THE EDUCATION OF A GREAT PLEBEIAN:

*Presenting Andres Bonifacio as a Liberal Reformist*

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Introduction

Andres Bonifacio, deemed the Great Plebeian had always been viewed as a poster boy of the uneducated and yet zealous leaders of the country. He is the banner of the people who believe that leadership is not honed through education but rather through a zealous desire to serve the country, as Bonifacio clearly had the zealous desire to free the motherland from her capturers: the Spaniards by the use of force and implement a revolution that is sure to make the country better. This is considered by most as a complete 180 from Rizal’s original view, a quiet reform obtained through intellect and education. For this reason Bonifacio and Rizal had always been viewed as opposite ends of the pole, two great heroes who had different views on how the country could be liberated from the Spanish colonial regime.

This, however, is merely scratching the surface of Andres Bonifacio and all the wonders that he managed to accomplish in his lifetime. It is true, however, that in the latter stages of his life, before his death, Bonifacio took up the banner of being a reformist and believed that force and the total eviction of the Spaniards is the only way to liberate the country, however, the revolution conducted by Bonifacio was in itself influenced by the liberalist view introduced by Rizal to the Philippines. Moreover, Bonifacio was actually a member of Rizal’s *Liga Filipina* which was established by Rizal in the country to educate the masses on the concepts of liberalism and free masonry.

That being said, Bonifacio, being influenced by liberalism, a concept purely based on the powers of the intellect to bring forth change and peace, Andres Bonifacio, contrary to popular belief, is a highly educated man, one of the few proclaimed autodidacts, a follower of Rizal’s liberal thinking and is deemed as Rizal’s contemporary by Nick Joaquin in his article “Why Fell the Supremo”. His label as the “great plebeian” is true only in reference to his stature in life, that
being one of the common people or the masses, however, this does not imply that he is uneducated. The circumstances surrounding his birth, his poverty and ultimately, the way he was portrayed in the mock trial conducted by the Magdalo party evidently shaped contemporary views on Bonifacio as the uneducated.

**The Great Plebeian: The Ilustrado versus The Indio**

Andres Bonifacio is deemed as the Great Plebeian. Plebeian, in common definitions generally mean a commoner, or during the Roman times one who was of the lower class.¹ It denotes therefore to the fact that someone comes from the masses, a commoner class and in no way refers to the intellectual or educational state of a person. However, a shift in the meaning of Plebeian is seen in reference to Bonifacio. Although in part, the plebeian actually denies his humble roots, there is an unspoken connotation to Bonifacio’s inferior intellect and lack of education is included in the definition.

A great part of Bonifacio’s persona as the uneducated and uncultured indio, is precisely because of the way the world perceives the ilustrado. The term ilustrado is applied only to a highly exclusive group of people who received certain benefits, if you will that the common people, the masses specifically the indios, do not. The ilustrado is someone who is a person of intellect. In the Philippines, the ilustrado was also a matter of social class, more than a term to denote intellectual ideals.²

The ilustrado were the middle class, the Rizals, the del Pilars and the Lunas. The people who are able to afford an education in Europe and become exposed to the reality that Spain in itself is actually a stilted country, overshadowed by Britain and Germany in wealth, culture and education. The ilustrado are considered liberals because liberalism, specifically, political

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¹ Plebeian, The Merriam Webster Dictionary  
liberalism was the school of thought they were exposed to in their studies all over Europe. The concept of the Renaissance was strong in Europe in those days and it would be next to impossible not to be influenced one way or the other by the spirit of Enlightenment. Rizal, for instance, built his ideals for the Philippines on the concepts of the Renaissance and liberalism, not wanting to evict the Spaniards from the Philippines but merely to have the Philippines recognized as a province of Spain and have racial equality, following the concept of liberty, equality and fraternity of the masons.\(^3\)

This then raises a pertinent separation between liberalism and revolution which primarily denotes the primary difference between the ilustrado and the indio. Note that the discourse focuses on political reform and revolution, as it was the focus of Bonifacio and Rizal as well as the other heroes.

Political liberalism and political revolution both have the same goal, the betterment of the political system. However the means of this change as well as the meaning of “better political system” varies between the two.

Political liberalism implements political reform in that the constitution must be changed in order to cater to the needs of the masses and provide equality through mutual rights. These mutual rights will then nullify all social stratifications and will allow everyone to be equal regardless of social status, nationality or gender.\(^4\)

In the ideology of political reform, the improvement of the law and constitution includes establishing an electoral system that gives power to the gentility, or the middle class who received formal education. The gentility will then form a political party that will then facilitate

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the political reforms in the government. The political reform coalesces into the international recognition of each country's rights and thus establish that each country is equal through the shared international rights. In effect, the notion of superior races is also abolished. Every country is then expected to take part in the world-wide movement of improving the political system. The white man's burden is a fallacy. Each country has the ability to improve its situation through the help of the educated. In effect, political reform guided by the spirit of liberalism then sees a better political system as a system that allows all nation states to be unified and recognize each other's independence as a movement for peace and betterment.  

Political revolution, on the other hand is caused by an act of oppression that leads to a fervent desire to bring down the tyrant that suppresses the political freedom and in effect the personal freedom of everyone within the nation state. The revolution therefore, aims to bring down the current dysfunctional system, contrary to the reform's desire to simply improve upon the system and establish a new system that will evidently uphold all their rights. However, most revolutions in history resulted in failure with a few exceptions.

There are many ideologies that guide a political revolution including Marxism, Pacifism, Fascism and even Anarchy which had been evident throughout history, however, the time of Bonifacio's revolt did not showcase these ideologies. A different kind of ideology guided the revolution during those times, as inspired by the Cuban, American and French revolutions. This ideology is the enlightenment. Under this ideology, the revolution will eventually implement liberalism, wherein everyone will have equality through rights and the educated man, the ilustrado will be needed to lead the new government.

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5 William Connely, *The Terms of Political Discourse* 3rd Ed. (United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2008), 179.
6 Connely, 139
Thus, in the context of Bonifacio's revolution, this ideology spurned on the great conflict between Bonifacio and Aguinaldo. Whereas Bonifacio was deemed as someone incapable of leading the new government, Aguinaldo who was educated, albeit not in the same league as Rizal, del Pilar or Luna, was better suited to lead the revolutionary government.  

Important distinctions can be derived from these definitions. First, Bonifacio cannot be considered as an ilustrado. The ilustrado of the Philippines, evidently is not merely an intellectual, it is also a social strata limited to those of the middle class and above who are able to afford formal education in universities specifically in Europe. As such, those who do not receive formal education, i.e. education within a school or university setting is considered uneducated and cannot be deemed an ilustrado. Second, the political reform that is implemented by the liberalists such as Rizal did not entail the revolution that was implemented by Bonifacio and Aguinaldo. Whereas the liberal ilustrados sought to gain equality from Spain and be considered as a province of Spain, the revolutionaries wanted complete freedom and separation from Spain, implementing instead a new government, however, since the liberalists presented their ideologies in art and literature that was hard to comprehend for the non-educated, their means were misinterpreted and thus the reform was viewed as the linchpin of a revolution.

In effect, since all the heroes are perceived to be all revolutionaries, the only difference seen between Rizal and Bonifacio is merely methodical. Rizal wants a peaceful revolution, whereas Bonifacio wants to wage a war. Rizal is educated, which is why he wants peace whereas Bonifacio, being an indio can only see violence as a solution. These assumptions are all, evidently, incorrect.

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9 Manolo O. Vano, Jose Rizal: Champion of the Nation’s Redemption (His Mission, Martyrdom and Writings) (Quezon City, Giraffe Books, 2001), 39.
Rizal was a liberalist reformer whereas Bonifacio was a revolutionary, yes. However, to say that Rizal is a reformist because of his education and Bonifacio a revolutionary because of his lack thereof is a mistake. In fact, Bonifacio, rather than being an opposition to the Rizal’s proposed system is actually its contemporary.\textsuperscript{10} However, the circumstances surrounding Bonifacio’s birth and the very definition of what it means to be an educated man hinders him from being recognized as an apprentice to Rizal’s sorcerer.

\textit{Batang Tundo: The Humble Beginnings of Andres Bonifacio}

Andres Bonifacio indeed came from humble beginnings, economically speaking, but in no way was he intellectually deprived. In our common dissertations from primary and secondary school we are lead to believe that Bonifacio is an uneducated boy who sold fans in order to support his family and later on became a great leader despite his lack in education.

This is not completely true. Bonifacio was born to parents who were not extremely rich, yes, but neither were they uneducated. Bonifacio’s father, Santiago Bonifacio was actually a \textit{teniente mayor}, the native leader of a town or barrio. This post indicated a great service to the government as well as have the qualifications suited for the \textit{gobernadorcillo} whom he served. Granted, there are several indications throughout history, especially in the fragments captured and highlighted in Rizal’s \textit{Noli me Tangere}, that many of the government officials were in fact uncouth and uncivilized, however, recognition must be given that were Santiago Bonifacio completely feeble in mind, he would not have been placed in such a place in the government. In addition, Bonifacio’s mother, Catarina was also a manager at a cigarette factory, also indicating that she has some level of education.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Joaquin, “Why Fell the Supremo”, 87
\textsuperscript{11} Sylvia Mendez Ventura, \textit{Supremo: The Story of Andres Bonifacio} (Makati City, Tahanan Books, 2001), 16-17.
Bonifacio also received formal education, contrary to popular belief. He finished his secondary education at the school of Guillermo Osmena of Cebu. However, he was unable to proceed to college because of the death of his parents.\textsuperscript{12}

Nevertheless, Bonifacio was an autodidact, one of the very few in the world along with Leonardo da Vinci, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln and many others.\textsuperscript{13} He taught himself how to read fluently in Tagalog and Spanish and in fact became a clerk for Flemming and Company. Eventually he learned English and became a salesman and eventually a warehouseman for Fressel. Bonifacio was described as an astute and intelligent man, showing evidences of educating himself albeit informally. Bonifacio was also a bookworm, constantly reading and teaching himself the nuances of the languages and the words. Bonifacio was also exposed to European literature of his time including Hugo’s \textit{Les Miserables} and Dumas’ \textit{The Count of Monte Cristo}.\textsuperscript{14}

Rizal, himself as a young child exposed himself to the works of Renaissance writers in his time and from this was enlightened with the ideals of the European enlightenment which gave a foundation for his subsequent liberalism and masonry.\textsuperscript{15}

Therefore, the background of Bonifacio and Rizal were not all that different in terms of their intellectual development. In fact, Bonifacio was also a scholar in politics, architecture, engineering and medicine. He was in fact a local doctor, treating boils and sores by applying iodine and other materials he learned from his readings. By this time Bonifacio was already earning enough money from his job to sufficiently support his family and even send himself off to school. His sister, Espiridiona, actually questioned his reasons for not pursuing a degree in any

\textsuperscript{12} Ventura, \textit{Supremo}, 18
\textsuperscript{13} Benedict Anderson, “Cacique Democracy in the Philippines”, \textit{Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, South East Asia and the World} (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 198.
\textsuperscript{14} Ventura, \textit{Supremo}, 20
\textsuperscript{15} Vano, \textit{Jose Rizal}, 17
of the courses he was educating himself in and Bonifacio replies “I don’t want to earn a living simply by sitting down. I must earn by the sweat of my brow.”Nevertheless, despite his lack of a formal education, Bonifacio can be clearly seen as someone who was well versed within the realm of the academe and is not merely an autodidact but an informal polymath as well, not all that different from Rizal.

What may be true regarding Bonifacio’s humble beginnings, however is that despite being an educated man despite the informality of his academic education, he did not possess the natural finesse and disposition of the properly educated ilustrados. The ilustrados possessed the ability to detach their own personal feelings from the revolution and saw a concrete path that must be taken in order to realize their goals of a free Philippines.

The problem with Bonifacio was that he never completely separated himself from the masses, even when the masses needed a leader and not a compassionate ear. Bonifacio, loved his country too much, and this love ultimately lead to his subsequent demise. Bonifacio was fervent in his desires to liberate the country, to stop oppression and avenge those who were harmed by the Spanish. This very zeal caused him to be detached from reason. He pushed through with a revolution despite having severe lacks in manpower, weaponry and strategy. Bonifacio ignited an insurrection that had been premature, destined for failure and evidently brought him to his own demise, to the point where he mentioned to his sister even before his death that he knew he would die in the hands of his confederates rather than through the hands of God.

This hot blooded nature of Bonifacio, his tendency to let his emotions guide him, instead of intellect, something that was honed in the ilustrados who thought critically and never had

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16 Ventura, Supremo, 21
17 Neferti Tadiar, “Revolt of the Masses: A National Psychology” Fantasy Production (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 160
18 Joaquin, Why Fell the Supremo, 88
19 Ventura, Supremo, 19
outbursts of emotion, would work against Bonifacio especially in his succeeding years as the Supremo of the Katipunan.

However, despite these dire circumstances, it was without doubt that Bonifacio was an educated man, despite the informality surrounding his situations. It is also evident, however, that despite Bonifacio’s intellectual advancement, an intellect that rivals even that of Rizal, he was unpolished, somehow uncouth and uncultured and evidently loved his country too zealously that he was detached from reason in the decisions he may have made.

In addition, Bonifacio, being an avid supporter of Rizal, may have been spurned on by his capture and subsequent death and evidently began the revolution.

**Blood Brothers: Rizal’s Influence on Bonifacio**

During this time, it is without doubt that Rizal was one of the greatest oppositions to the Spanish regime, specifically the reign of the clergy in the country. His novels *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* served as great mirrors of the inner workings of the friar system in the country, a system that the friars dearly wished the people to remain ignorant of. In the day and age, however, when the spirit of enlightenment was slowly permeating through the crevices and into previously colonized lands, it would be next to impossible to remain ignorant. There is a great stirring amongst the people, the system was questioned and more and more injustices were protested. Before the rise of the ilustrado who introduced liberalism in the country, the Philippines and everyone in it, had never had so much as a notion of freedom and independence.$^{20}$

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$^{20}$ Ventura, *Supremo*, 23-24
Manolo Vano claims that Bonifacio, contrary to popular belief is actually a kind and gentle soul, who, like Rizal, disliked conflict and bloodshed and was actually a liberalist, initially. He believed in Rizal’s concepts and considered them as viable to change the country.\(^\text{21}\)

Bonifacio was heavily influenced by Rizal and his concepts. Rizal established the *Liga Filipina* a group of freemasons who advocated free thinking and was in fact anti-clerical. The *Liga* fought to implement political reform through liberalism in the Philippines and their goal was to have a “dignified, free and prosperous” country and cease all the injustices within the nation. Bonifacio himself was a member of the *Liga*, and was in fact a Mason. Masons, are of course, very intellectual beings, again, a testament to Bonifacio’s educated state. \(^\text{22}\)

The *Liga* posed a threat to the friars governing the country in the day. They aimed to provide protection to all the people living in the Philippines, the Filipinos, regardless of whether they are *mestizos*, *inquilinos*, *indios* and even the *principalia* and shall be governed by a political party which was naturally assumed as lead by the ilustrado. The friars reacted badly to this notion and had Rizal captured and thrown to Dapitan. This became the final straw for Bonifacio and he began to see that a reform would be impossible without a prior revolution. \(^\text{23}\)

Nevertheless, even if Bonifacio eventually called for a revolution, he was still, first and foremost a liberalist, which means he was guided by the same spirit of enlightenment. A contemporary of Rizal, he also invested in intellect in order to change the country. A distinction must be made therefore regarding the linchpin to Bonifacio’s revolution. He was initially a man of the academe, a man of study and intellect and his emotions were responsible for his shift. Having seen Rizal, someone he considered a great inspiration captured and killed caused great turmoil in Bonifacio and started a sort of personal vendetta.

\(^{21}\) Vano, *Jose Rizal*, 44  
\(^{22}\) Ventura, *Supremo*, 26  
\(^{23}\) Ventura, *Supremo*, 27
Evidently, it was Bonifacio’s emotions that will prove to be his greatest enemy, and will play a big role in the reasoning behind Bonifacio’s recognition as an uneducated man, despite all evidences pertaining to his genius.

**Katipunan: The Revolution and Andres Bonifacio**

The Katipunan is a living testament to the life of Bonifacio. His ideals, goals and characteristics can actually be read by a close inspection of the structure of the Katipunan. 24 It is interesting to note that the Katipunan is actually a highly organized society, and is not merely made up of *indios* who wish to fight to the death for complete separation of the Philippines and Spain.

The Katipunan’s primary political goal entails separation from Spain unless the motherland grants the Filipino’s desires and evicts the friars from the country and grant everyone equal political rights, and as was mentioned, this was in line with the views of liberalism and political reform. Again this serves as a testament to Bonifacio’s prior education and exposure to the concepts of western liberalism and enlightenment. However, unlike the *ilustrados*, Bonifacio was already disheartened and disillusioned with the liberalist goals. Rizal’s death and capture caused him to believe that there would be no way the Spaniards would grant the liberals what they want and was prepared to fight to the death. 25

The primary task of the Katipunan, therefore, was not to forcefully remove the inquisition but to build a national mentality amongst the people since they believed that unity amongst the people would be the only viable way to fight the Spaniards and obtain our freedom. Applying the

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24 Tadiar, “Revolt of the Masses”, 162
25 Ventura, *Supremo*, 31
concept of “liberty, equality and fraternity” of the Free Masons, Bonifacio’s Katipunan believed that all Filipinos are brothers and equals regardless of social status or gender.  

Initiation into the Katipunan is seemingly an initiation to a Masonic Lodge. The concepts of free masonry was simplified by Bonifacio himself in order to make it more understandable for the masses. Ironically, the conditions for proceeding with the Katipunan was that one had the strength, courage and has a strong grip on his passions before he could be initiated with the Katipunan. The latter being the weakness of Bonifacio himself who was striving to be like the ilustrado.  

The Katipunan, in fact was a seeming revitalization of Rizal’s Liga. It had the same political structure which includes a supreme council, or a political party that will oversee the goals of the organization, provincial and local councils that carry out the orders of the supreme council. The Katipunan, fostering the initiative of fraternity, allowed members from all walks of life, even women were allowed to become Katipunas and often served as spies for the Katipunan. Everyone and their children was a member of the Katipunan. Everyone that is, except the wealthy.  

Despite the Katipunan wanting to make everyone realize the liberalist views and mission of Jose Rizal, the inferiority of Bonifacio’s birth could not be overlooked by anyone. Bonifacio and the other founding members of the Katipunan were all strictly in the intermediate class or the masses itself. The wealthy showed no sympathy with the cause of the Katipunan’s resurrection of the Liga due to the economic goals of the Katipunan.

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27 Ventura, Supremo, 34  
28 Ventura, Supremo, 33  
29 Constantino and Constantino, Bonifacio, 164
The Katipunan believed that mutual assistance must be provided for the poor and the oppressed and widening of economic opportunities. This entailed the establishment of a council where dues and taxes to the Katipunan will be paid. The wealthy, having much to lose and none to gain, decided to part ways with the Katipunan and put up their own group, the Cuerpo de Compromisarios which is basically a group of compromisers hoping that the liberalist reform advocated by Rizal will take place. They then used their money to fund Marcelo del Pilar and his publication the La Solidaridad, hoping that Spain will recognize the validity of the liberalist reform.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite the initial formation of the Katipunan in the light of liberalism and free masonry, the group, without the support of the ilustrado and principalia class, eventually turned into a revolutionary group. Bonifacio was clearly disheartened with the capture of Rizal and though the aim of the Katipunan was to attain a reform, they all knew a revolution was inevitable. Suddenly, Rizal’s Liga and the reform added with the spirit of liberalism was too tepid for Bonifacio, for it does not compare to the heat, the flash and burn of the angry men in the Katipunan. Educated though Bonifacio may be, he was not cultured enough to have reign over his emotions. Blazing with hatred for the oppressors, he saw their complete extinction from the Philippines as the only way we could be free.\textsuperscript{31}

Bonifacio’s revolution was however, not done in spite or without reason. The time of Bonifacio’s revolution coincided with the reign of Governor General Camillo Polavieja, one of the most brutal governor generals in the country. Polavieja ordered a massacre of the Filipino people in response to the whispers of the uprising without thought to gender and age. This greatly angered Bonifacio which lead him to finally declare the start of the revolution. His folly

\textsuperscript{30} Ventura, Supremo, 32
\textsuperscript{31} Ventura, Supremo, 32
may be in his inability to control emotions but the revolution was not started out of ignorance to the possible outcome or to the gravity of the situation. Bonifacio may have been a hothead, but he was not a dreamer. In his proclamation declaring vengeance on Polavieja’s actions, he clearly states that his reason for declaring an insurrection is that “the burning of the children, the rape of the women whose honor and weakness were not even respected, the snuffing out of the lives of the aged who could not move and of the sucking infants, acts which would never have been done by honorable and brave men call for immediate vengeance and punishment to the fullest extent”. Bonifacio’s actions are seemingly justified, however it mirrors how his emotions cloud his judgement.  

In the end, Bonifacio’s Katipunan was disorganized and ineffectual. All of their planned sieges of Manila failed evidently, not only because of their lack of resources but because they failed to be organized as an army. Instead the revolution bloomed not in the city, but in the province of Cavite, under the guidance of a General Emilio Aguinaldo, Bonifacio’s greatest rival yet. Where the Katipunan failed, the Cavitenos succeeded. In a span of days when the Katipunan was defeated left and right, three cities of Cavite – San Francisco de Malabon (General Trias), Noveleta and Kawit were already governed by Aguinaldo’s rebels. The Katipuneros were awed by the skill shown by the young general, who established a military command over his rebels, built fortifications and trenches, which are technologies coming from the western world. Even the Spanish recognized Aguinaldo’s genius and was attacking him and greatly ignoring Bonifacio. The heart of the rebellion shifted then, from the Supremo to the insurrectos of Cavite.  

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33 Joaquin, *Why Fell the Supremo*, 90
This is the greatest reason why Bonifacio is considered uneducated. Though his genius rivals that of Rizal, he was neither skilled nor organized in warfare, primarily because of his emotions, which proved to be his downfall. Aguinaldo was a military man, a general who can keep a level head despite the tense situation. He was able to lead whereas Bonifacio remained one of the guys, an *indio* fighting with fellow *indios* again resurrecting the argument that the tragedy of Bonifacio was that he could never separate himself from the circumstances of his birth enough to realize his capacities as a genius. Educated though Bonifacio may be, he was not trained in the art of war and this proved to be the heel on his Achilles.

**Miong: The Conflict Between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio**

Nevertheless, Bonifacio was still a very intelligent man, and recognizing that victory lay in the hands of the Cavitenos, he himself went to the heart of battle in Cavite itself. As Nick Joaquin said, the Katipunan was of Manila, but the revolution was of Cavite.

Emilio Aguinaldo was the general leading the militant rebel forces in Cavite bringing in the victories left and right, whereas Bonifacio failed to succeed in even one revolution. It is interesting to note that Aguinaldo is not what one will consider an intellectual especially when compared to the league of the polymath Rizal or the autodidact Bonifacio. Aguinaldo was a simple man, who believed that intelligence will ultimately lead a person to exile or worse death, as was clearly manifested by the tragedies of Gomburza and Rizal himself. 34

Aguinaldo, however, was of the principalia class and was a member of the Pilar Masonic Lodge which highlighted that he shared the same views as the other principalia classes of that time. Aguinaldo did not wish to eliminate Spain from the Philippines. He also wanted recognition and a political reform. 35

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34 Ventura, *Supremo*, 49
35 Ventura, *Supremo*, 50
Bonifacio posed a threat to Aguinaldo’s regime. With the Katipunan divided between the two factions, Magdalo of Aguinaldo and Magdiwang of Bonifacio, the goal of the revolution itself was also divided. The problem with the system is that the discussions regarding the direction that the revolution will take was limited to the higher command, i.e. the supreme council governing the Katipunan. Lower ranks continued fighting without realizing that they are fighting for a dying cause. The supreme council, composed mainly of *ilustrados* and members of the *principia* opted to elect Aguinaldo as the president of the revolutionary government that would render the Katipunan, then believed to be the ruling body, null and void. Initially, Aguinaldo was not to be nominated as president. It was Edilberto Evangelista, the brains behind the military tactics that brought about the Cavite victories who was advocated by the Aguinaldo party to be the leader of the revolutionary government. This caused great injury to Bonifacio, who believed himself as someone who deserved the job of president as he was the founder of the Katipunan. Further reasoning that since Evangelista was the most educated, having studied at Europe added salt to Bonifacio’s wound. Aguinaldo however won the elections whereas Bonifacio was elected as the Director of Interior which then posed Daniel Tirona to contest his election, stating that the position of the director of interior is an honoured position and must not be given to someone without a lawyer’s diploma. This greatly angered Bonifacio and carried away by the rush of emotions, he pointed a gun at Tirona’s head and angrily declared the assembly null and void. This event, called the Tejeros convention, opened up a can of worms that eventually lead to Bonifacio’s demise.36

Why Fell the Supremo: Viewing Bonifacio as the Uneducated

What is highlighted in these events concerning Aguinaldo and Bonifacio is the fact that the primary conflict was not between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio themselves, who were in fact good friends 37, but rather between Bonifacio and the other members of the principalia. The conflict of the wealthy and the middle and lower classes regarding the aims and goals of the revolution was never resolved and it escalated to a point where the two faction can no longer co-exist with each other. The principalia saw Bonifacio as an uneducated man, who holds no degree and as such cannot be counted on to lead the government, despite the fact that he was, indeed very much educated and considered to be in league with the genius of Rizal. Nevertheless, the circumstances of his birth, the fact that he failed to receive formal education and his uncurbed temper, unpolished demeanor and uncouth actions during the meetings with the two factions lead Bonifacio to be painted as an uneducated man, and as such was not capable of leading the Katipunan. Aguinaldo, on the other hand, despite not having Bonifacio’s genius, had favorable situations, the same situations that Bonifacio lacked and as such, he was recognized as the intellectual. In addition, Aguinaldo had a natural inclination for the militia. He was capable of organized attacks and he was able to obtain victories for the rebel forces. Most importantly, Aguinaldo was of the principalia class, and he was a free mason, as such he advocated for political reform which was in league with the desires and wishes of the people who made up the supreme council of the Katipunan. These situations made him a much more revered leader, despite being intellectually behind Bonifacio.

In the end, what hindered Bonifacio from being an effective leader was not his lack of education, the same way Aguinaldo’s education did not make him a better leader. Bonifacio was too hot, too eager, too involved with vengeance and war and idealistic dreams of revolution and

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37 Ventura, Supremo, 85
freedom to think rationally. Rizal himself did not want a revolution, for the time was not yet ripe, there were few people and even fewer arms and technologies to effectively win a war with a race more advanced than we are despite their own short comings. But Bonifacio paid no heed to this facts. He pushed through with an insurrection that was not yet ready to happen, and like fruit forced to ripen, the result was sour, for both the country and Bonifacio himself. Bonifacio may have been a very intelligent man, but he was not a leader, he was not a military man. He fought wars in terrains he did not know, he imposed authority on places that do not know him. Most importantly, Bonifacio was the anti-thesis to the very essence of the revolution.\(^\text{38}\)

The revolution was always through and through a movement of the *ilustrado*, the *principalia*, and the *bourgeoisie*. He was a plebeian trying to impose his vision amongst a highly egocentric and exclusive group that will shun someone they consider not to be in their ranks, and that it Bonifacio’s greatest downfall. His genius is recognized only as someone from the masses igniting a war, he is merely the spark, but he was not the blood and bone of the revolution.

This however is not caused by his lack of intellect but of the unavoidable stigma that runs between the opposing classes and is evident until now in modern times. Bonifacio may have been a failure as a leader, and as a military strategist, but this was definitely not because he was uneducated in the sense that he was intellectually ignorant. He was, however, insensitive to the actions of the civilized gentry, and was not a planner. He acted in the heat of the moment without thought to the impacts. He had tunnel vision, only seeing the freedom of the country from the oppressors and paid no heed to the real puppet masters of his land, the *principalia*.

In the end, his genius and his greatness was buried under the rubble that was caused by his own temper. Nevertheless, Bonifacio was a genius of his time, and had he had enough time to

\(^{38}\) Joaquin, *Why Fell the Supremo*, 103-104
develop his genius, he may have picked up where Rizal had left off and will be known as someone other than a Plebeian.
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