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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the social psychology of U.S. pragmatists John Dewey and George Herbert Mead shapes how early U.S. sociology position itself on questions of U.S. empire and geo-political dominance. It focuses also on how pragmatist thought influences how 1920s Chicago sociologists Robert Park and Emory Bogardus produced symbolic interactionist theories and studies on U.S. race and international relations.

This paper makes several interventions in the history of U.S. sociological theory. It re-examines the history of U.S. sociology and the philosophy of pragmatism through the lens of empire, rather than simply a myopic looking-glass of the “race problem.” This re-examination consequently highlights the interrelationships between racialist epistemologies and orientalist knowledges, rather than compartmentalizing empire and race, Asia and Asian America, sociology and philosophy. Further it draws attention to the ways pragmatism got deployed to deal with the “Question of the Philippines” in the interests of imperialism, even while at the same time pragmatism served as one crucial theoretical foundation for early U.S. anti-imperialist campaigns. These interventions are crucial as professional sociology in the U.S. commemorates its centennial beginning and assesses its many strengths.
Beginnings of U.S. Pragmatism, Sociology, and Empire:
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INTERWINING ADVANCE IN U.S. SOCIOLOGY AND THE U.S. EMPIRE

The 1890s was a decisive moment for U.S. sociology and U.S. global hegemony. At the start of the decade, U.S. Navy Captain Alfred Mahan laid out in *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (1890) the military and national-security strategies to gain this hegemony by taking control of the Panama Canal and the islands stretching from Hawai’i to the Philippines. In the middle of the decade, the Chicago School of sociology acquired national prominence by gaining department status and publishing the *American Journal of Sociology* (*AJS*) and began to explore the issues of the Philippines and the U.S. empire. By the decade’s end, the U.S. became involved in a military and colonial quagmire in the Philippines, its new possession gained after the war with Spain.

It is notable that the early dominance of the Chicago School – even with its diverse tendencies and many disagreements – served from the 1890s to the 1930s to Orientalize the people of the Philippines and helped build the *missionary* power-knowledge apparatus using social psychology and symbolic interactionism, apparent in their textbooks and *AJS* articles (see Chua 2004).

As a uniquely U.S. philosophy, this paper argues that pragmatic philosophy and sociologists influenced by pragmatism played a supporting role in the imperialist expansion into the new territories such as the Philippines and subsequent occupation. It examines how the pragmatism of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead (both as
founding faculty members in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago) gave rise to orientalism in U.S. sociology as it engages the questions of empire and the “problem” of the Philippines. Edward Said (1978) suggests that orientalism was never simply a re-framing of negative stereotyping (or racial prejudice) by those who have no contact with the orientalized “Other.” Instead the production of orientalist knowledge originates in the attempts of “experts” to explain and justify imperialist projects. This produces a seemingly science of the “Orient” – that man-made, imaginary geography from the “Near East” to the distinct Pacific isles – produced by British, French, and U.S. scholars during their respective periods of conquest and empire.

Accordingly this article explores on how such pragmatism shaped – and it turn as shaped by – the underlying epistemologies of the early Chicago School of Sociology, as expressed through the social psychological theories of symbolic interactionism and of race relations cycle, specifically of Robert Park and Emory Bogardus. It elaborates on the erasure of the orientalist epistemology as connected with empire and conquest, and the subsequent analytical redirection of this knowledge to reconstituted expert discourses on assimilation and race relations cycle regarding Filipino nationals.

Focusing on one of America’s possessions in the “Orient” – the Philippine Islands – and analyzing particular Orientalist practices of erasing evidence of imperialism in early sociology, this article signals how constitutive imperialism and its Orientalist projects have been in shaping the discipline’s agenda with respect to such “questions” as blackness, class conflicts, and gendered domesticities. Consequently one needs to start with the turn-of-the-century Philippines to grasp U.S. sociology.

Two recognized U.S. scholars outside the Chicago School examined U.S.
imperialism sociologically. Extending Social Darwinism, William Sumner (1913) of Yale viewed imperialist acts as detrimental to U.S. citizens, allowing the state to limit individual liberties and eroding human evolution for what he considered very limited gains. In contrast, eugenicist and apologist Franklin Giddings (1900) at Columbia argued that the “democratic empire” seeks to improve the lives of “barbarians,” justifying the pillage of their resources. Yet Sumner’s and Giddings’s views on imperialism did not have the lasting impact on the discipline of the Chicago School.

As the founding editor of the *AJS* and first chair at Chicago, Albion Small provided the critical direction in instituting the missionary power-knowledge apparatus for the new empire. While many have recounted how the Chicago School under Small’s leadership strived to forge sociology as a scientific reform-oriented discipline addressing urban problems with a Protestant missionary zeal, no attention has yet been turned to how this zeal was directed at the colonial territories.

For Albion Small, William Thomas, and others in the early Chicago School, regions like the Philippines became the sites for new social experiments in moral “democratic” education (see Small (1898) on Christian ethics). The *AJS* published a local ethnography with detailed halftone photos that recounts Cebu Normal School principal Samuel MacClintock’s (1903) description of the everyday life of the “natives,” their resistance to colonial rule, and the opportunities for educational training. In an earlier issue, Small commented on the need for Filipinos to improve their “mental content” in order to organize a “permanent government” and “order and industry” (1900: 341; also see Rankin 1907).

William Thomas, known for his exceptional work on Polish peasants and race
relations, focused more on the social psychological aspects of this moralizing education. He writes: “It is apparent already that a very low state of society is not prepared to accept bodily the standpoint and practice of a very high; the shock is too great, and the lower race cannot adjust. An important question in this connection is the rate at which a lower race may receive suggestion from a higher without being disorganized” (1905: 449).

Like Albion, Thomas began to craft the Chicago School’s terrain for social psychology: social contact and (dis)organization. In analyses like these, Filipinos and Filipinas living under U.S. imperial tutelage became the empirical “stuff” that helped in vital ways sociology’s early intellectual understanding of social psychology.

DEWEY, FILIPINOS, AND THE U.S. EMPIRE

Celebrated as the “American philosopher,” John Dewey typifies the outlook of white, highly educated, Protestant men in the early twentieth century. The climb of U.S. capitalism to global dominance and the transformation from progressive republicanism into imperialist reaction shape and are shaped by Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy (Wells 1954; Mills 1964; Dykhuizen 1973; Coughlan 1975; Novack 1975; Thayer 1997). On imperialism and the Philippines, Dewey (1976-83;1983-90) takes a flexible moral and political position depending on the specific circumstances. His writings contain seemingly contradictory claims supporting the just presence of U.S. forces in the Philippines and opposing acts of war, aggression, and imperialism. During the U.S.-Spanish war (1898-9), the U.S.-Philippine war (1899-1902), and subsequent “pacification” campaigns (1902-13), Dewey remains rather silent, acknowledging the violence without condemnation. As the result of the World War One and the debates
regarding the League of Nation, Dewey takes a more explicit pacifist position, twenty years after his more staunch anti-imperialist peers such as William James and Jane Addams.

**Dewey, Optimistic Pragmatism, and the Philippine Problem**

Dewey had much more direct experience in wars than revolutions. As an adult he lived through four wars: the Spanish-American war, the First and Second World Wars, and in his final years the Korean “police action.” Despite the pretensions of their artificers and the illusions of the American people, all of these wars were primarily waged to promote the imperialist aims of the United States. Except for the first of this series, Dewey did not see it that way—at least while the war was on. (Novack 1975:215)

During the brief appointment at the University of Chicago (1893-1904) as Chair of the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy, Dewey develops a unified functionalist model of behavior, explaining how humans interact with the surrounding stimuli and environment, rather than simply reacting to them. He also creates the educational laboratory school try out his new pragmatist approach to teaching and learning. He also participates in progressive intellectual exchange at Jane Addam’s Hull House, exploring new processes for democracy and group interactions. Significantly he develops more fully his pragmatist philosophy, one which emphasized the role of ideas as tools of practical and creative inquiry. In this development, he shifts away from the early influence of Christian ethics and Hegelian idealism. Pragmatism optimistically views people as creative, meaning makers, with the capacity to create knowledge through science and reflection enabling them to solve problems and rearrange the world (Thayer 1997).

While Dewey attempted to work out communication (rather than one-way
transmission), urban education, moral ethics, and democracy through pragmatism, he remains parochially unable to address the Philippine problem and U.S. new colonial territories. Nevertheless while at Chicago and afterwards, Dewey influenced the development of new social physiology by George Herbert Mead and later Chicago-trained sociologists.

**Dewey’s Worldliness**

After World War One, Dewey traveled widely to Japan, China, Turkey, Mexico, and other locations. While extensive lecturing in these locations, Dewey became more cognizant of nationalism and educational and economic problems faced by other countries. Nevertheless his writing continued to be myopic. He still remained silent on the Philippine question, while he published series of essays and commentaries in outlets such as the *New Republic* (see also Mills 1964).

For instance in the essay “In Explanation of Our Lapse” (1917), Dewey writes:

> we are unused to the ways of war, and like every eager and energetic beginner we are pressing our stroke. . . It is not to our discredit that we were unfamiliar with the ways and usages of wars, and that we were incapable of displaying, for example, the orderly decency of the French who have lived for decades in the sobering presence of a national danger. Getting into the war really upset our equilibrium for the time, not because we were opposed to the war, but because of our desire to make not only a good job of it but also a speedy and extensive one. To do everything and to do it all at once, with the biggest war loans, the most airplanes and so on, has been our desire. (p. 295)

This excerpt shows how Dewey (maybe rhetorically) erased U.S. military and imperialist activities, all the while boasting U.S. exceptionalism.

After his brief travel to Mexico, Dewey wrote his most anti-imperialist piece
called “Imperialism Is Easy” (1927). This essay recounts how U.S. imperialism as
directed to Mexico in the late 1920s is “a more or less consciously adopted policy” to
economically exploit the existence of violence and poverty in the country.
More and more his political analysis shifts to acknowledge the questionable status of the
Philippines while the U.S. Senate debated its status for statehood or independence.

Professor John Dewey has been elected to serve as chairman of the newly
established League for Independent Political Action… The objects of the
league are reported to be: … the freedom of the Philippines … and a
sincere and determined effort to eliminate the economic, psychological,
and political causes of war. (“Notes” 1929:198)

During this period Dewey participated politically in the U.S. anti-imperialist movement.

GEORGE HERBERT MEAD AND THE PROBLEM-SOLVING EMPIRE

This section elaborates on Mead’s pragmatist theories on international relations
and the social self. Mead lies the foundation for a problem-solving social psychology in
which conflict resolution approaches are used to limit hostility, war, and crude
nationalism. This elaboration into Mead’s work provides a way to assess silence on U.S.
colonial practices, particularly as related to the Philippines and territorial conquest since
1898.

Mead, Pragmatism, and International Relations

George Herbert Mead contributed to sociology by theoretically espousing
symbolic interactionism as a social psychological application of pragmatic philosophy.
While Mead’s analysis of small groups and face-to-face interactions continues to be
significant to shaping new inquiries on social psychological processes, his work on international activities remained less well known. Nevertheless this work reflects the liberal logic embedded in U.S. pragmatism and shapes the possible course for action, justifications, and dominance of nations.

Mead recounts the democratic ideals of the U.S. and its motivation to take part in World War One:

Our fundamental political habits of feeling, thought and action have been such necessary outgrowths of the doctrine that government must be with the consent of the governed that we could never associate ourselves with the imperialistic aims which have so largely dominated the alliances and hostilities of European nations. This has been most conclusively proved by the exceptions to the rule. After our war with Spain we found ourselves in military possession of Cuba and the Philippines. To the one we gave independence, and in our administration of the Philippines we have uniformly placed their independence as the goal of our occupation. Our recent legislation for these islands has placed that goal in the near future.

If war as the arbiter of national disputes opens the door to imperialism, and who will deny it who has passed in review the projects which have appeared on both sides for the reconstruction of the map of the world, America will be found instinctively ranging herself with those who seek to make the outcome of this war the forced abdication of military power as the adjudicator between nations. If this is the issue, America will fight with the force of all her history, all her traditions and her whole genius. (1917:XX)

This excerpt highlights how Mead recounts recent historical events and expounds a narrative of U.S. exceptionalism, without adequately grasping U.S. economic and political interests in staying in the Philippines, which were vividly described by proponents in the U.S. anti-imperialist movement (such as William James and Jane Addams), and in newspaper accounts and on congressional hearings on torture and atrocities during the U.S.-Philippine war and the subsequent occupation.

A further analysis of Mead’s narrative of U.S. exceptionalism highlights two
notable points. First, the U.S. is seen as superior among nation-states, embodying a particular sort of philosophical nationalism. Not because it is democratically perfect, rather it is solely capable to achieve the ideals of democracy through the practice of U.S. pragmatic philosophy. It is a society with practical concerns for solving problems and making things work.

Second, Mead further asserts that this exceptionalism emerges out of some assumed historical confluences and influenced by certain idealist thought to produce a nation without equal through some natural, almost God-like-driven process. He writes:

I have indicated what seems to me the important characteristic of American life, the freedom, within certain rather rigid but very wide boundaries, to work out immediate politics and business with no reverential sense of a pre-existing social order within which they must take their place and whose values they must preserve…. I take it that it is such an implicit intelligence that has been responsible for the steady development and social integration that has taken place in the American community, with little leadership and almost entirely without ideas. It is hardly necessary to point out that John Dewey’s philosophy, with its insistence upon the statement of the end in the terms of the means, is the developed method of that implicit intelligence in the mind of the American community. And for such an implicit intelligence there is no other test of moral and intellectual hypotheses except that they work. In the profoundest sense John Dewey is the philosopher of America. (1930: 230-1)

For Mead, U.S. leadership among nations, Europeans and others, is rightly deserved due to its ability to “work out” its domestic problems through pragmatic intelligence. This naturally leadership remains unquestioned.

As a result, U.S. exceptionalism viewed through Mead’s pragmatism suggests that the 1890s and 1900s U.S. expansionist policy into new territories is nothing other than a combination of (1) political supremacy that is implicitly racialized to justify new forms of colonial occupation, and (2) cultural supremacy that is implicitly contrasted against prior attempts of political supremacy (and older forms of empires). In brief, Mead’s
exceptionalist narrative implies that because U.S. is more intelligent, its imperialist project is also more benevolent seeking to foster “democracy” and consequently morally acceptable than previous attempts. As such, his pragmatic theory on international relations does not fully systematic account of the complexities of nation-states processes, but rather this theory addresses more how United States seeks to relate to other nations.

Mead’s article on “National-Mindedness and International-Mindedness” (1929) further articulates a pragmatic theory of U.S. relationality within the international community. While examining William James’s pacifist position involving the First World War, it calls for greater international cooperation and problem-solving approaches to limit war and hostilities among nations. Mead presents a pragmatist position that societal civilized progress can only truly occur when “creative intelligence” and considerate reflection among individuals, groups, and nations occur. That is, reasonable, intelligent, and considerate people and countries would not select to engage in warfare and militarism. Mead (1929) contends:

It [war] has become unthinkable as a policy for adjudicating national differences. It has become logically impossible. This is not to say that it may not arise. Another catastrophe may be necessary before we have cast off the cult of warfare, but we cannot any longer think our international life in terms of warfare. It follows that if we do think our national and international life, we can no longer depend upon war for the fusion of disparate and opposing elements in the nation. We are compelled to reach a sense of being a nation by means of rational self-consciousness…. The Great War has posed the problem before contending nations of carrying civilization into the community of nations; that is, it has left us with the demand for international-mindedness. (p. 401-3)

While in this excerpt Mead writes in generalities about war, nations, civilization, and rational self-consciousness, his exceptionalism narrative previously discussed provides a historical anchoring in this account as well as the more explicit victories of the First World War. This excerpt makes sense for Mead because of U.S. military, political, and
economic ascendency accelerates. Without this ascendency, rational dialogue would not be appropriate. Consequently the opportune call for greater dialogue and for international unity and cooperation occurs at the moment when U.S. seeks to find an expedient way out of its colonial problems (in the Philippines and elsewhere), urban European immigrant troubles, and its domestic economic crisis.

**Mead, Liberal Reform, and the Pragmatic National Self**

“It [international war] is a question that concerns both ethics and psychology” writes Mead (1929:404), suggesting that while pragmatism as an ethics calls for the end of war, social psychological processes of individuals and nations needs to be address to create rational, scientific, self-conscious beings. Mead’s accounts of these social psychological processes can be found in his more elaborated symbolic interactionist theories of mind and the modern self. Briefly Mead’s intellectual contribution to sociology is his development of symbolic interactionism, which explains how subjective experiences and the notions of self emerge through the use of cultural meanings, symbols, language, and social interactions. Through symbolic interactionism, Mead constructs an idealized modern individual or nation, fully rational, conscious, and practicing pragmatic philosophy. “Nations, like individuals, can become objects to themselves only as they see themselves through the eyes of others” (Mead 1915:604). This peaceful modern being comes to be embodied in educated U.S. residents and their political nation-state. Yet historically Mead remains rather myopic, unable to comprehend the colonial violence committed by those who are educated and superior, relegating atrocious actions to those uneducated and non-pragmatic.

As solutions to these erroneous actions, Mead (1899) expounds liberal social
reform, against socialist and anti-imperialist alternatives, where do not readily promote cooperation among all sectors.

In social reform, or the application of intelligence to the control of social conditions, we must make a like assumption, and this assumption takes the form of belief in the essentially social character of human impulse and endeavor…. [E]very attempt to direct conduct by a fixed [socialist] idea of the world of the future must be, not only a failure, but also pernicious…. Our reflective consciousness as applied to conduct is, therefore, an identification of our effort with the problem that presents itself, and the developmental process by which it is overcome, and reaches its highest expression in the scientific statement of the problem, and the recognition and use of scientific method and control. (1899:370-1)

Through scientific analysis of social problems and resulting liberal reforms to foster functional institutions, Mead and other pragmatists of the period argue that democracy, freedom, and liberty necessarily flourish. This modern formulation of pragmatism and reflexive consciences fail to challenge adequately notions of U.S. exceptionalism in liberal reforms and problem-solving, and to account fully the history and legacies of U.S. empire as if such events and colonial subjects never existed.

**IMMEDIATE IMPACTS ON THE 1920S CHICAGO SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY**

While Martin Blumer (1984; also see Deegan 2002) stresses the diversity of theoretical and methodical approaches of the early Chicago school of sociology, Robert Park’s and Emory Bogardus’s produced sociological accounts and silences on U.S. empire and racial notions pertaining to Filipinos and the Philippines. These accounts drew significantly from the pragmatic philosophies and social psychologies of Dewey and Mead.

*Empire, Race Relations, and the Social Psychology of Robert Park*
Dewey and Mead shaped Robert Park’s sociology of social interactions, making Chicago school sociologists reframe immigrant research into inquiries on racial relations cycle. Early on, the pragmatic philosophies of William James and John Dewey and the Germanic sociology of Simmel formed Park’s intellectual interest in constructing sociology as a social psychological study as attitudes as formulated in his dissertation.

After his doctorate work, Park sought to balance professional research and public engagement by briefly muckraking as a writer for the Congo Reform Association (Lyman 1992). Park published in Everybody’s Magazine a series of exposes of the atrocities and oppression in the Congo as the result of Belgian King Leopold’s imperialist drive. During the first decade of the 1900s (and overlapping with US military atrocities in the Philippines), Park relates issues of empire, brute violence, “civilizing mission,” and systematic theft of resources by merchants and missionaries. Yet Park notably remained silent on U.S. empire and the Philippine occupation.

Initially writing on the Congo, Park began to devote more energy to study first hand the conditions of Blacks in southern U.S. With the Tuskegee Institute and Booker T. Washington, Park spent seven years formulating a theory of racial assimilation and race relations cycle. In Chicago, Park makes the ecological notion of competition central in his re-conceptualization of human interactions, drawing from Cooley’s and Mead’s symbolic interactionism. He trained Chicago-school social psychologists, emphasizing concepts such as “conflict,” “prejudice,” “race consciousness,” and “accommodation” in the hope to reduce hostilities against racial and new ethnic immigrants during the 1920s United States (Park and Burgess 1924; Park 1950; Deegan 2002). These sociologists often presented prejudice as a natural instinct or everyday quirk, rendering it considerably
banal. Such prospective continues to dominate U.S. sociology.

Füredi (1998) rightly interprets Park’s theory on race relations as racial pragmatism, a “makeshift intellectual response which instinctively sought to avoid the consequences of racial oppression” (p. 107). This manifestation of pragmatism had two key impacts: Chicago-trained sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s (1) shifted from relying on W.I. Thomas’s immigrant studies to Park’s studies on racial prejudice and assimilation and (2) used the Park’s framework while conducting the Survey of Race Relations to understand the “Oriental” problem in the western U.S. (see Yu 2001). As such, the issue of empire for U.S.-based Filipinos and their colonial status become empirically erased.

**Emory Bogardus and the Sociology of U.S. Filipino Assimilation**

While Robert Park delineated societal dynamics, linking evolutionism and pragmatic social psychology, his peer Emory Stephen Bogardus (Ph.D. at Chicago in 1911) published college and high school textbooks in sociology and social psychology as well as conceptually developed the “social distance” scale (1920; 1925a; 1925b; 1928a; 1928b). His reprinted publication on race riots against U.S. Filipinos in 1930 Watsonville, California has made, in essence, the founder of the sociology of U.S. Filipinos (Bogardus 1930). In these writings, Bogardus offers an intellectual continuity drawing upon the logics of early U.S. pragmatism and Park’s social psychology.

Bogardus’s sociology theoretical constructs Filipinos as a domestic racial immigrant group even while Filipinos challenged the conquest and annexation of the Philippines into the U.S. territories and strived to gain again their national sovereignty. This sociology shifts constructing Filipinos from being subjects of empire to
domesticated racial immigrants, erasing further the brief prominence of a sociology of empire moving towards a lasting permanence of a sociology of U.S. race relations.

As part of his early sociology of empire that analyzes the opposition to the “acquisition” of the Philippines, Bogardus (1920:253) constructs a social psychology that emphasizes group loyalties and the need to overcome “provincial patriotism.” After this acquisition, Bogardus views expending Dewey’s and Mead’s pragmatic theories of social psychology in which further national and global progress should be evolutionary, needing non-violent conflict resolution and avoiding revolutionary change.

Shifting towards a sociology of U.S. race relations, Bogardus (1919; 1928b; 1930) epistemologically solidifies the notion of Filipinos as a domestic social “problem,” needing to racially assimilated and Americanized. In particular, Bogardus conducts historical and social psychological studies on racial attitudes, using his attitudinal measurement of “social distance” of racial and immigrant groups. His study of the 1930 Watsonville riots concludes that the vigilante attacks on Filipinos were racial, understanding the violence by constructing Filipinos as an “out-group” (p. 59) and by faulting the lack of “sane” Filipino leadership (p. 61). As a result, Bogardus’s social psychological understanding frames U.S. Filipinos as U.S. ethnics (1925a; 1925b), divorcing any explicit account of empire and commonwealth territories during these historical moments.

CONCLUSION

The social psychology of U.S. pragmatists John Dewey and George Herbert Mead shapes how early U.S. sociology position itself on questions of U.S. empire and geo-
political dominance. It particular, pragmatist thought has influenced how 1920s Chicago sociologists Robert Park and Emory Bogardus produced symbolic interactionist theories and studies on U.S. race and international relations.

This paper makes several interventions in the history of U.S. sociological theory. It re-examines the history of U.S. sociology and the philosophy of pragmatism through the lens of empire, rather than simply a myopic looking-glass of the “race problem.” This re-examination consequently highlights the interrelationships between racialist epistemologies and orientalist knowledges, rather than compartmentalizing empire and race, Asia and Asian America, sociology and philosophy. Further it draws attention to the ways pragmatism got deployed to deal with the “Question of the Philippines” in the interests of imperialism and against the asserted dangers of socialism, even while at the same time pragmatism served as one crucial theoretical foundation for early U.S. anti-imperialist campaigns.

These interventions are crucial as professional sociology in the U.S. commemorates its centennial beginning and assesses its many strengths. Yet this centennial narrative must somehow also account for its historical amnesia of early 1900s discussions in professional gatherings and settlement house meetings of the U.S. pacification campaigns in the Philippines. This amnesia becomes all the more haunting, as about one hundred years since the U.S-Philippine war and the founding of U.S. sociology, the revitalized U.S. empire has been conducting pacification campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines since September 11, 2001. Further sustained inquiry should assess if the legacies of U.S. pragmatism and early Chicago School sociology serve as the philosophy and social logic for this renewed project of empire.
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