

Reporting Home: Repercussion of Colonial Rule upon American Race Relations

This project will show how the experiences of American soldiers serving during the Spanish-American War, the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines helped transform the perceptions and racial attitudes of Americans at home during the late 19th and early 20th century. Recognizing the transfer of experience, made by soldiers under combat situations as a possible source for changes in attitudes at home will provide new insight for historic research of cultural and political changes during and after other conflicts – most notably the First and Second World War, the Vietnam War, or the occupation of Afghanistan. It will thereby help us to better understand the indirect impact military actions, as for example in the Middle East, have upon the country of origin and how these might be connected to the rise of the current Islamophobia.

This study will analyse the relationship between the American experience of race in its colonial periphery and the effects on the United States. It will go on to examine the subsequent impact on race relations in the U.S. and contribute to a growing historiography on race, empire, and the U.S. South. It will do this in the context of McCoy and Scarano's question: in "what ways, if any, the U.S.... was formed or even transformed from [the] experiences gained at its colonial periphery" (Scarano: *Colonial Crucible* 2009).

This study will reverse the usual historiography. Unlike those historians who concentrate on the impact of American concepts of race on foreign policy or colonial society, this study seeks to look at how America's experience in the colonial periphery affected race relations at home (eg. Krenns). Investigating individual experiences of the treatment of differing peoples in the colonies and dependencies, it will then trace their impact - on an individual and collective basis – on how these confrontations were reflected in race relations in the US. Although the works of McCoy, Scarano and Corbould have touched on elements of this subject, this project will expand the field. It will concentrate on the personal experiences of American soldiers and other servicemen with issues of race by studying the ideas of the participants through the analysis of personal documents as diaries, letters, and journals. Building upon this the project intends to trace the impact of such ideas upon the lives of returning soldiers as

well as surveying American newspapers and magazines for evidence of an overlap in the development of such ideas throughout the American society.

The US Army utilized both white and black servicemen in the Spanish American War and subsequent service in the Philippines and Cuba. Their experiences tell very different stories, drawing as they did on a narrative of race from opposite sides. For example, the refusal of US forces to allow black soldiers into the surrendering town of Santiago de Cuba in 1898 re-enforced ideas of America as a “white” nation in its dealings with a European country – Spain – ideas which placed black soldiers in a position of inferiority. Similarly, reports of atrocities during the Filipino insurrection by soldiers on the spot show a racial bias according to the colour of the reporter. Both these experiences are detailed in letters home, and both serve to re-enforce and create racial paradigms that leaked into their correspondence home and their subsequent lives.

In order to discover how American soldiers experienced race during the American struggle for Empire and how these changed attitudes at home, I will be using a variety of sources, including U.S. Military Archives, American newspapers, and the works and memories of American politicians, activists, and authors. By analysing these sources, I hope to identify a number of experiences among black and white American soldier respectively and illustrate which of these experiences were transported back home.

By tracing the impact these experiences had upon the post-service lives of American soldiers it becomes possible to illustrate a link between their experiences during the American imperial ventures and changes in their demeanor towards the American dealings with questions of race. Special attention will be given to sources which might illustrate increased political action of former soldiers, as the involvement in campaigns for or against black commissioned officers, American imperialism, or white supremacy. Court-martial and police reports are of further interest as such sources might illustrate an increasingly confident behavior of active and former African American soldiers in challenging segregation laws and practices of white supremacy.

The experiences of American veterans are of particular interest in a study of cultural changes inside the US. They provided unique input for people at home as they

represented a rare source of information about the “outside” world into which the US became increasingly involved. Their influence was even more prevalent during the Spanish-American war, which helped to overcome Civil War animosities and created new sense of what it meant to be American.

In addition to studying the impact of experiences on an individual level the project intends to analyze if the reports sent home by American soldiers influenced the discussion of questions of race and imperialism in black and white communities, thereby illustrating the importance of such experiences for the ongoing struggle of the American society with race. In order to demonstrate this link it is necessary to illustrate how the US approached questions of race prior to the Spanish-American War and identify some core perceptions held by black and white Americans. An analysis of debates in American newspapers, magazines, and literature might illustrate a link between the American experience of race in its 'colonies' and the rise of certain ideas in the domestic debate.

The project aims to illustrate the change in perceptions dealing with the question of representation, while providing an outlook upon the importance of the change of convictions for the agency of the actors involved in the racial struggles of the early 20th century.

The project relies primarily on the analysis, interpretation and contextualization of primary sources in order to provide an answer to these questions. A multitude of different approaches will be utilized in order to highlight correlations and connections between experiences and attitudes. My project draws from the Actor-Network theory (eg. Latour), highlighting the agency of the transmitted reports, as well as post-structuralist approaches in order to explain the link between individual experience, written reports and changes in convictions. Post-structuralist ideas will also be important as they provide the background for addressing questions of gender identity and help explain the importance of military service for the recovery of African American masculinity.

I am planning to conduct two research trips throughout my PhD. My first trip will concentrate upon the National Archives, Library of Congress and the USAHEC. These

archives houses a number of collections which will give me the opportunity to read personal letters as well official reports. The focus of this trip lies in finding sources that illustrate the experiences of American soldiers. I will concentrate on identifying experiences and remarks which will inform me about the events which influenced how they thought about race. In this textual analysis, I will look for racial expressions (eg. Goo-goo), enlisting of stereotypes, comparisons with 'civilized' nations. A similar approach will be used when studying photographic sources, which might help to illustrate how the perceived either fit into or contradicted the inherent assumptions about race. Of specific interest are the letters of soldiers send to their families or newspapers, as they might address issues of race more openly and provide evidence for the transmission of such ideas. To finance this research, I'm going to apply for the Kluge Fellowship.

My second trip will include research at the Schomburg Center, the Harry Ransom Center and newspaper archives (e.g. Clarion-Ledger). I will concentrate upon finding newspaper articles, literature and memories, which publicized the experiences of American soldiers overseas and depict their activities after their return. I aim to identify a number of veterans in order to conduct studies about their post-service activities in regard to race questions, ranging from civil obedience to political campaigning. To address the wider influence of such experiences upon the American society, I will conduct a quantitative and contextual analysis. I will study newspapers and literature around the Spanish-American war in order to identify changes in language, topics and bias in coverage of race. Paying attention to the emergence of new ideas and sentiments in the wake of the publication of soldier letters and demobilization, thereby illustrating how certain convictions entered public sentiment. As opinion pieces, letters to the editor and literature will be at the center of this analysis, this prompts me to conduct research in different newspaper archives as well as research the writings of authors like Paul Dunbar which engaged themselves with the perceptions and self-perception of black Americans.

Throughout my research I also plan on meeting scholars, establish an exchange with other CHASE Universities, participate in conferences and publish at least two articles in academic journals like The Journal of African American History.

Bibliography

Cell, John W.: *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy*. Cambridge 1982.

Fletcher, Marvin E: *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891-1917*. Columbia 1974.

Gatewood Jr., Willard B.: *Black Americans and the white man's burden, 1898 -1903*. Urbana 1975.

Gilberts, James: *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition*. London 2009.

Glasrude, Bruce A.: *Brothers to the Buffalo Soldiers: perspectives on the African American militia and volunteers 1865-1917*. Columbia 2011.

Go, Julian: *Patterns of empire: the British and American empires, 1688 to the present*. Cambridge 2011.

Kramer, Paul A.: *The blood of government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines*. Chapel Hill 2006.

Krenn, Michael L.: *Race and U.S. Foreign policy from the colonial period to the present: a collection of essays*. New York 1998.

Love, Eric T. L.: *Race over empire: racism and U.S. Imperialism 1865 -1900*. Chapel Hill 2004.

Marasigan, Cynthia L.: *"Between the Devil and the Deep Sea": Ambivalence, Violence, and African American Soldiers in the Philippine-American War and Its Aftermath*. University of Michigan 2010.

McCoy, Alfered W.; Scarano, Francisco A. [Ed.]: *Colonial crucible: empire in the making of the modern American state*. Madison 2009.

Ring, Natalie J.: *The Problem South. Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. London 2012.

Stoler, Ann Laura: *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: race and the intimate in colonial rule*. Berkeley 2002.