

**FIDEL A. REYES**  
(1878-1967)

Author of "*Aves de Rapiña*"

Journalist and nationalist, Fidel Alejandro Reyes was born on May 3, 1878 in Lipa, Batangas. There is little information about his early education. He may have studied at the *Escuela de Latinidad* that was headed by Sebastian Virrey, a famous professor during his time, or at the Grenas School, where his brother, Dr. Carmelo Reyes, also studied. However, records show that he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán in 1895.

Two years after returning to his hometown in 1896, Reyes was appointed *delegado de provincia* in 1898 under the revolutionary government. Inspired with nationalistic fervor, he helped found the *Club Democrático Independista*, a patriotic society of Batangueños dedicated to the attainment of independence for the country. During this time, he edited the weekly newspaper *Columnas Volantes de la Federación Malaya*.

With the installation of civil government in the country under the Americans, Reyes returned to the University of Santo Tomas to take up pharmacy. In 1902, he passed the board examination for pharmacists, but it was his career as journalist that he pursued.

Reyes served under Rafael Palma in the newspaper *El Nacionalismo* and under Macario Adriatico, in *Independencia*.

In 1907 or 1908, he was appointed city editor of the nationalistic newspaper *El Renacimiento*, founded in 1901. At the time of his appointment, its chief editor was Teodoro M. Kalaw. The paper was then engaged in an ethical crusade, publishing strongly worded editorials against corrupt and abusive public officials. It did not spare highly placed Americans in government as well as powerful businessmen and *caciques*, which used their influence and privileges to amass their fortunes.

Reyes was responsible for writing the scathing editorial, "Aves de Rapiña" (Birds of Prey), which elicited a libel suit from Dean Worcester.

A member of the Philippine Commission who was concurrently secretary of the interior, Worcester was a known anti-Filipino who abused his powers and was very unpopular with the people. He was a zoological collector for the University of Michigan from 1887 to 1890 before being named to the commission. Filipino journalists had long been accusing him of dereliction of duty as secretary of the interior.

For the said editorial, which was published on October 30, 1908, Reyes was arrested together with Teodoro Kalaw and Martin Ocampo, the paper's publisher.

In addition to the criminal aspect of the libel case, Worcester filed a civil suit against Kalaw and Ocampo, demanding compensation for moral damages. Both cases were tried with Worcester present in every court session, imposing his intimidating official presence on the court. Testifying in his favor were such high government officials as Governor James Smith, Secretary of Public Instruction Newton Gilbert, and Justice Gregorio Araneta. This prompted Kalaw to call the libel suit "a case against the government".

Reyes, Kalaw, and Ocampo were not without their supporters and sympathizers, including Filipino journalists in Spanish, English, and Tagalog newspapers who rallied to their side. Prominent lawyers like Felipe Agoncillo and other people offered free legal services and money for their defense. The trials of the twin case attracted nationwide attention, with even students from schools near their venue attending court sessions.

Ultimately Kalaw and Ocampo were convicted. As a result, they lost not only *El Renacimiento* but also its Tagalog counterpart, *Muling Pagsilang*, the printing presses and all other facilities being sold at public auction to pay Worcester his moral damages. The case reached the United States Supreme Court. Although it sustained the decision of the lower courts, Kalaw and Ocampo did not spend a single day in jail. President Woodrow Wilson pardoned them in 1914.

A *cause celebre*, the case generated publicity mileage for Reyes, Kalaw, and Ocampo in the course of the trials. Kalaw ran for assemblyman in the 1909 elections, and won a resounding victory over his rival. Entering politics in 1912, Reyes was elected to the Philippine Assembly, representing the third district of Batangas.

Among his legislative contributions were a bill that eventually became Act 2479, which established "sugar controls", and Act 2198, paving the way for the establishment of the Coconut Production Board.

Despite his election to the legislature, he continued his journalistic work, founding and editing the *Revista Economica*, mouthpiece of the Asociacion Economica de Filipinas. He also wrote for *La Opinion y El Comercio*.

In 1918, Reyes was appointed assistant director of the Bureau of Commerce and Industry. He served as its director from 1924 to 1929, during which he became managing editor of its organ, the *Commerce and Industry Journal*. He resigned from the bureau after being implicated in a controversial case. In the post-war period, he served as city assessor of Manila, to which President Osmeña had appointed him.

He married Josefa Katigbak in 1911.

He died on September 10, 1967.

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