

Sarah Steinbock-Pratt, *Educating the Empire: American Teachers and Contested Colonization in the Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2019.

Steinbock-Pratt begins her story of education and colonialism on the decks of the *Thomas* in 1901, a United States Army Transport carrying over 500 American teachers all eager to make their mark in the Philippines. What follows is an interwoven narrative of gender, race, and the role of education in the American colonial project. Steinbock-Pratt is clear in classifying America as a colonial power eager to establish a foothold in Asia. The American military additionally saw education as a key component in reconciling the Filipino population to American rule. While American “imperial administrators” intended to use American teachers as a way to prove America’s benevolence abroad, these teachers often had their own ideas about authority and their roles in the colonial state (6). At the heart of this enterprise was black male and white female teachers, complicating ideologies of race, gender, and power.

As Steinbock-Pratt explains, teachers were the only civilian representatives of the US government with daily, extended contact with the native Filipino population. She uses the private letters, diaries, and published articles of American teachers to juxtapose their understanding and feelings about territorial rule with those of the official records and correspondence of imperial administrators. Throughout the book, she outlines the myriad of ways teachers understood, participated in, and acted upon their roles in Filipino communities. By focusing on the various negotiations between teachers, students, and communities, Steinbock-Pratt shows that these local contests represented the American colonial project as a whole.

After the United States accepted Spanish surrender in 1898, the military almost immediately reopened public schools. As the teachers traveled to their new posts, they created what Steinbock-Pratt calls a “catalog of colonial knowledge” (22). Before leaving the United States, American teachers constructed a version of the Philippines that they found to be largely imagined. Chapter One focuses on those wide gaps the teachers often found themselves bridging between official reports and the reality of their work environment. Throughout these first chapters, Steinbock-Pratt analyzes how teachers saw themselves in Filipino communities. In Chapter Two, the definition of colonial teacher is outlined, as the Bureau of Insular Affairs debated over whether to hire women and African Americans. Throughout the American colonial process, lines between race, gender, and nationality were drawn and directly affected the educational practices of white, black, American, and Filipino teachers.

Further investigating those practices in Chapter Three, Steinbock-Pratt outlines how American teachers presented themselves and constructed certain identities to claim imperial authority. Both white female and black male teachers could participate in colonization and hold authority that was nearly inaccessible stateside. Chapter Four focuses on shifting definitions of whiteness and blackness in the colonial Philippines, and the racial hierarchies that emerged as black teachers negotiated through spaces still controlled by white supremacy but largely out of Jim Crow’s reach. Steinbock-Pratt does her best work at these intersections of race and gender, exploring the different ways in which these teachers created relationships with Filipino students and spread or contested American ideologies.

Steinbock-Pratt returns to the work environment in Chapter Five. She outlines how Filipino schools functioned on a day-to-day basis and highlights standard teaching methods of the era. Teachers often attempted to Americanize their students. To do so, they used complicated cultural and political methods that were not always well received. The political ideologies teachers shared as agents of empire is the focus of Chapter Six, with Steinbock-Pratt returning to the often fraught and complicated relationship between teacher and community. In her final chapter, she shifts the focus to the students, exploring the Filipino student protesters who pushed against American cultural and social interference. While the book focuses on the education system as an integral part of America's colonial power, the source material relies almost solely on the experience of American teachers. It misses the chance to include a more in-depth analysis of Filipino perspectives.

Nonetheless, this book is an important addition to the study of US foreign relations and Steinbock-Pratt follows scholars like Paul Kramer and Rebecca Tinio McKenna in uncovering the complex fault lines of race, gender, and power in the American colonial state. The Philippines represent a unique case in the history of the United States' colonial experiments, and existing studies of it often focus solely on military action. Additionally, the book includes an ever-relevant gender and race analysis, integral to studying any history of colonialism. Steinbock-Pratt makes sure that readers understand not only how Americans shaped the Philippines, but how the Philippines altered American understandings of race and empire. This book's contribution to the field will help fellow researchers to continue questioning not only the inevitable gaps between colonial theory and implementation, but also the effects of race, gender, power, and authority in the farthest reaches of the American enterprise.

Madison Ingram
Temple University