

**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
AND THE ACADEMIC  
LIFE OF EMPIRE**

**PAUL KRAMER**



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**PLAS CUADERNOS, NUMBER 1  
PROGRAM IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**



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# Princeton University and the Academic Life of Empire

Paul Kramer\*

*Viví en el monstruo, y le conozco las entrañas . . .*  
[I lived in the monster, and I know its innards . . . ]  
José Martí  
Letter to Manuel Mercado, May 18, 1895

*The Nation has broken its shell and bids fair to run a  
momentous career. Whether the Philippines are occupied or  
not conditions have changed and the university must change  
to meet conditions.*  
Woodrow Wilson  
Speech to Princeton alumni, January 14, 1899

What better place to begin than inside the monster itself. Not with José Martí in New York, but in 1898, with a forty-two year old political scientist at this very University, a conservative Southern Presbyterian with a somewhat provincial air. His name is Woodrow Wilson.<sup>1</sup> He has been reading the newspaper about events in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, actively conversing and corresponding with family and colleagues, and is brought suddenly

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\* This essay is dedicated to Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, for his support and encouragement during my years of graduate school. Many thanks to Jeremy Adelman; Ben Primer, Dan Linke and Nanci Young at Princeton University Archives; and especially to Jaclyn Maxwell. An earlier draft was presented at the conference “1898: War, Literature and the Question of Pan-Americanism,” held at Princeton University, March 27-29, 1998.

<sup>1</sup> On Wilson’s career at Princeton, see Hardin Craig, *Woodrow Wilson at Princeton* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960); Henry Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Years* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.)

to a moment of intellectual and political crisis. He takes up his memorandum pad in August 1898 and at the top of a page writes the words “What Ought We to Do?”<sup>2</sup> And beneath this title he begins an anxious meditation on the recent war and its impact on U.S. politics and society. “A brief season of war has deeply changed our thought,” he reflects, “and has altered, it may be permanently, the conditions of our national life.”<sup>3</sup> With the armistice treaty with Spain on the horizon, and the United States moving towards possession of a far-flung empire in the Caribbean and Pacific, he notes to himself, “We cannot return to the point whence we set out. The scenes, the stage itself upon which we act, are changed. We have left the continent which has hitherto been our only field of action and have gone out upon the seas, where the nations are rivals and we cannot live or act apart.”<sup>4</sup>

For better or for worse, Woodrow Wilson was becoming pan-American. So was the university that he was part of. As a missionary institution, Princeton had always kept at least one eye on the rest of the world, with mighty hopes for a China filled with Presbyterians.<sup>5</sup> But as Wilson was aware, the Spanish-Cuban-American War and Philippine-American War had immersed the institution quite suddenly in a much broader world. As Wilson observed, the imperial wars had wrought a world in which the map was yet to be drawn: Pan-Americanism meant the opening up of new transit-lines between

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<sup>2</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “What Ought We to Do?” Memorandum, c. August 1, 1898, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 10, pp. 574-576.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, “What Ought We to Do?” p. 574.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, “What Ought We to Do?” p. 575.

<sup>5</sup> Princeton played a key role in advancing the missionary impulses of the age, as one of the institutional centers of the intercollegiate Y.M.C.A.’s missionary program. Each year, the Senior class elected from among the alumni a missionary to represent the college in the “foreign field” for the following year. Their selected candidate of 1898, Robert Gailey, reported using heavy doses of college spirit in his efforts to attract Chinese students toward Christianity. “Once every fortnight social meetings are held,” he wrote, “when the hall is decorated with orange and black bunting, and the men are taught Princeton songs and cheers.” (“Letter from Robert Gailey,” *Daily Princetonian*, March 16, 1899, p. 1.)

cultures, a novel and unpredictable set of bridges between literary, intellectual and political locations that had not been connected before.<sup>6</sup> One century ago, Princeton University emerged as a place where the question of Pan-Americanism—of the relationship between the societies, cultures and nations of the Americas—would be posed, debated and answered in a variety of ways.

In this essay, I put before you some of the hidden histories of Pan-Americanism at Princeton. I will focus on three in particular—three Pan-Americanisms that emerged in Princeton a century ago—each which employed the university in a slightly different capacity: the first saw it as stage, the second as a bridge, and the third as a metaphor. The first is in the arena of undergraduate debating societies, where the events of 1898 were most seriously investigated and discussed. As I will show, Princeton students were a microcosm of broader pro-imperial opinion, advancing a number of arguments for a greater U.S. empire on the public stage of university life. The second Pan-Americanism is somewhat more unusual, one found in the experiences of Evaristo de Montalvo, a Princeton graduate, a Cuban, and a soldier in the U.S. Army in the Philippines. De Montalvo showcased Princeton as a crossroads of the new empire, one that bridged the former Spanish colonies both to each other and to the United States in novel ways. The third Pan-Americanism I will sketch was that imagined in the thought and writing of Wilson himself, who rose to the Presidency of the University before achieving the Presidency of the United States. From the platform of Princeton, using the tools of political science, Wilson forged an argument for U.S. empire that would help establish the nation's aggressive, interventionist policies in Latin America throughout the twentieth century, an argument that saw the University itself as a metaphor for Pan-Americanism more broadly.

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of 1898's role in reconsiderations of Pan-Americanism, see Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, "1898" in *Program in Latin American Studies Boletín*, Princeton University, Winter 1998, pp. 1-2, 5.



Students marching on Brokaw Field, Princeton University

### **Princeton as a Stage of Public Debate**

First, to Princeton's undergraduate debaters, arguably the first Princetonians to undertake a serious examination of the new dilemmas of empire. Princeton students had been urged to engage with the politics of imperial expansion by Daniel Coit Gilman, President of the Johns Hopkins University, at the dedication ceremony of Chancellor Green Library on October 22, 1898. Gilman himself was a somewhat private and ambivalent anti-imperialist, but felt certain that a proper foreign policy would take shape in the University environment. As he stated in his dedicatory address:

The Americans have reached the most serious difficulty in government that has arisen since the Constitution of the United States was adopted . . . It is highly probable that the young men of this University will soon be personally involved in the perplexities that have arisen from this war of one hundred days. They are likely to be engaged in one capacity or another, in relations with distant and unenlightened islanders.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Commemoration Day: The Exercises on Saturday, Dr. Gilman's Address," *Daily Princetonian*, October 24, 1898, pp. 2-4.

For Gilman, the key to an enlightened pan-American and pan-Pacific foreign policy was scholarly research. “For these responsibilities [the students] should be prepared by an acquaintance not only with geographical, ethnological and historical facts, but with the principles of economics, of administration, and especially public and constitutional law.”<sup>8</sup>

Students would familiarize themselves with these facts in preparation for the most hotly contested Ivy League debate of 1898, the 6th annual intercollegiate Princeton-Yale debate in New Haven, scheduled for December. It was customary to draw debating subjects from a small pool of hotly-contested current topics: in 1898, it was drawn from the national debate over imperialism. “Resolved,” read the proposition under discussion, “That the United States should annex Cuba.”<sup>9</sup> The stakes were indeed high: the teams were tied for victories in the series, and Princeton’s embarrassing debating loss to Yale the previous year had been a blow to prestige every bit as serious as football losses.<sup>10</sup> In November, a Princeton debating committee met to determine which side of the issue it ought to take. “After a prolonged discussion,” read one report, “it was finally decided that the affirmative was strategically the stronger side . . .”<sup>11</sup> The end of November saw the selected debaters in feverish anticipation. “The past few weeks have been spent in preparation and practice-debating,” reported a student newspaper, “and the men are now engaged in perfecting their final briefs for the contest.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Commemoration Day,” p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> “Subject for the Princeton-Yale Debate,” *Daily Princetonian*, October 19, 1898, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> On Ivy League debating in this period and its relationship to elite masculinity, see Roberta Park, “Muscle, Mind and *Agon*: Intercollegiate Debating and Athletics at Harvard and Yale, 1892-1909,” *Journal of Sport History* 14(3): 263-285, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> “Princeton-Yale Debate,” *Daily Princetonian*, November 2, 1898, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Yale Debate,” *Alumni Princetonian*, December 1, 1898, p. 1.

## University Curricula for Empire

The advent of empire made little impact on Princeton University's curriculum, as it would at other institutions. 1900 saw the addition of one course, "The Expansion of Europe," "discussing chiefly the colonial policies of European states and their different methods of administration, and leading to a consideration of the questions involved in the government of recent acquisitions of the United States." (1900-1 *Princeton University Course Catalog* in the collection of Mudd Manuscript Library). During its brief, three-year life, the course was taught by political scientist John Finley, like Wilson a graduate of Johns Hopkins. Finley had been trained in social work and approached the question of empire from the perspective of the new "scientific philanthropy," which aimed to "rationalize" charity and regulate the lives of the impoverished. Finley traveled throughout the Caribbean on investigative missions in the first years of the century. His published works, like *Political Beginnings in Puerto Rico*, praised the work of Anglo-Saxon colonial officials who, like "scientific" social workers stirred the "backward" culture of the poor (see Marvin E. Gettleman, "John H. Finley y El Caribe, 1900-1903: Contribuciones a Un Consenso Imperialista," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 15(3): 303-316, 1971). A second course, "The Government of Tropical Dependencies" was taught between 1904 and 1908 by Harry Augustus Garfield, but was not offered subsequently. Princeton University never saw itself as a formal school for colonial administrators, although many of its graduates, through routes in business, the political sphere and the military, would play central roles in the United States's new empire.

On the evening of December 6, a large audience assembled in Yale's College Hall to hear the debate. The Princeton team, arguing for Cuban annexation, began by pre-empting the argument of isolationist tradition by establishing a respectable lineage for annexationist politics.<sup>13</sup> "[T]he question of Cuban annexation is not a new one," claimed one debater, "but has for a century been before the minds of the American people."<sup>14</sup> While Congress had pledged against annexation, "the circumstances resulting from the war have thrust upon the country a moral obligation greater than that embodied in the congressional pledge."<sup>15</sup> Yale responded by claiming that, contrary to Princeton's arguments, there was clear evidence of Cuba's "eventual success in self-government," while annexation would be "disadvantageous to their advancement."<sup>16</sup> Annexation of this kind led to "frequent dissensions between the natives and the controlling power," because "[t]he Anglo-Saxon and the Latin American cannot assimilate nor can they co-operate, in the case of the United States and Cuba, for good government."<sup>17</sup> Even more fearfully, a Cuban state "would be entrusted with the task of helping to govern us. She is not fitted for this task; the Cubans do not understand the problems that confront us."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent sketch of the debate on imperialism in the Philippine case, see Richard Welch, Jr., *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979). For a discussion of key factors leading to the new imperialism in the late nineteenth century, especially the professionalization of diplomacy, see Robert Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1986).

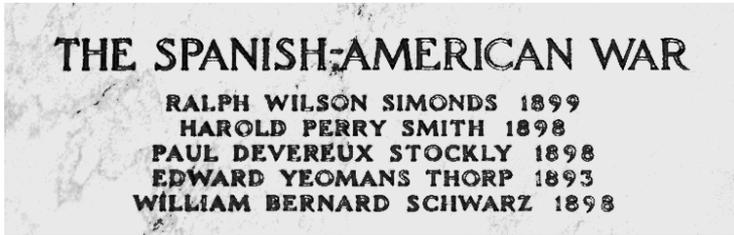
<sup>14</sup> "Princeton Defeated," *Daily Princetonian*, December 7, 1898, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> "Princeton Defeated," p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Princeton Defeated," p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> "Princeton Defeated," p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> "Princeton Defeated," p. 1. The line of argument that overseas colonies would pose novel racial dilemmas for America and threaten U.S. racial purity were common among anti-imperialists. For this specific strand of racist anti-imperialism, see Christopher Lasch, "The Anti-Imperialists, the Philippines, and the Inequality of Man," *Journal of Southern History* 24: 319-331, 1958; and Eric Tyrone Lowery Love, "Race Over Empire: Racism and United States Imperialism, 1865-1900"



Princeton University's war dead, detail of memorial in Nassau Hall of Princeton University

Princeton responded confidently with the claim that, were Cuba to be annexed, not all people within formal U.S. boundaries need be enfranchised. "If Cuba did come in as a state dangers due to the lower classes could be avoided," stated one Princeton speaker. "Certain classes have already been disenfranchised in the Southern states."<sup>19</sup> In its closing remarks, the Princeton team reaffirmed the duty of the United States to "maintain peace" in Cuba and charged Yale with naming "a single instance where government by the Latin race has succeeded."<sup>20</sup> The decision was an ambiguous victory for the cause of Cuban independence: the decision went to Yale based partly on a sense of the United States's "duty," partly on the fear of Cuban enfranchisement in the United States. But it provided one model of Princeton's Pan-Americanism, one in which the University would be a stage of public debate, and the relationship between the nations of the Americas would be rethought and argued by those who would inherit power and voice in the coming generation.

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(Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> "Princeton Defeated," p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> "Princeton Defeated," p. 4.

## Princeton and the Bridges of Pan-Americanism

If Princeton was the stage on which U.S. students thought for the first time about Cuba, it was also the starting point for new Latin American imaginings of the rest of the world. This was the Pan-Americanism of Evaristo Vicente de Montalvo, a Princeton graduate and soldier in the U.S. Army. De Montalvo was, by all accounts, something of an oddity at Princeton, one of two Catholics in his graduating year and the only Cuban.<sup>21</sup> But in class and breeding he was every bit a Princetonian, according to an alumni report “the scion of a prominent family of Cuban



Yearbook portrait of Evaristo Vicente de Montalvo '97

planters, educated at the Browning School in New York, an aristocrat, one whom we admired for his genuinely gentlemanly qualities.”<sup>22</sup> When the United States declared war against Spain in Spring 1898, the young alumnus contemplated enlisting for three days. “It was Cuba’s fight,” he wrote in retrospect, “my fight. Duty stared me in the face.”<sup>23</sup> He enlisted in the Utah Light Artillery and was sent to Salt Lake City, then by train to Camp Kent, where he

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<sup>21</sup> While exceptional, it is not clear that De Montalvo’s admission had to overcome obstacles of prejudice, although Princeton’s admission policies did actively discriminate against the entry of other religious, racial and ethnic groups in this period, and long after. See Maria Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> “Evaristo de Montalvo,” in Arthur M. Kennedy, ed., *Princeton 1897 Fiftieth Anniversary Book* (Princeton, New Jersey: Alumni Association, 1947), p.62.

<sup>23</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” Princeton Alumni Association, 1900, p. 59 (from Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University).

found the barracks “swarming with the greatest crowds of all kinds and conditions of men.”<sup>24</sup> While the majority were “hoboes,” the eager Princetonian eventually found here and there “a fellow worth while talking to.”<sup>25</sup>

While De Montalvo had aimed to fight with U.S. troops in Cuba, he was bound for Manila, where the United States’s Pacific Squadron had defeated the Spanish fleet to preserve U.S. options in the Philippines.<sup>26</sup> His troop was mustered out to San Francisco, where he found himself a subject of special interest to well-wishers. “They crowded up to the windows,” he reported, “many wanted a souvenir or to see the ‘Cuban’ (that was me.) Some were surprised because I looked very much like anybody else.”<sup>27</sup> Boarding the *S.S. Zealandia* for Honolulu, he wrote: “Like Columbus, we were sailing into the unknown.”<sup>28</sup> But contrary to De Montalvo’s expectations, Hawaii was far from “unknown” to U.S. nationals. Three years earlier, a cabal of U.S. sugar planters had conspired to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy, and the United States was on the eve of annexing the Islands as a formal territory. Upon arrival, De Montalvo was greeted by the Red Cross and “the American Yacht Club”; his Utah regiment was even invited to the large sugar estate of an U.S. planter from Salt Lake. While visiting, De Montalvo smelled boiling sugar juice and was carried back to nostalgic reveries of Cuba: “I looked over the waving cane, and at the freight

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<sup>24</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> On the Spanish-Cuban-American War, see Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, 2 vols. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Gerald Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974); David Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983); Graham Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The U.S. Army in the Spanish-American War* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 62.

cars loaded with it, listened to the rumbling noise of the crushers—that used to sound so sweet to me in San Lino, and used to lull father to sleep. Here was prosperity.”<sup>29</sup> But immediately this memory darkened into nightmare, as he imagined the results of the war in Cuba. “I saw a blackened, smoky expanse stretching before me . . . the big mill was motionless—dead—the rust eating, slowly eating the remains—RUIN!”<sup>30</sup>

Upon arrival in the Philippines a month later, De Montalvo’s distinctive origins became essential to U.S. military communications. “I was very much in demand as an interpreter,” he wrote. Among others, he “talked with many Spanish prisoners, and had the honor of seeing the Governor of Guam and his staff, who are all prisoners.”<sup>31</sup> Spanish troops and the Filipino revolutionary army were at that moment fighting for possession of Cavite, a key strategic port. De Montalvo was sent to negotiate with Filipino troops regarding provisions, and to engage in reconnaissance. “Owing to my knowledge of Spanish, I had the honor to go on several scouting expeditions to the field of operations,” he wrote.<sup>32</sup> In the eventual battle for Manila, De Montalvo found himself with other artillerymen waist-deep in mud, struggling to keep heavy guns aimed at the Spanish lines outside Manila, and cool enough to

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<sup>29</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 63. On the Cuban sugar industry on which Montalvo’s wealth was based, see the classic work by Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El Ingenio: Complejo Económico Social Cubano del Azúcar* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 65. On the difficulties faced by the U.S. military in Cuba and the Philippines in areas as varied as intelligence, language, mapping and technological infrastructure, see David Trask, “American Intelligence during the Spanish-American War,” in James Bradford, *Crucible of Empire: The Spanish-American War and its Aftermath* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1993); Brian Linn, “Intelligence and Low-Intensity Conflict in the Philippine War, 1899-1902,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1991), pp. 90-114; Paul Kramer, “Invincible Ignorance: Knowledge and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902,” unpublished essay (1997).

<sup>32</sup> “Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War,” p. 66.

function. When the Spanish were finally pushed back, U.S. troops charged into the city and established themselves in the former Spanish palace. De Montalvo was immensely important in this process: "I was kept on the run interpreting for two or three days, till I was unstrung and as slow as a tired horse."<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, the U.S. Army forbade the Filipino army, ostensibly its ally, to enter the city upon the defeat of the Spanish. During the next months, tensions between Filipino independence fighters and occupying U.S. troops increased. De Montalvo himself was witness to this, when a Western friend of his with "shooting proclivities" fired off his gun to mock Filipino troops and was killed in retaliation.<sup>34</sup> Such incidents, and aggression by American troops, erupted in open warfare early in 1899, when the United States moved to annex the archipelago and met the opposition of the Philippine Army.<sup>35</sup> During the bloody imperial war that followed, De Montalvo's skills would again be important. By 1899 the ambitious Princetonian had risen to the position of acting interpreter for General Otis, head of operations in the Philippines. At one point, another Princeton alumnus encountered him at work in Manila. "There he was, sitting at a table in the coolest corner of the inside balcony of the palace," he recalled, "clothed in spotless white duck, translating some regulations or other, which seemed as easy to him as the Spanish exercises he did for the fellows at college."<sup>36</sup>

De Montalvo's voyage was a quintessential imperial moment, a clear illustration of the unpredictable pathways of Pan-Americanism: a Princeton graduate traveling aboard a U.S. Navy

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<sup>33</sup> "Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War," p. 75.

<sup>34</sup> "Princeton Alumni in the Spanish War," p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> On the Philippine-American War, see Stuart Creighton Miller, *"Benevolent Assimilation": The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Brian Linn, *The U.S. Army Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Glenn May, "Why the United States Won the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review* 52(4): 353-377, 1983.

<sup>36</sup> "Evaristo de Montalvo," *Princeton 1897 Fiftieth Anniversary Book*, p. 63.

vessel, dreaming of his family's Cuban sugar plantation beneath the Hawaiian sun, on the way to conquering the Philippines. More than anyone, he illustrated the continuities between the Spanish and U.S. empires as well as their divergences. It was, after all, his fluency in Spanish that was most useful to the U.S. Army in defeating the Spanish army. But he also illustrated the process by which the new colonies were integrated politically, economically and culturally into the orbit of the United States. De Montalvo and others of his social class would be the collaborating base of the U.S.-dominated Cuban Republic of the early twentieth-century.<sup>37</sup> Following his service in the Philippines, he returned to New York, and by 1905 to Cienfuegos, where he became a prosperous sugar planter, contracting engineer and manufacturer of molasses. His Princeton credentials and Philippine service to the U.S. military would remain with him, however. During the First World War, he would act as a "confidential agent" of the U.S. Government in Cuba.<sup>38</sup> As well as a stage for debate, then, Princeton would serve as a link in expanding networks of U.S. foreign influence and control.

### **Princeton as a Metaphor of Pan-American Relations**

But there was another model of Pan-Americanism, one in which Princeton University became a metaphor for pan-American relations themselves. To examine it, let us return to Woodrow Wilson and his memorandum book. In 1898, Wilson was a young professor of politics in his eighth year at Princeton. He was in many ways a traditionalist in teaching, who had made his name as a popular lecturer and, to a lesser extent, as a student of the practical

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<sup>37</sup> On Cuba and U.S. political control in the early twentieth century, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> "Evaristo de Montalvo," *Princeton 1897 Fiftieth Anniversary Book*, p.63.



Woodrow Wilson in 1898

operations of government.<sup>39</sup> He was an influential instructor of undergraduates, a gifted speaker rated “Favorite Professor” by the Class of 1900.<sup>40</sup> In his professional life, his eager hope was to garner for Princeton respectable status as a modern University, rather than a provincial New Jersey college, a hope he articulated in his celebrated 1896 address, “Princeton in the Nation’s Service.”<sup>41</sup> He was also known to serve as a coach for the debating teams, and had helped Princeton students prepare for the debates on empire.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Milton Cooper, Jr., “Woodrow Wilson: The Academic Man,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 58(1): 38-53, 1982; Samuel J. Rogal, “From Pedagogue to President: Thomas Woodrow Wilson as Teacher-Scholar,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24(1): 49-56, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> *Nassau Herald*, Vol. 35, 1899.

<sup>41</sup> On the address itself, see Theodore J. Ziolkowski, “Princeton in *Whose Service?*” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, January 23, 1991, pp. 11-16.

<sup>42</sup> “Prof. Woodrow Wilson will confer with the judges to give any information they may desire concerning the contestants,” read a report on the Princeton-Yale Debate. “Preliminary Yale Debate,” *Daily Princetonian*, November 5, 1898, p. 1.

As stated earlier, the wars touched off a political and intellectual crisis for Wilson.<sup>43</sup> While convinced of the events' dramatic significance, Wilson was not at first convinced that they represented a positive development. In his public comments of 1899, he stated that "It was my personal wish . . . that we should not take the Philippines. I do not know but that I wish we did not have them now."<sup>44</sup> There were likely several reasons for this reticence. Supporters of Philippine annexation came from many quarters, most of which did not include Wilson himself. At the political level, it was the movement primarily of Republican party activists. Conservative Democrats such as Wilson largely opposed annexation, some for reasons of racial fear, others for foreign policy isolationism and still others because of the "revolutionary" increase in state power that overseas expansion would involve.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> As a few scholars have noted, the advent of an overseas empire after 1898 led to sudden and hotly contested attempts to annex the new territories as intellectual jurisdiction among U.S. scholars and their institutions. Wilson was a part of this phenomenon, but it extended more broadly through colleges, universities and emerging academic disciplines and professional societies. See Paul Kramer, "The Pragmatic Empire: U.S. Anthropology and Colonial Politics in the Occupied Philippines, 1898-1916," (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1998); Frank Ng, "Knowledge for Empire: Academics and Universities in the Service of Imperialism," in Robert David Johnson, ed., *On Cultural Ground: Essays in International History* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1994); Gary Marotta, "The Academic Mind and the Rise of U.S. Imperialism: Historians and Economists as Publicists for Ideas of Colonial Expansion," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 42: 217-234, 1983.

<sup>44</sup> "Report of a Speech on Patriotism in Waterbury, CT: Our Obligations, December 14, 1899, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 298.

<sup>45</sup> On anti-imperialism, see Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Roger J. Bresnahan, ed., *In Time of Hesitation: American Anti-Imperialists and the Philippine-American War* (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1981); Philip S. Foner and Richard C. Winchester, eds., *The Anti-Imperialist Reader: A Documentary History of Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, Vols I and II (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984, 1986); Jim Zwick, ed., "Anti-Imperialism in the United States, 1898-1935" (<http://web.syr.edu/~fjzwick/ai198-35.html>; August 1996).

### **Anti-Imperialism at Princeton**

While Wilson and some professors actively supported overseas imperialism, there was far from a consensus on the issue among the University's faculty and administration. Imperialism was often seen as a radical departure from the nation's traditions of republican government and continental empire, and at odds with Princeton's conservative instincts. Eighteen Princeton professors from a wide variety of departments, including Dean Andrew West, signed a 1904 petition by the "Philippine Independence Committee" circulated nationwide to college professors, clergymen, lawyers and other professionals (Philippine Independence Committee Petition, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library). The petition held that the United States's war in the Philippines was an embarrassment before "civilized mankind" and that withdrawal from the Islands and a guarantee of Philippine independence would be the only means to bring lasting peace. A lengthy occupation would fail, they claimed, because ". . . many Anglo-Saxons are but too much inclined to assert their superiority in a manner little mindful of the rights and self-respect of those whom they consider their inferiors." At the same time, its authors made clear their fears of Filipino "racial peculiarities" and did not "indulge in the delusion that their government will be all that we might desire." As in the case of Cuba and Mexico, they stated, a formally independent Philippines would grant the United States whatever military and commercial concessions it wanted, on more morally sustainable grounds.

Yet Wilson found his way gradually into the imperialist camp. According to a reporter summarizing a November 1898 address, “Dr. Wilson did not align himself with the expansionists of the extreme type, [but] his remarks indicated a preference for the more liberal policy in this respect, in that he did not seem to possess any fears for the alleged perils of such policy.”<sup>46</sup> In 1901, he was still seen as sympathetic enough to the anti-imperialist cause to be asked to circulate a petition through the Princeton faculty.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, he was busy attempting to use Princeton as a platform for imperialist argumentation: by October 1899, he was planning a series of lectures by visitors “on the administration of tropical dependencies.”<sup>48</sup>

Wilson found his way toward his half-hearted imperialism by the light of two questions of political theory which the events of the war had foregrounded, questions that had preoccupied him for some time.<sup>49</sup> First, how was a great and powerful nation to be built through

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<sup>46</sup> “A News Report of a Lecture on Constitutional Government,” November 2, 1898, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 66.

<sup>47</sup> Wilson was far from the only Princeton faculty member to have strong opinions about the new empire. While he himself neither signed nor circulated the anti-imperialist petition, eighteen Princeton administrators and faculty members from a wide variety of departments did, including Dean Andrew West. More in agreement with Wilson was John H. Finley, who offered one of only two courses given during the early twentieth century directly in response to questions of colonial administration. See Marvin E. Gettleman, “John H. Finley y El Caribe, 1900-1903: Contribuciones a Un Consenso Imperialista,” *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 15(3): 303-316, 1971. Gettleman overstates both Finley’s and Princeton’s commitment to instructing imperialism: the novelty of empire made little impact on Princeton’s largely traditionalist curriculum.

<sup>48</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Walter Hines Page, October 4, 1899, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 243.

<sup>49</sup> For an excellent overview of the history of social science institutions and debates at Princeton, in which Wilson was very much involved, see Daniel T. Rodgers, “The Tramp and the Policy Doctor: The Social Sciences at Princeton,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 58(1): 57-90, 1996. For a discussion of the evolution of Wilson’s political ideas, see Niels Thorsen, *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, 1875-1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Thorsen pays surprisingly little attention to Wilson’s foreign policy ideas in this period, and fails to mention the significance he assigned the Spanish-Cuban-American War.

politics? Second, what was the relationship between governmental power and individual liberty?<sup>50</sup> Wilson turned to the first question in his early public addresses on the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Viewed from the perspective of national political development, the war signaled a positive shift toward executive power that he believed was crucial to national greatness. Although “not an imperialist or expansionist” by his own measure, Wilson “welcomed the new state of affairs, as it furnished the necessity of a foreign policy and gave to the executive of the Nation a national character.”<sup>51</sup> As the President controlled foreign policy to a greater degree than domestic policy, overseas commitments meant a stronger national executive. “As long as we have only domestic subjects we have no real leaders,” he stated. Warming up for later campaigns, Wilson unembarrassedly concluded that “Princeton must come to the aid of the country with a trained hand and a man equal to the occasion.”<sup>52</sup>

The second question, of the relationship between state authority and civic freedom, was more problematic. For Wilson, the U.S. system of what he called self-government consisted “in the poise between liberty to the individual and control by the government under a system of laws . . .”<sup>53</sup> But for Wilson and many of his contemporaries, this system and its control was far from universally inclusive. “Freedom is not giving the same government to all people,” he stated confidently, “but wisely discriminating and

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<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the early history of American social science, that focuses on the efforts of American scholars to refigure a doctrine of “American exceptionalism,” an historically unique evasion of European developments toward socialism, see Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> “News Report of an Alumni Affair: Princeton Men Dine, Annual Banquet of Chicago Alumni a Jolly Affair,” January 14, 1899, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> “News Report of an Alumni Affair,” January 14, 1899, p. 94.

<sup>53</sup> “A Newspaper Report of a Lecture in Waterbury, CT,” December 13, 1900, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 12, p. 47.



Ship's bell, *USS Princeton*. This bell was a gift from Princeton University alumni to the *USS Princeton*, a battleship that saw service in Manila during the war.

dispensing laws according to the advancement of a people."<sup>54</sup> Wilson would make his clearest statement of this principle later as President, with his racial segregation of the federal civic service.<sup>55</sup> Yet even as a Princeton professor, he made clear that self-government was not an ideal applicable to all peoples, particularly what he called "the undisciplined Filipinos" against whom the United States was fighting.<sup>56</sup> In one address on overseas colonial administration, he "warned his hearers not to feel that the forms of government there must be like our forms at home."<sup>57</sup> For Wilson this was due, remarkably, to the Filipinos' incapacity to express consent as the United States's Founding Fathers had done. According to Wilson, "The 'consent' of the

<sup>54</sup> "A Newspaper Report of a Public Lecture and an Alumni Meeting in Harrisburg, PN," February 24, 1900, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 440.

<sup>55</sup> On Wilson's racial policies, see Henry Blumenthal, "Woodrow Wilson and the Race Question," *Journal of Negro History* 48(1): 1-21, 1963.

<sup>56</sup> "A Newspaper Report of an Address on Americanism in Wilmington, DE," December 7, 1900, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 12, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> "A Newspaper Report of a Lecture in Waterbury, CT," December 13, 1900, p. 48.

Filipinos and the ‘consent’ of the American colonists to government . . . are two radically different things . . .”<sup>58</sup>

The difference for Wilson was what he repeatedly referred to as “education.” In finding the balance point between individual liberty and state power Wilson turned continually to metaphors of education: students stood in for anarchic, unbridled freedoms, while professors and administrators represented the forces of stability, order and law. In the “school” of self-government, the subject of instruction was “liberty”: North Americans had been “schooled for centuries to the use of our liberties” under the British.<sup>59</sup> But as in the university it was a lesson to be learned through obedience rather than engagement. The U.S. occupation period would therefore be something like a Princeton education, then, in which unequal sides entered into a relationship of traditional learning and discipline. While he warned that as teachers, “men may be arbitrary, self-opinionated, impervious, impossible,” he maintained that the “children must be foolish, impulsive, headstrong, unreasonable.”<sup>60</sup> Repeatedly, he depicted Filipinos as political “children” beneath generous U.S. “instructors.” While “we must govern as those who learn,” he wrote, “they must obey as those who are in tutelage. They are children and we are men in these deep matters of government and justice.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Allen Wickham Corwin, September 10, 1900, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 573.

<sup>59</sup> “A Newspaper Report of a Public Lecture and an Alumni Meeting in Harrisburg, PN,” February 24, 1900, p. 440.

<sup>60</sup> “A Commemorative Address: The Ideals of America,” December 26, 1901, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 12, p. 223.

<sup>61</sup> “A Commemorative Address: The Ideals of America,” December 26, 1901, p. 223. Sadly, Wilson was far from the only dispenser of this metaphor, if he was one of its most educated proponents. The representation of former Spanish colonies as children to be instructed and punished was common in the popular press, as documented in John P. Johnson, *Latin America in Caricature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).



“Uncle Sam’s Class in the Art of New Self-Government” by William Allan Rogers (cover drawing for *Harper’s Weekly*, August 27, 1898)

Interestingly, Wilson defended the occupation only so far as it instructed Filipinos to be something like debaters, active critics of their imperial “tutors.” “We shall have to stand criticism . . . “ he stated. “If you enable the people of our dependencies to speak to us

as of ourselves, they will ultimately get the self possession of experienced critics.”<sup>62</sup> But ultimately self-government for Wilson was less like a Princeton debating society and, ironically, more like a private eating club, hedged about with strict stylistic codes and elaborate, inherited manners. In conveying the importance of active social engineering in the Philippines, Wilson described how self-government was much like learning how to wear a suit properly. “If we sent to the Philippines our institutions in manuscript they would suffer the same fate which befell a dress suit once captured by the savages,” he stated. “The coat was appropriated and worn by one savage, the vest by another, and the trousers by a third. Each savage had part of the suit and all were somewhat unconventional.”<sup>63</sup> Like the grooming of a Princeton man, the occupation would be a long process of “training” the Filipinos to a set of U.S. “conventions” from which they must not deviate. It was this vision, of liberty gained through stern “lessons,” that Wilson brought with him to the Presidency and which informed the numerous military interventions into the Caribbean that took place under his administration.<sup>64</sup>

From the dawn of a U.S. empire in the Caribbean and Pacific, Princeton was the setting for novel debates on and experiences of Pan-Americanism. Its debaters had made the University a political stage on which questions of Pan-Americanism would be fought over. Evaristo De Montalvo had found in the University a bridge between Cuba, the United States and the broader world. Wilson, in turn, found in Princeton University a metaphor for pan-American relations themselves, one in which subordinate nations would be “tutored” to participate in an international classroom but submit

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<sup>62</sup> “A Newspaper Report of a Speech in Brooklyn: Liberty and Its Uses,” January 14, 1900, in Link, ed. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 375.

<sup>63</sup> “Report of a Speech on Patriotism in Waterbury, CT,” December 14, 1899, in Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 11, p. 299.

<sup>64</sup> On Wilson’s Latin American policy in the context of U.S. intervention in Central America in the early twentieth century, see Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

themselves to constant supervision, discipline and, on occasion, corporal punishment. The end of the century provides an unique opportunity to examine, criticize and rework these models. At a moment when the U.S. Congress debates statehood (and somewhat bizarrely, English-only) for Puerto Rico, the question of Pan-Americanism remains an open one, and one that calls on all of our collective insight and inquiry.



## **About the Author**

Paul Kramer received his Ph.D. in history in January 1998 from Princeton University. Beginning in fall 1998, he will be an assistant professor of history at The Johns Hopkins University. His research interests include U.S. cultural, intellectual and political history, modern Latin American history, and comparative Atlantic history. He is the recipient of various prizes and fellowships, including a Fulbright Fellowship to Costa Rica, the Smithsonian Institution's Predoctoral Research Fellowship, the Newberry Library's Research Fellowship, and the Sawyer Seminar Fellowship at the University of Michigan. Most recently, he served as co-organizer of Princeton University's conference "1898: War, Literature and the Question of Pan-Americanism." His dissertation, "The Pragmatic Empire: U.S. Anthropology and Colonial Politics in the Occupied Philippines, 1898-1916," examines social science, racial knowledge and the contested intellectual life of the United States' new empire. Published work includes "Jim Crow Science and 'The Negro Problem' in the Occupied Philippines, 1898-1910," in Judith Jackson Fossett and Jeffrey Tucker, eds., *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). He can be reached at the Department of History, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland 21218.



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*Drawing by Consuelo Gotay*

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Princeton University  
Program in Latin American Studies  
Joseph Henry House  
Princeton, NJ 08544-1019 USA  
FAX: (609) 258-0113  
E-mail: [plas@princeton.edu](mailto:plas@princeton.edu)  
Web: <http://www.princeton.edu/plasweb>