

**An African American Soldier in the Philippine Revolution:
An Homage to David Fagen**

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African American soldiers prior to being shipped to the Philippines, 1900

*Let him never dream that his bullet's scream went wide of its island mark,
Home to the heart of his darling land where she stumbled and sinned in the dark.*

– William Vaughn Moody, “On A Soldier
Fallen in the Philippines” (1901)

*The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the
relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in American
and the islands of the sea.*

– W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

God damn the U.S. for its vile conduct in the Philippine Isles.

– William James, *Anti-Imperialist League Records* (1899)

Unless news of a disaster grabs the headlines – the eruption of a volcano that drove the U.S. military forces from Clark and Subic bases two decades ago, or of American missionaries kidnapped by the Muslim separatists, the Abu Sayyaf (labeled a terrorist group by the U.S. State Department in 2003) – the Philippines scarcely figures in the U.S. public consciousness. Not even as a tourist destination, or as the source of mail order brides and domestic help. Some mistake the Philippines as islands in the Caribbean, or somewhere near Hawaii or Tahiti; others wondered then if “them Philippians were the folks St. Paul wrote the epistle to.”

September 11, 2001 changed this somewhat. When U.S. occupation troops in Iraq continued to suffer casualties every day after the war officially ended, pundits began to supply capsule histories comparing their situation with those of troops in the Philippines during the Filipino-American War (1899-1902). A *New York Times* op-ed summed up the lesson in its title, “In 1901 Philippines, Peace Cost More Lives Than Were Lost in War” (2 July 2003, B1)). An article in the *Los Angeles Times* contrasted the simplicity of McKinley’s “easy” goal of annexation with George W. Bush’s ambition to “create a new working democracy as soon as possible” (20 July 2003, M2). Immediately after the proclaimed defeat of the Taliban and the rout of Osama bin Laden’s forces in Afghanistan, the Philippines became the second front in the U.S.-led war on terrorism, with hundreds of U.S. “Special Forces” re-invading the former colony.

Necrological Rites

Few Americans know about the Spanish-American War of 1898 – school textbooks allow only a few paragraphs for this “splendid little war.” After Spain’s surrender in the Treaty of Paris, December 1898, the U.S. Empire began with the military rule over Cuba, and annexation of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam and later on, Hawaii and parts of Samoa. Fewer know about the Filipino-American War, which began in February 1899 and lasted until 1913, with the Filipino Muslims sustaining the heaviest casualties in publicized massacres. This chapter in U.S. history is only now beginning to merit some attention in the wake of the adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan (Boot 2002; Kaplan 2003).

My story of African American soldiers in the Philippine revolution – U.S. officials called it “an insurrection” – might begin with President William McKinley. While there was public support for the war against Spain, pitched as a crusade to liberate the Cubans from Spanish tyranny, there was fierce debate over acquiring the Philippine Islands. This expansionist zeal of the “yellow journalists,” commercial houses, and militarists was opposed by an organized nation-wide group called the Anti-Imperialist League. It counted Andrew Carnegie, former president Grover Cleveland, George Boutwell, co-founder of the Republican Party; and numerous personalities such as Mark Twain, William James, William Dean Howells, Jane Addams, George Santayana, and others. Besieged by such a crowd, McKinley confessed to a visiting delegation of Methodist church leaders how he sought the light of “Almighty God” to advise him what to do with the Philippines, and God told him that, among other things, “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace to do the very best we could by them . . . and then I went to sleep, and slept soundly” (quoted in Schirmer and Shalom, 1987, 22-23). It was this sound sleep and McKinley’s policy of “Benevolent Assimilation” that led to U.S. casualties of 4, 234 soldiers killed, about 3,000 wounded, and anywhere from 250,000 to 1.4 million “new-caught sullen peoples” of the islands forever silenced.

With the 1898 Treaty of Paris, Spain agreed to cede – that is, sell – the Philippines to the United States for \$20 million, even though it had already lost control of the islands except for its Manila garrison. But the Filipinos, as William Blum puts it, “who had already proclaimed their own independent republic, did not take kindly to being treated like a plot of uninhabited real estate. Accordingly, an American force numbering initially 50,000 [126,500, all in all] proceeded to instill in the population a proper appreciation of their status,” gaining for the U.S. its “longest-lasting and most conspicuous colony” (2004, 39). Admiral Dewey himself, the hero of the battle of Manila Bay, reflected on how the Peace Conference “scarcely comprehended that a rebellion was included with the purchase.” Henry Adams wrote Theodore Roosevelt to express his alarm that the U.S. was ready “to plunge into an inevitable war to conquer the Philippines, contrary to every professor or so-called principle in our lives and history. I turn green in bed at midnight if I think of the horror of a year’s warfare in the Philippines

where . . . we must slaughter a million or two of foolish Malays in order to give them the comforts of flannel petticoats and electric railways” (Ocampo 1998, 249).

While postmodern scholars today expound on the need then of Americans to assert manhood, moral superiority, and so on, material interests were indubitably paramount in the turn-of-the-century discourse on progress and civilization. U.S. policy decisions and consequent practices were framed in a “regime of truth” based on the now well-known politics of colonial representation. Roxanne Lynn Doty (1996) describes this discursive economy that has since framed North-South relations, in Foucaultian terms, as the denial of the transcendental international signifier, sovereignty, to Filipinos and other newly conquered indigenes; that is, the denial of the capacity to exercise agency. Force is justified because the annexed or colonized are unruly, undisciplined, rebellious, disposed to resist the laws established by the civilizing missionaries. What stood out in the cry for colonial possession is the need for a naval port and springboard for penetrating the China market and demonstrating American power in the Asia/Pacific region. This ideological legitimacy for the occupation was voiced by Senator Alfred Beveridge, among others. After rehearsing the profits to be gained from trade and natural resources, he repeated a familiar refrain from past conquests of the Native Americans, the Mexicans, and other indigenes:

They [natives of the Philippines] are a barbarous race, modified by three centuries of contact with a decadent race. The Filipino is the South Sea Malay, put through a process of three hundred years of superstition in religion, dishonesty in dealing, disorder in habits of industry, and cruelty, caprice, and corruption in government. It is barely possible that 1,000 men in all the archipelago are capable of self-government in the Anglo-Saxon sense (Schirmer and Shalom 1987, 25)

This was echoed by General Arthur McArthur who thought the natives needed “bayonet treatment for at least a decade,” while Theodore Roosevelt felt that the Filipinos needed a good beating so they could become “good Injuns” (cited in Ignacio 2004). The “barbarous” natives, however, resisted for a time longer than anticipated, offering lessons that still have to be learned, even after Korea and Vietnam, and the quagmires in Iraq and

Afghanistan. Despite neoconservative revisionists that the U.S. “savage war of peace” in the Philippines was humane, humanitarian, and honorable under the circumstances, U.S. intervention to annex the Philippines continues to haunt the conscience of some humanists and historians of international relations.

Counting the Victims

Current controversy among scholars surrounds the tally of Filipino victims of U.S. pacification. Journalist Bernard Fall cited the killing three million Filipinos in “the bloodiest colonial war (in proportion to population) ever fought by a white power in Asia,” comparable to the carnage in Vietnam. Describing it as “among the cruelest conflicts in the annals of Western imperialism,” Stanley Karnow, author of the award-winning *In Our Image*, counts 200,000 civilians and 20,000 soldiers (1989, 194), while others give 600,000. Filipina historian Luzviminda Francisco arrives at the figure of 1.4 million Filipinos sacrificed for Uplift and Christianization – in a country ruled by Christian Spain for three hundred years. While Kipling at the outbreak of the war urged the U.S. to “take up the White Man’s burden” and tame the “new-caught sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child,” Mark Twain wrote some of his fiery pieces denouncing “Benevolent Assimilation” as the “new name of the musket” and acidly harped on the “collateral damage” of the U.S. “civilizing mission”: “Thirty thousand [U.S. soldiers] killed a million [Filipinos]. It seems a pity that the historians let that get out; it is really a most embarrassing circumstance” (1992, 62). Recently Gore Vidal stirred up the hornet’s nest when he wrote in the *New York Review of Books*:

Between the years 1899 and 1913 the United States of America wrote the darkest pages of its history. The invasion of the Philippines, for no other reason than acquiring imperial possessions, prompted a fierce reaction of the Filipino people . . . 400,000 Filipino “insurrectos” died under the American fire and one million Filipino civilians died because of the hardship, mass killings and scorched earth tactics carried out by the Americans. In total the American war against a peaceful people who fairly ignored the existence of the Americans until their arrival wiped out 1/6 of the population of the country. . . . Our policy in the

Philippines was genocide. We were not there to liberate or even defend a ‘liberty-loving’ people, we were there to acquire those rich islands and if we had to kill the entire population we would have done so. Just as we had killed the Indians in the century before (some of our best troops in the Philippines were former Indian fighters) and as we would kill Southeast Asians later in this century (1981).

In Search of the Dissenter

Whatever the exact figures of the dead, this landscape or theater of war was surely surveyed and closely inspected by one corporal David Fagen, an African American soldier, after he landed in June 1899. The Filipino revolutionary army was beleaguered and on the defensive, having suffered several defeats in Manila, Caloocan and Malolos, and the U.S. was on the way to winning the war. It was only a matter of time that superior force would reign supreme.

Fagen was one among fifteen to thirty deserters from four regiments of “Buffalo Soldiers” – the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the 23rd and 24th Infantry – dispatched to the Philippines in July and August 1899. Seven thousand African Americans were involved in the war. After fighting the Native Americans as “Buffalo Soldiers,” these four regiments were mobilized for the Spanish-American War. As the New York State Military Museum reminds us, the use of black soldiers by the War Department conformed to the belief that black soldiers were “naturally adapted to survive the tropical climate.” In fact, the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th U.S. Volunteer Infantry were later formed in response to the government need for soldiers “immune to tropical diseases.” Incidentally, it was members of the 10th Cavalry that used its “Indian fighting skills” to save Theodore Roosevelt and his “Rough Riders” from certain extermination. But they never received recognition equal to Roosevelt’s. When the Philippine resistance proved tougher than the officials estimated, the War Department recruited two regiments of black volunteers, the Forty-Eight and Forty-Ninth Infantry and sent them to the Philippines in early 1900 to stay up to the official end of the war.

We know the names of seven of about twenty-nine African Americans who deserted – their names have been expurgated from ordinary historical accounts.

Deserters from the military are never mentioned in official histories, much less in approved textbooks and government documentaries. Only Fagen of Company I of the 24th Infantry seems to have survived in civic memory because he joined the revolutionary army of General Emilio Aguinaldo, the beleaguered president of the first Philippine Republic. Fagen's courage and skill as a guerilla leader earned him the trust of his Filipino comrades. As captain of his unit, Fagen led skirmishes against the pursuing troops of General Funston, who offered a \$600 reward for his head. A report of his "supposed killing" failed to convince even the U.S. Army, so Fagen continues to live on, at last arriving at his niche in the *American National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Before describing the circumstances surrounding Fagen's defection, I should state at the outset that my interest is not so much in the personal life and biographical circumstances of Fagen as in his position as an indexical sign, a pedagogical signifier (if you like) of intersubjective or interethnic relations. It would of course be useful to have complete biographical details about Fagen and his other companions, and a full disclosure of all government documents on all the incidents of the war in which the soldiers participated. My interest, however, is in the political, ethical, and philosophical – dare one use the term "ideological" – issues. What I am concerned with in this historic event in which Fagen and seven other African American soldiers were involved is its potential as an allegorical trope, an exemplary figure (for some, an exemplum), of the politics of self-determination for enslaved and subjugated communities.

From the conventional optic, Fagen's decision to join the Philippine anti-colonial revolution was a treasonous act, a violation of his oath of loyalty to the U.S. military and government. But given the situation of African Americans at that time in U.S. post-reconstruction history, in the context of what some describe as an apartheid caste-system sanctioned by the 1896 Plessy versus Ferguson judgment and other laws, one might ask: Is Fagen's status that of a full citizen whose word to uphold the authority of the state is uncompromised? Is Fagen's decision to fight the invasion (under Filipino leadership) simply that of a soldier citizen, or could it not be read as an allegory of the black nation's struggle for self-determination? If the United States' war against the Philippine republic that had virtually wrested power from colonial Spain was a war of colonial conquest,

within this framework, can we not regard Fagen's refusal to be part of the State's violence a quintessential act of political dissent and his joining the enemy as an act of rebellion against the racial State?

Given the domination of white-racial supremacy, Fagen's act may be taken as a complete repudiation of that juridical-political order. His refusal to surrender confirms his choice as a moral and political act of self-determination – both on a personal and collective dimension. To commit oneself to join a revolutionary movement resisting a colonial power and its history of slavery and racialized subjugation of African Americans is to reaffirm the right of collective self-determination. It is to reaffirm a long durable tradition of revolt against a slave-system. Further, in contradistinction to the maroon revolts of the past which sought to restore a pre-capitalist or pre-feudal order in an isolated place, Fagen's decision to join the Filipino anti-colonial struggle – a struggle comparable to Haiti's revolution against the French, with the qualification that the U.S. in 1899 was a fully industrialized capitalist power – is to reaffirm a new level of dissent which, at the threshold of the era of finance-capital and wars for the division of the world into colonies and imperial metropolises, acquires a global transnational resonance. This concrete universality of Fagen's individual revolt taken as a symbolic act at the beginning of the century of revolutions and intercontinental wars is what I would like to explore further in connection with a quite distinct strain in African American political thought, dating back to Frederick Douglass and earlier reflections on slave revolts up to W.E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, C.L. R. James, Harry Haywood, Harold Cruse, Nelson Peery, and others. This is a modest exercise in a transformative critique of cosmopolitan, possessive individualist – shall we say, neoliberal – reason.

Historical Panorama

Before focusing on the figure of Fagen as an African American rebel-soldier, it might be useful to paint him against the historical landscape of the time. The war against the Spanish Empire was quite brief – indeed, “a splendid little war,” in John Hay's terms. After Theodore Roosevelt's “fabled” storming of San Juan Hill and the surrender of the Spanish forces in Santiago, Cuba, followed by the passage of the Teller amendment, that

episode might have concluded with the Treaty of Paris in December 1898. But strong opposition to colonial annexation of the Philippines delayed its Senate ratification.

Why would the United States want to acquire a colony? The major reason is the need of the ascendant commercial, industrial and military interests to penetrate the markets and natural resources of Asia. The initial desire (as expressed by Senator Beveridge, among others) was for a gateway to China. The Philippines offered a strategic location for a naval base, a military launching-pad, in addition to the immense value of its raw materials, above all mineral deposits. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge emphasized the potential market of the Philippines' ten million inhabitants, thus carrying out McKinley's adherence to "the great American doctrine of protection to American industries." President McKinley – whose wife was obsessed in converting the pagan "Igorottes" – pushed for colonization under the slogan of "Benevolent Assimilation" of the colonized subjects under U.S. sovereignty (for a summary of the historical context, see Constantino 1970, 67-91).

By the time Commodore George Dewey destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay in May 1898, the Filipino revolutionary forces under General Emilio Aguinaldo had practically liberated the whole country and was besieging the Spanish garrison in the Walled City of Manila. Dewey held Aguinaldo at bay with false promises of U.S. support. The Spaniards, after a mock battle already agreed upon, decided to surrender to General Merritt on August 13. Earlier, on June 12, General Aguinaldo formally proclaimed the independence of the Philippines from Spain; and on June 23, a revolutionary government was formed with provisions for administration of the entire country. Thus before the arrival of the first U.S. expeditionary troops on June 30, there was already a functioning Philippine government operating nationally and locally, which commanded the loyalty of the people. But despite Aguinaldo's desire to negotiate some kind of compromise with the U.S., McKinley and his military officials proceeded to build up the occupation forces until fighting broke out on February 4, six months after the Spanish surrender, and a few weeks after the inauguration of the Philippine Republic on January 23, 1899.

From June 29, 1898, McKinley's policy sought to enforce "the absolute domain of military authority" on people who had just won their freedom with arms. He knew

that Aguinaldo and his followers, the bulk of which came from the landless peasantry and impoverished middle strata, would never surrender their newly won independence. Fifty to seventy troops were needed to pacify and “benevolently” assimilate the islands. The Filipinos resisted in frontal battles from February to March, 1899. Meanwhile, in July 1899, the first of 6,000 segregated African American soldiers arrived in the Philippines. The U.S. began to occupy Jolo and other Muslim provinces once guarded by isolated Spanish forts in the southern Philippines.

On November 13, 1899, after losing the capital of Malolos and substantial fighters, Aguinaldo disbanded the regular army and switched to guerilla warfare. Military governor General Otis did not understand this new strategy and believed that the insurrection was suppressed with the capture of Malolos, the headquarters of Aguinaldo’s government. Before he was replaced by General Arthur McArthur, father of General Douglas McArthur, who was forced to abandon Bataan and Corregidor to the invading Japanese forces in 1942, Otis wrote to the War Department in April 1900 that we are no longer dealing “with organized insurrection, but brigandage,” which would require police action by a quarter of a million soldiers (Pomeroy 1970, 86). Mark Twain’s suspicion, shared by a large majority, was that “we do not intend to free, but to subjugate, the people of the Philippines” (Putzel 1992, 52). On May 2, 1900, Otis was replaced by General McArthur who imposed martial law on December 20, 1900.

Waterboarding and Other Gory Business

There is general consensus that the pacification of the Philippines is one of the bloodiest wars in imperial history. After two days of fighting, the Filipinos on Manila’s perimeter and nearby provinces sustained a casualty of nearly 10,000. Aguinaldo’s officers schooled in European manuals followed positional warfare along classic military lines; but they were forced to resort to mobile warfare, utilizing their knowledge of the countryside and universal support from the populace in the face of vastly superior U.S. firepower. The inaugural model of anti-colonial “people’s war” may be found here, as well as its ruthless antidote, “low-intensity” warfare.

As we saw, Otis and his officers thought that the insurrection would be over in a matter of weeks. Mobile tactics and eventually guerilla strategy reduced the U.S. garrisons to easy targets, with the U.S. troops finding themselves ill-suited and ill-equipped to confront their enemies, who lacked adequate firearms, often fighting with bolos – long bladed knives – and spears. The Filipino insurgents resembled the proverbial fish swimming in the ocean of their sympathizers so that by subterfuge and hand-to-hand combat, the rebels overcame the odds against them. After protracted fighting with unconscionable losses, the U.S. army began to treat all the “niggers” as enemies, whether armed or not; it resorted to destroying villages and killing civilians. In the second year of fighting, 75,000 troops escalated the war against the Filipino masses, not just the sporadic guerillas in the “boondocks” – the term adopted from the Filipino word, “bundok,” contested mountainous terrain.

General MacArthur observed that guerilla warfare was contrary to “the customs and usages” of civilized warfare,” hence those captured are no longer soldiers but simple criminals, brigands, etc. They are “are not entitled to the privileges of prisoners of war.” This accords with the U.S. Army “Instructions” (General Order 100) issued during the Civil War, defining “war rebels” who “rise in arms against the occupying or conquering army” as “high robbers or pirates” (Pomeroy 1970, 87). Those rebels would be today’s “unlawful combatants” not deserving of Geneva Convention guidelines. By placing Filipino resistance outside the bounds of recognized warfare, William Pomeroy notes, “the American military authorities in effect and in practice gave sanction to barbarous methods,” among them the infamous “water cure,” rope torture, and others (1970, 88). Such atrocities flourished in the racist ethos of the conduct of the war.

The U.S. pacification campaign against the insurrectos, argues Jonathan Fast, “degenerated into a grisly slaughter of non-combatants” (1973, 74). From April 1901 to April 1902, four successive “depopulation campaigns” were carried out. The first occurred in Northern Luzon, described by one American Congressman: “Our soldiers took no prisoners, they kept no records; they simply swept the country and wherever and whenever they could get hold of a Filipino they killed him” (quoted in Wolff 1968, 352). Then in August 1901, in Panay island, the same procedure was adopted. U.S. troops cut an area 60 miles wide from one end of the island to the other, burning everything in their

path. In September and October, U.S. troops swarmed into Samar, with orders from General Jacob Smith to burn and kill everything over ten,” as a reprisal for the ambush of 48 American soldiers in the town of Balangiga. His subalterns fulfilled his vow to make the whole island “a howling wilderness.”

The climax is rather unsurprising. In December, the entire population of Batangas (about 500,000) was forced into concentration camps. Frustrated by Filipino perseverance in resisting U.S. sovereignty, General J. Franklin Bell, who masterminded the Batangas campaign, stated that he intended to “create in the minds of the people a burning desire for the war to cease – that will impel them to join hands with the Americans. . . .” For this purpose, it was necessary to keep the people “in such a state of anxiety and apprehension that living under such conditions will soon become unbearable” (Storey and Codman 1902, 71-73). Due to the brutal conditions in the detention camps, to hunger and diseases, over 100,000 died in Batangas alone. Later on, General Bell calculated that over 600,000 Filipinos in Luzon alone had been killed or died as a direct result of the pacification campaign. This estimate made in May 1901 does not take into account the victims of the other four campaigns listed above. The extermination of almost the entire population of Samar remains emblematic of how the U.S. administered the stick without the carrot. General Jacob Smith wiped out the town, summarily executed prisoners, and devastated the whole province – probably the longest and most brutal campaign on record. His method could not be considered exceptional, as Linn and others argue, because it had been repeated many times. Although Roosevelt declared the war over on July 4, 1902, the fighting lasted until 1910 when the last guerilla leader was captured in Luzon; and Muslim uprisings continued until 1916, punctuated by the massacres of Bud Dajo in 1906 and of Bud Bagsak in 1913.

Orientalist Theater of Cruelty

Harsh measures such as “reconcentration” or hamletting of civilians became official policy in fighting Aguinaldo’s guerilla forces. The most notorious practitioners were Gen. Bell, who inflicted it in Batangas and southern Luzon and Gen. Jacob Smith, who turned Samar into a “howling wilderness.” Recently, in the controversy over the use

of torture such as “waterboarding,” Paul Kramer rehearsed again what a British witness called “the murderous butchery” of the U.S. “pacification” campaign. Except for apologists of the McKinley and Roosevelt policies, such as Brian McAllister Linn (whose claim to neutrality in his book, *The Philippine War 1899-1902*, is quite a feat of Olympian hauteur), the general consensus is that the atrocities committed by the invading U.S. army was out of proportion to the resistance of the revolutionary guerillas of the Philippine Republic, even allowing for the desperate measures Filipinos took to retaliate in kind. Of course, it is easy to say that both are guilty. But that is to abandon the search for historical clarity if not some measure of provisional objectivity. Kramer recounts some of the findings of the Senate committee that inquired into the reports of “cruelties and barbarities” earlier revealed through letters sent to newspapers. At one hearing, the testimony of Charles Riley of the 26th Volunteer Infantry described in detail a scene of “water cure” that he witnessed, but after the ritual of a court martial, the guilty officer, Capt. Edwin Glenn, was suspended for a month and fined fifty-dollars; in 1919 he retired from the army as brigadier general.

At one hearing, William Howard Taft, head of the second Philippine Commission sent to the islands and first Civil Governor of the Philippines, was forced to admit that “cruelties have been inflicted” and the “water cure” administered, but countered that military officers have condemned such methods. Elihu Root, Secretary of War, excused the cruelties because the Filipino insurgents were guilty of “barbarous cruelty, common among uncivilized races.” One stark leitmotif in this narrative centering on Fagen is the question of civilization. Filipinos were not only an “uncivilized race,” they were savages, barbarous, treacherous, wild devils, and so on. In one Senate hearing, Senator Joseph Rawlins asked General Robert Hughes whether the burning of Filipino homes by advancing U.S. troops was “within the ordinary rules of civilized warfare,” to which Hughes replied curtly: “These people are not civilized” On January 9, 1900, Senator Beveridge already reminded the U.S. public not to worry about the cruel conduct of the war because “We are dealing with Orientals.” This strain appeared again in Senator Lodge’s ascription of “Asiatic” cruelty to all Filipinos. Harvard University philosopher William James accused McKinley’s camp of hypocrisy and cant and said: “God damn the U.S. for its vile conduct in the Philippine Isles” (Zinn 1980, 307). Systematic

extermination of homes and inhabitants occurred in the destruction of Caloocan before Aguinaldo switched from positional to guerilla warfare. The general sentiment of the occupying army was captured by one volunteer: “We all wanted to kill ‘niggers’ . . . beats rabbit hunting. . . .” In November 1901, the Manila correspondent of the *Philadelphia Ledger* reported: “The present war is no bloodless, opera bouffe engagement; our men have been relentless, have killed to exterminate men, women, children, prisoners and captives, active insurgents and suspected people from lads of ten up, the idea prevailing that the Filipino as such was little better than a dog. . . .” (Zinn 1980, 308).

Were it not for a persisting amnesia or selective forgetting in the national psyche, the catalogue of gruesome facts would be a perverse imposition. Aside from Twain, Vidal and others, Gabriel Kolko rendered one of the most cogent reflections on the “enormity of the crime” of force and chicanery accomplished by officers most of whom were veterans of the Indian campaigns:

. . . Against the Indians, who owned and occupied much coveted land, wholesale slaughter was widely sanctioned as a virtue. That terribly bloody, sordid history, involving countless tens of thousands of lives that neither victims nor executioners can ever enumerate, made violence endemic to the process of continental expansion. Violence reached a crescendo against the Indian after the Civil War and found a yet bloodier manifestation during the protracted conquest of the Philippines from 1898 until well into the next decade, when anywhere from 200,000 to 600,000 Filipinos were killed in an orgy of racist slaughter that evoked much congratulation and approval from the eminent journals and men of the era who were also much concerned about progress and stability at home. From their inception, the great acts of violence and attempted genocide America launched against outsiders seemed socially tolerated, even celebrated (1976, 287).

Race War

One might venture the proposition that even before the Filipino-American War started, it was already a thoroughly racialized conflict. This is no longer news. Historian

Richard Welch observed that the attitudes of the invaders then demonstrated “colorphobia,” and the Filipinos to be subjugated were considered “monkey men” and “niggers” (1979, 101). A recent book by Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, elaborates on what W.E.B. Du Bois observed about the “race questions” of the United and those of the world becoming tightly “belted” together by imperialism. Du Bois identified the U.S. “ownership of Porto Rico, and Havana, our protectorate of Cuba, and conquest of the Philippines” as constituting the “greatest event since the Civil War,” confirming how the space between America “and the islands of the sea” was dissolving, and with it, the former boundaries between the “race questions of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. He urged the unity of “Negro and Filipino, Indian and Porto Rican, Cuban and Hawaiian,” to struggle for “an America that knows no color line in the freedom of its opportunities” (1997, 102).

Kramer’s book is one of the most sustained expositions of how race and imperial ideology coalesced to produce the exceptionalist politics of U.S. global hegemony, with the conquest of the Philippines as a kind of experimental laboratory for its invention. It rehearses what many previous historians have noted: the racial formations in the U.S. were exported and renegotiated anew in the Philippine scene, with the Filipino savages labeled “niggers,” “gugus” (forerunner of “gooks”), Indians, etc., but with a difference in function. The racial imaginary justified extermination of the enemy race. Though self-limited in its focus on “race” as an amorphous, protean concept, Kramer convincingly demonstrates that on all sides, the U.S. conquest of the Philippines was a “race war” with profound implications that resonate up to today’s thinking about ethnicity, racial relations, and a viable multicultural democracy.

Let us situate Fagen in the context of a “race war” that initially claimed to be a civilizing, benevolent project, but no longer a mission to liberate the Philippines from Spanish tyranny. The U.S., as Du Bois says, seized this “group of colored folks half a world away . . . [to rule] them according to its own ideas” (1970, 184). It is certain that Fagen experienced the bitter race hatred that black soldiers experienced when they were in Tampa, Florida, where a race riot began; black soldiers retaliated against drunken white soldiers. Twenty-seven African American soldiers and three whites were severely wounded. The chaplain of a black regiment in Tampa asked: “Is America any better than

Spain? . . . Has she not subjects in her own borders whose children are half-fed and half-clothed, because their father's skin is black. . . . Yet the Negro is loyal to his country's flag." That loyalty was severely eroded and dissolved in Fagen when he landed in the Philippines in 1899 to help carry out a "regime change."

From the start, African Americans in the media and the leadership of civil-society groups demonstrated strong opposition to the colonial intervention. The ambivalence toward the war in Cuba was replaced with vigorous opposition to the war in the Philippines. As part of the Anti-Imperialist League (founded on October 17, 1899), Du Bois condemned the war as an unjust imperialist aggression, the slaughter of Filipinos a "needless horror." The League recalled Fredrick Douglass' view, enunciated sixty years earlier, that the interests of the Negro people were identical with that of the struggling colonial peoples: "We deny that the obligation of all citizens to support their government in times of grave national peril applies to the present situation" (Foster 1954, 415). In Nov. 17, 1899, the *American Citizen*, a black paper in Kansas City, Kansas, stated that "imperialist expansion means extension of race hate and cruelty, barbarous lynchings and gross injustice to dark people." Bishop Henry Tuirner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church called the U.S. occupation of the Philippines an "unholy war of conquest" (Welch 1979, 110). Another newspaper (*Broad Ax*, Sept. 30, 1899) called for the formation of a "national Negro Anti-Expansionist, Anti-Imperialist, Anti-Trust, Anti-Lynching League." On July 17, 1899, a meeting of African Americans in Boston protested the "unjustified invasion by American soldiers in the Philippine Islands." They resolved that "while the rights of colored citizens in the South, sacredly guaranteed them by the amendment of the Constitution, are shamefully disregarded; and, while the frequent lynching of negroes who are denied a civilized trial are a reproach to Republican government, the duty of the President and country is to reform these crying domestic wrongs and not to attempt the civilization of alien peoples by powder and shot" (The *Boston Post*, July 18, 1899). Whether Fagen knew or was aware of this sentiment can not be ascertained for now. But he certainly was aware that in general U.S. troops treated Filipinos as "niggers" who were "therefore entitled to all the contempt and harsh treatment administered by white overlords to the most inferior races," as a correspondent of the *Boston Herald* wrote (Schirmer 1971, 21).

Fagen no doubt shared many of the sentiments expressed by black soldiers who felt they were sent to the Philippines to take up “de white man’s burden.” One of them wrote in a letter of 1899: “Our racial sympathies would naturally be with the Filipinos. They are fighting manfully for what they conceive to be their best interests.” A black infantryman wrote from Manila in June 1901 to an Indianapolis paper: “This struggle on the islands has been naught but a gigantic scheme of robbery and oppression.” Amid the burning of villages and massacre of supporters of the insurgents in Batangas and Samar, African Americans in Massachusetts addressed a message to President McKinley about how Negroes in Wilmington, North Carolina, “guilty of no crime except the color of their skin and a desire to exercise the rights of their American citizenship, were butchered like dogs in the streets;” and how black men were hunted and murdered in Phoenix, South Carolina,” while McKinley catered cunningly to Southern race prejudice” (Zinn 1980, 312-13).

Lifting the Veil

It was in this environment suffused with racialized exterminist sentiments that David Fagen enters the scene. I cannot describe all the varied and forceful sentiments expressed by African American soldiers and other participants in the war found in letters compiled by Willard Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees” and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* – an extremely valuable primary sourcebook. As a sample, I cite an anonymous black soldier who complained that white troops, after seizing Manila, began “to apply home treatment for colored peoples: cursed them as damned niggers, steal [from] them and ravish them” (Gatewood 1987, 279). Patrick Mason, a sergeant in Fagen’s 24th Infantry regiment, wrote to the *Cleveland Gazette*: “I feel sorry for these people and all that have come under the control of the United States. I don’t believe they will be justly dealt by. The first thing in the morning is the “Nigger” and the last thing at night is the “Nigger” You are right in your opinions. I must not say as much as I am a soldier” (Gatewood 1987, 257). A black lieutenant of the 25th Infantry wrote his wife that he had occasionally subjected Filipinos to the water torture (Dumindin 2009). Capt. William Jackson of the 49th Infantry admitted that his men

racially identified with Filipinos but stated that “all enemies of the U.S. government look alike to us . . . hence we go on with the killing.” Fagen occupied the same position, but he drew a necessary demarcation between his being a soldier for the Empire, and his being an insurgent for an occupied community on the defensive, struggling for national/communal self-determination.

Most often quoted is the statement of Sgt. Maj. John W. Galloway, who accused whites of “establish[ing] their diabolical race hatred in all its home rancor in Manila.” He wrote about how white soldiers told Filipinos of “the inferiority of the American blacks – [their] brutal natures, cannibal tendencies” (1987, 253); and speculated that “the future of the Filipino, I fear, is that of the Negro in the South.” As a reprisal and warning to African Americans, the U.S. military accused Galloway of sympathizing with the insurgents. He was jailed, deported, and discharged dishonorably.

Completely informed of the history of racial conflict in the U.S., the Filipino resistance used what one black soldier called “affinity of complexion,” revealed, for example, by a comment made by a Filipino lad: “Why does the American Negro come . . . to fight us when we are much a friend to him. . . . Why don’t you fight those people in America who burn Negroes, that make a beast of you?” The Filipino resistance claimed to speak as “black brothers” of African Americans, distributing pamphlets addressed “To the Colored American Soldier” with the appeal:

It is without honor that you are spilling your costly blood. Your masters have thrown you into the most iniquitous fight with double purpose – to make you the instrument of their ambition and also your hard work will soon make the extinction of your race. Your friends, the Filipinos, give you this good warning. You must consider your situation and your history; and take charge that the blood of . . . Sam Hose proclaims vengeance (Gatewood 1997, 258-59).

Another soldier wrote on Christmas Eve, 1900, to Booker T. Washington: “These people are right and we are wrong and terribly wrong.” One African American enlisted man learned from his experience that “Filipinos resent being treated as inferior” and thus set “an example to the American negro.” After surveying the archive of sentiments expressed by numerous participants, Anthony Powell concludes that throughout the war

African American soldiers would be continually plagued by misgivings about their role in the Philippines. . . . Their racial and ideological sympathy for colored people struggling to achieve freedom seemed always to be at war with their notions of duty as American citizens and their hope that the fulfillment of that duty would somehow improve the plight of their people at home” (1998).

One might interpolate here that during the war years, an epidemic of anti-black violence swept the South. Howard Zinn notes that between 1889 and 1903, “on the average, every week, two Negroes were lynched by mobs – hanged, burned, mutilated” (1980. 308). In Lakeland, Florida, during that same period, black soldiers confronted a white crowd because they were refused service by a drugstore owner. Du Bois described the outburst of racist violence, such as the lynching of Sam Hose in Newnan, Georgia, in 1899. These and other incidents were known to the Filipino revolutionaries. Despite the Filipino appeal of racial solidarity against white oppressors and the offer of commissions to defectors, there were only twenty-nine desertions among the four regiments of African American regulars; and only nine actually defected to the rebels (Robinson and Schubert 1975, 73). Other researchers cite 20 defectors, seven of them blacks (including Fagen). Various reasons dissuaded them, among others, their long-standing loyalty, the hazards of war, severance of cultural/social ties, the threat of long imprisonment, capture and certain death. Why and how David Fagen surmounted these risks and dangers, remains a persistent subject of speculation, speculators attracted to the personality rather than to the convictions or collective meanings invested in his actions.

Journey to the Liberated Zone

The early life of Fagen, who was born in 1875 in Tampa, Florida, is unknown. Described as a “dark brown young man with a carved scar on his chin, standing five feet six inches tall,” Fagen worked then at Hull’s Phosphate Company. At the age of 23, on June 4, 1898, Fagen enlisted in the 24th Infantry, one of the four black regiments based in Tampa at that time, and was sent to Cuba. Upon its return, Fagen accompanied the regiment to Fort Douglas, near Salt Lake City, Utah, where he was discharged. After his father died, Fagen re-enlisted on February 12 at Fort McPherson, Georgia, where his

character was validated as meeting “all requirements.” He trained at Fort D.A. Russell, near Cheyenne, Wyoming, before being shipped to the Philippines from San Francisco in June 1899. Immediately after his arrival, he was engaged in a major campaign in the fall of 1899. General Samuel Young led the northeast thrust to Central Luzon, fighting the insurgents near Mount Arayat and then garrisoning key towns in the vicinity. Fagen’s Company 1, together with three others, occupied San Isidro, the principal town of Nueva Ecija province, from which President Aguinaldo fled.

It is said that Fagen encountered difficulties with his superiors. But the cause could not be incompetence since he was promoted to corporal in the months after his arrival at Fort Russell. Reports indicate that he could have been court-martialed for refusing to do all sorts of “dirty jobs.” While a person does not make important decisions based simply on personal discomfort, this adversity may have reinforced Fagen’s sharpened awareness of how thoroughly racist the war was conducted, with Filipinos regarded as “black devils,” “niggers,” thieves, and other insults. All these converged in that “particular solution” to a dilemma that Fagen chose on November 17, 1899. There is no doubt that his decision to defect was prepared and planned in advance. Assisted by a rebel officer with a horse waiting for him at the company barracks, Fagen cut off his ties with Company 1 and headed for the guerilla sanctuary.

Subsequent reports describe how Fagen wreaked havoc on the invading army. One veteran recounts how Fagen, in the midst of raging battles, would taunt U.S. soldiers; during one encounter, he reportedly shouted, “Captain Fagen’s done got yuh white boys now” (Ganzhorn (1940, 191). But there was more to it than getting back at white supremacists. Instead of simply escaping to an isolated native community and withdrawing from the conflict, Fagen embraced the revolution with such boldness and energy that no one could be blind to the depth of his commitment to the Filipino cause, especially in the light of George Rawick’s reminder that Afro-American slaves “do not make revolution for light and transient reasons.”

From November 1899 to September 1900, we have no record of Fagen’s activity as a leader of the Filipino resistance. On September 6, 1900, General Jose Alejandrino, commander of the Republic’s army in Nueva Ecija, promoted Fagen from first lieutenant to captain “on account of sufficient merits gained in campaigns.” His valor and audacity,

as well as popularity, were acknowledged by his soldiers who referred to him as “General Fagen.” The *New York Times* (October 29, 1900) deemed Fagen important enough to cover his exploits, remarking that Fagen was a “cunning and highly skilled guerilla officer who harassed and evaded large conventional American units and their Filipino auxiliaries. From August 30, 1900 to January 17, 1901, Fagen figured in eight clashes with the U.S. army. In one daring raid, he led 150 rebels in capturing a steam launch loaded with guns on the Rio Grande de la Pampanga river and escaped unhurt into the forest before the American infantry arrived. In two of the skirmishes mentioned, Fagen clashed with General Frederick Funston, the U.S. army’s famous guerilla hunter. John Ganzhorn, a member of General Funston’s elite scouts, recalled confrontations with Fagen, whose shrewd tactics led to successful ambushes (Ganzhorn 1940, 190-92; Funston 1911, 380).

A new development alarmed the U.S. military. In February 1901, six members of the 9th Cavalry regiment deserted and joined the insurgents in the province of Albay: John Dalrymple, Edmond DuBose, Lewis Russell, Fred Hunter, Garth Shores and William Victor. Except for Dalrymple, who died of a fever, the five others surrendered with the other Filipino insurgents. All were court-martialled, only DuBose and Russell were publicly hanged before a crowd of three thousand people on February 7, 1902. Records prove that their execution was deliberately agreed upon by the military to serve as a warning to soldiers not to emulate Fagen. The Judge Advocate General reported to the Secretary of War that the execution of the two black soldiers was necessary because “great injury has been done the United States by deserters from the service, chiefly of foreign birth or of colored regiments, who have gone over to and taken service with the enemy” (quoted in Brown 1995, 171). The other soldier, Fred Hunter, was killed while trying to escape; Victor and Dalrymple were sentenced to life imprisonment in Leavenworth. Shores and another soldier from the 25th Infantry regiment were sentenced to death for entering “the service of the insurrectionists,” but President Roosevelt commuted their sentence to dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of pay, and imprisonment at hard labor for life (Powell 1998). In May and June 1901, two volunteer regiments of African American troops were shipped home.

Of some twenty deserters sentenced to death, only these two black privates were executed (Robinson and Schubert 1975, 78). While the insurgency continued for more than a decade, Roosevelt had to terminate that “dirty war” (Boehringer 2008) on July 4, 1902 to allay public sentiment against the war and prevent further desertions.

Birth of a Legend

In March 1901, Funston captured Aguinaldo by devious means, thus emerging as one of the few heroes of the ugly and brutal war. As recorded in his memoirs, Funston’s frustration at his failure to capture or kill Fagen became an obsession, contributing to the rise of a collective phantasy. Throughout 1901, Funston continued to pursue Fagen around Mt. Arayat – sightings of him were reported by the Twenty Second Infantry in February and April. Rumors of his exploits, stories of his cunning and audacity, led to the creation of a public image, a myth larger than the man – not unlike Nat Turner’s. While the infantry was chasing him in Nueva Ecija, a *Manila Times* report narrated his visit to a brothel in the capital city, with the following account:

[Fagen] wore a crash blouse, similar to those of the native police, with a broad white trimming such as officers wear. The insignia on the shoulder straps were a pair of Spanish bugles. His trousers were dark in color, neat fitting, and topped a pair of patent leather shoes. A brown soft felt hat completed his apparel (Feb. 26, 1901).

When two civilians approached him, Fagen supposedly “rose from the chair, placing his foot upon it, and grasping his concealed revolver in his right [hand] and a small sword or bolo in his left.” His escape from the military cordon around the city is considered “as daring as he is unscrupulous.” He is even reported to have recklessly boarded a troop ship headed back to the United States.

American prisoners of Fagen also repudiated the charges of atrocities and brutalities. At least two of them, George Jackson, a black private of the Twenty-fourth Regiment, and white Lieutenant Fredrick Alstaetter, testified that they were treated kindly by Fagen. Nonetheless, Funston and other officers called him “a wretched man,”

“a “rowdy soldier,” “good for nothing whelp,” lacking intelligence because of his “unusually small head,” and so on. Belying these rather malicious dismissals is the gravity with which senior officers like General Adna Chafee (veteran of the ferocious and brutal suppression of the Boxer rebellion in China) expressed grave concern about black turncoats and defectors. Of the twenty defectors, black and white, who were condemned to death, only two were actually executed: the two black privates noted earlier. President Roosevelt supported these executions while commuting all other death sentences for other guilty soldiers. The other victim of this drive to persecute disloyal soldiers involved Sergeant Major Galloway (already mentioned earlier), also from Fagen’s regiment. His letter to a Filipino acquaintance condemning the war as immoral was captured in a raid on the Filipino residence and used to judge him as “exceedingly dangerous” and a “menace to the islands,” for which he was jailed, demoted to private, and dishonorably discharged.

Fagen operated as a guerilla commander, persisting in a relentless and protracted struggle against the U.S. army, even when his immediate superior, General Alejandrino, surrendered on April 29, 1901. During the negotiation for his surrender, General Alejandrino asked an American officer if Fagen and two other deserters would be allowed to leave the islands; the answer was negative. When Alejandrino’s successor, General Urbano Lacuna himself surrendered to Funston on May 16, 1901, General Lacuna also sought amnesty for Fagen. Funston’s response was not surprising: “this man could not be received as a prisoner of war, and if he surrendered it would be with the understanding that he would be tried by a court-martial – in which event his execution would be a practical certainty” (1911, 431).

Prophecy of An Ending

On March 23, 1901, General Emilio Aguinaldo was captured by Funston. He accepted U.S. sovereignty and called on his followers to do so. His generals, Lacuna and Alejandrino, soon followed. But not Fagen. It was reported that he left the revolutionary camp with his Filipino wife and a small group of nationalist partisans for the mountains of Neva Ecija. Throughout the year, Fagen was hunted as a bandit, with a reward of \$600

for his head, “dead or alive.” Funston rejoiced over Fagen’s branding as a common criminal, “a bandit pure and simple, and entitled to the same treatment as a mad dog.” Civilian bounty hunters and civilian law enforcement agencies joined forces in pursuing Fagen.

On December 5, 1901, a native hunter, Anastacio Bartolome, turned up at the American outpost of Bongabong, Nueva Ecija, with a sack containing the “slightly decomposed head of a negro,” which he claimed was Fagen’s. He also produced other evidences, such as weapons and clothing, Fagen’s commission, and the West Point class ring of Fagen’s former captive, Lt. Frederick Alstaetter. But the military officers who reviewed the report were not convinced, and called the official file “the supposed killing of David Fagen.” And there is no record of payment of a reward to Bartolome. There are two explanations for what happened: Either Bartolome found Fagen’s camp and stole the evidence he presented, together with the head of an Aeta, a tribe of black aborigines; or Bartolome colluded with Fagen in order to fake his death and thus get relief from further pursuit. Fagen could then have fled further to live with the natives in the wilderness of northern Luzon where Jim Crow could not pester him. Shrouded in mystery, Fagen’s “death” becomes the birth of his legendary career in academic minds. On October 30, 1902, a Philippine Constabulary unit recounted their pursuit of Fagen and other insurgents ten months after he had allegedly been hacked to death by Bartolome. The most plausible explanation, assuming Bartolome’s story as fabricated, is that Fagen survived and remained for the rest of his life with the aborigines and local folk with whom he identified.

Our pioneering biographers, Michael Robinson and Frank Schubert, conclude that Fagen’s rebellion is significant in revealing the “intensity of black hostility toward American imperialism,” a militant act of self-determination that can cross boundaries and seize opportunities anywhere:

[Fagen’s] career illustrates the willingness of Afro-Americans to pursue alternatives outside the caste system when such options become available. Militance does not distinguish him from the civilians who razed Tiptonville, Tennessee. The difference is in the circumstance. The Philippine insurrection

offered him a choice similar to the one Nat Turner gave Southampton slaves and the Seminole wars gave escaped slaves like Abraham (1975, 82).

The editor of the *Indianapolis Freeman* supplied an obituary to Fagen's supposed death on December 14, 1901, by attempting to extenuate the "traitor's death" with the plea that he was a man "prompted by honest motives to help a weaker side, and one to which he felt allied by ties that bind."

Indeed, the specific historical circumstance inflected individual choice. Unlike the slaves who revolted from the plantations in South America and the Caribbean and formed runaway communities – maroons, cimmarones, quilombos – Fagen joined a community already up in arms against an invading and occupying power. In that process of affiliation, his rebellion from a white-supremacist polity mutated into a revolutionary act. His decision exemplified what Eugene Genovese calls (in his study of how Afro-American slave revolts helped fashion the modern world) a visionary emblem of dialectical transformation: "Ignorant and illiterate as the slaves generally were, they grasped the issue at least as well as others, for their own history of struggle against enslavement in the world's greatest bourgeois democracy led them to recognize and to seize upon the link between the freedom of the individual proclaimed to the world by Christianity and the democratization of the bourgeois revolution, which was transforming that fateful idea into a political reality" (1979, 135).

Subaltern Testimony

Before returning to the socially symbolic and prefigurative value of Fagen's act, I want to cite here the testimony of the Filipino general under whom Fagen served. General Jose Alejandrino wrote a memoir in Spanish entitled *La Senda del Sacrificio* (*The Price of Freedom*, published in 1933). He recounts how when he confronted Funston to discuss the terms of his surrender, Funston brusquely demanded that his surrender could not be accepted without his first delivering Fagen, otherwise he would remain a prisoner. Alejandrino refused because it would be an infamy since (as he told

Funston) if you caught him, “you would be capable of bathing him in petroleum and burning him alive” (1949, 173).

General Alejandrino met Fagen around August 1899 when Aguinaldo was in full retreat. Alejandrino provides us ingredients for a portrait of Fagen that might flesh out the legend, tid-bits loved by the spinners of our mass media infotainment industry:

Fagen was a Negro giant of more than six feet in height who deserted the American Army, taking with him all the revolvers that he could bring, and who served in our forces with the rank of captain. He did not know how to read or write, but he was a faithful companion. He was very affectionate and helpful to me, going to the extent of carrying me in his arms or on his shoulders when I, weakened by fevers and poor nutrition, had to cross rivers or to ascend steep grades. The services which he rendered to me were such that they could only be expected from a brother or son.

I had heard narrations of the feats of valor and the intrepidity of Fagen, but his most outstanding characteristic was his mortal hatred of the American whites. . . .

They told me that when Fagen went with his guerillas, whenever he was on horseback, it was a sign of advance or resistance, but when he got down from his horse, his soldiers already knew that it was the sign to retreat. I asked him the reason for this custom and he answered me that, while advancing in search of the enemy or while fighting he did not want to tire his legs unnecessarily, but when it came to retreating, he had to leave the horse behind because his feet are faster than those of his horse. Besides, he could squeeze himself into and pass places which a horse could only go with great difficulty.

Fagen was very fond of carousals and drinking. In one of his escapades he arrived in a small village on the banks of the Rio Chico of Pampanga. He looked for a guitar and, with some members of his guerilla, began to drink and to serenade the women of the place. When the night was already very late, he went to bed in a small hut, sleeping with a companion. After a short while his companion woke him up, telling him that he was hearing footsteps and voices of Americans. Fagen, who was half-asleep, answered him that he was dreaming and that his fear induced him to hear and see visions. Inasmuch, however, as his

companion insisted, Fagan reluctantly stood up to peep out of the window, and there he really saw that the hut was surrounded by Americans. He lost no time in jumping out of the window and, taking advantage of the circumstances that the Americans could not fire for fear of wounding their own men in the dark, he selected the site nearest to the forest and with a revolver he shot his way out and escaped.

Fagan spoke Tagalog very vividly and lived in the camp with a woman. One morning this woman presented herself to me crying and showing one cheek bitten off and saying that Fagen had done it. I sent for Fagan and asked him what happened.

“I was only dreaming,” he answered.

He related to me that he had dreamed that he was being surprised by the Americans and, not having the intention to be caught alive, he resisted as much as he could with punches, kickings and bitings, but his fury against the enemy had been rained on his woman companion.

When our surrender was effected, I really felt very sorry in having to leave Fagen. I left him some twelve rifles for his defense. Later on, I learned that the Americans put a price on his head and he was assassinated, according to versions, in the mountains of Bongabon (1949, 174-76).

After Fagen’s “supposed death” in December 1901, he was still being blamed for inflaming the Filipino resistance, as in the Balangiga, Samar, disaster in September 1901, and the renewed fighting in the other islands. His legendary figure begins to haunt popular memory and civic conscience. We might encounter Fagen again in the persons of African Americans who found themselves in the Philippines when the U.S. army returned to “liberate” the colony from the Japanese occupiers, with the son of Gen. Arthur McArthur leading the forces to liberate the colonized from Japanese tyranny. Their sense of affinity was no longer based on complexion but on shared ideals and political solidarity.

Alternative Interventions

After a hundred years, the situation of David Fagen and six other African

Americans who were labeled by the *Manila Times* as “vile traitors” still await understanding and judgment by the peoples in the United States and the Philippines, as well as by the international community. This topic is still a tabooed subject, too dangerous to handle. Ngozi-Brown reminds us again of their “extremely difficult situation,” serving as “foot soldiers for a racist ideology in which white Americans characterized Filipinos as they did African Americans as inferior, inept, and even sub-human. When the United States military occupied the Philippine islands, it installed a racist society which alienated Filipino and African American soldiers” (1997, 42). The official authorities of course have pronounced them traitors and renegades, though one novelist, Robert Bridgman (author of *Loyal Traitors*), believed that their commitment to American ideals compelled them to resist the immoral course of their country and that a “higher patriotism” prompted them to commit treason (Powell 1998). Can such ambivalence of judgment be maintained? After the war, over 1,200 African Americans opted to stay in the Philippines. One soldier explained why those soldiers preferred to make the Philippines their home: “To an outsider or one who has never soldiered in the Philippines the question would perhaps be a hard one to answer, but to the initiated the solution is easy and apparent at once. . . . They found [the Filipinos] intelligent, friendly and courteous, and not so very different from themselves” (1901).

World War II gave the opportunity for African American soldiers to “return,” as it were, to the Philippines as part of MacArthur’s “liberation” army. In his autobiography, *Black Bolshevik*, Harry Haywood mentions his brief sojourn in Manila, Philippines, where he met a group of revolutionary students and intellectuals with ties to the Hukbalahap, Communist-led anti-Japanese guerillas. He was told how American troops disarmed these peasant guerillas in the underground who helped in the capture of Manila. Writes Haywood: “They were bitter and sharply critical of MacArthur’s hostility toward the popular democratic movement. His clear intention was to return to the status quo of colonialism” (1978, 526), a return to the days of his conquering father, General Arthur MacArthur, and his notorious “stringent” and “drastic” measures under General Order 100, punishing non-uniformed guerillas as criminals (Linn 2000, 213).

During the same period, Nelson Peery, bricklayer and political activist, participated in World War II as a soldier in the all-black 93rd Infantry Division. He

details the momentous political awakening that he experienced in the Philippines in the first volume of his autobiography, *Black Fire* (1994). Peery made contact with the same groups and confirmed Haywood's observation. The entire apparatus of the U.S. State, its intelligence agencies and armed forces, had mounted a ruthless plan to crush the national liberation movement as they did forty-five years before. Peery noted that MacArthur quickly moved to re-establish a fascist, privileged officer corps in the Philippine army to protect the investments and control the islands for the United States." Peery recalls how the activists knew the story of David Fagen and how the "US army would never have allowed this talented black soldier to become an officer. Captain Fagen, with his black comrades, fought to the death for Philippine independence" (1994, 277).

Peery goes on to indict the hundred thousand U.S., mainly Southern white, soldiers who slaughtered over a million Filipinos, introduced the water cure, burning of villages, killing of civilians as part of the "scorched earth" tactics, while they "routinely brutalized the black troops." Nevertheless, he goes on: "the black Twenty-fourth and the Twenty-fifth Infantry murdered right along with them. The Philippine people would not surrender. In 1914, black troops were sent in to crush the Moro rebellion. This time, however, the black soldiers refused to fight their black Filipino brothers. The people of Mindanao never forgot that" (1994, 278).

Peery's testimony arrives at this eloquent judgment that, in my view, delivers a powerful rhetorical thrust that is quite unforgettable and prophetic at the same time in terms of what is going on right now in the Philippines:

If the Americans had never committed genocide against the Indian; if they had never incited wars of annihilation between the native peoples of this land; if there had never been a Trail of Tears; if America had never organized and commercialized the kidnapping and sale into slavery of a gentle and defenseless African people; if it had never developed the most widespread, brutal, exploitative system of slavery the world has ever known; if it had never held carnivals of torture and lynching of its black people; if it had never sundered and fractured and torn and ground Mexico into the dust; if it had never attacked gallant, defenseless Puerto Rico and never turned that lovely land into a cesspool to compete with the cesspool it had created in Panama; if it had never bled Latin

America of her wealth and had never cast her exhausted peoples onto the dung heap of disease and ignorance and starvation; if it had never financed and braced the Fascist dictatorships; if it had never pushed Hiroshima and Nagasaki into the jaws of hell – if America had never done any of these things – history would still create a special bar of judgment for what the American people did to the Philippines (1994, 276-77).

Although Peery did not join the Huks (the Filipino communist guerillas) then, he may be said to have traced Fagen's footsteps in forging solidarity with Filipino revolutionaries opposing U.S. neocolonialism, imperialism mediated through the native client oligarchy. A politics of linkages and reciprocity afforded a new internationalism, a global perspective, a synthesizing "double-consciousness." Kevin Gaines observes that the Spanish-American War and the Philippine campaign accomplished little in the way of improving African American social conditions since political disfranchisement persisted, culminating in the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906. However, Gaines believes that African American soldiers, even within their contradictory position in an imperialist war and within a segregated army, provided symbols of heroism and "a boost of morale" (Interview PBS). The fusion of the struggle for civil rights at home and self-determination for colonized peoples abroad constitutes a paradigm-shift from the dualistic polarity of isolationism and messianic nation-building, from the social-Darwinistic and evolutionistic stance of Anglo-Saxon, Eurocentric triumphalism.

Theorizing Elective Affinities

The most incisive formulation of this transformation may be found in Harold Cruse's reflections on his passage through World War II as a soldier radicalized by contact with the anti-colonial movement in the French colony of Algeria. Chiefly responding to Albert Camus' existentialist theory of metaphysical rebellion in a 1966 essay published in Sartre's review, *Le Temps Moderne*, Cruse's project of conceptualizing the black "idea of revolt" germinated from his part in the war effort. It was a unique catalyzing experience that connected fragments of his world picture into some kind of concrete universality. Cruse's perception of the global arena pervaded by

revolution and counter-revolution crystallized from a reflexive rationality:

The Army was the beginning of my real education about the reality of being black. Before the war, being black in America was a commonplace bore, a provincial American social hazard of no particular interest or meaning beyond the shores of the Atlantic. It was simply a national American disability – a built-in disadvantage to us all that we had to put up with, similar to a people that has to endure the constant imminence of droughts, floods, famines, or native pestilences. Race in America is her greatest “natural calamity,” but it has today become internationalized into a global scandal because she is so rich in everything else, including democratic pretensions. A global war has made all this a global fact. But it is also a fact that it took this global war to initiate a personal metamorphosis that has culminated in what I am in 1966, as an American black (1968, 169).

Cruse’s metamorphosis parallels Fagen’s, except that Fagen and his fellow African Americans were plunged into a war of colonization, while Cruse was engaged in the fight against fascism and reaction. But Cruse’s realization of his collective plight and the ethico-political imperatives required to resolve the division between his abstract citizenship and his humanity, between his racialized self and his potential species-being, resembles Fagen’s. It approximates what Frantz Fanon would refer to as the passage from the racial/national sensibility to a liberatory social consciousness transcending national boundaries and other socially constructed differences. This is not the occasion to elaborate on this Fanonian theory of collective self-determination.

I would like here to add the insight of C.L. R. James on how the revolt of the colonized subalterns in Africa, Latin America and Asia, joining the insurrection of the racially oppressed peoples/nations (African Americans, indigenous communities, etc.), could act as the “bacilli” or ferment that would mobilize the proletariat and usher the beginning of world revolution against capitalism. Whether this is still applicable today or not remains to be discussed. In any case, Fagen’s metamorphosis prefigured what Cruse and others went through as their minds entered the stage of world-history, in a moment when the Owl of Minerva (to use Hegel’s worn-out trope) has not yet awakened from the

night of the problematic, duplicitous Enlightenment and its contradiction-filled “civilizing mission.”

From Solidarity to Community

After more than a hundred years of Americanization, however, the attitude of the “natives” would no longer be hospitable to Fagen, or even to Haywood, Peery, and their kind. Filipinos have chosen to be on the other side of the Veil, have exchanged their identity for that of their erstwhile colonizers. That is, they have chosen to be “white” in body and soul, a testimony to a century of McKinley’s not-so-“Benevolent Assimilation.” The majority of Americanized Filipinos seems to confirm the fructifying power of what scholar David Joel Steinberg called “the U.S. policy of self-liquidating colonialism, in which the ‘little brown brother’ [Taft’s patronizing epithet] was permitted to achieve independence when he grew up, a maturation process that took forty-five years” (1982, 50). Nonetheless, Filipinos have celebrated some other personalities of foreign descent, including two Spaniards who served as generals of the Philippine army (Generals Manuel Sityar and Jose Torres Bugallon), and a Chinese (Gen. Jose Ignacio Paua), but Fagen has so far eluded such recognition. The reason is simple: the Philippine elite, vulnerable to blandishments, corruption, and patronage, has absorbed American Exceptionalism and perpetuated the Veil, fearing that to elevate Fagen to heroic stature would offend the fabled “special relations” with Washington and stir up the guardians of White Supremacy. Maybe the presidency of Barack Obama will begin to change this century-old prejudice and finally give proper homage to David Fagen and his comrades who, even in the face of certain defeat, cast their lot with their brothers and sisters in the Philippine revolution.

Allow me to quote, in conclusion, two sentences from W.E.B. Du Bois “Address to the Nations of the World” issued in 1900, about the time when Fagen together with the Philippine insurgents were resisting the U.S. military’s relentless advance in the plains of Northern Luzon to capture General Aguinaldo, the moment when Fagen separated himself from this occupying army. Du Bois wrote:

[T]he modern world must remember that in this age when the ends of the world are being brought so near together the millions of black men in Africa, America, and the Islands of the Sea, not to speak of the brown and yellow myriads elsewhere, are bound to have a great influence upon the world in the future, by reason of sheer numbers and physical contact. . . . Let the nations of the world respect the integrity and independence of the free Negro states of Abyssinia, Liberia, Hati, and the rest, and let the inhabitants of these states, the independent tribes of Africa, the Negroes of the West Indies, and America, and the black subjects of all nations take courage, strive ceaselessly, and fight bravely, that they may prove to the world their incontestable right to be counted among the great brotherhood of mankind.” (Bresnahan 1981, 193-94)

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