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La Revolucion Filipina, by Reyes

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The motivation of the book is worthy of praise; the execution less so. Both footnotes and bibliography contain hundreds of books and articles on Rizal and on Philippine matters generally. It is perhaps ungracious of me to say that though my five books and various articles on the nationalist movement are cited frequently and often with high praise, repeatedly the book says the opposite of what I said in the book of mine which is cited. The book is filled with historical errors, inconsistencies, and a mass of undigested materials. To cite one example which occurs repeatedly, all priests—those of the Spanish friar orders, the Spanish Jesuits, Fathers Burgos, Gomez, and Zamora, and Filipino priests in general—are called “friars,” (while Ambeth Ocampo is gifted with the title of “Father”). All this in spite of the fact that such authors as the highly (and rightly) praised biography of Guerrero, to say nothing of all of my own books, have carefully distinguished the category of friars from Jesuits and secular priests.

The book is completely without a visible order, as the author jumps from century to century and back, and repeats himself in numerous parts of the book. He says that this second edition corrects some of the factual and typographical errors of the first. A multitude more of each remains to be corrected. It would be pointless to try to show the fallacies and inconsistencies which abound, or to criticize the thesis of the book, for it has none that is perceptible to this reviewer. I cannot recommend this book to anyone, undergraduate or professional, as its one contribution is the listing of large numbers of books and articles, annotated or not. But clearly many of them do not deserve even a mention. It is unfortunate that so much work be expended on something which will serve no one.

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La Revolucion Filipina, 1896–1898. El Nacimiento de Una Idea. By Virgilio A. Reyes. Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones Ltda., 2000. 199 pages.

At least four things are needed to start a revolution: a complaint, a leader, the means, and the occasion. These four must converge at the same time, or there will be no revolution.

The cause of the Philippine revolution was the frustrated efforts at peaceful reform in the last decades of the nineteenth century in Spain. The occasion was the discovery of the Katipunan, Bonifacio's secret revolutionary society. The means were inadequate—bolos, daggers, and knives still being forged in the printing house where the Katipunan was discovered. Since evidence of their plot had been discovered, Bonifacio, founder of the society and first leader of the revolt, had no choice but to rise in arms.

What about the idea itself of rebelling? Initially, writing to thank Blumentritt for his good wishes when *La Solidaridad*, the Filipinos' propaganda fortnightly first came off the press, Marcelo H. del Pilar said that they were not asking for much, actually. The Filipinos just wanted to "identify our interests with those of the Peninsula, think and feel like it, respect what it respects, reject what it rejects; in a word, forge our rights and duties with the rights and duties of the Metropolis."¹

Rizal in exile, four years later, voiced the same desires: Philippine representation in the Spanish legislature, secularization of the parishes, moral integrity in government, establishment of schools, promotion of technology and the arts, and the freedoms of conscience, speech, and assembly.²

During the revolution itself, Apolinario Mabini wrote that national independence meant "liberation from slavery and tyranny, recovery of lost freedoms and entrance into the concert of civilized nations." Violent revolution, he added, was the instrument peoples used to win back "the sovereignty, which by nature belongs to them, the justified means after people have vainly tried peaceful efforts which reason and experience urge."³

These are the ideas of the Philippine revolution of 1896-1898. Long in coming, they were articulated by three great Filipinos, who shared identical aspirations despite their different personal backgrounds.

Nothing happens overnight in history, and to try to analyze them in a brief book of less than 150 pages is risky. Many aspects need to be finely nuanced, which unavoidably demand more detailed discussion.

The book attempts to sum up a movement that has its roots centuries before any of the above three was born. This means painstaking study of primary sources, which the book does not show. The bulk of the essay depends on secondary sources, and the book is therefore an interpretation of interpretations. Historians, of course, know that research and scholarship continues and one must not depend only on secondary references.

Actually, this is an important subject, and each chapter of this book could be an independent volume by itself. Each discusses an important issue and will certainly yield important insights if analyzed at length.

The author is not a trained historian. He felt the urge to look into the Philippine revolution when, assigned to a diplomatic post in Mexico, he went on to Chile where he learned more about Latin America, with which the Philippines has very close, almost identical, historical roots. This occasioned the writing of the book, for which he deserves congratulations.

The title of this brief book, aptly chosen, should incite the Filipinos to ask similar questions about the history of the Philippines.

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Notes

1. Marcelo H. del Pilar to Ferdinand Blumentritt, Barcelona, 10 March 1889: *Epistolario de Marcelo H. del Pilar* (Manila, 1955), I, 54.
2. Reports of Ricardo Carnicero, Commanding Officer of Dapitan, to the Governor General, in Wenceslao E. Retana, *Vida y Escritos del Dr. Jose Rizal* (Madrid, 1907), 273–87.
3. Apolinario Mabini, *La Revolucion filipina*. Edited by T. M. Kalaw (Manila, 1931), I, 169; II, 20.