

AMERICA AND THE PHILIPPINES

By Ian Morley

The Battle of Manila Bay in the Philippines on May 1, 1898, fundamentally changed the course of American history and America's relationship with Southeast Asia. In the ensuing months, Spanish colonialism in the Philippines collapsed and was replaced by American sovereignty. As an upshot of this transition, the United States changed from being a republic based on the consent of the governed to, for the first time, being a ruler of a distant territory. Notably, too, its self-perception altered. America no longer viewed itself as "just another nation." Now, America recognized itself as being a world power (Figure 1). It also viewed itself as being a nation fulfilling its destiny, a perceived birthright based in part on its history of continuous territorial expansion so as to redeem and enlighten "barbarous races" with the gift of civilization.¹ Crucial to this bestowing of civilization, at least in the context of the Philippines after 1898, was the development of modern cities through the practice of urban planning.

With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in December 1898 and its subsequent approval after bitter debate by only one vote in the US Senate on February 6, 1899, the US took formal possession from Spain of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam. In light of declaring independence from more than three hundred

After the majority of Filipino nationals had been defeated, the colonial US mission was reaffirmed, and the colonial governmental strategy widened.



Figure 1. "The New Giant among Nations, Victor Gillam.²

years of Spanish colonial rule on June 12, 1898, and establishing a Republic with Emilio Aguinaldo as president on January 23, 1899, many Filipinos opposed the new US presence. Tension between local citizens and the Americans ultimately led to armed combat. From February 1899 to July 4, 1902, when the US declared itself the victor, the Philippine-American conflict saw American soldiers and Filipino nationalists fight for control. Despite the American declaration, intermittent armed conflict continued in specific locales for several years afterward.

After the majority of Filipino nationals had been defeated, the colonial US mission was reaffirmed, and the colonial governmental strategy widened. As a consequence, American authorities initiated a separation of the Catholic church from the state. English was introduced as the official language; the education

Modern Civilization and City Planning

system reformed; port, rail, and road-building programs initiated; and war-damaged settlements rebuilt. Notably, Western architecture and urban planning forms were introduced as part of this “national development” process.

Americans quickly recognized a number of social and environmental problems existed. These included poor quality housing, polluted waterways, widespread poverty, and the lack of a national education system. Likewise, the Americans viewed the cultural condition of the local population as being an issue of grave concern. Filipinos were perceived to be lacking in moral fiber and trustworthiness.³ It was also noticed that they had no grasp of nationhood, but rather had an identity derived from the variegated assemblage of different ethnic groups to whom individuals had loyalty.⁴ Simply put, the Americans viewed the Philippines as being a place in great need of “improvement,” and a strategy was formed to disassociate Filipinos from their past and portray the Philippines as an “uncivilized” place by creating a fresh culture, environment, and identity.⁵

America strove to create a new governmental system for the Philippines while also manufacturing new surroundings for people to live and work.

To understand how America sought to bring betterment to the Philippines, it is important to understand the Philippine Commission, a small-sized governmental body formed in January 1899 by President McKinley to implement American rule across the Philippine archipelago. The commission recognized how important towns and cities would be to the process of importing “American” civilization. As a case in point, the commissioners outlined the significance of urban places to the process of governance. They concluded that American authority was wholly reliant upon developing urban communities because, as in the US, urban communities were the seats of government and places where the nation’s political and social aspirations had been realized.

Furthermore, given the nature of US culture by the 1890s, urban places were considered to be the foundation and hope of civilization—the locales where civic virtues were to be generated.⁶ Developing urban places was considered central to successfully managing the Philippines. Guided by President McKinley’s “benevolent assimilation” proclamation of December 21, 1898, in which he defined the purpose of US colonization as a means to educate, civilize, and uplift Filipinos, Commissioner Dean Worcester asserted that urban development would assist in modeling Philippine society along American lines. In so doing, matters that had previously served to undermine “progress” would be eradicated while concurrently civil and religious freedoms, education, and quality homes would be bestowed to all. Thus, cities would aid the socialization of the local population, permitting America to instruct Filipinos in the duties of good citizenship and “practical political education,” i.e., the responsibilities necessary for self-government.

To understand the US desire to initiate “progress,” it must be recognized that Americans sought to place the Philippines “in the pathway of the world’s best civilization.”⁷ America strove to create a new governmental system for the Philippines while also manufacturing new surroundings for people to live and work. In some regards, environmental improvement could not be ignored. In the capital city of Manila, urban renewal was desperately needed because so many buildings and districts had been destroyed by war. There was an immediate need to improve hygiene and health. For example, a cholera epidemic in 1902 killed an estimated 200,000 people across the country. Healthier environments had to be built. This would allow the indigenous population to live in healthier settings but would also provide the colonizers with familiar, comfortable surroundings in which to live and work, and thus “improve” the Philippines.

In 1904, Daniel Burnham, the Chicago-based urban planning visionary, visited Southeast Asia. As the former director of works for the 1893 Columbian World’s Fair in Chicago and the architect of numerous prominent buildings in the late 1800s and early 1900s, e.g., the Flat Iron Building in New York and Union Station in Washington, DC, Burnham’s trip to the Philippines had an enormous impact on the course of the nation’s development. Despite being in the Philippines for just a handful of weeks, the legacy of

There was an immediate need to improve hygiene and health. For example, a cholera epidemic in 1902 killed an estimated 200,000 people across the country.

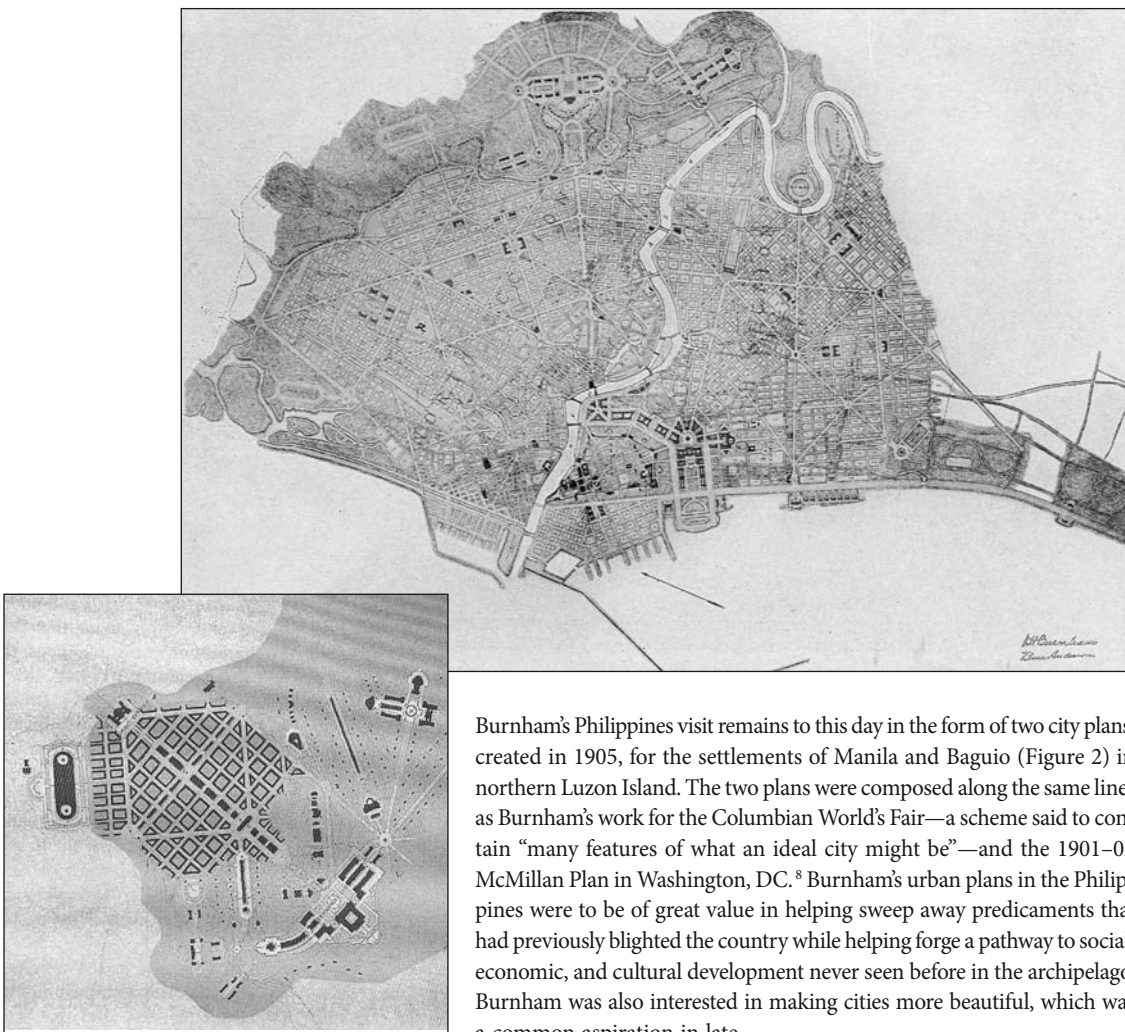


Figure 2. (Top) Daniel H. Burnham and Pierce Anderson's, urban plan to redevelop Manila and (bottom) plan for the new city of Baguio (Burnham and Anderson).⁹

Burnham's Philippines visit remains to this day in the form of two city plans, created in 1905, for the settlements of Manila and Baguio (Figure 2) in northern Luzon Island. The two plans were composed along the same lines as Burnham's work for the Columbian World's Fair—a scheme said to contain “many features of what an ideal city might be”—and the 1901–02 McMillan Plan in Washington, DC.⁸ Burnham's urban plans in the Philippines were to be of great value in helping sweep away predicaments that had previously blighted the country while helping forge a pathway to social, economic, and cultural development never seen before in the archipelago. Burnham was also interested in making cities more beautiful, which was a common aspiration in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American urban planning.

Conceived with no-nonsense objectives, the development of Baguio and the redevelopment of Manila played a fundamental role in pushing the Philippines to a state of being that contrasted greatly with the country's perceived “uncivilized” past, a state of existence that, in the opinion of the Americans, would guide the Filipino population toward “progress.” American authorities assumed that Filipinos desired freedom from disease, poverty, and bad housing, and tutelage in “progressive civilization” through instruction and example.

In Manila, a city of about 225,000 in 1900, Burnham's plan was to fuse colonialism with contemporary American urban design practices by establishing a new hub that consisted of a collection of public buildings, called the Government Group, which were to be laid out in strict geometric manner so as to form a single, coherent architectural unit, thereby bequeathing both beauty and convenience.¹⁰ Burnham suggested laying down a circular plaza near the Government Group (Figure 3) where boulevards would radiate out across Manila and give civil servants the opportunity to look out to the people over whom they serve.

Burnham also suggested creating a mall close to the Government Group—an open area reminiscent of the monumental space in Washington, DC—that would present a grand vista toward Manila Bay, the scene of America's military triumph over the Spanish Navy, and a locale said by Burnham to be as picturesque as the Bay of Naples in Italy. The central alignment of the mall was to be terminated to the east by the center of the circular plaza, marked by a statue, and marked along the axis by the dome of the principal public building, the Capitol (Figure 4), a vertical element explicitly symbolizing America's power within



Figure 3. A public building and the plaza belonging to Burnham's suggested civic center for Manila. (Photo: Ian Morley)

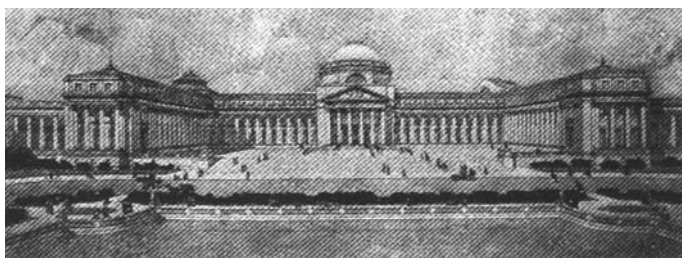


Figure 4. Gerard Lico, *The Capitol Building* (Lico).¹¹

the city could look with reverence toward the civic center.

Baguio is located in the mountains of north Luzon, at about 5,000 feet above sea level. It was created as the summer capital when the climate of Manila became too uncomfortable for the Americans. Developed along the lines of a miniature Washington, DC, Burnham's plan for Baguio, like that for Manila, sought to utilize the natural environment to proclaim the virtues of US civilization. For example, the design of the civic core is composed of two clusters of buildings, one belonging to the local government, the other to the national government. Each building was arranged in a geometric manner close to hilltops—not on the tops of the hills, as this would have broken the natural silhouette of the landscape, and Burnham saw this as a great quality of the local environment—the municipal and national government buildings faced toward each other from opposite sides of a valley that formed the heart of the settlement.¹² Thus, the creations associated with American power were artfully yet prominently visible.

Although smaller than Manila—Baguio was planned for a population of 25,000, and Manila's redevelopment was to cope with the city's growth to an anticipated level of 800,000—the plan for Baguio repeated many of the features found in the colonial capital city. One component was the recurring use of parks. In Manila, Burnham sought to create nine green areas that would not only beautify the city and provide shade from the tropical sun, but would also provide environments to permit social interaction. This, in the cultural context of the early 1900s, would inspire citizens to equate civic spaces with beauty, pride, cultural cohesion, and social equality, and consequently, new civic values could become manifest. In Baguio, Burnham Park was formed at the center of the city and laid down on the central axis between the municipal and national government buildings, similar to the mall in Washington. Radiating off Burnham Park, a geometric road pattern was created in order to supply approaches to the central district and its edifices.¹⁴



Figure 5. Vista from Baguio's City Hall to the National Government Center in 1925 (Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University).¹³



Figure 6. A view of the core of Baguio in 1926 (Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University).¹⁵

CONCLUSION

The American narrative on the advancement of the Philippines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries usually focuses on teaching English and building schools, ports, and rail systems. While accurate in many regards, this account ignores the use of city planning as another tool in the US vision of social improvement in the archipelago.

If one visits the Philippines today, Daniel Burnham's city plans can easily be seen. In both Manila and Baguio, Burnham's plans form a significant part of the cityscape (Figure 7). Baguio, for example, retains a



Figure 7. Left: Burnham Park in Baguio as it appears today. Right: The National Museum of the Philippines, an institution established by the Philippine Commission in 1901, which formed a major component of Burnham’s proposed grand civic core for Manila. (Photos: Ian Morley)

great deal of the spatial character put forward by Burnham, and Burnham Park is a prominent place for leisure activities. Although much of Burnham’s original plan was not enacted in Manila, the partial development of the Government Center and the redevelopment of the waterfront south of the city center demonstrate Burnham’s imprint. As such, Burnham’s, and America’s, legacy endures. Burnham’s urban design proposals also influenced later Filipino architects, including Juan Arellano, who in the 1930s planned the campus of the University of the Philippines in Quezon City as an environment defined by a monumental axis marked at its ends by the university’s administrative building and library.

Historians are familiar with American achievements in the Philippines after 1898, particularly successful efforts to improve health care and education. Urban improvements were also an essential element of American state building in the archipelago, and the tangible examples that still exist in Manila and Baguio illustrate this largely ignored part of the story. ■

NOTES

1. R. J. Bartlett, *The Record of American Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 385.
2. Victor Gillam, “The New Giant among Nations. Introduced by his Cousin, John Bull,” *Judge* (New York: Arkell Publishing Company, July 9, 1898).
3. John M. Bass, dispatch of August 30, 1898, in *Harper’s Weekly* 42 (October 15, 1898), 1008.
4. “Filipinos Unfit to Rule Themselves,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1899, 6.
5. Julian Go and Anne L. Foster, *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 3.
6. Charles Zueblin, *A Decade of Civic Development* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1905), 167; and minutes of the meeting of the Philippine Commission, *Report of the Philippine Commission*, no. 1, January 31, 1901.
7. “The Imperialism Myth,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1899.
8. John Coleman Adams, “What a Great City Might Be—A Lesson from the White City,” *The New England Magazine* 14 (March 1896), 3.
9. Daniel H. Burnham and Pierce Anderson, *Report on the Improvements of Manila* (Washington, DC: United States Federal Government, 1905); and Daniel H. Burnham and Pierce Anderson, *Report on the Proposed Plan for the City of Baguio* (Washington, DC: United States Federal Government, 1905). Both images were published in Charles Moore’s tome *Daniel H. Burnham: Architect Planner of Cities*, no. 2 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923).
10. Burnham and Anderson, *Report on the Proposed Improvements at Manila*, 631.
11. Gerard Lico, *Arkitekturang Filipino: A History of Architecture and Urbanism in the Philippines* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2010), 249.
12. Burnham and Anderson, *Report on the Proposed Plan of the City of Baguio*, 10–11.
13. Photograph of Baguio in 1925, Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University.
14. Charles Moore, *Daniel H Burnham: Architect, Planner of Cities*, 2 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 201.
15. Photograph of Baguio in 1926. Source: Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS AND REPORTS

Bartlett, Ruhl J. *The Record of American Diplomacy: Documents and Readings in the History of American Foreign Relations*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954.

Burnham, Daniel H., and P. Anderson. “Report on the Proposed Improvements at Manila.” *Report of the Philippine Commission*. Washington, DC: United States Federal Government, 1905.

_____. “Report on the Proposed Plan of the City of Baguio.” *Report of the Philippine Commission*. Washington, DC: United States Federal Government, 1905.

Go, Julian, and A. L. Foster. *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003.

Moore, Charles. *Daniel H Burnham: Architect, Planner of Cities*, 2. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921.

Philippine Commission Report 1. Washington, DC: United States Federal Government, 1901.

Zueblin, Charles. *A Decade of Civic Development*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1905.

NEWSPAPER AND JOURNAL ARTICLES

Adams, John Coleman. “What a Great City Might Be—A Lesson from the White City,” *The New England Magazine* 14 (March 1896): 3.

Bass, John M., dispatch of August 30, 1898. *Harper’s Weekly* 42 (October 15, 1898): 1008.

“The Imperialism Myth.” *The New York Times*, March 23, 1899.

“Filipinos Unfit to Rule Themselves.” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1899, 6.

IAN MORLEY is a scholar of Urban History. He has published widely on the design of built environments, particularly the civic design of cities during the late 1800s and early 1900s. He has participated in television documentaries on the Taipei 101 Tower for *The Discovery Channel* and *Voom!*, as well as being interviewed by *The Wall Street Journal Asia* and *Los Angeles Times* about urban development in Rangoon, Burma. He is the book review editor for *Urban Morphology*, a council member of the International Planning History Society, and an editorial board member of the journal *Planning Perspectives*. He has been a Visiting Fellow at the University of Sydney and University College Dublin.