

ARTICLE

# Disinfecting the Dead, Sanitizing Empire: The Cultural Memory of Fallen Soldiers in Cuba

Shannon Bontrager 

Independent Scholar, Alpharetta, GA, USA  
Email: [shannon.bontrager@gmail.com](mailto:shannon.bontrager@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The misremembering by Americans of the Spanish-Cuban-American War was not an accident of either time or place. Rather, it was a collaboration between the citizenry, political and business elites, and the military-industrial complex centered on the cult of the fallen soldier. As businessmen carved up the Cuban landscape and the military occupied Guantanamo Bay, the war dead played one last service of memory. American commemoration of fallen soldiers acted as a shroud to obscure the practices of American imperialism. The recovery of the war dead thus provides an interesting example of how officials wanted Americans to remember the conflict. Most of the fallen died from disease rather than combat. Recovering the war dead thus entailed an elaborate process of sanitizing the “sick” dead and disinfecting the remains of warriors buried in foreign and tropical soil to repatriate them back to the United States. The metaphorical intersected with the medical in presenting dead soldiers from an imperialistic war with “clean and sterile bones” that would neither threaten the health of the general public nor their collective memory. Such a re-presentation would help shape how Americans remember a clean and sterile “Splendid Little War” without acknowledging the mucky details of empire-building.

**Keywords:** cultural memory; death studies; commemoration; Spanish-American War; American empire

I heard somebody dying near me. He was dying hard. Hard. It took him a long time to die. He breathed as all noble machinery breathes when it is making its gallant strife against breaking, breaking. But he was going to break. He was going to break. It seemed to me, this breathing, the noise of a heroic pump which strives to subdue a mud which comes upon it in tons. The darkness was impenetrable. The man was lying in some depression within seven feet of me. Every wave, vibration, of his anguish beat upon my senses. He was long past groaning. There was only the bitter strife for air which pulsed out into the night in a clear penetrating whistle with intervals of terrible silence in which I held my own breath in the common unconscious aspiration to help.

—Spanish-Cuban-American War correspondent Stephen Crane

A mother visited Presbyterian minister and naturalist Henry C. McCook at his Philadelphia home in 1899. The minister, who served as a chaplain for the 2nd Pennsylvania Volunteers during the Spanish-Cuban-American War, had returned earlier to Cuba to record all the graves of American soldiers buried where they fell in battle.<sup>1</sup> The woman visited McCook because she saw a sketch, published in a newspaper, he had made of her son's grave. She was interested in having her son's remains returned to her. Dr. McCook showed her his original sketch and noted that her son lay in a "beautiful spot where he sleeps side by side with two of his comrades." This reassurance did not, unfortunately, alleviate her grief as McCook noted that "with trembling voice and eyes filled with tears, she cried: Oh! Dr. McCook, do you believe that this was a war for humanity? It was so different from the Civil War! It would be such a comfort to be assured that my child, the only jewel of my home, had died for his fellow men. Was it a war for humanity?"<sup>2</sup> This mother was struggling with how she should remember the war in Cuba. Memories of the Civil War, for some, obviously loomed over the invasion of Cuba, but would Americans remember the war against Spain differently than the war against slavery? The cultural memory of the Civil War seemed displaced by the context of an imperialistic war in Cuba. For this mother, grief was not merely an act of solitary remembrance of her only son but also a collective act to remember her son's sacrifice within the context of the American nation. Why did her son have to die in Cuba? Did he die for a noble cause of freedom or something less noble? How would Americans mourn these dead? Her unsureness symbolized an opaque collective memory. New memories of this recent war would have to be made almost immediately to remedy these potential misgivings. The bodies of fallen soldiers became the cultural sites that offered the most clarity regarding this ambiguity. U.S. officials and citizens together retrieved the war dead, sanitized their bodies from disease and imperialism, and repatriated them to commemorate them as heroes of reunification and republicanism. In turn, the dead helped Americans recall memories that accentuated the nation's republican origins and obscured its imperialistic impulses.

Cuba posed a potent juxtaposition for American Protestant capitalists who exploited American bodies (living and dead) as testimonial evidence of reunification and the kind of republican valor that underscored the United States and distinguished American soldiers from the "weakness" of Spanish and Cuban forms of masculinity.<sup>3</sup> They used combat in Cuba as an opportunity to construct the "healthy, vigorous bourgeois body" in contrast to the weaker body of the "other" at the periphery of the empire.<sup>4</sup> The contrast produced a memory of an empire that pinioned remembrances of reunification with the ideals of capitalism, civilized versus uncivilized, Protestant versus Catholic, manly versus feminine, and racialized stereotypes that could describe American imperialism as an act of republicanism. Thus dead bodies (as well as living ones) could animate a cultural network that could, suggests historian Jan Assman, "convey a sense of belonging that is something very different from a natural, ethnocultural awareness. A consciously communicated and acquired sense of belonging connects with a different consciousness than the sense of belonging into which one is born." White, Protestant, capitalist Americans practiced this technique as a crucial part of the invasion of Cuba. "Culture produces identity internally, it also produces alienation externally," observes Assmann. This cultural network became the framework through which Americans communicated and shared their collective memories of the war. They used the war dead as evidence of creating a sense of identity and belonging, as well as the alienation of Cubans, especially because soldier sacrifice outlined the capacity to carry moral entitlement. Wherever Americans could locate the dead, recover their bodies, and commemorate them, they could assert the republican

virtue of their sacrifice, made even more effective by the dead losing the ability to speak for themselves.<sup>5</sup> The mother who visited McCook seemed unsure of her son's legacy. Her son died in Cuba not for the emancipation of slaves but in an invasion of a foreign land that seemed like the work of an empire. What was at stake for her was whether the sacrifice of her "only jewel" would be worthy of remembrance and inclusion in the national identity. The Spanish-Cuban-American War dead thus offered a generation of Americans the evidence they needed to produce a new American identity out of its imperialistic reality.<sup>6</sup>

Americans had plenty of experience building cultural memories out of their shared grief over the last half of the nineteenth century. More than 700,000 soldiers died in the Civil War, amounting to more than 2 percent of the entire U.S. population, with another 400,000 to 500,000 wounded and perhaps another 400,000 captured or missing. Few Americans escaped the grief of the conflict. In this context, President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was a cultural memory manifesto that laid out the basic rules and techniques for how Americans should remember the martial dead. Although the war was fought to end slavery, a new era of Reconstruction helped Americans reimagine American society and develop new cultural memories of the past.<sup>7</sup> For the first time, Americans seriously and collectively confronted how deeply slavery had become rooted in the American experience. Citizens developed rituals and techniques to reinforce this new cultural memory, such as parades and Memorial Day traditions, aided by the U.S. military's construction of national cemeteries to bury Union soldiers. Many African Americans celebrated Emancipation Day, Evacuation Day, and Juneteenth. Americans pressured Congress to create pensions for widows, orphans and disabled soldiers. Despite such invented traditions, not everyone subscribed to these Reconstruction memories and institutions. Many Confederates rejected and remained hostile to them. Initially, the Confederate dead were not included in this kind of memory—they died fighting for the idea of a nation built not on equality but on slavery. But as Reconstruction efforts waned and former Confederates reclaimed positions of power in former Confederate states, Black Codes, the Ku Klux Klan, and Jim Crow laws became popular techniques to protest, delay, and even reject Reconstruction efforts. Northern voters retreated from radical Reconstruction politics, and Congressionally mandated institutions such as the Freedmen's Bureau, Civil Rights bills, and the Enforcement Acts withered away. Northerners and southerners instead departed down a path toward reunification and creating an alternative memory surrounding the Lost Cause mythology to smooth their progress.

The invasion of Cuba in 1898, however, shared few causative factors with the Civil War. Cuba was, among other things, an attempt to expand the American economy—dislocated by the 1893 financial crisis—and consolidate U.S. control of the North Atlantic capitalist economy by invading the Hispanic Caribbean with military force. The conflict began with the suspicious sinking of the USS *Maine*. It ended with a quick victory that resulted from an effective U.S. naval blockade, more so than Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill or the Army's siege of Santiago. Soldiers from the North and the South made up American forces, and the quick victory enabled some to describe the conflict as a "splendid little war." This was not the same kind of combat that American soldiers would experience in the Philippines, which was a much longer and more brutal form of colonialism that involved torture and concentration camps, and which was fought across an expansive archipelago. This "splendid" description had multiple meanings; one was that northerners and southerners, fighting side by side, seemed to consummate their reunification on the battlefields of Cuba. The overall strategy of the war saw the U.S. Navy blockade Cuban ports and cut off the resupply and evacuation routes of Spanish troops.

Although few moments of intense combat gripped American soldiers, the U.S. Army's larger strategy was to trap and then prevent the Spanish Army from escaping. Soldiers from the North and the South collaborated with soldiers of the *Cuba Libre* movement to ensnare Spanish troops in Santiago. Spanish forces surrendered because the U.S. naval blockade prevented them from resupplying troops, especially as yellow fever began wreaking havoc, killing 15,000 soldiers. Meanwhile, American soldiers surrounding Santiago had little to do. They grew restless and sick, too, from mosquitoes carrying malaria and yellow fever. The terrible siege ended after only several weeks.

The justification of the American invasion as necessary support to the *Cuba Libre* movement promised U.S. aid to Cuban sugar and tobacco interests, as well as nationalists who wanted independence from Spanish rule. But this justification soon changed as American private investment in the Cuban economy, the sinking of the USS *Maine*, and the quick military victory prompted many Americans to construct a narrative in which a "superior" reunified masculine force defeated an "effeminate" European army. Key to this masculinity was the idea that southern and northern soldiers contributed to a reunified sense of Americanness. Americans largely forgot about their Cuban allies. "The proposition of war waged and won by the United States," claims Cuban historian Louis A. Pérez Jr., "purported nothing less than to redefine Cubans' relationship to their own independence. The denial of agency to Cubans served immediately to silence the Cuban voice in the discussions concerning postwar settlements."<sup>8</sup> With many Cuban voices quieted, the Americans insisted that Cubans express gratitude for American involvement. Pérez describes this moral righteousness as "simultaneously a source of moral entitlement and means of social control by which to transact assumptions of domination" among Cubans.<sup>9</sup> Americans expected Cubans to be grateful for the sacrifices that U.S. soldiers made to liberate the island from Spanish colonial rule, and they used the bodies of dead soldiers to garner support for American empire building. American expansionists accentuated a cultural memory of white, Protestant, and capitalist ideals that they inherited from Northern Europe, developed in domestic homelands and contested borderlands. They now sought to apply this cultural memory to newly captured territories.

Cubans, however, had their own motivations for liberating themselves from Spanish colonial overseers. Cuba's Catholic history posed a formidable alternative cultural memory network that dated back to the days of Spanish conquistadores, developed deep roots in the Caribbean island, and provided a foil to expansionists' aims. Historian Luis Martínez-Fernández argues that Spanish officials attempted to squeeze Spain's colonial resources in the Hispanic Caribbean in the last half of the nineteenth century partly as a response to the growing dependence of Cuba and Puerto Rico on the North Atlantic economies dominated by the Protestant and industrialized United States and Europe. Cubans critical of Spanish colonialism, according to Martínez-Fernández, leveraged the burgeoning trade between the Hispanic Caribbean and the North Atlantic economies into a movement that weakened Spanish rule and Catholic influence on the island over time. These Cubans were aided by the growing presence of American, German, British, and Caribbean Protestants and missionaries immigrating to the island. For these newcomers, dead bodies and burial grounds became key battlegrounds in this imperial standoff as Catholic officials maintained stringent control over local burial practices. As a way of limiting the presence of North Atlantic missionaries and industrialists, religious officials would only sanction the burial of Catholics. Should Protestants die in Cuba, Catholic priests could deny them burial in consecrated ground unless loved ones could produce evidence of the deceased's Catholic conversion before death. Although some immigrants

could afford to have their bodies transported back home, most were forced to convert soon after their arrival because death was often present throughout Cuba. Yellow fever and malaria, for example, are spread by mosquitoes and always pose a significant risk, especially to newcomers. If Protestants died unexpectedly, they risked exclusion from purchasing a coffin, acquiring the services of a hearse, or securing a license for any burial or exhumation, all of which Catholic entities controlled and profited from. Instead of consecrated ground, non-Catholic bodies would be interred in a potter's field and an unguarded shallow grave. Protestant missionaries, especially American ones, stepped up their attempts to wrest control of the burial grounds from Catholic regulation. However, they would not completely succeed until the U.S. military invaded Cuba in 1898.<sup>10</sup>

Cuba would form the centerpiece of American informal economic power in the Caribbean by securing Guantanamo Bay through the Platt Amendment—despite severe criticism from Cuban nationalist politicians such as Juan Gualberto Gómez—and establishing a formidable naval base protecting the future Panama Canal (and the Western Hemisphere) from European influence. It seemed possible to use the dead to blunt even the most vociferous domestic critics of the war who may not have been enthusiastic about the empire but shared with expansionists widely held assumptions about race. Anti-imperialists such as German-American and former Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz and Senator Benjamin “Pitchfork” Tillman of South Carolina opposed the annexation of Cuba not because they cared much for the liberty of the Cuban people; rather, they based their anti-imperialism on the racial arguments of white supremacy and “True Americanism.” Although the anti-imperialists succeeded in their quest to keep the United States from formally annexing Cuba, Ambassador John Hay, Rough Rider and future President Theodore Roosevelt, and President William McKinley all believed that the war would invigorate American manliness and the U.S. economy and help the nation ascend in the world system. If not able to obtain a formal empire, these political power brokers would turn to innovation, making Cuba a semi-colony that marked an informal American empire.<sup>11</sup>

Using the dead to obscure the American empire with the memories of American reunification and republicanism had its challenges. The War Department had not practiced this kind of massive recovery effort in nearly a generation since the Civil War. Furthermore, the war in Cuba was not a domestic conflict but rather an overseas conflict fought beyond U.S. borders. New policies and procedures for recovering the dead and repatriating bodies did not yet exist and would have to be implemented quickly. It was much more difficult to justify the sacredness of American sacrifice in the tropical climate of Cuba, where disease killed significantly more men than did battle. Of the 72,000 U.S. soldiers deployed to the Caribbean, 385 died in combat, while more than 2,000 died of disease.<sup>12</sup> Yellow fever and typhoid scourged U.S. forces during the later stages of the war; most soldiers had no immunity to yellow fever, and the hot, humid Cuban climate made it easy for mosquitoes to reproduce.<sup>13</sup> By the end of combat, so many American soldiers had become infected and sick they could no longer fight, including the entire 5th Corps, which had to be recalled just forty days after deployment. On the one hand, the dead (re)presented to everyday American citizens the sacred ritualized republican themes of cultural memory as evidence of a military conquest in the global South. If the dead could symbolize to U.S. citizens and the rest of the world that the United States could and would compete with overseas empires to replace a deteriorating British empire, they would have had to die in a wildly successful war. On the other hand, it was significantly more difficult to preserve the righteousness of American empire building when bodies had been destroyed not by bullets but by mosquito bites.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the duration of the war, American soldiers were left alone to bury their comrades in haphazard ways they hoped would reflect their own perceived republican presence in a tropical land. It was up to their comrades, not the nation-state, to guarantee their sacrifices. When a soldier died in Cuba, colleagues usually buried the body near where he served. During his time as a chaplain, McCook noted that soldiers decorated their comrades' graves in unique ways with "crackerboxes and ammunition boxes" and "in some cases, these were covered with tin sheeting" to identify the dead with names and death dates "punched into the metal with a nail, a stone probably being used as a hammer." Some men buried the dead under trees and tore a patch of bark away to etch the identity of the fallen into the tree, while others spelled the names of the dead with spent cartridges pushed into the dirt of the grave.<sup>15</sup> Soldiers honored their comrades the best that necessity and creativity would allow. However, the tropical environment of Cuba threatened the American dead and the ability to retrieve them or even commemorate them. McCook noted that "the rapid growth of tropical plants would soon hide the places of burial and that the torrential rains would efface the writings hastily made upon the rudely constructed markers." Besides the wild nature of the island, Cubans themselves also posed a problem to preserving the sacredness of the American dead. According to McCook, "strangers indifferent or hostile to our cause and name would occupy the fields honored by the valor and consecrated by the death and burial of our heroes." McCook observed that farmers seeking to put land back into production seemed ungrateful for the sacrifices that Americans made in the conflict (Figure 1).<sup>16</sup>

So-called "ingratitude" was the least of the problems for U.S. occupation in the immediate aftermath of combat. Disease spread unmercifully throughout Santiago, Cuba. In a sanitation report from the U.S. military, for example, issued just days after combat ended, U.S. officials described a horrible scene. In August, Sanitary Inspector H. S. Caminero of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service began issuing daily reports in which death rates dramatically increased among the general population of Santiago after the Spanish surrender, from fifty-three deaths on August 3 to seventy-eight deaths on August 7 to ninety-two deaths on August 10. Inspector Caminero could not identify the mysterious tropical disease that was ravaging native Cubans as well as foreigners in the city. Doctors



Figure 1. Overgrowth obscuring U.S. gravesites near Siboney, Cuba. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

in Santiago suggested the disease was malaria. Still, there were also cases of dysentery, cholera, and yellow fever that were “causing so many victims among the civilians and military men.” The malaria diagnosis was inconclusive, claimed Caminero, because the symptoms experienced by people did not include “black vomiting.” Quinine “seems to have no action in modifying or cutting short” the disease and the fever seemed to last for only three to six days. The inspector, nevertheless, hoped sanitary conditions would improve as “large bodies of men are now employed in cleaning and removing all the dirt and garbage from the streets and dwellings” of Santiago. He also believed that conditions would continue to progress now that “two American physicians act as sanitary inspectors for the town and are constantly looking out for any delinquency of the sanitary rules laid out by the military Government.” In addition, he believed illness would subside once Spanish troops, especially the sick soldiers numbering about 2,600, finally left the city onboard transport vessels.<sup>17</sup>

Sanitation was important to Caminero because the lingering residue of miasma theory shaped how many Americans thought about the disease at the end of the nineteenth century. Miasmatic scientists theorized that putrefying flesh and waste could contaminate the water and the air and then spread disease, especially in unsanitary locations. According to the theory, although humans could not see the plague, it produced a putrid odor that alerted people to the presence of disease, and many people looked at uncared-for dead bodies as potential epidemic-causing sites. During the war, Dr. Walter Reed, working for the U.S. Army in Las Animas, Cuba, performed experiments that proved yellow fever and malaria were spread by mosquitos, not miasma. But this newfound evidence was little known. Military officials still relied on sanitation and olfactory detection of disease; clean air was vitally important. “Smell registered dangers” alerted Americans to the “fear that they would otherwise be sickened and perhaps killed by the odors of the tropics,” contends historian Andrew J. Rotter. The belief in the miasma theory accentuated a kind of American Orientalism, or cultural “othering,” which shaped how Americans often imagined the people and places in the tropics. When Americans traveled abroad, they “believed they were experiencing smells fundamentally different from those they knew at home.” Rotter asserts that “stench was alleged to be common to racial Others and the causes of the illnesses they harbored, particularly in the tropics[;] bad smells were not, by this logic, merely unpleasant: they could be fatal.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite Caminero’s hopes, the “peculiar fever” raged on. Caminero’s miasmatic tendencies led him to suspect the cause of sickness was the Cuban soil, climate, and poor sanitation presided over by the Spanish colonial government. He noted that the large numbers of sick were accompanied by “agglomeration of people in weakened condition, soil torn up, and trees cut down and woods cleared. All of this was accompanied by heavy rains.” Additionally, the inspector identified as a problem “thousands of bodies buried near the surface of the ground and close to streams from which the water was used for drinking purposes.” Such accusations placed the blame for infection rates squarely on the perceived malevolence of the Catholic and Spanish officials and the tropical Cuban climate. The military government ordered all coffin-less dead bodies burned and the ashes sent to pauper’s graves.<sup>19</sup>

American martial bodies lay strewn across the Cuban landscape and in urban burial grounds. Their presence in cemeteries under the control of Spanish authorities contributed to breaking the Catholic domination of Cuban burial grounds. McCook reported his concerns directly to President McKinley. The president issued an order charging the Secretary of War with the responsibility of making American graves in Cuba permanent. The War Department placed McCook in charge of the process to document the graves.

The Presbyterian minister declared McKinley's order "was the first step toward the restoration, by national authority at public expense, of more than a thousand soldiers who had fallen in foreign service." Despite this grand federal promise, Major General William R. Shafter offered McCook few resources to complete his mission. The chaplain's arrival in Santiago was unheralded. He set out on his mission with only a Kodak field camera, a sketchbook, and an interpreter. In the middle of his work, he fell ill and returned to the United States.<sup>20</sup>

President McKinley had political reasons for caring for the war dead buried in Cuba. Shortly after the war ended, the president went on an expansive tour of parts of the United States. From October 1898 to February 1899, the president delivered seventy-six speeches in big cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, as well as small towns such as Sibley, Iowa, and Terre Haute, Indiana, all in areas that voted for his administration in the 1896 election. It was a victory tour in which he rallied supporters in the Midwest and New England to stay loyal to his administration in peacetime as much as they had in wartime. To this end, in nearly every speech, McKinley stressed the themes of patriotism and reunification caused by the victory in Cuba. He continually cited the heroism of soldiers. In Omaha, Nebraska, at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, the president noted the valor and bravery of America's armed forces—soldiers and seamen from the North and the South—who enhanced the "majesty of the American name [which] stand forth in unsullied glory, while the humanity of our conduct have given to war, always horrible, touches of noble generosity, Christian sympathy and charity, and examples of human grandeur which can never be lost to mankind." The audience applauded vociferously. McKinley continued to consider the current soldiers as "worthy successors and descendants of Washington and Greene," of "Grant, Sheridan, Sherman," and of "Lee, Jackson, and Longstreet." Tremendous applause ensued. In Illinois, McKinley spoke at the Chicago Jubilee, celebrating victory in Cuba. Here, the president suggested that his administration's work remained unfinished; he needed sustained support to accomplish the nation's goals. Those goals, he suggested, amounted to something beyond reunification. "The war with Spain was undertaken," claimed the president, "not that the United States should increase its territory, but that oppression at our very doors should be stopped." He admitted that while the American empire did not seek to accumulate territory (this would not be the case for the Philippines), Americans would not tolerate economic and political turmoil beyond its boundaries. Combat did not resolve this threat. McKinley asserted, "This noble sentiment must continue to animate us, and we must give to the world the full demonstration of the sincerity of our purpose. Duty determines destiny." Taking McKinley's speeches at Omaha and Chicago together, one can see the president tie the themes of unification and imperialism together in a conjoined manner that enlivened American foreign and domestic policy under the McKinley administration.<sup>21</sup>

The president took this message beyond the friendly surroundings of his supporters to politically hostile territory, too. In December 1898, McKinley continued his victory tour by attending the Atlanta Jubilee before making stops throughout Georgia and South Carolina. In Atlanta, the president gave a now infamous speech before the Georgia state legislature that dramatically changed American memory's history. Deploying strategies of reunification and imperialism to gain support amongst Georgians who voted against his presidential candidacy in 1896, McKinley promised legislators that "sectional lines" and "sectional feeling no longer holds back the love we bear each other." He said, "fraternity is the national anthem, sung by a chorus of forty-five States and our Territories at home and beyond the seas. The Union is once more the common altar of our love and loyalty, our devotion and sacrifice." This kind of reunion was proved as the shared "memory of the



dead will be a precious legacy, and the disabled will be the nation's care." He then segued to the national cemeteries of the Civil War, arguing that "those who fell in battle are proof that the dead as well as the living have our love. What an army of silent sentinels we have, and with what loving care their graves are kept! Every soldier's grave made during our unfortunate Civil War is a tribute to American valor." Then the president pivoted by appealing directly to those legislators, many of whom voted for Jim Crow laws and supported the Lost Cause mythology, by stating that times had changed and in "the evolution of sentiment and feeling under the providence of God, with in the spirit of fraternity we should share with you in the care of graves of the Confederate soldiers." The audience erupted in "tremendous applause and long-continued cheering." The president thus rhetorically welcomed the Confederate dead into the national identity as "proof" of American valor. Reunification finally had its exclamation point. He made no such commitment to freedpeople, Native Americans, or Cubans. A few days later, in an unplanned stop in Columbia, South Carolina, McKinley spoke to a gathering and declared, "In this year 1898, one of the most glorious, there have been such manifestations of good feelings, of goodwill, of loyalty, upon the part of all the people of all sections of the country, as have been unprecedented in our history." Here, we can see that people who politically supported McKinley and those who did not could agree that the dead could be used as proof of American Christian benevolence even if that magnanimity papered over American imperial reality. It was imperative then that the U.S. government commemorate the dead in Cuba efficiently and effectively so that evidence of American goodwill could be preserved for the world (and northerners and southerners) to see.<sup>22</sup>

Preserving this kind of evidence, however, would be a difficult task. It was too expensive to care for the dead buried in Cuba without consolidating them. The War Department changed course and determined the best way to preserve graves permanently was to return the bodies to U.S. soil. But this process, too, posed significant risks. Retrieving dead American bodies and repatriating them risked exposing the dead who "were seen as potential focuses for Yellow Fever outbreaks in the United States" to the public, thus diminishing the virtue of their sacrifices.<sup>23</sup> Military officials attempted to deal with this on several levels. They appointed civilian C. E. Norton as Superintendent of the Burial Party recovery operation in Cuba. They also developed a retrieval process that stressed the disinfection of the soldiers' remains who died from disease. This military process destroyed the graveside monuments soldiers themselves built to honor their fallen comrades. Instead, War Department officials sought to impose their own nationalistic memory of the dead. The tropical island's hot climate became the perfect space for the War Department to experiment with recovering soldiers' bodies and implementing new commemorative practices. Norton began his tour well after the completion of the war and had orders to include "General Prisoners ... except those whose court martial sentences include dishonorable discharge." Commanders ordered him also to exclude "insular employees and other employees paid from Insular funds" because they were "not considered within [the] category of War Department employees."<sup>24</sup>

Re-presentation of the dead to the public meant every step of the retrieval process had to demonstrate hygiene and reverence for the dead. Any element that construed disrespect or uncleanness might generate public criticism. The recovery of the war dead thus provides an interesting example of how officials wanted Americans to remember the conflict. However, the military retrieval process proved exceedingly tricky for many reasons. For example, the remains and the earth had already begun to mix, in some cases, long before Norton reached the burial site. In other cases, bodies had decomposed significantly, and all that was left was a putrefying corpse. This decomposition sent

sanitation alarms alight. Another important difficulty was securing reliable laborers who would respect the sacredness of retrieval and understand the importance of hygiene. Deputy Quartermaster General Solon Massey oversaw Norton's expedition in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Norton commanded several undertakers, men who did the work of locating the bodies, digging up the earth, and disinfecting the bodies with chemicals. Massey thought little of these laborers; he believed that most undertakers took advantage of the War Department's reimbursement policy. Instead of paying them \$125 per month plus expenses, Massey wanted to pay them \$100 a month plus "actual expenses." "The fact is that all these men put in expenses for full \$3.00 a day. They dont [*sic*] limit themselves with 'subsistence'. In this way they have as a rule, been drawing about \$90.00 a month for expenses." Massey also recommended that William Abbot of Newport, Kentucky, be dismissed because he was prone to "drunkenness" and John Walsh of New York City be replaced because he was "unreliable."<sup>25</sup> Drunkenness, unreliability, and wages had to fall in line with the solemnity of the process, or else they would undermine the respect for the dead and, worse, potentially spread disease. Re-presentation and safety mattered immensely; the burial party needed men with experience handling "unhygienic" bodies rotting away in the Cuban heat. Massey warned, "most of them [the undertakers] have to be carefully watched to prevent slighting work." Some, he believed, understood the basics of embalming and were experienced in dealing with bodies shortly after death. But he added, "Not one in ten of them understands theory of up-to-date disinfection or the chemistry of the operations employed in preparing the remains of persons that have been buried and are found in various stages of decomposition."<sup>26</sup> Massey insisted on reliably following procedures. Failing to use proper chemicals when handling decomposing flesh, he believed, could spread malaria and yellow fever to local populations.

The War Department insisted Norton begin his work in February when the weather was cooler. Officials believed this early start would help minimize the spread of disease contracted from dead bodies. The need to retrieve the dead before the heat of the summer often meant that War Department officials eagerly transgressed both Catholic traditions and Cuban and Puerto Rican law when it came to recovering "diseased" corpses. Military surgeon Colonel John Van Rensselaer Hoff noted that "the local laws of Puerto Rico forbid the disinterment of dead bodies until five years after death, and forever in case of contagious disease." These Catholic laws were only slightly less restrictive in Cuba, where the possibility of disinterment after two years was possible for the "healthy" dead. Still, none of the buried bodies around the recovered body could be disturbed in the process. These local rules threatened to force the U.S. military to abandon their war dead on Cuban tropical soil. Instead, U.S. officials violated local laws to recover their dead. Hoff designed the initial military recovery policies in Cuba by disregarding Spanish laws and Catholic enforcement. In cases where Norton recovered bodies that had been infected by yellow fever or malaria, Hoff instructed the superintendent to stay in constant communication with the commanding officer who would in turn act as a liaison with local Catholic authorities. This relationship between the occupying force and local authorities allowed Americans to circumvent parochial laws when recovering diseased dead. Anti-imperialist residents of Cuba connected to the capitalist economies of the North Atlantic long fantasized about ways to weaken Catholicism's hold on Cuba. Those Cubans critical of Spanish and Catholic colonialism saw in American retrieval efforts an opportunity to secularize Cuban rituals and thus lessen local Catholic officials' hold on Cuban burial customs. Hoff, however, was focused on sanitizing the dead, not on internal Cuban culture wars. Thus, without receiving a license for disinterment from Catholic authorities, he ignored local laws and recommended that all the weeds, grass, and soil be taken from

the site or decontaminated, particularly if the soil encountered the coffin. He also suggested that the coffin be disinfected with mercuric chloride before and after use, and the body should be “wrapped with a sheet saturated in bichloride solution.” When transferring the body, it should be placed in a metallic coffin and immediately hermetically sealed and then the metal coffin should be placed in a wooden box. When transported out of the country, the remains should be accompanied not with a Catholic permit but by a surgeon’s certificate and a “certificate of the shipping undertaker” stating that all safety precautions had been taken in transporting the body and preventing disease. Both certificates were to be fastened to the wooden exterior coffin. This process would ensure the safety of everyone handling the corpses and the identification of the remains.<sup>27</sup>

These precautions were necessary, officers believed, because during the war, soldiers were often buried with little concern of the possibility of spreading disease. Army surgeon Marion F. Marvin, one of the overseers who worked with Superintendent Norton and who submitted his report to the army in 1901, noted the numerous types of burial discovered in the retrieval process. He described four kinds of burial: burial in metallic coffins; burial in wooden caskets encased in outer pine boxes; burial in wooden caskets only; and burial without any coffins. The biggest problem for Marvin was the bodies entombed in metal caskets. Those bodies, even those buried at the beginning of the war, deteriorated much more slowly than bodies encased in the more porous wood caskets. The partially decomposed bodies were awash in “dark, red fluid, which was in each and every case exceedingly offensive.” Marvin noted, “when the liquids of the decomposing body were cast off, they were all collected and held in the metal box, and not allowed to escape as in other styles of caskets.” The surgeon reported that chloride of lime had been placed in some metal coffins. He commented, “In such cases, instead of there being a lot of fluid in the casket, there was a mushy mess.” Marvin mentioned that one soldier’s body was placed in a metal casket and enclosed with a blanket, feather pillow, bed linen, and “several suits of outer and under clothing.” The medical doctor commented, “All of these articles were saturated with the fluid mentioned and it made the removal of the body very difficult.” Bodies buried in wooden coffins fared a little better. Marvin noted that wooden coffins with an exterior pine box saw the drainage of the red fluid but the “soft parts of the corpse remained.” Where only a wooden coffin was used, bodies after a year in the ground disintegrated into “only dry bones.” The same situation was discovered in cases where no coffin was used at all. The cemetery at the Las Animas Hospital that treated yellow fever patients buried victims “stripped, wrapped only in a sheet, saturated with mercurous chloride ... the bottom and sides of the graves were filled with chloride of lime and some six inches or more laid on top of the body.” This process consumed the flesh and fluids of the body within “a very few months, leaving perfectly clean and sterile bones.”<sup>28</sup>

The metaphorical intersected with the medical when military officials presented dead soldiers from an imperialistic war with “clean and sterile bones” that would not threaten the general public or collective memory. Such a re-presentation would help shape the ways Americans would remember a clean and sterile “Splendid Little War” without acknowledging the mucky details of empire building. From a practical perspective, Marvin recommended the best way to bury soldiers was without a coffin. But such treatment of the dead would fail to impress an American public dubious about America’s military presence in foreign lands. Such measures seemed sacrilegious to many. Military officials keenly understood the tension between retrieving nationalized dead bodies and hygienic sterile bones. Marvin believed that a coffin-less burial “would be so bitterly condemned by the general public” that he conceded the army should use a thin pine box with half-inch drainage holes drilled in the bottom. Bodies should be covered in chloride

of lime. Marvin contended that this practice would make the recovery process easier and more presentable. Within a few months, “the disinterring corps would have nothing but clean bones to deal with” rather than “a foul putrid mass, that resembles nothing on earth.” Metallic coffins, claimed the surgeon, should never be used. Prohibiting them would eliminate foul odors and eliminate “the possibility of infection not only to those engaged in the work but to those living in the immediate vicinity of the place of burial.” These measures, argued the medical doctor, would consume the flesh faster and make it “safer to import it into the United States because our disinfection can be and is more thorough when we have dry bones to deal with, we have eliminated the possibilities of their being any offensive odor and from any possible damage to the casket en route.”<sup>29</sup> After receiving Marvin’s report, Norton asked the chief surgeon of Camp Columbia in Cuba, Dr. A. N. Stark, for his view. Stark agreed that wooden boxes with holes bored in the bottom should be used. He suggested, however, that naked bodies be placed in the coffin and covered with quick lime.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in order for the dead to be ritualized and repatriated, their flesh, muscle, and sinew had to be chemically devoured. The realities of retrieving the dead were obscured by the re-presentation of the dead to the American public. This metaphor fittingly conveyed how the realities of imperialism could be obscured by republican rhetoric and symbolism.

Meanwhile, Norton began the collection work, directing superintendents under him to carry out a specific procedure for recovering bodies. When soldiers were buried in a Cuban cemetery, superintendents worked closely with local governors, but when the bodies were buried in military cemeteries, superintendents ignored them and violated local exhumation laws. Superintendents secured local labor and had the power to negotiate wages. Norton claimed that most Spanish workers would labor for one dollar per day, but many Cuban workers would refuse to work for anything less than \$1.50 per day. Norton had several disagreements with Cuban workers and replaced the Cubans with Spanish laborers whenever possible. This situation spoke to the complex racial hierarchies that American imperialists encountered in Cuba.<sup>31</sup>

Undertakers, meanwhile, had to open each grave in a specific way. After finding the coffin, workers sprayed mercury bichloride diluted at a 1:500 ratio into the chasm. Workers then inserted metal hooks into the grave, grabbed the coffin with the hooks, and raised it to the surface with ropes. Then they inserted cross boards of wood beneath the coffin to suspend the casket above the grave. They cracked the top of the casket and dumped five gallons of mercury bichloride and a pint of carbolic acid, a deodorizer, into the coffin. If it was a metal coffin, they drilled a hole in the top, inserted the chemicals, and then drilled a hole in the bottom, letting the fluids drain out and into the empty grave. They broke apart the sides of the wood caskets and allowed the fluids to spill out. Workers took a portable military toilet filled with water, diluted the mercury bichloride, and soaked the body wrappings in the solution. Then, the laborers spread the sheet along the ground beside the coffin and rolled the body out of the casket and onto the sheet. They covered the remains with the chemical cloth and transferred the corpse to a metallic coffin that workers had doused with carbolic acid. Such nasty work and profane treatment of the dead was necessary to re-present the sacredness of the dead soldiers. Sanitized remains could now occupy new metallic caskets. Then, the workers sealed the metallic coffin with a rubber seal and a joint made from white lead. Once hermetically sealed, undertakers lowered the metallic casket into a wood box, sprinkled it with sawdust, and diluted it with carbolic acid. Letters stenciled into the wood identified the soldier and the destination of the coffin. Workers strapped the box together and then shipped it to Havana to be taken to

the United States. In this retrieval process, dead bodies were decontaminated before receiving sacred treatment.<sup>32</sup>

It was one thing to extract the sacred dead from profane soil; it was another to insert the dead into American culture. The War Department experienced several problems in transporting bodies to the United States because there was no precedent, no bureaucracy, and no military code to follow. Military officials were often careless, naïve, and even negligent in their handling of the dead. American civilians wanted complete documentation that undertakers had purified the remains from disease and that the bodies posed no public health threat. Military officials found this task difficult to comply with. The burial party of 1900, for example, collected 167 corpses. However, the bodies remained in Havana for some time because the New York harbor authorities quarantined them when Havana experienced a yellow fever outbreak.<sup>33</sup> In 1901, Norton failed to document adequately the 171 caskets his party recovered. Norton had to send death certificates noting each soldier's name, rank, date of death, and cause of death a week ahead so that New York authorities had time to process the paperwork. Instead, Norton gave the paperwork to the assistant quartermaster, who traveled with the bodies on the ship to New York. Authorities in New York usually refused entry to those bodies without a death certificate. They refused to let the army hold the bodies in the city while officials processed the paperwork.<sup>34</sup> Major Baker telegraphed Captain Palmer in New York, trying to avoid disaster. Baker warned Palmer that there might be problems with New York authorities because the quartermaster held the death certificates on board and not attached to each casket. Baker asked Palmer to intercept the certificates and quickly fasten them to the caskets before harbor authorities received the coffins. Baker also requested that Palmer inspect the caskets because they "were roughly handled" in Cuba, and many suffered damage.<sup>35</sup>

After inspecting the documentation, New York harbor authorities agreed that the remains were sanitary. They allowed the caskets to enter the United States and, thus, American culture. Major Baker learned from this experience and reorganized the process to make it more efficient. The army could not afford to hold the remains hostage to bureaucratic folly. At the end of 1901, Baker instructed Lieutenant Bruce Palmer in Cuba to oversee diligently the loading of bodies onto the ship. Baker explained that Palmer would receive the bodies from the head superintendent of the burial party. The superintendent fixed a death certificate and a certificate of disinfection to the casket and handed two copies of each document to Lieutenant Palmer. Palmer took one copy to the head surgeon at the Marine Hospital; the other copy became part of the cargo manifest. The lieutenant oversaw the loading of the caskets and ensured that "they are so stowed in the hold as to be secure against straining or breaking open from the motion of the vessel and thus avoid the possibility of their arrival at destination in improper condition."<sup>36</sup>

The public never saw the nastiness and haphazardness of recovering bodies in Cuba. The reality of recovering decaying bodies drenched in fluids, emitting a terrible stench, and posing a threat of infection contradicted the way officials wanted the American public to remember the war. And not everyone in the United States believed this kind of imperialistic combat was a splendid affair. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, for example, the author, who called himself "An American," ridiculed U.S. involvement in Cuba. "The Fruits of War," the author claimed, produced for Cubans "an American master in place of his Spanish one, and the supplanting of his native civilization with our American one."<sup>37</sup> Government officials wanted to be sure that they controlled the discourse of war to reinforce the justification of invading Cuba. Inserting dead bodies into American culture could often plant memories in society to counteract critics who accused

U.S. officials of acting imperialistically. These martial bodies, however, could do more effective work of couching the invasion of Cuba as an exercise in republicanism if their acceptance into the American Valhalla was obvious and clear. So American officials turned their bodies into national relics after they doused them with chemicals, sanitized them, retrieved them from profane soil, and stored them in American domestic sacred spaces. It was as if the chemicals deodorized the imperialistic war dead from their imperialistic stench and turned them into sweet-smelling, sterile, virtuous symbols of republicanism.

Public cooperation with the military was evident in how the war dead received their final commemoration. In March 1899, for example, bodies from Cuba arrived in New York. The *New York Times* reported that “[t]he bringing home of the dead to the land of their birth or adoption is regarded as an innovation in the world’s history of warfare.” With bodies on board, the transport ship *Crook* moved through New York harbor and “anchored under the shadow of Liberty’s statue.” The entire harbor remained eerily silent as the ship moved through it. Forts Wadsworth and Hamilton guarded the harbor and lowered their flags to half-mast. Harbor ships also lowered their colors and kept their whistles silent. Personnel began unloading the ship at 11:00 a.m. the next morning. Family members of the dead assembled on shore to collect their loved one’s remains. Representatives of the Seventy-first Regiment assembled to carry the bodies of their comrades to the local armory for their own memorial service. Company I of the Thirteenth Regular Infantry, stationed at Governor’s Island, moved onto the pier to serve as an honor guard. Some 110 bodies were unidentified and taken, along with 259 other bodies (presumably yellow fever victims), by special funeral train “draped in mourning” to Arlington National Cemetery. The reporter noted that the caskets of Black and white soldiers lay next to each other in the ship’s hold and that “side by side or piled on top of each other were names suggesting widely different nationalities and races, a strange conglomeration of the nations of the earth brought together with the common object of defending the unyielding rights of their common country.” “There was no music, no display of flags, no cheering by assembled multitudes.” With each body slowly unloaded and lowered to the pier below, the Thirteenth Regiment “lifted their rifles in salute.” Military officials in Cuba, unfortunately, mixed all the caskets together and stacked them upon each other when they loaded the ship; unknown remains headed for Arlington laid next to the caskets of the Seventy-first Regiment staying in New York. In Hoboken, New Jersey, it took time to separate the sarcophaguses. “The work of unloading the bodies was slow, as the greatest care was taken with the coffins.” Of course, the unloading lasted the entire day until 7:00 a.m., when work stopped with less than 200 caskets unloaded. It would take almost three days to unload the nearly 700 caskets (Figure 2).<sup>38</sup>

The poor planning of this ceremony could not diminish the importance of the dead’s cultural meaning as the public cooperated in the recovery of bodies from a foreign land. While ceremonies in New York commemorated the dead of the Seventy-first Regiment, a funeral train full of bodies left New York. It went to Washington, D.C., where the bodies were prepared for reburial. President McKinley and his entire cabinet attended the service at Arlington National Cemetery. McKinley authorized an executive order closing every government building in the city for the day and lowering flags to half-mast. The entire artillery in Washington, a battalion of cavalry and a battalion of marines, and the entire National Guard in and around the city escorted the bodies to the cemetery. Inside Arlington, mounds of dirt stood by holes in the ground, awaiting the arrival of the caskets, each covered with an American flag. First, the military escorted the bodies and



**Figure 2.** Caskets of U.S. soldiers from Cuba at Arlington National Cemetery pre-burial. Notice the etchings of names, wooden caskets, and U.S. flags draped over the caskets. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

stood guard over the caskets, and then “thousands of people” came to observe the ceremony. “Some sought vantage points in trees or on the ramparts of old Fort McPherson.” Finally, McKinley and his cabinet arrived, followed by military personnel and foreign diplomats. The troops marched into the grave enclosure and surrounded the graves, forming three sides of a rectangle. The president, his cabinet, and the military officials followed, taking the side of the rectangle left open by the military. Then, the few parents who were able to attend entered the rectangle and placed flowers and wreaths at the graves of their sons. After this ceremony, the military band played “Nearer My God, to Thee,” while the chaplain of Fort Monroe, C. W. Freeland, and Reverend Father McGee of St. Patrick’s Church consecrated the ground. As Freeland uttered, “dust to dust, earth to earth,” the soldiers picked up handfuls of dirt and cast them onto the caskets already lowered into the ground. A military detail fired three shots from their rifles, after which a lone bugler played “Taps.” Fort Meyer soldiers fired an artillery piece every half-hour for the rest of the day. After the ceremony, the president’s party and military personnel left, and the work of covering the graves began. Gravediggers completed the work three days later. The mass burial at Arlington was the culmination of a whole series of official and civilian actions suggesting that, whether killed by disease or gunshot, whether known or unknown, whether regular or volunteer, those who died in Cuba perished in a noble cause (Figure 3).<sup>39</sup>

A new generation could look at those Arlington graves and retrieve memories of the war within the context of reunification and republicanism. But these new memories



**Figure 3.** U.S. soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery overlooking the completed graves of servicemen who died in Cuba. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

were also designed to distract the public from the American businesses and corporations that launched a postwar economic invasion of Cuba and a military occupation of Guantanamo Bay. Historian Mark Smith has noted that Americans saw post-independence Cuba as a “New Frontier” in which investors “displaced Cuban landowners by quickly buying up, at bargain prices, bankrupt or foundering properties left in the wake of the war.” With the expansion of U.S. sugar consumption, Smith argues that imported sugar from Cuba promised large profits for corporations. Over the longer term, Cuba’s protectorate status allowed the United States to significantly influence land distribution, the development of infrastructure such as railways, and even citizenship.<sup>40</sup> The Reciprocity Treaty gave Cuban commodities special tax-free or tax-reduced status in the domestic United States. All of these tax incentives resulted in an increase of Cuban sugar production and exports, claims Smith, from \$17 million prewar profits to \$38 million by 1905. The war with Spain had given American investors unprecedented commercial opportunities in Cuba.<sup>41</sup>

While businessmen were trying to carve up Cuba, Americans were more interested in celebrating their newfound nationalism. The commemoration of the dead from Cuba, coupled with McKinley’s Atlanta speech, effectively turned American memory upside down. An overseas war had brought together a nation once divided by the Civil War. Unlike the fallen of that conflict, the war dead from Cuba represented a single people, not two opposing sides. This new project first transformed the 258,000 Confederate dead into valiant heroes. Southerners who fought and died in the Spanish-Cuban-American War seemed to redeem the southerners who fought and died in the Civil War. With this transformation in place, War Department officials and U.S. citizens re-presented the dead as part of an honored community of the fallen that now included Union and Confederate troops from the Civil War, even as they marginalized Cuban patriots from their collective memory. A war for empire became the basis for a reunited nation. The war dead could play one last service of memory. It was enough to elicit the concerns of a confused war mother who asked whether her son had died for a just and



worthy cause. When responding to the mother who asked him if her son had died in a war for humanity, Dr. McCook pondered, “what could one think or say, other than a hearty affirmative.”<sup>42</sup>

**Acknowledgments.** Special thanks Ian Christopher Fletcher, Joe Perry, Larry Youngs, and Michele Reid-Vasquez who read portions of this article and to Steven Blankenship who read the entire article multiple times.

## Notes

- 1 Scholars such as Louis A. Pérez Jr. suggest using the term *Spanish-Cuban-American War* to decolonize our memories of this conflict and to remember that Cubans played the central role in the conflict. See Louis A. Pérez, “Incurring a Debt of Gratitude: 1898 and the Moral Sources of United States Hegemony in Cuba” *American Historical Review* 104 (Apr. 1999): 356–98; Louis A. Pérez Jr., “The Meaning of the Maine: Causation and the Historiography of the Spanish-American War,” *Pacific Historical Review* 58 (Aug. 1989): 293–322.
- 2 Henry C. McCook, *The Martial Graves of our Fallen Heroes in Santiago de Cuba* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1899), 32–33.
- 3 Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender and Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
- 4 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 11; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995). Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 5 Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 130, 2. Cultural memory describes shared or collective memories that shape and are shaped by culture.
- 6 Barbara A. Gannon, “They Call Themselves Veterans’: Civil War and Spanish War Veterans and the Complexities of Veteranhood,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5 (Dec. 2015): 528–50.
- 7 Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2009); Mark S. Shantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).
- 8 Pérez, “Incurring a Debt of Gratitude,” 359.
- 9 Pérez, “Incurring a Debt of Gratitude,” 359.
- 10 Luiz Martínez-Fernández, “Don’t Die Here’: The Death and Burial of Protestants in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1840–1885,” *The Americas* 49 (July 1992): 23–47, quotations 46, 45.
- 11 Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 1902–1934* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986).
- 12 Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and other Figures, 1492–2015*, 4th ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), 255. Spanish combat deaths amounted to 900 out of nearly 200,000 troops stationed in Cuba. An additional 15,000 died from disease. See Spencer Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of the Spanish-American and Philippine American Wars: A Political, Social, and Military History*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 105.
- 13 John R. McNeil, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 14 Vincent J. Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli: The Spanish-American War and Military Medicine* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 91.
- 15 Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli*, 25.
- 16 McCook, *Martial Graves*, 10, 11, 13, 15–16, 65.
- 17 H. S. Caminero, “Sanitary Reports from Santiago,” *Public Health Reports* (1896), Aug. 26, 1898, vol. 13 (34): 929–31. Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli*, 91. In fact most of the cases of malaria were misdiagnosed cases of typhoid.

- 18 Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses: Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 161–69. See also Melanie A. Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).
- 19 Caminero, “Sanitary Reports from Santiago, 929–31; Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli*, 91.
- 20 McCook, *Martial Graves*, 10, 11, 13, 15–16, 65.
- 21 *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From March 1, 1897 to May 30, 1900* (New York: Doubleday and McClure, 1900), 104, 134; Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/04004761/> (accessed July 20, 2023).
- 22 *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley*, 158–59, 183.
- 23 Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli*, 91.
- 24 Telegram, Ludington to Major Baker, Dec. 4, 1900, National Archives (hereafter NA), RG 92, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.” This C. E. Norton was not the well-known Harvard University professor Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908).
- 25 Letter, Solomon Massey to Quartermaster General, Nov. 6, 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Functions Cemeterial, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party Under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 26 Massey to Quartermaster General, Nov. 6, 1901.
- 27 Memorandum, John Van Rensselaer Hoff, Jan. 1900, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.” Mercuric chloride is poisonous and can cause significant health problems and even death after long-term exposure.
- 28 Report, Marion F. Marvin to C. E. Norton, Feb. 19, 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 29 Report, Marvin to Norton, Feb. 9 1901.
- 30 Letter, C. E. Norton to A. N. Stark, Feb. 11, 1901; Letter, A. N. Stark to C. E. Norton, Feb. 13, 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 31 John Marshall Klein, “Spaniards and the Politics of Memory in Cuba, 1898–1934,” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2002). Letter, C. E. Norton to Chauncey B. Baker, Feb. 11, 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder, “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 32 Norton to Baker, Feb. 11, 1901.
- 33 War Department memo to Major Chauncey B. Baker, Nov. 6, 1900, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 34 Telegram, Humphery to Major Chauncey B. Baker, July 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 35 Telegram, Major Baker to Captain Palmer, Mar. 12, 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 36 War Department Memo, Major Chauncey B. Baker to Lieutenant Bruce Palmer, Dec. 28, 1901, NA, RG 92, Records Relating to Cemeterial Functions, 1828–1929, box 1, folder “Operations of Burial Party under C. E. Norton in the Department of Cuba.”
- 37 “Fruits of War,” *New York Times*, Jan. 15, 1899.
- 38 “686 Dead Heroes,” *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1899; “Soldier Dead Removed,” *New York Times*, Mar. 31, 1899.
- 39 “Soldier Dead at Rest,” *New York Times*, Apr. 7, 1899.
- 40 Rebecca J. Scott, “Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Cuba: A View from the Sugar District of Cienfuegos, 1886–1909,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 78 (Nov. 1998): 687–728.
- 41 Mark Smith, “The Political Economy of Sugar Production and the Environment of Eastern Cuba, 1898–1923,” *Environmental History Review* 19 (Winter 1995): 33–36.
- 42 McCook, *Martial Graves*, 32–33.

**Shannon Bontrager, Ph.D.**, is an independent scholar and author of *Death at the Edges of Empire: Fallen Soldiers, Cultural Memory, and the Making of an American Empire, 1861–1921*. He was awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Humanities and the American Historical Association Bridging Cultures Project and was an American Council of Learned Societies Fellow. Both programs contributed financial and professional support that made this paper possible. After holding a position in higher education for more than eighteen years, he recently accepted a position teaching U.S. and World History at Chattahoochee High School near his home in Alpharetta, Georgia.