A Brief Narrative of the Philippines’ Olden Times and Contemporary History

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The People-Power Revolution in 1986 was a historical event that could never be forgotten by all Filipinos wherever they were in those days.

The following is a summary of very-interesting tidbits of history of the Philippines for your perusal and consideration. These are extracts taken from glimpses of Philippine conditions from Spain’s colonization to the present time. Although it may appear to be a late story to tell, it may educate many Filipinos wherever they are today.
The overwhelming events in the Philippines today . . . the civic, social, political and economic pictures . . . convey a sad story. From the beginning of the Spanish rule up to the present time, the disparity between the rich and the poor is estimated at 30 percent middle-class and rich and 70-percent economically-disadvantaged class and the poor of the poorest. In all honesty, the country nowadays is being subjected to serendipity of events that it becomes a less-attractive place to live in permanently. It may be a favorite place of retirement for Filipinos working abroad, but it is politically beleaguered that a few are having second thoughts about it.

In 1521, when Magellan used fire in burning the homes of our forefathers in Mactan off Cebu Isl and , Lapu-Lapu rose and took up arms. He and his warriors killed Magellan and several of his European soldiers along the shores of Mactan Island . Lapu-Lapu was a hero and he could be considered the forerunner of a nationalist – even if the archipelago at that time was bogged down in tribal wars. It is admitted that a Filipino nation was not born despite the defeat of Magellan. We were under the Spanish rule for more than three centuries (1565-1898), after Spain sent a second expedition to Cebu . As they say, the rest is history. The intolerable abuses of the Spanish regime resulted into the formation of a group of reformist movement that later paved the way for the Philippine Revolution. Local revolts against Spanish imperial corruption, racial discrimination, and church abuse happened intermittently before but only succeeded late in the nineteenth century. Some of the initial revolts called for reform of the economic-political system but not for outright independence. A young doctor-writer, Jose Rizal, used his pen to expose the brutalizing, depressive and inhumane treatment of the Spanish colonizers. Dr. Rizal was arrested and then executed by a firing squad at Bagumbayan on December 30, 1896 . Dr. Rizal, who was just 30-years old when he was executed, aroused the Filipinos to support the rebellion, spurred by the Katipunan that was organized by our heroes Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo. However, they engaged in an ugly infighting resulting in the execution of Bonifacio. They failed to coalesce their forces and fight side by side against the enemy and the leaders lost their souls to greed and thirst for power.
In 1898 The American-Spanish War ensued. The Americans led by then Commodore George Dewey invaded Manila Bay and defeated the lackluster Spanish Navy. The Spaniards eventually surrendered to the Americans although their Walled City of Intramuros was surrounded by Filipino freedom fighters.

On June 12, 1898, in Cavite el Viejo (now Kawit), Cavite, Philippines, the KKK (Katipunan) patriots of General Aguinaldo proclaimed the Philippine Declaration of Independence. With the public reading of the Act of the Declaration of Independence, Filipino revolutionary forces under Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed the sovereignty and independence of the Philippine Islands from the colonial rule of Spain. However, on December 10, 1898...
In 1935, a semiautonomous Philippine Commonwealth was inaugurated in Manila with Manuel L. Quezon as President and Sergio Osmeña as Vice-President. This became the United States-based Philippine government-in-exile during the Japanese occupation.

The Philippines came under the Japanese empire from 1941-1945, that produced disaster, devastation and annihilation of the Filipino people from the Japanese imperialist forces. You all remember the Death March in Bataan. General Douglas McArthur fled to Australia with a promise, “I SHALL RETURN.” The American forces returned in October 1944 to liberate the country. Manila City was the second most-devastated city (after Warsaw, Poland) in the world during World War II.
We celebrated the independence of the Philippines from the Americans on July 4, 1946. During the two decades that followed as a democratic country, six Presidents were elected and served one after the other in peaceful transition. About 17-million Filipinos populated the country then in 1946. Since then, there has been no change in the gap between the rich and the poor . . . 30% rich and 70% poor.

In 1969 the Moro National Front was founded and it conducted an insurgency in the Muslim areas on the Island of Mindanao. The political violence was blamed on the leftists but it was probably initiated by government's agents provocateur. The situation led Marcos to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus as a prelude to martial law.

**MARTIAL LAW/DICTATORSHIP**

It was on September 21, 1972, that Marcos issued Proclamation 1081, which declared martial law over the entire country. Under the President's command, the military arrested opposition figures, including Benigno Aquino, Jr., journalists, student-and-labor activists and criminal elements. Approximately 30,000 detainees were kept at compounds ran by the Philippine Army or the Constabulary. Weapons were confiscated, and "private armies" connected with prominent politicians and other figures were broken up. Newspapers were shut down, and the mass media were brought under tight control. With the stroke of a pen, President Marcos closed the Philippine Congress and assumed its legislative responsibilities. During the 1972-81 martial law period, Mr. Marcos, invested with dictatorial powers, issued hundreds of presidential decrees,
many of which were never published before they took effect.

Years of dictatorial abuse followed, as crony capitalism shackled free enterprise. There was near economic collapse and the middle class was slowly demoralized. The gap between the rich (30%) and poor (70%) widened, as the people remained in a quagmire. Mr. Marcos claimed that martial law was the prelude to creating a "New Society" based on new social and political values.

Despite the martial-law government's often-perceptive criticisms of the old society, President Marcos, his wife, and a small circle of close associates, the crony group, now felt free to practice corruption on an awe-inspiring scale. During this time, Mr. Marcos called for self-sacrifice and an end to the old society. However, in the “New Society” Marcos’ cronies and his wife, former beauty queen Imelda Romualdez-Marcos, willfully engaged in rampant corruption. Although always influential, during the martial-law years, Imelda Marcos built her own power base, with her husband's support. Concurrently the governor of Metro Manila and Minister of Human Settlements (a post created for her), she exercised significant powers. When martial law was lifted in 1981 and a “New Republic” was proclaimed, very little had actually changed and Marcos easily won reelection.

The beginning of the end of the Marcos era occurred when his chief political rival, Liberal Party leader Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr., was assassinated on August 21, 1983. Mr. Aquino had just disembarked from an airplane at the Manila International Airport
when he was shot to death at the tarmac by an alleged assassin. Before that, the opposition leader had been jailed by Mr. Marcos for eight years. Then he was sent to the United States for medical treatment and subsequently exiled in the city of Boston, Massachusetts. Several Marcos cronies were charged with the crime but were acquitted. However, the court convicted some of the soldiers that escorted him out of the plane and into the tarmac. Ninoy Aquino became a martyr and his murder became the proximate cause of popular indignation against a corrupt regime.

EDSA REVOLUTION

The Catholic Church, a coalition of old political opposition groups, the business elite, the left wing, and even factions of the armed forces, began to exert pressure on the regime. There was also foreign pressure, and feeling confident with the support given by the Reagan White House, Marcos called for a “snap” presidential election on February 7, 1986.

When the Marcos-dominated National Assembly proclaimed Marcos the winner, Cardinal Jaime Sin and key military leaders (including Minister of Defense Juan Ponce Enrile and acting Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Lieutenant General Fidel V. Ramos) rallied around the apparent majority vote winner, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, Ninoy Aquino’s widow.
In a protest rally held on February 22, 1986, at the Community Concourse in downtown San Diego at the time of the revolution, I was one of the speakers in denouncing President Marcos for perpetuating an atrocious regime and for the mass fraud and terrorism committed during the recent Presidential election in the country. I was appointed by Senator Raul Manglapus as National Chapter Executive of Movement for Free Philippines (MFP) that he founded.

**Editor’s Note**: Please read Benjamin G. Maynigo’s first-person account of his father-in-law, Raul Manglapus, in this article, *Remembering Raul S. Manglapus and the Christian Democracy*.

Here are excerpts of my speech that I considered my very-important contribution to Philippine political history:
Ladies and gentlemen: We have finally come to the final hour and the election in the Philippines, our beloved country, has ended but not over yet. Democracy has faced the toughest challenge of resurrection in the archipelago of the brave and the home of the free. It is the Filipino people’s turn to make a judgment wherever they are, whether here in the United States, Canada or other parts of the world. What remains to be done now is to save our people from the continued Marcos rule. The reason you and I are here this afternoon is to appeal to the conscience of the people of the United States, to the leaders of the government, particularly to Mr. Reagan, to stop support of a government that has destroyed and gutted the very main fiber of democratic principles in the Philippines.

Ferdinand Marcos has devoted the greater part of his twenty years of presidency in plundering the economy of the Philippines and corrupting its civic institutions. In the ultimate act of greed and larceny, he has brazenly stolen and hijacked the expressed hope of the Filipino people for a return to democratic rule. The hue and cry in the Philippines is for a change to a democracy. The country's economy is deplorable; peace and order are deteriorating all over the country; the insurgents under the NPA are becoming stronger. Human rights are destroyed and there is no justice served to those perpetuators of crime who happen to be the supporters and cronies of the Marcos administration.
The Filipinos proved beyond doubt to the entire world that they want democracy back. But what had happened? Mr. Marcos stole the election! The will of the people has been trampled.

Cory Aquino, the 52-year-old widow of the fallen leader Benigno Aquino, has shown a mandate of the people had it been a free-and-fair election. There are rampant intimidations of pro-Aquino supporters and in some cases, some of them were murdered. A good friend of mine, Evelio Javier from the province of Antique where I came from, was murdered in broad daylight at the Provincial building where he was watching and safeguarding the ballot count for Mrs. Aquino. I lost a great friend, the youngest governor ever elected in the Philippines at age 29. He was murdered because he was anti-Marcos . . .

What we want from you Mr. Reagan is to stop military and moral support of a man who has betrayed that legacy of liberty. Only then will the Philippines become a true heir to our legacy of liberty. Only then will the shadow of blood vanish from the face of the sun. We will and must continue to seek for that wonderful dream—a return to democracy. Marcos has deprived the Filipino people of that democratic right in the last 20 years and finally the people have awakened.

The People-Power Movement – a popular uprising of priest, nuns, ordinary citizens, children, and supported by military units – ousted Marcos. The dictator fled on the supposed day of his inauguration (on February 25, 1986). It brought Corazon Aquino to power in an almost-bloodless revolution. People Power was our shining glory! The whole world applauded our saintly courage, our dignified defiance, and our bloodless solution to expel a dictator. We
were the toast of all freedom-loving countries, the envy of all oppressed people. These made news headlines as “the revolution that surprised the world”. The majority of the demonstrations took place at Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, known more commonly by its acronym EDSA, in Quezon City, Metropolitan Manila, and involved more-than 2,000,000 Filipino civilians as well as several political, military and religious figures.

Editor’s Note: Please read a related article about President Reagan:

The 1986 EDSA Revolution Was Part of the “Reagan Revolution”

THE PHILIPPINES AFTER THE EDSA REVOLT
In 1986, we placed Cory Aquino, Ninoy's widow, in Malacañang. She was virtuous, full of probity, sincere and with good intentions for the country. But what happened under Cory? Coup attempts by Greg Honasan and his fellow Reform-the-Armed Forces Movement leaders, power struggles, political squabbles, and the infighting for juicy deals harassed the amateur Cory presidency.

After Cory Aquino, Fidel Ramos was elected as the President. But all of Ramos’ gains during his presidency faded away into thin air. The poor became poorer than ever.

Because he was a popular movie actor, Erap Estrada was elected President to manage the country. He enjoyed widespread popularity, particularly among the poor moviegoers. In October 2000, however, Mr. Estrada was accused of having accepted millions of pesos in payoffs from illegal gambling businesses. To quote an anonymous writer, “The jueteng bombs exploded! People were aghast at knowing the bizarre drama of alleged bribery, gambling, drunkenness, womanizing, deceit, and corruption.” Estrada was impeached by the House of Representatives, he was forced from office on Janu

We were inspired that Malacañang regained its honor and dignity. But more total failure happened instead! The peso plummeted to a horrifying US$1 to P51. Graft and corruption, plunder, scam and thievery ruled the country. Mr. Estrada was pardoned and is now running again for President of the Archipelago. C’mon an impeached president and served in prison to run again? (But then Mr. Estrada was permitted by election officials to run in the May 10, 2010 elections where he placed second.)
Again, the whole nation was witnessing sickening crimes attributed to the inept personnel in the government.

As of 2008 data, there are now more-than 90-million Filipinos in the country. The poor still composed 70% of the population. Now, for the election for May 2010, what we are about to experience is the shredding of the covenant of the 1986 “people power” revolution. Politically, it is a despicable country. To win an election you must be filthy rich. I’m referring to an English slang. Call it the way you think. Is politics in the Philippines simply filthy? Filipinos in general have to be responsible; however, they are noted to be openly immature in our politics. A lot of stupidity: between a handsome movie star and an honest-and-brilliant political scientist, many people will vote for the reel celebrity.
The most recent one on May 10, 2010: Simeon Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino, III, won the election and became the 15th President of the Republic of the Philippines. What, then, does the future hold for Filipinos? He stated: “My first task is to lift the country from poverty”. A friend, Dr. Carmelo Dichoso, said: “One change in the administration will not solve the ‘Philippine problem.’ It takes time for (a) young republic to mature – the process may be slower for some than others. Moral bankruptcy, the worst form of poverty, is one hell of an albatross for a nation to rid itself of.”

Quo vadis, Filipinos? I put this question to the 15th President of the Republic of the Philippines. He must know this brief history. # # #

{xtypo_quote}Editor’s Notes: Our new columnist, Cesar D. Candari, MD, FCAP Emeritus, was the first Commissioner of Filipino descent of the Governing Board of the San Diego Stadium Authority and Field Commissioner of the Licensing Division of the State Medical Board of California. He exemplifies the multi-talented and positive contributions of Filipino Americans to Mainstream America. He has been making, and still makes, Filipino Americans look good and feel good about themselves and their multiethnic heritage. A more detailed introduction is found at Traffic Problems in Manila Are Beyond the “Wang-wang” {/xtypo_quote}