



Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State (New Perspectives in Southeast Asian Studies)

By Alfred W. McCoy

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At the dawn of the twentieth century, the U.S. Army swiftly occupied Manila and then plunged into a decade-long pacification campaign with striking parallels to today's war in Iraq. Armed with cutting-edge technology from America's first information revolution, the U.S. colonial regime created the most modern police and intelligence units anywhere under the American flag. In *Policing America's Empire* Alfred W. McCoy shows how this imperial panopticon slowly crushed the Filipino revolutionary movement with a lethal mix of firepower, surveillance, and incriminating information. Even after Washington freed its colony and won global power in 1945, it would intervene in the Philippines periodically for the next half-century—using the country as a laboratory for counterinsurgency and rearming local security forces for repression. In trying to create a democracy in the Philippines, the United States unleashed profoundly undemocratic forces that persist to the present day.

But security techniques bred in the tropical hothouse of colonial rule were not contained, McCoy shows, at this remote periphery of American power. Migrating homeward through both personnel and policies, these innovations helped shape a new federal security apparatus during World War I. Once established under the pressures of wartime mobilization, this distinctively American system of public-private surveillance persisted in various forms for the next fifty years, as an omnipresent, *sub rosa* matrix that honeycombed U.S. society with active informers, secretive civilian organizations, and government counterintelligence agencies. In each succeeding global crisis, this covert nexus expanded its domestic operations, producing new contraventions of civil liberties—from the harassment of labor activists and ethnic communities during World War I, to the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, all the way to the secret blacklisting of suspected communists during the Cold War.

“With a breathtaking sweep of archival research, McCoy shows how repressive

techniques developed in the colonial Philippines migrated back to the United States for use against people of color, aliens, and really any heterodox challenge to American power. This book proves Mark Twain's adage that you cannot have an empire abroad and a republic at home.”—Bruce Cumings, University of Chicago

“This book lays the Philippine body politic on the examination table to reveal the disease that lies within—crime, clandestine policing, and political scandal. But McCoy also draws the line from Manila to Baghdad, arguing that the seeds of controversial counterinsurgency tactics used in Iraq were sown in the anti-guerrilla operations in the Philippines. His arguments are forceful.”—Sheila S. Coronel, Columbia University

“Conclusively, McCoy’s *Policing America’s Empire* is an impressive historical piece of research that appeals not only to Southeast Asianists but also to those interested in examining the historical embedding and institutional ontogenesis of post-colonial states’ police power apparatuses and their apparently inherent propensity to implement illiberal practices of surveillance and repression.”—Salvador Santino F. Regilme, Jr., *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*

“McCoy’s remarkable book . . . does justice both to its author’s deep knowledge of Philippine history as well as to his rare expertise in unmasking the seamy undersides of state power.”—*POLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*

Winner, George McT. Kahin Prize, Southeast Asian Council of the Association for Asian Studies

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Editorial Review

Review

“This remarkable study provides a meticulous analysis of the novel colonial system developed by the U.S. in the Philippines after the murderous conquest, with startling implications for the shape of the modern world. As McCoy demonstrates, the U.S. occupation developed a major innovation in imperial practice, relying on the ‘information revolution’ of the day to establish intense surveillance and control of the occupied population, along with violence when needed and privileges to obedient elites. This ‘protracted social experiment in the use of police as an instrument of state power’ left a devastating legacy for the Philippines, while also contributing substantially to the modes of suppression of independence and social change elsewhere, and returning home to lay the foundations for a national security and surveillance state.”—Noam Chomsky, MIT

“A stunning, exemplary, and hair-raising fusion of colonial and metropolitan histories. McCoy shows how the Philippines served as a laboratory subject for experiments in policing, intelligence, surveillance, and ‘black-operations’ that were then repatriated to shape the American domestic surveillance state from World War I forward. This is history at its most powerful and most subversive of imperial self-hypnosis. The term *magnum opus* applies both to its ambition and its comprehensiveness.”—James C. Scott, Yale University

“In this stunning book, McCoy reveals how empire shapes the intertwined destinies of all involved in its creation. Written with deft strokes, this is an instant classic of historical writing.”—Lloyd Gardner, Rutgers University

“Alfred McCoy has written the most thorough account of America relations with the Philippines that the reader is likely to come across. It’s a history with meticulous detail, the product of an academic career that’s concentrated on the torturous story of the connections between the US and Southeast Asia.”—*Peace Researcher*

“[S]hows how the dark underworld of crime, subversion, vice and drugs in the Philippines has been linked to the bright, public world of politics. The link? The police and security forces, particularly their shadowy side: spies, undercover agents, specialists in covert operations, assassins. The currency passed up and down the system? Information, particularly incriminating information, scandal, graft, murder.”—John J. Carroll, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*

“McCoy’s monograph will be the starting point for any future historical study of control and dissent in the

Philippines. Summing Up: Highly recommended.”—*Choice*

“An eye-opener of a book, this should be must reading for concerned Filipinos, not only to be able to understand their own police forces—and criminal world, as well as their politicians—better, but also to see deeper into the United States design and policies.”—Ricardo Trota Jose, *Philippine Studies*

“Provocative. . . . raise(s) important issues regarding the impact of empire, as home as well as abroad, a dialectic of ill effects wrought by an imperial system bottom lined by domination and coercion, force and violence.”—Allen Ruff, *Against the Current*

About the Author

Alfred W. McCoy is J.R.W. Smail Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His books include *The Politics of Heroin* and *A Question of Torture*.

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