

- The significance of the first declaration of Philippine independence is here explained by a noted professor in the state university.

JUNE 12 AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The recognition of June 12 as the chief Philippine holiday, however, has been the most important step taken toward the consolidation and strengthening of the national identity. Before this act, it was not easy to make people, including some of our countrymen, accept the historical fact that the Filipinos were the first to establish a liberal democratic Republic in Asia.

When we were marking our independence only from July 4, 1946, the date on which the United States restored the Republic which our revolutionary heroes had established toward the end of the nineteenth century as an independent national state, the Philippines was not much older than India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, because these countries won their independence only shortly after 1946. But now we can rightfully claim that our reformists and revolu-

tionaries were in the vanguard of the liberal, democratic nationalist movement that began shaking the ramparts of colonial Asia and Africa towards the later part of the nineteenth century and which is still sweeping over large areas of those continents in our own days.

The declaration of independence at Kawit on 12 June 1898 was the first concerted act of a visible political authority derived from representatives of the people from the different provinces assembled to assert their sovereignty. From it we can trace the clear beginnings of the Filipino national identity. The martyrdom of Burgos, Gomez, and Zamora in 1872, the publication of Rizal's novels (it is significant that Rizal himself described the "Noli" as "novela tagala" and the "Fili" as "novela filipina"), the founding of the La Solidaridad in 1889 and of the Liga Fili-

pina and the Katipunan in 1892, the premature outbreak of the Revolution in 1896 and the martyrdom of Rizal in December of the same year — all these also contributed to the formation of the Filipino nationality, but it was the Declaration of Independence in 1898 that formally marked the birth of the Filipino nation.

This declaration was followed by the convening of the Congress at Malolos which ratified the declaration and which promulgated a Constitution for a wartime Republic which was inaugurated in January 1899. That the Republic which was established subsequent to the Independence Proclamation was suppressed by American arms cannot destroy the significance or minimize the importance of the Kawit declaration in the life of the Filipino people.

When the Kawit proclamation was made by Aguinaldo and his associates the following month, it was with the understanding on the part of Aguinaldo that America, on the strength of the promise he claims to have received

from Admiral Dewey and the American consuls at Singapore and Hongkong, would recognize that independence and extend help to the young Republic. That things did not turn out as expected by Aguinaldo and that, instead, the fledgling Republic had to fight for its life against the new invaders, has already become a significant chapter in our history.

In spite of the ill effects of the American colonial rule in the advancement of Philippine nationalism, particularly its economic and political aspects, it must be admitted that the rule also contributed some definite good to the national life, like the secular and popular public school system extending from the grades to the University, an efficient system of hygiene and public health, and a representative democracy kept relatively stable and clean through the use of the secret ballot in the conduct of elections.

Set against this background, the celebration of July 4 as Independence Day is not very appropriate; in the context of the national

history, the Kawit declaration was much more important than the Truman proclamation of Independence read at the Luneta on July 4, 1946. The Declaration at Kawit would for us Filipinos have the same significance as the Declaration of July 4, 1776 of the Philadelphia for the Americans and of the Declaration of August 17, 1945 at Jakarta for the Indonesians.

It is inevitable that the Kawit declaration will develop into the most eloquent and effective rallying point for those who would want to enhance the Filipino heritage and the national identity. There is very little

danger of our suffering the same fate as the Hawaiians, Basques, Guamanians, and Maltese, who have lost their identity to some other and more powerful people.

Despite our centuries of subjection by colonialists, neither the Spaniards nor the Americans nor the Japanese have succeeded in assimilating or suppressing us altogether. It is well to remind ourselves always, however, that the national identity can always be undermined if we don't take necessary measures to protect it from harm. — *Leopoldo Yabes, abstracts from Manila Times, June 8, 1967.*