

Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903, Stuart Creighton Miller, Yale University Press, 1982.

Benevolent Assimilation is one of the most referenced and consulted works on the American – Philippine war. The book is a well-written general military and political history that falls into the group of new-left histories written during or shortly after the U.S. Vietnam war. As such, it consciously evaluates the American experience in the Philippines within the context of the perceived American tragedy of Vietnam. Miller's view is that American success in the Philippines represents the triumph of a world military power over the nationalistic aspirations of an oppressed indigenous population.

Miller's narrative is chronologically organized and begins with the Spanish American War and focuses on American operations and policy in the Philippines beginning in 1898 and ending with the official declaration of the end of combat operations in July 1902. Strangely, the title uses the dates as 1899-1903, though the book covers events in 1898 in some detail and barely addresses the year 1903. Though the author focuses on events and military operations in the Philippines, he also thoroughly describes and analyzes the political debates in the United States between the imperialists and anti-imperialists, both in and out of government, that occurred throughout the war. There is little analysis of the point of view of the Filipinos. The author does not discuss in any detail Filipino society, the impact of Spanish colonization on the indigenous Filipinos, the organization and composition of the revolutionaries or the motivation, strength and influence of the pro-American Filipinos. Miller's narrative is bookended at the beginning with an essay on the historiography of U.S. imperialism; and at the end with an essay comparing the Philippine War with the Vietnam War. Neither essay are particularly insightful.

Stuart Miller's work falls into the category of new-left foreign policy history which categorizes American foreign policy as fundamentally imperialistic, militaristic, exploitive, and racist. The title of the book, *Benevolent Assimilation*, references President William McKinley's policy regarding U.S. annexation of the Philippines, and is meant to be cynically juxtaposed to the actual history that Miller presents. Miller's history is unbalanced, and demonstrates little understanding or insight into military insurgencies and counterinsurgency operations. Examples of this include Miller's chastisement of the early army leadership as "ill-suited to play diplomatic roles due to their training and temperaments." Though the military leadership certainly made mistakes, Miller does not examine the difficulty that these officers faced in a foreign land, without sufficient military resources, virtually no useful political guidance from the President, and facing a multitude of potential adversaries. Miller gives no credit to the American military leadership for avoiding conflict with the Philippine revolutionary army in these difficult circumstances for more than six months. Miller's account of the war makes almost no effort to describe or assess the U.S. military's substantial and relatively effective efforts to implement the benevolence policy through reformed government, schools, economics, taxation, and legal codes (in fact he describes John Gate's work in this area as a "white wash" of army operations).

Much of the latter portion of Miller's book focuses on the extremely violent campaigns in 1902 to pacify Samar and Southern Luzon. Though he provides an excellent description of the very controversial, and in some cases, failed tactics, the impression that Miller gives is that these late actions were the decisive campaigns of the war. In fact, military historians John Gates and Brian

Linn both rate the campaigns as anticlimactic, coming as they did after the back of the insurgency had been broken in 1901. Gates also points out that the conduct of the late campaigns were contrary to the carefully conceived American pacification strategy. Miller's account, though detailing the subsequent court martials of American senior leaders, makes no attempt to place the events in strategic context.

Stuart Miller was a professor of social science and history at San Francisco State University. His specialty area was Asian history and U.S. policy toward Asia. *Benevolent Assimilation* is at its best describing the U.S. domestic debates on policy. It is at its worse describing military events. This is because military policy and strategy is outside the author's expertise and because the author is so strongly influenced by an anti-military biased caused by the Vietnam War. Incredibly, he sees many similarities between the American military of the turn of century and the post-World War II army that fought in Vietnam. Though in general Miller's work is well researched, he relies too heavily on contemporary newspapers of the period. The partisan nature of contemporary papers and their intentionally strident style adds to the anti-military and anti-McKinley Administration tone of Miller's book.

In sum, despite its flaws, Miller's is an important work to read and understand. To many, the book continues to represent how the U.S. military repeated mistakes made in earlier wars in Vietnam. Currently, it is also used to illustrate the flawed U.S. policy in Iraq. For these reasons it is important that military professionals engage with Miller's history, and are able to compare and contrast his history with the more nuanced, pragmatic, and realistic analysis of John Gates and Brian Linn.

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