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James R. Arnold, *The Moro War: How America Battled a Muslim Insurgency in the Philippine Jungle, 1902-1913*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011. Pp. 306. ISBN 978-1-60819-024-9.

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In *The Moro War*, historian James Arnold looks at the little known American counterinsurgency conducted in the aftermath of both the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). The fight in the southern islands of the Philippine archipelago pitted US forces against a range of Moro insurgents striving to remain independent of outside control. The war against the insurgents lasted, in various forms, for eleven years. Among other things, it gave the US Army its iconic sidearm, the 1911 Colt .45 semi-automatic, designed to replace the .38 revolver, which was ineffective against Moro warriors attacking at close range. The conflict was one of those “savage wars of peace”¹ waged by imperial powers. The Moros, who had resisted Spanish rule for centuries, saw no reason to capitulate to the Americans; living in a culture that privileged a martial masculinity, they fought back fiercely, if rather chaotically. Unfortunately, they concentrated their resistance at fortified strong points. Unlike the Spanish, the Americans were willing to slog their way into the heartlands of the Moro islands to get to those bases and they brought their field artillery with them. The Moros, unskilled in the use modern weapons (they had a fair number of rifles, but were not able to fire them accurately), could not long resist the US military.

Arnold offers a solid and engaging narrative of the Moro Rebellion, focusing almost entirely on the American experience and analyzing the roles of such famous generals as Leonard Wood and John J. Pershing. In the process, he gives detailed accounts of a number of critical battles, analyzing outcomes and criticizing the participants, all in a smooth and vivid prose style. The author’s special interest in people and personalities is reflected in such chapter titles as “The Rise of Jack Pershing,” “Leonard Wood Goes To War,” and “Tasker Bliss and the Return to Benign Assimilation.” Evocative photographs and many useful maps enhance the text throughout.

Despite his US perspective, Arnold does not ignore the interests of the Moros. He rightly critiques the Americans’ tendency to see everyone as an enemy, their ignorance of Moro customs and ideas, and the regular slaughters they visited on civilians. While the book’s subtitle is a nod to America’s twenty-first-century wars in Muslim countries, Arnold makes it clear that the Moros were motivated less by their religious faith than by a strong aversion to American conquest. This is welcome in a time when certain historians² too often make facile comparisons casting very disparate and distant historical events as prequels to present-day conflicts.

The book is not without its flaws, however. The critique of US actions sometimes leads Arnold to oversimplify complicated moral issues. Slavery, for example, was a long-standing institution in Moro society that the Americans tried to eliminate. Arnold does not acknowledge the ambiguous position of an outside power imposing its will to destroy an immoral local practice. It was imperialistic, certainly, but it is hard to argue that the United States should have allowed the practice to continue. In addition, Arnold does not elaborate on American efforts to promote education and health care, which benefited particularly women and children, thereby undercutting the Moros’ patriarchal power structures. He mentions American attempts to break the stranglehold of coastal merchants on trade with the inland Moros, but does not carefully consider the military and class implications of those efforts. The unfortunate result is a simplistic overemphasis on the military dimensions of the US intervention in the Moro islands.

1. The phrase originated with the title of Alistair Horne’s book, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (NY: Viking, 1978).

2. Notably, Victor Davis Hanson—see his *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise to Western Power* (NY: Doubleday, 2001).

Arnold's analysis also lacks nuance on the military side. He sets up a misleading bright-line contrast between officers like Tasker Bliss, who advocated diplomatic solutions, and those like Leonard Wood, who pushed for a sterner, more martial approach. The situation was more complicated than that. Arnold mentions, but does not enlarge on, Wood's combination of a military approach with substantial investments in education and infrastructure. This carrot-and-stick method, which had worked well earlier against the Filipino *insurrectos*, eventually proved effective against the Moros as well. This counterinsurgency campaign drew successfully on the US Army's experience in the Philippines.³ Arnold addresses this only at the end, not in his main narrative of battles and the roles of individuals. In addition, while relating the often vicious battles of the war, he highlights the Moros' successful ambushes against American soldiers, but does not stress the overall (much) higher casualty rates inflicted by US troops. As in the Philippine-American War, that disparity, more than the effect of any specific battle, was the principal cause of the Moros' ultimate military defeat.

Finally, Arnold makes little use of Moro (or Filipino) sources. This is understandable, given the paucity of such material, especially in English. But it makes for a one-sided story, reported largely by Americans, that gives no sense of how the Moros themselves perceived and responded to the onslaught of their enemy. Consequently, Americans are defined by their thoughts, their words, and their actions, Moros almost entirely by their actions alone. Since many Moros engaged in extreme behaviors like *jurmentado*—a religiously motivated suicide attack on enemies—the final picture of them is not necessarily inaccurate, but it is incomplete and badly skewed.

But I would not end this review on a negative criticism. James Arnold has drawn on solid research in telling the tale of an unfamiliar war in which the United States brought to bear its domestic customs and (especially racial) beliefs on its newfound imperial possessions. There are, of course, significant implications here for America's current position in the world. If not the final word on its subject, *The Moro War* is a good introduction, especially for the non-specialist.

3. Arnold echoes Stuart Creighton Miller's ideas about the imposition of benevolent assimilation through force in his grossly simplistic summary of the Philippine-American War: "The Christian Filipinos had not particularly appreciated benign assimilation until compelled by a ruthless combination of military might, concentration camps, and starvation" (21); cf. Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1984). That might have been true on Leyte and Samar late in the war, but not in 1899-1901 on the other Philippine islands, where the population proved remarkably willing to side with the Americans, even in the absence of force. See David Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (NY: Hill and Wang, 2008).