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Emilio Aguinaldo

Review Author: Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

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EMILIO AGUINALDO. GENERALISSIMO AND PRESIDENT OF THE FIRST PHILIPPINE REPUBLIC IN ASIA. By Alfredo B. Saulo. Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House Inc., 1983. xlii, 562 pages, appendices, Part One and Part Two, bibliography, illustrations.

Three critics describe this biography of Aguinaldo as "a fine contribution" (p. xi), a "labor of love and patriotism" (p. xiii), and "detailed but argumentative" (p. xv). I would add "unnecessarily long and emotional." In every page one feels the deep admiration Alfredo B. Saulo has for his hero and one wishes it had not beclouded his judgment.

Historians are usually hesitant to write about events occurring in their lifetime or in the generation immediately preceding them. The happenings are too close for proper evaluation, and it is only after years that distance in time allows them to be viewed in perspective. It should, therefore, not surprise anyone that a good biography of Aguinaldo has not yet been written. Anyone acquainted with the present state of Philippine historiography knows that, besides the absence of primary sources, Filipino historians have their prior interests, and the life of Emilio Aguinaldo is not one of them. If none of the "tens of thousands of educated Filipinos, including historians and avid students of Philippine history" (p. 3) has questioned why Aguinaldo has not been accorded a hero's honor, this may perhaps be simply because to these educated Filipinos the matter is not too important.

Saulo has a valid point when he says that Aguinaldo saved the revolution which would have failed if left in the hands of Bonifacio alone. But to imply that this was due to Aguinaldo's patriotic "love of country above self" which was a "kind of patriotic discipline beyond the comprehension of our historians," or that for "lack of revolutionary experience our historians have failed to grasp the essence of Aguinaldo's actions" (p. xxxi), is to condemn all writing by historians who may have been destined to live in unbroken peace. Likewise, to deny the heroism of Rizal merely because he was "American-made," is to overlook the care with which Governor Taft had sought advice before deciding on whom to propose as a model for the Filipino youth.

Historians are rightly skeptical about personal memoirs and diaries as sources of history. No man is ever a good judge in his own cause and such writing must be checked against contemporary evidence. This is one of the weaknesses of this biography. Saulo seems to have taken at face value the writings of Aguinaldo. There is no attempt to allow for the possibility of change in the Generalissimo's outlook as he gained experience in war or in acting as a leader. It would have added a new dimension if others' opinions, favorable or not, had been used to round out his personality. Only the positive comments are accepted, while negative reports are passed over or not thoroughly examined. Significantly, McKinley is always a "treacherous"

president, whereas when Aguinaldo decreed on 3 August 1900 to provide humane treatment for prisoners, Saulo observes that he had shown "such magnanimity, to war prisoners [never] shown before in the annals of civilized warfare" (p. 13). As Shakespeare wrote, "the lady protests too much, methinks."

The number of factual errors in the book raises more than one question. For example, it does not inspire confidence in the author when he asserts on page 18 that the term "Filipinas" was "adopted after King Philip II of Spain whose only distinction as a ruler was that he was a lover of horses"! This caricatures Spanish history and ignores the numerous studies and excellent biographies of the prudent King. The problem of the secularization of the parishes is not as simple as it is described on page 21. The opening of the Suez Canal brought to the colony hordes of political hangers-on which, instead of providing a "solution" to the problem, hardened the peninsulars in their prejudice against the Filipinos (*criollos*, *mestizos*, and *indios*).

There are others which need not be listed here, but they do pose a few difficulties. Perhaps they are due to the strongly one-sided dependence on sources favorable to the author's thesis. For example, Wolff's *Little Brown Brother*, first published more than twenty years ago, is practically the only source mentioned for information on the Philippine-American conflict of 1899-1902. Unfortunately, this has been criticized in recent writing as "based on limited research" (Glenn A. May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines* [Westport, Conn., 1980] p. 253). Two other books which deal with the same subject are not mentioned in the bibliography: William T. Sexton, *Soldiers in the Sun* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1939) and John M. Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1899-1902* (Westport, Conn., 1973). As an aside, one wonders why Wolff is considered a primary source.

The point here is not that one should be partial to American, or even Filipino writers, but rather that, like Wolff's, the present biography is based on limited research. To depend for the history of nineteenth-century Spain on an encyclopedia article and never mention one of the better books on the subject, Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1939* (Oxford, 1966) is, to say the least, indicative of a number of things. This limitation—or purposeful selection?—of sources explains the weakness of Chapter Two, "Backgrounder of a Hero," otherwise an important chapter for the appreciation of the age which produced a personality such as Aguinaldo.

Like an *obligato*, the double-dealing hypocrisy of the Spaniards and the Americans is a theme constantly recurring throughout the book, with nary a word on similar moral failures of the Filipinos, or, at most, they are glossed over. It must be kept in mind that, as far as Spain and the United States were concerned, the Philippines was not a sovereign nation. The Treaty of Paris transferred jurisdiction over a colony from one power to the other. The Americans came to the Philippines to make good what they considered their legal

right, despite the protests of local leaders. And the problem of what did take place between Dewey and Aguinaldo is actually a question of fact, to be answered largely by careful analysis of circumstantial evidence: was any agreement made? In what terms? This is not evident in the book being reviewed.

Biographical writing is a rather neglected art in the Philippines. It is hard, and demands self-discipline. As the psychologists warn us, it is difficult enough to understand a person who is still alive; how much more if the subject is dead. The least one can do is to marshal the facts and try to truthfully describe what the man did. It will never do to categorize him *a priori* and then try to fit the facts to support that description.

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.
History Department
Ateneo de Manila University

G.I. JIVE. AN ARMY BANDSMAN IN WORLD WAR II. By Frank F. Mathias. Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1982. xii, 227 pages, illustrations.

War is always an unacceptable political solution, unimaginable in its reality, and unforgettable for the survivors (p. 204).

I practiced swings of my knife in the dim starlight, as if a Jap were there. 'This is silly,' I muttered, and with that admission my brain began accepting its first insight into my true position. The whole world looked silly . . . I hated no Jap; I had never seen one until I went to Ford Ord. We were utterly trapped, with everything to live for and no place left to live it. Cannon fodder. Adolescent theories . . . gave way to reality as I questioned the war and myself (p. 79).

These two passages and others similar to them redeem these memoirs from the common self-serving this kind of literature is notorious for. Written in the first person, *G.I. Jive* is not a mine for "facts" for a history of the second world war. It is rather the story of a private in the U.S. Infantry who experienced the war and its terrors mostly on a bandstand playing the saxophone (hence its title, the name of a popular song). During the campaign, he wrote letters home which his mother kept. Now a professor of history, Frank F. Mathias dug them up and skillfully integrated them into this narrative.

What can this soldier, promoted to a sergeant's rank just before the war ended, tell us about that war? A few things. Guadalcanal, he argues, was a much publicized episode; but another, more costly battle which counted 594 more casualties was just as important, namely, the Papuan campaign