

# Characteristics of a national hero essay sample

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Executive Summary No law, executive order or proclamation has been enacted or issued officially proclaiming any Filipino historical figure as a national hero. However, because of their significant roles in the process of nation building and contributions to history, there were laws enacted and proclamations issued honoring these heroes.

Even Jose Rizal, considered as the greatest among the Filipino heroes, was not explicitly proclaimed as a national hero. The position he now holds in Philippine history is a tribute to the continued veneration or acclamation of the people in recognition of his contribution to the significant social transformations that took place in our country.

Aside from Rizal, the only other hero given an implied recognition as a national hero is Andres Bonifacio whose day of birth on November 30 has been made a national holiday.

Despite the lack of any official declaration explicitly proclaiming them as national heroes, they remain admired and revered for their roles in Philippine history. Heroes, according to historians, should not be legislated. Their appreciation should be better left to academics. Acclamation for heroes, they felt, would be recognition enough. 1. Selection and Proclamation of National Heroes 1. 1 National Heroes Committee

On March 28, 1993 , President Fidel V. Ramos issued Executive Order No. 75 entitled “ Creating the National Heroes Committee Under the Office of the President”.

The principal duty of the Committee is to study, evaluate and recommend Filipino national personages/heroes in due recognition of their sterling character and remarkable achievements for the country.

## 1. 2 Findings and Recommendations of the National Heroes Committee

In compliance with Executive Order No. 75 dated March 28, 1993 , the National Heroes Committee submitted its findings and recommendations.

### 1. 2. 1 Criteria for National Heroes

The Technical Committee of the National Heroes Committee held a series of meetings on June 3, 1993 , August 19, 1993 , September 12, 1994 and November 15, 1995 , defining, discussing and deliberating upon the merits of the various definitions and criteria of a hero. The Committee adopted the following criteria as basis for historical researchers in determining who among the great Filipinos will be officially proclaimed as national heroes:

#### Criteria for National Heroes

(Adopted by the Technical Committee of the National Heroes Committee on June 3, 1993 , Manila . Members of the Committee included Drs. Onofre D. Corpuz, Samuel K. Tan, Marcelino Foronda, Alfredo Lagmay, Bernardita R. Churchill, Serafin D. Quiason, Ambeth Ocampo, then known as Dom Ignacio Maria, Prof. Minerva Gonzales and Mrs. Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil)

1. Heroes are those who have a concept of nation and thereafter aspire and struggle for the nation's freedom. Our own struggle for freedom was begun by Bonifacio and finished by Aguinaldo, the latter formally declaring the

revolution's success. In reality, however, a revolution has no end.

Revolutions are only the beginning. One cannot aspire to be free only to sink back into bondage.

2. Heroes are those who define and contribute to a system or life of freedom and order for a nation. Freedom without order will only lead to anarchy.

Therefore, heroes are those who make the nation's constitution and laws, such as Mabini and Recto. To the latter, constitutions are only the beginning, for it is the people living under the constitution that truly constitute a nation.

3. Heroes are those who contribute to the quality of life and destiny of a nation. (As defined by Dr. Onofre D. Corpuz)

#### Additional Criteria for Heroes

(Adopted by the Technical Committee of the National Heroes Committee on November 15, 1995, Manila)

1. A hero is part of the people's expression. But the process of a people's internalization of a hero's life and works takes time, with the youth forming a part of the internalization.

2. A hero thinks of the future, especially the future generations.

3. The choice of a hero involves not only the recounting of an episode or events in history, but of the entire process that made this particular person a hero. (As defined by Dr. Alfredo Lagmay)

#### 1. 2. 2 Historical Figures Recommended as National Heroes

On November 15, 1995 , the Technical Committee after deliberation and careful study based on Dr. Onofre D. Corpuz' and Dr. Alfredo Lagmay's criteria selected the following nine Filipino historical figures to be recommended as National Heroes:

- a. Jose Rizal
- b. Andres Bonifacio
- c. Emilio Aguinaldo
- d. Apolinario Mabini
- e. Marcelo H. del Pilar
- f. Sultan Dipatuan Kudarat
- g. Juan Luna
- h. Melchora Aquino
- i. Gabriela Silang

1. 2. 3 Status of the Report/Recommendations Submitted by the National Heroes Committee.

Since the submission of the report/recommendations by the National Heroes Committee to then Secretary Ricardo T. Gloria of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports on November 22, 1995 , no action has been taken. This was probably because this might trigger a flood of requests for proclamations. Another possibility is that the proclamations can trigger bitter debates involving historical controversies about the heroes.

2. Laws Honoring/ Commemorating Filipino Historical Figures

2. 1 Heroes

## 2. 1. 1 Jose Rizal

2. 1. 1. 1 Decree of December 20, 1898 , issued by General Emilio Aguinaldo, declared December 30 of every year a day of national mourning in honor of Dr. Jose Rizal and other victims of the Philippine Revolution.

2. 1. 1. 2 Act No. 137, which organized the politico-military district of Morong into the Province of Rizal , was the first official step taken by the Taft Commission to honor our greatest hero and martyr.

## 2. 1. 2 Andres Bonifacio

2. 1. 2. 1 Act No. 2946, enacted by the Philippine Legislature on February 16, 1921 , made November 30 of each year a legal holiday to commemorate the birth of Andres Bonifacio

2. 1. 2. 2 Act No. 2760, issued on February 23, 1918 , confirmed and ratified all steps taken for the creation, maintenance, improvement of national monuments and particularly for the erection of a monument to the memory of Andres Bonifacio

## 2. 1. 3 Other Heroes

2. 1. 3. 1 Act No. 3827, enacted by the Philippine Legislature on October 28, 1931 , declared the last Sunday of August of every year as National Heroes Day.

2. 1. 3. 2 Proclamation No. 510, issued by Pres. Fidel V. Ramos on November 30, 1994 , declared the year 1996 as the year of Filipino Heroes as a tribute

to all Filipinos who, directly and indirectly, gave meaning and impetus to the cause of freedom, justice, Philippine independence and nationhood.

2. 1. 3. 3 R. A. No. 9070, April 8, 2001, declaring the eighteenth of December of every year as a special working public holiday throughout the country to be known as the Graciano Lopez-Jaena Day

## 2. 2 Other Historical Figures

2. 2. 1 R. A. No. 6701, February 10, 1989, declaring September One of every year, the death anniversary of Gregorio Aglipay y Labayan, as Gregorio L. Aglipay Day and a special non-working holiday in the Municipality of Batac, Province of Ilocos Norte

2. 2. 2 R. A. No. 7285, March 24, 1992, declaring February Nineteen of each year as Doña Aurora Aragon Quezon Day a special nonworking holiday in the Province of Aurora in order to commemorate the birth anniversary of Doña Aurora Aragon Quezon, the first President of the Philippine National Red Cross, and Foundation Day of the Province

2. 2. 3 R. A. No. 7805, September 1, 1994, declaring January 28 of every year as a non-working special public holiday in the City of Cavite to be known as Julian Felipe Day

2. 2. 4 R. A. No. 7950, March 25, 1995, declaring December Eighteen of every year as “ Araw ng Laguna” and a special working day in the Province of Laguna and the City of San Pablo to commemorate the memory and death of the late Governor Felicisimo T. San Luis

2. 2. 5 R. A. No. 9067, April 8, 2001 , declaring April 15 of every year as President Manuel A. Roxas Day which shall be observed as a special working public holiday in the Province of Capiz and the City of Roxas

\*From the Reference and Research Bureau Legislative Research Service,  
House of Congress

## WHAT IS A NATIONAL HERO?

On our national hero's 150 birth anniversary, I am forced to rethink my answer to this question once more. In the not so distant past, there has been a lot of question as to why Dr. Jose Rizal is the country's national hero. Renato Constantino argues that he is an American-sponsored hero; that Rizal symbolized non-violence and peaceful advancement of reforms, traits that the American occupiers wanted for Filipinos to adopt and thus prevent further revolts against their hegemony. Others have hailed Andres Bonifacio as the " true" national hero for organizing the first Philippine government and leading the first anti-colonial revolution in Asia. The Retraction Controversy has also placed doubts on Rizal's nationalism and his anti-clerical stance. The questions stem from the fact that our usual notion of a national hero is someone who is courageous, strong, able-bodied, and leads a military force into war against a colonial/imperial power — people such as George Washington, Simon Bolivar, or Sun Yat Sen. Apparently, machismo is still in the psyche most Filipinos.

This notion has to change in our time when even the smallest deeds of self-sacrifice can be considered heroism. In my opinion, for one to be a hero, one must sacrifice him/herself for the liberation its people or as an impetus of



such liberation. Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo falls under this category, both having courageously fought the Spaniards in the battlefield. However, Andres Bonifacio never won any of his battles and usually goes off to save himself once his forces are routed. He really sees it important that people's leader remains alive at the end of the battle rather than sacrifice life and limb. The same way with Emilio Aguinaldo who instead of facing the Americans in the battlefield, has decided to elude them until his arrest in Palanan and subsequent pledge of allegiance to the United States. Dr. Jose Rizal is perhaps the epitome of such self-sacrifice though.

He sacrifices his love life and a quiet life to gather knowledge around the world that would be helpful in the struggle for reforms in the country. He translates famous literary works into Filipino for his countrymen to see (such as works by Hans Christian Andersen and Schiller) and labors to ensure a fair perspective about his country abroad (such as annotating Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*). He uses his own fortune, time and effort to care for his countrymen, as he did when he opened his clinic in Hong Kong or in Dapitan. He enlightens his people about their status in society by writing the *Noli* and the *Fili*. His ultimate sacrifice perhaps is when he refuses to be saved by Bonifacio's revolution and instead gives his own life at execution so that the revolution can have the ultimate inspiration.

Both Bonifacio and Aguinaldo recognized his sacrifices by revering him as the revolution's inspiration. Aguinaldo was first to declare him national hero in 1898, even before the Americans "sponsored" it. Rizal's self-sacrifice has been modeled throughout history by other heroes, such as Manuel L. Quezon

(who sacrificed time, money and effort for the establishment of the Commonwealth), Jose P. Laurel (who sacrificed reputation to collaborate with the enemy and save more Filipinos from the Japanese), Ninoy Aquino (who sacrificed his life at assassination so that the People Power Revolution could push through) and Efren Peñaflorida (who sacrificed time, money and effort to teach the street children of Cavite). In the end, there is no doubt that Rizal is the first to envision himself and his country as a nation of Filipinos and to uphold its liberty from the occupiers. At his 150th birth anniversary, Dr. Jose Rizal will remain as the heart of the Philippine revolution and the Philippine national hero.

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On December 20, 1898, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, as head of the Philippine Revolutionary Government, issued a decree proclaiming Dec. 30 of every year a national day of mourning in honor of Dr. Jose Rizal and the other martyrs of the revolution against Spain. This was just two years after the execution of the hero by the Spanish colonial government. On Feb. 16, 1921, the members of the Philippine Legislature passed Act No. 2496, proclaiming Nov. 30 of every year a legal holiday to commemorate the birth of Andres Bonifacio, founder of the Katipunan. This was just 25 years after the launching of the nationalist revolution against Spain by the Kataastaasan Kagalang-galang na Katipunan nang manga Anak nang Bayan (Highest Honorable Association of Children of the Nation), or Katipunan. Since then, the names of Rizal and Bonifacio have led the parade of illustrious and

valorous heroes honored by generations of Filipinos for their contributions to national unity, freedom and social progress.

#### Revisionist views

But since the 1960s, there has arisen a revisionist historical trend questioning the standing of both Rizal and Bonifacio in the vanguard of that parade of heroes. One school of thought contends that Rizal was not worthy to be considered our foremost national hero because he was “made in USA.” In an article written in 1970, titled “Veneration Without Understanding,” the historian Renato Constantino referred to Rizal as an “American-sponsored hero.” This viewpoint was expressed during the period of social and political activism led by students, workers and peasants against the brewing Marcos dictatorship and against the American war on Vietnam as an expression of resurgent US imperialism.

Constantino claimed that US Governor General Howard Taft set up Rizal as a national hero because Rizal was considered a “reformist” and a “pacifist,” while Bonifacio was a revolutionary who resorted to violence to gain national independence. Since the US colonial rulers naturally wanted to discourage revolution against their regime, they chose Rizal over Bonifacio as the Philippines’ national hero. The message was interpreted by the activists as reflecting their view that it was Bonifacio who most deserved the title of No. 1 Filipino hero. The Taft Commission, which functioned as the US colonial administration in the Philippines from 1900 to 1904, passed Act No. 37, creating the Province of Rizal out of the military district of Morong in honor of Dr. Rizal. The act did not formally declare Rizal a national hero, nor proclaim

a national holiday in his honor. Besides, the Taft Commission represented a foreign government that had gained power through force and could not speak for the Filipino people. Popular sentiment

General Aguinaldo, acknowledged leader of the de facto Philippine Republic, proclaimed Rizal a national hero ahead of the American colonial administration. In compliance with his decree of Dec. 20, 1898, the people of Daet, Camarines Norte, immediately started a subscription for the building of a monument for Dr. Rizal at the town's plaza. The monument was inaugurated in February 1899, shortly after the outbreak of the Philippine-American War on Feb. 1. Hence, the proclamation of Rizal as a national hero was an authentic act of the Filipino people even before the United States officially consolidated its rule.

By no means can it be said that he was an “ American-sponsored” hero. If at all, in supposedly choosing Rizal as our national hero, Taft was only abiding by the popular sentiment of the Filipino people as already expressed through General Aguinaldo, whose government was then sovereign throughout the entire nation, except in Manila. The proclamation of Bonifacio as a national hero was made by the Philippine Legislature, composed of duly elected Filipino representatives of the Philippine Legislature, then enjoying self-rule under the American colonial regime. He, too, should be considered a genuine choice of the Filipinos as a national hero despite the objection of the American administration that he was too much of a revolutionary.

Bonifacio revised

Bonifacio, like Rizal, has also suffered from historical revisionism. The most

recent revisionist writing about Bonifacio was that by Bryan C. Paraiso, a senior historical sites development officer of the National Historical Commission. In Paraiso's article published by the Philippine Daily Inquirer on Nov. 30, 2012, on the occasion of Bonifacio's 149th birth anniversary, the hero reveals fervor in his writings. Paraiso described Bonifacio as an "elusive" historical character. Paraiso went so far as to favorably quote an American historian, Glenn Anthony May, that "the Bonifacio celebrated in history textbooks and memorialized in statues around the Philippines is in reality something closer to a national myth." May, who has written a number of controversial books on Philippine history emphasizing the role of the elite in the Philippine revolution and in the armed resistance against American occupation, is a history professor at the University of Oregon.

Paraiso rejected the judgment of Filipino historians like Epifanio de los Santos, who had tried to vindicate the image of Bonifacio against his detractors. Paraiso considered the writings of De los Santos and other Filipino historians "subjective" interpretation, implying that the foreigners' interpretation of Philippine history is "objective." In fact, the observations of the American historians on our anticolonial struggles could just as well carry bias to justify the colonial conquests of our country. But is it necessary and helpful for Filipinos to pit their heroes against each other, endlessly debating who are more deserving of popular adoration? Unique role

Every hero plays his own unique role in history, which is that to defend and promote the interests of the nation at any particular time of national crisis, sacrificing his or her own life and self-interest. George Washington and

Abraham Lincoln are both American primary heroes performing different roles at different times in their country's historical development. They, too, had their critics. Rizal consciously planted and nourished the seed of nationalism. In his novels, essays and proclamations he promoted the idea of freedom and the eventuality of national independence. At first Rizal advocated reforms. But when the plea for reforms failed, he advocated independence, even through revolution. This is evident in his novel "Noli Me Tangere," which emphasized reforms, and its sequel, "El Filibusterismo," which preached revolution. Rizal's principal essays, "The Indolence of the Filipinos," and "The Philippines a Century Hence," argued for an end to colonialism, by reforms if possible, and, if not, through revolution. Bonifacio read the novels of Rizal and possibly his two nationalistic essays that were published by La Solidaridad, the periodical of reformist Filipino emigres in Madrid, which Rizal had joined but which he later left when he finally realized that their agitation for reforms were falling on the deaf ears. It was then that Rizal wrote the "Fili." La Liga Filipina

It was Rizal's writings and his growing reputation as a leader of Filipino nationalism that led Bonifacio in 1892 to join Rizal's La Liga Filipina, an organization that was in essence a shadow government for an independent nation. The organization of the Liga by Rizal was cited in the indictment against him as one of the acts of treason he allegedly had committed against the Spanish regime. The stated aims of the Liga, including, "To unite the whole archipelago into one compact, vigorous and homogenous body," were correctly interpreted by the Spanish authorities as an attempt at separatism.

This led the Spanish government to exile Rizal to the fastnesses of Mindanao. He was eventually executed upon conviction of treason.

In his memoirs of the Philippine Revolution, Apolinario Mabini recalled that he met Bonifacio at the organization of the Liga. After Rizal's banishment on July 6, 1892, Bonifacio and a handful of other members of the Liga tried to keep it alive by continuing to solicit contributions for La Solidaridad. Mabini, was elected secretary of the Supreme Council of the Liga after Rizal's arrest. He later became president of the Cabinet of President Aguinaldo and secretary of foreign affairs in the first Philippine Republic that fought the United States for independence. The late former Sen. Claro M. Recto, the greatest Filipino nationalist of our time, in a speech in 1960 to a civic convention in Baguio City, identified "Rizal, the poet, thinker, realist; Bonifacio, the idealist man of action; and Mabini, the statesman," as "three of the greatest nationalists this country has produced." Katipunan

When the Liga finally dissolved because of disagreements among its officers, Bonifacio formed the Katipunan, which was totally dedicated to the objective of overthrowing the Spanish colonial government through armed revolution. Bonifacio had come to the conclusion that the period for petitions had ended, and that revolution had become an imperative. The Katipunan was therefore a direct outgrowth of the Liga Filipina. Bonifacio used the name of "Jose Rizal" as one of the passwords for the members of the secret society. It was an acknowledgment by Bonifacio that Rizal was his mentor and inspiration, if not his leader. All revolutions start out with petitions for reforms. Thus it was with the French, Russian and American revolutions. The US Declaration of

Independence states: “ In every state of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.”

The rejection of the petitions for reforms by the La Solidaridad propagandists, including representation in the Spanish parliament, paved the way for the bloody Katipunan revolution for separatism. In his seminal essay, “ The Philippines A Century Hence,” published by La Solidaridad from Sept. 30, 1898, to Feb. 1, 1890, Rizal wrote that if the reforms were not granted, “ the Philippines one day will declare herself inevitably and unmistakably independent .... Necessity is the strongest god the world knows, and necessity is the result of physical laws put into action by moral forces.” Rizal planted the seed of revolution, and Bonifacio watered it. They were the twins of historical necessity. The dynamic of history brought them together, each to fulfill fated roles in the struggle of our people for nation-building and independence. That their legacies should be made to compete against each other goes against the law of history, which mandates that each historical figure, like every generation, has a definite role to play in the destiny of a nation. Divide and rule

Revisionists are employing the time-honored colonial tactic of “ divide and rule” to impose and perpetuate their dominance over conquered peoples. Those who play this game, pitting our heroes against each other, and planting seeds of suspicion about their worth, are playing the game of our former colonial masters. As Recto said in the same speech, “ A firm belief in the genius of our race and in the capacity of the people for advancement



toward the attainment of their destiny is another basic component of nationalism.” Destroy that nationalism and you destroy the nation. After all, colonialism does not end in the mere overthrow of the colonial power. Colonial institutions are left behind, especially after 400 years of foreign domination (350 by the Spaniards and 50 by the Americans). There are leftovers of colonialism that must be swept away completely before the colonial subjects can be totally free, especially when they are embedded in the habits of the mind. The destruction of the characters of national heroes are tantamount to sabotage of the nation’s strength and noble purposes.

Continued efforts to annihilate the message of Rizal by preaching that he had retracted his writings is a subterfuge to destroy nationalism. The same goes with efforts to mythologize the persona of Rizal’s partner in nationalism and revolution, Bonifacio. Bertolt Brecht, European poet and playwright, in his play, “ Galileo,” has written, “ Unhappy the land that needs heroes.” The Philippines is an unhappy land of misery, poverty and underdevelopment. It needs heroes. Why destroy them? Paraiso denigrated Bonifacio even on the occasion of his death anniversary, which the nation reverently observed. Paraiso said, “ Fate has been unkind to Bonifacio. His mystery-shrouded life ended in ignominious death.” According to the American Heritage Dictionary, “ ignominious” means “ marked by shame or disgrace: dishonorable.” It is bad enough that this honorable and courageous “ son of the people” (anak ng bayan) should be called a “ myth” by an obscure American historian, and his death should be called shameful or disgraceful by an employee of the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. The courage of Bonifacio

It is true that Bonifacio was executed by an order of Aguinaldo in a struggle for power within the revolutionary movement. But Bonifacio faced his fate bravely, with the same invincible courage that he had mustered in building the revolutionary movement from a handful of patriots to thousands of poorly armed zealous partisans eager to lay down their lives for freedom and independence. Bonifacio did this through four long years of painstaking recruitment in secret rites in darkened rooms under the very noses of the increasingly nervous colonial and clerical authorities, with every moment fraught with the danger of discovery, torture and death. And finally, when the movement was inadvertently discovered, he launched the revolution armed only with a revolver, assaulting a military arsenal, igniting the revolutionary war that vindicated and upheld the honor and manhood of generations of Filipinos who had been chained in colonial thrall for three and a half centuries.

Following disagreements in the ranks of the revolutionaries, Bonifacio was shot and wounded as he resisted capture by soldiers he considered renegades to the revolution. His captor, Col. Lazaro Makapagal, claimed that Bonifacio shed “bitter tears” when, together with his brother, he faced certain death, but he did not beg for his life, and the tears he shed were certainly due to his frustration that the revolutionary movement that he led to fruition was in danger of disaster. Bonifacio’s background showed that whatever his faults, lack of courage was not one of them. As the quintessential revolutionary, Mao Zedong said, “A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; .... A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class

overthrows another.” It is not so orderly like romantic fiction. Ratified by the people

Yes, Bonifacio’s death was a personal tragedy. But it was not “ ignominious.” Even as he considered himself a victim of injustice by some of his fellow revolutionaries, he did not abandon the revolution. He decided to leave Cavite, the province of his factional adversaries, to continue to fight the revolution elsewhere. “ Heroes are those who have a concept of nation and therefore aspire and struggle for the nation’s freedom,” said the technical committee of the National Heroes Commission in a report to President Fidel V. Ramos on June 3, 1993. Rizal and Bonifacio met that standard completely. They are, so far, the only heroes who have been honored by decree and law with national holidays. The rest are equally honored with special holidays. The members of the committee who drafted the criteria for heroes were recognized historians and writers: Dr. Onofre D. Corpuz, Samuel K. Tan, Marcelino Foronda, Alfredo Lagmay, Bernardito R. Churchill, Serafin D. Quiason, Ambeth Ocampo (then known as the monk Dom Ignacio Maria), Prof. Minerva Gonzales and Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil. Other historical figures

The committee recommended nine other historical figures to be recognized as national heroes in a report to the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (Decs) in a report on Nov. 22, 1995. But the Decs took no action on the recommendation for fear that it would stir controversy. Rizal and Bonifacio, who had already been declared national heroes by acts of Congress, led the list of heroes made by the committee. The choice of Rizal and Bonifacio as the foremost national heroes has been ratified by the

Filipino people through many generations as evidenced by the statues erected spontaneously in their honor in towns and cities throughout the archipelago. Historical revisionism, for whatever reason, will not erase this heartfelt veneration in concrete and stone by all Filipinos nationwide.