

# Symbolic Defiance: Care and Resistance Through Community

While direct and violent confrontation against imperialist regimes meant risking death or other forms of severe punishment, many Pilipino natives resorted to symbolic defiance through everyday actions. This form of resistance has largely been neglected by history, often regarded as merely “bad manners” or laziness; however, the strengthening of community bonds within the colonized territories represented a form of solidarity and care that thrived throughout Spanish and American occupation. As historian Fernando A. Santiago, Jr. writes in his article on symbolic defiance in the Philippines, “What makes everyday politics distinct from other forms is that it ‘involves little or no organizations, is usually low profile and private behavior, and is done by people who probably do not regard their action as political.’” (Santiago 143).



[15-17777](#)  
Children Playing



[15-17776](#)  
3 children playing "poker" by lamplight

Everyday resistance was therefore not about epic political leaders or powerful rebel groups, but about the ordinary and powerless who desired some semblance of agency. The photographs included in this section of the exhibit attempt to illuminate some of the neglected stories of mutual aid and care through everyday resistance - whether through friendships, religion, or simply staring directly at the cameraman. Some depict children at play; others show ceremonial practices. They are not centered on occupation or confrontation as the photographs' central theme.



[13-2956](#)

Native police & native women dancing on US Army parade ground

For instance, even while most of the subjects captured do not acknowledge the photographer, Roy Franklin Barton, he is still present in an almost voyeuristic and intimate sense. The first photograph of children playing (15-17777) has a tension that forces the viewer to make eye contact with the subjects, as if interrupting their activity. The fifth image (13-2915) is captured at a downward angle and conveys a physical distance from the crowd. Yet, there is nothing inherently political about dancing, playing poker, or simply gathering. It is the juxtaposition of their quotidian activities within the colonial context that implicitly demonstrates their symbolic defiance, refusing to acknowledge or show deference to an oppressive force.



[13-2909](#)

Rice Festival: ceremonial drinking



[13-2915](#)

Children holding stalks of rice & tossing an object into the air