

ARTICLE

Colonizing Workers: Labor, Race, and U.S. Military Governance in the Southern Philippines

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Management of labor was central to articulating and constructing U.S. colonialism in the southern Philippines. Governed by American military officers for fifteen years (1899–1914), the major island of Mindanao and those of the Sulu Archipelago became sites of intensive race management efforts. Colonial officials identified racialized Muslim and Lumad societies as out of step with the modern world of work and developed myriad programs to address this “problem,” including mandatory service on public works projects, carceral labor, industrial education, and directed markets. Unevenly applied and frequently contested, these initiatives generated a range of responses from local actors. The drive to create disciplined laborers through incentive, coercion, and violence shaped state building in the region and linked it to preoccupations with work and racial reform in other U.S. imperial possessions and the wider colonized world.

Labor loomed large in the entwined worlds of U.S. military governance, commerce, and racial reform. Racialized workers played key roles in establishing and maintaining American imperial domains. They were subjected to programs devised by colonial administrators, military officers, and private entrepreneurs to locate, manage, and discipline them. Settler domestication projects in the American West, plantation economies in the post-emancipation American South and the colonized Hawaiian Islands, semicolonial corporate enclaves in Central America, and the American “civilizing mission” in Southeast Asia had common features. These similarities emerged from shared aims of exporting and refining U.S. market templates, accumulating capital, cultivating colonial prestige, and managing the global color line.¹ In the Philippine context,

I am grateful to Julie Greene, Justin Jackson, Natalie Ring, and Karine Walther for resources and suggestions that improved this article. I presented earlier versions of this piece at the University of Edinburgh American History Seminar and the University of Oxford American History Research Seminar. My thanks to seminar attendees for their insightful questions and comments, and, in particular, to Stephen Tuffnell, Chris Nitschke, and Neil Suchak for their productively critical readings. The anonymous reviewers and editors at *Modern American History* likewise provided thoughtful critiques that helped sharpen the article’s contributions.

¹The foundational collection here is Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman, eds., *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York, 2015). A special issue of *Labor* also explored the topic in a series of essays; see Julie Greene, “Builders of Empire: Rewriting the Labor and Working-Class History of Anglo-American Global Power,” *Labor* 13, nos. 3–4 (Dec. 2016): 1–10. See also Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca, NY, 2011); Andrew Friedman, “U.S. Empire, World War II and the Racialising of Labour,” *Race & Class* 58, no. 4 (2017): 23–38; Julie Greene, “Movable Empire: Labor, Migration, and U.S. Global Power During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15, no. 1 (Jan. 2016): 4–20; Justin F. Jackson, “Roads to American Empire: U.S. Military Public Works and Capitalist Transitions, 1898–1934,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33, no. 1 (Mar. 2020): 116–33; Justin F. Jackson, “Crossing Islands and Oceans in Labor Histories of American Empire: Capital, Commodities, Coolies, and Consumers,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 91 (Spring 2017): 180–96; Janne Lahti, “Colonized Labor: Apaches and Pawnees as Army Workers,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 283–302; and Alfred Peredo Flores, “‘No Walk in the Park’: U.S. Empire and the Racialization of Civilian Military Labor in Guam, 1944–1962,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (Sept. 2015): 813–35.

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a rich scholarship has parsed the relationship between islanders and U.S. labor projects, though it mostly bypasses Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Colonial bureaucrats in the Philippines segregated, monitored, and moved native workers, rationalizing these acts through grammars of economic dynamism and colonial tutelage. The plantations, work camps, chain gangs, and industrial schools of the American-ruled Philippines are now increasingly understood as outgrowths of and contributors to the rise of U.S. global power in the Progressive Era.²

Issues of education and “race management” intersected with colonial labor in these territories. Industrial schooling drew from curricula that developed in Europe, germinated in American overseas missions, crisscrossed the North American continent, and made their way into the former Spanish colonies after 1898. As David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch remind us, a key management strategy in the globalizing metropolitan and colonial economies of the late nineteenth century involved fusing hierarchies of race to capitalist labor regimes.³ It manifested in numerous areas of colonial life, among them a trans-oceanically applied educational model premised on the idea that racialized groups represented a “problem” and promising permanent correction through labor-oriented school programs.⁴

What connected an ostensible periphery in Southeast Asia to larger currents running through entangled domestic and imperial realms were ideas about labor: that race and

²On how labor patterned colonial empire and postcolonial nationalism in the Philippines, see Greg Bankoff, “Wants, Wages, and Workers: Laboring in the American Philippines, 1899–1908,” *Pacific Historical Review* 74, no. 1 (Feb. 2005): 59–86; Adrian De Leon, “Sugarcane *Sakadas*: The Corporate Production of the Filipino on a Hawai‘i Plantation,” *Amerasia Journal* 45, no. 1 (2019): 50–67; Vernadette V. Gonzalez, “Military Bases, ‘Royalty Trips,’ and Imperial Modernities: Gendered and Racialized Labor in the Postcolonial Philippines,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 28, no. 3 (2007): 28–59; Justin F. Jackson, “‘A Military Necessity Which Must Be Pressed’: The U.S. Army and Forced Road Labor in the Early American Colonial Philippines,” in *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, eds. Marcel M. van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García (Leiden, 2016), 127–58; Moon-Kie Jung, “Racialization in the Age of Empire: Japanese and Filipino Labor in Colonial Hawai‘i,” *Critical Sociology* 32, nos. 2–3 (2006): 403–24; Mark Maca, “American Colonial Education Policy and Filipino Labour Migration to the U.S. (1900–1935),” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37, no. 3 (2017): 310–28; Rebecca Timio McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral: The Architecture of U.S. Colonialism in the Philippines* (Chicago, 2017), 49–74; Theresa Marie Ventura, “American Empire, Agrarian Reform and the Problem of Tropical Nature in the Philippines, 1898–1916” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2009); and Colleen Woods, “Building Empire’s Archipelago: The Imperial Politics of Filipino Labor in the Pacific,” *Labor* 13, nos. 3–4 (2016): 131–52.

³David R. Roediger and Elizabeth D. Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (Oxford, 2012), 40–97.

⁴On industrial education in the New South and its global connections, see James Levy, “Forging African American Minds: Black Pragmatism, ‘Intelligent Labor,’ and a New Look at Industrial Education, 1879–1900,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 17, no. 1 (2016): 43–73; Shoko Yamada, “Educational Borrowing as Negotiation: Re-Examining the Influence of the American Black Industrial Education Model on British Colonial Education in Africa,” *Comparative Education* 44, no. 1 (2008): 21–37; and Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 20–65. Among indigenous North Americans, see Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln, NE, 2007); Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose, eds., *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations* (Lincoln, NE, 2016); and Mark Odis Hagenbuch, “Richard Henry Pratt, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, and U.S. Policies Related to American Indian Education 1879 to 1904” (Ed.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1998). For the overseas colonies, see Carl Kalani Beyer, “Manual and Industrial Education During Hawaiian Sovereignty: Curriculum in the Transculturation of Hawai‘i” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Chicago, 2004); Solsirée del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898–1952* (Madison, WI, 2013); Ronald K. Goodenow, “The Foundations of American Imperial Education,” *Revista Española de Educación Comparada* 31 (2018): 87–110; and Glenn Anthony May, “The Business of Education in the Colonial Philippines, 1909–30,” in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, eds. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison, WI, 2009), 151–62.

economic torpor were linked and that the colonially constructed challenges of managing racialized groups could only be resolved in the classroom, factory, and field. Recentring labor in the history of colonial Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago serves multiple analytical ends. It textures accounts of military violence, legislated coercion, imprisonment, and local reform in the Moro Province, locating these issues within a border-crossing framework of “problems” and “solutions” grounded in prevailing theories of how colonized populations could or should work. It also connects colonial governance in the Muslim South to reform projects elsewhere in the Philippines and across U.S. extraterritorial possessions. Following the “closing” of the American West, the Moro Province represented the U.S. military’s longest-lived and most extensive contribution to Progressive Era race management schemes. Administrators in the southern Philippines drew from directed labor programs and model marketplaces on Luzon, welcomed prisoner transfers from Manila to bolster their workforce, and shared an abiding faith in the benefits of industrial education with their civilian counterparts. Their efforts spoke not just to the colonial Philippines, but also the intertwined extractive agendas and civilizational initiatives of governmental officials, labor contractors, corporate leaders, plantation owners, missionaries, and educators throughout U.S. imperial territories, from Alabama to Hawai’i to the Panama Canal Zone. An exploration of labor, violence, and reform in a militarized state thus acts as a window onto the larger efforts to build an American empire in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The creation and propagation of disciplined indigenous laborers from 1899 to 1914 animated U.S. efforts to solve the so-called “Moro problem,” a phrase conjured by American colonial elites to encompass the challenges posed by the sociocultural “backwardness” of Muslims in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. The civilizing project in the Philippines rested in part on the belief that the market economy functioned in a redemptive capacity. In its ideal form—which resembled the industrialized national cores of North American and European empires—the new colonial economy required quiescent wage laborers who would settle by worksites and learn to desire and consume the products of global modernity. Precolonial commercial arrangements needed replacement or major readjustment. Recasting Moros and Lumad as contributors to emerging agricultural and industrial systems in Mindanao-Sulu integrated them into a larger structure, where colonial labor hierarchies, private enterprise, and military-led state building birthed market-oriented futures. In these futures, the south’s peoples would escape the twin despotisms of the local *datu* (community leader) and the primitive labor system, and embrace scientifically validated managerial structures introduced by U.S. administrators. The extensive, interconnected labor programs devised by state and state-aligned actors moved through every district of the Moro Province, reordering localities in their wake. Roadworks, penal farms, plantations, primary schools, and local marketplaces became creation sites for the new colonial laborer, as well as spaces of contestation.

Despite its important contributions to the construction and imagined resolutions of the Moro problem, labor has played a secondary role in the historiography of the Philippines’ Muslim South. The region’s distinct trajectories under U.S. colonialism have encouraged this oversight. The Moro Province was partitioned from the north and governed by army officers who served as both civilian administrators and military commanders. Armed hostilities in the south continued long after the conclusion of the Philippine-American War, driven by political instability, state violence, and cultural incursion. The Islamic and animist spiritual practices of the southern indigenous populations became mechanisms for distancing, used as evidence of innate fanaticism and justifications for extreme force. Given the extended presence of the U.S. Army in the south, scholarship on the Moro Province—growing but still limited compared to writings on the northern islands—frequently examines military violence in its most elemental

forms.⁵ The punitive expedition and the colonial massacre are shared features of modern empires and crucial to understanding the colonization of Mindanao-Sulu, but these phenomena were also wed to everyday forms of coercion, including the structuring of labor relations. Labor regimes and state violence shadowed and reinforced one another in the Moro Province, something most evident when U.S. Army officers linked road building to military pacification, but also apparent in collisions over tax codes, vagrancy laws, compulsory schooling, and market integrations.

On February 22, 1906, the children of Zamboanga's public schools gathered to celebrate the "patriotic occasion" of George Washington's birthday. The day's entertainments included poetry readings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the singing of "O Spirit of the Nation, Come" by a school choir, and a Spanish-language paean to "El Rojo, Blanco y Azul"—the colors of the American flag. At the height of festivities, the Zamboangueno historian Balbino Saavedra gave a keynote address on the importance of industrial education to the southern Philippines' future. Adopting the tone and terminology of U.S. reformers, Saavedra described the "modern world" as a "vast and varied workshop" with factories and fields as both measures and engines of civilization. "Victories are won and conquests are made, not by soldiers and warships, but by the immeasurably more powerful armies of industry and fleets of commerce," he told the gathered crowd of Moros, Filipinos, Americans, and Europeans. Speaking from the seat of U.S. power on Mindanao, the historian voiced the aspirations of the Moro Province, a colony-within-a-colony administered by the U.S. Army and undergirded by a belief in rationalized labor systems and colonial marketization. Saavedra's martial language of industry, with its "armies" and "fleets," unwittingly fit in another way: the Moro Province was a space where the creation of model native workers and the practice of state violence were mutually constituted.⁶

Added to the United States' expanded overseas empire following the 1898 Spanish-American War, Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago had not undergone the same degree of Hispanicization and Christianization as the northern islands of the Philippines. The south had approximately 500,000 inhabitants, most of whom received the blanket designation of "non-Christians" from the ethnologists in the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes responsible for racially mapping new colonial territories. Muslim Malays, called "Moros," and inland animist groups, referred to as "pagans" (in this article as "Lumad"), comprised the majority of the population, with Christian Filipino enclaves hugging the western and northern coastlines of Mindanao.⁷ While critical of the long Spanish imperial project and its outcomes, many

⁵This includes traditional accounts of the U.S. military presence in the south, as well as works that critically evaluate the use of violence there. The classic text is Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899–1920* (Quezon City, Philippines, 1977). Military historians have used the period to explore U.S. counterinsurgency practices against Muslim adversaries; see James R. Arnold, *The Moro War: How America Battled a Muslim Insurgency in the Philippine Jungle, 1902–1913* (New York, 2011); and Ronald K. Edgerton, *American Datu: John J. Pershing and Counterinsurgency Warfare in the Muslim Philippines, 1899–1913* (Lexington, KY, 2020). Recent scholarship analyzes massacre as an intra-imperial practice and uses gender to explore mass violence in the Muslim South. See Joshua Gedacht, "'Mohammedan Religion Made It Necessary to Fire': Massacres on the American Imperial Frontier from South Dakota to the Southern Philippines," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, eds. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison, WI, 2009), 397–409; and Michael C. Hawkins, "Managing a Massacre: Savagery, Civility, and Gender in Moro Province in the Wake of Bud Dajo," *Philippine Studies* 59, no. 1 (Mar. 2011): 83–105. The only two recent works that deal directly with labor in the Moro Province are Michael C. Hawkins, *Making Moros: Imperial Historicism and American Military Rule in the Philippines' Muslim South* (DeKalb, IL, 2013); and Autumn Hope McGrath, "'An Army of Working-Men': Military Labor and the Construction of American Empire, 1865–1915" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2016).

⁶"Public School Entertainment," *Mindanao Herald*, Feb. 24, 1906, 1.

⁷For a precise articulation of what designations of "Moro" and "Lumad" mean in the context of contemporary Mindanao, see Oona Paredes, "Indigenous vs. Native: Negotiating the Place of Lumads in the Bangsamoro Homeland," *Asian Ethnicity* 16, no. 2 (Mar. 2015): 166–85, here 168–70. The efforts of Americans to reconfigure

Americans subscribed to the idea that previous contact with European Christian culture had a partially elevating effect on Filipinos on Luzon and in the Visayas. The south was a dark analogue in the colonial imaginary: unintegrated, undeveloped, uncivilized. This narrative fixated especially on Moro groups, citing their Islamic identities and long histories of political autonomy. “Their social condition is essentially different,” the Moro Province official Najeeb Saleeby wrote of the Moros, “and this difference is not in degree or in form, it is a difference in kind.”⁸

Filtered through Progressive Era vernacular, this “difference in kind” became the “Moro problem.” Saleeby, a medical doctor and educational specialist who served as the colonized south’s resident Moro expert, articulated the problem in straightforward terms: unlike Christian Filipinos, Muslims had not made the “preliminary progress in social development” required for them to adopt “European institutions and forms of government.”⁹ Their civic bodies remained anchored in locality, region, and the wider Islamic world. Moro elites cultivated cosmopolitan connections in Singapore, Borneo, Java, and the Ottoman Empire rather than Madrid, London, or Washington. Although embedded in Southeast and East Asian maritime economies, the towns and villages of the south lacked American-approved forms of commercial agriculture and industry and thus a modern laboring class.¹⁰

These issues raised questions among American administrators: how could existing societal structures in the south be co-opted or eliminated? What punishments or incentives would reconcile Moro (and Lumad) communities with the new colonial order? What combination of racial, religious, or economic obstacles might hinder progress? Resolving the imagined Moro problem would ultimately involve different strategies in different periods, from violent counterinsurgency campaigns during military rule, to the contested integration of “non-Christian” peoples into the emerging Philippine nation-state in the 1930s, to the economic “opening” of the island of Mindanao, which spanned the entire American colonial period. Writing for *Foreign Affairs* in the late 1920s, the University of Michigan political scientist (and future vice governor of the Philippines) Joseph Ralston Hayden worried about what came “next” for the Moros, “whose country [was] rapidly being brought within the limits of Western civilization.”¹¹ The durable phrase survived American rule and saw use in the latter-half of the twentieth century, when Moro independence movements challenged Filipino cultural, political, and economic hegemony.¹²

and order race and ethnicity in the colonial Philippines are explored in Daniel P. S. Goh, “States of Ethnography: Colonialism, Resistance, and Cultural Transcription in Malaya and the Philippines, 1890s–1930s,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 1 (Jan. 2007): 109–42; and Francis A. Gealogo, “Bilibid and Beyond: Race, Body Size, and the Native in Early American Colonial Philippines,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (Oct. 2018): 372–86.

⁸Najeeb M. Saleeby, *The Moro Problem: An Academic Discussion of the History and Solution of the Problem of the Government of the Moros of the Philippine Islands* (Manila, 1913), 5.

⁹Saleeby, *The Moro Problem*, 5.

¹⁰On Islamic cosmopolitanism in Asia, see R. Michael Feener and Joshua Gedacht, “*Hijra, Hajj* and Muslim Mobilities: Considering Coercion and Asymmetrical Power Dynamics in Histories of Islamic Cosmopolitanism,” in *Challenging Cosmopolitanism: Coercion, Mobility and Displacement in Islamic Asia*, eds. Joshua Gedacht and R. Michael Feener (Edinburgh, 2018), 1–29.

¹¹Ralston Hayden, “What Next for the Moro?” *Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 4 (Jul. 1928): 633–44, here 644.

¹²The ongoing resonance of the phrase is discussed in Peng Hui, “The ‘Moro Problem’ in the Philippines: Three Perspectives,” *Southeast Asia Research Centre Working Paper Series*, no. 132 (Dec. 2012): 1–24. Since the 1970s, it has resurfaced in scholarship as a means to describe ongoing political issues (namely Moro separatism), to articulate historical challenges, and to analyze patterns of prejudice in the Philippines. For instance, see Gene Carolan, “Solving the Moro Problem: Legalizing the Bangsamoro Peace Process,” *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 8, no. 3 (2016): 212–23; Dennis Bryce Fowler, “The Moro Problem: An Historical Perspective” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1985); and Gladys Nubla, “Managing the ‘Moro Problem’: Fractured Nation/ Narration in *Bagong Buwan*,” *positions* 19, no. 2 (2011): 393–420.

The idea of the Moro problem had multi-sited historical origins, born out of the violence of colonial race making in Southeast Asia and dominant discourses in the United States. Conditioned by colonial Catholicism and centuries of intermittent conflict between their empire and the Muslim sultanates of the southern Philippines, Spanish writers essentialized Moros as unpredictable, prone to religious fanaticism, and resistant to Christian civilization, creating a portrait of recalcitrant ungovernability.¹³ Their accounts influenced the American soldier-officials administering the Muslim South. So, too, did those produced by the British in Malaya and North Borneo, which portrayed Malays as idle, volatile, and “slow of comprehension.”¹⁴ U.S. native policy in the Philippines ultimately diverged from the British and Spanish models in important ways, but it derived from many of the same assumptions and critiques. Chief among these was the idea of Southeast Asian Muslim populations as a problem requiring resolution.¹⁵

White Americans also brought their own notions of torpor and progress to the Philippines. The Moro problem joined a set of similar concerns produced by stateside reformers that targeted racialized groups in moral, political, material, and economic terms. Debates over the “Indian problem” peaked in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when military campaigns in the frontier territories, Congressional legislation, and intensive missionizing coalesced to erode indigenous political and cultural sovereignties across the Trans-Mississippi West. After 1898, Indian “underdevelopment” became explicitly linked to other “problems” in overseas colonial territories. Policy makers, army brass, missionaries, journalists, businessmen, and visitors from other empires discussed these issues at the annual “Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples” conferences, held in Lake Mohonk, New York, from the 1880s–1910s.¹⁶ Fantasies of assimilation and expulsion likewise underpinned the “Negro question,” which stemmed from antebellum concerns about the place of African Americans in U.S. society and expanded following the Civil War as millions of formerly enslaved peoples joined free labor’s ranks. By the Progressive Era, white advocates of “industrial evolution” saw a route to black integration through the shop floor, with racial issues resolved and racial progress achieved in the regimented environment of the twentieth-century factory.¹⁷ A “problem” or “question” could also afflict entire regions or be abstracted even further to encompass societal shifts like urbanization.¹⁸ The “Moro problem” thus took shape as part of a larger discursive

¹³Oliver Charbonneau, *Civilizational Imperatives: Americans, Moros, and the Colonial World* (Ithaca, NY, 2020), 169–72.

¹⁴Charles Hirschman, “The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology,” *Sociological Forum* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 330–61, here 343.

¹⁵Donna J. Amoroso, “Inheriting the ‘Moro Problem’: Muslim Authority and Colonial Rule in British Malaya and the Philippines,” in *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*, eds. Julian Go and Anne L. Foster (Durham, NC, 2003): 118–47. The amorphous idea of the “race problem” had currency elsewhere in the British Empire; see Jane McCabe, *Race, Tea and Colonial Resettlement: Imperial Families, Interrupted* (London, 2017), 44–67.

¹⁶The presence of the “Indian problem” in elite discourse is explored in Robert G. Hays, *A Race at Bay: New York Times Editorials on “The Indian Problem,” 1860–1900* (Carbondale, IL, 1997). On political interventions made by Mohonk participants in another colonial possession, Puerto Rico, see Carlos Figueroa, “Quaker Political Interventions, and U.S. Puerto Rico Policy Development, 1900–1917,” *Journal of Race & Policy* 11, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 36–55.

¹⁷On pre-Civil War removal projects, see Nicholas Guyatt, “‘The Outskirts of Our Happiness’: Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (Mar. 2009): 986–1011. Ikuko Asaka considers “problem” rhetoric in the antebellum era, tying it to settler colonial race fantasies in *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham, NC, 2017), 1–80. Mohonk also hosted conferences dedicated to the civilizing mission among formerly enslaved peoples. See Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., “The ‘Negro Question’ at Mohonk: Microcosm, Mirage, and Message,” *New York History* 74, no. 3 (July 1993): 277–314. On the management of Black labor in industrial America, see Paul R. D. Lawrie, *Forging a Laboring Race: The African American Worker in the Progressive Imagination* (New York, 2016).

¹⁸Natalie J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880–1930* (Athens, GA, 2012), 1–17.

trend, like the “Philippine problem,” which related to Filipino self-governance and national identity, and the “Davao problem,” shorthand for fears about Japanese economic domination of Mindanao during the interwar period.¹⁹

The southern Philippines was hardly the indolent and disconnected space conjured in Spanish and American accounts. Customary labor practices varied across the heterogenous cultural and economic geographies of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Coastal and island groups participated in regional mercantile networks and forged connections with other Muslim societies in Island Southeast Asia. The two major sultanates—Sulu and Maguindanao—controlled flows of manufactured goods in the Sulu Sea and prospered from their connections to Chinese and European traders. In the case of Maguindanao, agriculture in the verdant Pulangi River Valley proved an economic boon. Lowland Moro leaders in Cotabato taxed upland peasants, controlled commodities exports, and profited from Spain’s inability to secure dominance over inland Mindanao.²⁰ Along the coasts, foraged and hunted items like pearls and bird’s nests “found lucrative markets in China,” and the sultanates became adept as brokers in the growing firearms trade.²¹ Slavery also played a central role in regional economies, benefitting the Sulu sultanate enormously as it reached its zenith in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Tausūg aristocrats helming the sultanate deftly managed relations with different client groups (including the slave-raiding Iranun and Sama-Bajau), the Chinese merchant diaspora, and European and Euro-American commercial interests.²² Maritime trade tied the coastal south to regional integrations and global commodity chain intensifications. By the late nineteenth century, however, the sultanates’ power had eroded, victim to the growing western imperial presence in Southeast Asia.²³

Moro and Lumad communities in Mindanao’s interior engaged in limited-scale agriculture, clearing forest areas through burning or with their *bolos* (bladed cutting tools). They turned soil by hand or small plow and planted seeds afterward. When cogon grass or other invasive plant life overtook a plot, a farmer might repeat the process elsewhere. This method—known as *kaingin*—readily supplied small markets with produce and fed individual Moro and Lumad families, but was criticized by colonial officials, who worried about its impact on the “agricultural future” of Mindanao.²⁴ Most communities raised livestock, and there was also a brisk trade in cloth, wood, and metal manufactures. Moro craftspeople working with iron, gold, silver, and fabrics created ornate decorative items, drums, weapons, and clothing, which they traded or sold. A fishing industry also existed among the Maranao people of the Lake Lanao region. Chinese and *mestizo* traders provided links to the wider world, but also gave rise to

¹⁹Pedro Guevara, “The Philippine Problem,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 131 (1927): 9–13. The “land problem” in Davao is detailed in Lydia N. Yu Jose and Patricia Irene Dacudao, “Visible Japanese and Invisible Filipino: Narratives of the Development of Davao, 1900s to 1930s,” *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* 63, no. 1 (Mar. 2015): 101–29.

²⁰Sietze Vellema, Saturnino M. Borrás, Jr., and Francisco Lara, Jr., “The Agrarian Roots of Contemporary Conflict in Mindanao, Southern Philippines,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, no. 3 (July 2011): 298–320, here 302.

²¹Michael Salman, *The Embarrassment of Slavery: Controversies over Bondage and Nationalism in the American Colonial Philippines* (Berkeley, CA, 2001), 62.

²²James Francis Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi: Globalization, Maritime Raiding, and the Birth of Ethnicity* (Singapore, 2003), 406–7; James Francis Warren, “The Sulu Zone, the World Capitalist Economy and the Historical Imagination: Problematizing Global-Local Interconnections and Interdependencies,” *Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (Sept. 1997): 177–222, here 190.

²³Euro-American spatial and racial imaginaries of the Southern Philippines are examined in Charbonneau, *Civilizational Imperatives*, 24–48.

²⁴Ralph W. Hoyt, *Annual Report of Colonel Ralph W. Hoyt, 25th United States Infantry, Governor of the Moro Province, for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1909* (Zamboanga, 1909), 6.

debt relationships that amplified inter-ethnic tensions.²⁵ The Spanish colonial presence remained minimal beyond coastal towns like Zamboanga, and native political power was less concentrated in Mindanao's interior, which allowed for a high degree of local autonomy.²⁶

The bustling commercial life of coastal Mindanao-Sulu and the villages of the central plateaus did not impress U.S. officials, who regularly denounced regional forms of production. What little admiration they expressed was directed toward Moro manufactures, which became collector's items and subject to forms of both racial nostalgia and disdain. The ornate bladed weapons and woven fabrics of the south were fashioned in small workshops or family homes. This artisanal labor was time-consuming and difficult to scale and therefore an affront to the modernizing designs of the colonial state. At the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, "primitive" items appeared in the display halls of the vast Philippine Reservation, presented by organizers as evidence of limited evolution in the centuries preceding U.S. rule.²⁷ Indigenous agricultural practices fell under similar scrutiny, critiqued by civilian and military administrators for reducing soil quality and producing insufficient yields. Colonial desires to reform Moros and their land fed on a growing sense that the "opening" of Mindanao meant massive economic rewards for both ambitious officials and settler frontiersmen.²⁸

Americans worried about the abilities of Moros and questioned labor practices in the region. Visiting Mindanao in the wake of the U.S. takeover, journalist Frederick McAuley Palmer saw little potential in Moro workers. He tempered his pessimism with the hope that American "enterprise and ingenuity" might develop a labor force capable of matching or exceeding those found in Europe's Asian colonies.²⁹ Before this could happen, other issues needed to be addressed. The most contentious was slavery, which U.S. military authorities initially side-stepped during the Philippine-American War to avoid conflict with Moro *datus* and sultans. They did so by presenting enslavement in the southern Philippines as milder, contrasting it favorably with the American South, and assuring the metropolitan public that the U.S. government did not tolerate the "peculiar institution" beyond its shores. Prevailing ideas about race and work factored into this calculus. According to historian Michael Salman, colonial elites found slavery morally objectionable and inefficient as a system of production, but also accepted it as common among groups lower on the racial-civilizational scale and perhaps even "necessary ... until a higher order of civilization" triumphed. Gradual abolition and prolonged tutelage became general prescriptions for avoiding economic strife. "Only at high stages could workers be left to govern themselves freely through self-control," Salman writes, "just like advanced nations fit for independence and democratic self-government."³⁰ After 1903, direct

²⁵"Moro Problem: Excerpt from Annual Report of the Provincial Governor of Lanao for the Year 1933," 1933, folder 9, box 28, Joseph Ralston Hayden Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI [hereafter BHL].

²⁶On the complexities of studying Spanish "rule" in the Cotabato region, see Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), 80–5.

²⁷The pioneering study of international fairs and empire remains Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984), 154–83. On the presence of Moros at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, see Michael C. Hawkins, *Semi-Civilized: The Moro Village at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Ithaca, NY, 2020); and Oliver Charbonneau, "Visiting the Metropole: Muslim Colonial Subjects in the United States, 1904–1927," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 2 (Apr. 2018): 204–27.

²⁸Settler colonial initiatives in the southern Philippines are examined in Christopher John Chanco, "Frontier Politics and Imaginaries: The Reproduction of Settler Colonial Space in the Southern Philippines," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 111–33; and Oliver Charbonneau, "'A New West in Mindanao': Settler Fantasies on the U.S. Imperial Fringe," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 3 (July 2019): 304–23.

²⁹Frederick Palmer, "Americanizing the Southern Philippines," *Collier's Weekly* 25, no. 22 (Sept. 1900), folder 1, box 2, William A. Kobbé Papers, United States Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA [hereafter USAHEC].

³⁰Salman, *The Embarrassment of Slavery*, 52.

rule altered this calculus and abolition became a means of weakening the power of the *datus* and creating new reservoirs of labor for the state and private enterprise.³¹

All of these factors connected in a tidy colonial narrative: hobbled by the institution of slavery and the corrupt rule of traditional leaders, the indigenous producers of the south remained frozen in a premodern state, unable to labor effectively or properly manage their lands. Solutions to this constructed dilemma abounded. The *Mindanao Herald* framed the issue through the prism of race. “If races have missions on this earth,” an unsigned editorial declared, “the mission of the Aryan peoples [is] to preach the gospel of work.” Conjuring images of dominance and submission, the editors argued that the peoples of the Philippines could only become “strong, robust, [and] self-reliant” by “working as we have worked.” The “shop, factory, [and] field” served as training grounds, backed up by robust vagrancy laws and labor-creating public works initiatives.³² Military officials spoke often about desired outcomes. Governor Tasker Bliss cast labor as a tool for integration, melding the “various races” of the southern Philippines into a “homogenous body under a common civilization.”³³ A. B. Foster, governor of the Cotabato district, painted a hopeful picture in his attempts to boost the region, claiming Moros were keen to work for white business interests and could be hired cheaply. “Almost an unlimited supply of laborers can be secured at any time and they work for 40 and 50 cents a day,” he told the local press in 1907.³⁴ The creation of a “permanent class of [native] laborers” was a primary objective of government during the military period.³⁵

Protection and firm guidance served as moral rationales in the quest to make the southern Philippines economically productive and racially harmonious. Military administrators argued that labor relations under the *datus* and sultans were defined by either predation (slavery) or fragmentation (village economies). Unlocking labor potential involved creating a level playing field, where all could work for (low) wages. This aim meant identifying vulnerable groups, sheltering them from threat, and teaching them to work. The district governor of Zamboanga, John Park Finley, a self-taught ethnologist in his spare time, declared the Lumad of Central and Northern Mindanao as “the primitive farmers of the country and its real producers.” He believed they required shielding from Moro slavers, Chinese merchant profiteers, and predatory Euro-American business interests before their labor power could be harnessed.³⁶ Annual reports from the Moro Province furthered the narrative of protection, recounting instances where Lumad and Moros fell prey to “unscrupulous traders”: Manobos selling foraged goods could expect a pittance for their efforts; Moro laborers received as little as twenty centavos for a day’s work; plantation stores kept local communities in degrees of debt bondage; and price-gouging was common, particularly during periods of epidemic and famine.³⁷ Governor John Pershing used these phenomena to justify the combining of labor and civilizational reform. Malign actors were “[fleecing] the credulous wild man beyond belief,” he wrote, and something needed to be done.³⁸

The threat and exercise of violence underpinned the creation of the new colonial laborer. According to Governor Bliss, the southern peasantry could be taught to work only “under

³¹George T. Langhorne, *Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province: September 1, 1903, to August 31, 1904* (Washington, DC, 1904), 16.

³²“The Gospel of Work,” *Mindanao Herald*, Nov. 11, 1905, 1.

³³Speech, Feb. 12, 1907, folder 5, box 43, Tasker H. Bliss Collection, USAHEC.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵“Report on Military Situation: Moro Province and Department Philippines,” Dec. 5, 1913, box 218, Leonard Wood Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC [hereafter LOC-MD].

³⁶John P. Finley, “Race Development by Industrial Means Among the Moros and Pagans of the Southern Philippines,” *The Journal of Race Development* 3, no. 3 (Jan. 1913): 343–68, here 355.

³⁷John J. Pershing, *Annual Report of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, U.S. Army, Governor of the Moro Province, for the Year Ending June 30, 1911* (Zamboanga, Philippines, 1911), 8–9.

³⁸John J. Pershing, *The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province for the Year Ending June 30, 1913* (Zamboanga, Philippines, 1913), 58.

the guiding hand of a nation strong enough and just and wise enough to now impose upon all what in the remote future an intelligent majority of all will impose of its own free will.” New paradigms of production that would create the conditions for true democracy, in other words, needed “imposition” in the short term. Bliss openly acknowledged the disciplinary dimensions of labor programs, which would be enforced through imprisonment and, in some cases, search-and-destroy operations.³⁹ Here the pieties of the civilizing mission and drive to make the south profitable intersected with security concerns. The connected processes of redefining labor relations and instituting new forms of taxation provoked resistance, especially among Moro populations in the Sulu Archipelago. Military officials interpreted local recalcitrance as the growing pains of peoples trapped in antique social and economic systems, and cast state violence as an initial—rather than ultimate—step toward the permanent correction of native behaviors. The “rough” lessons of incarceration, torture, and massacre would give way to vigorous enterprise, wage labor, private property, and a new class of native consumers, resolving the cyclicity of colonial violence that plagued the Spanish era. With force legitimated and integrated into the architecture of governance in the south, ecstatic prognosticating about the native potential to build roads, cut railroad ties, harvest hemp, and populate new agricultural settlements continued uninterrupted.

Initial efforts to forge a new Moro laboring class emerged amidst military operations in Lanao in 1902–1903. Located in northwestern Mindanao, the district was less accessible than coastal Zamboanga or Cotabato and had experienced only limited Spanish interference in the previous centuries, leaving traditional political and economic structures intact. Many Maranao sultans and *datus* guarded their autonomy, correctly surmising that the U.S. colonial state intended to co-opt or entirely displace local authority. Others decided to work with the Americans, which aggravated pre-existing communal schisms around the lake.⁴⁰ As war subsided in the north, Lanao became the site of running conflicts between Maranao leaders and the U.S. Army. Punitive expeditions led by Col. Frank Baldwin and (future governor of the Moro Province) Capt. John Pershing targeted noncompliant *datus* and their *cottas* (fortifications), overwhelming them with small-arms and artillery fire. Violent, asymmetrical clashes at sites like Bayan and Bacolod left hundreds of Maranao dead with comparatively few American casualties. Army brass and sympathetic press organs framed these battles as the only practicable means of combatting “savage” opponents.⁴¹ Military commanders twinned the onslaughts with attempts to cultivate collaborators, mimicking their European counterparts in other Asian colonies.⁴² Subordinating the Maranao to American imperatives proved a difficult, unevenly applied process, particularly in the more remote areas of the region, and left the door open to further unrest. This was already occurring on Jolo in the Sulu Archipelago, where a group of Tausūg leaders had begun pushing back against new criminal statutes, land surveys, and the economic regulation of the maritime environment.⁴³

Wage labor provided a potential means of mitigating these instabilities. Looking to the industrializing landscapes of the United States, army officers in Lanao envisioned a homogeneous force of Maranao workers, who would be reliant on the state and private enterprise rather than local patronage relationships. Ideally, the sedentism of daily work would encourage the emergence of a modern consumer culture, thus locking the Maranao into the

³⁹Speech, Feb. 12, 1907, folder 5, box 43, Tasker H. Bliss Collection, USAHEC.

⁴⁰The most in-depth recent account of the Lanao campaigns is Edgerton, *American Datu*, 28–78.

⁴¹General Adna Chaffee framed the Battle of Bayan, where some 400–500 Maranao died (eleven Americans killed), as a learning experience for the Moros. Adna Chaffee to Henry Corbin, May 13, 1902, box 11, Hugh Drum Papers, USAHEC.

⁴²John Pershing, “Interviews and Interrogations,” 1902, box 319, John J. Pershing Papers, LOC-MD. John Pershing became especially adept at these; for more, see Edgerton, *American Datu*, 79–96.

⁴³“Sultan Is Arrested,” *Manila American*, July 24, 1902, box 318, John J. Pershing Papers, LOC-MD; “Petitions,” 1901–1902, folder 4–8, set 1, Records of the Sultanate of the Sulu Archipelago, LOC-MD.

production-consumption cycles necessary for capitalist development. Lanao's perceived disconnection from coastal Mindanao (and thus the global market for agricultural commodities), as well as the logistical challenges this posed, made road building a preliminary area of focus. Roads could link the peoples of the lake to coastal communities like Iligan (to the north) and Malabang (to the south), binding Lanao to Mindanao's integrated economic future.⁴⁴ In May 1902, army engineers and enlisted men began constructing a wagon road connecting Malabang to Camp Vicars, fourteen miles distant at the southern edge of the lake. Moros labored along this route, serving as guides, installing telegraph poles, and transporting supplies. American soldiers maintained a tentative relationship with these workers, who provided valuable manpower and topographical knowledge, but who were also viewed as potential fifth columnists. Cycles of attack and reprisal on the trail-turned-road aggravated American feelings of isolation and encirclement, a situation worsened by language and cultural barriers.⁴⁵

The marriage of physical infrastructure and labor reform extended throughout the district. Further north, roadworks operated along a twenty-mile stretch of land linking Iligan to Marawi. The 2,200-foot climb between the coast and Lake Lanao presented surveying and grading challenges, as did finding laborers to renovate the old Spanish trail. Maj. Robert Lee Bullard oversaw the entire operation. A veteran of settler-indigenous conflicts in the American West, Bullard developed an expansive view of what road building might accomplish.⁴⁶ Both the work itself and its outcomes represented pathways from primitive outer darkness towards civilization. Once completed, the roads would draw the Maranao into the "current of the world's progress." The American tutelary fantasy began with Maranao men observing American soldiers reclaiming forest paths in the hills above Iligan and concluded with another sort of reclamation, where the Maranao began building roads themselves and reaped the rewards. This new Moro workforce, in lockstep with their American managers and the demands of industrial time, would inspire nearby communities and dampen anticolonial sentiment.⁴⁷

The officer's pat redemption tale obscured myriad difficulties. Colonial conditions (warfare, dislocation, environmental degradation) aided the spread of infectious disease. Cholera sickened and killed both American soldiers and Maranao workers on the Iligan–Marawi road, with each group blaming the other. Bullard also struggled with leaders in the communities from which he drew workers, who expected compensation for providing laborers and generally mistrusted American plans. At the worksites, Moro labor gangs often operated on more irregular schedules and at slower paces that unsettled the industrial sensibilities of their overseers. Even under less-than-ideal circumstances, however, colonial officials believed that road work mitigated the "danger of idleness" and reinforced "white military authority."⁴⁸ Writing for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1906, Bullard boasted that "lawlessness" had retreated as local communities collaborated to "earn money together on the American road" from their army paymasters. His article, "Preparing Our Moros for Government," connected the military-run work camp to the creation of modern Muslim colonial subjects and promoted the notion that wage labor could eventually emancipate Moros from colonial rule entirely.⁴⁹

Districts across the Muslim South experimented with programs to manage labor. Authorities on Jolo became more involved in the local trade in pearls and other maritime products, and colonial attempts to control sea traffic in Sulu reshaped Tausūg markets. Americans on the island also encouraged Moros to sell locally made "curios" for export to the United States.

⁴⁴Preoccupations with road building were linked to the U.S. Army's desire to have "more military discretion over civilian affairs," something that could be more easily realized in the overseas colonies. Katharine Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire* (Philadelphia, 2019), 150.

⁴⁵Charles Hack, "Journal," June–Sept. 1902, folder 7, box 1, Charles W. Hack Papers, LOC-MD.

⁴⁶Bullard receives extensive biographical treatment in Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists*.

⁴⁷Robert Bullard, "Road Building Among the Moros," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1903, 818–26, here 823.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Robert Bullard, "Preparing Our Moros for Government," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mar. 1906, 385–94, here 391.

In response, Chinese and European merchants in Jolo town began stocking their shops with Moro manufactures.⁵⁰ Finessing the island economy was a means for moving Moros toward approved forms of free labor and encouraging them to accept growing colonial dominion over trade in Maritime Southeast Asia. U.S. Army officers and their civilian counterparts in the north believed that sedate, reliable local labor forces were the future. American soldier-workers were temporary, subject to redeployment, replacement, and, increasingly after 1902, permanent numerical reduction. In any case, the climactic determinism of the day dictated that white men were not fit to labor “under a tropical sun.” As evidence, supporters of this idea pointed to pestilential conditions and high mortality rates in remote stations.⁵¹

The establishment of the Moro Province in 1903 created new opportunities to assert control over labor. Devised as a long-term successor to direct military rule but staffed almost entirely by army officers, the new governing body gave the south an U.S.-led administrative core with extensive policy making abilities. It was technically subordinate to Manila yet possessed a large degree of autonomy, effectively making it an experiment in military-led state building. District governors at Zamboanga, Lanao, Davao, Jolo, and Cotabato served in dual capacities: they were responsible for overseeing administrative tasks typically performed by civilians and for leading armed campaigns against anti-state groups, giving them the character of local strongmen. The Legislative Committee of the Moro Province, based in the provincial capital Zamboanga, oversaw the districts and ensured coordination between them. Its first head, Governor Leonard Wood, was a military surgeon who rose to prominence as commanding officer of Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War. After serving as military governor of Cuba, where he designed and implemented public infrastructure projects, Wood transferred to the Philippines and received the south’s top post.⁵² An avowed Anglo-Saxon and Christian supremacist, the governor took a hard line towards the Moros, believing their civilizational redemption could only be achieved with a degree of force.⁵³

Under Wood’s direction, the Legislative Committee instituted an annual personal tax of ten pesos on “each able-bodied male resident of the tribal ward between the ages of eighteen and fifty years.”⁵⁴ This poll tax mirrored the old *cedula personal* levied by Spanish authorities across the archipelago and was deemed necessary to make the province self-supporting.⁵⁵ If a resident could show he had been “engaged in any lawful work, trade, occupation or profession,” he was exempted from the tax. Most work in the south did not meet government standards, however, and Moro men faced a choice: pay a tax that seemed arbitrary and unjust, or refuse to pay and face punishment. The Legislative Committee anticipated the latter. Tax delinquents faced trial under new vagrancy laws. Following conviction, they were required to labor on public works projects for fifty centavos per day, meaning potentially twenty days of work.⁵⁶ Enacting

⁵⁰R. H. Little, “Details of the Sulu Compact,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 26, 1899, 1; Stefan Eklöf Amirell, “Pirates and Pearls: Jikiri and the Challenge to Maritime Security and American Sovereignty in the Sulu Archipelago, 1907–1909,” *The International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 1 (2017): 44–67, here 49–52; “Programme of the Jolo Agricultural and Industrial Fair,” Oct. 12, 1906, folder 67, box 15, Tasker H. Bliss Collection, USAHEC.

⁵¹“Mindanao Troops May Be Relieved,” *Manila Times*, Feb. 14, 1903, 1.

⁵²For an account of Wood’s supervision of military public works projects on Cuba, see Jackson, “Roads to American Empire,” 120–3.

⁵³Omar H. Dphrepaulezz, “Genesis or Genocide? Leonard Wood, Theodore Roosevelt and the White Man’s Empire in the Southern Philippines,” *Theory in Action* 9, no. 4 (Oct. 2016): 65–89.

⁵⁴Langhorne, *Annual Report 1904*, 68.

⁵⁵Americans at the time were aware that the *cedula* had been widely despised. For example, see Carl C. Plehn, “Taxation in the Philippines I,” *Political Science Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Dec. 1901): 680–711, here 691–5.

⁵⁶Langhorne, *Annual Report 1904*, 68.

vagrancy laws and prosecuting tax delinquents became the primary means for disciplining native workers. These practices blurred lines between free and unfree labor, allowing the government to sidestep comparisons to the notoriously draconian policies of European colonial regimes. Workers were “paid” for their time, although the notional wage simply went to pay the fine. Whereas Robert Bullard had to negotiate with local *datus* to secure road workers, the Moro Province had legal tools to create labor pools.

The public works programs in the Moro Province closely mirrored labor initiatives in the Northern Philippines. Luzon’s Benguet Road, a years-long undertaking requiring thousands of native laborers, shared features with Bullard’s roadworks in Lanao and the taxation acts being passed in Zamboanga. Cut into the hills leading to the colonial summer capital at Baguio, the road served as a “moving workshop in how to acquire, motivate, and retain [labor].”⁵⁷ White management incentivized, coerced, and used legal mechanisms to bolster their workforces. Part of this involved wedding the Spanish *polo*—an annual tax for public works—to American concepts of free labor, creating a model where “forced labor and wage labor ... [marched] together in close ranks.”⁵⁸ In 1906, the year workers completed the Benguet Road, the Moro Province introduced similar measures. Act No. 187, colloquially known as the road law, stipulated mandatory labor for every male inhabitant of the Moro Province subject to the poll tax or payment of the “equivalent in cash of such days’ labor.” In addition to paying their personal taxes, Moro and Lumad men now had to work on “public highways, bridges, wharves, or trails” for five nine-hour days each year. The provincial annual report noted optimistically that the law was being accepted “in a public-spirited way and no trouble is anticipated in enforcing its provision.”⁵⁹ The *Mindanao Herald* celebrated the act as a means of connecting “centers of commercial and agricultural activity” across the south.⁶⁰

In addition to using taxation, colonial authorities marshalled labor by conscripting prison populations. The Legislative Council’s 1906 Act No. 180, enacted to address worker shortages, provided for the “compulsory employment of able-bodied prisoners serving sentence in district or municipal jails.”⁶¹ The act emerged from discussions between Leonard Wood and Commissioner of Commerce and Police William Cameron Forbes that linked the penal cultures of the military south and civilian north. The Wood–Forbes scheme borrowed from the Spanish practice of carceral circulation—namely, moving convicts from Bilibid Prison in Manila to sites around Zamboanga. The Moro Province received inexpensive and easily controllable manpower, while the Philippine Commission was able to weaken insurrectionary sentiment in its prisons through dispersal.⁶² Overseen by the Philippine Constabulary, the colonial state’s military police force, prisoners constructed roads, wharves, and public buildings in Western Mindanao. By 1907, Wood’s replacement Tasker Bliss observed that “most of the public improvements [had] been with prison labor” in the larger municipalities.⁶³ Imported convicts and a growing culture of imprisonment within the Moro Province itself swelled the population of its prisons and the Legislative Council sought remedies. They settled on re-establishing the old Spanish penal colony at San Ramon, near Zamboanga. Run as an experimental farm in the first years of U.S. rule, the site transitioned back to its original purpose in 1907. Inmates grew copra, coffee, coconuts, and other crops with the aim of making the farm entirely self-sufficient. They also joined their fellow prisoners from Bilibid laboring on public works. Touted as a

⁵⁷McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral*, 51.

⁵⁸Jackson, “A Military Necessity Which Must Be Pressed,” 134.

⁵⁹Tasker H. Bliss, *The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province for Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1907* (Manila, 1907), 21–2.

⁶⁰“Editorial Comment,” *Mindanao Herald*, Aug. 3, 1907, 4.

⁶¹Bliss, *Annual Report 1907*, 21–6.

⁶²Benjamin D. Weber, “Fearing the Flood: Transportation as Counterinsurgency in the U.S.-Occupied Philippines,” *International Review of Social History* 63, S26 (Aug. 2018): 191–210.

⁶³Bliss, *Annual Report 1907*, 21–6.

model of colonial penology, the farm at San Ramon developed into the southern hub of the Philippines' carceral network.⁶⁴

The challenges and rewards of restructuring regional labor systems featured heavily in district reports, which gauged success or failure in terms of both military pacification and the ability of colonials to acquire, manage, and retain native laborers. Moros "worked well" in Lanao when handled with "tact and fairness," building barracks, bridges, roads, and a saw-mill.⁶⁵ Davao, with "almost unlimited" land and an "extremely favorable" climate for hemp production, was the site of a nascent Euro-American settler movement. Settlers in the district encouraged Lumad and Moro villagers to resettle on their plantations and set them to clearing and cultivating the land. Laborers earned 50 centavos per day, although this often came in the form of "rice, cloth, beads, or some other commodity," resembling the "company store" in the United States that kept workers bound to their employers through dependence, isolation, and debt.⁶⁶ Basilan, the easternmost island in the Sulu chain, presented "unusual advantages" to companies and enterprising individuals. Its proximity to Zamboanga lessened supply costs, but the island lacked a vigorous labor market. Americans tried to develop one, encouraged by the relatively inexpensive cost of workers (twenty-five centavos per day) compared to Zamboanga (seventy-five centavos per day) on the other side of the Basilan Strait.⁶⁷ On Jolo, Tausūg villagers increased their cultivation of hemp and coconuts under the approving gaze of district administrators, who pointed to "new and permanent" homes as evidence of labor's civilizing effects. Joloano farmers and craftspeople won numerous prizes at the 1907 Zamboanga fair for their crops and manufactures.⁶⁸

Boosterism saturates the colonial archive, obscuring both the experiences of native laborers and the obstacles faced by the colonial state. Provincial documents enumerated successes, hoping to convince Manila and Washington of the U.S. Army's exceptional skill at discipline and direction. The regional press, which represented white merchants and settlers, even more hyperbolically downplayed problems and painted Mindanao as a place to make a fortune—an extended sales pitch at a moment when U.S. colonial zones in the Caribbean and Pacific competed for capital, labor, and settlers. Drawing resources and bodies to the Southern Philippines would transform the region and its peoples, boosters argued, borrowing language used in the settling of the American West.⁶⁹ Yet latent unease also surfaced in official reports and newspaper articles, much of it connected to labor shortages and under-financing. Davao planters complained of Lumad "timidity" and "aversion to hard work" and searched for migrant laborers in the Visayas. They also sought technological solutions, buying hemp stripping machines to reduce the need for workers who might be absent or inconsistent.⁷⁰ The limited freedoms of the colonial labor market also created unanticipated frustrations for the state and private enterprises. Native workers moved between jobsites searching for higher payrates or, when they had earned enough money or grew tired of the demands made on them, simply returned to their home communities. Basic features of modern wage labor - choice and mobility - vexed white colonials, who preferred sedentary, predictable work crews. Other

⁶⁴John J. Pershing, *Annual Report of Brigadier General John J. Pershing, U.S. Army, Governor of the Moro Province, for the Year Ending August 31, 1910* (Zamboanga, Philippines, 1910), 4; Frank W. Carpenter, *Report of the Governor of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu (Philippine Islands), 1914* (Washington, DC, 1916), 355–7.

⁶⁵George T. Langhorne, *Second Annual Report of the Governor of the Province of Moro for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1905* (Manila, 1905), 32.

⁶⁶"Hemp in Mindanao," *The Far Eastern Review*, Aug. 1906, 100–2, here 101.

⁶⁷Langhorne, *Annual Report 1905*, 17–8.

⁶⁸Bliss, *Annual Report 1907*, 37.

⁶⁹"Fortunes in the Soil," *Mindanao Herald*, Oct. 7, 1905, 4; Charbonneau, "A New West in Mindanao," 310–2.

⁷⁰"Davao Planters Seeking Labor," *Mindanao Herald*, Feb. 1, 1908, 1. The fates and fortunes of the Davao planting and laboring classes are examined in Patricia Irene Dacudao, "Abaca: The Socio-Economic and Cultural Transformation of Frontier Davao, 1898–1941" (Ph.D. diss., Murdoch University, 2018).

challenges also emerged: cholera outbreaks halted production; fluctuations in global commodities markets paralyzed plantation growth; itinerant traders bilked Moros and Lumad of their wages; and Chinese exclusion severed businesses from a key foreign labor market.⁷¹

Although the Moro Province marketed itself as a space where colonial work replaced *lantakas* (cannons) with plows, its gradations of free and unfree labor produced a culture of violence. The stern language of American administrators suggested as much: “weeding out the weak and inefficient” Moros would lead to a superior class of local workers. Those unwilling to accept new realities were cast as remnants of a “crude” past and subject to detention or extreme force.⁷² With their inbuilt provisions for directed labor, new taxation schemes proved especially unpopular in Moro communities and were often rejected as unjust impositions. The introduction of a *cedula* on Jolo became the source of ongoing state-subject tensions, with military violence the primary means of punishing the *datus* and peasants who flouted the tax. The 1906 massacre at Bud Dajo, where the U.S. Army killed between 700 and 1000 Tausūg Moros, constituted in part a brutal escalation of anti-tax protests. By absenting themselves to an extinct volcanic crater and building fortifications, the Tausūg families on Dajo signaled a rejection of the new colonial order, which expected them to live stationary lives, labor regularly, and direct some of their income into state coffers. A boundaryless ethos of race war amplified the resulting violence, justified by American officials as the only possible response to people who refused to recognize the legitimacy of the state.⁷³

Najeeb Saleeby, one of the few moderates in the government of the Moro Province, despaired at the crude wielding of military power. “Peaceful measures bear more fruit in the end,” he wrote after his retirement from colonial service, arguing for a reform agenda that would simplify U.S. rule by channeling the authority of local *datus* and *panditas* (religious leaders).⁷⁴ For some officials, applying “progressive” solutions to race “problems” became a means to permanently pacify the region. Nowhere was this more evident than in the school system. “In order to labor intelligently, education is necessary,” Tasker Bliss wrote. “We have no room in the Moro Province for an idle class, and we are, therefore, going to teach ... children not only the knowledge which comes from books but the knowledge which comes from training in industrial and agricultural schools.” The child educated in manual skills would have “something to add” to the province, enriching its productive capacities while stabilizing its politics.⁷⁵ “Industrial education should form nine-tenths of instruction here,” a 1905 *Mindanao Herald* article advised.⁷⁶

Industrial education, which taught mechanical and agricultural skills, had a long history in the continental and overseas activities of American educational reformers, who gravitated to European manual training programs in the early 1800s and made attempts to apply them in the growing cities of the northeast. They also influenced Protestant religious organizations like the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which played increasingly central roles in the settler colonial cultures of Hawai‘i and Alaska.⁷⁷ After the Civil War,

⁷¹Pershing, *Annual Report 1913*, 58; Pershing, *Annual Report 1911*, 11; Tasker H. Bliss, *The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1908* (Zamboanga, Philippines, 1908), 26; “Editorial Comment,” *Mindanao Herald*, Oct. 21, 1905, 4; Hoyt, *Annual Report 1909*, 7.

⁷²“Report on Military Situation: Moro Province and Department Philippines,” LOC-MD; Langhorne, *Annual Report 1904*, 23–4.

⁷³Hawkins, “Managing a Massacre,” 83–105.

⁷⁴Saleeby, *The Moro Problem*, 18.

⁷⁵Speech, Feb. 12, 1907, folder 5, box 43, Tasker H. Bliss Collection, USAHEC.

⁷⁶“Editorial Comment,” *Mindanao Herald*, Oct. 21, 1905, 4.

⁷⁷Early industrial education programs in the United States are described in Lewis Flint Anderson, *History of Manual and Industrial School Education* (New York, 1926), 135–54. On the organization of schools in U.S. foreign

the rising industrial fortunes of the nation ensured a steady demand for skilled and unskilled laborers, while compulsory schooling laws spread across the continent in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Mass immigration, class division, hardening racial categorizations, and the rapid settling of the western territories intensified calls for more instruction in manual skills, with a particular emphasis on the children of low-status groups.⁷⁸ Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the Hawai'i-born son of missionaries, founded the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868 to train formerly enslaved African Americans. His stated intention was to "build up an industrial system, for the sake not only of self-support and intelligent labor, but also for the sake of character."⁷⁹ Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee State Normal and Industrial Institute followed in 1870, modeled along similar lines, and an indigenous-focused outgrowth of Hampton, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, was established in 1879 by Capt. Richard Henry Pratt. Industrial education in reservation and off-reservation boarding schools expanded dramatically in the 1880s and 1890s. Curricula at these schools invariably emphasized Anglo-Saxon cultural norms and manual training.⁸⁰

After 1898, the movement found proponents among white policy makers, missionaries, and educators in the new overseas colonies.⁸¹ Extending industrial education to the Caribbean and the Philippines seemed natural to civilian and military leaders like William Howard Taft and Tasker Bliss, who framed the schools as part of a collective effort to resolve race problems in the U.S. empire. Circulation points like the Mohonk conferences and World's Fairs reinforced the notion of educational uplift as a key colonial strategy, both within the U.S. orbit and among the European empires. The experiences of the U.S. Army officer class "Americanizing" the indigenous West, and then participating in debates over native policy with civilian elites, influenced the character of school-building in the southern Philippines from the outset.⁸²

While pre-Moro Province manual training schools in Mindanao, like the one run by son-of-missionaries Emerson Christie in Zamboanga, contained overt Christian elements, those that followed under Wood and his successors leaned more heavily on industrial proselytism. "Too many boys are attending school with the idea of earning their living by some other means than manual labor," Wood complained in 1906. "Opportunities in agricultural and some of the mechanical arts are very great, whereas in the professions they are exceedingly limited." The province required a supple labor force, in other terms, not burgeoning professionals whose education could lead them to challenge colonial hierarchies. Although Wood dreamed of covert Christianization, his principal understanding of industrial education—as a mechanism by which Moros could move towards the "proper stage of culture that modern institutions require"—was materialist and concerned with governance and development.⁸³ In his view, training in industrial schools would contribute to Moros' reaching cultural, economic, and political benchmarks required for self-governance—all of which fed into colony-wide narratives about "benevolent assimilation" and the ill-defined postcolonial future.⁸⁴

missions, see Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY, 2015), 74–101.

⁷⁸Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club*, 115.

⁷⁹Quoted in Anderson, *History of Manual and Industrial School Education*, 211.

⁸⁰Louellyn White, "White Power and the Performance of Assimilation: Lincoln Institute and Carlisle Indian School," in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, eds. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (Lincoln, NE, 2016), 106–23; Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 38–64.

⁸¹Del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*, 24–57; May, "The Business of Education in the Colonial Philippines," 152–3.

⁸²Karine Walther, "'The Same Blood as We in America': Industrial Schooling and American Empire," in *On Imperial Grounds: New Histories of Religion and U.S. Empire*, eds. Sylvester Johnson and Tisa Wenger (New York, forthcoming).

⁸³Leonard Wood and Tasker H. Bliss, *Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province* (Zamboanga, Philippines, 1906), 15; Saleeby, *The Moro Problem*, 5.

⁸⁴This future was imagined by pro- and anti-imperialists alike, manifesting in debates over the racial, religious, and political capacities of Filipinos and Moros. For instance, see Susan K. Harris, *God's Arbiters: Americans and the*

The Moro Province started small. Limited budgets aside, education officials and members of the Legislative Council recognized that because plantation agriculture and manufacturing existed in an embryonic state, advanced industrial training for indigenous youth was impractical. Mindanao had few factories, and most of them lacked the “costly and complicated” steam-powered technologies found on an American shop floor. Developing the region into an economic dynamo was a long-term priority, but one that would happen only after specific manual skills had been developed by a majority of the labor force. Instilling such skills at a young age was intended to ensure that the Moro or Lumad child would grow into an adult who did not simply live “on the production of others.”⁸⁵ As in U.S. continental programs, students initially received small tools with which to learn the basics of “wood-working, iron-working and agricultural methods.” If, in time, they attained employment in a more complex industrial setting, they would already have a “sound basis of practical tool work” and adapt quickly.⁸⁶

Attending a public school in the southern Philippines meant rapid immersion in basic vocational education. American and Christian Filipino teachers instructed younger students on weaving techniques and block building. Upper-year boys learned woodworking; girls, in keeping with Victorian sensibilities, focused on domestic labor. Schools geared training activities toward the environments of their local districts, believing this would speed development, and curricula varied between remote and more heavily populated areas. With their advanced infrastructural demands, larger municipalities like Zamboanga required laborers who could grade roads, erect wharves, and contribute to local manufacturing. Rural schools focused on crop cultivation and the collection of forest products. At the experimental school in Lais in the Davao district, students spent most of their time tending the soil, though they also received rudimentary training in ironworking and carpentry. They raised vegetable gardens and each had a patch of hemp, which they could then strip during “recreation hours” and sell for their “individual benefit.” This mixed agricultural-industrial model led to the development of similar sites in the Cotabato and Lanao districts.⁸⁷

Basic vocational training was part of a provincial strategy to domesticate “wild” labor and draw Mindanao’s hinterlands closer to the colonial center. Bilaan, Manobo, Tagakaolo, and Bagobo communities in Davao had been intermittently served by Spanish missionaries, and some contributed to the small pre-American planter economy in Southern Mindanao. The Moro Province had more ambitious plans for them. The abaca, hemp, coconuts, rubber, bananas, and other crops grown in Davao required workers. White settlers did not exist in great enough numbers to cultivate the soil, and substantial increases in Visayan and Japanese settlement did not occur until after the Moro Province period. Frustrated by these labor shortages, the government and independent business interests saw education as a long-term fix. In Padada, a small municipality on the western side of the Davao Gulf, American planters established a school for the children of “hill people” working for them. Although provincial reports characteristically failed to distinguish between ethnic groups, enrolled students likely came from local Calagan, Bilaan, and Tagakaolo communities.⁸⁸ Children from around 100 Lumad families attended the school, which became a model for others in the district. On a

Philippines, 1898–1902 (Oxford, UK, 2011), 3_40; and Julian Go, “Anti-Imperialism in the U.S. Territories after 1898,” in *Empire’s Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism*, eds. Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton (Ithaca, NY, 2015), 79–96.

⁸⁵Speech, Feb. 12, 1907, folder 5, box 43, Tasker H. Bliss Collection, USAHEC.

⁸⁶Bliss, *Annual Report 1908*, 14.

⁸⁷Pershing, *Annual Report 1913*, 31.

⁸⁸Lucille Tanguihan reconstructs indigenous and settler histories in her article on Padada. She notes American planting operations there at the time, including the Ames and McClellan Plantation, the Balutaki Hemp Company, the Mindanao Estates Company, the Padada Plantation Company, the Harry B. Wilson Hemp Plantation, and the Christenson Plantation. Lucille G. Tanguihan, “Reconstruction of a Town’s History,” *Proceedings Journal of Education, Psychology and Social Science Research* 3, no. 1 (2016): 123–9.

1907 visit there, superintendent of schools Charles Cameron argued that creating “educational advantages” would solve labor shortages. Over time, Cameron and other supporters of plantation schools hoped the institutions would rectify extremely low rates of enrollment among the 28,000 Lumad children of school age and spell the end of “nomadic habits.” The operating logic was circular: agriculture, manufacturing, and trade would “induce community life and the accumulation of property.” Schools would grow and perpetuate these practices, permanently solving the “non-Christian problem.”⁸⁹

Pedagogical solutions to labor issues extended beyond the classroom and followed from social reforms in the United States that presumed the elevating effects of commerce on religiously and racially suspect urban immigrant groups.⁹⁰ In the Moro Province, these ideas found their champion in John Park Finley, district governor of Zamboanga, who believed that a failure to adopt Western systems of trade deepened communal factionalism in Mindanao-Sulu and hindered state formation. Finley developed a theory that regional growth had been restricted due to inter-ethnic predations by the “coast people” (Moros) toward the “hill people” (Lumad). He saw labor devaluation, precolonial economic networks, and elite corruption as factors preventing material—and thus racial—progress. To combat perceived “internal” causes of economic stagnation and anticolonial violence, Finley proposed integrating the south’s peoples through a unified system of modern marketplaces. He called them “Moro Exchanges,” and claimed the markets would eliminate “racial, social, religious, and commercial” tensions, simplify colonial rule, and ensure future prosperity.⁹¹

The directed marketplace gained currency across the colonial Philippines in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁹² Finley’s ideas drew from programs in northern Luzon. A sequence of local markets had opened around Baguio under the direction of William Cameron Forbes, who served on the Philippine Commission before becoming governor general of the islands. The northern markets operated on a familiar premise: that they would turn the primitive indigenous subject into a modern citizen through commercial rehabilitation. This colonial “market pastoral” turned on the notion that economic, rather than political, development represented the road to individual and perhaps collective autonomy. By buying into the market, the Igorot in Baguio (or Moro in Mindanao) freed themselves from war, destitution, and a slavish dependency on their local leaders. In the north, Rebecca McKenna writes, American grandees like Henry Stimson and William Howard Taft promoted the idea that commerce would “[facilitate] democratic culture” in the Philippines and perhaps help usher the Philippine nation into being.⁹³ In foregrounding market relations as the primary developmental vehicle for Moros and Lumad, U.S. officials tapped into a global conversation that reimagined the village-level transaction as potentially liberating. Ad hoc local and regional forms of “developmental imperialism” existed across the European, Japanese, and Ottoman empires—a common thread running through the civilizing missions of the late-imperial world.⁹⁴

⁸⁹“Schools and Hemp in District of Davao,” *Mindanao Herald*, Oct. 19, 1907, 3; Bliss, *Annual Report 1907*, 17.

⁹⁰David Huyssen, *Progressive Inequality: Rich and Poor in New York, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 49–62; Elizabeth Carolyn Brown, “Pedagogies of U.S. Imperialism: Racial Education from Reconstruction to the Progressive Era” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2016), 1–31.

⁹¹Finley, “Race Development by Industrial Means,” 355.

⁹²Missionaries experimented with teaching indigenous peoples the “modern ways of the word” across the U.S. empire. For an example from Alaska, see Roxanne Willis, “A New Game in the North: Alaska Native Reindeer Herding, 1890–1940,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 277–301.

⁹³McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral*, 122; Finley, “Race Development by Industrial Means,” 355. On Luzon, the anthropologist Albert Jenks wrote about the desirability of guiding Igorots to a state of “continual free commerce.” Americans also established experimental exchange markets among the Cordilleran mountain peoples. For examples, see Albert Ernest Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot* (Manila, 1905), 159; and Jackson, “A Military Necessity Which Must Be Pressed,” 157.

⁹⁴For instance, see Kenneth Pomeranz, “Empire & ‘Civilizing’ Missions, Past & Present,” *Daedalus* 134, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 34–45, here 38–40; Faika Çelik, “‘Civilizing Mission’ in the Late Ottoman Discourse: The Case

Approving Finley's Moro Exchange scheme in 1904, the Moro Legislative Council determined that it would encourage capital and property accumulation among "non-productive" natives.⁹⁵ Finley enlisted the support of Moro leaders, using his connections to Datu Mandi and Sama-Bajau leaders on the Zamboanga Peninsula, to evangelize for the exchange system in testimonials. The missives, which Finley later used in his published writings, had a coached quality. "Governor Finley, help us avoid temptation and sin," one read. "Regulate our customs and laws so that they may be brought into line ... with the customs and laws of the American government, and that we as Mohammedans may become better American citizens."⁹⁶ At the ceremony celebrating the 1904 opening of the first Exchange in Zamboanga, Finley extolled wage labor and the market economy to the audience, calling them the "the only road to advancement, prosperity, and peace."⁹⁷

The Zamboanga Exchange site began as a single structure with twenty vendor stalls but quickly expanded. Its multiple buildings eventually included a 130-bed dormitory for visiting traders and farmers, animal pens, a tool house, and a lumber supply depot.⁹⁸ In its first year of operation, the Exchange was visited by William Cameron Forbes, Secretary of War William Howard Taft, and a party of U.S. Congressmen.⁹⁹ Buoyed by this recognition, the system grew, and by 1911 Moro Exchanges operated in thirty communities across the Zamboanga Peninsula and Sulu Archipelago.¹⁰⁰ An executive council composed of Finley, the provincial treasurer, and the provincial auditor oversaw the Exchanges, with Moro leaders acting as board members. They set fees for local traders and determined salaries for employees. Permanent vendors paid fixed stall rates, and "transient" traders surrendered 1 percent of their profits. While masked in the language of free enterprise, the entire operation was a tightly directed affair. The Exchange council controlled what was sold and purchased in the markets, managed loans, regulated labor, mediated disagreements, and ran a central bodega in Zamboanga to dispose of surplus goods.¹⁰¹ To undercut outside commerce, the Exchanges sold imported items to Moros and Lumad for twenty percent above cost and sent agents to buy up stock from rural merchants.¹⁰² Finley advertised the use of Moro employees in the markets, but any real native influence over the Exchanges came in the form of collaborating *datus* on the Executive Council, who ensured local compliance.¹⁰³

The swift growth of the Exchanges excited the imaginations of reformers on both sides of the Pacific. By 1911, reports indicated the volume of trade at Zamboanga over the previous seven years totaled in the millions of pesos, with the Exchange at Jolo also doing sound business.¹⁰⁴ News of the program filtered back to the United States, where the *Washington Post* reported it

of Gypsies," *Oriente Moderno* 93, no. 2 (2013): 577–97; and Matsuda Kyōko, "Inō Kanori's 'History' of Taiwan: Colonial Ethnology, the Civilizing Mission and Struggles for Survival in East Asia," *History and Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (June 2003): 179–96.

⁹⁵Act No. 55, Legislative Acts Enacted by the Legislative Council of the Moro Province, June 14, 1904, box 216, Leonard Wood Papers, LOC-MD. For a closer account of the Exchanges, see Charbonneau, *Civilizational Imperatives*, 62–5.

⁹⁶Finley, "Race Development by Industrial Means," 355.

⁹⁷"Editorial," *Mindanao Herald*, Sept. 3, 1904, 4.

⁹⁸Atherton Brownell, "Turning Savages into Citizens," *Outlook*, Dec. 24, 1910, 921–31, here 928.

⁹⁹Journal, Nov. 30, 1904, box 1, W. Cameron Forbes Papers, LOC-MD; Atherton Brownell, "What American Ideas of Citizenship May Do for Oriental Peoples: A Moro Experiment," *Outlook*, Dec. 23, 1905, 975–85, here 983; Memorandum, Aug. 17, 1905, folder 3, box 11, Frank Ross McCoy Papers, LOC-MD.

¹⁰⁰Brownell, "Turning Savages into Citizens," 928.

¹⁰¹Report, Oct. 31, 1910, folder 2, box 217, Leonard Wood Papers, LOC-MD; "The Non-Christians of the Southern Islands," Speech, Oct. 24, 1912, box 38, Burton Norvell Harrison Family Papers, LOC-MD.

¹⁰²"The Non-Christians of the Southern Islands," LOC-MD; Brownell, "Turning Savages into Citizens," 928–9.

¹⁰³Brownell, "Turning Savages into Citizens," 928; Journal, W. Cameron Forbes Papers, LOC-MD.

¹⁰⁴Business Records, 1912, folder 1, box 1, John Park Finley Papers, USAHEC; "Moro Exchange at Jolo," *Mindanao Herald*, July 6, 1907, 1.

had been designed to mimic the New York Produce Exchange—“an engine of civilization”—as closely as “conditions would permit.”¹⁰⁵ Finley returned to North America in 1912, where he wrote journal articles and gave public lectures touting the successes of the Exchanges.¹⁰⁶

Finley’s charm offensive obscured harsh realities about the colonial marketplaces. Moro Exchange outposts appeared on Basilan and in Dapitan, for instance, in the wake of military assaults that “wiped” Moro and Lumad rancherias “off the face of the map.”¹⁰⁷ Beyond serving as rationales for and outcomes of violent counterinsurgency campaigns, the Exchanges also faced opposition from native farmers and artisans. The 1 percent commission was unpopular, leading many producers to sell or barter privately. The “Bolsa Moro,” as locals referred to them, gained a reputation for economic coercion. Under Finley’s direction, officials forced Moro and Lumad producers to sell at the markets even when demand was greater elsewhere. After 1912, the new district governor of Zamboanga, George Helfert, reviewed the entire system and concluded that native communities wanted to see the Exchanges either overhauled or discontinued entirely.¹⁰⁸

The 1912 U.S. presidential election brought a Democratic administration to Washington and a shift in the government’s approach to the Philippines. Democratic Party policy makers ruled out immediate sovereignty for the islands and instead sought to move Americans out of administrative roles there, replacing them with Christian Filipinos. A new governor general, Francis Burton Harrison, committed to this “Filipinization” of the colonial bureaucracy. This development presented challenges for the Moro Province, which was still under U.S. military governance. Beginning in late 1912 and continuing through 1913, military commander of the Philippines, J. Franklin Bell, and governor of the Moro Province, John Pershing, worked with civilian authorities in Manila to “normalize” the south. The process ended the Moro Province, which in 1914 officially became the Department of Mindanao and Sulu. The new civilian governor, Frank W. Carpenter, was American, but Filipinos (mainly from Luzon and the Visayas) increasingly took over government posts in the districts (now organized as provinces). U.S. Army troops departed, replaced by the Philippine Constabulary and Philippine Scouts.¹⁰⁹

The Moro Province continued to experiment with mandatory labor schemes, which persisted in various forms until the region was reorganized. Road extension remained a primary focus. In 1911, a road tax of 2.5 pesos per annum could be paid through five days labor, echoing earlier Legislative Council acts. Two years later the law changed, with every male non-Christian between eighteen and sixty now required to pay three pesos annually and “perform ten days labor upon the public roads and trails.”¹¹⁰ Imagining a future where plantation agriculture, shipping, and small manufacturing firms dominated Mindanao, the province’s final military governor John Pershing passed an act “regulating relations between capital and labor,” describing it as a means to protect Moro and Lumad workers.¹¹¹ Its actual impact on them escapes the colonial record. What does not is Pershing’s antipathy toward the nascent Filipino movement in Zamboanga, which he erroneously connected to Moro insurgencies elsewhere in the province.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵“Teaching New York’s Trade Tactics to the Moros,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 1912, SM4.

¹⁰⁶John P. Finley, “The Mohammedan Problem in the Philippines,” *The Journal of Race Development* 5, no. 4 (Apr. 1915): 353–63.

¹⁰⁷“Brief Report of the Basilan Campaign,” 1907–08, folder 6, box 217, Leonard Wood Papers, LOC-MD; Brownell, “Turning Savages into Citizens,” 930; “Teaching New York’s Trade Tactics to the Moros,” SM4.

¹⁰⁸Pershing, *Annual Report 1913*, 18.

¹⁰⁹“Report on Military Situation: Moro Province and Department Philippines,” LOC-MD.

¹¹⁰Pershing, *Annual Report 1911*, 14; Pershing, *Annual Report 1913*, 25.

¹¹¹Pershing, *Annual Report 1913*, 57.

¹¹²Pershing sent two memoranda to General J. Franklin Bell in January 1913 outlining his fears that fledgling unionism was connected to Filipino and Moro insurrection. He recommended that a “thorough system of secret

Similar approaches to labor survived in the Department of Mindanao and Sulu. Carpenter advertised the south at the Second Philippine Exposition in 1914, encouraging “immigrants and capitalists” to settle the region. He boasted of skilled Moro and Lumad craftspeople waiting to be harnessed by industry, including Bagobo bead workers, Maranao silversmiths, and Tirurary basket weavers.¹¹³ The governor worked with Manila to encourage colonization schemes and to create a new class of native laborers, whose outputs would be bolstered by state-provided “scientific aids” and agricultural specialists.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, missionaries like the Newport socialite Caroline Spencer travelled to Jolo to teach the Tausūg “simple employments that [would] make the idea of labor attractive.”¹¹⁵ Spencer’s collaborations with Episcopal Bishop Charles Henry Brent on the Moro Educational Fund produced a boarding school on the island where Moro children raised crops and received basic industrial training. Students writing for the school newspaper dutifully assessed the productivity of their classmates. “Hadjan finished a good table last week,” one article read. “It is very hard and it would make nice furniture for an office. Halim completed very quickly his two little tables for the printing room. They were not difficult to make, but they are very neat. Halim is a rapid worker. Hamja and Gandawali are becoming rapid workers on the chairs.”¹¹⁶

The Moro Province was an attempt by U.S. colonial authorities to reconfigure the political, economic, and sociocultural fabric of the southern Philippines. Tapping into the Progressive Era vernacular of race management, the “Moro problem” was the rhetorical scaffolding upon which U.S. military officers legitimated their attempts to enact these transformations. It originated in the racialization of Muslim Malays and animist groups, adapting stock colonial imagery to depict them as violent, work-averse, and cowed by petty *datus* and sultans. Reliant on bartering, subsistence agriculture, and cottage industries, they existed outside the linearities of historical progress.¹¹⁷ These derogatory composites of “the Moro” provided rhetorical cover for the province’s practice of “savage warfare,” with the demonstrative spectacle of torture, execution, and massacre used to enshrine white authority.¹¹⁸ But, in the language of the “problem,” the grim lesson of the burned *cotta* or the executed “bandit” had to be augmented with permanent alterations to the structures of native societies—ones that would greatly reduce or obviate entirely the need for militarized pacification. Wage labor, first agricultural and later industrial, was an imagined means of accomplishing this aim. It tied “producing classes” to their employers, provided them with money, amplified their desires for material goods, and encouraged sedentism. Americans saw clear benefits: creating easily surveilled populations whose stake in the colonial order mitigated security concerns and who would serve as inexpensive and reliable workers. In an idealized future, authorities hoped, the stabilization of the Moro Province

service” be established to remedy the issue. John Pershing to J. Franklin Bell, Jan. 16 and 23, 1913, box 320, John J. Pershing Papers, LOC-MD.

¹¹³“The Department of Mindanao and Sulu at the Second Philippine Exposition,” Feb. 1914, box 1, Frank W. Carpenter Papers, LOC-MD.

¹¹⁴Frank Carpenter to Dean Worcester, May 13, 1914, box 1. Dean C. Worcester Papers, BHL; Carpenter, *Annual Report 1914*, 361–2.

¹¹⁵“Forsakes Society to Teach Murderous Moros,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1913, SM5.

¹¹⁶“Shop,” *The Student Weekly*, Mar. 7, 1925, 1. The rarity or absence of Moro student and worker voices in the sources used for this essay remind us of the problematic composition and inherent limitations of the colonial archive.

¹¹⁷The concept of “imperial historicism” as it relates to the Muslim South originates from Michael Hawkins, “Imperial Historicism and American Military Rule in the Philippines’ Muslim South,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (Oct. 2008): 411–29.

¹¹⁸Kim A. Wagner, “Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency,” *History Workshop Journal* 85 (Spring 2018): 217–37.

would draw industrious settlers and foreign business interests, with each group contributing to regional modernization.

Incentive, coercion, and violence coalesced as U.S. and Filipino state officials and corporate representatives enacted and profited from modernizing drives. The Moro Province was linked to military and civilian colonial state building in the northern islands through the shared prioritization of infrastructure projects, tutelary marketplaces, tax laws, industrial education programs, and land reform initiatives.¹¹⁹ The state security apparatus coordinated across the semipartitioned boundaries that separated north and south, something most evident in the carceral circulations between Luzon and Mindanao, but also apparent in the growing influence of the Manila-run Philippine Constabulary in the final years (1910–1913) of military rule.¹²⁰ Yet it is important not to obscure the distinctive qualities of the Moro Province. It was a sub-state whose governing structures were devised and directed by American military officers, in contrast to Luzon and the Visayas, where the U.S. Army's role diminished after the Philippine-American War. The province also lacked many of the fledgling representative bodies and nods to self-governance that existed in the Christian North, instead operating via Legislative Council *diktat* and mediating rule through a small group of collaborating *datus*. Most importantly, perhaps, the province's rulers possessed extensive repressive capabilities and rationalized their use through reference to ostensible civilizing missions. Beholden to global colonial imaginaries of race, reform programs were tightly connected to the capacity and willingness to perform violence.

In the southern Philippines, the Moro Province's legacy was not the successful conclusion of the "Moro War" (a homogenizing term that conjures battlefields rather than a long and complex imperial annexation), but rather its inscription of colonial development models onto "non-Christian" societies and the land itself. By positioning Moro and Lumad laborers as "solutions," the province stimulated the growth of connective infrastructure (roads, ports, railways, telephone lines, relay stations), emphasized the relationship between work and private land ownership, imagined a future where agribusiness monocultures flourished on Mindanao, and encouraged deeper regional integration into global commodities markets. The military period and its programs anticipated the arrival of multinational corporate plantations between the 1910s and 1930s—which would include firms like Goodyear Tire, B.F. Goodrich, and what became Del Monte—and also initiated other forms of enclosure. The early twentieth-century land reforms that rendered "unclaimed" space surveyable, divisible, and alienable did modernize the south in a distorted sense: they expanded the power of landed elites and initiated the settler colonial arrivals that would define political and economic life in the region during the latter twentieth century. Beyond this, afterlives of the Moro Province appeared in the 1930s as the Commonwealth government extended roads throughout Western Mindanao, and also in the post-independence era, when the centralizing state attempted to impose rigorous taxation on Muslim communities.¹²¹

Although often minimally present or entirely absent in broader studies of U.S. imperialism, the Moro Province shares important connections to continental, trans-Pacific, and circum-Caribbean American empire-building. Articulating a "Moro problem" allowed state agents, private entrepreneurs, and the U.S. public to translate the colonial encounter through the language of Progressive Era race management and borrowings from other empires, buttressing

¹¹⁹On the last of these, see Theresa Ventura, "From Small Farms to Progressive Plantations: The Trajectory of Land Reform in the American Colonial Philippines, 1900–1916," *Agricultural History* 90, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 459–83.

¹²⁰The Constabulary presence in Mindanao and Sulu features heavily in memoirs of Col. John R. White, an officer with the organization in the early twentieth century and participant in the Bud Dajo massacre. See John R. White, *Bullets and Bolos: Fifteen Years in the Philippine Islands* (New York, 1928). See also Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison, WI, 2009), 208–10.

¹²¹Vellema, Borrás, Jr., and Lara, Jr., "Agrarian Roots of Contemporary Conflict in Mindanao," 298–320; Chanco, "Frontier Politics and Imaginaries," 118.

elite-driven arguments that the United States was engaged in a global project of uplift and legitimizing colonial security models premised on manufactured native threat. Marshaling local labor to build roads, municipal buildings, and other physical assets placed the Moro Province alongside contemporaneous and connected American attempts to pacify island populations in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the northern Philippines public via works infrastructure.¹²² Likewise, the provincial drive to embed plantation agriculture and enlist Moro and Lumad communities to work these new sites not only anticipated future capitalist development on Mindanao but is also implicated in intra- and trans-imperial drives to commodify land in the early twentieth century, most evident in the sprawling Hawaiian plantation complex but also present in the American South, the Caribbean, the Central American states, and across a range of tropical and semitropical spaces controlled by European empires.¹²³ We can apply a similar observation to industrial education, whose metropolitan and overseas forms developed in dialogue with one another. Many of the provincial officials invested in these educational models had extensive links to transnational and trans-imperial reform networks.¹²⁴

In 1905, governor of Lanao Capt. Daniel Devore toured the wards of his district. His report to Zamboanga's Legislative Council de-emphasized security operations, instead focusing on farming, logging, and other forms of "honest labor." Devore imagined a shining future for Lanao. "When [the Maranao] are far enough removed from their savage nature to appreciate that protection can be given them in their goods and chattels," he wrote, "they will be encouraged to accumulate a little property."¹²⁵ In its varied forms, labor provided a crucial means of assessment and a method by which to solve "problems" and vindicate colonial projects. The world of work fashioned by the Moro Province had its own particularities—especially in the ways it was ignored, contested, or renegotiated by targeted groups of Moros and Lumad—but also resemblances, and direct links, to other colonial contexts. These connections illustrate the value of analyzing labor regimes as both regionally emplaced *and* globally constituted phenomena, texturing the history of military rule in the Southern Philippines and connecting it to the controlling racial and economic logics of global colonialisms in the early twentieth century.

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¹²²Jackson, "Roads to American Empire," 116–9. Many of these issues remain unresolved in the present and are examined in Magne Knudsen, "Agrarian Transition in the Southern Philippines: More than Poverty, Dispossession, and Violence," *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 232–52.

¹²³Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 47–117; Gerald Home, *The White Pacific: U.S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu, 2007), 92–127; Ring, *The Problem South*, 94–134; Ulbe Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery: How Island Southeast Asia Became a Mass Exporter of Labor* (New York, 2019), 1–15.

¹²⁴A cursory glance at the proceedings from the 1907 Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples conference in Upstate New York reveals discussions on the following topics: "Indians as Workers," "Educational Needs of Alaska," "The Schools of the Philippine Islands," "Some Educational Experiments in Porto Rico," and "Hawaii and Her Needs." *Report of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples, 1908* (Mohonk, 1908), 5–6.

¹²⁵Quoted in Langhorne, *Annual Report 1905*, 32.