

So This is the Good Old United States of America! An Ordinary Man's Extraordinary Fifty Fantastic Years in America!

Richard Sacote Morada

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Opportunity often arises unexpectedly and it seems so does the decision to emigrate. Though Morada planned to become a ship's captain after graduating from high school in the Philippines his father's unexpected refusal to support his son led him instead to America. This aura of risk-taking and impulsiveness pervades his memoir about his new life after reaching San Francisco—for Morada has a natural ability to begin a chapter with a sense of suspense and adventure.

The problem however is that by the time the reader gets to the chapters and main events she already knows what is going to happen. Morada's detailed preface reads like a synopsis and pitch describing events covered in the book but giving too much away to entice the reader further. Once the book gets going numerous redundancies and a tendency to summarize and conclude events before telling them from the beginning leaves little desire to see them explicated.

It's also extremely difficult to take any writing seriously when on the first page acute errors already occur. Copious grammatical errors—including issues of sentence structure misused words and phrases misspellings tense punctuation and formatting—which could have easily been prevented with careful editing all markedly impact the clarity of Morada's ideas.

Though certainly anyone living in the West at this time would have experienced the "maelstrom of social economic and cultural upheavals" Morada's depiction of immigrant life is one to which not all have been privy. It is these accounts that have the best chance of capturing imaginations—his time spent picking grapes in California waiting tables at a primarily Jewish country club retreat or embarking on educational pursuits. This insight is at times hampered by the inclusion of trivial conversations and details; the book is not aided by mundane recollections of driving routes from one part of San Francisco to another. Had Morada focused more on his relationships and firsthand knowledge personal observations and experiences the book would have been more authentic and effective.

Still above it all there hover important thematic threads particularly the link between those who helped him along the way and his personal development (we are told of this but events are not used to show this or any other discernable thesis) as well as how Morada navigated an open field of choices to follow his dreams. This is the hidden power of Morada's story which unfortunately can only be gained by enduring a long journey of reading hardships.

CHRISTINE THOMAS (December 8, 2006)

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