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Changing markets and political and technological circumstances have altered both the likelihood and mode of reporting from foreign shore. Based on the author’s media experience and research into the background of the first American foreign correspondent in the Philippines, this article offers a historical perspective of two geographically and thematically linked forays in the field of international reporting.

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Reporting From Imperial Frontiers: The Making Of Foreign Correspondents A Century Apart

Just as teachers of fame-seeking broadcasting students must sometimes remind their charges of just how few of them will end up at an anchor’s desk, educators focused on international journalism must note the great distance between journalistic apprenticeship and what many consider the pinnacle of the profession, foreign correspondence. Recommending a patient and steady advance through the ranks of a major news organisation, however, often proves unsatisfactory to journalism students seeking to emulate the path I took to overseas reporting while still in my mid-twenties. To those focused more on experience than status and salary, however, I offer at least the encouragement that it has been and can be done. Changing markets and political and technological circumstances alter both the likelihood and the mode of reporting from foreign shores, so for historical perspective, I offer for consideration two geographically and thematically linked forays into the field of international reporting, the fruit of my personal experience and of my research into a significant predecessor in interpreting the Philippines for an American audience.

If anything unites my work as one reporter among many in the crisis-torn Philippines of the last half of the 1980s and that of John Barrett, the first American journalist to introduce the then-Spanish colony to a US audience in the waning years of the 1890s, it is the...
primacy of the marketplace in determining how a reporter's work will be both shaped and received. If there is a single most significant difference, it may be the way the respective eras' journalism markets valued expertise about the colonial sphere. Drawn to the action promised by a change of rulers in a strategically located archipelago, the former diplomat and I shared a common terrain, national origins and markets, but took divergent paths. Barrett, well connected and animated by top-down power equations, functioned most effectively in the midst of the decision-makers he considered his natural peers. I found my niche concentrating on culturally oriented, human-scale stories largely ignored by the journalistic pack.

Polar opposites in many ways, we both pursued the mandate of the craft to follow the action. When from a US perspective the news value of the Philippine theatre receded, we both departed, carrying away intellectual capital, experience and contacts that proved convertible in varying ways into financial and cultural assets. The degree to which opportunity and action have been intertwined with information monopolies and power relations on the Philippine frontier of American global ambition at the beginning and end of the 20th century will be explored in this article through the narrow lens of two young reporters' experiences. It is hoped the altered context of the compared tales will shine through to illustrate the differences between the eras at the dawn and dusk of US hegemony in the archipelago and the roles of foreign correspondents in the American globalist project.

When Barrett embarked on his Philippine odyssey, he was exploiting terra incognita. No American news organisations maintained bureaus in Asia. Today, as Stephen Hess's extensive survey of foreign correspondents and international news (1996) reveals, foreign correspondence is well entrenched and is dominated by an experienced and elite corps of reporters. That corps also includes indeed, depends upon an interrelated population of freelancers, moonlighters, specialists and, sometimes, partisan zealots.

My own narrative is one of modest but generally satisfying service among the burgeoning ranks of the regions foreign correspondents in the middle and late 1980s, supplemented by shorter stints in the early 1990s. It may be useful as a beginner's guide, though in important respects it is as out of date as Barrett's tale. Since news work occupied my full attention, changes in technology and the marketplace have been countervailing influences on aspirants' prospects. The Internet has made distribution and communications considerably cheaper and easier, while the end of the Cold War, among other influences, has reduced even further the limited appetite for world news in the largest market, the United States.
Specific circumstances rather than fixed verities guide the course of the news and the correspondents who follow it, but salient aspects of the trade become evident in historical comparison. The older story on which this essay will concentrate relates an enduring lesson about the importance of having a clear purpose and, to use words written by the editor of The Overland Monthly about Barrett, being astride a tendency. The simultaneously impressive and cautionary tale of John Barrett, whose parlaying of government and business connections put him in a position before the age of 30 to affect one of the most significant alterations ever in the US global posture, illustrates how much the game has changed since the first wave of American reporters began traversing the Pacific a century ago. Barrett’s training consisted of a few years of stateside reportorial experience and diplomatic work in Southeast Asia, only one of which is likely to be on the resume of today’s potential correspondents in an age of professionalised diplomatic service. His progression nonetheless illustrates the possibilities and limits of the correspondent’s work and the importance of context in defining those parameters.

Preparing students for specific contexts is well nigh impossible. The crises that create most opportunities for international reporting have very specific sources. Instructing students on the particulars of working as a foreign correspondent serves little purpose at the stage when most educators encounter them. As advanced training, however, I would recommend a course of study including foreign languages, world history, international relations, intercultural communication and, of course, a solid grounding in the basics of news writing and reporting. I encourage my students to find domestic contexts from immigrant communities, for example in which they can practice their craft. I counsel patience and perseverance and issue the standard cautions about dedication, goals, flexibility, language and intercultural skills, willingness to forego standard rewards and the importance of dumb luck. I point them toward Hess’s state-of-the-art worldwide survey of foreign correspondents (1996) and urge them to consider, as both inspiration and fair warning, his list of the various paths followed and divergent destinations reached by the plethora of writers at any given time to claiming the status of foreign correspondent.

Searching for my own niche among Hess’s array of classifications (Hess 1996: 68-70), I find my younger self a hybrid, not quite fitting entirely into his expert or adventurer categories, but happy to lay claim to both identities and to recommend them to those who would follow either road. My route to international reporting began, if earlier overseas living and an international relations degree are put aside, as a function of my position as The Miami Herald’s reporter for Miami’s Haitian community. In 1984, I experienced a taste of the correspondents life, travelling to Baby Doc’s Haiti with a political figure returning from exile. I had sold the story to editors using the metaphor of Benigno Aquino’s return to the Philippines and his immediate assassination
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the year before.

I practised the limited French that had helped me obtain the position, hobnobbing with the likes of pundit and raconteur Aublien Jolicur at Port-au-Prince's Grand Hotel Olufsson, both made famous by Graham Greene's The Comedians. I made good use of the intensive Creole training the Herald had provided me to interview the little people of Port-au-Prince and its hinterlands and to find my way to secret meetings with dissidents in hiding. Few other correspondents passed through Haiti in those days, so I had the country virtually to myself -- an ideal situation I always commend to shortcut-seeking beginners. Find a place off the beaten track and make it your job to bring its story to light. When it later bursts into wider view by dint of a coup, disaster or other foreign news convention, a claim to expert status based on accumulated experience, reading and contacts, however minor, might be parlayed into at least a follow-up assignment and perhaps more. Barrett, who based his Philippines expert status in 1898 on a single 1896 visit and 1897 article, is a classic case of such leveraging.

I missed my chance to exploit my Haitian experience upon the ouster of the Duvalier regime. By 7 February 1986, the day I learned of Haiti's transition, I was attempting to get astride a parallel tendency in the Philippines, where longtime US client Ferdinand Marcos was also losing his grip on power. That day, a month into my initial trip to Southeast Asia, I had just survived a pair of gunfire-punctuated election-day encounters. As the (probably intentionally) missed target of warning shots from the ballot box-stealing private militia of a Moro warlord, I took flight at full speed, spurred on the terror shown by my hosts from NAMFREL, the election-monitoring organisation that had orchestrated my election-morning flight to central Mindanao. Later, I was a tense witness to a slower-developing but equally threatening disagreement between rival political factions who as temporary allies against Marcos had rescued me, along with a fearless Japanese photographer, from the aforementioned paramilitary Leopards of Mohammad Ali Dimaporo. The excitement of documenting the fraudulent, violence-filled presidential election between Marcos and Corazon Aquino was leavened with the knowledge that I had neither experience in nor formal training for such sticky situations and was lucky to be around later that evening to curse the downed telephone connections that kept my story of election-day excitement restricted to a single newspaper.

As a Gannett Fellow in Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii in 1985-86, I followed up my undergraduate research into Southeast Asia, studying for a year the history, politics, religion and culture of the Philippines, especially its relations with the United States. At the semester break, I joined the throng of journalists gathered to chronicle the snap election called by a defiant Marcos on Nightline. For all that
valuable scholarly training, though, I was left to my wits, my 300-baud Tandy and a set of alligator clips to contend with the vaunted guns and goons and the even more daunting problems posed by the on-again, off-again Philippine telephone system. The nitty-gritty details of the foreign correspondent game, a contest played on a decidedly uneven playing field, were a phase of my education for which no seminar in anthropology or political science could prepare me.

Responding decisively to marketplace problems was another challenge. So crowded with journalists was the Philippines in 1986 that I quickly determined to follow an alternative approach to my job. Instead of following the major political news of the day along with the rest of the pack, I would investigate the stories no one else was getting. Drawn initially to the sizzle of revolution, I became more interested in how the steak travelled from pasture to plate. Travelling to the far reaches of the archipelago and focusing increasingly on cultural stories, I gained unexpected insights into the cultural configurations of political power in Philippine society. Former Marcos officials dominated the country’s professional basketball league. The weaving centres of the Cordillera were rife with partisan as well as artisan rivalries. The deteriorating state of the coral reefs was linked to various forms of corruption. While those stories found regional outlets, the US market for such reportage proved scattered and unreliable.

It had been a wonderful education, but also a maddening one. Finding payment for my services difficult to collect from a surprising number of supposedly professional publications, I could see no solid long-term financial security without becoming a part of the pack of globe-trotting nomads in the thrall of breaking news, so I opted out. I extended my experience through a year based in Hong Kong, a lucrative site for business reporting, as well as sporadic foreign stints while pursuing graduate study. Aside from a visit to Panama at the time of Manuel Noreiga’s ouster and reportage from places such as Guatemala, where war was a constant but usually hidden presence, I moved toward a quiet end to a pursuit that had started out with a bang.

Hess noted that three quarters of foreign stories concern battle, domestic government or diplomacy. (Hess 1996: 102) There is a reason reporters are drawn to the sizzle. The marketplace wants blood, bang-bang and, ironically, bureaucracy. In the US market, an unwavering focus on any American interests at stake makes for surprising interest in the most mundane-sounding business and political stories.

My years in East Asia and subsequent forays into Central America and the Caribbean, which included a stint as a staff writer for an Asian news weekly as well as various retainer-based, roving-correspondent and freelance deals with dozens of publications around
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the world, exposed me to journalists of all stripes, few of whom had received any formal instruction in the art of foreign correspondence (and make no mistake, it was and is an art, not a science). A select few, such as a college friend sent by the Washington Post to learn Russian at Harvard prior to a Moscow posting, received excellent preparation. Most, especially those falling into Hess’s admittedly fluid set of sub-elite categories, receive only on-the-job training, in the classic journalism tradition.

Poring over the papers of a 19th century diplomat-cum-newsman at the US Library of Congress a few years ago, I was struck by the familiar process Barrett undertook as he remade himself, for a time at least, into a foreign correspondent. In dispatch after speculative dispatch from his post in Bangkok in the 1890s, the young US consul tailored his tale of Asian economic opportunity to regional audiences in his homeland. For the Atlanta Constitution, his headline suggested that “Asia’s Millions Want Cotton” (and, he asserted without evidence in the article’s text, they “prefer American over Egyptian or Indian cotton”). For the San Francisco Chronicle, Asian trade was “California’s Great Opportunity”. For the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, “The Great Trans-Pacific Opportunity” beckoned. As a stateside-trained newspaperman, Barrett understood the importance of the local angle. Operating at a time when no American news organisation maintained regular correspondents in Asia, he understood the need to simultaneously promote both himself and the vast continent where he had determined American interests were soon to be served. His near-monopoly on the information he was commodifying would be worth little if the market for such knowledge could not be expanded.

I was drawn to Barrett’s story for reasons transcending his status as the first US journalist to publish on Asia’s first nationalist revolution (Barrett 1897). Barrett’s case provides a valuable glimpse of the emerging craft of foreign correspondence at a time when the profession was a relatively new one in the United States. His brief stints covering the Philippines in 1898 and 1899 were characterised by deft manoeuvring between occupational bases, close identification with the globalising movement that ultimately triumphed in the Philippines (and, it could be argued, the world) and contrasts between his work as a newsman striving for veracity and his subsequent evolution into a less reliable political propagandist.

After his well-timed interlude as a news operative, Barrett emerged as a leading American expert on the Philippines. While other
reporters such as Oscar King Davis hiked with US troops through the muck of a long and bloody suppression of the newly declared Philippine Republic, Barrett left behind the dirty land war and the inconvenient fact of US atrocities, preserving the highly saleable triumphalistic memory of Dewey’s decisive victory at sea in a biography of the Admiral and in his glossed-over rhetoric of the “Trans-Pacific Opportunity”. Drawn to business and power, Barrett’s multiple transitions between journalism and government service and the partisan ties that underpinned each frequently left him swimming in murky ethical waters. His journalistic activities on behalf of the Democratic Party and the Asia-oriented trade boom that was fuelling the growth of the US Pacific Northwest served as stepping-stones to his consul job, which he accepted as a consolation prize when his desired posting to economically dynamic Kanagawa, Japan, fell through. As an officially discouraged sideline to his political job as plenipotentiary to Siam, Barrett’s freelance journalism efforts were maintained even in the face of a September 1896 edict from the State Department warning ministers and consuls against sending materials to the press. Barrett was far from alone in the practice, but he was perhaps the most prolific of the double-dipping diplomat scribes.

Perhaps because he knew his days were numbered anyway under a new Republican administration, Barrett was undaunted by the gag rule as he wrote articles promoting American interest in Asia for magazines and newspapers nationwide. He also encouraged others to promote the Trans-Pacific Opportunity, sending the San Francisco Examiner US$50 as a prize for the Californian reporter writing the best essay on California-Orient trade development and making a similar offer to the Portland Oregonian (Ferguson nd: 26, 30).

In addition to promoting the nation’s business with Asia, Barrett was laying the foundation for his own continued employment on the Asian frontier that he was so sure held the key to American world power in the 20th century. Then as now, opportunity, circumstance and ambition guided foreign correspondents in the pursuit of their profession. Likewise, then even more than now, the often rare commodity of previous experience in a place -- even the most fleeting passage marked by publication -- could undergird a claim to expertise convertible into the kind of status that wins assignments and contracts. Perhaps equally important in such pecuniary respects, positioning oneself in line with or even anticipating prevailing political currents could create unparalleled opportunities.

Even though his forecasts were sometimes badly askew, Barrett’s early recognition of imperial opportunity in the Philippines distinguished him as the first US journalist of the period to provide a specific rhetorical rationale for the significant resources and prestige the United States would commit there over the following century. During the crucial period of imperial decision-making in the United
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States, Barrett would leverage that precocious insight into fame, influence and a revived diplomatic career that would prove synergistic with his journalistic work.

Travelling throughout East Asia in 1896, via Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Japan and the Philippines, the opportunistic consul noted at every turn the possibilities for American commerce. In only one instance, however, did he assess any of the objects of his desire in military terms. “It is plain that the city is not protected with reference to defence against a foreign power,” he wrote of Manila. “It could easily be razed to the ground by a half dozen modern gunboats.” (Barrett 1897: 178) It was with apparent foreknowledge of such an event that Barrett, leaving his consular post and looking for journalism work in early 1898, turned down James Gordon Bennett Jr’s offer of US$200 a month plus expenses to go to Japan to report for the New York Herald early in 1898 (Ferguson nd: 38).

Barrett had managed to extend into 1898 his official tenure in Bangkok despite Republican William McKinley’s election in 1896, largely on the strength of the close ties he had forged with Bangkok’s ruling elite and the backing of his Oregon political mentor, Republican Senator John H. Mitchell. While partial to the perquisites and power of government office, the former Tacoma Daily Ledger and Portland Oregonian reporter recognised patronage realities and never stopped preparing for a return to full-time journalism.

Thanks to high-level connections such as his friendship with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Barrett was clear on exactly where the next big story would take place. On April 12, 1898, two weeks before Commodore George Dewey received his orders to sail for Manila -- but eight days after Dewey moved to obtain the British steamer Nanshan and its 3,000 ton supply of coal (Halstead 1899: 279) -- Barrett told his mother, “Of course, if war comes, we will take the Philippines, and, in them, possess the most valuable group of islands, either to keep ourselves or sell to the highest bidder. Few people in America appreciate the splendid resources and great wealth of the Philippine Islands. They are the richest of the East Indies.”

With war fever peaking after the sinking of the USS Maine off Cuba, Barrett offered his services to the State Department as well as several newspapers. The government was slow to act on Barrett’s offer, but news organisations fomenting jingo war fever responded with alacrity. Barrett left himself free to contribute to multiple periodicals, but signed an exclusive newspaper contract with William Randolph Hearst’s sensational New York Journal for US$500 a month plus expenses, noting in a letter to his disapproving mother that while he disagreed with the paper’s “methods and policies”, it was “undoubtedly
read by more people than any other paper in America”.  

For all his populist economic rhetoric and satisfaction at reaching the upstart paper’s proletarian readers, however, Barrett’s discourse remained elite-oriented. He continued to contribute to The North American Review and to focus his attention on those with power. His privileged background -- a graduate of Dartmouth College, his parents were eighth- and ninth-generation Vermonters -- and the access to important sources he enjoyed as a direct result of his Green Mountain ties, virtually defined Barrett’s niche for him. His view was Olympian, frequently taking in the broad sweep of Asia in a single article. His self-image was as much policy-maker as chronicler, so it might be considered natural that Barrett would insinuate himself into the centre of matters immediately upon his arrival in Hong Kong in May 1898.

Difficulty extricating himself from his affairs in Bangkok had kept Barrett from moving quickly enough to join the flotilla headed for the grand confrontation on Manila Bay at the end of April. He had been beaten to the scene by three rivals, the Tribune, New York World and Chicago Record. Because Dewey had ordered the cable from Manila be cut in order to forestall any possible Spanish calls for reinforcement, the details of the dramatic tale of one-sided victory in Manila Bay had to await the return of the fleet to Hong Kong a week later to be sent home. As other reporters arrived to join the hunt for breaking war news, Barrett achieved a coup by arranging with British authorities in Hong Kong to be allowed to join the fleet. As he wrote to his mother, “I was the only one of the scribes allowed to go.”  

Such an edge would prove key to Barrett’s ascent to the top rank of reporters in the Philippines. As more reporters arrived, an increasing premium came to be attached to exclusives, especially regarding major news figures. Political connections would prove the key to establishing information monopolies over such stories.

There were no two greater objects of public fascination in May 1898 than Dewey and his military partner against the Spaniards, Filipino supremo Emilio Aguinaldo. Both were early Barrett interview subjects. Even as more correspondents, many drawn from the British press in Hong Kong, began to crowd the increasingly lucrative American market for images and anecdotes from the celebrated encounter, the paramount prize remained Dewey himself. Again, connections solved the problem for Barrett. Secretary of the Navy John D. Long responded to an inquiry from influential Republican Senator Redfield Proctor on fellow Vermonter Barrett’s behalf by tossing the question of access for Barrett to Dewey himself. Dewey, also from Vermont, approved Barrett’s application to board the Olympia.  

Eager to make a good
impression on the aristocratic seaman, whose career had also risen on his connections, Barrett drew on his diplomatic skills and contacts to present the hero with a special token of thanks.

Treading delicately around the issue of British neutrality, he secured permission to fill the hold of the US dispatch steamer Zafiro with a load of delicacies for the Commodore and his staff. A private interview with Dewey soon followed. Though he was later ordered out of the Commodore’s sight for disturbing him at an inappropriate moment, Barrett had established himself as an insider (Ferguson nd: 50). “Will send interviews with Admiral and Aguinaldo a little later,” he wrote to Hong Kong counsel Rounsevelle Wildman, “so as to give the appearance of specials where the other papers will have nothing.” 8 Barrett’s diplomatic status also proved useful in helping him to jump to the head of the queue of reporters in Hong Kong seeking interviews with Aguinaldo, the exiled leader of the Philippine insurgents whose cooperation on the ground Dewey would need in order to keep order around Manila (Ferguson nd: 40).

Reporters in the late 19th century were frequently used as conduits of information or otherwise pressed into the service of the government — indeed, correspondents were regularly assigned diplomatic or clerical duties (Ferguson nd: 42) — but Barrett’s recent status as a United States Minister placed him in a different league. Combining the access to information and sources facilitated by his government connections with the access to both mass and elite readerships guaranteed by his contracts with the New York Journal and the North American Review, Barrett occupied a powerful dual role. His status as a relatively experienced Asia hand lent credibility to his reports.

Luck did not hurt his cause, either. Though his late arrival meant missing the headline-heavy Battle of Manila Bay, Barrett found himself advantageously situated in Hong Kong when Dewey ordered the cable from Manila cut in order to forestall Spanish reinforcement plans. The British trading colony thus became the conduit for all reports about the Philippines reaching the rest of the world. While his colleagues waited on board the triumphant United States fleet for a resumption of contact, Barrett set about using his contacts to establish himself as a man in the know and a man worth knowing. Early articles praising the service of his fellow members of the diplomatic corps, particularly the Hong Kong consul, Wildman, yielded certain benefits: After receiving a “secret” letter from Wildman alerting him that: “I will be thankful for any nice things you can think up about me and put in your dispatches,” Barrett filed more reports praising the consul, who responded with thanks, a request for more and an offer of free use of the transport vessel Wing Foo. 9
Barrett was well aware of the opportunity presented by the United States inchoate policy in the Philippines. Years of tireless promotion had barely nudged his countrymen in the direction of Pacific trade. Suddenly an entire colony -- and a strategically placed one at that -- was there for the taking. During the months of contemplation between Dewey’s lightning strike against the Spanish fleet and the arrival of sufficient numbers of troops to occupy Manila in August, the myriad possibilities for American policy regarding the Philippines were debated in newspapers and magazines, but the action on the front was frozen. Spanish forces fired occasionally from within the walls of Intramuros, while Filipino troops ringed the outskirts of Manila but remained outside its limits to honour an agreement with the Americans. Evincing early signs of frustration at the restricted scope of his reportorial position, Barrett complained to Wildman of a lack of suitable quarters and the “difficulties of the situation here”, which he termed adverse to doing the best work, specifically noting the fact that he could “only land at Cavite where there is very little of interest”. 10

Barrett thus returned to the tried-and-true “big picture” tack that had served him so well, exhorting readers of the North American Review to consider “the great strategical and commercial importance” of the Philippines. “Now is the critical time when the United States should strain every nerve and bend all her energies to keep well to the front in the mighty struggle that has begun for the supremacy of the Pacific seas. If we seize the opportunity we may become leaders forever, but if we are laggards now we will remain laggards until the crack of doom. The rule of the survival of the fittest applies to nations as well as to the animal kingdom.” (Barrett 1898: 267)

Barrett also warned Americans not to “shirk the duty of governing the Philippines” (Barrett 1898: 267). The skilful construction of an alternate rhetorical universe was a necessary underpinning of the new imperial policies the United States was then adopting. Barrett disseminated a dual-edged discourse of opportunity and obligation, laid atop a claim to privileged knowledge. “The American people, I fear, do not appreciate the actual importance of the Philippines, their wealth and resources, their location and possibilities, their area and population,” he wrote, deriding the “flippant and satirical tone of many writers and newspaper contributors who have apparently never visited the islands” (Barrett 1898: 267).

As journalists began to arrive aboard troop ships filled with volunteer regiments in preparation for the capture of Manila on 13 August 1898, the monopoly on first-hand information enjoyed by Barrett and a few other journalists evaporated. How Barrett would have fared in a different reporting environment cannot be known, for he developed a liver ailment and returned home upon the conclusion of his Journal contract in September. He thus departed prior to the
Treaty of Paris, at a point of no certain policy resolution for the question of Philippine retention.

At that time, it was possible to simultaneously uphold the American martial spirit and the notion of Filipinos as a people capable of self-government. The delicate balance of those rhetorical positions was already being undermined by the contempt with which Filipinos were viewed by a largely racist and increasingly restive US soldiery. Having compared Filipino leaders favourably with the Japanese Parliament and the Siamese Council (Ferguson nd: 44) and left Manila on good terms with Aguinaldo, Barrett could be seen as a friend of the Filipinos. Yet within months, he had become one of the fiercest critics extant of the United States newest enemies and their anti-imperialist backers in the United States.

Following the outbreak of hostilities between Americans and Filipinos on 4 February 1899, Barrett measured the political temperature and adjusted his perspective accordingly. He returned to the Philippines for a week-long visit in late February and passed through again briefly as a government official in 1902, but for the most part his writings and speeches on the Philippine situation drew on his experiences there and the opinions of American officials, particularly military men. Even as his reports grew less connected to on-the-ground reportage and more oriented to political ends, Barrett never abandoned the pretext of privileged knowledge based on direct experience. Able to trade upon an outmoded claim to expertise even after his initial renown as an expert on the Philippines had been eclipsed by other reporters, Barrett maintained a lucrative interest in the islands from afar, publishing frequently and delivering speeches to all manner of audiences about the new imperial acquisition.

Shorn of the reportorial proximity that allowed him to claim special knowledge -- hard-won information of the sort most esteemed in the temper of the times -- Barrett appears to have allowed his increasing distance from the Philippines to erode his commitment to reporting what was actually done. Echoes of the fake stories Barrett had earlier disavowed on the basis of that proximity began to emerge in his post-Philippines work on the islands.

The steady rise in Barrett’s political fortunes was marked by a corresponding increase in attacks on his veracity. Citing Barrett’s erroneous claim in the Review of Reviews that the island of Cebu had asked for American protection, Episcopal minister and journalist Peter MacQueen called the disputed claim part of a “vast output of misinformation regarding... the Philippines”. A nasty exchange with the New York Sun’s Oscar King Davis over Barrett’s attempts to paper over incidents of looting by Oregon volunteers and Barrett’s habit of attributing to dead soldiers quotes damning anti-imperialists lent further credence to the notion that the triumph of his political persona over his journalistic ethics foreshadowed Barrett’s passage from foreign
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Barrett’s incremental abandonment of the profession he had so enthusiastically embraced not long before is only one sign of the enduring disparity of power between those who make policy and those who merely report on it. Drawn irresistibly to the magnet of political power, Barrett was a journalist when it was convenient, a propagandist when it suited his interests, and a self-promoter always. Many more like him can doubtless be found throughout the history of foreign correspondence, yet few have had such influence at so crucial a juncture. Historically, Barrett can be seen as a transitional figure, rooted in the “man of affairs” tradition of aristocratic privilege yet schooled in the bare-knuckle world of daily journalism. His career course indicates that the former strain was dominant, but it may also reflect the influence of the traits developed in the latter realm.

Modern foreign correspondents are far more likely than Barrett and his colleagues to have deep and unbroken roots in journalism, and pride at bestriding a tendency in public opinion is not something today’s sophisticated reporters crow about openly, even if all know it is the big story, not their own prose, that is propelling their bylines onto the front page of the newspaper. Perhaps that knowledge that they are at best an important cog in the machine of international journalism contributes to the disconcerting unwillingness of many correspondents to diverge from established story lines.

To his credit, John Barrett stood out from his cohort in avoiding racist pandering to triumphalist Americans bent on seeing the colonial sphere as an extension of the poisoned domestic order. His rapid abandonment of his Filipino friends in early 1899, however, shows he understood the limits of reportorial independence from national objectives, a problem that persists today. Abundant evidence continues to suggest a remaining tendency to stereotype and demonise foreigners unfriendly to the interests of a home country or cherished ideology, especially in times of war.

A professional culture that rewards loyalty and ideological boundary observance with foreign postings is unlikely to ameliorate such tendencies. Media educators thus face a challenge to inculcate values of fairness and balance that can survive the nationalist and corporate cultures currently responsible for producing and maintaining most foreign correspondents. Overseas correspondents in the employ of major news organisations are excellent candidates for specialised training in the language, culture and history of the peoples on whom they report. Some are receiving it, with salutary results. Those seeking a short cut to the exotic dateline might do well to pause long enough for some of the same training. Media educators, most of whom have
no overseas reporting experience, face special challenges in designing curricula appropriate to the broad spectrum of journalists involved in international reportage. Studying the mistakes and successes of previous practitioners would seem a good place to start.

Media educators should help prospective journalists to understand the marketplace for their production and the way it continues to change with altered political circumstances. Except for the bursts of crisis coverage that make up most of the foreign coverage in the US press, news lacking a steady diet of mayhem is lost, and contemplation of culture is virtually beyond the limits of the average newspaper’s conceptual universe. Focusing on meeting the needs of regional markets may help to bridge the economic chasm between staff work and freelancing to American and European markets. It may also lend itself to a more diverse exploration of a given milieu and provide opportunities to tackle more advanced reportorial and editorial responsibilities than the domestic apprenticeship commonly required. The development of special expertise, particularly in a business area, may help to provide opportunities. Barrett’s focus on trade propelled his rise through both the journalistic and diplomatic ranks. My own bank account swelled when I accepted more assignments from business magazines in Hong Kong.

Striving for exclusives remains a key element to journalistic success in the marketplace, whether the context is domestic or international. Reportage from remote locales, a great educational experience in its own right, may yield some dividends in this regard, but it is access to prominent individuals that commands the most rewards from the marketplace. The ethical questions associated with cultivating and keeping key sources remain relevant across time and geography. With greater power comes a larger responsibility, and while in the end such choices rest with the individual, effective preparation in the ethical realm by media educators may yield substantial benefits for international communication, especially if prospective correspondents are reminded that their actions may eventually be held up to scrutiny, even if only by historians.

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9. Wildman to Barrett, 1 July 1898, JB Box 120.
11. John Barrett to Caroline Barrett, 26 June 1898, JB Box 7.
13. Portland Oregonian, 25 August 1898, JB Box 18, pp. 5-11; Barrett to Oregonian, 9 July 1899, JB Box 18, pp. 5-11; Oscar K. Davis to Barrett, 6 December 1900, JB Box 18; Barrett speech to New England Society of New York, 22 December 1899, JB Box 18; Henry E. Howland to Barrett, 26 December 1899, JB Box 18; Atkinson to Barrett 4 January 1900, JB Box 18; Roosevelt to Barrett, 12 July 1900, JB Box 18; Mary C. Lawton to Barrett, 27 October 1900, JB Box 18; Barrett speech to National Geographic Society, 8 December 1899, JB Box 107.
14. The primary sources for this work are personal experience and the papers of John Barrett in the Manuscript Division at the United States Library of Congress. Citations to Box and File numbers refer to this collection. More specific references to correspondence, speeches, drafts and articles found within this collection may be found in the first and second chapters of Christopher A. Vaughan, “Obfuscating a New Other, Defining a New Self: Discourses on the Colonization of the Philippines” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997 (available from University Microfilms).
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