

The Contradictions of Empire

Migrants, Subjects, Citizens: Comparative Perspectives on Nationality in the Prewar Japanese Empire

Tessa Morris-Suzuki

http://www.japanfocus.org/-Tessa-Morris_Suzuki/2862

August 28, 2008

Women's Anti-Imperialism, 'The White Man's Burden,' and the Philippine-American War

Erin L. Murphy

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-erin-murphy/3182>

July 6, 2009

Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire:

The Philippine-American War as Race War

By Paul A. Kramer

http://japanfocus.org/-paul_a_-kramer/1745

June 2, 2006

The contradictions of racial discourse, and their relevance to our contemporary world, are well illustrated in this last set of readings. Morris-Suzuki explains the tensions in Japan's empire building, especially the distinctions between formal nationality and civic rights. One could be a member of the Japanese empire, and therefore a subject of the Emperor, without necessarily having the privileges (voting, office holding) or responsibilities (conscription) of citizenship. Legally resembling an amalgamation of British and French systems, the expanding Japanese colonial system of the early 20th century differed from its British and French counterparts in practice because it had both large inflows and outflows of migrants. While Japanese migrated to other parts of Asia and elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of Asians flowed into Japanese territories and the home islands themselves. In all cases, however, the Japanese, like other colonial empires, imposed a system of unequal rights legitimized by the belief in some kind of natural hierarchy, often based on race. These practices have left a lasting and often painful legacy in the contemporary world.

The articles by Murphy and Kramer take us in a different direction by examining some of the controversies surrounding the American decision to incorporate the Philippines into its own expanding empire at the beginning of the 20th century. These articles are important for a number of reasons. First, they remind us that Japan and America began to build colonial empires at the same time. Second, they reveal the importance of concepts like race, civilization, and progress in all justifications for empire. Third, they illustrate how powerfully national and racial identities were gendered, and the key role war played in that process. Kramer shows how initial American restraint devolved into a war filled with race hatred

while, at the same time, Filipino leaders anguished over adopting guerrilla tactics because they would make their people appear uncivilized.

Murphy examines the Philippine-American War from the perspective of its American opponents, the anti-Imperialists, a diverse collection of men and women of different classes and races led for the most part by elite white men. She focuses primarily on the efforts of women to stop the American annexation of the Philippines and, when that failed, to expose the atrocities of the war itself. In the process, we see how their opponents used gender to discredit these women and their supporters, employing language and imagery that closely resembled common forms of racial discrimination. In addition, both articles show how many people in those days, especially men, understood war as a force of progress, as a way of weeding out the weak, and, of course, as an expression of manly virtue and honour.