible and desirable. Yet doing so would carry the substantial political cost of encouraging rival powers in their own territorial ambitions. Were the United States to take Japan's islands "an international grab bag would surely follow," warned an advisor to the San Francisco delegation, Abe Fortas. "In that event we might well find that our tremendous military and security interest in other parts of the world would be prejudiced."⁹⁷ Such broader interests were better served by a less territorially ambitious approach, though this carried the serious risk of depriving the United States of its Pacific security buffer, now as important to Washington as control of Poland was to Moscow.

Which way the U.S. delegation would break at San Francisco was of world-historical importance. It was widely recognized that the United States—the host of the San Francisco conference, the most powerful country, and the swing vote between the imperialist and anti-imperialist camps—would decide the fate of empire within the new world order. Would it, as the Chinese and Soviet delegations hoped, commit the new United Nations Organization to the outright "independence" of colonies worldwide? Or would it, as the British sought, pursue such vaguer ends as "liberty" or "self-government," which did not rule out continued foreign rule?

"When it came to the test, the United States sided with the colonial powers," the historian Wm. Roger Louis has written.⁹⁸ The deciding moment was an extemporaneous speech by Harold Stassen, tasked with leading the

delegation's deliberations on the colonial question. Stassen came out firmly against inserting "independence" into the UN charter's article on non-self-governing territories. It was a "provocative word," he argued. "Self-government" was preferable because it would not lead to the UN "butting in on colonial affairs."⁹⁹ Staying out of colonizers' business would keep the United States on friendly terms with Britain, which would be useful, delegation member Isaiah Bowman predicted, in the "inevitable struggle" between Washington and Moscow.¹⁰⁰

On the issue of the Axis territories, the delegation successfully pushed for a system of "trusteeship" whereby the territories would fall under UN sovereignty yet be administered by individual victorious powers. This resembled the League of Nations' mandates system, though more oversight. Within this system, Japan's former Micronesian holdings received a unique designation, a "strategic trust territory"; Washington would administer them and answer only to the Security Council, on which the United States had the right of veto. This gave the United States, as a State Department committee wrote, "the substance of annexation without actual annexation."¹⁰¹

The essential precondition for all of these diplomatic maneuvers was Philippine independence. In his pivotal speech rejecting independence as a UN commitment, Stassen invoked the Philippines as "a concrete example" of U.S. policy, proof that the U.S. deference to the British at San Francisco did not signal a capitulation to imperialism.¹⁰² U.S. diplomats brought up Philippine independence constantly in such discussions. It was a large deposit in the decolonization bank, the act that "created confidence" in Washington's "desire to realize the anti-imperialistic principles of the Atlantic Charter," a State Department committee wrote.¹⁰³ The diplomat Abbot Low Moffat regarded it as the sole tangible evidence of the U.S. commitment to anticolonialism.¹⁰⁴ "Without it," agreed James Shotwell, an important contributing architect of the United Nations, "our position would be almost impossible."¹⁰⁵

For Senator Millard Tydings, chief author of the Philippine Independence Act, U.S. control of the Pacific and Philippine independence were a quid pro quo. Having visited Japan's Micronesian islands, he was convinced that the United States "must forever hold them." This might appear imperialistic, Tydings acknowledged, but he believed that Philippine independence would offset and excuse it. "Our relationship with the Filipinos shows clearly that America will not abuse the power which God has given it, that our power shall be used for justice and for decency among the peoples and the nations of the

world, and that the right kind of leadership has at last come to keep the peace and promote the civilization and welfare of all mankind.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, the Philippines showed that the United States could be trusted with power, not just in Micronesia but everywhere.

All of these international negotiations took place before 1946, before scheduled independence. From Roosevelt’s clarification of the meaning of the Atlantic Charter in 1942 on, the Philippines had served as the centerpiece of U.S. diplomacy concerning empire. Given this, delaying or canceling independence would have been extraordinarily difficult, no matter the situation on the ground. Asian calls for liberation and the “official determination to establish the American commitment to anticolonialism,” Gary Hess has rightly written, gave “irresistible impetus” to the transfer of authority.¹⁰⁷ And so, amid the ruins, Manila staged an independence ceremony on the promised date: the Fourth of July, 1946. Philippine postcolonial autonomy was seriously compromised by continued U.S. military and economic incursions. But, before an international audience, the Philippines could showcase the United States’ liberating mission.¹⁰⁸

THE UNITED STATES had vaguely promised the Philippines independence from the start, and in 1934 it had drawn up a timetable. In 1946, right on schedule, the Philippines went free. It is thus tempting to explain Philippine independence by reference to a longstanding intention dating to the turn of the century or at least to the 1930s. This is when the train started moving down the rails toward its destination.

However, as I have here argued, neither the early promises nor the 1934 independence act sufficed to ensure Philippine freedom. Promises could be and had been broken, for example the ill-fated Jones Act. The Philippine Independence Act, moreover, was riddled with loopholes, and the motives for it in the 1930s had nearly all vanished by the 1940s, in the case of the military aspect to be replaced by strong motives favoring retention. Meanwhile, the independence process outlined by the 1934 act had been wholly upended by the Second World War. Chances to cancel or delay Philippine independence were many, and top-ranking colonial officials frequently advocated taking them.

That the Philippines went free on July 4, 1946, thus cannot be fully explained by the events of the 1930s or before. Its proper explanatory context lies in the 1940s. Then, with war shaking empire’s foundations and the United States ascending to a new international role, the liberation of the largest U.S.

colony took on a significance it had not held before. Philippine independence was no longer a question of Filipinos' civilizational achievements or balancing the books. Rather, it was a way to acquire global influence, giving the United States license to accommodate European imperialism, take its Pacific conquests, and hold onto its remaining territories without forfeiting its status as a champion of decolonization. Letting the Philippines go bought good will in Asia, put gentle pressure on Europe, and rendered U.S. talk about the dismantling empires plausible.

Seeing Philippine independence as a car, where navigational decisions are made in the moment, rather than a train, where they are made when the vehicle starts rolling down the tracks, allows us to firmly place this event within the global history of decolonization. By 1945, armed nationalist movements, particularly in Asia, had made colonialism a precarious proposition. It was the U.S. desire for a foothold in decolonizing Asia that made freeing the Philippines a priority, even if the conditions that had initially prompted the independence promise had evaporated. The Philippines' release in turn allowed Washington to more credibly prod European imperial powers. The most powerful empire releasing its largest colony at an early date—before India (1947), Burma (1948), or Indonesia (1949) gained independence—set an example that U.S. diplomats invoked frequently.

Reperiodizing Philippine independence—understanding it as a car turning in the 1940s rather than a train embarking on a journey in the 1930s or earlier—also makes it easier to see the United States' own decolonization. Often, scholarship about the United States and decolonization focuses on how Washington helped or hindered the breakup of European empires.¹⁰⁹ Putting Philippine independence in its proper chronological context helps show that the United States was a theater of decolonization as well as an actor in the drama.

Just as European overseas rule began unraveling after the Second World War, so did U.S. colonialism. That meant small but consequential changes in the United States' smaller colonies: the first black governor in the U.S. Virgin Islands (1946), citizenship and civil government for Guamanians (1950), and civil government for American Samoa (1951). Bigger changes came to the larger colonies. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a "commonwealth." Though this changed little about the lines of authority—the lawyer who drafted the commonwealth constitution later insisted that the island remained a colony—it sufficed to get Puerto Rico stricken from the United Nations' list of non-self-governing territories.¹¹⁰ The UN removed Alaska and Hawai'i from that list, too,

after they became states in 1959. Statehood was not decolonization in its typical form, but it can be understood as a variant.¹¹¹

The dismantling of the U.S. Empire was incomplete, but its chronology, 1946–1959, fits neatly with that of European decolonization. In its imperial history, the United States has not stood apart from the world. Like other major powers, it has had a colonial empire. And for it, too, the 1940s was when that empire began to fall.¹¹²

The difference is that the diminution of its colonial empire did not mean, for the United States, a loss of power. The period of its partial decolonization was also the time of Pax Americana, the emergence of a hierarchical global system built around the United States.¹¹³ Maintaining it—making basing agreements and military pacts, superintending trade deals—required the United States to present itself as essentially different from other great powers, as a neutral arbiter rather than a force for domination. Helpfully, the on-time freeing of the Philippines served a “shining example” of U.S. benevolence, as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles put it.¹¹⁴

“America is proud of its part in the great story of the Filipino people,” President George W. Bush reflected in 2003, while searching for allies in his desired war with Iraq. “Together our soldiers liberated the Philippines from colonial rule.”¹¹⁵ As a historical claim, that was preposterous. But it highlighted the enduring importance of Philippine independence—nearly sixty years after the fact—in legitimizing U.S. power.

I owe thanks to members of the National History Center’s Decolonization Seminar (particularly Dane Kennedy, Wm. Roger Louis, Tom Meaney, Jason Parker, Tehila Sasson, and Marilyn Young), Alvita Akiboh, *PHR*’s anonymous readers, and Marc Rodriguez.

¹ Hugh Butler, *Congressional Record*, 79th Cong., 2d sess., A4945. On the flag-raising, see Alvita Akiboh, “Objects and Identity in the U.S. Colonial Empire, 1898–1959” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2019), chap. 5.

² Alfred W. McCoy, “The Philippines: Independence without Decolonisation,” in Robin Jeffrey, ed., *Asia: The Winning of Independence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 23–65.

³ There is a great deal of research on independence in Philippine history. Important book-length works include Theodore Friend, *Between Two Empires: The Ordeal of the Philippines, 1929–1946* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Renato Constantino and Letizia R. Constantino, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1978); Stephen Rosskamm Shalom, *The United States and the Philippines: A Study of Neocolonialism* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1986); Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989); H. W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines*

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⁴ Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home, 1945–2000* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 80.

⁵ James T. Patterson: *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁶ Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), xix.

⁷ A. G. Hopkins, "The Real American Empire," in James Belich et al., eds., *The Prospect of Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 146–159.

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⁹ Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *American Umpire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 272.

¹⁰ Harry Truman, Message to the People of the Philippines, 3 July 1946, Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *American Presidency Project*, www.presidency.ucsb.edu (hereafter APP).

¹¹ Theodore Roosevelt, First Annual Message, 3 December 1901, APP.

¹² Woodrow Wilson, "The Ideals of America," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1902, 731. This mission is helpfully discussed in Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning Elite Political Cultures and the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). An intriguing portrait of U.S. judgments of Filipinos is Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses: Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹³ On the purposefully nebulous nature of the term, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), chap. 2.

¹⁴ Ken De Bevoise, the most careful student of the matter, estimates 775,000 war-caused deaths for the period 1899–1903. This number covers the first five years of the war and does not account for 1904–1913, when U.S. forces fought Filipino Muslims in the south. Ken De Bevoise, *Agents of Apocalypse: Epidemic Disease in the Colonial Philippines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 13. Recent important war histories are Resil B. Mojares, *The War against the Americans: Resistance and Collaboration in Cebu: 1899–1906* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999); Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000); Kramer, *Blood of Government*; and Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto, *Knowledge and Pacification: On the U.S. Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Roosevelt, First Annual Message, 3 December 1901, APP.

¹⁶ Taft, Address accepting the Presidential Nomination, 28 July 1908, APP.

¹⁷ 1912 Democratic Party Platform, APP.

¹⁸ Wilson, First Annual Message, 2 December 1913, APP.

¹⁹ "The Senate Votes to Scuttle," *Detroit Free Press*, 7 February 1916.

²⁰ 39 Stat. 545, preamble.

²¹ "Calvin Coolidge Says," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 25 May 1931.

²² *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 2:25.

²³ Kramer, *Blood of Government*, 424.

²⁴ Thomas Pepinsky, "Trade Competition and American Decolonization," *World Politics* 67 (2015): 387–422.

²⁵ Royal S. Copeland in *Congressional Record*, 72d Cong., 1st sess., 14364, 14362.

²⁶ *Independence for the Philippine Islands: Hearings before the Committee on Insular Affairs*, House of Representatives, 72d Cong. 1st sess., 112.

²⁷ James G. Strong in *ibid.*, 340.

²⁸ Fred Cummings in *ibid.*, 158.

²⁹ Samuel Morgan Shortridge in *Congressional Record*, 72d Cong., 2d sess., 383.

³⁰ Brands, *Bound to Empire*, 163.

³¹ Quoted in Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 179.

³² See especially *ibid.*, chap. 5; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), chap. 3; and Schlimgen, “Neither Citizens nor Aliens,” chap. 6.

³³ “The Philippines and Economics,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 July 1931, 14.

³⁴ Ten Eyck Associates, *Philippine Independence: A Survey of the Present State of American Public Opinion on the Subject* (New York: Ten Eyck Associates, 1932), 31.

³⁵ Personal politics must also be mentioned. Quezon’s rival Sergio Osmeña had negotiated the first bill, the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act. By blocking it and securing passage of the similar Tydings-McDuffie Act, Quezon wrong-footed Osmeña.

³⁶ Samuel Flagg Bemis, excerpt in “Policy—FDR admin.—Philippines” folder, box 5; Specialized Functions, Records of the Research Unit on Territorial Policy, Reference File of Saul K. Padover; Records of the Office of Territories, Record Group 126; National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter RG 126 for the record group, Padover File for the reference file).

³⁷ Woodrow Wilson, 8th Annual Message, 7 December 1920, APP.

³⁸ The point is debated at length in *Congressional Record*, 72d Cong., 1st sess., 14367–72 and 2d sess., 185–205. See Schlimgen, “Neither Citizens nor Aliens,” 305–315, and, more broadly, Christina Duffy Burnett, “Untied States: American Expansion and Territorial Deannexation,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 72 (2005): 797–879.

³⁹ Jorge Bocobo, quoted in Manuel V. Gallego, *The Price of Philippine Independence under the Tydings McDuffie Act: An Anti-View of the So-Called Independence Law* (Manila: Barristers’ Book Company, 1939), 85. Gallego’s book helpfully analyzes the independence act’s loopholes.

⁴⁰ 48 Stat. 456, sec. 2.

⁴¹ 31 Stat. 895, sec. 3.

⁴² C. Q. Marron to Francis Sayre, 28 October 1941; “Civilian Defense” folder, box 1; Office of the High Commissioner, Records Concerning Political and Economic Matters; RG 126 (hereafter HC-Pol/Econ).

⁴³ The authoritative account is Terami-Wada, *Sakdalistas’ Struggle*.

⁴⁴ Theodore Roosevelt Jr., *Colonial Policies of the United States* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1937), 187.

⁴⁵ Paul V. McNutt, radio address, 14 March 1938, “Commonwealth (Administration) Philippines” folder, box 2, Padover File. For context, see Kotlowski, “Independence or Not?” and Dean J. Kotlowski, *Paul V. McNutt in the Age of FDR* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ McNutt, Speech at the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, 24 June 1939, “Independence—Philippines” folder, box 4, Padover File.

⁴⁷ Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 75.

⁴⁸ George Gallup, “Public Sentiment Does Not Favor Immediate Freedom for Philippine Islands,” *Washington Post*, 23 February 1938.

⁴⁹ State Department, “Political Aspects of Philippine Independence,” 24 September 1940, p. 2, “Independence, Comments, Gen., 1937–” folder, box 4; Office of the High Commissioner of the Philippines, Records of the Washington, DC, office, 1942–46; RG 126 (hereafter HC-DC).

⁵⁰ "Quezon Proves to be Irresponsible!" *Philippine-American Advocate*, 1938, clipping in "Independence–Philippines" folder, box 4, Padover File.

⁵¹ See, for example, Floro C. Quibuyen, "Japan and America in the Filipino Nationalist Imagination: From Rizal to Ricarte," in Fujiwara and Nagano, eds., *Philippines and Japan in America's Shadow*, 106–131.

⁵² Pritchard, "Quezon and the British Empire."

⁵³ Meixsel, "Quezon, MacArthur, and the Military Mission," 264. For MacArthur's initial disapproval of independence, see 264–265.

⁵⁴ George Marshall to Douglas MacArthur, 9 February 1942, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1942* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 1:898 (series cited hereafter as FRUS).

⁵⁵ "Rebuilding Manila," *New York Times*, 29 December 1945.

⁵⁶ Eisenhower quoted in James Burke, "U.S. Colonial Exhibit No. 1: The Philippine Republic," *The China Weekly Review*, 6 July 1946. On the 100,000 figure, see Alfonso J. Aluit, *By Sword and Fire: The Destruction of Manila in World War II, 3 February–3 March 1945* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1994), 398–399.

⁵⁷ Richard Connaughton, John Pimlott, and Duncan Anderson, *The Battle for Manila* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 174.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Carlson, *Twisted Road*, 21.

⁵⁹ Millard Tydings, "Report on the Philippine Islands," 7 June 1945, 22, "Philippine Rehabilitation Commission" folder, series 4, box 2, Papers of Millard E. Tydings, Special Collections, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park (hereafter Tydings Papers).

⁶⁰ Paul Steintorf to James F. Byrnes, 19 September 1945, "Collaboration" folder, box 1, HC-Pol/Econ.

⁶¹ Douglas MacArthur, quoted in Office of the Commanding General, Army Forces of the Pacific, 9 May 1946, "Pub. Relations Press Releases, 1946, pt. A" folder, box 11, Office of the High Commissioner of the Philippines Islands, Records of the Manila Office, 1935–46; RG 126.

⁶² Hernando J. Abaya, *Betrayal in the Philippines* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1946), 92.

⁶³ Useful discussions of collaboration include Kerkvliet, *Huk Rebellion*; Carlson, *Twisted Road*; and De Viana, *Kulaboretor*.

⁶⁴ On the parlous state of the Philippine bonded debt: Manuel Roxas, address, 26 January 1948, in "Territories Committee, Philippine Islands" folder, box 5, series 4, Tydings Papers.

⁶⁵ Cullather, *Illusions of Influence*, 37.

⁶⁶ The Philippine Independence Act had raised the possibility of bases without guaranteeing U.S. access to them. Paul V. McNutt, "Democracy's Child is 21," *Collier's*, 6 July 1946, 69. A good account is Cullather, *Illusions of Independence*, chap. 5.

⁶⁷ A potent example is *Back to Bataan* (1945), which asserted that the Philippines had "finally earned the right to self-government," Sharon Delmendo writes. Though the wartime films consistently cast Filipinos in subordinate roles, they eschewed the exclusionary racism of the 1930s. Delmendo, *Star-Entangled Banner*, 89, and see Camilla Fojas, *Islands of Empire: Pop Culture and U.S. Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), chap. 1. On the wartime retreat of exclusionary racism, see Thomas Borstelmann, *Just Like Us: The American Struggle to Understand Foreigners* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020) and Rotter, *Empires of the Senses*, conclusion.

⁶⁸ The War Brides Acts of 1945 and 1947, the Veterans' Alien Fiancées Act of 1946, and Truman's slight raising of Philippine immigration quotas in 1946 also softened the independence act's immigration restrictions. Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 227–228.

⁶⁹ "McNutt Raises Question of P. I. Readiness for Freedom July 4th," *Manila Evening News*, 23 January 1946.

⁷⁰ Robert Trumbull, "Filipinos Uneasy on Independence," *New York Times*, 30 December 1945.

⁷¹ "How About a 49th State?" *Washington Times-Herald*, 4 March 1946.

⁷² Abaya, *Betrayal*, 179.

⁷³ "Doc. B," 1940, enclosed in E. D. Hester to Frank P. Lockhart, 13 November 1944, "Emergency Proclamation" folder, box 1, HC-Pol/Econ.

⁷⁴ "Doc. A," 13 November 1944, enclosed in *ibid.*

⁷⁵ E. D. Hester to Frank P. Lockhart, 12 January 1945; "Emergency Proclamation" folder, box 1, HC-Pol/Econ.

⁷⁶ On Hester, see Golay, *Face of Empire*, 331–332, 363.

⁷⁷ E. D. Hester to Richard R. Ely, 3 July 1945, "Hester, E. D." folder, box 2, HC-Pol/Econ.

⁷⁸ Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Nicholas Murray Butler, 20 December 1938, "Independence–Philippines" folder, box 4, Padover File.

⁷⁹ The previous year, Congress amended the commonwealth constitution to keep Quezon in office despite the impossibility of elections. The *Washington Post* warned that this "perilous business of Constitution-busting" might derail independence. Vicente Villamin, "Philippine Government," *Washington Post*, 26 October 1943.

⁸⁰ Frank Lockhart to Joseph Grew, 16 February 1945, and response, 7 March 1945, in *FRUS 1945*, vol. 6, 1193–1195. Ultimately, a high commissioner was sent.

⁸¹ Statement on the Atlantic Charter Meeting with Prime Minister Churchill, 14 August 1941, *APP*.

⁸² Quoted in Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941–1945* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), 102.

⁸³ Quoted in Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 200. See also Samuel Zipp, *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie's Wartime Quest to Build One World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), chap. 10.

⁸⁴ "'World Charter' Hailed by Quezon," *New York Times*, 9 August 1942. For Philippine responses to the Atlantic Charter: Mark Reeves, "The Broad, Toiling Masses in All the Continents: Anticolonial Activists and the Atlantic Charter" (M.A. thesis, West Kentucky University, 2014), chap. 4.

⁸⁵ Frederick R. Barkley, "Roosevelt Calls Philippines Model for Independence," *New York Times*, 16 November 1942.

⁸⁶ Roosevelt, Radio Address on the Seventh Anniversary of the Philippines Commonwealth Government, 15 November 1942, *APP*. Roosevelt had earlier, in his fireside chat of 23 February 1942, noted briefly that the Atlantic Charter applied to "the whole world" (also *APP*).

⁸⁷ Truman, Message to the People of the Philippines, 3 July 1946, *APP*.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 160.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Marc Frey, "Visions of the Future: The United States and Colonialism in Southeast Asia, 1940–1945," *Amerikanstudien/American Studies* 48 (2003): 382.

⁹⁰ Edward T. Imparato, ed., *General MacArthur: Speeches and Reports, 1908–1964* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing, 2000), 145.

⁹¹ McNutt, "Democracy's Child," 69.

⁹² Harry S. Truman to Kenneth McKellar, 3 April 1946, "Independence, Ceremonies, 1946" folder, box 4, HC-DC.

⁹³ On anticolonialism in 1940s Asia, see Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Ronald H. Spector, *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (New York: Random House, 2007); and Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On its effect on Philippine independence, see Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), chap. 14.

⁹⁴ On this hinge moment, see Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*; Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*; Patrick J. Hearden, *Architects of Globalism: Building a New World Order during World War II* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002); Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); and Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁹⁵ The United States had the fifth-largest empire by population in 1938. It moved briefly to fourth place after Japan's empire disintegrated. Bouda Etemad, *Possessing the World: Taking the Measurements of Colonisation from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Andrene Everson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 131.

⁹⁶ George Gallup, "The Gallup Poll," *Washington Post*, 24 May 1944.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the 11th Meeting of the U.S. delegation, Washington, 17 April 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 1:321. Megan Black recounts a similar, simultaneous debate about whether the United States should extend its borders to include its seabed in *Global Interior*, chap. 5.

⁹⁸ Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 532.

⁹⁹ The U.S. delegation allowed "independence" to appear elsewhere in the charter, in the goals for trust territories. But since the U.S. trust territory was overseen by the Security Council, where Washington had veto power, that language was, for the United States, unenforceable. Minutes of the 45th Meeting of the U.S. delegation, San Francisco, 18 May 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 1:793. On Stassen's speech, see Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, 534–535.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the 45th Meeting of the U.S. delegation, San Francisco, 18 May 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 1:796.

¹⁰¹ Committee on Dependent Areas Minutes 99, p. 7, 20 March 1945, box 121; Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records of Harley A. Notter, 1939–1945; National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter Notter Records).

¹⁰² Minutes of the 45th Meeting of the U.S. delegation, San Francisco, 18 May 1945, *FRUS 1945*, 1:793.

¹⁰³ Committee on Dependent Areas Document 165, "Disposition of the Japanese Mandated Islands in Relation to General Policy for Dependent Areas," 22 May 1944, p. 2, Notter Records.

¹⁰⁴ Hess, *United States' Emergence*, 236.

¹⁰⁵ Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 215.

¹⁰⁶ Tydings, "Report on the Philippine Islands," 54–55.

¹⁰⁷ Hess, *United States' Emergence*, 218. See chap. 7 of Hess; Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 10 and 28–29; and King, "Uses of Ambiguity," 134–137 for the Philippines as a global model. The Philippines' enabling role in Washington's approach to the

post-1945 international order has not been widely appreciated beyond regional studies. For example, the Philippines does not feature prominently (or sometimes at all) in such recent histories of the United States and world government as Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York: Random House, 2006); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Rosenboim, *Emergence of Globalism*; and Zipp, *The Idealist*. Though published too recently for full inclusion in this article, Woods's *Freedom Incorporated* is a welcome study of Philippine independence in global politics.

¹⁰⁸ Philippine independence comes up repeatedly in "United States Policy toward Dependent Areas," 2 May 1950, box 130, Notter Records. However, Robert Shaffer notes that skeptics outside of officialdom saw the Philippines as still substantively unfree: "'Partly Disguised Imperialism': American Critical Internationalists and Philippine Independence," *Journal of American–East Asian Relations* 19 (2012): 235–262.

¹⁰⁹ Principal works discussed in Frank Ninkovich, "The United States and Imperialism," in Robert Schulzinger, ed., *A Companion to American Foreign Relations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 90–91.

¹¹⁰ José Trias Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 3.

¹¹¹ The case for Hawai'i: Gretchen Heefner, "'A Symbol of the New Frontier': Hawaiian Statehood, Anti-Colonialism, and Winning the Cold War," *Pacific Historical Review* 74 (2005): 545–574; A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), chap. 14; and Sarah Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State: Hawai'i and the Cultural Transformation of the American Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). A counterpoint, seeing statehood as empire amplified, is Dean Itusji Saranillio, *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

¹¹² Arguments for understanding the United States as having an essentially normal imperial history are Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Hopkins, *American Empire*.

¹¹³ A helpful overview is Daniel Sargent, "Pax Americana: Sketches for an Undiplomatic History," *Diplomatic History* 42 (2018): 357–376. See also the new "pointillist empire" of islands and bases discussed in Immerwahr, *How to Hide*, part 2.

¹¹⁴ Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State*, 42.

¹¹⁵ George W. Bush, Remarks to a Joint Session of the Philippine Congress, 18 October 2003, APP. A recent scholarly use of Philippine liberation in the case for U.S. exceptionalism is Cobbs Hoffman, *American Umpire*, chaps. 5 and 9. Later, postwar Japan and post-statehood Hawai'i would serve this function—see Jennifer M. Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), chap. 3, and Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State*, chap. 3.