Analysis of ”Showing the Light to the Filipinos”

This short activity helps you analyze a political cartoon about U.S. imperialism in the Philippines.

Objectives

- Students will be able to identify different parts of a political cartoon (date, title, people, symbols, labels).
- Students will be able to translate a pro-imperialist political cartoon into a written/verbal argument.

Instructions

1. **Step 1:** You will need to be familiar with the following key points prior to analyzing the cartoon:
   - *The Philippines were a territory of the United States from 1898 to 1946.*
   - *The U.S. gained the Philippines as a territory following American victory over Spain in the Spanish-American War.*

   You will also need to make sure that you locate the Philippines on a globe or a map to take note of the large distance between the two nations.

2. **Step 2:** Please locate the cartoon. Read the title and the description (in italics) of the cartoon. Identify the source and date of the cartoon. Look up the definition of any unfamiliar words or phrases in the description or cartoon.

3. **Step 3:** Please locate the “Questions for Analysis” and work individually to complete it.

Historical Context

The United States' long and bloody war in the Philippines provoked a flurry of protest at home, in newspapers and political cartoons, from those that said U.S. expansion violated American principles such as self-determination. Ardent defenders of imperialism, however, regarded Filipinos as inferior, saw opportunity to expand markets for U.S. goods abroad, and framed their enterprise as a force for good, civilizing "backwards" people around the world. To understand the period and the arguments for and against imperialism, it is important to be able to decode political cartoons.
"Showing the Light to the Filipinos"

From 1898 to 1902, the United States waged a bloody war in the Philippines. Filipinos wanted independence from centuries of Spanish colonial rule. U.S. leaders, however, saw the opportunity to control the Philippines and gain access to markets in Asia. President McKinley argued that the Filipinos could not govern themselves or defend themselves against other countries. Many supporters of the Philippine-American war also believed in the "civilizing mission"—the idea that European nations and the United States had a moral duty to civilize "backwards" peoples in other parts of the world by introducing Western culture and technology.

SOURCE | Boston Herald, March 1899
CREATOR | Unknown
ITEM TYPE | Cartoon
Questions for Analysis: Imperialism Cartoon

1. What is the title of this political cartoon?

2. Find and label the following images in the cartoon:
   - President William McKinley (president of the United States from 1898—1901)
   - Filipino person
   - Oil lamp
   - American flag
   - Books

3. Circle the correct word or phrase to make the sentences true:
   - This cartoon was created [before / during / after] the U.S. war in the Philippines.
   - Before the United States intervened, the Philippines had been ruled by [the Spanish / the French].

4. In the cartoon, who or what represents the United States?

5. In the cartoon, what words and images represent “civilization”?

6. What is the cartoonist’s point of view about Filipinos? Use details from the cartoon to support your answer.

7. According to this cartoon, why is it right for the United States to go to war in the Philippines?

On the back, explain the cartoon in your own words in a paragraph of 3-4 sentences.