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The American Occupation of Cebu

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THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF CEBU. WARWICK BARRACKS 1899-1917. By Jose R. Quisumbing. Quezon City: Progressive Printing Palace, 1983. xiii, 114 pages. Illustr., Exhibits.

The title promises more than the essay actually gives in five chapters loosely put together, narrating the change of governments in Cebu at the turn of the century. It is hardly more than a chronology culled from standard sources. One misses an analysis or explication of the motivations to explain why certain events took place. For example, the author merely states that the Americans seemed to have bent over backward "to get the acceptance of [by?] the Cebuanos of the American rule." (p. 31) But this is precisely the issue that needs to be fully discussed. Neither is it enough to say that the Cebuano leaders preferred freedom to American rule; or that the "collaborators" accepted American overtures because of overwhelming odds against them. What is the evidence to support these statements?

There are a number of inaccuracies which could have been better rephrased. Just to mention one or two: Dewey, strictly, did not mobilize the Far Eastern American fleet, but it was Theodore Roosevelt who, not at all averse to the noisy propaganda of the American yellow press, had foreseen and favored open war with Spain. Aguinaldo's return from Hongkong did not start, but solidified and provided leadership and direction for the disunited anti-Spanish groups in and around Manila.

The author himself is aware of the unusually numerous printing errors, for which he prepared a list. The book does not read easily, mainly because of erroneous use of prepositions and mixed verb tenses. In general, the English style needs more improvement.

There are other weaknesses that can be mentioned, but the following should suffice. Beyond serving as the headquarters of the American occupation army in Cebu (what is so unusual about having military barracks where there are soldiers?), what important role in the development of Cebu did Warwick Barracks play to deserve a full chapter in this book? What resulted from the introduction of the railroad, the improvement of the harbor, the introduction of the public school? There is evidence that before the Americans came, the schools in Cebu were some of the best in the Philippines. To sum it all up, how was Cebu in the long run affected by the American presence?

These and similar questions occur to the reader, but unfortunately the book provides no answers. And of the total number of pages in this essay, only 59 pages comprise the main text of the study. The rest is set aside for Exhibits and pictures.

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