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## **Reports of the Fact. Finding Board on the Assassination of Senator Benigno S. Aquino Jr.**

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REPORTS OF THE FACT-FINDING BOARD ON THE ASSASSINATION OF SENATOR BENIGNO S. AQUINO JR. Metro Manila: Mr. & Ms. Publishing Company, 1984. iv, 420 pages.

*Reports of the Fact-Finding Board on the Assassination of Senator Benigno S. Aquino, Jr.* can only be properly evaluated within the context of the Marcos regime and the rising consciousness of the Filipino middle class in the 1980s. Indeed, it should be said that the lengths to which people will go to safeguard what they perceive as the truth reflects the depths to which the ruling class has sunk in the esteem of the people.

The meticulously assembled *Reports*, prepared by the crusading Mr. and Ms. Publishing Co., is, first of all, a cry for truth and justice. In ideas both said and unsaid, it captures the simmering frustration and the fragile hope of a people for whom preservation of the truth is seen as the final defense.

As eloquently stated in Letty Jimenez-Magsanoc's introduction: "Those of us who lived through the shock and grief of the assassination and the searing days after, know how and why it happened. But our children and generations of other Filipinos will have to be told. This is the book's reason for being" (p. iv).

*Reports* should then be judged as an attempt to document and reconstruct the events surrounding the Aquino-Galman murders. As a historical account, it is an important contribution. However, as a readable book, *Reports* is only a half-success. It tries to be too many things to too many people in too short a space. It tries to construct a story line, present a dramatic characterization and capture the excitement of those stirring events, and at the same time be as coldly factual as possible. These elements are immiscible and overall, *Reports* becomes just that—two immiscible layers.

The list of contents reads enough like a coherent detective story. It introduces the event with headlines and news items of the assassination mostly from the foreign press (as the then-meek media were obediently silent). In the second chapter, the two main characters who are actually non-players in the story are vividly biographed—the victim-heroes: returning senator Benigno S. Aquino, Jr., and gunman-accused Rolando Galman. The Aquino characterization is vintage Max Soliven while the Galman sketch was pieced together by Jose Ma. Nolasco. Lita Torralba-Logarta sets the stage with a short account (chapter 3) of the Presidential Decrees which mandated the creation, first, of the Fernando Commission, and finally of the Agrava Fact-Finding Board. The next chapter on "The Fact-Finders" puts flesh on the main participants of the inquiry with short individual biographical descriptions.

The painstaking proceedings of the Board are studiously and extensively but tediously summarized by Nolasco in chapter 5. It recalls the testimony of some 193 civilian and military witnesses, a feat of patience in itself. It is at this point that most readers would probably beg off reading further and just

browse through the text. While the summary of all the accounts may interest the historian and sleuth, a coherent highlighting of the key testimonies would have served the general reader better. The story line wanders and gets lost in a mass of facts, personalities and details.

The remainder of the book: "The Exhibits," "The Photochronology," "The Board Counsel's Report," "The Board Members' Report" and "The Chairman's Report" reads more like an appendix—it contains important information, but things one would not normally read through. The 150-slide photochronology, the master stroke of Andres Narvasa, General Counsel of the Board, is a priceless historical documentation of the two murders. Save for the fatal few moments of the murder, the photochronology will always make the event vividly familiar. The Majority Report appears in full for posterity—a gutsy challenge to the official stand.

The book ends with Chairwoman Corazon Agrava's closing signature of the Minority Report. But while the Board has signed its finis, the painful fact remains that, despite fifteen months of intense investigations and public pressure, neither the actual killers, nor the mastermind, were identified.

The Aquino story continues to alternately unravel and get knotted to this day. Yesterday, it was fifteen months of the Agrava commission. Today, who can say what the Sandigang Bayan will conclude? But perhaps the results of the judicial proceedings are not what the people are really interested in. The idea left unsaid in the *Reports* is that even if the triggerman is identified and meted the legal penalties, we are still not assured of justice. We still would have left the question unanswered: who is responsible for the murder of Ninoy Aquino? When the real conclusion is finally drawn, the *Reports* will most certainly be part of that event in history.

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THE FILIPINO REACTION TO AMERICAN RULE 1901-1913. By Bonifacio S. Salamanca. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, xii, 267 pages.

This book has already been reviewed in this periodical by Fr. Schumacher, S.J. (18 [1970] 429-435). My remarks, therefore, are additional observations prompted by the advance in scholarship during the decade and a half after its first issuance in 1968.

This is, of course, a better edited book. Gone are the misprints of the older edition, except, alas! one on page 229, note 75, where the line should be "... mention [not mentioned] might be made . . . ." The bibliography has been