

AGUINALDO'S CASE AGAINST THE UNITED STATES*

BY A FILIPINO

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*This article was written by an authorized personal representative of Aguinaldo. For diplomatic reasons he considers it unwise to attach his signature. – EDITOR N. A. R.

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Emilio Aguinaldo, ca. 1899

We Filipinos have all along believed that if the American nation at large knew exactly, as we do, what is daily happening in the Philippine Islands, they would rise *en masse*, and demand that this barbaric war should stop. There are other methods of securing sovereignty — the true and lasting sovereignty that has its foundation in the hearts of the people. Has not the greatest of English poets said:

“Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood?”¹

And, did America recognize this fact, she would cease to be the laughing stock of other civilized nations, as she became when she abandoned her traditions and set up a double standard of government — government by consent in America, government by force in the Philippine Islands.

“Coming events cast their shadows before.”² Let us look at the situation exactly as it is, as we know it to be, and let the American people no longer deceive themselves or be deceived by others. . . .

You have been deceived all along the line. You have been greatly deceived in the personality of my countrymen. You went to the Philippines under the impression that their inhabitants were ignorant savages, whom Spain had kept in subjection at the bayonet's point. The Filipinos have been described in serious American journals as akin to the hordes of the Khalifa; and the idea has prevailed that it required only some unknown American Kitchener to march triumphantly from north to south to make the military occupation complete.³ We have been represented by your popular press as if we were Africans or Mohawk Indians. We smile, and deplore the want of ethnological knowledge on the part of our literary friends. We are none of these. We are simply Filipinos. You know us now in part: you will know us better, I hope, by and by.

Some clear-headed men in the United States Senate knew the facts; but, alas, genius and correct thinking are ever in the minority. . . .

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¹ Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Lady Clara Vere de Vere,” 1842.

² Thomas Campbell (Scottish poet, 1777-1844), “Lochiel's Warning,” 1802.

³ A year earlier, in September 1898, General Horatio Kitchener had solidified British control of the Sudan by defeating tribesmen led by Khalifa Abdullah al-Taashin.

You repeat constantly the dictum that we cannot govern ourselves. Macaulay long ago exposed the fallacy of this statement as regards colonies in general.⁴ With equal reason, you might have said the same thing some fifty or sixty years ago of Japan; and, little over a hundred years ago, it was extremely questionable, when you, also, were rebels against the English Government, if you could govern yourselves. You obtained the opportunity, thanks to political combinations and generous assistance at the critical moment. You passed with credit through the trying period when you had to make a beginning of governing yourselves, and you eventually succeeded in establishing a government on a republican basis, which, theoretically, is as good a system of government as needs be, as it fulfils the just ideals and aspirations of the human race.

Now, the moral of all this obviously is: Give us the chance; treat us exactly as you demanded to be treated at the hands of England, when you rebelled against her autocratic methods. . . Now, here is an unique spectacle — the Filipinos fighting for liberty, the American people fighting them to give them liberty. . . .

You declared war with Spain for the sake of Humanity. You announced to the world that your programme was to set Cuba free, in conformity with your constitutional principles. One of your ablest officials gave it as his opinion that the Filipinos were far more competent to govern themselves than the Cuban people were.⁵

You entered into an alliance with our chiefs at Hong Kong and at Singapore, and you promised us your aid and protection in our attempt to form a government on the principles and after the model of the government of the United States. Thereupon you sent a powerful fleet to Manila and demolished the old Spanish hulks, striking terror into the hearts of the Spanish garrison in Manila. In combination with our forces, you compelled Spain to surrender, and you proclaimed that you held the city, port and bay of Manila until such time as you should determine what you meant by the word “control,” as applied to the rest of the islands. By some mysterious process,



Emilio Aguinaldo, third from right, and Filipino revolutionary leaders, ca. 1900



⁴ Thomas Macaulay, British historian and essayist, promoted “liberal imperialism” in the mid 1800s.

⁵ Admiral George Dewey, telegram to the Dept. of the Navy, 23 June 1898: “[T]his people are far superior in their intelligence and more capable of self government than the natives of Cuba, and I am familiar with both races.”

heretofore unknown to the civilized nations, you resolved “control” into “sovereignty,” on the pretense that what is paid for is “possession,” no matter what the quality of the title may be. . . .

Never has a greater mistake been made in the entire history of the nations. Here you had a people who placed themselves at your feet, who welcomed you as their savior, who wished you to govern them and protect them. In combination with the genius of our countrymen and their local knowledge, you would have transformed the Philippine Islands from a land of despotism, of vicious governmental methods and priestcraft, into an enlightened republic, with America as its guide — a happy and contented people — and that in the short space of a few months, without the sacrifice of a single American life. The means were there, and it only required the magic of a master-hand to guide them, as your ships were guided into Manila Bay.



Who is responsible for the contrast between the picture I have just drawn and that which meets the eye at the present moment with all its ghastly horrors? Wider and wider the separation became with very many aggravating circumstances, until liberty now travels in two parallel lines, very distant from each other.

It is our distinct opinion, and we would fain think it correct, that the President of the United States was misled by the military ideas of Gen. Merritt, as he has been later deceived by those of Gen. Otis. He saw the fatal mistake too late. Gen. Merritt, whose name must ever go down to posterity linked with the memory of the bloodshed and the horrors of this inhuman and unjust war, was recalled.⁶ Let us hope the error was one of judgment alone.

The rest is a matter of history, of which the American public, otherwise lamentably ignorant of details, possess at least Gen. Otis' version, which, needless to say, is far from being the correct one. The administration defend themselves by saying that they know the truth. The more shame to them that they continue this barbarous and unjust warfare!

You have been deceived from the beginning, and deception is the order of the day. You continue to deceive yourselves by the thought that once the military power is established in the Philippines, the rest is a matter for politicians. Verily you are falling into the pit you have dug for yourselves. Your officials and generals have broken their promises with our countrymen over and over again. Your atrocious cruelties are equalled only by those of Spain. . . .

You will never conquer the Philippine Islands by force alone. How many soldiers in excess of the regular army do you mean to leave in every town, in every province? How many will the climate claim as its victims, apart from those who may fall in actual warfare? What do the American people, who have thousands of acres yet untilled, want with the Philippines? Have you figured up the cost?

⁶ General Wesley Merritt commanded the American expeditionary force that landed in the Philippines. In August 1898 he was replaced by the first military governor of the territory, Major General Elwell Otis.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: you were duped at the beginning. You took a wrong step, and you had not sufficient moral courage to retrace it. You must begin by conquering the hearts of the Philippine people. Be absolutely just, and you can lead them with a silken cord where chains of steel will not drag them. We excuse your want of knowledge in the past, for you have had no experience in treating with our people; but retrieve your mistake now, while there is time. . . .

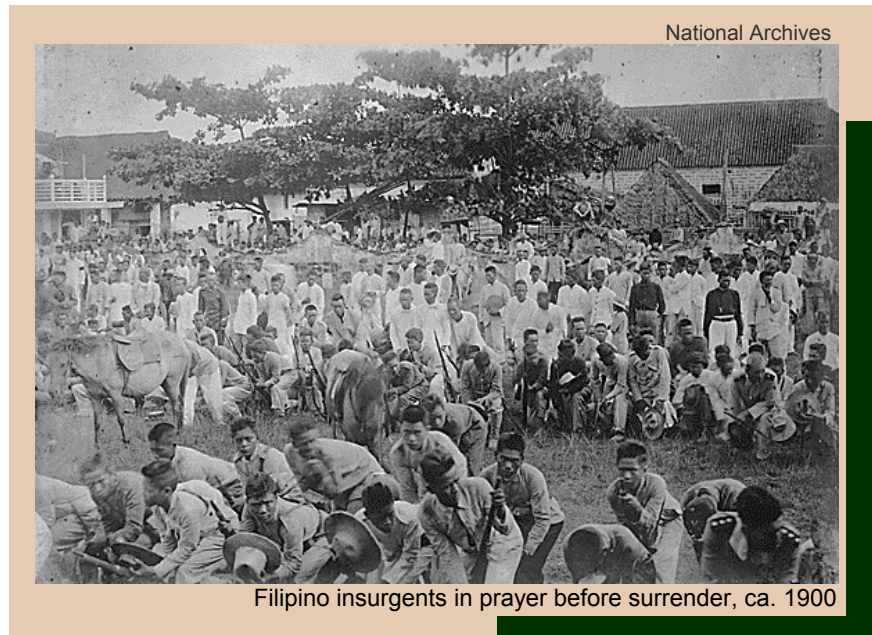
“Lay down your arms,” you say. Did you lay down your arms when you, too, were rebels, and the English under good King George demanded your submission? How in the name of all that is serious do you demand that we shall do what you, being rebels, refused to do? . . .

Our friend, Admiral Dewey, will undoubtedly have something to say to your president when he reaches home. He caught the genius of the Philippine people, and if he had been left alone many valuable lives would have been spared and many millions of treasure saved. Be convinced, the Philippines are for the Filipinos. We are a virile race. We have never assimilated with our former oppressors, and we are not likely to assimilate with you.

Negros and Cebu⁷ are wavering in the balance, uncertain whether or not to continue under your jurisdiction. We know how all that came to pass and the intrigues in Manila. Your newspaper correspondents know it also. But I am violating the commands of Gen. Otis by letting you into the secret. Meanwhile, I subscribe myself

SEMPER VIGILANS.

Paris, August, 1899.



Filipino insurgents in prayer before surrender, ca. 1900

⁷ Large islands of the Philippines southeast of the principal island of Luzon, on which guerrilla warfare continued.