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1898: History and Memory

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I wish to thank the Association's executive for the invitation to give this lecture, but I must say that while I was working on it I felt not only grateful but also somewhat bewildered by the challenge inherent in this topic. Every scholar - and certainly every historian - should know that inside an anniversary's obvious opportunity there is also a concealed pitfall, and this centennial of 1898 is no exception.

Whether he/she has a critical or celebratory disposition towards a historical anniversary, the historian must weigh the evidence, analyze the established interpretations, investigate the cultural legacy and somehow take stock of an event. But this has to be done while all these elements are recombined together in new configurations, because the very mechanism of the anniversary brings new alterations to the event's shape, colors and memory. You must change your shoes while you keep running, since historical interpretations surely affect memory, but the construction of public memory is simultaneously redefining the historiographical discourse you are supposed to rely upon.

History and memory, that is, chase each other in a circular fashion and contaminate each other, thus projecting a fickle, mutable image that can hardly be crystallized into clear-cut lines and reference points. On the other hand, these are the rare occasions when history and memory engage in an open, direct dialogue that discloses some of their hidden features, and that is why I decided to collate and compare them.

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The war of 1898 has been variously labelled - depending on the interpretation - as the Spanish-American War, the Spanish-Cuban-American-War or, more recently, the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War[1]. U.S. historians, and particularly the specialists in U.S. foreign relations, have engaged in recurrent debates on its significance and its interpretations. On the one hand, scholars such as diplomatic historian Samuel Bemis emphasized the war's value and legitimacy deriving from its anti-colonial, democratic aim, as spelled out in the Congressional resolution that called to a war for Cuba's independence. Accordingly, Bemis saw *one* of the consenquences of the war - the establishment of an imperial U.S. sovereignty upon Puertorico and the Philippines - as "the Great Aberration", the temporary deviation from the nation's anti-colonial tradition[2].

On the other hand, historians who transcended a purely territorial notion of empire and focused on the peculiar features of the international projection of U.S. power saw the war as a "Great Culmination". The very moment, that is, when the Manifest Destiny's cultural legacy of expansionism and continental conquest transmuted into economic, strategic and cultural aggrandizement in the larger world system (or at least in a broad regional area). The United States therefore ascended to an unprecedented role as international power and inaugurated a century that would come to be characterized by the strategic and conceptual hegemony of multilateral liberalism[3].

Scholars of every persuasion, however, agreed upon the widespread popular perception of the war as a crucial turning point in the nation's history. "We have witnessed a new revolution" Woodrow Wilson wrote in 1902, "We have seen the transformation of America completed.[...] The nation that was one hundred and twenty-five years in the making has now stepped forth into the open arena of the world"[4]. The real issue was the way in which America should perform in such an arena, how it should move in it, and ultimately why it should act in it, since this raised crucial questions on the nation's nature and identity, and particularly on its ambivalent relationship with the concept of empire. The war (and especially the ensuing decisions on the peoples and territories that had been wrenched away from Spanish domination) stimulated the most explicit debate on empire in American history.

Ever since the nation was founded the idea of empire had contained different and even contrasting meanings. It could simultaneously spell the notion of monarchical tyranny or the aspiration to an expanding realm of law and civilization. The United States were therefore conceived as the best example of liberation from the former as well as the predestined agent of the latter, as in the lofty formulation coined by Thomas Jefferson: "the empire for liberty"[5].

Hence there was no lack of precedents for the unabashed praise of a "civilizing" imperialism that was advanced at the turn of the century, for instance by Senator Albert J. Beveridge: "American law, American order, American civilization and the American flag will plant themselves on shores, hitherto bloody and benighted, but, by those agencies of God, henceforth to be made beautiful and bright"[6]. This type of acclamation could later on appear as an aberration, but Beveridge's reply to the Anti-imperialists was surely less ephemeral or "aberrant": "the rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-governing"[7].

Many other distinguishing features of the turn of the century's expansionist culture certainly appear as "culmination" rather than "aberration". For instance, Theodore Roosevelt's recurrent rhetorical juxtaposition between mastering the self in order to regenerate the nation and conquering external spaces for their betterment; or his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine which posited a role of "international police power"[8] for the U.S. in the Western hemisphere. Equally "culminating" were the geopolitical speculations of Henry Cabot Lodge or Brooks Adams on the necessity of expanding U.S. power and trade in view of the coming clash with that "colossus of despotism and military socialism" represented ... by Czarist Russia![9]. Or Admiral Alfred T. Mahan's admonitions on the commercial and strategic importance of a naval empire pivoted on the control of the Caribbean sea[10]. These are intellectual legacies that would constantly reappear throughout the 20th century, in Adolf Berle or Paul Nitze, in Henry Kissinger or the neo-conservatives in the 1980s, as well as among many orthodox historians.

But persistences and continuities are no less visible and remarkable on the other side as well. The 1899 American Anti-Imperi-

alist League Program condemned McKinley's actions as subversive of American ideals: "We earnestly condemn the policy of the present National Administration in the Philippines. It seeks to extinguish the spirit of 1776 in those islands. [...] The real firing line is not in the suburbs of Manila. The foe is in our own household. The attempt of 1861 was to divide the country. That of 1899 is to destroy its fundamental principles and noblest ideals"[11]. Sixty years later William Appleman Williams - the founding father of contemporary historical revisionism - entitled his seminal critique of Open Door expansionism *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, thus emphasizing its inherent perversion of republican ideals of democratic self-government both at home and overseas[12]. It was an argument that resonated, though in variable guises and with different intents, among the isolationists of 1935-1938 and, one generation later, among almost all those who opposed the American war in Vietnam.

Between these polarities of a public and scholarly debate on imperialism - in many ways a contest on the very nature of America and of 20th century modernity - the war of 1898 has been dissected, analyzed, and reassembled in a kaleidoscope of motives and explanatory factors. Given the hesitations of a business community that, fearful of inflation and financial instability, resolved for war only in the last instance, historians such as Julius Pratt, Richard Hofstadter or Ernest May rejected the economic interpretations of the war. They rather saw it as symptom and expression of a "psychic crisis" of the nations, to use Hofstadter's formulation[13]. In an era dominated by the European example (which posited imperial aggrandizement as a prerequisite for a modern industrial nation that aspired to a great power role) the uncertainties of end of the century America found their outlet in an adventure decided, almost imposed by a mixture of public pressures. The anxieties deriving from the end of the frontier, the tensions erupting from the Second industrial revolution and its class cleavages, the fears connected to ethnic diversification reinvigorated the vision of a commercial and Christian empire that Secretary of State William H. Seward had outlined thirty years earlier[14]. It was meant to be an empire bent on uniting rather than fragmenting, attracting rather subjugating, reordering rather than perturbing. An empire ordained to expand in the Caribbean and the

Pacific that "civilizing" mission that had been completed, but also consummated, on the continental mainland.

The evolutionist culture of social Darwinism legitimized a racial and ethno-cultural hierarchy as natural and historically bound to dominate. In its American version - interlaced with Anglo-Saxonism, with a naval-oriented geopolitics focused on the Pacific, and with the Spencerian utopia of a world unified by the peaceful competition of *laissez faire* - such culture posited a Western march of civilization, under the leadership of an emerging great power, as the realization of America's missionary promise. Conquest was then meant as the elevation of the conquered peoples and spaces as well as the regeneration of the self through the virile realization of a historical and ethical duty. Thus, the "American mission was reconceived as a kind of civilizational imperialism under Anglo-Saxon impress"[15].

This was the ground upon which various factors intersected in early 1898: a "yellow press" that inaugurated its century with resounding invocations for a "civilizing" war; a public opinion that could cultivate and relish its own chauvinism as humanitarian; and a cultural and strategic design that members of the Republican élite, such as Henry Cabot Lodge or Theodore Roosevelt, managed to represent as duty and destiny even more than as opportunity. After the explosion on the *Maine* - when a feverish chauvinism erupted but McKinley was still reluctant to plunge the country into war - Roosevelt said: "The President has no more backbone than a chocolate éclair"[16].

It was a symptomatic but mistaken judgement. Two months later McKinley, having exhausted his attempts to coerce Spain without military intervention, declared war and drove it to a rapid and victorious conclusion[17]. The "splendid little war" (as Secretary of State John Hay enthusiastically dubbed it) did not actually deserve either of those adjectives, except in naval and emotional terms. Army operations in Cuba were rather chaotic and the conflict had an enormous financial cost. With a total bill of $ 6 billion in war-related expenditures, amounting to 40% of the United States GNP in 1898, its cost was considerably higher than the total profits accruing from U.S. exports in the years 1890-1914[18]. However, it was certainly a diplomatic, strategic and symbolic triumph. For the United States and the

Americas (not to mention Spain) it was a historical turning point.

The United States, flamboyant entrance among the ranks of world powers excited the Americans but did not yet awe the Europeans, Spaniards aside. Nevertheless, the 1898 victory propelled the United States on many of the courses of its subsequent ascent. Control of Puertorico and the Philippines, the simultaneous annexation of Hawaii, and the *de facto* protectorate on Cuba spelled U.S. domination of the Caribbean region - soon to be completed with the construction and control of the Panama Canal - and a vigorous naval and commercial projection in the Pacific. It thus brought to actual life the scenario envisioned by American strategists before the war. A scenario that should be considered one of the war's crucial explanatory factors, since McKinley viewed the conflict with Spain as an opportunity to solve two crises at once: the crisis in Cuba and the one looming in the Far East, where American presence seemed endangered by the stiffening of the European powers' control on China, and was thereafter salvaged by the acquisition of the Philippines as a spring-board for America's access to the Asian mainland[19].

In the aftermath of the war, the European powers were divested of any residual influence in a region now under unrivalled American hegemony. Central America became the keystone of that domination of the two great oceans that after 1917 was to be the foundation of America's international power. The Panama Canal became the hub of a commercial and military system designed to guarantee the security of the nation as a world power and the prosperity of the world's largest economy[20].

The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine institutionalized this new power role. In Central America and on the Pacific routes that were presumed to open the gates of Asia's fabled markets - key to a long-dreamed golden age to come - U.S. exports and investments went on a "search for opportunity"[21] that was to be the engine of international expansion. The short-term economic return of such a search was relatively modest, but we can now appreciate its long-term value for the interdependence of world markets (of crucial importance to the 20th century history of Fordist big business) and the transformation of the United States into a protagonist of the world system.

For analysts and historians from Woodrow Wilson onwards, the McKinley Administration is the starting point of the growth of a "promotional state" with efficient diplomatic, military and commercial institutions, as well as the first instance of a gradual strengthening of the presidency as strategic center of the federal state and symbol of the nation.[22]

The worn-out metaphor of Central America as a "backyard" is less revealing than misleading, since it actually belittles its importance for the U.S.. Theodore Roosevelt theorized a U.S. right to discipline its Southern neighbors whenever they deviated from Washington's conceptions of legality, order and stability. Surely he did so in order to protect American investments in the area, and thanks to the macroscopic differential of power between the U.S. and its smaller neighbors. But he also did it for broader cultural and strategic reasons. Deviance from American order raised the specter of a potential regression of civilization in that Central American "backyard" that, as a gate to the great oceans, was actually the center of gravity, the very pivot of U.S. international power[23].

A new type of "civilizing" expansion soon began to burgeon in the same area and along the same routes where the "search for opportunity" spread its wings. The renowned protestant missionaries were foremost in trying to "save" Latin, Filipino or Chinese peasants (with the ensuing influence that they came to enjoy on the formulation of U.S. attitudes towards China). But they were soon followed by sprightly teams of doctors, nurses, educators, social workers, administrators, engineers and assorted experts. With bridges and canals, civic and hygienic education, field hospitals and libraries, they interpreted and built that "imperialism of righteousness"[24] which should be counted among the progenitors of the Marshall Plan and the Peace Corps.

Once the Spaniards had been expelled, it was precisely in this humanitarian and "civilizing" emphasis that a temporary solution was found to the ethical, constitutional and conceptual dilemmas raised by conquest. (Not an entirely accidental conquest, since McKinley had repeatedly proposed to purchase Cuba and, after war had been declared, he had urged Madrid to cede Puertorico, Guam and a harbor in the Philippines). The rationalist, Christian and pro-

gressive neo-empire could not countenance the anarchy potentially inherent in the self-government of pre-modern and "unfit" peoples: it could spell infinite practical problems for Washington and, above all, it would belie America's civilizing nature. Nor could a nation so eager to reassert its Anglo-Saxon identity contemplate the inclusion in its constitutional and cultural sphere of a racial (and religious) mixture perceived as dangerously volatile. In view of these restraints, the moral and historical duty to elevate the peoples just liberated from colonial oppression thus dictated the solution of tutelage. The liberated peoples were to be integrated in the great civilizing circuit of commerce and law, while at the same time carefully avoiding "the incorporation of a mongrel and semibarbarous population into our body politic"[25].

The limited sovereignty of Cuba on the basis of the Platt Amendment; the creation of the unincorporated territory of Puertorico (which integrated its population in the American economy and nation but not in its citizenship); the double invention of a Panamanian independence within which the U.S. had sovereignty on the Canal: there was no dearth of creative, juggling solutions to the tension between control and self-government. They were made possible by the distinction between New and Old World bequeathed by the Monroe Doctrine, which soothed American conscience by stretching the Constitution. In the hemisphere now freed from tyranny, the discipline administered by Washington became, in a recurrent family metaphor, an act of love rather than power. In paternal fashion, *Uncle Sam* was now governing and schooling groups of children, infant nations whose republican self-government was envisioned only after a prolonged process of education and maturation[26].

Analogous reasons were advanced by McKinley to explain the colonial annexation of the Philippines, which he had not initially contemplated. Those islands surely could not be left in Spanish hands, nor could they be transferred to the French or German competitors ("that would be bad business and discreditable"). And so "one night it came to me that there was nothing left to do but take them all, and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize them, and by God's grace do the very best by them as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died"[27].

In the Pacific, however, another logic was also operating: the logic of power and its credibility. It was not incompatible with the "civilizing" impulse, but quite less malleable and hardly escapable, as the U.S. would find out on several occasions during the 20th century. In the Far East - where the U.S. were about to enter world competition with the innovative Open Door notes - McKinley needed Manila harbor as a naval and trading post. The defense of Manila required full control of Luzon island, and this in turn called for securing the entire archipelago. It was thus posited that without annexation the U.S. could not eventually prevent the European powers from shutting the gates to China's commercial and symbolic riches.

Thus, the much more brutal and lengthy war against the Filipino insurgency inaugurated a century of American dilemmas *vis a vis* the tension between self-government and the imperatives of a world-power role interpreted not only as opportunity but as moral and historical destiny as well. Once more, it was Theodore Roosevelt who connected past and present (and, we could add today, part of the future). As vice-presidential candidate, in 1900 he campaigned against the Anti-imperialists by hitting them in their most vulnerable spot, their incongruence with the received wisdom on the nation's historical experience. If we were "morally bound to abandon the Philippines - Roosevelt said - we were also morally bound to abandon Arizona to the Apaches"[28].

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Today, if you want to explore the American public memory of the war, and browse the Internet in order to visit the sites on the 1898 centennial, you are overwhelmed - as is often the case on the Internet - by the sheer amount of material. In quantitative terms, military matters obviously outnumber any other topic or approach. The exhibits set up by the U.S. Navy and Army museums, or by the countless military buffs who inhabit the net, illustrate not only the war operations but the adventures and whereabouts of virtually every American unit, ship or group of people that were mobilized for combat or other war-related activities.

You would then find several sites that depict the war locations,

weapons, uniforms or assorted other objects that convey a sense of daily life at the time. Other sites profile the various participants, from volunteer groups to Red Cross nurses, or provide local history sketches of Tampa (the major point of concentration and embarkment) and other areas affected by mobilization. Several sites are also focused on the press in 1898, which can be portrayed from a historical or media-studies angle, but most often is simply reproduced with a sort of tongue-in-cheek folklore nostalgia. In most cases all these sites abound in images and are short on text, they exhibit rather than explain and tend to eschew any explicit judgement or evaluation. Lastly, a fair number of specialist scholars (usually from small universities or colleges) offer web pages with materials meant for their students' papers of social or cultural history on topics such as "The Birth of US Imperialism", "Effects of the Press on Spanish-American Relations", "Anti-Imperialism in the United States", or "Yellow Fever and the War"[29].

A detailed analysis of these sites would probably provide us with an interesting map of the centennial's representation - and interpretation - in umpteen fragments of American society and culture. But the truly striking finding is the scarcity of sites - and of related public events - that approach the war in all its complexity, that make use of the centennial in order to provide a synthesis and a historical interpretation, that openly engage in a debate with historical assessments of the war and its significance for the American nation and its identity.

Web sites of this type are rare, and in most cases are organized around methodological approaches and topical choices that line up all the usual suspects of contemporary cultural and social science studies in America: race, gender, ethnicity, mass-media. This might appear stereotypical, and perhaps raise some irked eyebrows, but it would be difficult to deny that such approaches are particularly topical, and relevant, to this case. It was a war revolving around the encounter, and the clash, of an Anglo-Saxon culture with "mongrel and semibarbarous" peoples, but in which the U.S. fielded an extraordinary proportion of African-Americans (about one third of the forces deployed in the campaign for Cuba). A war that was often considered, and explicitly portrayed by many of its advocates, as a regen-

erative test of the nation's endangered virility. A war that brought to the forefront the nexus between ethnicity and citizenship. A war that remains the archetypical case-study on the role of the press in fomenting national hysteria and precipitating war (perhaps only the recent case of the British war in the Falklands in 1982 comes close)[30].

If we see it in this light - or through the various sites dedicated to the culture of imperialism and anti-imperialism - the war certainly appears as a culmination, and a beginning. Not because it is represented as the starting point of the journey to U.S. international hegemony in the 20th century (this remains the least developed aspect of the centennial), but because it is used as a mirror to reflect the long-term transformations of American society. Race, gender or the culture of civilizational imperialism are here deployed as lenses that magnify the legacies of the 19th century, but most of all the features, cleavages and guidelines of the 20th century society then in the making. They are primarily tools of a microscopic focus on the dilemmas of U.S. society at the turn of the century.

What we are presented with is a microcosm of the interactions between the closing of the frontier and the impulses of the second industrial revolution, between progressive rationalism and jingoist mobilization, racial hierarchy and missionary christianity, manhood and pacifism, democracy and power. We are looking at a sort of *in vitro* experiment, in which the specificities of 19th century continental expansion enjoy a last battle-cry while they are being phased out and metamorphosed into the mass, modern, urban, Fordist features of 20th century America. It is the same approach that has recently come to prominence in comparative historical and cultural studies on the U.S. in the era of imperialism, as evidenced for instance in the collection of essays on *Cultures of United States Imperialism*[31].

This segmented representation of the war as a mirror and a crossroad has some of its roots in the rich, impressive, recent development of cultural studies and historical sociology, but it results in the bypassing, if not the neglect, of the specific historical issues implicated in that war. And the same can be said of the historical works on 1898 published for the centennial, as can be seen in the Library of Congress Catalog. (A search also tells us that the cycles of histori-

ographical activity seem largely disjointed from commemorative anniversaries: more titles on the 1898 war were published in 1969-71 or around 1990 than on the centennial).

A revealing and emblematic example can be drawn from the commercial presentation of one of the centennial's few historical monographs. (I should perhaps add that even coffeetable books or the popular history volumes on the matter are rather scarce). It is written by Kristin Hoganson and entitled *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. Its web page promo (and presumably its back-cover) declares that: "jingoist political leaders, distressed [...] by women's incursions into electoral politics, embraced war as an opportunity to promote a political vision in which soldiers were venerated as model citizens and women remained on the fringes of political life"[32].

Anyone with a decent historical knowledge of the period could hardly dispute such a statement (the bolder assessment of Hoganson's title, that gender politics *provoked* the war, is surely more debatable). The problem is that much the same could be argued - albeit without the support of Theodore Roosevelt's vivid rhetoric - about *every* American war in this century (with the possible exception of the Gulf War) and perhaps of war in general. Is there a modern military conflict that does not also include a national project for, or at least an impulse towards, a remasculinization of society and its cultural values? Similarly, it is worth remembering that not only the Spanish-American war, but *every* American war in this century (not to mention the more obvious case of the Civil War) engendered crucial cultural and institutional alterations of the shifting boundary between segregation and integration for African-Americans.[33]

Visions and representations of the 1898 war as a mirror or screen rather than a transforming event - with the ensuing reluctance to make an explicit historical assessment, whether positive or negative - dominate also the more general and comprehensive sites of the centennial commemoration, which usually give similar preeminence to the issues of race and ethnicity and to the role of the mass-media. The New York Public Library exhibit *"A War in Perspective"* devotes the three most important of its five sections to

"Public appeal", "Popular participation" and *"Public memories"*[34]. Here we find photographs, prints, letters, maps, memoirs and other documents (with brief captions) on soldiers and volunteers, on the African-Americans in the military and on public opinion in Spain, on the postwar debate between expansionists and anti-imperialists, on the press's chauvinist agitation and the public memorials later erected throughout the country. The first section, entitled *"Antecedents 1895-1898*", diligently sums up the pre-war events in Cuba, Puertorico, the Philippines and Spain; it describes the importance of the pro-Cuban appeals in the U.S. and then stops abruptly with the explosion on the *Maine,* defined as "a most influential incident in precipitating the war". You then turn to the final section, *"Historical perspective",* but here too your questions about the war's causes, significance and repercussions remain unanswered. Because this section merely informs the reader that interpretations of the war have changed over the years! Commendable as it is, relativism in this case shows its dullest face.

Taken as whole, in short, the New York Public Library exhibit embraces every side, gives visibility to every actor's motivations, is scrupulously free of any patriotic rhetoric and admirably multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. The only aspect that is left out is the very focus of the historian's interest: the reasons and motivations of the U.S. choice to go to war. Symptomatically, the McKinley administration and the President himself are hardly visible. Decisions and decision-makers are the sole, conspicuous, crucial absence.

Even though smaller and intended primarily as documentation for schools and educators, the web exhibit prepared by the Library of Congress Hispanic Division, *"The World of 1898*: *the Spanish-American War",* is not very different in its thematic choices. It is primarily a multi-ethnic overview of the countries and populations involved in the war[35]. However, the various materials offered by the Library of Congress exhibit are accompanied by a brief essay - explicative rather than overtly interpretative - by historian David Trask[36].

U.S. military intervention is here defined as "the culminating event" of the Cuban and Philippines crises, but the reader is hard put to find its motivations. Trask merely tells us that after the *Maine* ex-

plosion "the reluctant McKinley was then forced to demand that Spain grant independence to Cuba". Madrid's reasons for rejecting such a request are spelled out with clarity, while U.S. motivations disappear between the lines of a chronicle that registers the war declaration and then swiftly proceeds to narrate the main military operations, which take up most of the short essay. An attentive reader would perhaps notice the assertion - almost casually inserted within the convolutions of a long narrative sentence - that the U.S. demanded a harbor in the Philippines. But no other information is given to clear the interpretative mist surrounding a war that appears to pour down upon a reluctant McKinley as ineluctably as a tropical storm. In his closing paragraphs, Trask attributes the annexation of the Philippines to the pressure of an expansionist public opinion, which McKinley merely rationalized by invoking "the duty of the nation and its destiny". The author briefly mentions the anti-imperialist criticism of the limitations imposed on Cuban sovereignty and then reassuringly concludes that "eventually, the US rejected the expansion of 1898"[37]. And this is all the explanation we get.

I am not surprised by the implicit intepretation of the war as an unplanned escalation of a complex crisis, nor by the view of expansionism as the eruption "of the burgeoning national development of the late nineteenth century" rather than a conscious strategy[38]. These theses might be controversial but are a solid, widespread and documented part of the historiographical traditions[39]. What is striking is that they remain concealed between the lines, forced into a low profile, timidly hinted at rather than spelled out. That the American war is not celebrated might be understandable, but why should it not be at least highlighted and analyzed? In the effort neither to criticize nor uphold it, it ends up being disregarded. As a major event, a power clash, and a historic turning point it just evaporates, diluted as it is in the multifaceted portrait of the complex interaction of races and cultures then taking place on the periphery of the Spanish empire.

This is the reason for my bewilderment. The more you "navigate" in this centennial the louder you peevishly ponder a question: "what kind of anniversary is this" ? A very un-American one - I am tempted to reply - in view of the fact that the conflict is portrayed as devoid of heroes or villains, of noble causes or fearsome menaces,

of full-blown martyrs or oppressors. Its language might obviously be more emotional and participatory in the umpteen individual sites focused on a specific feature, particularly those devoted to some military performance or to the anti-imperialist criticism[40]. In general, however, you find few traces of a profound identification, and they are usually expressed in unassuming tones, while emphatic rhetoric is hard to find.

The overall feeling is still the one dictated by the more inclusive and visible sites that I commented upon: the symptomatic dispersal in the socio-cultural multi-ethnic representation; the careful avoidance of stark committed assessments; the dilution of controversial issues in the vaguely nostalgic portrait of a remote time. Temporal distance surely contributes to this attitude, which incorporates 1898 into a growing collection of moments of American history that have been revisited and reorganized in the numerous historical museums set up in the last couple of decades. Here too the prevailing framework is an inclusive and pluralist one that derives from a cultural approach shaped by social, ethnic and material history. In the case of 1898 there is obviously no compelling contemporary reason for moral claims. No one urgently needs to reclaim that American war as noble and just. There is no lively lobby keen on its unblemished celebration, as was the case, four years ago, with the Smithsonian exhibit on Hiroshima and the *Enola Gay*[41].

Distance might also matter in other ways that come to mind when you notice the even deeper neglect or reluctance by the historical profession and intellectual commentators in general. I mentioned the relative scarcity of new books published on the centennial. Perhaps even more strikingly, no major historical journal has paid any attention to the war of 1898, and their silence is truly resounding. The *American Historical Review,* the *Journal of American History,* and even *Diplomatic History* have simply ignored the anniversary. In 1998 they did not publish a single item specifically related to the war of 1898. Were they made cautious by the bitter polemics on the anniversary of Hiroshima, which resulted in a painful defeat for the historical profession? Are they reluctant to explore an issue - America as an imperial power - that cannot avoid being publicly controversial and that has been unremittingly investigated by the historical

profession over the last thirty years? Have they prudently decided to postpone their pronouncements until after the centennial celebrations, with the reviews that the recently published books will elicit ? I cannot give positive answers to these questions, but I suspect that they hint at some of the reasons of the historians' silence[42].

In the *New York Review of Books* of April 23, 1998 - perhaps the only relevant exception - the historian of Cuba Hugh Thomas published an essay specifically, and solely, focused on the *Maine* incident[43]. He deftly exposes and dismantles the mechanisms of the public hysteria that followed the explosion. Its unfounded and contrived nature is made clear by the results of subsequent investigations, which pronounced the explosion an accident. A clarification that might appear redundant but is still necessary: the main popular narrative history published for the centennial (naval historian Ivan Musicant's *Empire by Default*) manages to ignore those investigations altogether, including the conclusive one made by the U.S. Navy itself in the 1970s[44].

But can we imagine any other major American war anniversary confined only to the interaction between the media and public opinion? Please let me indulge in some paradoxical rhetorical questions. Could the American participation in World War I ever be remembered simply by discussing the consequences of the sinking of the *Lusitania,* or of the Zimmerman telegram? Can we conceive of a Vietnam anniversary that, even seventy years from now, dwell only on the public impact of the Tonkin Gulf accident?

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I would thus venture into some conclusive remarks. Firstly about the public dimension. This soft-spoken anniversary - so pleasantly devoid of raucous polemics and high-minded rhetoric, so diversified in its multi-cultural pluralism as to appear disjointed and decentered - tells us something about America's current perception of its relationship with the outer world. It is a country that might be uncertain but evidently is neither lacerated (as it was one hundred years ago) nor deeply anxious about it (as in mid-century). At the

end of this century, the themes and conflicts of 1898 do not appear acrimoniously controversial; they do not rend the nation and its culture apart; they do not raise the specter of current controversies and therefore are not used as clubs for contemporary conflicts. The clashes and divisions of 1898 are history rather than a vivid and painful memory.

These features of the centennial are even more symptomatic of the methods, interests, and acquisitions - as well as the idiosyncratic fads - of the current scholarly and intellectual debate. No one should be surprised by the prevalence of social and cultural history canons and languages, and therefore of the analytical angles that these approaches have privileged. The issues of race, gender and ethnicity are not only crucial for the nation's overall history, they are especially cogent and congruous in the specific context of 1898. Besides, they incorporate a most immediate and relevant connection with the methods and stakes of today's cultural conflicts. In recent years historiographical revisionism has moved so far into the realm of cultural studies that I would have been rather surprised if the centennial had not adopted its language and codes.

Nonetheless, this marginalization of the political dimension, this radical decentering of the decision-making moments and actors in favor of the larger premises and contexts have a cumulative effect that is well evidenced by this centennial's peculiar profile. Events and transformations that, like the war of 1898, are universally seen as crucial, emblematic turning points, end up surrounded by an aura of inevitability which communicates a sense of immutable predetermination. In the absence of any integration with some kind of political history, we just end up with a cultural construct that - no matter how inspired it is by a criticism of power - provides an implicit but substantive representation of power relationships as essentially preordained. If we analyze the components of historical conflicts but not their dynamics, power inevitably becomes an immanent category disconnected from historical transformations.

Finally, the centennial's profile is also revealing of a few features and legacies of that distant war of 1898. "Splendid" as it might temporarily have appeared to its excited protagonists, that war became an event that can perhaps be forgiven but not celebrated. Even

its defenders have to face up to its dark sides, to those "aberrations" from its purportedly progressive goals. A war, in short, that cannot appear entirely just even within the canon of an idealized nationalism. But it is also a war that defies an all-round damning rejection. The anti-imperialists themselves often distinguished between the desire to facilitate Cuban independence and the imperial propensity to expand and subjugate, particularly in the Philippines.

This contamination, this inextricable blending of positive and negative values in the American consideration of the war could obviously be explained away by taking refuge in the contrasting categories of interests and ideals. Good and evil, heroes and villains would then be opportunely distinguished by means of a comforting set of principles. But here even more than in other cases this would be a truly Manichean simplification.

The problem is that that war comprises many different, contrasting and often paradoxical aspects of the historical transformation of the American nation and its peculiar way of being in the world. It is the last war to be inspired by the culture of "civilizing" expansionism embodied in the discourse of Manifest Destiny[45]. But it is also the first one to transcend the continent's physical and symbolic boundaries, projecting American expansion upon peoples, territories and sovereignties unmistakably perceived as other's or other. It is the first American war - after the the struggle for independence completed in 1812 - in which Washington brandishes its own founding principle of anti-colonialism against a colonial power. But it is also - antithetically - the only one concluded with the direct transfer of colonial possessions to the United States.

Among the American wars it is the first one of multi-continental scope and range, thus anticipating those that will follow in the 20th century and prefiguring the U.S. course to a power of global extent. But it is also the last one to be located and conceptually resolved within a regional dimension. Because it is limited - so to speak - to expelling an "alien" power from an area that, even though a hub between the two oceans and their markets, is nonetheless viewed as the location of a project for security, prosperity and self-realization that concerns only the American nation and no other. In other words, it is the last American war that is not aimed at building

(or preserving) a world-wide system of collective security and prosperity designed by the U.S. and guaranteed by its power. It is the last occasion on which the nation's own security and prosperity are conceived not in direct association with its power to reorder the entire world system.

Naturally, we must consider this war, especially on its centennial, as the first performance of the U.S. as a great power. In this light, its peculiarity does not reside in the strident contrast between anti-colonial rhetoric and neo-imperial assertion. Rather more significantly, this first decisive step in the world contest does not yet address, let alone resolve, the issue that will thereafter characterize America's world role: the nexus between nation and interdependence, between unilateral power and internationalism, between American mission and world system.

As historians we are bound to explore the roots of that event, its inherent continuities, and its symptomatic exemplification of a series of culminations in American history: from the search for opportunities to civilizational imperialism, from gender politics to the second industrial revolution, from the anxieties about ethno-cultural fragmentation to the persistence of an anti-imperial culture. But we cannot be truly surprised by a centennial whose memory appears segmented and multi-focused, whose controversies are murmured rather than shouted, whose actors feel free to shed light on whatever element they care most deeply about, be it aberration or culmination.

If you want to trace a substantive and recognizable continuity with the course to the 20th century American "empire" - however you judge its achievements, its consequences and its hegemonic features - the 1898 war is simply not sufficient, because it still lacks that ambivalent perception of modern interdependence as a mixture of danger and opportunity, a context for the actuation of the American mission but also a potential vehicle for its dreaded demise and disgregation. In 1898 both the meaning of the mission and the legitimacy of its scope were radically controversial. But no one, yet, perceived it as inherently threatened by the precarious vulnerability of the world fabric in which it should be actuated. Without the collapse of the world order (which was previously beyond the imaginary

sphere of the American mission), without the despondent Wilsonian reflection on the danger that liberal modernity might be subverted by anarchy or autocratic militarism, the expansionary thrust of 1898 cannot be fully connected to the subsequent rise to global predominance.

The use of American power to proclaim Cuba's "independence", to enter the Asian markets, to subjugate the Filipino insurgency (as well as to assert some traits of a contested national identity) surely anticipates later developments. But it is still quite a different game from the subsequent global display of American power and culture "to make the world safe for democracy". The world of American pre-eminence in which we live today, a century from the Spanish-American war, could not even be imagined without that further crucial step that pushed America well beyond 1898[46].

1 See Bruce Jentleson and Thomas Paterson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of United States Foreign Relations*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, vol. IV, pp. 110-114.

2 Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the US*, New York, Holt, 1936, p.468.

3 See Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire. An Interpretation of American Expansionism 1860-1898,* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1963; Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire 1893-1901,* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967; Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1902* , New York-London, Monthly Review Press, 1972.

4 Woodrow Wilson, "The Ideals of America", in *Atlantic Monthly.* December 1902, quoted in Tony Smith, *America's Mission,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 38.

5 See the recent discussion in Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny. American Expansionism and the Empire of Right,* New York, Hill & Wang, 1995, chap. 1. For a broader analysis of U.S. foreign policy culture see Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987.

6 Albert Beveridge, *The Meaning of Time and Other Speeches* (1908), quoted in A. Stephanson, cit., pp. 98-99.

7 Albert Beveridge, *Salute to Imperialism* (1900), quoted in Thomas G. Paterson, *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy,* Lexington, Heath, 1989 , vol. I, p. 390.

8 Theodore Roosevelt, *The President's Annual Message to Congress,* 6 December 1904.

9 Henry Cabot Lodge quoted in A: Stephanson, cit., p. 97.

10 See Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power,* New York, Harper, 1897.

11 *The American Anti-Imperialist League Program* (17 October 1899), quoted in Thomas G. Paterson, *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy,* Lexington, Heath, 1989, vol. I, pp. 387-88. On the history and culture of the Anti-Imperialists see Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire. The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900,* New York, McGraw-Hill, 1968.

12 William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American diplomacy,* Cleveland, World Publishers, 1959.

13 Richard Hofstadter, *Manifest Destiny and the Philippines,* in Daniel Aaron, ed., *America in Crisis,* New York, 1952, pp. 173-200; Julius Pratt, *The Expansionists of 1898,* Gloucester, P. Smith, 1959 [1936]; Ernst May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence ofAmerica as a Great Power,* New York, Harcourt & Brace, 1961, and *American Imperialism. A Speculative Essay,* New York, Athenaeum, 1968.

14 See *The Works of William H. Seward,* editor George E. Baker, 5 vols. ,Boston, 1853-1883.

15 A. Stephanson, cit., p. 67.

16 Quoted in Hugh Thomas, "Remember the Maine?", in *New York Review of Books,* 23 April 1998.

17 See John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895-1898,* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

18 The actual cost of military operations was $ 400 million, but the total bill for veterans' pensions and benefits ran up to $ 6 billion, an astounding amount even by American standards. In the other wars waged by the U.S. - including the most recent and expensive ones - the cost of pensions could reach up to three times the cost of operations, while for the 1898 war it was fifteen times as large! (see *Historical Statistics of the U.S.,* Washington, GPO, 1976, series Y849, p. 1140). This abnormal figure resulted from the Republicans' decision to grant extraordinarily generous pension benefits in order to win electoral consent. I am grateful to Richard Jensen for his valuable suggestions and information on this matter.

19 See Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913,* vol. 2 of *the Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations,* Warren I.Cohen ed., New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

20 See D. Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean,* Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment. American Economic Expansion in the Hemisphere, 1865-1900* , Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1998.

21 Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913,* cit.

22 Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government,* New York, 1908; see also Walter Lafeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913,* cit. and Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion 1890-1945,* New York, Hill & Wang, 1982.

23 See Thomas D. Schoonover, *The United States in Central America, 1860-1911,* Durham, Duke University Press, 1991.

24 Julius Pratt, *The Expansionists of 1898,* cit.

25 These are the words of a Senator from South Carolina in the Congressional debate of January 13, 1899, on the Philippines, as quoted in Walter LaFeber, *The American Age,* New York, Norton, 1989, p. 211.

26 See the discussion by Elisabeth Cobb, "Why They Think Like Gringoes: The Discourse of US-Latin American Relations", a review essay in *Diplomatic History,* XXI, 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 307-316.

27 McKinley's own account is quoted in W. LaFeber, *The American Age,* cit., p.200.

28 Theodore Roosevelt, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* edited by Elting E. Morison *et al.,* 8 vols., Cambridge, 1951-1954, vol. II, pp. 1404-1405.

29 This summary overview does not pretend to be precise or exhaustive. I derived it from a subject search on some of the main search engines on the Internet (Yahoo and Altavista).

30 See for instance *Effects of the Press on Spanish-American Relations in 1898,* by John Baker (http://www.humboldt.edu/-jcb10/spanwar.htmD.

31 Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (editors), *Cultures of United States Imperialism)* Durham, Duke University Press, 1993.

32 Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998. Its Web page is: (http://aaup.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/hfs.cgi/99/Yale/hogans1.ctl),

33 See Alexander DeConde, *Ethnicity, Race and American Foreign Policy: A History,* Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1992; Michael Sherry, *In The Shadow of War. The United States since the 1930s,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995.

34 The New York Public Library, *A War in Perspective, 1898-1998. Public Appeals, Memory, and the Spanish-American Conflict,* http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/epo/spanexhib/index.htm). The NYPL exhibit was part of a series of "exhibitions and programs", mostly of and about art, organized in New York City with the Spanish Consulate: "1898-1998: A War Becomes History".

35 Library of Congress - Hispanic Division, *The World of 1898*: *The Spanish-American War* (http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/index.html).

36 David Trask, *The Spanish American War* (http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/trask.html),

37 Ibid., p. 1 and p. 5.

38 Ibid., p. 5.

39 For analytical overviews of the historiography on the war see Jerald Combs, *American Diplomatic History. Two Centuries of Changing Interpretations,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983 ; and Joseph A. Fry, *Imperialism, American Style, 1890-1916,* in Gordon Martel (ed.), *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993,* London, Routledge, 1994.

40 See for instance Chris Conway, *The Birth of Imperialism at the Turn of the*

Century (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/9852/usimp.htm); and Rutgers. The State University of New Jersey. Latin American Studies Program, *Changing Empires. Reflections at the Centennial of The Spanish-American War* (http://spanport.rutgers.edu/lecturer.htm).

41 See the discussion in "History and the Public: What Can We Handle? A Round Table about History after the *Enola Gay* Controversy", in *Journal ofAmerican History,* vol. 83, no. 3 (December 1995), pp. 1029-1144.

42 In reply to my queries, the editors of the three journals explained that their editorial policies usually eschew all anniversaries. Thus, they cannot be accused of deliberately neglecting this one. (Michael Grossberg, editor of the *American Historical Review,* to the A., 30 November 1998: the AHA is going to publish an article on Cuba and the USA in its April 1999 issue). David Thelen, editor of the *Journal of American History,* added that he also noticed the US historians' lack of attention to the 1898 centennial (letter to the A., 30 November 1998), and Michael Hogan, editor of *Diplomatic History,* broadly concurred with this assessment (letter to the A., 1 December 1998).

43 Hugh Thomas, *Remember the Maine?,* cit.

44 Ivan Musicant, *Empire by Default. The Spanish-American War and the Dawn of the American Century,* New York, Holt 1998.

45 On this see the work by A. Stephanson, cit., and the two classical studies by Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History,* New York, Vintage Press, 1963; and Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny,* Chicago, Quadrangle, 1963-1965.

46 On the concept of interdependence and the innovative character of Wilsonian internationalism two recent, stimulating contributions are Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, and Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1992. I discussed the elements of continuity in 20th century US foreign policy in Federico Romero, *L'impero americano,* Firenze, Giunti, 1996.