

THE CHANGES IN THE 19TH CENTURY PHILIPPINES

A study on the political, economic, and social transformations that shaped the emergence of modern Filipino nationalism and the long path toward independence.

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Political and Economic Shifts: The End of Isolation

Late 18th Century

European political and economic revolutions—such as the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution—began to affect Spain and, consequently, its distant colony, the Philippines.

1

2

1815: End of the Galleon Trade

The last Manila-Acapulco galleon arrived, officially ending the long-standing, restrictive colonial trade route. This forced Manila to seek new global commercial opportunities.

3

Mid-1830s: Manila Opens to the World

The port of Manila was opened almost without restriction to foreign merchants (primarily British and American). This influx of foreign capital and ideas spurred commercial agriculture.

4

1869: Suez Canal Completed

The opening of the Suez Canal drastically reduced travel time between Spain and the Philippines. This boosted trade, expanding the export of cash crops like sugar and abaca, and facilitated the entry of liberal European ideas and Filipino students.

The Rise of a New Social Class

The growth of commercial agriculture, driven by global demand for crops like sugar, hemp (abaca), and coffee, led to significant changes in land ownership and the social hierarchy of the Philippines.

Creation of New Wealth

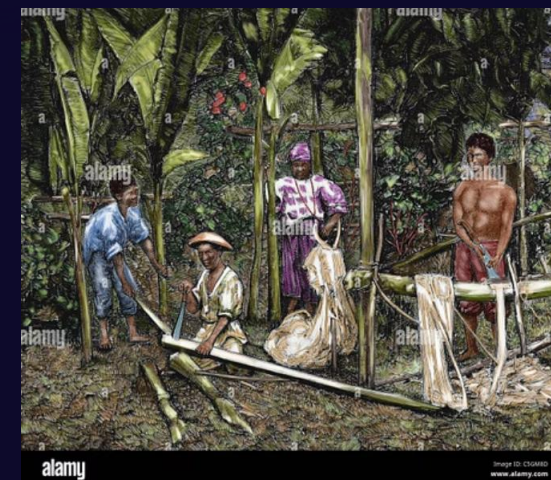
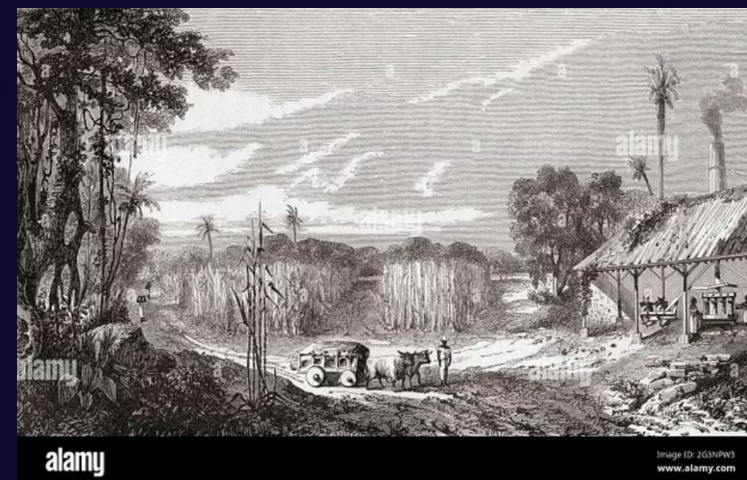
The export boom generated immense wealth, primarily concentrated among a rising class of landed elites, often Chinese-Filipino mestizos, who invested in large agricultural estates (haciendas).

The Mestizo Landowners

Chinese-Filipino mestizos, often bridging the gap between Spanish colonial rulers and the indigenous population, became the dominant landowning class, controlling the production and trade of export crops.

Enduring Influence

Many of the families who amassed wealth and political influence during this period—the *principalía*—still maintain significant power in contemporary Philippine politics and economics, highlighting the lasting impact of 19th-century economic reforms.



Education and the Birth of Nationalism

Despite limited access to education, cultural changes and exposure to liberal ideas sowed the seeds of Filipino national consciousness.

The Limits of Colonial Education

Public education was technically established in 1863, but its implementation was limited, and the curriculum was strictly controlled by the friars. As a result, less than 20% of students achieved basic literacy in Spanish, and very few spoke it fluently.

Higher education remained severely restricted and clerical-controlled, ensuring the intellectual subservience of the local population.



Sending Sons Abroad

Wealthy Filipinos leveraged the reduced travel time (thanks to the Suez Canal) to send their sons (the *ilustrados*) to universities in Europe (Madrid, Barcelona, Paris).



Exposure to Liberalism

In Europe, they were exposed to Enlightenment philosophies, liberal ideas, and political movements—concepts highly restricted in the Philippines—which fueled their nationalistic sentiments.



The Propaganda Movement

These students formed the Propaganda Movement, using pamphlets and literature (like *La Solidaridad*) to advocate for reforms, primarily seeking equality and representation within the Spanish system, not independence.

José Rizal and the Shift from Reform to Revolution

Dr. José Rizal became the most prominent voice for reform, but his execution proved to be the catalyst that transformed the nationalist movement into an armed revolution for independence.



The Pen and the Sword

Rizal's powerful writings critiqued the injustices of Spanish rule. His novels, *Noli Me Tangere* (1886) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891), awakened Filipino consciousness and are considered cornerstones of Philippine literature and nationalism.

He founded the **La Liga Filipina** (1892), a civic organization advocating moderate reform and loyalty to Spain. His arrest, exile, and subsequent execution in 1896 galvanized the populace.

The Katipunan: The Call for Independence

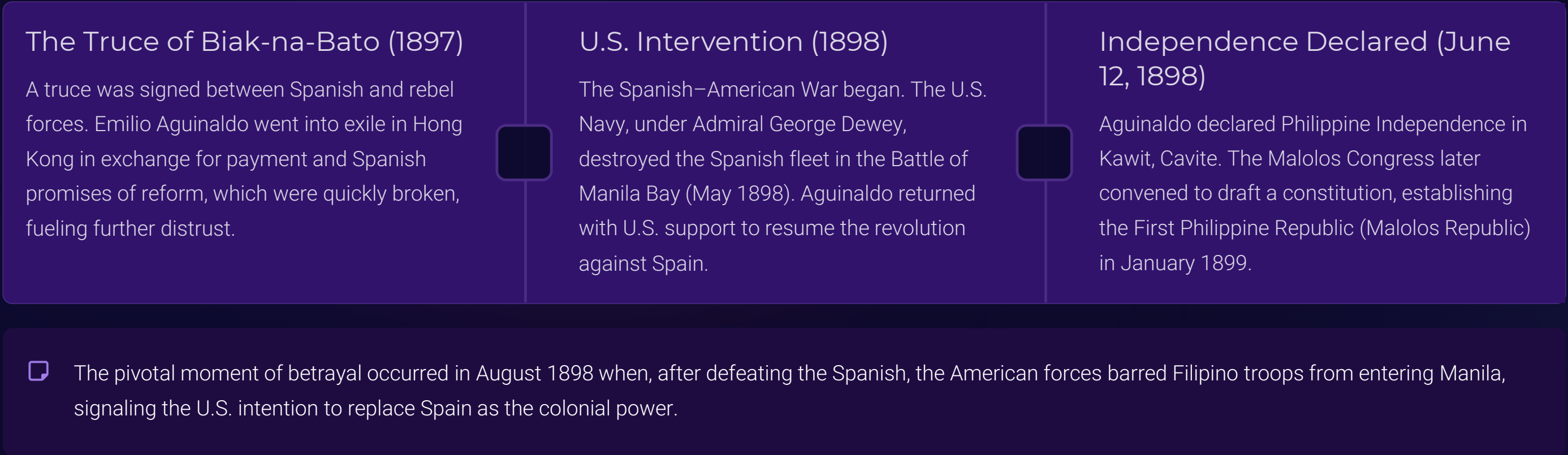
Following Rizal's arrest, Andres Bonifacio, a self-educated worker, founded the **Katipunan** (Kataas-taasan, Kagalanggalangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan—the Highest and Most Honorable Society of the Children of the Nation) in 1892.

- The Katipunan was a secret revolutionary society that rejected reform and instead aimed for complete independence from Spain through armed revolt.
- This marked a definitive ideological shift from the reformist goals of the *ilustrados* to the revolutionary aims of the masses.

In August 1896, when the Katipunan's plans were discovered by Spanish friars, Bonifacio was forced to initiate the Philippine Revolution. Revolts erupted in provinces near Manila, igniting the first unified Filipino movement for self-determination.

The First Republic: Independence Declared and Betrayed

The Spanish-American War provided a brief window for Filipino independence, which was quickly overshadowed by the start of American colonial ambition.



The Treaty of Paris and the Philippine–American War

The **Treaty of Paris** (December 10, 1898), signed without Filipino consultation, ceded the Philippines to the U.S. for \$20 million. This act—ratified by the U.S. Senate by a single vote—ignited the **Philippine–American War** (1899–1901), as Filipinos refused to recognize U.S. sovereignty.

American Rule and the Path to Autonomy (1899–1916)

The U.S. established imperial control but justified its presence by claiming to prepare Filipinos for self-government, gradually transferring power to the local elite.



Early Commissions

The Schurman (1899) and Taft (1900) Commissions established a civil government. The U.S. priority was pacification and establishing the framework for colonial administration, culminating in the establishment of the Philippine Assembly in 1907.



Philippine Assembly (1907)

The creation of this elective legislative body (the first in Southeast Asia) marked a significant step toward self-rule, although voting rights were initially restricted to the educated, property-owning class.



The Jones Act (1916)

This U.S. Congressional act formally promised eventual Philippine independence, setting the goal of recognizing it "as soon as a stable government can be established." It replaced the appointed Philippine Commission with an almost entirely elected Senate, expanding autonomy.



The Legacy of American Education and Economic Inequality

While the U.S. colonial period fostered significant educational development, economic policies maintained—and often exacerbated—pre-existing social inequalities.

Educational Triumph

- The arrival of hundreds of American teachers (Thomasites) in the early 1900s initiated a massive public school system.
- Education consistently received the highest percentage of government expenditure, leading to a fivefold growth in the school population in one generation.
- Literacy doubled by the 1930s, and English became a crucial lingua franca and a foundation for modern democratic ideals, though not always translating to immediate economic mobility.



Economic and Social Failures

U.S. efforts to address entrenched social issues, particularly landownership, were less successful:

- **Concentration of Wealth:** Land remained concentrated among the wealthy elite. Share tenancy doubled between 1900 and 1935, leading to peasant uprisings like those in Central Luzon.
- **Unequal Trade:** The Payne–Aldrich Tariff Act (1909) allowed free entry of Philippine goods to the U.S. but also allowed U.S. manufactured goods into the Philippines, stifling local industrial growth and prioritizing export agriculture (sugar), which primarily benefited the landed elite.

Transition to the Commonwealth: Quezon and Osmeña (1935)

Political maneuvering led to the establishment of the Commonwealth, a critical 10-year transition period toward full independence, despite underlying elite rivalries and global economic pressures.

1

The Hare–Hawes–Cutting Act (1933)

This act set a definite date for independence, driven partly by U.S. economic interests during the Great Depression (seeking to limit Philippine imports). It was rejected by the Philippine legislature due to the political feud between Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmeña.

2

The Tydings–McDuffie Act (1934)

Negotiated by Quezon, this nearly identical law was accepted. It mandated a 10-year Commonwealth period before full independence, during which the U.S. retained control over defense and foreign affairs.

3

The 1935 Constitution

A Constitutional Convention drafted a charter modeled after the U.S. system. It was approved by plebiscite, establishing the framework for a functioning democratic government.

4

Commonwealth Inauguration

The Commonwealth of the Philippines was inaugurated on November 15, 1935, with Manuel L. Quezon as the first President and Sergio Osmeña as Vice President, marking the first time Filipinos governed under a constitutional democracy.

The Commonwealth was meant to strengthen democratic institutions and prepare the country for economic independence, though it quickly faced major challenges, including agrarian unrest and the looming Japanese threat.

Post-War Independence and the Marcos Era

The path to true independence was immediately interrupted by World War II, leading to complex political legacies, culminating in the rise and fall of Ferdinand Marcos.

Independence and Early Challenges (1946)

- After the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), the Philippines achieved full independence on July 4, 1946, with Manuel Roxas as the first President of the independent republic.
- The nation faced massive destruction and was bound by U.S. trade conditions (Bell Trade Act) and the long-term lease of U.S. military bases, restricting economic sovereignty.
- Post-war agrarian unrest sparked the Hukbalahap Rebellion, highlighting that social reform goals of the earlier revolution remained unfulfilled.



The Downfall of Marcos and Restoration of Democracy

Ferdinand Marcos ruled from 1965 to 1986, establishing a dictatorship under **Martial Law** (1972–1981) to address unrest and consolidate power. The regime was characterized by corruption and suppression of civil rights.

The assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino Jr. in 1983 ignited massive public outrage. This led to the 1986 People Power Revolution (EDSA), which forced Marcos from power and installed Corazon C. Aquino, Benigno's widow, as President, restoring democratic government and establishing the 1987 Constitution.