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Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910

[MANUEL L. QUEZON III](#)

Special to the Century Book

Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910

Patricio N. Abinales

THE birth of the Philippines in 1896 was one thing; consolidating the territory was another matter. While most Filipinos would attribute the unification of the Philippines to the 1896 Revolution, in reality it was a series of local revolts against the Spanish, and later against the Americans. It remains debatable as to whether these revolts either identified wholly with Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo's Malolos Republic, or whether, had they all succeeded, whether would unite under one contiguous territory. Already when the first American troops landed in Negros Island, Negrenses were threatening to create their own republic.

The Americans were actually responsible for giving territorial reality to Las Islas Filipinas, the basis of the future Republic. They did this first by employing force against those who opposed American rule. They waged brutal military campaigns against forces loyal to the Malolos Revolutionary Government of Pres. Emilio Aguinaldo, pushing the latter as far back as the mountain fastness of northern Luzon and scattering his troops in southern Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. The American use of armed might was so brutish that in Samar Island, for example, hundreds of women and children were killed when Gen. Jacob Smith ordered to turn the island into a "howling wilderness." After Aguinaldo's capture at Palanan, Isabela, there were attempts to re-establish a new revolutionary center, but all this was quashed by the Americans.

In the towns and in Manila, American suppression of Filipino revolutionary nationalism took the form of proscribing the publication of "seditious" materials that could be disseminated through the emergent print media and the ever-popular plays. Public display of pro-revolutionary sentiments were also prohibited, with the most notable ban being the Flag Law that disallowed any showing of flags associated with the Katipunan and the Malolos Republic. The Americans also sped up the organization of police forces to oversee "peace and order" and this successor of the hated Spanish Guardia Civil proved up to the task of suppressing urban dissent.

Once sure that their control would not be seriously challenged anymore, the Americans turned their attention to governing "the new possessions." The foremost problem that immediately confronted them was the generating money for the colony and then developing the personnel necessary to run the government.

The U.S. Congress approved the colonization of the Philippines but refused to provide sustained financial support for the undertaking. In fact, the Congress allotted only \$3 million for the Philippines in the entire period from 1903 to the formation of the Philippine Commonwealth. One economist called it colonial administration "accomplished 'on the cheap.'" Financial constraints were also complicated by the difficulty of attracting Americans to govern the colony. The solution to these problems was found in generating revenues from the colony's own resources, particularly the existing crops that the colony was exporting abroad later years of Spanish rule. Enhancing this export economy, however, was not easy. American legislators, especially those coming from the agricultural regions of the U.S., vigorously opposed proposals that Philippine products enter the country tariff-free. As a consequence, the so-called "free trade" that introduced under American rule was not so free. The U.S. was very selective in the choice of Philippine products that could be exported to the American mainland. Only sugar, hemp and coconut were allowed open access to the U.S. market; and even these products would later be taxed in American ports. Selective entry of these goods however was enough to resurrect the export economy, and by the end of the decade much of it was re-energized because of the American market.

The second issue—putting people into the administrative and political structure—proved more successful because the Americans early on opened up the structure to Filipino participation. It is general knowledge that even as the war against Aguinaldo was raging, the Americans were already able to recruit prominent Filipinos to their side. These collaborators became the backbone of the Federalista Party, a party committed to full American control as well as the medium for introducing the party system to the Philippines. The Federalistas were also supposed to become the dominant Filipino party in the soon-to-be formed Philippine Assembly and American backing initially helped them to mobilize Filipino support.

The Americans transformed the Philippine Commission from its original function as a fact-finding and policy-recommending body created by Pres. McKinley, to the highest policy-making body of the colony. Through the Commission, the Americans were also able to bring in Filipinos into the leadership (although they had limited powers) and further legitimize their rule. With the Federalistas supporting them and the pacification campaigns winding down, especially after Gen. Macario Sakay, the last of the revolutionaries fighting for a Tagalog Republic in 1905, the Americans proceeded to prepare the grounds for eventual self-rule.

The Commission ordered a colony-wide census to ascertain the exact population of the Philippines. The census was followed by provincial elections in 1906 where a new group of Filipinos emerged to challenge the Federalistas. The former consisted of local elites who saw the value of the nationalism of 1896 and how it made many Filipinos suspicious of the pro-American Federalistas. Using their provincial positions, this group began to present themselves as the real alternative to the Federalistas. Americans increasingly recognized the strength of this sentiment, especially at the provincial and municipal levels, and began to turn their attention to these new elites. The result of this new collaboration was the creation of the Nacionalista Party, a coalition of provincial elites who promised to fight for the cause of nationalism but within the framework of the American policy of eventual self-rule.

On July 30, 1907, the first elections to the Philippine Assembly—the legislative body which would act as the “lower house” to the more “senatorial” Philippine Commission—was held and the Nacionalista won a majority. From their ranks emerged Manuel L. Quezon (from Tayabas province) and Sergio Osmeña (from Cebu), who would lead the fight to expand Filipino power inside the government and eventually become the dominant leaders of the American period. Under Quezon and Osmeña, a colony-wide party system began to take shape, its power derived from a combination of clan-based alliances, patronage and a commitment to Filipinization. As more Americans chose to return to the mainland instead of staying to serve the colonial government, Filipinos increasingly took over their position.

By the end of the first decade, “regular provinces” comprised half of the Philippines. These provinces had elected and appointive Filipino officials, many of whom owed their positions to Quezon, Osmeña and the Nacionalistas. Combining their local political experiences learned from the last years of Spanish rule, with the “political education” they were getting from the Americans, the Filipinos proved within a short period of time that they had the ability to be equally adept at governing the colony. In its first year at work, the Philippine Assembly had already shown a marked adeptness in introducing additional provisions or new amendments to existing colonial laws, and in negotiating with the Philippine Commission and the Governor General over matters of policy formulation, funding and government personnel changes. Quezon and Osmeña were at the top of all these processes. They were fast becoming astute leaders of the political party they helped build, of the Assembly that they presided over, and of the colonial regime they co-governed with the Americans. If Rizal was credited for having conceived of the “Filipino,” and if Bonifacio and Aguinaldo were the leaders who gave this imagination a reality with the Revolution, to Quezon and Osmeña must be given the distinction of helping construct the political and administrative structure that would be associated with the term “Filipino.” The Americans may have created the colonial state, but it was these two leaders who gave flesh to it and putting the foundations that the future Republic would stand on.

This type of political and administrative consolidation however was only happening in one part of the colony—the “Christian” Filipino dominated “lowlands” in Luzon, the Visayas and northern Mindanao. In the other half of the colony, the U.S. army administered the “special provinces” on the grounds that their population—the so-called “non-Christian tribes”—were more backward than the Filipinos and were prone to more “warfare.” The Americans saw their “civilizing mission” as special given that the underdeveloped character of the Cordillerans and Muslims required a longer time for them to become familiar with self-government. They also had to be thoroughly “pacified.”

Surprisingly, the pacification process was fast and relatively easy. There was hardly any resistance from the various indigenous communities in the Cordilleras, while Muslim resistance was scattered and unsustainable. At the middle of the first decade, the Cordilleras and “Moro Mindanao” had become very stable and peaceful areas.

A major reason for the American success was the cooperation extended by Muslim and Cordilleran leaders to the Americans. They regarded colonial rule as a means of protecting themselves against Christians and “lowlanders.” American military officials reciprocated this cooperation by resisting the efforts of Filipinos to extend their power to the “special provinces.” A working relationship eventually developed between these community leaders and the Americans whereby the former were given minor posts in the provincial government (“tribal wards” in the case of the Muslims) in exchange for agreeing to recognize American sovereignty. U.S. army officers who administered these

areas also became their protectors against Filipino leaders, doing everything they can to limit the presence of Manila and the Nacionalista party in the Cordilleras and "Moro Mindanao."

The only major resistance came from the Muslims at the hills of Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak, when the army declared a ban on weapons and raised head taxes. American military superiority prevailed and over a hundred Muslim men, women and children were killed. Politically, however, these actions eroded the army's standing and opened up an opportunity for Quezon to attack military rule in Mindanao. After the massacres, the army was forced slowly to concede authority to Manila and the Filipinos. The army's powers were also clipped once the U.S. Congress authorized its partial demobilization, and once the American president ordered its withdrawal from the special provinces and its replacement by Philippine Constabulary units. Many American officers also preferred to continue their military careers in the U.S. mainland, seeing very little prospects in just limiting themselves to the Philippines. All these problems emboldened the Filipinos to assert their political presence in these special provinces. This was something that a weakened military government could not repulse anymore. In 1913, the army conceded its power to the Department of Mindanao and Sulu, a body controlled from Manila and by Filipinos. The Cordilleras' status as a special province was also terminated and the Nacionalista Party began recruiting its first "Cordillerans" to join the organization.

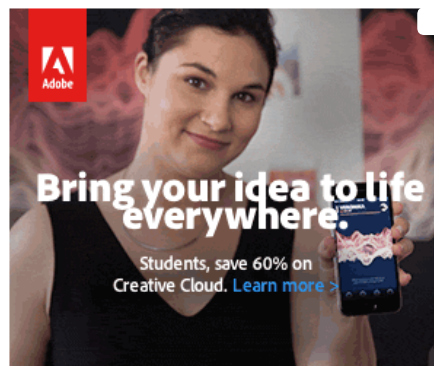
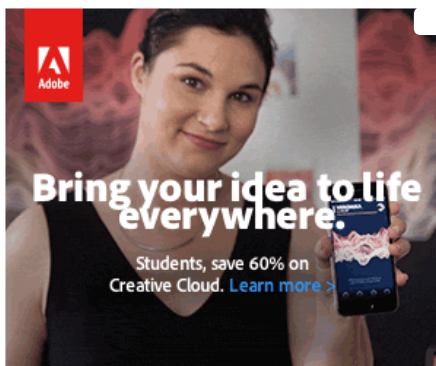
Two major features therefore characterized the first decade of colonial rule. First was the full and effective unification of Las Islas Filipinas under American rule, and second was the division of colony into two major zones of administration reflecting the histories of their respective populations. These two zones were eventually unified under the Filipinization policy, but the distinctiveness upon which they were based continued to affect overall colonial development. Muslims and Cordillerans remained staunchly pro-American and anti-Filipino, while Christian "lowlanders" continued to mistrust and maintain a low regard for these "wild tribes."

About half a century later, a separatist movement threatened to disengage "Moro Mindanao" from the Philippines, while in the Cordilleras, the quest for autonomy remained strong.

End

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17 Comments

**Maria Elizabeth Embry**

FEBRUARY 26, 2007 AT 10:50 AM

REPLY

The reality is that no matter what the colonial rulers will always rule according to their own selfish agenda. This article also sounds like Iraq! The Kurds, U.S. allies, feel constraint by U.S. occupation/invasion. Meanwhile, the Sunnis seeking U.S. protection from the newly empowered Shiites. Alignments & realignments. People are just pawns. Nothing has really changed. Yesterday, it was the sugar U.S. is after, now it is the oil

Manuel L. Quezon III: The Daily Dose » Blog Archive » Re-constructing colonial Philippines

NOVEMBER 11, 2007 AT 8:02 PM

REPLY

[...] Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910 by Patricio Abinales. [...]

Manuel L. Quezon III: The Daily Dose » Blog Archive » India and the Philippines redux

NOVEMBER 16, 2007 AT 10:20 AM

REPLY

[...] I think, the potential not only for greater mutual understanding but for problem-solving, too. As Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910 by Patricio Abinales points out, The U.S. Congress approved the colonization of the Philippines but [...]

**gerry eusebio**

NOVEMBER 17, 2007 AT 1:07 AM

REPLY

i'm a history lecturer. i just saw this title now and it seems very interesting i will reply as soon as i read it. i would like to commend mr. quezon for publishing or issuing these types of articles of great interest to me and to your other lovers of history as well. it's already in the wee hours of the morning when i came across this piece so i intend to read this maybe tomorrow after which i will submit my academic comment.

**TALIBA**

JANUARY 5, 2008 AT 11:22 AM

REPLY

From TALIBA's point of view, the two major features characterizing the first decade of colonial rule could be aptly described (restated) in the following manner: First was the complete consolidation of American rule over the entire archipelago (This laid down the groundwork and gave way to the complete institutionalization and consolidation of control over the national economy of the oppressive "materialistic capitalist system", upon which the seed of rebellion [CCP-NPA] shall grow), and second the great division among the inhabitants, which brought about disparity of thoughts and sentiments (consequently resulting to the inhabitants' inability to formulate a "common national ideology"). An unfortunate historical event which would become a significant factor in triggering the secessionists sentiments in Muslim Mindanao and quest for autonomy in the Cordilleras.

**UP n student**

FEBRUARY 3, 2008 AT 10:56 AM

REPLY

Question for the author (and anyone else):

Why did the US leadership as early as 1905 decide to withdraw from the Philippines? What was happening so starting 1905 ... [the Americans proceeded to prepare the grounds for eventual self-rule.](#)

The US administration did not do the same for Guam nor Puerto Rico, two other territories that Spain ceded to the US (as a result of the Spanish American War and the Treaty of Paris). For example, the Jones Act 1917 granted Puerto Ricans US citizenship.

Manuel L. Quezon III

AUGUST 11, 2008 AT 4:32 PM

REPLY

[...] Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910, historian Patricio Abinales (who is from Mindanao) made short shrift of the belief that Moro [...]

Current » The perils of partition

REPLY

AUGUST 11, 2008 AT 4:35 PM

[...] Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910, historian Patricio Abinales (who is from Mindanao) made short shrift of the belief that Moro [...]

Current » Looking South: Are there really “outsiders” in the Mindanao issue?

REPLY

OCTOBER 25, 2008 AT 12:36 PM

[...] body politic. Together with the writings of a Mindanawon historian, Patricio Abinales (see his Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910) and Zainudin S. Malang’s Examining the Nexus Between Philippine Constitutionalism and the [...]

Manuel L. Quezon III: The Daily Dose » Today’s Dose » Looking South: Are there really “outsiders” in the Mindanao issue?

REPLY

OCTOBER 25, 2008 AT 12:49 PM

[...] body politic. Together with the writings of a Mindanawon historian, Patricio Abinales (see his Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910) and Zainudin S. Malang’s Examining the Nexus Between Philippine Constitutionalism and the [...]

Notes for a prospective article on the emerging politics of a national identity (in progress) : Manuel L. Quezon III: The Daily Dose

REPLY

JULY 10, 2009 AT 2:36 PM

[...] Moro areas in green; Christian/lowlander areas in pink; Uplander/“Non-Christian tribes” (today’s IP’s) in yellow. Areas in green declined to be integrated into Philippine Republic; areas in yellow claimed as integral by Pink areas, nucleus of emerging nation-state. Note: American political arrangements would merge yellow and green but segregate from pink. See Abinales: Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910. [...]

**dicklicker**

AUGUST 29, 2011 AT 7:09 AM

REPLY

fuck you

Remembering Osmeña | Manuel L. Quezon III

REPLY

SEPTEMBER 9, 2012 AT 12:51 PM

[...] Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910 Selective entry of these goods however was enough to resurrect the export economy, and by the end of the decade much of it was re-energiz... [...]

North Borneo (Sabah): An annotated timeline 1640s-present «

REPLY

MARCH 6, 2013 AT 9:21 AM

[...] Abinales, Patricio. “Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910.” 1900-2000: the Philippine Century. Manila: Philippines Free Press, 2001. p. 19. [...]

Charter Change: An Annotated Timeline 1934-2014 » Manuel L. Quezon III

REPLY

SEPTEMBER 5, 2014 AT 5:27 PM

[...] Presidential Museum and Library, Today in History, Tumblr, July 30, 2012). For a background, see Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910 by Patricio Abinales; Institutionalizing state interventionism, by Manuel L. Quezon III. For an [...]

Bud Dajo: Americans, Filipinos, and Moros » Manuel L. Quezon III

REPLY

SEPTEMBER 14, 2016 AT 6:46 PM

[...] single-volume introduction to our history and development of our nation—argued in an essay titled “Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910,” that the “territorial reality” of what we now know as the Philippines was the result of [...]

The Explainer: Bud Dajo: Americans, Filipinos, and Moros » Manuel L. Quezon III

REPLY

OCTOBER 5, 2016 AT 8:19 AM

[...] single-volume introduction to our history and development of our nation—argued in an essay titled “Re-constructing Colonial Philippines: 1900-1910,” that the “territorial reality” of what we now know as the Philippines was the result of [...]

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