

War as a Form of Resistance

One of the ways in which Pilipinos resisted colonization is through direct organized confrontation. After years of revolting against the Spanish, Pilipinos from different regions, tribes, and organizations shifted focus towards the Americans. This method of resistance is more known and discussed in contemporary history books and classes; however, it is often forgotten that while there was a national revolutionary movement led by Emilio Aguinaldo, many Indigenous groups and people in the provinces confronted the Americans on their own via guerrilla warfare.

The Indigenous Peoples of the Cordillera region, including the Ifugao and Kalinga, originally fled to the Mountain Provinces to escape Spanish colonization. Although not completely isolated in the mountains, they were able to preserve their tribal organization, customs, and culture. However, when Americans took over the Philippines, the Cordillera region was heavily under siege due to their advanced agriculture—simply put, taking control of the region was a strategic move that would greatly benefit the Americans.

During the Philippine-American war and thereafter, people from the Cordillera region could be seen in both sides, all hoping to receive some level of peace and independence from the Americans.



Moro Warriors
[13-3019](#)

The Moro Rebellion (1899-1913) is a short period of the Moro people's 400 years of resistance against colonial rule. After the Philippines' transfer of power from Spain to the United States in 1898, the Mindanao region (and so was the rest of the country), faced violent political turmoil. The United States appointed governors and implemented demonstrations of brutality to intimidate the Moro people into submission. They used tactics such as privatizing land that used to be communally owned, forcing Moros to convert to Christianity, ordering disarmaments, and wrapping Moro corpses with pig skin - a practice that is considered haram in Muslim religion. The 14-year long rebellion formally ended with the Battle of Bud Bagsak, where Americans introduced the Colt .45 pistol in warfare and wiped out all Moro soldiers, including their leader Datu Amil.



Soldiers white & native in long parade up winding road. Natives line the road to watch

[13-3002](#)

In the early days of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), Spain and the US created a narrative of American salvation through mock battles, which made many Pilipinos believe that the US would be granting them freedom. During the war, however, it became clear that the US was there to colonize and claim the country. American soldiers used torture and scorched-earth tactics to subvert and suppress the Pilipinos quicker. While many Pilipinos believed that they must fight to resist American imperialism, a lot also believed in cooperation with the American army to preserve life, culture, and existence. Whether it be due to fear or genuine belief in allyship, Indigenous People were particularly instrumental in the victory of the United States in the Philippine-American War due to their familiarity of the land.



Rifle
[10-202](#)

The western warfare technology was more advanced than the Pilipinos', which contributed to their victory. While the Americans had plenty of artillery and advanced weapons such as guns and bayonets, many Pilipino revolutionaries from all over the country relied heavily on knife-like weapons such as Bolo knives (also known as itak, sundang, buneng, or binangon), kalis, sibat, balisong, and many others. On the occasions the Pilipino men had weapons and artillery to match the Americans, they were only able to steal very few. In the end, 20 000 Pilipinos perished as a direct result of the war.



Squad of native soldiers

[13-3008](#)

Because they remained largely independent of colonial control during the Spanish era, the Ifugaos continued to have very strong ties to their culture. Even though they have been forced to adopt many Westernized practices, they were able to incorporate their traditions into warfare and everyday life. As portrayed in the photograph, the Pilipino soldiers are wearing American military jackets but are also wearing the traditional Ifugao male clothing called *bahag* (loincloth).

While waging direct war was one of the main ways the Pilipino people resisted colonization, this is not the only method they used. In fact, Pilipinos countered colonization even outside the battlefield and into their daily lives. Even though not all battles were won and the Americans ultimately took control of the Philippines, the Pilipinos' sacrifice of life is proof of their dedication to preserve autonomy, culture, and existence.