

*The Philippines: From Earliest Times to the Present*

By Damon Woods

My forthcoming book is intended to introduce readers to a nation originally named after a European prince. The people of the archipelago that now constitutes the Philippines had a long history before any European contact occurred. Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, Filipinos have experienced a wide range of encounters with the US. The Philippines was Asia's first republic and then became a US colony after an American war of conquest and pacification, which some argue resulted in the deaths of 10 percent of the population. Almost a million Filipino soldiers and civilians, and approximately 23,000 American military, died in the war against Imperial Japanese forces.

There are at least two ideas that drive this book. The first is that the Philippines was not some isolated archipelago that was accidentally “discovered” by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. Some residents of the Philippines had contact with “the outside world” long before European contact through trade with other Southeast Asian polities and Imperial China.

The second and more important theme is that vibrant cultures existed before outsiders arrived, and they have continued throughout the history of the Philippines, though perhaps not seen or simply ignored by historians and other scholars. The intrusion by the Spaniards might be seen to have changed almost everything, as did the American incursion, and to a lesser extent the Japanese occupation. This is not the case. But if one does not know what was there before, the focus may be upon the intruders—their religion, culture, economies, and the impact they had on the local population—rather than on Filipinos, the local inhabitants. While acknowledging the impact and influence of foreign occupations, I sought in the book to focus on Filipinos and to see them as not merely, or even primarily, reactive.



Damon Woods. Source: Photo courtesy of the author.

Beginning with the pre-Hispanic period, *The Philippines: From Earliest Times to the Present* seeks to present, briefly, the reality of an advanced indigenous culture certainly influenced but not erased by more than three centuries of Spanish occupation. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence on two levels—peasants and elite—of organized resistance to that presence, culminating in what some call a revolution and finally a republic. But this development was cut short by the Americans. When a commonwealth was put in place during the fourth decade of American rule, this was interrupted by World War II and the Japanese occupation. After World War II, the Philippines once again became an independent republic with the growing pains of a newly evolving democracy and its share of ups and down, including the Marcos dictatorship.

The Philippines has emerged in the twenty-first century with a robust and expanding economy, and as an important member of ASEAN. And it has its issues. On November 7, 2013, the most powerful Philippine typhoon on record hit the central part of the archipelago, resulting in more than 6,000 deaths. President Rodrigo Duterte, elected in 2016, has caught the eye of human rights advocates as he has dealt harshly with a drug problem that is far more significant than most realized. Then there is the ongoing conflict with China over islands in the South China Sea. The Philippines has been and will continue to be in the news.

*The Philippines: From Earliest Times to the Present* depicts Filipinos as not passive or merely the recipients of foreign influences. Contrary to the title of Stanley Karnow's 1989 book, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines*, the Philippines is not made in anyone's, including America's, image. Teachers and students should find this book helpful, not only in dealing with the history of the Philippines but also in recognizing that often the histories of developing countries fail to seriously take into account the local population—their culture, their actions, their vision of the world. The Philippines is perhaps best-known today in the West as a place with beautiful beaches and as a wonderful place to vacation. This book will show it to be much more than that.

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