# The Colonial Past in the Postcolonial Present: Eddie Romero's "Cavalry Command"

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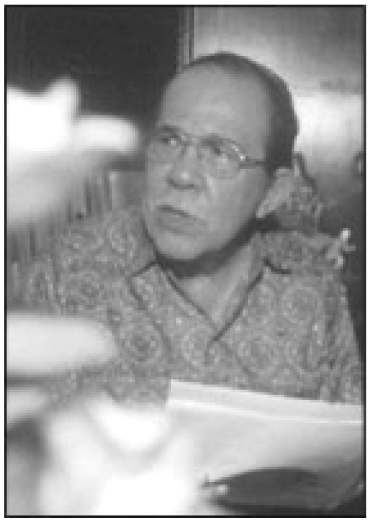
*In late 1963,* **Cavalry Command,** *a fictional filmic account of the U.S. Army's successful pacification of a Philippine village during the Philippine-American War, beamed across movie screens in the United States. Made through the interdependent efforts of an American film studio, a Filipino director and crew, and a cast of both American and Filipino performers,* **Cavalry Command** *was one of many co-produced films made in this decade. This essay examines* **Cavalry Command** *in relation to other contemporaneous accounts of the American colonial period, considering its distinct accounting of this history as a function of the production process itself and the subjectivities of its director, Eddie Romero*

In the late 1950s an intense labor movement in Manila placed a great deal of pressure on the Philippine film studio system. Unions organized within the big studios demanded higher wages and better working conditions (Lumbera, 1983: 74). Under this financial strain the big studios closed, ending a period dubbed by many scholars as "the golden decade of Philippine cinema" (Garcia, 1983; Torre, 1994). In the decade after the Philippines secured its formal independence from the United States, Philippine studios produced big budget films that won international acclaim and attracted huge domestic audiences. With the decline of the studio system, many of the filmmakers responsible for these films went to work for American film companies working in the Philippines. Though union wages were too high to sustain the domestic studio system, American production companies found operating in the Philippines extremely cost efficient. By filming on location in the Philippines, upstart independent American studios could exploit

the tropical, exotic look of the archipelago while dodging the strictures of Hollywood trade unions. American companies filled the void created when the big domestic studios closed, employing Filipinos to help make films geared toward the US market. These films were true co-productions, with Filipino actors, directors, and producers working alongside their American counterparts.

Eddie Romero was the most prominent and prolific Filipino artist to work on these films. Today, Romero is considered the doyen of Philippine cinema. Recognized by the Philippine government as a National Artist, he is credited with providing leadership to an industry struggling against the dominance of American commercial cinema. But, in the 1960s and 1970s, Romero worked on dozens of these co-productions. This essay examines ***Cavalry Command*** (1963), a film Romero wrote and directed with an eye for success in the American marketplace.[1] I consider the ways in which the film presents the colonial past, making this period visible for American audiences, and its relationship to contemporaneous texts in American public culture that also revisited this history. This analysis notes the similarities in these historical accounts while also asserting that the collaborative production process itself and Romero's own filmic craftsmanship gave ***Cavalry Command*** its own peculiar take on the Philippine-American past. Furthermore, I argue that ***Cavalry Command*** is a rich artifact from the postcolonial period, a site of negotiation with the past informed by its postcolonial context. The film is a commentary on the Philippine-American past authored



Eddie Romero (retrieved May 16, 2006 from http://www.planetphilippines.com/archives/mar1-15-04/current/features_current/feature4.html)

by a Filipino artist seeking to address an American audience. It is a point of intersection and exchange between the United States and the Philippines where the past is revisited and reshaped to address the varying demands of the postcolonial immediate. Serving as filmmaker and historian, Romero situated himself within the cultural borderlands between the United States and the Philippines, exerting some command over both the presentation of the past, and the ongoing exchange between the two nations.

## Two Kinds of Colonial Subjects:
### The Patriot and the Irredeemable Other

Set in 1902, *Cavalry Command* tells the story of the occupation of the mythical town of San Pascual (which we are told is located in Northern Luzon) at the close of the Philippine-American War. The film's narrative repeats a well-worn accounting of American colonialism in the Philippines, dramatizing a line of development that moves from initial misunderstandings to an ultimately mutually beneficial relationship. An American brigade occupies San Pascual and convinces the residents that their intentions are noble. The soldiers begin a series of projects and work with the residents to improve the town. However, these efforts are plagued by the pestering resistance of the "one-man army" of Captain Magno Maxalla and fierce attacks launched by Igorot warriors. This


Movie poster of the movie ***Cavalry Command*** (retrieved May 17, 2006 from http://www.moviegoods.com/movie_product.asp?master_movie_id=1612)

hostility is only resolved once the Americans are able to repel the Igorots and finally convince Maxalla of their purely altruistic aims.

The voice of the film's protagonist, Sgt. Judd Norcutt (John Agar), carries over the first shots of the American army entering the town. He informs the audience of the noble regulatory mission carried out by the Americans, stating, "After 300 years of Spanish rule, the United States army moves in to establish order." This statement establishes the occupation as a righteous burden, a calling to replace a baneful colonialism with a beneficent one. Norcutt acknowledges a resistance to this *noblesse oblige*, but one that stems from ignorance rather than a rational rejection of subjugation. He summarizes the great trial of the film, the task of convincing the Filipinos that this conquest is in their best interests, in noting that "What is left of the Philippine rebel army has for the past two years continued to offer resistance to the occupation forces, believing that we are here only to replace their Spanish masters."

This resistance comes in two forms in ***Cavalry Command***. The first is from Maxalla, the leader of the rebel forces. Maxalla's confederates have abandoned him and the nationalist cause, accepting American control. But, Maxalla is determined and remains dissuaded by American overtures. He wages a guerrilla war on his own, dynamiting bridges and disrupting the American army's efforts at establishing order in San Pascual. Norcutt describes Maxalla as "a vain, stubborn, hardheaded man, but nevertheless, a patriot." Here, Romero's script offers a mixed characterization of the Filipino insurgent that allows the viewer to grant some sympathy to the film's antagonist. Maxalla is at once a cliché of the anticolonial warrior, spurred by irrational motives, too blind to see the futility and destructiveness of his actions. But this foe of America is also a Filipino patriot, and given due respect for his determination and service to his nation. American designs for the uplift of San Pascual are also vexed by "renegade bands of hill people, the Igorots." In ***Cavalry Command***, the Igorots are the irredeemable other. They are both uncivilized and uncivilizable, worthy of no sympathy. Norcutt attests to their hopeless

intractability and capriciousness, gravely remarking that the Igorots will "fight anyone and everyone who tries to bring about order."

Throughout the film the Igorots attack both the American troops and Maxalla. They have no speaking roles or character names and are usually represented in long shots as an undifferentiated mass of wild men. In his analysis of diaries kept by Americans in the Philippines during the first few years of the occupation, Vicente Rafael has found a similar representation of the Igorots. In the imagination of these settlers, the Igorot was the Filipino outside the reach of colonial cleansing. The Igorot haunted these memoirs, a constant and pervasive threat to the salubrious order the Americans sought to bring to the archipelago (Rafael, 2000: 52-75). In emphasizing unity and homogeneity, President Ferdinand Marcos's "New Society" program of the late 1960s attempted to rid the Igorots of their designation as "cultural minorities," emphasizing instead "one nation, one race, one destiny." The term "cultural minority" stemmed from the Igorots' dissimilarity to the "true Filipino," the vast majority of people who exhibit the cultural traits that resulted from their ancestors' assimilation into the Spanish and American empires (Scott, 1985: 28-41). The history of the Igorots is one of sustained resistance to colonial intruders. But, ***Cavalry Command*** does not present an opportunity to appreciate this history. Instead, the Igorots' peculiarity can only be attributed to their inherent backwardness. The film extends two visions of anti-American resistance, the "patriot" Maxalla who speaks English and Spanish, and the mute Igorots who are outside the influence of any "civilizing" culture. One of the limits of Romero's film is its reinforcement of the idea of the "true Filipino." This reinscribed the marginality that the Igorots continued to occupy even in the postcolonial period.

## Co-Productions and Mutuality

The residents of San Pascual who are redeemed by the American presence are those willing to engage with the occupiers. Upon

entering the town, the commander of this US brigade, Lt. Worth (Myron Healy), addresses a group of frightened residents hiding in the church. Worth begins the process of convincing the Filipinos, informing them,

> We have not come here to punish any of you. We are not here to confiscate property, impose taxes, or impose restrictions of any kind. We've come to help you realize the principle for which you and your forefathers have fought for many generations.

This expression of America's conquest of the Philippines obviously attributes a false altruism to the event. But in this roseate retelling, Romero has pushed the relational aspects of colonialism to the fore. ***Cavalry Command*** is a story of Filipinos and Americans interacting. Impositions of all sorts are excluded. This obscures the ferocious violence imposed on the Filipinos but also counters the idea that the trappings of modernity were grafted on to passive recipients. Romero's vision of the colonial encounter attends to its asymmetry while also considering its deeply relational character.

This suggestion of mutuality is interesting in that ***Cavalry Command*** is itself a product of such a relationship. Working in the Philippines required American film companies to hire native actors and enlist local people as extras. Though many parts consisted of little or no dialogue, some prominent Filipino actors and actresses played key roles in these films, and ***Cavalry Command*** is no exception. These actors and extras were active participants in the production of these films. Jose P. Abletez praised ***Cavalry Command*** (under its alternative title, ***Day of the Trumpet***) for giving its "Philippine stars fair treatment in the credit titles" as opposed to most co-productions in which Filipino actors were "usually discriminated against, if not cheated outright" (Abletez, 1968: 24). In addition, American studios were completely dependent upon Filipino producers and directors. Their equipment, skills, and knowledge of the local industry were vital and the production process itself was in their hands. Eddie Romero

described his ability to assert himself as a director by stating, "I was left pretty much to myself as far as direction was concerned" (E. Romero, personal interview, November 18, 2005).

In the late 1950s, Romero journeyed to the United States convinced he could establish himself in the American film industry.[2] He had already written seven screenplays for Sampaguita Pictures, the largest studio in the Philippines and one of the few to survive the downturn in the late 1950s. Ironically, Romero relied upon his English in order to break into Philippine films. He would have his scripts translated into Tagalog. Later, when working as a director, Romero had a translator on set, or spoke in English in order to communicate with his actors. Romero crafted some of the great Tagalog films of the "golden age of Philippine cinema" before fully learning that language.[3] After working with American film companies for two decades, Romero made a series of acclaimed films in the late 1970s and early 1980s that explored Philippine history and national identity. Productions like ***Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon*** (1976) helped solidify Romero's position as a significant contributor to Tagalog language moviemaking and an important voice in this era regarded as Philippine film's second "golden age."

But for many years Romero worked as a filmic intermediary between the United States and the Philippines, forging many connections with Americans and American film companies.[4] In the United States, Romero met Harry Smith, a sound mixer for Columbia Studios. Smith liked the script for ***Cavalry Command*** and agreed to help find actors and crew members willing to film in the Philippines if Romero could secure funding for the project. Later, Romero joined with New York businessman, Kane W. Lynn, to form Hemisphere Pictures. Lynn was a veteran who had been stationed in the Philippines during World War II. After the war, Lynn remained in the Philippines and was asked by the Navy to serve as a technical advisor on CBS's ***Navy Log***. He enjoyed the film production experience and became fast friends with Romero (Ray, 1991: 63). Hemisphere Pictures went on to make a number

of war and horror films in the 1960s that proved quite successful in the American drive-in film market. These co-productions were a site of interdependent, vigorous, and creative interaction between Americans and Filipinos after independence. They were material examples of the process of exchange between the two nations that Romero projected into the past in *Cavalry Command*.

## American Orchestrated Uplift

Lt. Worth chooses Norcutt to help instruct the people in the ways of civil government, reminding him to "teach the people to help themselves." When Norcutt expresses doubt, his commander urges him to "keep working with these people until you win them over." The American army aims at "winning them over" by building a school in San Pascual. Norcutt selects Laura (Alicia Vergel) to be the teacher because, along with the town priest (Eddie Infante), she is the only one in San Pascual who speaks English. Though Laura has received some schooling, her new colonial master must educate her as well, as Norcutt is quick to correct her when she uses "child" instead of "children." Laura is an important barometer in judging the cavalry's success. She is romantically linked to Maxalla and protests vehemently when her assistance is solicited. Laura inveighs, "Why I help? You come take our country. Kill our men. Now you I help?" The broken English shows her benightedness but it also expresses her patriotism. The idea that Laura is not a collaborator but a patriot is reinforced when Norcutt declares, "You are doing this for your own people." Again, Romero presents an almost painfully sanitized portrait of colonialism, but he does so in a manner that presents Filipinos as participants in this history.

Laura agrees to serve as the town teacher. Along with the school, the soldiers build wells, teach the Filipinos baseball, and start a number of civic projects designed to improve the lives of San Pascual's residents. When Lt. Worth is pleased with the progress, he orders the bulk of his regiment to pull out, leaving just three Americans to oversee the now pacified and improved town. As

the lieutenant departs, the residents turn out to say good-bye. Overwhelmed by their show of appreciation, Lt. Worth tells the priest, "The people express their gratitude by letting us help them."

This narrative of American orchestrated uplift parallels other contemporary popular discourses on the postcolonial relationship. A little over a month before ***Cavalry Command*** arrived in American theaters, ***The New Yorker*** published Robert Shaplen's account of his time in the Philippines as a member of the Peace Corps.[5] Like the soldiers in the film, Shaplen had to convince and instruct Filipinos. He states, "The principal difficulty of the Volunteers I talked with was learning how to deal with the false or distorted concept of Americans and American life that seems to prevail in the Philippines" (Shaplen 1963: 52). But unlike the cavalry, the distortion did not stem from suspicion but rather an unqualified adoration. His recapitulation of the colonial past is far more ennobling than ***Cavalry Command's***. Shaplen asserts, "Americans have a special place in the hearts of Filipinos, thanks to their historical role in rescuing the people from the hardships of Spanish rule and then from the Japanese invaders, and finally, in giving the islands their independence" (52). In listing these gifts bestowed upon the Philippines, Shaplen passes over the entire colonial period. Furthermore, he elides the contributions of Filipinos in each of these events. Unlike ***Cavalry Command***, Shaplen's history is a history without the Filipino, a record of imposition without mutuality.

But Shaplen's chronicle of the Peace Corps' contemporary efforts in the Philippines repeats ***Cavalry Command's*** story of improvement and tutelage, the fictional film and the journalistic report constructing together a continuity of generosity between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Like Sgt. Norcutt, Shaplen is the confident emissary of American orchestrated uplift. Shaplen discusses how he and his cohorts taught English and science to the residents of the small village of Dao. Instead of baseball, they instructed schoolchildren in the rudiments of basketball. And like the film, these emissaries of America insist

on teaching the Filipinos to help themselves. Shaplen reprints a letter authored by a Peace Corps member stationed in Manila. The volunteer states,

> If, after my departure, the good people of Antique Province can say to each other, 'Look at our wonderful irrigation system we built by ourselves,' instead of saying, 'We are very poor, not like the United States; the Cano (Americano) who was here five years ago was interested in building an irrigation system for our thirsty crops, but by and by he went back to the States,' then I will consider myself a success (62).

This ventriloquism projected into the future establishes an unverifiable success for the volunteer. The Peace Corps member asserts that these efforts have changed the Philippines and the Filipinos by appropriating their voice. In this logic of helpful intervention, the Philippines is a place made and spoken for by Americans. The voice of the Filipino can be used to attest that the Americans are the altruistic reformers they claim to be.

Shaplen rattles off a list of practical projects he participated in. In each instance he credits the residents of Dao but it is clear from the overall tone of the article that it is the Americans who are changing the Philippines. He enumerates the successes, "One community learned how to construct a compost pit, for instance, and another how to plant seeds for the best yield; still others learned how to build a bamboo pump for small-scale irrigation project employing local wells, or how to rig up a question-and-answer game board that worked on flashlight batteries" (66). With the exception of the electronic game board, this summary is identical to the improvement projects brought to San Pascual in ***Cavalry Command***. These two contemporaneous texts, stories of American-led improvement emanating from the Philippines, construct a continuous vision of US-Philippine relations. This continuum is not interrupted by violence or exploitation. It is maintained by the efforts of Americans who bring light into the

darkness. Though Shaplen writes a history of the Philippines without US colonialism or Filipino resistance, his account melds with the history represented in the film, together interjecting into American public culture a testament to an unbroken, timeless American mission of reform.

And Shaplen's report works to establish the inevitability of continuing this effort in the future. Despite the successes in the Philippines, Shaplen testifies to the problems associated with dragging backward people into the dawn of progress. He states that his charges impede the Americans' attempts to improve their condition, noting that "The frequent inefficiency, lethargy, and unpunctuality of the Filipinos are other traits that dismay the average Volunteer, who is accustomed to thinking and acting quickly" (77). The article carries a quote from Dr. Lawrence H. Fuchs, the head of the Philippine Peace Corps project that also attests to this absolute difference between the enterprising American and the passive Filipino. Fuchs emphasized that the Volunteers were hampered by "the fundamental indifference which has been a part of Malayan culture for centuries," and "a remarkably deep resistance of rural Filipinos to certain fundamental qualities of American life: belief in progress, confidence in science, individualism, and faith in education" (66). Thus the article represents the Philippines as both improved and untouched by America. A place marked by positive change and also a land where much more needs to be done. The Filipinos are on their way to becoming American yet remain locked in their ontology. This duty is even more honorable in that it has no end. In representing America's mission in the Philippines as unquestionably noble and perpetually incomplete, Shaplen's article naturalizes a certain postcolonial future in which the two nations are inexorably linked.

## Giving an Honest Account of the Past

In ***Cavalry Command***, one Filipino remains unmoved by America's efforts, Captain Maxalla. His intransigence seems

particularly unjustifiable considering that he is saved from the Igorots by the American soldiers. When the cavalry forces the Igorots into retreat, Maxalla turns his gun on them. But the intrepid Americans are able to capture this "one-man army." Maxalla's incarceration allows for a more honest and reciprocal account of America's history in the Philippines. Unlike the whitewashed history in Shaplen's ***New Yorker*** piece, the chronicle in Romero's film is contested and indeterminate. In a vigorous exchange, Maxalla and Norcutt debate America's war of conquest. Upon learning that Norcutt does not understand Spanish, Maxalla proclaims, "All Americans are ignorant." Norcutt sheepishly replies, "Well, we try to learn as we go along." The lead Filipino character, this great patriot, is able to deflate the supposed superiority of America even while imprisoned by its army. Though this dignified image of Maxalla only amplifies the savagery exhibited by the Igorots, it does show an instance in which the Filipino holds command over the American. And it inverts the discourse of ignorance that the fiction of beneficent intervention (either in the colonial or postcolonial context) is predicated upon.

Norcutt is clearly cognizant of Maxalla's aptitude, citing his "capacity for leadership" as the reason why he will not be executed. But the clever and determined Maxalla anticipates Norcutt's offer, emphatically objecting, "You think you can make a puppet out of me?" Maxalla cannot trust the Americans because as he recalled, "We believed your generals when they came with promises to help us liberate ourselves from Spain. When we turned our backs, what happened?" Norcutt has no reply to this question, tacitly conceding that Maxalla's account is correct. He can only hope that Maxalla will follow in the path of Laura, accepting the occupation and forgetting about the crushed hopes for independence.

*Cavalry Command* presented Americans with an alternative way of imagining their colonial history. Into this largely laudatory story of American intervention in the Philippines, Romero introduces this reminder of the broken promises of the

past. Maxalla may be "vain" and "stubborn," but his recalcitrance is also reasonable. He holds on to these memories that cannot be easily excused away. The ghosts of the past continue to haunt, and Romero made sure they visited American audiences, perhaps unsettling their confidence in the narrative of uplift that continued to permeate American public culture. The character of Maxalla points to the indeterminacy of subjectivities for both filmmakers and their audiences. Though some Americans could view Maxalla as a villain or misguided loyalist, Romero views him as the hero (E. Romero, personal interview, November 18, 2005). In a film on the Philippine-American War, intended for American audiences, the most forceful and significant character is this Filipino "rebel." Furthermore, the film points to a shared history, a common experience that can be reshaped and reclaimed by both Filipinos and Americans.

Recognizing this mutual past could be a pathway to imagining a more generous mutual future. In the years surrounding ***Cavalry Command's*** release, historians in the United States were revisiting and reshaping interpretations of American imperialism. This reappraisal was spurred by William Appleman Williams's influential study, ***The Tragedy of American Diplomacy***. Published in 1959, Williams's book offered a scurrilous critique of the dogma of the Pratt thesis. Julius W. Pratt argued in his ***Expansionists of 1898*** (1936) that America's entrance into the Spanish-American War and subsequent colonization of the Philippines took place in a fit of emotion. Rather than economic forces, Pratt asserted that this aggression stemmed from a momentary mania sparked by a blend of religious, humanitarian, and intellectual concerns. This interpretation remained largely unchallenged until ***The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*** appeared. In this work, Williams insisted that American diplomacy was directed toward the goal of assuring the nation's economic supremacy on a global scale. Rather than an aberration, the conquest of the Philippines was one incident in this larger, purposeful drive. In 1963, Walter LaFeber extended this thesis, stating flatly, "The

overseas empire that America controlled in 1900 was not a break in its history, but a natural culmination. Americans neither acquired this empire during a temporary absence of mind nor had this empire forced upon them" (LaFeber, 1963: vii). ***The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*** became the starting point for the work of many revisionist and New Left historians, who believed that America's foreign policies were dominated by the narrow economic interests of a small elite (Billias & Grob, 1982).

In the second edition of ***The Tragedy of American Diplomacy***, published in 1962, Williams drew a distinction between America's "humanitarian urge" and the crude economic interests that drive expansion. He states that in forcing its system on much of the world, "America has made it very difficult for other nations to retain any economic independence (Williams, 1962: 14-15)." Here is a refutation of the discourse of development expressed in Shaplen's article and ***Cavalry Command***. Rather than helping people to help themselves, Williams argues that such improvement projects actually hurt the lands under American hegemony. The idea that this is for "their own good" is countered by Williams as he appraises the net effect of American expansion as, "The overall result is that America's humanitarian urge to assist other peoples is undercut—even subordinated—by the way it goes about helping people" (15).

***The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*** and ***Cavalry Command*** converge in intriguing ways. Williams saw his book in an optimistic light, as an opportunity to change course and forge a more just world order. Once the United States paused in honest reflection upon its past sins, Williams believed it would be then "easier to work out a program for helping other people that is close to American ideals and also more effective in practice" (20). As much as this text is a pungent critique of American foreign policy, it leaves this idea of "American ideals" unscathed, pointing to this reservoir of virtues as a beacon of hope. Likewise, ***Cavalry Command*** champions a certain "American spirit." But their more important similarities stems from perspective. Williams is standing

in the postcolonial immediate and reflecting upon the colonial past. This position proves troubling as the baneful legacy of American imperialism lays bare. But it is also an opportunity to usher in a more generous future. Williams writes, "History is a mirror in which, if we are honest enough, we can see ourselves as we are and would like to be" (20). With his film, Romero holds up a mirror to America, offering an image fit for critical reappraisal and guarded optimism. He presents a history of Filipino-American interaction and exchange, conflict and resolution. ***The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*** and ***Cavalry Command*** each attempt to make use of the past to proffer a harmonious ideal. Neither extends a wholesale rejection of intervention. Instead both place their faith on an open acknowledgment of the interdependency of the world. Both Romero and Williams remind America of its imperial history in order to influence the postcolonial future.

## "Both Sides Had Won"

The Americans in San Pascual show their dedication to comity and goodwill by releasing Captain Maxalla. Waiting outside the jail on the night of his release is an Igorot. The warrior takes a shot at Maxalla. The American soldiers are able to kill the Igorot, but Maxalla is convinced they set him up. He implores the townspeople to join with him against the American occupiers that attempted to have him killed. But the villagers, appreciative of their improvement efforts, have learned to love the Americans. Maxalla calls them "cowards" and "bootlickers" and retreats into the hills to formulate a plan to further his one-man war of resistance. During a fiesta held to honor the construction of a town well, Maxalla is able to overpower the three cavalry soldiers stationed in San Pascual. The soldiers are caught off guard as they have become intoxicated from the local brew and charmed by the sights of the locals dancing. When he ties up the Americans, Maxalla gleefully boasts, "Now here are the masters. The invincible Americans taken prisoner without firing a shot."

Though in a commanding position, Maxalla is undercut by his own people. Laura pleads, "The Americans have taken nothing from us. They are friends." But the sting of betrayal is too strong for Maxalla as he replies, "Friends of the mouth like the Spanish?" Laura attempts one last appeal, stating, "It is not like with the Spanish. The Spaniards put a price on your head; the Americans saved you from the Igorots." When Maxalla moves to burn down the school, a villager cries out, "Please Captain, my son goes to that school. None of us had a chance before." It is now clear to Maxalla that the people have been pummeled into obedience. He is determined to show his superiority over the Americans. So, Maxalla unties Norcutt. But the American soldier is too skilled with his fists and is able to defeat Maxalla in this showdown.

Humiliated, but undeterred in his mission, Maxalla retreats to the outskirts of San Pascual. He plans on destroying a shipment of weapons sent by Lt. Worth to help replenish the American troops. But Maxalla's plans go awry when the Igorots launch their own attack on the supply wagon. A mass of Igorots descends upon the only road into town, attempting to burn down the bridge in order to derail the wagon. The Igorots are able to set portions of the bridge ablaze, but Maxalla joins with the American soldiers to repel the tribesmen. Once the Igorots are turned back, the wagon collapses on the bridge. Spilling out, right in front of Maxalla, are crates of medical supplies. The Americans were not rearming the town, they were continuing their mission of aid. Maxalla now realizes he was wrong about the intruders. And for divine sanction of this moment of conciliation, a rain cloud opens up over the burning bridge, extinguishing the flames. In the final scene, as the wagon trucks its supplies into San Pascual, Norcutt's voice-over declares that "both sides had won." The events in San Pascual were a microcosm of the larger colonial experience as Norcutt announces, "The same thing was happening all over the Philippines." America had shown "the world that the only important weapons an army can ever have are goodwill and integrity."

This idea that "both sides had won" in the colonial encounter was a common trope employed in the immediate period after decolonization by prominent statesman seeking to secure an advantageous position in the new relationship between the Philippines and the United States. Carlos P. Romulo was arguably the Philippines' leading journalist at the outbreak of World War II. He served as a dutiful propagandist for Douglas MacArthur, helping to conceal the general's ineptitude by crafting a heroic image that would garner MacArthur the Congressional Medal of Honor for his defense of Bataan and Corregidor (Hamilton-Paterson, 1998: 84). Romulo used his contacts with the outgoing American administration to become appointed as the Philippines' delegate to the United Nations. He later served in Marcos's cabinet.

In 1947, the year after the Philippines gained its formal independence, Romulo published his account of American colonialism in his nation. In ***Mother America: A Living Story of Democracy***, Romulo defined the Filipino as "the Americanized, Westernized, Oriental who had been given every privilege of democracy under the American flag" (Romulo, 1947: 2). Though he acknowledged that America's conquest of the Philippines was imperialism, Romulo noted that American imperialism is different than all other forms because of its inherent integrity. He summarizes, "In all his dealings with the Filipino the American never failed to recognize what the imperialist overlooked in dealing with other races—the dignity of the human soul" (10). For Romulo, the story of his nation's engagement with America was one of mutual benefit, an extraordinary model of development that can only be credited to the peculiar qualities of the United States. In defining this American character, Romulo states, "That is America—always willing to look at the other fellow's side, hear his story, give him credit on equal terms" (11). And the Philippines is distinct in the colonized world because of the exceptionalism of the United States. Romulo notes that "In other countries of the Far East natives were reduced to the level of animals, but in the Philippines, from the very beginning, the Americans regarded us

as men" (11). In the wake of decolonization, Romulo positions himself as the spokesman for the peculiar Philippine-American relationship. This relationship is rooted in uplift and altruism, not exploitation. According to Romulo, the Philippines was American made, and it would continue to exhibit the benefits of its unique molding far into the future. ***Mother America*** also anticipates an intertwined postcolonial relationship (headed by politicians like Romulo) by establishing an unbroken line of American assistance.

In order to explain the Filipino's true love for ***Mother America***, Romulo must describe the antagonisms of the Philippine-American War as unfortunate misunderstandings. In his account, the Filipinos who fought the American invaders suffered from the same blindness as Captain Maxalla. ***Cavalry Command*** and ***Mother America*** are just two texts in a larger discourse that reconciles the conquest as the result of mere misperceptions. Though this confusion had immediate tragic results, once the Filipino, like Captain Maxalla, realized America's true intentions, the ultimate outcome was a beneficial partnership. And as in the film, America's duty in the Philippines was to persuade its new subjects. Romulo credits the fierce resistance of the Filipino patriots to their abuse under the Spanish, a trauma that made them suspicious of the noble designs of the Americans. Therefore, it was up to the United States to quell the insurrection with words, not guns. He argues that "The Americans realized [war] would continue indefinitely in the Philippines unless some means could be found to convince the Filipinos that American intentions were friendly" (27). Through its fair dealings with the Filipinos, America proved its true intent in the archipelago. And through this process, the Filipinos learned that they "had far more in common with the Americans than with our neighbors and close relations in near-by Asia" (31).

Romulo paints a picture of two people who are inherently suited to live together. He states that the struggle of the Filipinos resonated with Americans because they too had fought for their independence. The Filipino had to go through the process

personified in the character of Captain Maxalla to finally realize this commonality. And once recognized, this commonality would endure indefinitely. Romulo employs the same narrative line of misunderstanding to mutuality present in ***Cavalry Command*** and Shaplen's account, reviving and redeploying a mythical colonial past in order to frame the postcolonial present.

The character of Captain Maxalla embodies the mass of Filipinos in Romulo's account. But it also has a more specific symbolic meaning. In 1898, Emilio Aguinaldo, the leader of the Katipunan forces fighting to free the Philippines from Spanish control, declared independence and established the First Philippine Republic. Spain's tenuous hold on the archipelago was slipping away. Eager to acquire an overseas empire of its own, the United States had instigated a war with Spain, using support for the independence movement in Cuba as a guise for its acquisitive intentions. The beleaguered Spanish, seeking to avoid a futile battle against a US-Filipino assault, sued for peace. In the Treaty of Paris, the United States paid Spain 20 million dollars in order to acquire the Philippines. The Filipino nationalists who had fought alongside the Americans to liberate their nation learned that their allies had no intention of leaving (Hamilton-Paterson, 34-35).

Like Maxalla, Aguinaldo refused to accept his new colonial masters. The Katipunan, now labeled as "insurgents" by the Americans, took up arms in a fierce war of anti-colonial resistance directed at their former comrades, a struggle that continued well after Aguinaldo's capture in 1901. The Americans did not execute Aguinaldo. Instead, he became an important power broker in the colonial regime set up by the United States. As John T. Sidel has shown, the US government in the early years of colonialism in the Philippines helped establish a system of government in which political power, closely linked with control over the developing industrial economy, fell into the hands of a small group of "bosses." Folding Aguinaldo into this system gave solidity and symbolic weight to the new regime. Sidel states, "the Americans' transfer of provincial powers to local hands linked the fortunes of

Aguinaldo's nascent political machine to the forces of the national state in nearby Manila" (Sidel, 1999: 57). Aguinaldo used his relationship with the colonial government to secure ownership of huge tracts of land while receiving a generous pension from the United States. The president of the First Philippine Republic and leader of the anti-American resistance had been "won over" by the Americans.

Aguinaldo presents an intriguing point of comparison with Maxalla and the representation of Philippine-American relations perpetuated by Romulo. Beyond the similarities with Maxalla, Aguinaldo offers another point of intersection with ***Cavalry Command*** that shows how the colonial past was reshaped in the postcolonial period. On February 6, 1964, while ***Cavalry Command*** was still showing in movie theaters throughout the United States, Aguinaldo died at the age of 94. Here was another site in American public culture, contemporaneous with Romero's film, to revisit the colonial legacy. ***The New York Times*** ran a remarkably lengthy obituary that openly acknowledged the horrors of the Philippine-American War. It stated, "The war is seldom described in American history books. Before it was over, more than a quarter-million people had died, most of them Filipino refugees killed by disease, starvation, and exposure" (22).

But along with this admission, the obituary repeated the tale of two antagonists who learned to get along. In reference to his capture, ***The New York Times*** stated, "The insurgent leader, after long torment, finally signed a statement ending the war and pledging his loyalty to the United States" (22). In this account, there is no indication of the close relationship Aguinaldo had with the colonial government after he performed this service to his country. Instead, the obituary reported that "For almost 50 years afterwards he [Aguinaldo] sat in his fortress-like house near Manila and waited—a spectator watching the parade of history" (22). This passive Aguinaldo received a gift from the ever beneficent America when "Finally, on July 4, 1946, his homeland was granted its independence" (22). ***The Chicago Tribune*** repeated this image

of the insurgent won over by America, stating "After taking the oath of allegiance to the United States he retired to a farm in the province of Cavite" (18). And ***The Los Angeles Times*** attested to Aguinaldo's ability to transform from "brilliant insurgent" to loyal subject, observing, "But his [Aguinaldo] forces finally fell apart and he was captured. He then swore allegiance to the United States" (21).

The Aguinaldo obituaries share a common theme with all of these revisitations. They assert that a symbiotic relationship developed as a result of colonialism. Though hardships ranging from misunderstandings to mass slaughter marked the initial phase of this encounter, the net result was a mutual relationship so strong and intertwined it cannot but endure. And it endures for the benefit of both nations. In this sense, these revisitations have a certain postcolonial utility. They construct the past in a manner that naturalizes a continuing Philippine-American relationship and attends to its demands. A comity rooted in history augurs for a beneficial relationship in the present and the future. Concerns about asymmetries in power and exploitation are simultaneously wiped away from the past and the immediate present.

## The Filmmaker As Historian: Fabricating Films, Fabricating Nations

But *Cavalry Command* differs from this historiography and reportage in that it was an interpretive and interactive project, shaped by peculiar collaborative qualities. It was a filmic expression of Filipino-American exchange, produced through that very exchange, intended to communicate to Americans and Filipinos still interlocked in this process. And it is this experience in process, the active work of production, which is reflected in Romero's assessment of Philippine-American relations. Unlike this contemporary historiography and reportage, Romero is keenly aware of how ***Cavalry Command's*** history is his history. It does not lay out a proper accounting of America's acquisitive imperial

past designed to jar Americans into insisting on a foreign policy consonant with genuine American values. Nor does it reveal the true, immutable essence of the American and the Filipino and the story of how they learned to get along. Any articulations of an American or Filipino spirit in the film were Romero's own fabrication. As he told me in our interview, "Any claim to an essence is after the fact, it is easy to say, but what does it mean?" Romero insisted that ***Cavalry Command*** did not carry a political message or was meant to give a complete account of history, but rather it was driven by his own interest in the period and in crafting "interesting characters" (Eddie Romero, personal interview, 18 November 2005). Though this assertion of being detached from any political context or meaning is a problematic work of imagination, a production or performance in its own right, it does point to Romero's own awareness of his subjectivity. The history revealed in ***Cavalry Command*** was his creation, a past under his command, to be consumed on those terms. And like any retelling of the past, its true account or essence elusive and incomplete, it could be reinterpreted, rejected, or contested.

This sense of history and national essences is further reflected in Romero's reporting on America for ***The Philippines Free Press*** in the 1960s. After over a decade working in collaboration with American studios, Romero gained some authority as an expert on the American condition. ***The Philippines Free Press*** billed him as a long standing "student of Philippine-American relations," his knowledge bolstered by numerous trips he made to the country to secure movie deals and edit his projects. In an article entitled, "The American Dream Revisited," Romero outlined a broad sweep of US history not as a linear progression driven by American ideals, but as an ongoing, unfinished war between the inimical ideological traditions of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Employing an alarmist tone often present in American journalistic accounts of an ever "volatile Philippines," Romero described an America so bitterly divided that if the

conflicting interests could not negotiate, "an epidemic of violent outbreaks [was] imminent" (Romero, 1969: 62). He portrayed a nation still developing, its past marked by debate and conflict, its present and future indeterminate. Romero applied the same assessment to the Philippines, rejecting the idea that America would play the dominant role in shaping the country's future, instead insisting that the Philippines, in its development as a nation and in its dealings with the United States, will "act only on options and initiatives that we [Filipinos] ourselves fashion." Rather than predetermined by an unassailable essence or absolute past, the nation, like the movie, could be fashioned anew.

For Filipino film director Eddie Romero, the nation is collectivity made in the present, forged by anxieties and anticipations. He explains, "What a nation fears, longs for, and does is its identity" (Reyes, 1997: 53). This filmmaker, a purveyor of fantasy and artifice, imagines the nation as an ongoing project, constantly reinvented by what it "does." The making of movies, historiography, and national identities, all involve similar fabrications, constantly produced and reproduced for consumption in the immediate. Created through a collaboration between Americans and Filipinos, ***Cavalry Command*** constructed its own vision of the past, marked by the same mutuality that defined the production process. It was both the representation and fabrication of a mutual relationship, making and remaking cultural ties between Americans and Filipinos.

## Notes

[1] ***Cavalry Command***, producer Cirio H. Santiago, director Eddie Romero, 77 minutes, Peoples Pictures, 1963, videocassette. All plot, dialogue, aural and visual evidence cited from ***Cavalry Command*** in this paper was derived from this videocassette copy released in 1984 by Paragon Video Productions. The film was released in some markets under the

script's original title, ***The Day of the Trumpet***. In the Philippines it was released as, ***Cavalleria Commandos*** and ***The Day of the Trumpet***.

2 In an interview, Romero recalled watching American westerns and thinking, "I could do that, I could do better than that." Eddie Romero, interviewed by Pete Tombs, special feature found on DVD copy of ***Brides of Blood*** issued by Image Entertainment in 2002. Romero reiterated this in our interview, confirming the influential and formative role American films had on his own filmmaking.

3 Romero would not learn Tagalog until the late 1950s when he took language classes as well as courses in filmmaking while residing in London.

4 In addition to Hemisphere's products, Romero made dozens of films for New World Pictures and American International. One of his last jobs for an American studio was as a producer of ***Apocalypse Now***. Romero handled the Filipino arrangements for the film. Though often credited as the provincial vision of Francis Ford Coppola, ***Apocalypse Now*** would never have been made in the Philippines without the efforts of Romero and the network of filmic relationships that had existed between the two nations for decades.

5 ***Cavalry Command*** premiered on November 6, 1963. Academy Register, Production File for ***Cavalry Command***, Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

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