



WHY WE CELEBRATE RIZAL DAY EVERY 30TH DAY OF DECEMBER

By: ***Quennie Ann J. Palafox***

On the 30th day of December yearly, the whole nation observes the death anniversary of our great national hero, Dr. Jose P. Rizal. This is to commemorate the nationalism and martyrdom of Rizal which is highlighted by the raising of the Philippine flag and wreath laying-ceremonies at the Luneta Park, Rizal Shrine in Calamba and Zamboanga and Rizal Monument in Baguio City. For this reason, 30 December is declared a national non-working holiday. The theme of this year's Rizal Day celebration is "Rizalismo: Sandigan ng Kaunlaran, Pagkakaisa at Kapayapaan" which is apparently timely to the status quo with the economic crisis and political conflicts confronting the Filipinos. We often come up with a theme such as the abovementioned to arouse the nationalistic fervor of the people and join hand in hand in the celebration of Rizal's martyrdom. Another reason for the said celebration is perhaps to bring the Filipinos together as they immortalize Rizal and his significance in contemporary times.

It is a controversial fact that we celebrate Rizal day on December 30 of each year, since it his death anniversary it is the opposite of the more jovial occasion that is his birthday. Jose Rizal was born on the 19th of June 1861 in the town of Calamba. He was re-arrested by the Spaniards because of his alleged involvement with the series of revolts that broke out in 1896 referred to as the Philippine Revolution. Thus, from November 3, 1896, to the date of his execution, he was again committed to Fort Santiago. In order to get rid of him immediately, he was convicted of rebellion, sedition and of forming illegal association. In the morning of December 30, 1896, Rizal, then 35 years old, was shot at Bagumbayan Field. In hindsight, both the dates June 19 and December 30 are of historical relevance to the life of Rizal as the former is his date of birth while the latter is his date of death. Debates have cropped up in the past on the appropriateness of celebrating December 30 as Rizal Day.

The observance of Rizal Day goes back to the decree issued by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo on Dec. 20, 1898 declaring Dec. 30 as the anniversary of Jose Rizal's death and also as "a national day of mourning", for Rizal and other victims of the Spanish dominion throughout its three centuries rule. He issued a directive that all national flags shall be hoisted at half-mast from 12:00 noon on December 29 and all offices of the government shall be closed the whole day on December 30 as a sign of mourning. This decree appeared in the government organ, *El Heraldo de la Revolucion* issued on December 25, 1898 in two languages, Tagalog and Spanish.

The first ever celebration of Rizal Day in the Philippines was held in Manila on December 30, 1898 by the Club Filipino which coincided with the unveiling of the Rizal monument in the town Daet in Camarines Norte. The monument was the first ever erected in honor of Rizal. Aguinaldo's revolutionary government did not last long when the Americans came in and established their rule in the country. The Americans, conscious of the veneration of Filipinos for Jose Rizal, and perhaps to enliven the spirit of the people, came out with Act. No. 243 enacted on September 28, 1901 which granted the right to use public land upon the Luneta in the City of Manila upon which to erect a statue of Jose Rizal from a fund to be raised by Public subscription. The committee tasked to raise funds by subscription and the for causing the erection of the monument and the expenditure of the funds consisted of Pascual Poblete, Paciano Rizal, Juan Tuason, Teodoro R. Yangco, Mariano Limjap, Maximo Paterno, Ramon Genato, Tomas G. del Rosario and Dr. Ariston Bautista, most of whom had personally known Rizal. The shrine was finally unveiled on December 30, 1913 during Rizal's 17th death anniversary. On February 1, 1902, the Philippine Commission enacted Act. No. 345, which set December 30 of each year as Rizal Day, and made it one of the ten official holidays of the Philippines.

December 30 as national holiday continued as statutes were enacted by succeeding presidents. Republic Act No. 229 was enacted by President Quirino on June 9, 1948 to create a committee to take charge of the proper celebration of Rizal Day in every municipality and chartered city. On November 8, 2002, Pres. Arroyo enacted Administrative Order No. 44 directing the chairman of the National Historical Institute to spearhead the observance of the 106th anniversary of the martyrdom of Dr. Jose P. Rizal on December 30, 2002.

There are moves to change the observance of Rizal Day from December 30 to June 19 his birth date. This move is based on the argument that June 19 is a more positive celebration as it his birth anniversary, and that it is close to significant days in the formation of Filipino nationhood such as the National Flag Day on May 28 and Independence Day on June 12. Another point for the contention is that December 30 is not well attended as people are on their Christmas vacation.

Both December 30 and June 19 are significant dates to the Filipinos and should be remembered and celebrated by the Filipinos as June 19 marks Rizal's birth and December 30 his martyrdom, symbolizing his great love for country, the reason he gave up his life.

Ref.: <http://nhcp.gov.ph/why-we-celebrate-rizal-day-every-30th-day-of-december/>

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