Across history, there exists moments when the unity of people triumphs over the tyranny of a power set against them. One such occasion occurred in the Philippines in 1986. Over the course of three days, the Filipino people overcame differences in class, religion, and political ideologies to come together and make a change. This movement would come to be known as the People Power Revolution. It came about to remove the president at the time, Ferdinand Marcos, from power. Marcos, who had abused his power to enforce martial law, rig election, and assassinate the opposition, was seen as a threat to all people in the Philippines. With the support of the catholic church, the people used a variety of nonviolent and violent tactics such as mass protest, civil disobedience, and human barricades to force Marcos out.

In 1965, Marcos was running for president of the Philippines. The vows he would promise to the people were “...to fight the corruption that was rife in public life and to carry out land reform to reduce the country’s vast disparities of wealth” (Ackerman and Duvall 372). Marcos won the election that year. During his term, Marcos instead focused on creating more infrastructure like roads and bridges using foreign loans which plunged the country into massive debt. In the 1969 election, he used more foreign loans to rig the election and get reelected. During his second term, along with more exorbitant spending, Marcos supported the U.S. war effort in Vietnam in which he even sent Filipino troops to fight. The Vietnam War was something that Marcos originally had no thoughts of supporting. Going against this brought outrage especially among students who staged “...large and sometimes violent demonstrations” as a result (Ackerman and Duvall 372).

These students would perform marches and demonstrations protesting these actions. The more radical groups of students would throw rocks and Molotov cocktails. On one occasion, a group even drove a fire truck through the front gate of a government building. Seeing the unrest of the people, oppositionists such as Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino pushed heavily to remove Marcos from office. Aquino was a longtime advocate against Marcos and the person most likely to beat Marcos in an election. Marcos, who was preparing for a third term, was uneased by all the turmoil. Marcos leveraged a policy to keep him in power as he was certain “...that his life-long enemy, Benigno Aquino, would be elected as his successor” (Overholt 1139). This led to Marcos taking drastic measures.

Using civil unrest and growing communist forces as his justification, Marcos enacted martial law. Martial law is when the military takes complete control of the government. Declaring it means that the nation is forced to obey the military and is imposed in times of war or natural disasters. Under martial law, Marcos could extend his term past the nationally sanctioned two terms. Using his new power, Marcos ordered “...a sergeant... [to blow] up a series of minor power pylons and other targets around Manila...” and framed it as communist attacks to solidify the need for martial law (Overholt 1140). Marcos then got rid of the position of vice president, censored all forms of media, prohibited demonstrations/strikes, and arrested all the leaders of the political opposition which included Aquino under false accusation of a bombing. With this, “[a] constitutionally elected president had turned himself into a dictator” (Ackerman and Duvall 372).

While Aquino was imprisoned, all around Manila, there were acts of civil disobedience. Groups used tactics such as arson, bombings, and noise barrages to gain media attention. Noise barrages were when a group would bang pots and pots to disrupt work and get people’s attention. These sorts of protests would spring up all over the Philippines. However, with Marcos controlling the spread of information, the message that these protests were trying to convey was lost. These protests were labeled as baseless and eventually, all participants were arrested. Opposition against Marcos was slowly losing steam under the strict rule of martial law. After seven years in prison, Aquino was finally convicted for the murder of several people and was sentenced to death. Upon hearing this, the US stepped in. Using a heart condition as an excuse, Aquino was flown to the US for treatment and exiled from the Philippines.

Even from the US, Aquino still showed his support for the Filipino people. Aquino advocated for a radical group by the name of April 6th Liberation Movement (A6LM). This group conducted bombings on empty buildings and spread propaganda that a revolution had begun. The group did not gain public sentiment despite their efforts. With the media still under Marcos' rule, the message they were trying to spread could be contained. A6LM did not stop though. Determined to create a bigger statement, the group bombed a convention that Marcos was attending. This was a drastic leap from their previous acts. However, it did create dialogue between Aquino and Marcos. After this conversation, Marcos lifted martial law in 1981 and made the decision to hold an election. With all other opposition boycotting the election, Marcos won a third term. The morale of the people was at an all-time low. Aquino was persuaded not to go back to the Philippines as there were tips of an assassination attempt. However, despite these threats, both the people and Aquino himself wanted to return. On August 21, 1983, Aquino stepped off the plane and into the Philippines.

When Aquino landed in the Philippines, he was equipped with a bullet proof vest and guarded by multiple police and military units who were armed and ready. However, despite all the protection, as soon as Aquino stepped off the plane, he was gunned down by a volley of bullets. The media did not report his death at all. Only a single Catholic radio station reported his death. However, the news spread all over the Philippines which “let loose an avalanche of public grief and spontaneous demonstrations” (Ackerman and Duvall 372). There was one group that surprisingly had a reaction to this: the elite.

Marcos had not been received well by the elite. After plunging the country into debt, the elite of the Philippines were losing money and their standing. However, they could live with Marcos as they did not feel threatened by him. That all changed when Aquino was murdered. The elite did not just feel as if they could lose their class immunity but that they themselves could be killed. With this, “[e]lite anger finally coalesced with middle class deprivation against the brutality and corruption of the regime...” (Litonjua 388). With this newfound hatred, movement groups had gained even more support.

One such group that rose to power was the National Democratic Front (NDF). The NDF was not a new party, they were founded in 1973. However, due to the recent events, they had gained a strong backing. Their support ranged anywhere “from students, large segments of the middle class, human rights groups, teachers, dispossessed businessmen, and respected Catholic and Protestant clergymen (including two bishops)” (Overholt 1152). During this time, the Catholic Church was also making its move. Like the students, the church “became involved in grassroots organizing and consciousness-raising among the peasantry and urban poor, developing an analysis of the ills in Philippine society, a vision of what a liberated society would look like and strategies on how to get there” (Zunes 131). The poor now had a voice with the church and became more outspoken and bolder. These would lead to public demonstrations, such as *welgang bayan* or people’s strikes, in the streets in order to gain the attention of even more citizens. All of these came to a climax at the 1986 election.

Corazon “Cory” Aquino, Ninoy Aquino’s widow, became the opposing candidate of Marcos. With massive support from all over the country, it seemed certain that Marcos would be voted out. However, surprisingly, it was announced that Marcos had won the election. It was obvious that Marcos had rigged another election. As a result, Aquino, at a rally called the *Tagumpay ng Bayan* or People’s Victory, called for the people to boycott the election. This matched the sentiment of the Archbishop and Philippine Church. This would lead to the events we now know as the People Power Revolution.

On February 22, 1986, 2 million Filipinos took to the streets as a form of mass protest and civil disobedience. This included military and elite groups, all of differing amounts of support for Marcos. This led to armed conflicts between the groups. However, regular citizens who did not want any bloodshed would be the ones to ease the situation. As stated in a witness interview, “[t]he civilians had to be the ones to place themselves between the soldiers in order to avoid bloodshed... Because they saw among the civilians their brothers, fathers, and children” (“People Power” 36:58). These human barricades showed the soldiers the unity of the people. Nuns and priests would go around to military vehicles during conflicts to hand out food and water and flowers. As Jose Dalisay states in his interview with BBC, “no Filipino really wanted to kill a fellow Filipino, it just wasn’t worth it, Marcos wasn’t worth it” (BBC 2:50).

There were so many people on the streets that even Marcos himself hesitated to fire. As time passed, more soldiers defected and joined the people in the crowd. Eventually, the crowd descended on where Marcos was staying. The United States, under Reagan’s presidency, reached out saying “that Marco’s ‘time was up’ and [assured] him of safe passage out of the Philippines” (Ackerman and Duvall 391). By the morning of February 26, one day after Aquino was sworn in president, Marcos and his family were on a military flight to exile in Hawaii which ironically mirrors Aquino’s own exile to the States.

Overall, using a multitude of violent and nonviolent tactics, the Filipino people removed a dictator who had been in rule for over two decades. Not only this, but the People Power Revolution showed the indomitable spirit of a united people. Within three days, despite all their differences, they joined hands towards a brighter future. In these times, we are reminded of what Ninoy Aquino had said a day before his death.

“I have carefully weighed the virtues and the faults of the Filipino and I have come to the conclusion that he is worth dying for because he is the nation’s greatest untapped resource.”

Aquino believed in the strength and resolve of the Filipino people even as he knew his death was inevitable. He knew that even after his death, change would come and that his death would not be in vain. While the ultimate goal was to release themselves from a dictatorship, the Filipino people gained something greater, an everlasting reminder that the Filipino “is worth dying for.”

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