



Julian Go, American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism

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between creole leaders and the diaspora that resulted from the counter-revolution in Saint Domingue, she focuses on one of the lesser-known figures, Georges Biassou (whose picture graces the cover). Her discussion of the marriage connection between the families of Biassou and Whitton in Florida beautifully underscores the interconnectedness of this world. Elsewhere Landers effectively outlines the rise of the free coloured class in Cuba and, in particular, the Pardo and Morelo militia units, which grew in numbers and in privileges over the second half of the eighteenth century. She highlights the openness of the Spanish Empire to people of colour and describes the arrival of various new waves of creoles, many from Saint Domingue, and the evacuation of Florida, who found themselves in Havana and Matanzas with many other free blacks and free coloureds, as well as communities of maroons.

Landers's text is less cogent when dealing with the material she knows best, the convoluted history of Florida and its borderlands. At times her narrative rambles disconcertingly through the border history of Florida, following the life stories of several mixed race and whites, as well as enslaved Africans and Indians, as they were buffeted by the highly volatile political environment of 1790–1820. That said, her description of the rise of the hybrid Seminoles, a breakaway splinter group of Creek Indians intermarried with a hybrid group that contained many black ex-slaves and refugees from Georgia and South Carolina, who sought to create a homeland on the borderlands of Florida, is terrific. She paints a disturbing picture of vicious American expansionism under presidents Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and Jackson, especially the ethnic cleansing carried out by Andrew Jackson (as general) to remove the Seminoles from their homes.

Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions is an important, if somewhat flawed, addition to the scholarship of the Atlantic world, prodigiously researched and with excellent and informative footnotes. Landers shows how Atlantic creoles were some of the most mobile and adaptive people, trained to live on the margins precisely because history did not allow them to settle down. She emphasizes the communication skills and the choices of this multi-ethnic, multilingual community who were perpetually on the move.

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Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism* (2008), xii + 377 (Duke University Press, Durham, \$84.95, paperback \$23.95).

What, if anything, can American global power achieve in other territories? How do territorial people calculate their fortunes and fates under formal colonial rule by the United States? Julian Go addresses these questions by delving into the early twentieth-century American occupation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Focusing on the initial decade of colonial administration, from 1898 to 1912, Go enquires how elites in the two territories adjusted their stock of political concepts and behaviours in light of US tutelary policies.

With careful research of archival documents, speeches and newspapers, Go analyses local and metropolitan discourses of democracy and statistical records of voting behaviour and

office-holding. In both territories, the US implemented a plan to inculcate democratic self-government by tutoring elites in making public pronouncements of democratic ideals, running for local office and voting in local assembly elections. American officials attempted to correct any elite activities they deemed corrupt and oligarchic.

Go is more interested, however, in how Puerto Rican and Filipino political leaders incorporated US rhetoric and expectations for 'good government' into the respective political cultures which they developed under the prior Spanish colonial regime. In a key example, Puerto Rican leaders, before the US occupation, pursued self-governance and political representation within a single-party system. Several factors, including an economic crisis, a natural disaster and the refusal of the United States to back the dominant party, weakened the ability of the elites to garner support among voters. Over time, they overhauled their political culture, bringing it into a form closer to American expectations of democratic transparency. In stark contrast, Filipino elites maintained core patron-client relations that operated outside the party system. The changes that US tutelary colonialism effected in the Philippines were merely additive, rather than transformative. American officials followed suit, charging Filipino elites with recalcitrant political corruption.

Go effectively demonstrates that US overseas governance was not just a matter of planting a flag in new territories, but rather a complex process of interaction between two groups, bound together by tutelary policy that neither understood in quite the same way. Without attending to the localization of American Progressive ideals of democracy and popular self-government, American policy-makers could not anticipate the supposed failure of their political objectives in the Philippines. For their part, Puerto Rican elites were unable to foretell how they would overhaul their patronage practices in light of the occupation and socio-economic shifts by the United States.

A significant contribution of this book is its vision of American colonialism in a global comparative frame. While most literature on American empire makes only passing reference to Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Cuba and Hawaii as having a shared political status in 1898, Go attends to the local experiences of incorporation. As a work of historical sociology, this study employs comparative methodology to advance a theoretical model of political culture. Its aim is not merely to describe colonial dynamics and connect those dynamics to resultant transformations in electoral behaviour and democratic discourse. More ambitiously, Go seeks to explain why, despite encountering similar expectations from the US colonial state and accommodating them, the Puerto Rican 'domestication' of American political meanings and structures led to significant change in local politics while Filipino engagement with the same set of meanings and structures did not (11).

The interest in explanation makes some dynamics fall out of the picture because they do not directly impact the political activities deemed worthy of the American colonial state, which include, as mentioned above, public rhetoric supporting democracy, voting and taking office. To this end, Go argues why some comparisons are better than others. He contends that none of the well-known differences between Puerto Rico and the Philippines – geographical features, population size and diversity, and language – provide sufficient explanation. Regardless of those differences, elites in each territory encountered the same set of political imperatives from the US colonial state, similarly operated in a highly centralized colonial government, and similarly constituted a generational cohort that sought to retain dominance as the United States replaced Spanish rule. Most importantly, Go notes, both elites to a significant degree 'subscribed' to the

new political structures as a way to consolidate power and pursue self-governance. The similarities, rather than the contrasts, between the two colonies allow Go to isolate where the trajectories of Puerto Rican and Filipino elites diverged. Such turning points were economic crises, social challenges to elite power and a re-evaluation of whether the existing political culture operated to the benefit of these elites.

Common-sense knowledge about how Puerto Rico differs from the Philippines in geographical location, size, ethnic diversity, language and racial composition fails to account for the divergence in political cultures. Notably, the presence of armed insurgency in the Philippines and its absence in Puerto Rico is not a pertinent factor in Go's comparative model. Shaping a study on the stated terms of American tutelary colonialism would naturally leave out the war, which was not seen as a dynamic at all, but as an illegitimate movement that fell outside the elite's known political activities and thus beyond the pale of political tutelage. The Philippine–American War has dominated recent scholarship on formal American empire, including Filipino studies. Discounting this event is a significant, but underdeveloped, challenge to extant literature.

While Go's research shows that elite political discourse relied on gendered terms such as 'mother patria' and 'familia puertorriqueña', he notes that meanings of gender, nation and race are not central to his theoretical model (72, 77). Ultimately, this study seeks to treat colonialism not as matter of ideological contest or Foucauldian governmentality, but rather as an historically inflected process of creating and re-creating local political culture. Further scholarship on American empire will find a veritable challenge in building upon Go's theoretically complex arguments.

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Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (2008), 372 (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, \$55.00, paperback \$24.95).

Historians of the Caribbean scene have long bemoaned the fact that language barriers have precluded greater access to French sources. Indeed, Philip Boucher's observation that 'the French Circum-Caribbean before the Age of Revolution is nearly *terrae incognitae* to English-Language scholars' accurately sums up the situation that faces the lecturer who is called upon to teach a course on the Caribbean. The fact that such courses might so often be misnamed as 'histories of the Caribbean' only serves to identify the magnitude of the problem. Indeed, while a more recent scholarship has greatly expanded our knowledge of Anglophone contact with the French Caribbean from the initial settlements up to the time of abolition, much of this scholarship is known only to a few initiates. Thus, most students of Caribbean history are hard pressed to find adequate material to fill the gaps of knowledge that exist. The situation is no less daunting on the other side of the language divide. It is in this context that a review of Boucher's work must assess this contribution in terms of its stated response to the problem.

In his introduction, the author shows that he is quite prepared to challenge the prevailing wisdom on the question of slavery. Indeed, quite early in his treatment, he questions the view