

Public Abstract

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The history of the Philippines is one defined by its regional, ethnic and geographical division. Since its settlement by the earliest Malay immigrants, the over 7,000 islands have hosted a multitude of cultures, languages, religions and societies. Despite this diversity, a strong nationalist movement emerged in the late 1800s, and developed into a unified Filipino identity by the end of World War II. This study seeks to understand how a region so historically divided could adopt a single national identity. Examination of the Philippines' three major occupations suggests that the crucial factor that enabled nationalism to take root was colonialism. Over the course of 400 years, Spain, the U.S. and Japan incorporated these isolated cultures under one rule. As a result, the disparate groups developed a common history out of a shared experience of colonial exploitation. Foreign powers imposed many foundational changes in the Philippines, both intentional and unintentional. In particular, colonization introduced new aspects of cross-regional unity (Catholicism, a lingua franca, etc.) while also strengthening existing historical commonalities, such as Filipino values and paternalism. As colonial offenses grew, Filipino resistance intensified, uniting Filipinos against a common enemy. Over the decades, these alliances of necessity became permanent parts of cultural identity, culminating in the popular anti-Japanese resistance armies of World War II, who organized extensive guerrilla armies independent of elite control.