

The ‘Savage’ Filipino Natives and Their Dog-Eating Habits

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The practice of consuming “man’s best friend” has been around for some time now, especially in Asia. People in China, Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines are known to have dog as part of their authentic meal.¹ Many of their residents have had a long tradition of ceremonial eating dog that goes back several generations. To most the choice of dog meat is no different than the choice of beef for an American. However, the consumption of dog has not been accepted in the West. American views about the vulgarity of consuming dogs can be seen when looking at how American newspapers reported the eating habits of certain Filipino tribes at the Philippine Exhibit during the 1904 World’s Fair.

The Spanish-American War of 1898, transferred power from the Spanish to American control of the Philippines. The acquisition of this new territory increased American exposure to Filipino traditions, which included the consumption of dogs. For many in the United States, dogs are seen as domestic pets and not as an item for dinner. Due to their eating habit, the Filipino natives were seen as inhuman and uneducated. As Bel Castro pointed out, “[a] dominate belief at the time was that the evolution of mankind from savagery-to-barbarism-to-civilization was also an evolution of the races with Anglo-Saxon at the top of the ladder, and beneath them, an array of ‘lesser races’ down to the darkest, and thereby the most savage, peoples.”² Amid criticisms of the United States’ annexation of the Philippines (e.g., those posed by the Anti-

¹Frank H. Wu, “The Best “Chink” Food: Dog Eating and the Dilemma of Diversity,” *Gastronomica* 2, (2002), 39.

² Bel S. Castro, “Food, Morality, and Politics: The Spectacle of Dog-Eating Igorots at the 1904 St Louis World Fair,” in *Food and Morality: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2007*, ed. Susan R. Friedland (London: Prospect Books, 2008), 73.

Imperialist League), many in the United States government officials wanted to show to the American public that Filipinos could learn and grow from being exposed to American ways. One way of doing this was to include the Filipino natives as part of an exposition at the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904.

World's fairs have been used to show and celebrate the advancement of one's own country. By displaying the Filipino natives at the fair, the United States would be able to show their citizens that their involvement in the Philippines was justified. The U.S. government made sure that Filipino participation in the fair would be secured. The Philippine Commission passed Act 514:

Among the act's stated objectives were to show off the Philippines: its civilization, culture, and economy; promote its products and natural resources and attract traders, buyers, and investors; pacify and improve the Filipino condition; and ' . . . make Americans realize what its new colony holds in promise in a way of potential wealth, opportunity for service and exotic wonders'.³

Mass media played an important role in shaping American public opinion on the Philippines. A large portion of the information that was accessible to the public came from newspapers, which reported heavily on the 1904 World's Fair, including the tribes of the Philippine Exhibit.

A Filipino tribe known as the Igorots and their traditional customs of eating dog sparked a frenzy among American newspapers reporting on the fair in St. Louis. I examined how the Igorots and their eating habits were reported in several American newspapers; from this I have determined that American newspapers used different methods to sway public opinion and promote the idea that the Filipino natives were 'dog-eaters', 'savages' and/or 'barbarians', while simultaneously gathering support for the continued presence of the United States in the Philippines.

³ Castro, "Food, Morality, and Politics," 72.

Dog-eating in the Philippines

I first reviewed the literature that has been written on the Filipinos and their dog eating habits to better understand the natives that were on display at the 1904 World's Fair. R. F. Barton's *The Half-Way Sun: Life among the Headhunters of the Philippines* provides a detailed description of the natives and their way of life on the Islands. A well-known anthropologist who conducted research in the Philippines, Barton describes the natives, their customs, and his experience with them. He emphasizes how different their traditions are compared to western culture, especially when it comes to their clothing, living locations and eating habits. Barton pays particular attention to the natives' consumption of dogs. He nicely points out that, "a Filipino never kills a pup, but lets it grow up to a healthy death-in-life existence."⁴ During Barton's time in the Philippines, he studied the schools that the American missionaries built. He noted the kind of menu that would be served to the natives and how it would be changed to include dogs in



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hopes that it would popularized the school.

In the book, *The Philippine Islands* by William D. Boyce includes an entire section titled, "The Dog-Eating Igorots." Boyce was an American newspaper man and an explorer. He

Fig. 1. William D. Boyce, *The Philippine Islands*. New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1914.

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adventures. *The Philippine Islands* was published in 1914 and described his interactions with the natives during his time on the islands in the first years after the Spanish-American War. The

⁴ R.F. Barton, *The Half-Way Sun: Life among the Headhunters of the Philippines* (New York: Brewer & Warren Inc., 1930), 12.

“Dog-Eating Igorots” chapter of Boyce’s book covers the custom of consuming dog and how they cook them. He provides a detailed description of how a dog would be prepared:

He’s come twenty miles, most likely, to buy that dog. He’ll take two weeks to fatten it and then there’ll be a feast. They take a long, sharp rattan and run it through the live dog. Then they tie the rattan to post on either side of the fire. They swing the dog round and round for about fifteen minutes and, when he is half cooked, they cut him up in small pieces and eat everything but the feet and tail. The tail is considered fit only for an enemy.⁵

Boyce goes on to note that this was anything but a pretty site.

These two sources provide insight to the natives in their home country. Neither one of these authors say anything negative about the natives’ consumption of dog; they do however, note that it was a common practice among the Filipino natives. While understanding the practice of consuming dog in the Philippines can provide insight to their eating habits, looking at the ways that the natives were displayed at the World’s Fair helps one to better understand how this once treasured practice became the stereotype that most Filipinos would become associated with.

At the World’s Fair

Since the end of the St. Louis World’s Fair on December 1, 1904, books, journal articles, and newspapers have been published detailing the events and exhibits of the fair. Most of them cover the fair as a whole and all tend to have at least one section on the Philippine Exhibit. In their discussion of the Philippine Exhibit, the authors pay particular attention to the natives’ eating habits and lack of clothing, signifying their ‘savages’ or ‘barbarians’ state, which, in turn, was used to support U.S. occupation of the Philippines.

⁵ William D. Boyce, *The Philippine Islands* (New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1914), 92.

Robert W. Rydell is the best known historian who covers world's fairs. In one of his books, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, Rydell discusses in great detail several of the American world's fairs, with a large section devoted to the one held in St. Louis. Rydell's section on the 1904 Fair provides interconnecting discussion of the Fair as a whole and the Philippines and their exhibit. It places heavy importance on the reasons behind the exhibit rather than how the natives were displayed to the public.



Fig. 2. Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Igorrotes in European clothing in the Philippine Reservation, Department of Anthropology at the 1904 World's Fair*. 1904. Photograph. Missouri History Museum Library and Research Center, St. Louis.

He notes that the creators of the exhibit wanted “as comprehensive an



Fig. 3. Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Igorrotes Killing a Dog to Eat (Philippine Reservation, Department of Anthropology at the 1904 World's Fair)*. 1904. Photograph. Missouri History Museum Library and Research Center, St. Louis.

exhibit as possible of the products and resources, manufactures, art, ethnology, education, government of the Philippine Islands, and the habits and customs of the Filipino people.”⁶ Rydell also points out that Americans hoped to influence the Filipinos natives on display to change their

“savage” ways after their exposure to American costumes.

⁶ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 168.

Meanwhile, historian James Gilbert focuses on the memory and the history of the 1904 World's Fair, with several sections on the Philippine exhibit in his book *Whose Fair?* He addresses the spectacle of the exhibit, "A special program had been arranged at the Igorrote Village including a series of spectacular dances and dog feast." Also included in this section is the phrase "The dog eaters took pains to make the feast as revolting as possible,"⁷ which was done so in hopes to attract a crowd. Gilbert describes the natives' nakedness in conjunction with their dog-eating practice to display how the audience was ready to both be disgusted and titillated at the same time while viewing this exhibit. While the books on the 1904 World's Fair provide accounts of Filipinos and how and why they were on display, including their odd eating habits, the best way to understand how the titles of 'dog-eaters', 'savages' and/or 'barbarians' and how their dog consuming ways were used to sway public opinion is to look at what was produced by the newspapers that covered the Fair in 1904.

Dog-eating as Presented in American Newspapers

Many of the newspaper articles across the United States that were published during the 1904 World's Fair covered a large array of topics. A number of them detailed the Philippine Exhibit, mainly the Igorots, including their dog-eating habits. These topics consisted of, but were not limited to, small stories about dogs finding their way into the mock-village, the natives' preference in color of the dogs, the belief of the dogs' spirit, wedding ceremonies and the modification of the natives and their eating habits. By looking at each of these topics, a better understanding of the use of language and how certain titles became synonymous with the natives can be developed along with the understanding that these articles were produced to

⁷ James Gilbert, *Whose Fair?: Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 46.

simultaneously attract readers and shock them into supporting the U.S. occupation of the Philippines.

One way that newspapers created a connection with their reader was by creating stories about these poor dogs that wandered into the mock-villages of the Filipino natives, whether or not they were factual. A well-known newspaper in the city of St. Louis, *The St. Louis Republic*, published two different articles that used this method of storytelling to attract their readers. The first article came out on May 10, 1904 and it is about a dog, by the name of Towser, who regretfully found his way into the village. The article details the dogs' interactions with the Filipino natives, who are referred to as "head-hunters," and their upcoming dog feast: "In anticipation of this feast Towser was captured. There are now six dogs in the village and every one of them is carefully watched to see that it does not escape. The guard at the main gate – the only entrance – has strict orders to see that all dogs that care to do so may come in, but that none go out."⁸ This story of the lost dog could evoke feelings of sympathy among the readers because they viewed dogs as domestic pets,

While the first article from *The St. Louis Republic* depicts a story without a happy ending, the second article published a day later creates a different result for a "lost" dog. The second story begins in the same fashion: A dog, this time a Newfoundland, discovered the village of Filipino natives. Like the other article, it mentions the natives and their upcoming feast. However, this article has a section, which states,

The Newfoundland reached the other side of the creek when a lame dog come up and there was a seconds confab between them, when the Newfoundland turned

⁸ "Igorrotes are to have Dog Feast Saturday: Canines Admitted Free to the Village and Governor Hunt Promises the Savages a Holiday," *The St. Louis Republic*, May 10, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

and ran as fast as his legs could carry him for the gate. The Igorrotes pursued him, but he escaped. It is presumed that the lame dog whispered to the visitor that he was in the dog-eaters' enclosure.⁹

This second article took a different storytelling approach by detailing a heartwarming story of a “lost” dog who had escaped from becoming dinner. Both of these tales had the potential to appeal to a multitude of personalities, who might make up the newspapers' audience. By telling what might be considered as an upsetting story as well as a heartwarming one, *The St. Louis Republic* created a connection between its readers and the dog; thereby, placing the Filipinos in a negative light because of their dog-eating habits. Both articles could develop the feeling of either disgust that the natives are keeping this dog to be consumed or a moment of relief that the other dog had avoided becoming dinner; either way the natives were presented as ‘savages’.

While displaying the Filipino natives as villains was one way to potentially swing the support of the American people, another strategy was adopted by newspaper reporters. This other way was the description of the tribesmen's preference of the type of dog they consumed. By including this aspect within many of the articles that were published, newspapers tried to show a softer side to the natives and even one that was valued by Americans. One article from the *East Oregonian* detailed a more pleasant side of the Igorrotes' enjoyment of dog: “In the first place the Igorrote is particular about the kind of dog served him. A short-haired, yellow dog suits his mind the best. A particularly vicious dog is a dietary dream. A fine-looking dog appeals to the sense of beauty and oftentimes the life of a dog is spared because of its peculiarly pleasant

⁹ “Gossip of the Savages at the World's Fair,” *The St. Louis Republic*, May 11, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

lines.”¹⁰ This description of the Igorots’ habits illuminates what a reader might take as soft-side of the natives due to their ability to see the beauty in an animal and therefore they might want to spare the dog’s life. This softness allows the readers to connect with the natives on a different level because of a natural empathy humans tend to have when seeing the beauty of an object, in this case a dog.

The May 10th edition of *The St. Louis Republic* depicts this connection while still detailing their preference for a certain type of dog. *The St. Louis Republic* expands on its method of storytelling by discussing the Filipino natives’ choice of dog while at the same time providing proof that they had respect for Americans:

The Igorrote is not at all particular about the breed of dog, but he is about the color,” said Governor Hunt. “For instance, a white dog is not desired. White is the color of the Americans, and the head-hunters have a wholesome respect for the Americans, and therefore, consider white sacred. What the white elephant is to Siam so the white dog is to the Igorrotes. Black and Yellow are their favorites. This color of black corresponds more closely to their own and again a yellow dog is suggestive of a Chinaman, and the Igorrotes do not like the Chinese. Thus, you see, the black and yellow dogs are their natural meat, and that is no joke, while the white dog is immune.”¹¹

In this passage, the reader gained a better understanding of the kind of dog the Igorrotes preferred and why they only wanted dogs of certain colors. A sense of connection between the reader and the native, might develop, one that could be considered an emotional bond between

¹⁰“Natural History of the Igorrote,” *East Oregonian*, December 16, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

¹¹ “Igorrotes are to have Dog Feast Saturday: Canines Admitted Free to the Village and Governor Hunt Promises the Savages a Holiday,” *The St. Louis Republic*, May 10, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

the two. This bond may have generated sympathy for the Filipinos, which might have worked in favor or against the U.S. government's agenda to remain in the Philippines.

This strategy of showing a different side of the natives, one that the American audience could relate to, is not only accomplished through the presentation of a softer side to the natives but also by demonstrating that the natives gave a deeper meaning to their dog eating ways. This is done by examining the Filipino's feeling towards the importance of the spirit of the dog and by detailing its importance in a traditional wedding ceremony. Two articles that were produced by the *East Oregonian*, published on December 16, 1904 focused on the dogs' spirit. The first article, "Natural History of the Igorrote," points out, "[a]ccording to the Igorrote the dog possesses a "brave spirit," which is shown only when driven into a corner and danger is threatened." The bravest of the tribes men would keep the dog tied up until it became enraged thus revealing its "brave spirit," which was then the time that the dog needed to be killed by cutting its throat.¹²

While the first article leaves its readers wondering about the role that the dogs' bravery played, the article that followed directly below it provides those missing details. According to the "Dog Served with Rice," "[t]he peculiar superstition attending the feast is the brave spirit shown by the dog before the killing will enter one of the members of the tribe."¹³ The idea that the brave spirit of the dog being passed on to one of the tribes men sheds light about who was able to partake in the feast. Women were barred from the feast due to the fact that they were not

¹² "Natural History of the Igorrote," *East Oregonian*, December 16, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

¹³ "Dog Served with Rice," *East Oregonian*, December 16, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>."

expected to be brave. The article goes on to depict that certain men were allowed to join the feast due to their actions or attributes, while others were not: “Among the head hunters of the tribe the feast is only observed when the head of an enemy is brought into camp, and only those who have won distinction of bravery are allowed to partake. Cowards are not allowed to attend the feast, for fear the brave spirit would be lost.”¹⁴ While these descriptions of the dogs’ “brave spirit” do not distract the reader from the natives’ consumption of dog, they do allow the reader to see that the natives’ practice has more meaning than just dinner.

By detailing the importance of the dogs’ spirit from the Filipino natives’ perspective, newspapers could potentially connect with their readers by creating a deeper meaning into the

Double Wedding of Igorrotes at World’s Fair

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BEE.—Fatted dogs have been gathered for the feast and a double wedding is soon to be celebrated in the camp of the head-hunting Igorrotes at the World’s Fair. Dog dinners are essential to the Igorrote marriage ceremony, for it is a section of the canine intestine, stuffed with tender bits of the meat, highly spiced and flavored, that binds the matrimonial contract. Fantastic dances, which are also a part of the ceremony, are daily rehearsed in the Quartel and the reservation has taken on a holiday mein in anticipation of the approaching event. Comment has been given by the natives for the public to witness the wedding, and when all is ready it will be one of a day’s events at the exposition. Governor Hunt’s first intimation that love making was being indulged in by his wards was when Domingo and Boreno, two of the young warriors, lay aside their spears and shields and suddenly began building each a house after the fashion of his clan. Domingo is a Bontoe and his people prefer the low roofed structure with



REHEARSAL OF IGORROTE WEDDING CEREMONY AT WORLD’S FAIR.—Photo Copyright, 1904, by Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company.

Fig. 4. John C. Small, “Double Wedding of Igorrotes at World’s Fair,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 2, 1904. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

consumption of dogs, thereby allowing the readers to develop an understanding of the natives practice. The

story about the spirit of the dog was one way to

create this connection; another was the reporting of important ceremonies, such as weddings. In May 1904, the *Omaha Bee Daily* newspaper published a full page story about a traditional Igorot wedding ceremony. In “Double Wedding of Igorrotes at World’s Fair,” not only is the whole ceremony represented in great detail, but so is the importance of dogs. The article opens up with a description of how dogs have been fattened up just for this wedding feast and continues by

¹⁴ Ibid.

saying that, “Dog dinners are essential to the Igorrotes marriage ceremony, for it is a section of the canine intestine, stuffed with tender bits of the meat, highly spices and flavored that binds the matrimonial contract.”¹⁵ The article also notes that, “After the guests have cleaned their plates, the strange dish of dog entrails will be served to the two couples. When this has been eaten, Patriarch Byungasiu will chant a blessing upon the unions, no promises will be exacted, no advice given. With but a single swallow two hearts will be made as one, and the dance will start.”¹⁶ This description of the wedding ceremony not only develops a deeper understanding behind the importance of dog to the natives, but pulls at the heartstrings of its reader. All three of the aforementioned articles pull their readers in by explaining that the natives are not just consuming dogs for the sake of consumption, but there is a deeper meaning behind it. This deeper meaning method was just one way to get readers interested in the natives and may lead to either support or opposition of America’s involvement in the Islands.

Lastly, the newspapers that were published in 1904 used the method of displaying progress or advancement by depicting stories about the natives changing their ways. *The St. Louis Republic* produced an article halfway through the fair on August 22nd that discussed an advancement in the natives’ eating habits. In the article titled, “Fair has Reformed the Dog-Eaters: Dishes of Canine Persuasion No Longer Tempt the Igorrotes; Like the American Diet,” members of the Igorrote tribe, as well as the Pygmies, no longer have a need to consume dog because they came to enjoy and considered the American diet of



¹⁵ John C. Small, “Double Wedding of Igorrotes at World’s Fair,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 2, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

beef better. The article then noted, “No longer is the cry for dog heard on the Filipino reservation.”¹⁷ It also suggests that this change in diet might have resulted from the natives spending time with the dogs and becoming fond of those dogs. The article pays particular attention to one dog, that was spared, and how it ended up living among the natives becoming almost like a pet to them. The article also presented other reasons for the change in the natives’ eating habits:

The reason the Igorrotes had abandoned the dog as a source of food was the action taken by the Humane Society to prevent the sale of dogs. The Igorrotes vigorously deny that a ban was placed on their sale, but they say they no longer care for dog so long as their present diet of rice and beef prevails as the official bill of fare.¹⁸

Fig. 5. “Fair has Reformed The Dog Eaters: Dishes of Canine Persuasion No Longer Tempt the Igorrotes; like the American Diet,” *The St. Louis Republic*, August 22, 1904.

This change in the natives ‘savage’ ways would allow the reader to be hopeful about the success of U.S. involvement in Philippine affairs. Many hoped that the Filipino natives would be exposed to more civilized customs while they were on display at the World’s Fair and take those customs back to their homeland and spread them to others.

¹⁷ “Fair has Reformed the Dog Eaters: Dishes of Canine Persuasion No Longer Tempt the Igorrotes; like the American Diet,” *The St. Louis Republic*, August 22, 1904, in Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1904-08-22/ed-1/seq-12/>.

¹⁸ “Fair has Reformed The Dog Eaters: Dishes of Canine Persuasion No Longer Tempt the Igorrotes; like the American Diet,” *The St. Louis Republic*, August 22, 1904.

Conclusion

Examining the portrayal of Filipino natives in American newspaper articles that were published in 1904, a multitude of methods that were intended to attract readers as well as potentially influence their views on the U.S. occupation of the Philippines are revealed. Common words and phrases that appeared in these newspapers articles included ‘savage’, ‘dog-eaters’ and/or ‘barbarian,’ which invoked a feeling of separation between the American readers and the Filipino natives and place the latter in a negative light. The use of such words and phrases, along with the other methods that were deployed in these newspapers, creates the impression that all Filipinos are dog-eaters. The Filipinos’ reputation as dog-eaters has persisted even today and it can be argued that it is a result of the American newspaper reports on the Filipino natives eating habits during the 1904 World’s Fair.

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