# The Declining Reverence for the Philippine Flag

The Declining Reverence for the Philippine FlagQuennie Ann J. PalafoxHistory Researcher IINational Historical Commission of the Philippines A century after the banning of the flag, we shall again celebrate National Flag Day on May 28, 2012. It was in those dark days of the American occupation of the Philippines when the Philippine Commission passed Act No. 1696 or the Flag Law of 1907 which prohibited the Filipinos from using or displaying the Philippine flag, the Katipunan flag and other revolutionary emblems in public. The Americans legislated the ban to curb nationalist sentiments as flags were treated as seditious materials that would incite rebellion. This move cultivated animosity on the part of the Filipinos. To rectify this status quo, Senator Rafael Palma sponsored Senate Bill No. 1, repealing the Flag Law of 1907. But the bill failed to pass into law. It took twelve years before the ban on the Philippine flag was lifted when Governor General Francis Burton Harrison signed on October 24, 1919, Act No. 2871. On March 26, 1920, the Philippine Legislature enacted Act. No 2928 which provided for the adoption of the Philippine flag as the official flag of the Philippines. In 1932, however, a Chinese violated an act against the Philippine flag in his eagerness to promote his laundry business located at Lara Street in Binondo, Manila. He used the picture of the Filipino flag as a poster to state that all kinds of clothes were cleaned in his laundry shop. The accused was found guilty and fined twenty pesos. While our forefathers fought their way to repeal the Flag Law of 1907 that barred the Filipinos from displaying their flag, many Filipinos today do not respect the flag. Some use the Philippine flag as props or costume, an incorrect way of expressing nationalism. Recently, a local girl group was castigated for wearing costumes designed to imitate the national flag as seen on the cover of their latest album. Even foreign artists have joined the fad of making an outrageous display of the Philippine flag through their costumes like musician Steven Patrick Morrissey who recently performed in Manila wearing a pink shirt and jeans, and the Philippine flag wrapped around his waist. Such acts violate the present Flag Law which prohibits the wearing of the National Flag in whole or part as a costume or uniform. Philippine flags fly all over the country but one can sometimes see shameful instances of tattered flags on display, or flags inverted or arranged in improper order such as those on the flagpoles of some government agencies. Last year, a group of men were caught on video mishandling and then wrapping the flags over their heads to protect them from the sun after removing the flags from the poles. This is against the Flag Law, since it prohibits the mutilation, defacing, defiling, trampling on, casting contempt, or committing any act or omission casting dishonor on the Philippine national flag. A similar case happened in 1999 when a former Barangay official in Tacloban City who in trying to abide by the city ordinance requiring motorcab owners to put curtains on their motorcabs, used a Philippine flag as curtain. She cut the flag into two and placed half, bearing the three stars and the sun, upside down in the back of the driver's seat. The other half, she hung in the cab's entrance. As punishment of the lady, the police chief superintendent ordered her to sing the National Anthem and recite the Panatang Makabayan. On her first try, she failed to sing in full the national anthem, as well as recite in full, the oath of allegiance. This seems to typify the Filipinos lack of awareness or appreciation of the relevance of the Philippine flag and the role it occupies in our history. Displaying the flag improperly reflects our lack of nationalism as we do not give justice to what the flag symbolizes for our country. This is a disgrace to the national flag because it is not mere a piece of cloth, it embodies the ideals of our forefathers who sacrificed their lives for the sake of freedom. It was the late Senator Blas F. Ople who authored the bill which became Republic Act No. 8491 "An Act Prescribing the Code of the National Flag, Anthem, Motto, Coat-of-Arms and other Heraldic Items and Devices of the Philippines" in 1998. This law penalizes any act casting dishonor, ridicule or contempt on the national flag or the national anthem. The law provides rules, guidelines and standards on the proper hoisting and display of the flag; technical specification and criteria in the making of the flag; allowable uses, as well as prohibited acts, relating to the flag; and the correct rendition of the national anthem. In 2010, the House of Representatives passed the House Bill 465 or An Act Prescribing the Code of the National Flag, Anthem, Motto, Coat-of-Arms and Other Heraldic Items and Devices of the Philippines which updated the earlier law and has more teeth. As a measure of protection for the National Anthem, the Philippine Flag and other heraldic items, the law criminalizes the improper use of the Philippine flag and other heraldic items and devices as advertising tools for political or private purposes; and as clothing or fashion accessories in ways that are also prohibited. Under the Flag and Heraldic Code, the flag should never be used to cover a desk or table; as covering for a ceiling or receptacle; or as drapery of any sort whatsoever. When used in unveiling a statue or monument, the flag should not be allowed to touch the ground. It cannot be displayed in front of buildings or offices occupied by foreigners or even in local discotheques, cockpits, night and day clubs, casinos, gambling joints and places of vice or where frivolity prevails. The Philippine Flag should not be used as a pennant in the hood, side, back and top of motor vehicles. It is also prohibited to add any word, figure, mark, picture, design, drawings, advertisement, or imprint of any nature on the National flag. The Philippine flag has stood as witness to the glorious events in our struggle to attain independence. The flag was hoisted for the first time at the port of Cavite Nuevo on May 28, 1898, the same day the Battle of Alapan was won by the Filipinos against the Spanish forces in Imus. This served as the historical basis for declaring May 28 as the National Flag Day. The Philippine flag was formally raised during the proclamation of Philippine independence in Kawit, Cavite on June 12, 1898. It was again raised when our sovereignty was given back to us by the United States on July 4, 1946. On National Flag Day every 28th of May, we honor not only the Philippine flag, but also what our heroes have fought for. Let National Flag Day be our reminder that we are one nation enjoying the benefits of sovereignty united by the ideals of democracy. Let it be a moment to pause and take the time to appreciate what the flag represents for each Filipino. Thus, let us sing with immense pride the national anthem and show respect to the national flag- mirrors of our greatness as a race.