



2013-012

Gregg Jones, *Honor in the Dust: Theodore Roosevelt, War in the Philippines, and the Rise and Fall of America's Imperial Dream*. New York: New American Library, 2012. Pp. xvi, 430. ISBN 978-0-451-22904-5.

Review by Stacy W. Reaves, Tulsa Community College (reavessw@gmail.com).

Insurgents, water cure, war crimes, torture of prisoners, and occupation forces—all sound like descriptions of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, or perhaps Vietnam. But these terms appeared in newspaper headlines covering the Philippine war at the turn of the twentieth century, a conflict that introduced US soldiers and marines to jungle warfare and insurgency. Distinguished journalist Gregg Jones tells the story of America's attempt to flex its military muscle and become a world power by its actions in the Philippines between 1899 and 1902.

Jones argues that the story of the war is one of America asserting its power over the islands and engaging for the first time in war atrocities. During the late nineteenth century, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt and his fellow Republicans promoted American imperialism. The victory over the Spanish in Cuba and the resulting acquisition of territory added fuel to their desire for further expansion. Republicans argued that a US presence in the Philippines would provide valuable markets and help to “civilize” the islands while casting America as a shining example of honorable behavior on the world stage. Unfortunately, the occupation and dominance of the islands was more difficult than Roosevelt and others envisioned. Emilio Aguinaldo and other rebels led a determined insurgency to expel their occupiers and secure independence. Even after the capture of Aguinaldo, the guerrilla fighting did not end, as insurgents targeted US troops in surprise attacks and even supposedly friendly natives turned on Americans.

Frustrated by the inability of US troops to secure the islands, Roosevelt approved a much harsher campaign against the insurgent forces. Military leaders were authorized to execute guerrillas, conspirators, spies, and anyone else suspected of posing of threat. This led to massacres and other horrific brutalities. Some commanders subjected prisoners to the “water cure” in the attempt to gain information. Large quantities of water were forced down the victims' throats till their stomachs swelled; then their torturers proceeded to beat the water out of them. Marine officers ordered executions of Filipinos they believed to be either working against them or merely sympathetic to the enemy. In 1901, the violence of the Samar campaign shocked the nation: it was revealed that Brig. Gen. Jake Smith had ordered Maj. Tony Waller to kill and burn all suspected guerrillas. When questioned about the age limit, Smith answered ten years and above, adding “The more you kill and the more you burn, the more you will please me” (242).

By the time Theodore Roosevelt became president, the stories of mistreatment and atrocities were embarrassing the Republican Party. The president refused to investigate and tried to counter the criticism. His opponents, such as Gen. Nelson Miles and anti-imperialists like Mark Twain, began calling for a review of the military's conduct in the Philippines. Many felt Secretary of War Eli Root and others were covering up the abuses. To save his political career, Roosevelt reluctantly agreed to the investigation and trials of several officers, on condition that he could review the verdicts. A Naval court acquitted Tony Waller of murder charges, but convicted Jake Smith, Maj. Edwin Glenna, and Lt. Julius Gaujot. Roosevelt never again used American forces to occupy and subdue another nation. Jones argues that he used the valuable lesson learned in the Philippines in dealing with Panama and Colombia.

The aptly titled *Honor in the Dust* is a lively and engaging narrative of the Philippine war. The United States, waging an unconventional conflict in a country it deemed uncivilized, failed to preserve its honor as its troops were allowed to resort to torture and the nation struggled to deal with its damaged self-image. The book includes an in-depth discussion of the Spanish-American War and US involvement in the Chinese Boxer Rebellion.

Jones effectively uses primary sources and current secondary literature. He also traveled extensively in the Philippines as part of his research. Both the general public and historians will find his book enjoyable and enlightening. Its fast-paced, descriptive writing style vividly conveys the excitement of the times and the horror and drama of the war. A typical example is the following paragraph on the Samar campaign.

At daylight on January 6, their tenth day in the jungle, Waller and his ragged band awoke and each man ate a slice of raw bacon before resuming the march. They reached the Cadacan River, their route inland during the Sohoton cliffs assault, and were preparing to set off downstream in a large dugout canoe they found when a cutter carrying Captain Dunlap and his resupply party chugged into sight. Joy swept over Waller and his men as they dragged themselves aboard. Some of the Marines wept quietly. Others laughed hysterically. They were gaunt and shoeless, their clothes shredded, their bodies covered with cuts and sores and bloody bites of leeches and insects. But a far worse fate awaited their comrades left behind in the jungle. (260-61)

Jones reintroduces his readers to an often forgotten war, reminding us that Americans fought in jungles and suppressed insurgents long before the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The present controversy over “enhanced interrogation” is nothing new in American military history. The book illustrates yet again the adage that those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it. Indeed, the actions of Lt. William Calley at My Lai in 1968 almost mirror those of Tony Waller at Balanginga on Samar Island in 1901. Like Theodore Roosevelt, today’s military and political leaders must weigh the efficacy of harsh measures against the need to maintain American honor during war.