

Author Biography

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Sam McClintock is a fourth-year History major, with research interests in colonialism and 20th century world history. Under the guidance of Dr. Andrea Oñate-Madrado, he wrote his article centered around Filipino-Americans in California as his senior project. After graduation, Sam will pursue a teaching credential in social studies at San Jose State University.

Filipinos in California, Community and Identity: A Personal Inquiry

Sam McClintock

A 2001 obituary for a woman named Segunda C. Reyes headlined, “Longtime leader, dies at 90.”¹ The article, posted in the *Stockton Record*, listed some of the important aspects of Reyes’ life: She immigrated from the Philippines in 1931, ran hotels to provide housing for Filipino farm laborers, and helped establish social clubs for Filipina women. It even highlighted a non-profit organization named after her, committed to social support and outreach for senior farm laborers in the San Joaquin County community. She was survived by three children, thirteen grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and even two great-great-grandchildren. I am one of her great-grandchildren.

For a time, the obituary was no longer available on the *Stockton Record’s* digital archives. The Segunda C. Reyes foundation has since ceased operations, and the city even paved over the park that bore her name. Nevertheless, the discovery of Reyes’ obituary began a very personal journey for me to uncover my

1 Eric Louie, “Segunda Reyes, longtime leader, dies at 90,” Recordnet.com, June 2, 2001.

own history. Who was Segunda C. Reyes? What was her life like? How do hers and Filipino immigrants' experiences in early 20th century United States echo to today?

In my research, I found that the experiences of Filipino individuals living in the United States in the early twentieth century were inexorably tied to the political, economic, and social currents of the unequal relationship between the Philippines and the United States of America. While other migrant groups arriving to the Western United States at the time experienced similar conditions, the conflux of American imperialist aims constituted Filipinos' unique location in society.

This paper focuses on three specific moments that fed into early Filipino immigrant identities the United States. First, I will discuss the experiences of Filipinos who migrated to the West Coast of United States in the 1920s and 30s, fleeing colonialist foreign policy in the Philippines only to be denigrated by a racialized society set a baseline as the first significant wave of Filipino migrations. Next, I will consider how the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 led to demographic shifts in *who* immigrated as communities and family units became more permanently settled in the 1960s and 70s. Last, I will discuss how second-generation American-born Filipinos explored their parents' histories and cultural roots in the effort to carve out an identity.

Constantly in flux, people experienced identity in diverse ways. Thus, analyzing historical trends, this paper will show how the resulting structures that Filipino migrants developed were and are based on a variety of unique, individual sociocultural backgrounds. The United States' imperialist initiatives in the Philippines laid a foundation for a American Filipino identity still experienced in a variety of forms today.

The impetus for migrations of people from the Philippines to the United States is centered on the historically unequal relationship between the two nations. Dating back to the Spanish-American war of 1898, the United States

intervened in the Philippines' conflict with Spain in the hopes of gaining control over the crumbling empire's maritime colonies.² What immediately followed was a brutal campaign of "pacification" in the Philippine-American War concurrent to a massive influx of American administrators, clerks, and teachers to the islands with the express goal of reorienting the Philippine economy and society to be more favorable to the United States.³ In doing so, the United States asserted colonial dominance over the Philippines. As a result of the U.S.-centric education program, many young Filipinos turned to the imperialist country as a place to escape poverty wrought by the transformed industrial export economy.⁴ Because of their fringe legal status as "nationals"—neither citizens nor aliens—Filipinos circumvented discriminatory immigration laws. This allowed labor recruiters to hire Filipinos to work on Hawaiian sugar plantations as early as 1906 and later, more extensively, on the mainland as agribusiness boomed during the 1920s.⁵

Carlos Bulosan's writings capture the struggle, violence, and heartbreak that the earliest generation of Filipino migrants looking for a way out of poverty experienced in America. Originally published in 1943, Bulosan's semi-autobiographical novel *America is in the Heart* survives as Filipino scholars' deliberate effort to remember the racial differentiation and exclusion that early migrants encountered. While more recent histories of Filipinos in America recognize that Bulosan's work only reflects a single experience, it is vital to the historiography of Filipino-American stories. *America is in the Heart* established an archetype of a single, male, migratory, poor, seasonal-worker experience similarly recounted in many other personal histories about the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, the book served as a focal point for other histories about Filipinos to contest and

2 Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 10-11.

3 Yen Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 24-25.

4 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 26-27.

5 Baldoz, 12-13.

pivot on. Many of Bulosan's writings are imbued with a bottom-up perspective that he and some other Filipino people from his generation maintained: hope in the possibility of a more equitable United States for future generations.

Fred Cordova's seminal 1983 work *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* serves as an important contribution to the historiography of writings about Filipinos in America. Contextually, it is a significant and early compilation of the Filipino immigrants' lives and experiences during the 1920s and 1930s. In terms of content, it serves as a focal point for history owing to the idea of constructing a kind of Filipino-American identity. The book positions itself as a way to actively rectify the absence of histories written about the contributions and exploits of Filipino-Americans from their own perspective. In the author's words, "They wrote their own history, which is our-story, revealing simply but inspiringly that they have actually been real live people, human beings making it in American society."⁶ If *America is in the Heart* was one man's story of life in America, then *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* serves as a collection of many stories and starting place to celebrate the exploits and achievements of Filipino-Americans.

The methodology for the ways in which many compilations of personal narratives, oral histories, and collections of photographs are preserved and reproduced reflects the networks of members of the community who wished to contribute to the publication of the work in question. Yen Espiritu attributes access to the interviews in *Filipino American Lives* to established community networks of elderly Filipinos in the San Diego area.⁷ The Stockton Oral History Project's *Voices* thanks not only its interviewees, but also its interviewers who retrieved narratives for the collection.⁸ These social and familial networks were essential to my research too: our family copy of Cordova's *Filipinos*

6 Fred Cordo, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* (Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983), xiii.

7 Yen Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 28-30.

8 "Dedication," in *Voices*, ed. Joan May Cordova and Alex Canillo (Filipino Oral History Project: Stockton, 1984).

contains not only a dedication on the inside cover to my uncle for his interest and persistence in remembering but also my grandmother's annotations along the margins of certain pages, pointing to photos of the people she knew personally.

Changes brought on by imperialism in the Philippines not only affected how Filipino people positioned themselves within the relationship between the United States and the Philippines but also in the creation of a disconnected, transnational, and diasporic dialogue. Cultural theorists in the late 1990s and early 2000s argued that scholars should not limit Filipino Studies to just the United States or the Philippines, highlighting the varied importance of colonization and encounters with imperial powers in mapping the ways that Filipinos identified themselves.

E. San Juan emphasizes the multinational dimensions of Filipinos in the United States through a postcolonial lens to corroborate Filipino experiences and the socioeconomic impacts of a framework of colonial discourse: that Filipino bodies were and are inexorably displaced and made subaltern by racist policies, and that identity-construction ought to include other nuanced factors and solidarity with other global subaltern minorities to combat hegemony.⁹ The author argues that “[V]iolent colonization and unmitigated subjugation by U.S. monopoly capital” are the chief factors that set Filipinos apart from other Asian-Americans, and the history and consequences of U.S. colonization are vital to establishing a future direction for the diaspora.¹⁰ Theoretical constructions of transnational identity pave the way for later sociological discussions about framing the position of Filipinos in U.S. society. Rick Baldoz's *The Third Asiatic Invasion* takes a two-fold examination of U.S. policy. First, the book explores how colonial governments' policies enforced in the Philippines directly clashed with nativist domestic policy on the mainland. Second, the book discusses the

9 E. San Juan Jr, *From Exile to Diaspora: Versions of the Filipino Experience in the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 6-10.

10 E. San Juan Jr, *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 13-15.

Filipinos navigation of the liminal in-between space of racial differentiation and legal loopholes.¹¹ S. Lily Mendoza offers a critique of the studies of intercultural communication in an expansion to these theoretical foundations. She argues that in scholarly circles, the pervading narrative of “core-periphery exchange” verges on its own hegemonic, “essentialist” narrative, and insists that the nuance of “indigenization” and “decolonization” are valuable components to consider when looking at the construction of transnational diasporic identity.¹²

In the 21st century, scholars tend to expand who is included in the Filipino identity and what it means to analyze Filipino experiences. More diverse identifiers such as gender, sexuality, and the nuances of economic class expand Filipino self-identification. The physical dimensions of race play an important role in defining Filipinos’ relationship to white America. Gender distinctions of Filipina experiences and dimensions of femininity also inform identity construction and the ways individuals interact.

A common argument in many more recent developments is the idea that Filipino experiences are not unilateral nor stagnant. Yen Espiritu builds off the critical transnational discourse of scholars like San Juan Jr. and frames larger patterns in the context of familial relations and migrations. She argues that economic and social factors influenced decisions made by family members and the community to decide who migrated and when—especially within the context of changes caused by post-1965 immigration legislation and encounters with the racialized economic and cultural landscape of the U.S.¹³ Dawn Mabalon’s *Little Manila is in the Heart* is concerned with the deliberate destruction of the physical evidence of Filipino spaces. In her book, Mabalon laments the demolition of Stockton’s “Little Manila” district that once housed and supported the businesses and leisure spaces of those early immigrants that occurred as part of urban

11 Baldoz, 12-17.

12 S. Lily Mendoza, *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora: Reconceptualizing Culture, History, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 14-16.

13 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 20-22.

redevelopment projects in the latter half of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Mabalon, Espiritu, Baldoz, San Juan Jr., among others contend that there is not one kind of Filipino: Different political, economic, sociological, and theoretical currents historically impacted and continue to contribute to the diverse ways that Filipinos experience and interact with these forces. They were not all men, and they were not all disparate laborers as in Ronald Takaki's generalized portrait of Filipinos as a component of Asian-American history.¹⁵

Many previous works discussing Filipino Americans involve very little published cultural and historical memory. Each collection of narratives and photographs begins with the author's thankful dedication to their subjects and a sense of remorse that they could not have captured more. While this will always be the struggle of documenting and recording history, it stands to reason that, in this moment, some one hundred and twenty years since the United States wrestled social, political, and economic control from the Philippines, many peoples' stories survive. This paper's existence, thanks to the diligence of second-generation immigrants, is proof. There will always be a sense of lost opportunity—of the physical evidence of treasured newspapers, photographs, and even buildings discarded or destroyed for their perceived lack of value—an attitude that realizes the value of Filipino history experienced as a remnant of colonial subjugation in a racialized landscape. But as the scholarship of Filipino experiences expanded since the days of the Fred Cordovas of the community, more and more has been recaptured, remembered, and reinterpreted. Does this mean that the overarching narrative to contextualize Filipino experiences is deliberately fabricated in such a way as to establish a sense of identity or closeness to other Filipinos that might be predicated on false premises? Not necessarily, as this seems to be an ongoing discussion between academic and familial social circles. Even if it does, that does

14 Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipino/a American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9-11.

15 Mabalon, 11.

not mean that was is there isn't without some analytical value as one kind of perspective, keeping in mind that there are many others that did not or have yet to be enshrined in the field. The first Filipino-Americans may be gone, but there are still those who remember them and those who remember their stories. The fact alone that their descendants *exist* is enough to prove that they once lived. Through this patchwork of shared oral stories and scrapbooks of personal histories passed on from children to grandchildren, from uncles and aunts to nieces and nephews, the legacy of Filipino History is still very much alive. One does not have to look very hard to uncover the impact of Filipinos in America.

First Contact

Situated on the road leading out to “The Rock,” nowadays an ever-popular tourist destination in Morro Bay California, there is another rock with a plaque on it commemorating the first time that people native to the islands called The Philippines supposedly stepped foot onto continental North America. This monument describes an event from October 1587: an ill-fated attempt by Pedro de Unamuno, a Spanish explorer arriving on the *Nuestra Señora de Esperanza* who stopped there along the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade, to establish a foothold for New Spain further north up along the coast of the empire's California territory.¹⁶ The Spanish Empire found interest in the Philippine Islands due to its access to the markets of Asia and its role as a stopping point for the journey of its ships between these markets and its ruling territory over the New World in Mexico.¹⁷ The first galleon to leave the Philippines and initiate the Manila Galleon Trade left from Cebu on June 1, 1565, beginning a 250-year period of transpacific trade during which the Spanish used the labor of Philippine Natives to access lucrative markets at the port of Manila.¹⁸ As such, some of these “Luzon Indians” were among Unamuno's crew as part of the landing party sent to make contact with

16 Lorraine Jacobs Crouchett, *Filipinos in California from the Days of the Galleons to the Present*, (El Cerrito, CA: Downey Place Publishing House, Inc, 1982), 9-11.

17 Crouchett, 2.

18 Cordova, 9.

the Chumash peoples on the coast: an encounter that ended with the North American natives attacking the party and the deaths of a Spaniard and one of the Filipinos in the crew. The galleon disembarked two days later, and no attempts would be made to land along the California coast from Manila until 1595.¹⁹

Other histories detail further exploits of people native to the Philippines settling in the “New World” over the course of the next several centuries. There are the “Manilamen” who jumped ship from the Spanish galleons and established small communities in modern-day Louisiana in 1763, the settlers who stayed and integrated into Mexican society upon arrival as a way to escape the brutality of colonial exploitation in the Philippines, or any number of “seafaring exiles and working sojourners” that ended up in territories stretching from Vancouver to Southern California, to Hawaii and Alaska, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁰ While these stories are sparse, they reveal a much deeper transnational history of Filipino people spurred on by encounters with imperial, colonialist powers. The purpose of the plaque in Morro Bay, dedicated in 1995, and the historicization of these other Filipino arrivals to North America that are recounted in Cordova’s book, exist as part of this larger effort in the late twentieth century to reclaim or reaffirm the existence and importance of Filipinos in American history. It is a cry by Filipino Americans to proclaim that, chronologically, bodies from their shared nation of geographic origin preceded the arrival of the Anglo settlers that would come to dominate the economy, culture, and society of North America. This idea of how Filipinos have thought about themselves and their place in the construction of American society, especially in the latter half of the 20th century, is something that will be touched on again later. To begin mapping the shape of these interactions throughout the 20th century, the starting point for the clash between Filipinos and American society began with canon fire off the port of Manila during the Spanish-American War in 1898, and in the bloodshed

19 Crouchett, 11-12.

20 Cordova, 9-10.

that followed in its aftermath.

War, Resistance, and New Imperial Bonds

The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1898, ended the Spanish-American War and ceded the Philippines to the United States for 25 million dollars.²¹ When Commodore George Dewey arrived in Manila Bay to put pressure on Spain by opening a second front in the war, he did so in the context of stepping into an already open conflict that had been brewing for several years between Spain and the *Katipunan*: a revolutionary secret society led by Andres Bonifacio and made up of members across class lines and the Philippines' many regional-linguistic groups who were united by the shared goal of gaining complete political independence to avail the economic and social ills wrought by colonialism.²² On March 22, 1897, the *Katipunan* was replaced by a revolutionary government at a convention, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, who would lead a landing force of Filipino revolutionaries armed with American guns and fire support from Dewey and his gunboats, eventually leading to the siege of Manila in June of 1898.²³ Aguinaldo declared independence from Spain on June 12, 1898, and conventions to draft a republican constitution took place throughout the summer.²⁴ Fighting would not end until August, culminating in a staged battle where the Spanish surrendered to the *Americans*, not the Filipinos, to break the three-way stalemate between Dewey's naval forces, Filipino Revolutionary forces dug into trenches surrounding Manila, and Spanish forces trapped in the walls of the city.²⁵ By December, when the treaty was signed, America's military presence had not left the Philippines,

21 George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 320.

22 Antonio J.A. Pido, *The Pilipinos in America: Macro/Micro Dimensions of Immigration and Integration* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1985), 45-46.

23 Crouchett, 21-24.

24 Pido, *Pilipinos in America*, 46.

25 Luzviminda Francisco, "The First Vietnam: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," in *Letters in Exile: An Introductory Reader on the History of Pilipinos in America* (UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1976), 5.

initiating the conversation of what to do with the Philippines.

From the start, Congress based its debates on America's role in the Philippines on racial terms. Both expansionist and anti-imperialist camps argued over the purpose and direction of what to do with the Filipino *people* as the focus of debate; make no doubt that the value of the islands as a critical strategic outpost for establishing Pacific naval bases as "coaling stations" and as a permanent foothold in proximity to China's lucrative markets were prime factors that motivated President McKinley's refusal to recognize Aguinaldo's provisional government and his decision to instigate US military rule over the islands in December 1898.²⁶ As a moral justification of overseas expansionism, McKinley invoked language of "racial paternalism" and assimilation, positioning the United States' control over the Philippines as a civilizing mission not unlike its moral justifications towards policies of assimilation directed at Native Americans throughout the nineteenth century.²⁷ McKinley claimed that after praying in the White House one night the idea came to him:

"...we could not leave [the Filipinos] to themselves—they were unfit for self-government, and they would soon have anarchy and misrule worse than Spain's was; and that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died."²⁸

Never mind, of course, that under the Spanish Empire the Philippine Islands had adopted Catholicism as its chief religion for over two centuries and that the self-governance movement made considerable progress opposing the Spanish military and drafting its constitution by the time the United States instigated its rule.

Anti-imperialists argued that extensions of overseas colonialism stood in

26 Herring, 321-322.

27 Baldoz, 27.

28 William McKinley, "Decision on the Philippines," interview by James Rusling, *The Christian Advocate*, January 22, 1903.

contrast to the republican ideals of the American experiment and might violate the constitution if new territories were not offered an opportunity at statehood.²⁹ This option was clearly off the table for all the territories that the United States gained control over in the late nineteenth century. Others still turned to color lines and racial and class confrontations that would inevitably arise from the “collective naturalization of eight to ten million ‘dark-skinned’ Filipinos who would be incorporated into the national polity as fully enfranchised members,” pointing to recent examples of the failure of “carpetbagger” reconstruction governments in the South and the influx of Chinese laborers on the West Coast to prove that America was ill-equipped to meaningfully contend with race-based political involvement.³⁰ In a sense, the United States already had a tumultuous history of navigating policies pertaining to this idea of race and upholding embedded establishments against this determinate threat of including non-white people in its processes. The Philippines represented another entrant into this contentious debate. Surveys sent to analyze the economic and social conditions of the Philippines deemed its peoples not only unfit for self-governance, but also divided the many tribes and ethnic localities into different tiers of proximity to *civilization* to assess fitness for assimilation into American culture.³¹ This sort of interest in pursuing pseudo-scientific methods of race to construct policy would inform arguments for both expansionist and Anti-imperialist rhetoric and serve as the basis for Filipino stereotypes.

There is one other moment of note that preempts the arrival of Filipino immigrants to the United States: the “Philippine Insurrection.”³² It goes without saying that Aguinaldo and his camp of revolutionary fighters were not so eager to turn the Philippines over to the United States. They had just won their war for independence and had effectively been handed over to new imperial leadership

29 Herring, 322-323.

30 Baldoz, 27-30.

31 Ibid, 33-38.

32 Herring, 327.

per the terms of the Treaty of Paris. The Philippine War broke out on February 4, 1899, and saw the deaths of thousands of Filipino soldiers in its earliest battles dug in around Manila, under equipped and outmatched by American artillery in what some referred to as a “quail shoot.”³³ As the Philippine army retreated into Central Luzon, Aguinaldo turned to guerilla tactics of ambushes and cut-and-run attacks against an increasingly dispersed American fighting force aided with supplies from local villages along the way.³⁴ The war took on a new meaning for American troops upon the realization that locals were aiding the resistance efforts, and soldiers began to reframe the conflict as a clash of civilizations among Philippine peoples. Americans began throwing around racial epithets for their adversaries and employing the “water cure”: a form of waterboarding, to drive information out of residents of captured villages.³⁵ Here, color lines between Filipinos and Black people or Native Americans and the use of wanton violence fed into the confirmation and creation of America as a white nation. Black newspapers in the United States decried the onset of war and violence as another version of unresolved issues of subjugation against colored minorities on the mainland.³⁶ As the fighting dragged on, the Americans turned to exceptionally brutal strategies of counterinsurgency: slash and burn tactics, free-fire zones, and killing members of entire villages, not unlike counterinsurgency strategies seen in guerilla conflicts throughout the Cold War nearly half a century later, were par for the course and lauded as humane by McKinley’s generals.³⁷ With the surrender of General Malvar, the last “respectable military element” in 1902, President Roosevelt declared that the war was over on July 4 of that same year.³⁸

33 Francisco, 5-6.

34 Ibid, 7-8.

35 Herring, 328.

36 Nerissa S. Balce, “Filipino Bodies, Lynching, and the Language of Empire,” in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Eduardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia PA: Templeton University Press, 2006) 54-55.

37 Francisco, 9-16.

38 Ibid, 18-19.

For the Filipinos, fighting did not cease with this declaration. Some estimates place the conflict continuing until as late as 1915.³⁹ Although the number of 250,000 civilian deaths is often used to recount the cost in human lives of the war, other estimates that consider that this number might have been produced before the more brutal campaigns in Samar and Batangas, not to mention the continued fighting after the “official” end of the war and deaths as a result of disease and malnourishment, place the total number much higher at upwards of one million, conservatively.⁴⁰

Relating this context to the political society of the United States, Filipinos were colonial subjects, dominated into submission by the full might of America’s industrialized military force. This is by no means to suggest that this is the sole position that Filipino people ought to be relegated to in historical imagination of the end of the nineteenth century. However, from the perspective of America’s civilizing mission and experiments in colonialism, the survey projects of the islands and rhetoric that denigrated the Filipino people as tribal “savages” unfit for civilization in conjunction with racialized policies of segregation and exclusion aimed at other minority groups on the mainland of the United States preprogrammed an image of differentiation, non-understanding, and non-acceptance into the economic, political, and social apparatuses of American society. This projection was one that Filipinos experienced consistently across time and place throughout the waves of migration and demographic shifts of the 20th century.

Early Migration and the *Manong/Manang* Generation

The impetus for Filipino migration to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s following “pacification” of the Philippines was twofold. To take a general cue from the “push-pull” framework of migration studies, cultural and economic changes brought on by the “Americanization” of civil society in the Philippines

39 Mabalon, 33.

40 Francisco, 18-19.

pushed Filipinos towards the United States.⁴¹ American economic incentives to find a source of cheap labor to bolster lucrative agri-business enterprises growing on the west coast “pulled” them there.⁴²

McKinley’s initiative to “educate” the Filipino people and bring them closer to “civilization” can be situated as a vital turning point that began to orient Filipinos towards the United States. Concurrent to the war efforts of “pacification” in the countryside, William Howard Taft was appointed as the Civil Governor of the Philippines in 1901 and oversaw the development of an expansive education system designed to lead Filipinos towards self-governance, which had the effect of reshaping Philippine society.⁴³ Almost 7,000 students were enrolled in American public schools in Manila as early as 1899, with the more significant development in this endeavor being the arrival of over 500 young professional teachers aboard the US transport ship, the *Thomas*, in 1901 dubbed the “Thomasites.”⁴⁴ By 1915, there were thousands of these elite-educated American citizen teachers conducting classes for over half a million enrolled Filipino students.⁴⁵ Classes were taught in English, curriculum was based out of American textbooks, and students learned about historical figures like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. In this way, students were extolled the values of the United States as a free and Democratic society by the American schooling system and even saluted the American flag in their classrooms.⁴⁶ Carlos Bulosan recounted how, as he was learning English as a boy to emigrate more easily to the United States, “I was fascinated by the story of this boy who was born in a log cabin and became president of the United States.”⁴⁷ In this marketed vision of America,

41 Baldoz, 44.

42 Pido, *Pilipinos in America*, 56-57.

43 Pido, *Pilipinos in America*, 48-49.

44 Mabalon, 32.

45 *Ibid.*, 33.

46 Baldoz, 46-47.

47 Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (Seattle WA: University of Washington Press, 1973), 69.

anyone could have the opportunity to better themselves. If Abraham Lincoln, who was born a peasant could become a “great man,” then anyone born a peasant, like Carlos, could have the opportunity to improve their station in America.⁴⁸ Another effect of acculturation by American education in the Philippines was, as Antonio J.A. Pido puts it, “Aside from the basics, the thrust was inculcating Filipinos with American values and the Coca-Cola culture.”⁴⁹ Opportunity was the allure of America, and as education programs and a flood of new consumer products began to reorient Filipinos towards American commercial and cultural values, “it was perceived the only way to live like Americans was to be in America.”⁵⁰ Reflexive of this attitude, born in Ilocos Norte in 1907, A.B. Santos recounted his experience in an interview with Yen Espirit:

“I did not know much about the United States, but I had heard from the Americans and the other Filipinos that there were many opportunities there. I had an American teacher who used to tell our class that in the United States, so long as you are willing to work and not weak, you can survive very well. So I was impressed with this.”⁵¹

Another immigrant from those early days recounted in 1984, “Our American instructor said before that Filipinos would be treated nicely in the United States because we (in the Philippines) belong to the United States and there is equality and no prejudice.”⁵² Though only a sample of Filipinos recollecting their imagination of America from the Philippines, these statements capture these changes in attitude as an effect of American civil society in the Philippines. The economic landscape continued to be an important overarching context. At this point, elites in the

48 Bulosa, 69-71.

49 Antonio J.A. Pido, “Dimensions of Pilipino Immigration,” in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 24-25.

50 Ibid.

51 AB Santos and Juanita Santos, “Chapter 1: We Have to Show the Americans that We Can Be as Good as Anybody,” interview by Yen Le Espiritu in *Filipino American Lives*, (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 37-38.

52 Interview in *Voices*, 7.

Philippines still owned most of the land in the form of an agricultural plantation system which Americans looked the other way from as a problem that the Filipinos needed to solve internally, whilst reaping economic benefit from deals with these landowners.⁵³ Bulosan wrote about these social conditions extensively as a chief component of his childhood: “I hated absentee-landlordism, not only because it had driven my family from our home and scattered us, but also because it had shattered the life and future of my generation.”⁵⁴ Elaborating on Bulosan’s experience of his family “scattering,” he and each of his parents and siblings were separated from one another and their family farm out of necessity to find work and pay back the landholder of their estate, which eventually pushed the young man to America as another avenue for economic independence.⁵⁵ Additionally, educational opportunities proved another important locus for immigration to the United States, likely to that same tune of personal improvement and access to opportunities not available in the Philippines afforded by imaginations of the United States. This was the case for Segunda C. Reyes, who was 19 years old and a home economics teacher at the time that she immigrated to the United States with her husband in 1930. She wrote, “...we left for the United States of America where my husband was going to school in the University of California Berkely [*sic*] to take his master’s degree.”⁵⁶ In another case, an older immigrant recalled their justification for traveling to America was, “I am going there for two purposes: to educate myself and at least try to find good employment for myself. My brother was here already so I told my family that I’m going to follow him and perhaps, he could support me through school.”⁵⁷ All told, the product of changes to Philippine society was a vision of America as an equitable place where one

53 Pido, *Pilipinos in America*, 23.

54 Carlos Bulosan, “My Education,” in *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan*, ed. E. San Juan Jr. (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 124.

55 Bulosan, 43-48.

56 Segunda C. Reyes, “In No One’s Footsteps,” Unpublished autobiography project in typescript and handwriting, date unknown, c. 1992, TD Reyes Personal Collection, 16.

57 Interview in *Voices*, 6.

could go to make some money and receive a better education: a place that, for some, offered better opportunities than those in the Philippines.

This orientation towards American society, interest in pursuing education, and potential of economic opportunity to counteract the growing disparity of land-value systems and the industrial export economy all preempted colonial border-crossings from the Philippines to America from the span of 1900-1935. In America, burgeoning industries on the West Coast were eager to accept Filipinos for their labor. To take a step back for just a moment, it is important to note that the importation of Philippine labor to the West Coast of the United States can be situated as part of a larger trend at the conjunction of race and labor in America at the turn of the twentieth century. Booming agricultural and industrial endeavors necessitated the importation of an exploitable labor force, so to fulfill these requirements, recruiters turned to Asian immigrants across the Pacific. An increasing Chinese presence in places like Hawaii and California led to race riots and moral fears about the sanctity of white labor and ownership, which resulted in the shuttering of *all* immigration by “persons of the Chinese race” per an 1888 addendum to the Chinese Exclusion Act, not just the laborers the act had originally singled out.⁵⁸ Japanese laborers imported alongside and after Chinese laborers to fill in the gap left by exclusion similarly faced legal barriers to immigration. President Roosevelt responded to Japanese immigrants who purchased land and settled in California and Hawaii by restricting Japanese immigration from Hawaii to the mainland. Shortly thereafter, he negotiated the Gentlemen’s Agreement with Japan to cease issuing passports to Japanese people bound for the United States before practically restricting entrances outright under the quotas of an immigration law in 1924.⁵⁹ Because the Philippines had become a colony of the United States by 1901, Filipino people did not meet the threshold of

58 Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York, NY: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 111-112.

59 Takaki, 203-209.

“foreign nationals” used to bar immigration and paths to naturalized citizenship. Combined with the effects of reorientation towards American culture, this led to a flood of Filipino migration which growers and industrial owners were happy to accept to make up for labor lost by immigration restrictions.⁶⁰ Additionally, there was the opportunity cost of utilizing an eager new source of labor to drive down wages and pit Chinese and Japanese against Filipino laborers with threats of replacing them with this new resource.⁶¹

The nearly 150,000 Filipinos who left the Philippines for Hawaii and California between 1907 and 1929 entered a highly racialized society that did not amount to the vision of upward mobility that they had been sold in the Philippines.⁶² Despite the aspirations of prosperity promised by imaginations of America passed down from the school systems and tales of other Filipinos who had regaled their relatives about the money they were making and how well they had it in America through letters back home, the only jobs available for Filipinos were menial labor in Hawaii’s sugar plantations, canneries in Seattle and Alaska, California’s lush agricultural fields, and as servants and busboys in hotels and restaurants.⁶³ Educational and economic background did not preclude any sense of where these early immigrants would be relegated in America’s racialized social strata. One Filipino immigrant recalled,

“I noticed that all the low class jobs were filled by foreigners, mostly Filipino or Chinese. I didn’t feel any job discrimination. But it seems that even college graduates you know, could never get a good job like the others. Even if you were a college graduate you could still be a dishwasher during those times.”⁶⁴

This was certainly the case for Segunda Reyes’ husband, a school principal

60 Baldoz, 48-54.

61 Ibid, 61-68.

62 Mabalon, 62.

63 Takaki, 316-320.

64 Interview in *Voices*, 14.

who traveled to America to pursue a master's degree. She remembered, "while going to school he found a job in a restaurant washing pots and pans," and that, "during that time was depression, the wages were only 10¢ an hour. Making \$1.00 a day was not enough to support us because we have a child. So he has to stop school and we went to the farm to work."⁶⁵ What followed for the Reyes family was a stint of moving from town to town around California, chasing seasonal agricultural jobs cutting asparagus, picking pears, onions, tomatoes, and grapes, each for only a few weeks to a month at a time throughout that first year they lived in America.⁶⁶ This story of grueling seasonal labor jobs to stave off an ever-present threat of economic insecurity is consistent throughout accounts of the 1920s and 1930s. Back breaking "stoop labor" cutting lettuce and asparagus with short hoes, cramped cots in labor camps, and already low wages siphoned off to pay for "room and board" are some of the kinds of dismal stories of exploitative conditions in those Depression-era days repeatedly in the oral histories of laborers.⁶⁷

Sick of the poor conditions and bad pay, Filipinos banded together to form organized labor groups. Filipinos had a propensity for militant organized labor, dating back to Pablo Manlapit's mobilization of thousands of Filipino sugar plantation workers in Hawaii in January 1920, and again in April 1924, which came to a head when the police killed 16 strikers: 60 more were arrested, and others were barred from working in Hawaiian plantations, ultimately pushing them to California.⁶⁸ By the early 1930s, tight-knit units of Filipino laborers in Stockton would walk off the job together in loosely coordinated "gang strikes," leaving a crop untenable and resulting in various degrees of success for demanding better wages.⁶⁹ In more organized moments, The Filipino Labor Union (FLU) struck against the lettuce growers in Salinas in 1934, and the Filipino Agricultural

65 Segunda C. Reyes, "In No One's Footsteps."

66 Ibid, 6-17.

67 Multiple contributors, interviews in *Voices*, 17-20.

68 Cordova, 74.

69 Mabalon, 88-89.

Laborer's Association (FALA) in Stockton mobilized 6,000 asparagus workers to raise the prices for cutting asparagus in 1939.⁷⁰ Filipino labor organizations would continue to be a prominent force in California's agricultural sector for decades. Philip Vera Cruz, at one time a vice president of the United Farm Workers (UFW), reflected on how Delano's Agricultural Worker's Organizing Committee (AWOC) was comprised of mostly Filipino laborers, and attributed the success of the strike to the fact that the Filipinos had a strong "worker's consciousness" to be able to coordinate with one another—a consciousness that stemmed from their shared experiences working in California's agricultural centers for over 40 years.⁷¹ The eventual merger between AWOC and the predominantly Mexican NFWA into the UFW maintained vital support from Filipino members, illustrating a mostly practical dimension of interracial collaboration.

Though wages were low, Filipino laborers still got paid. In the metropolitan centers dotting the agricultural fields where racial and ethnic minorities congregated, in places like Stockton and Delano, Filipinos took the money that they had earned and used it to hit the town.⁷² Pool halls and Taxi Dance Halls were popular spots where Filipino laborers came for leisure and to socialize. An old *manong* recounting the since-closed halls in Stockton in the 80s recounted how:

"They used to work asparagus, come to town, all dressed up. Dressed to kill, with a necktie, knickerbocker, whatever. Muffler and topcoats. The people, especially the warmongers, they'd yell at us, 'where'd we get the money?', all dressed up to kill, just making ten cents an hour working in the asparagus. They'd call us names, goo-goos, monkeys, idiots, whatever. No-brain."⁷³

70 Cordova, 75.

71 Philip Vera Cruz, in *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Labor Center, 1992), 28-34.

72 Takaki, 337-339.

73 Unnamed Speaker, "Sammy," interview with John Fortes and David Reyes, c. 1980, Stockton, Digitized VHS, 2:39-3:29.

These places were not free from racialized discrimination and differentiation and are especially important in understanding the historical experience of young Filipino bachelors because it was here that they encountered white women. These interactions are important on two fronts. First are the ways that white women were used to extort the few remaining dollars from already exploited Filipino bachelors and keep them in a denigrated economic class on the pretense of companionship owing to the disproportionately lacking Filipina presence in California.

Additionally, the moral purity of white women was used to leverage the moral licentiousness of these Brown men as a threat to the social hierarchy of white masculinity and as a gateway to interracial relationships.⁷⁴ Witnessing Filipino workers paying for dances in a crowded dance hall in Seattle, Carlos Bulosan described how “the girl was supposed to tear off one ticket every three minutes, but I noticed that she tore off a ticket for every minute. That was ten cents a minute. Marcelo was unaware of what she was doing; he was spending the whole season’s earnings on his first day in America.”⁷⁵ It is important to note that the white women are not the culprits in this sexualized differentiation and exploitation of Filipino men. As Philip Vera Cruz recalled, white women “hustlers” were themselves oftentimes poor and desperate: they might not have seen profits from the money Filipinos spent on dance tickets or in their “schemes” towards Filipino men, and that to deride all of them that way was disingenuous because there were certainly plenty of cases where Filipino men and white women couples did enter loving relationships and marriages with one another.⁷⁶ That said, it was not easy to obtain legal interracial marriages at this time. In California, marriage licenses between a white person and a “Mongolian” were prohibited, though these marriages would be recognized if they were performed in a jurisdiction

74 Baldoz, 120-135.

75 Bulosan, 105.

76 Philip Vera Cruz, in *Philip Vera Cruz*, 9-11.

where they were allowed.⁷⁷ Situated within this context, white women become an accessory to or a tool in creating this sense of a white, masculine, construct of social power and superiority.

Filipina women were not completely absent from this early generation of immigrants from the Philippines, though young men far exceeded them in number. Some estimates place the Filipino population by 1930 as 95 percent male.⁷⁸ Segunda Reyes' story is somewhat of a special case in this regard, since she was already married and had a child when her small family unit immigrated to the United States—an unusual but not unheard-of situation. Families were a vitally important part of traditional cultural values, and thus identity, in the Philippines.⁷⁹

Young men's inability to establish families in this period due to the absence of Filipina women and miscegenation laws barring interracial marriages in California ultimately perpetuated the bachelor laborer archetypal construction that appears relatively consistently throughout narratives and recorded collections of this period. Without access to family networks of their own, these men turned to other members of the community for support. In one testimony, Connie Tirona, who was born in Selma, California, in 1929, recalled how the *manongs* that she and her family would visit in the camps in the Sacramento-San Joaquin region as a child ostensibly considered her their adopted niece.⁸⁰ These instances broadened the depths of connections between Filipinos in America through dimensions of shared connections and familiarity with one another as a part of the Filipino community even if they were not directly related to one another.

The lack of a pathway to naturalized citizenship was an immense barrier

77 W.I.C, "Marriage: Miscegenation," in *Asian Indians, Filipinos, Other Asian Communities, and the Law*, ed. Charles McClain (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1994), 2-3.

78 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 64.

79 Jonathan Okamura, *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1998), 33-34.

80 Connie Tirona, "Sometimes, I Am Not Sure What It Means to Be an American," interview by Yen Espiritu in *Filipino American Lives*, 66-70.

for this early generation of Filipinos to overcome and gain access to the equal rights and protections they were offered by American education in the Philippines. “Citizenship, then, is the basis of all this misunderstanding?” Carlos Bulosan mused when his brother was denied a civil service job in Los Angeles.⁸¹ For some, voluntary service in the U.S. military was a pathway to obtaining that citizenship. U.S. naval bases in the Philippines, established as part of that colonial domination and strategic positioning of the islands, served a dual role as recruiting stations for thousands of Filipino foreign nationals to serve in the U.S. Navy.⁸²

Often times, however, the only positions that Filipinos were allowed to serve were as stewards, infuriatingly relegated to serving as the personal servants for officers stationed in the Philippines.⁸³ World War II expanded Filipino participation in the armed forces. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the fall of Bataan in 1942, Filipino men from communities all over the United States enlisted or were drafted into all branches of the U.S. military to participate in the liberation of the Philippines from Japanese occupation.⁸⁴ The First Filipino Infantry Battalion, consisting of three thousand Filipinos, was activated in April 1942 at Camp San Luis Obispo, and trained in camps throughout California.⁸⁵ Participation in the war effort earned Filipino veterans respect as capable comrades in arms, but the goals of citizenship from service would not last. An overlapping period of Japanese rule of the Philippines and changes to the Nationality Act of 1940 in 1946 rendered thousands of Filipino Veterans who served in the Philippine Commonwealth Army as a mobilized arm of the U.S. army ineligible

81 Bulosan, 202.

82 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 28-29.

83 Jesse G. Quinsaat, “An Exercise on How to Join the Navy and Still Not See the World,” in *Letters in Exile: An Introductory Reader on the History of Filipinos in America* (UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1976), 101-102.

84 Cordova, 217.

85 *Ibid*, 217-218.

for U.S. citizenship.⁸⁶ In conjunction with changing immigration laws and the changing status of the Philippines, this act of limiting veteran citizenship served as another route to limit Filipino access to the American nation.

New Immigrants, Families, and the Post-1965 World

In 1946, the Philippines became an independent nation per the ten-year transition from commonwealth status to independence laid out in the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934. Devised on racialized terms in the same vein as the limits to immigration placed on “Asiatics” from China and Japan in the preceding decades as a reaction to the social presence of Filipinos in America, this new law changed the status of Filipinos from “noncitizen U.S. nationals” to “foreign nationals” practically overnight, with immigration quotas placing limits on further movements altogether once the Philippines became independent.⁸⁷ Restrictions on immigration were not eased until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The act lifted the national-origin quota, and stipulations under the conditions of “family reunification” and “occupational characteristics” led to a new demographic to migrate from the Philippines that differed in composition and motivation from the first wave that migrated through the 1930s.⁸⁸ Between 1960 and 1975, women constituted over 50 percent of immigrants from the Philippines and the percentage of educated professionals almost doubled,⁸⁹ leading to the development of more permanent family units. Racial discrimination and differentiation remained an obstacle for these immigrants. However, immigrants were also “more aware that they were not coming to the land of equal opportunity, at least between races.”⁹⁰ Edgar

86 Angelo N. Ancheta, “Filipino Americans, Foreigner Discrimination, and the Lines of Racial Sovereignty,” in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Eduardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia PA: Templeton University Press, 2006), 97-99.

87 Ibid, 94-95.

88 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 31-33.

89 Pido, *Pilipinos in America*, 78-82.

90 Pido, “Dimensions of Pilipino Immigration,” 33.

Gamboa, a San Diego physician who immigrated with his wife in 1976, cited how he was subject to additional medical exams and had to restart his residency program from scratch as in what he called, “a more subtle form of racism, where people feel that an individual who does not carry the right genes, whose skin is a tad darker, or who comes from an unfamiliar university, could not possibly be as qualified and talented and educated.”⁹¹ In many locations in scholarship about the relationship between The Philippines, Filipinos, and the United States, this wave of migration constituted a proverbial “brain drain.” Some constructions go so far as to codify this relationship as a neoliberal shift in colonial exploitation of labor and the potential of the Philippines by the United States and other Western powers by siphoning away its educated professionals and intellectuals with the lure of better salaries elsewhere on the globe, leaving the nation in a state of under-development.⁹² That being said, economic opportunity cost was not the only reason Filipinos began to immigrate in large numbers. Family ties accounted for a much larger percentage of migrations in this period, with studies surveying immigrants in 1975 and 1990 reporting that rejoining family members who had become situated with a job and income in America and could assist the migration of their relatives accounted for a considerable factor of the over 500,000 Filipinos who immigrated in the 1980s.⁹³ One element of post-1965 demographic shifts that Yen Espiritu is particularly concerned with is an inversion of gender norms and profession that belie the impetus of immigrations. She notes that in this landscape of women and professionals, the onset of *Women Professionals*, often nurses, afforded upward mobility not typical to male-led married migrations and at times required men to take on more caretaker-like roles in the family dynamic to compensate for the women’s work schedules.⁹⁴ Shifts like these within family

91 Edgar Gamboa, “International Medical Graduates Are Tested Every Step of the Way,” interview by Yen Le Espiritu, in *Filipino American Lives*, 133-135.

92 E. San Juan Jr., *From Exile to Diaspora*, 7-8.

93 Okamura, 42-44.

94 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 148-152.

social dynamics were reflective of and contributed to larger changes among the Filipino community that would beget the development of a new kind of Filipino identity.

As a continued thread of colonialism over the Philippines, the “Military Bases Agreement” of 1947 allowed the US Navy to not only continue to operate its bases in the Philippines, but to continue recruiting Philippine citizens as well.⁹⁵ It would not be until 1994 that the last Naval base would be turned over to the Philippines.⁹⁶ Because of this continuity, many Filipino career veterans of the US Navy elected to settle in the United States upon completion of their service, often in the communities that cropped up alongside naval towns up and along the California coast.⁹⁷ Often times, they would move to these communities with wives they had met and young children they had in the Philippines, again citing those same values of better education and better economic opportunity in the United States than could be afforded back home.⁹⁸ Alongside middle class professionals and nurses, navy veterans and their families constituted a considerable influx in the changing Filipino demographic and the growth of Filipino communities across the state.

Interpersonal dynamics among settled family units reflected some larger changes in the community that preempted the move towards a different kind of Filipino identity. For one, the fact that there even *were* Filipino families in contrast to the lack of Filipinas and miscegenation laws of the 1930s were a marked shift in the Filipino community. It is worth taking a moment to note that the Philippines is not a monolith and consists of a wide variety of ethnolinguistic groups in addition to different kinds of class developments as noted above. As an example of the way that these regional differences manifested in the early waves of migration, TD Reyes described in an interview that regional differences

95 Quinsaat, “An Exercise on How to Join the Navy and Still Not See the World,” 102-103.

96 Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 28.

97 Quinsaat, 109.

98 *Ibid.*

between Ilocanos and Visayans, two of the most prominent ethnic groups that ended up in Stockton, maintained rivalries and prejudices towards one another and rarely married members outside of their group. He noted too, that these regional differences still sometimes cropped up in the attitudes of old Filipinos in the Stockton area today.⁹⁹ The shift in question in the community by growing younger generations in this period was that other aspects began to circumvent these regional identities, at least in part, as the children of Filipino immigrants interacted with and participated in American society. Children spoke English at home and went to schools around other children who were not Filipino. In a departure from traditional family norms in the Philippines, children who acted independently of their parents by talking back to them or by refusing to listen to their opinions contributed in part to a “culture shock” of acculturation.¹⁰⁰ As one example, Nemesia Cortez, who immigrated first to Hawaii in 1965 then to Oceanside, California in 1974, reflected on her daughters’ Americanized attitudes in an interview in the 1990s. She didn’t like how her daughters didn’t attend church, nor how her oldest married a white man when she would have preferred them both to marry Filipinos. She also felt remorse that her children could not speak Ilocano and favored English.¹⁰¹ Thus, consistent with several narratives in Yen Espiritu’s volume, many Filipino immigrants felt negatively toward the differences between the way they and their children were raised.

Remembering History and Constructing Filipino Identity

By 1970s and early 1980s, Filipino families had established their lives in America.¹⁰² This is where a distinctly separate conception of what it means to

99 TD Reyes, interview conducted with author, November 25, 2021.

100 Caridad Concepcion Vallanga, *The Second Wave: Pinay and Pinoy (1945-1960)* (San Francisco, CA: Strawberry Hill Press, 1987), 211-213.

101 Nemesia Cortez, “I Only Finished First Grade,” interview by Yen Espiritu, in *Filipino American Lives*, 123-125.

102 Juanita Tamayo Lott, “Demographic Changes Transforming the Filipino American Community,” in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 15-16.

be Filipino started to come from, both among younger generations of children from family units that had immigrated and the slightly older second and third-generation children of members from the earlier *manong/manang* generation. What separates these U.S.-born Filipinos is just that fact; they had been born in the United States and were more “demonstrative about [their] rights as ‘True Americans,’ in addition to being assertive about [their] racial, ethnic, and cultural roots.”¹⁰³ Educational materials produced by students and emerging young scholars at this time called on other Filipinos to develop a critical consciousness; to become aware of the issues that had historically plagued the Filipino community and to contest the myths of the “American melting pot” in a way that their parents and grandparents had not been able to due to threats of violence and lack of legal recourse.¹⁰⁴ The theme that cropped up here among the younger generation is a sense of pride in having a heritage that traces back to the Philippines. This feeling developed despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that younger peoples’ own connection to the language, customs, and memories of the islands was not as strong as those of their immigrant parents. In a poster about this idea of “Filipino” as its own distinct identity, a young Alberto Yamay Balingit pondered, “Why the confusion and why not just Philipinos as Philipinos is beyond me. But the quest for self-determination and recognition will soon dispell [*sic*] the categorization of Philipinos in other races or in ‘others.’”¹⁰⁵

In addition to the arrival of new immigrant families, the children of the first generation of immigrants grew up and questioned the absence of Filipinos in American history.¹⁰⁶ Because of miscegenation laws and the comparative lack of Filipina women, many of those early laborers remained unmarried in their old

103 Pido, *Dimensions of Pilipino Immigration*, 33.

104 Alex Canillo, “Filipino Consciousness,” in *Pinoy, Know Yourself: An Introduction to the Filipino American Experience*, ed. Alex Canillo, Fred Cordova, et. al (Santa Cruz, CA: Third World Teaching Resource Center, Merrill College, University of California, 1975), 8-10.

105 Alberto Yamay Balingit, flyer titled “Pilipino” with photo of three young men and quote underneath, date unknown, location unknown, TD Reyes Personal Collection.

106 Joan May Cordova and Alex Canillo, *Voices*, 58.

age as couples and families immigrated in the latter decades of the 20th century. Without families of their own, they turned to social and community networks for support. Reflecting on his life growing up in Stockton and Manteca in the 1960s and 1970s, TD Reyes recalled how, “If there were a thousand Filipino men, they were all my uncle. There were ten to fifteen thousand guys, and they were all your uncle. They made you feel appreciated, like you belonged somewhere.”¹⁰⁷ For TD, this personal connection to members of the community drove his interest in preserving their wisdom and experiences. Similar interests by other members of the community are likely what led to the proliferation of attempts to preserve and remember. As a result, an influx of recorded history and documentation of this period arose in order to preserve the lives and experiences of those now elderly Filipinos who had been a part of the early wave of migration while they were still alive to recall their stories firsthand. Projects like Fred Cordova’s *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*, and Joan May Cordova’s *Voices: A Filipino American Oral History* were published in 1983 and 1984 respectively, no doubt products of several years of community-driven research. A research project by the “Filipino Multi-Service Center” based in the San Joaquin Delta region in 1979 which set out to document the lives and experiences of that early generation of agricultural laborers described,

“Today, the once young and strong Filipino can still be found in the same migratory pattern and, after 50 years, still living in relative isolation from the rest of society in substandard conditions such as small hotel rooms or labor camps around the small delta towns of Holt, Walnut Grove, Isleton, the surrounding areas of Stockton and the area along Lafayette and El Dorado Streets.”¹⁰⁸

Interest in Filipinos had to be predicated on the idea that they had a history worth preserving. This is precisely the purpose of the Filipino American movement:

107 TD Reyes, interview conducted with author, March 10, 2022.

108 Ted Reyes, Overview/Project Proposal for “The History of Filipinos in Northern California,” date unknown, c.1979, TD Reyes Personal Collection, 2.

to make sense of the kinds of things that Filipinos had experienced in America and preempt creating this new kind of identity that Filipinos could belong to by engaging with that history.¹⁰⁹

Engaging with history as a point to build a Filipino-American identity around coincided with interests in the Philippines. Attempts to build towards a critical consciousness and active participation in decolonizing frameworks led young people to begin to take an interest in Philippine languages, arts, and culture to reconcile who they were.¹¹⁰ “Pilipino Cultural Nights,” or PCNs, are large-scale productions collectively put on by Filipino students at colleges around the U.S. showcasing “various suites of Philippine folk dance accompanied by live or recorded music interspersed with a script that deals specifically with Filipino American experiences.”¹¹¹ In an expansion of Filipino-American discourses, Theo Gonzalves, a professor of Asian arts and culture who participated in PCN’s as a graduate student, described how he and some of his peers began to readapt the format of these shows that had become sort of played-out since their inception, choosing instead to focus on the act of working together with other Filipinos to put on the show rather than as a tradition for tradition’s sake¹¹² This just goes to show that even as third and fourth generation Filipinos begin to emerge into academic and social spaces, identity-construction continues to be a constantly evolving process. In another advent of identity-building, *balikbayan* trips, or “returns to the homeland,” represented a literal translocation to the Philippines to reconnect to one’s cultural roots. This can be undergone by Filipinos returning

109 Linda A Revilla, “Filipino American Identity: Transcending the Crisis,” in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 96-98.

110 Leny Mendoza Strobel, “Coming Full Circle,” in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 69-78.

111 Theodore S. Gonzalves, “On the Politics of (Filipino) Youth Culture,” interview by Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr, in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Eduardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia PA: Templeton University Press, 2006), 115-116.

112 Ibid, 116-119.

from America either for the first time in a long time or periodically. These trips complicate ideas of Filipino or Filipino-American identity-construction for American-born college students “returning” to the Philippines for the first time.¹¹³ While the utility or effect of these trips is debated in scholarly circles as a valid way to construct meaning or a version of “Filipino,” it stands to reason that the individual’s experience taking it can be a crucial decolonizing tool in that tradition of establishing a shared culture or history to belong to in a very tangible sense that remains relevant to that individual’s self-identification. A letter from 1989 by Ted Reyes, at one time an assistant coordinator for a Filipino youth group that took part in one of these trips, sought to reunite participants of the “student exchange during that long ago summer of 1976.”¹¹⁴ Even thirteen years later, the experience of participating in these *balikbayans* maintained a level of significance in the memories of these Filipinos that had traveled to the Philippines together. A participant in the 1976 trip, TD Reyes recalled how those three months “changed my life,” in the ways that the experience gave him a new perspective and context for the kinds of struggles that other Filipinos faced and continued to face in the Philippines.¹¹⁵ Taken altogether, demographic normalization between men and women, settled family units with various degrees of acculturation to both US society and Filipino customs, and renewed interests in reconnecting or maintaining ties to the Philippines, set for a wide swath of understanding of what it meant to self-identify and connect to other Filipinos for Filipinos in America throughout this latter period of the 20th century.

Later scholarship around the turn of the 21st century contested the idea of the Filipino-*American* archetypal construction that had begun to develop

113 S. Lily Mendoza, “A Different Breed of Filipino Balikbayans: The Ambiguities of (Re-) turning,” in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Eduardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia PA: Templeton University Press, 2006), 199-201.

114 Ted Reyes, letter to members of “PBI/YSTAPHIL 1976 Student Exchange,” October 7, 1989, TD Reyes Personal Collection.

115 TD Reyes, interview conducted with author, March 10, 2022.

in the 1960s and 1970s. The cultural critic E. San Juan Jr. rebuked what he considered uncritical reorientation and the purpose of further Americanization in identity politics in the ways that histories of Filipinos attempt to reconcile with the violent imposition of American imperialism. These collections and images, he stipulates, attempt to rewrite or re-represent the exploits of Filipino people in a context that is wholly ignorant or avoidant of the devastating effects of America's imperial subjugation of the Philippines and its inhabitants.¹¹⁶ Dylan Rodríguez takes an even harsher critique by framing the development of the Filipino-American movement and Filipino-American studies through the language of the civilizing mission of the Philippine War, postulating that the direction of Filipino-American discourse verges on its own hegemonic narrative that occludes the deep complexities of class, ethnicity, and linguistic traditions amongst people from the Philippines, relying on active mis-remembrance of the wide-scale annihilation and rejection of those selfsame people by military and political apparatus to acculturate on the terms of the imperial hegemon.¹¹⁷ That all said, these early advents in documenting Filipino History do not fail to acknowledge differentiation and exclusion experienced by those early Filipinos. Nor do educational tools like *Pinoy Know Yourself* and *Letters in Exile* produced with the express purpose of building a Filipino consciousness shy away positioning those hardships as a critique of American society, as these projects situate some of the most overtly racializing rhetoric about Filipinos directly next to discourses and firsthand accounts that deal with the effects of those methods of exclusion. That research project documenting elderly farm laborers in the late 1970s describes how "Today, there are approximately 500-600,000 Filipinos in the United States. *Their* life is not so hard, the cultural barriers have been brought down *somewhat*

116 San Juan Jr., 77-93.

117 Dylan Rodríguez, "A Million Deaths? Genocide and the 'Filipino-American' Condition of Possibility," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Eduardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia PA: Templeton University Press, 2006), 145-161.

and it is all because of these now old and forgotten men who were ‘THE FIRST’” [emphasis mine].¹¹⁸ This description evokes a sense of remorse not just about American history at large, but within the growing Filipino community that the immeasurable hardships and confrontations that the older generation faced had gone on misremembered. Not only that, but a sense that those old bachelor laborers represented a literal dying breed that was slowly disappearing as families and middle-class new immigrant families began to crop up in other metropolitan and suburban centers across California. This lamentation about the changing state of the world is recounted in the researcher’s notes, that, “Their futures may have been less in terms of material success but they have succeeded in being attached to the land and have remained human in the process; a trait that most of us have lost or forgotten long ago.”¹¹⁹ There is a sense of nostalgia and reverence for these old community members to have been able to live their lives in spite of immense currents of violence and exclusion and the feeling that the author and people like him would not even exist had they not done so. The goal of this project, and ostensibly other visual experiential projects like it, is not to erase what had happened but to recapture and remember what survives to resist erasure and build an identity through a shared history. Lest it be gone for good, and the imperializing mission persist unchallenged as a success.

What Does It All Mean?

“If you want to know who we are, we’re just farmers from Hawaii, then California. You had an uncle who got Shanghaied, literally Shanghaied, in 1896. It’s all in the family tree, I can show you.”¹²⁰ These were the words that my uncle, whose support and personal collections made the research for this paper possible, imparted to me when he learned that his nephew was interested in learning about Filipino history. This story about a distant uncle and the conversation that

118 Ted Reyes, Overview/Proposal for “The History of Filipinos in Northern California,” 2.

119 Ted Reyes, “Observations” in section marked “Field Notes” for “The History of Filipinos in Northern California” project, date unknown, c. 1979, TD Reyes Personal Collection.

120 TD Reyes, interview conducted with author, November 25, 2021.

followed it uncovering and revealing family history is only one small component of one Filipino family's experience in America. But by historicizing that story in the context of imperial confrontations, it acts a microcosm of the kinds of conditions and experiences that underscored the migration of Filipino people who came to live in the United States throughout the twentieth century. The informal nature of the discussion between family members about a shared past, acts as a gateway to reveal the depth of personal and familial connections between Filipinos situated in the United States. Engagement with those tools of identity-construction can lead to a deeper understanding of the historical dimensions of interactions between Filipino people and the political and cultural landscape of the United States of America.

To take a reading from the critical transnational works of San Juan after situating them next to the very arguments that he criticizes, the takeaway from all these personal narratives and stories about interactions with the forces of history might reveal that it does not matter who or what Filipino people identified as in terms of class or ethnic origin before they came to America (or as Yen Espiritu more accurately places it, before America came to the Philippines).¹²¹ Rather, these people became something else as a result of victimizing realizations of the United States' imperial ambitions and racializing rhetoric that changed society and the ways they saw themselves and one another. Through this lens the overarching narrative of Filipino History is not necessarily one of proud resilience or making it in America, but rather fighting like hell to carve out a space in contrast to the domineering power of an imperial hegemon—something that members of the Filipino community have proven they are more than capable of in multiple contexts. San Juan might disagree that the underlying rhetoric of collected narratives and attempts at pan-ethnicity among other Asian American groups at the heart of the works of the Cordovas, Yen Espiritu, and Ronald Takaki undermine attempts at real resistance to hegemony in the ways that they

121 Yen Espiritu, *Home Bound*, 25.

orient themselves towards America by identifying the “-American” aspect of Filipino-Americans and Asian-Americans historically and spatially. In his view a more meaningful kind of counter-hegemonic resistance might look something more like expanded democracy and political and economic sovereignty of the Philippines and its people free from the structural aims of global capitalism.¹²² But neither this shift in scope nor criticism of the method necessarily invalidates the end results that these research experiments have produced, or the efforts of the people who wanted to produce them. Knowing is half of that fight, and the capacity to piece together what happened from a bottom-up perspective can reveal the brevity of this ideological conflict of nation-building, differential race-making, and apparatuses of social and economic power through the very real effects it has and has had on the lived experiences of real people. And there has been plenty of resistance. Look at the impact that Labor Unions had for the collective power of farm laborers in the 1930s and again in the 1960s. Or the way that interest in Filipinos and the Philippines spurred on the creation of education curriculum and indigenous reconnection to the proverbial homeland to create solidarity for those younger generations of families in America. The old *manongs* and *manangs* interviewed for those early attempts at preservation did not shy away from wanting to share their experiences, allowing those stories to be captured and serve as a connecting point for future generations. Even the conjunction of family history with the larger historicization of imperial hegemony leads to ways of contextualizing and reconnecting with this contentious and tumultuous past. Building critical consciousness must come from somewhere, and the purpose of decolonizing narratives does not have to be synonymous with assimilation. Rather, it can be a step towards counter-cultural resistance; discourses like Rodríguez’s probably wouldn’t exist if this, in part, was not the case.

Who are the Filipinos in California? They are people who can trace their ethnicity to a cluster of Islands in the Pacific Ocean called “the Philippines.”

122 San Juan Jr., *After Postcolonialism*, 54-56.

They were the people in the early days of the twentieth century who were unwittingly thrust into economic and cultural circumstances wrought by US colonial ambitions. Those early immigrants struggled with violence, hardship, and differentiation, and eventually built families and communities with stronger connections to one another in a world that has repeatedly been caught in a hypocritical paradigm of needing them but not wanting them. As Filipino families grew in America and new demographics of Filipinos began to arrive from the Philippines, the meaning of what it is to “be” Filipino was molded by individual experiences and those connections to one another at the conjunction of cultures. And still they remain. These transitory patterns connecting people across time and a vast ocean maintain the development of Filipino identity today. It is hard to imagine some of the places that Filipinos used to frequent if you visit them now. Stockton’s historic “Little Manila” district has been reduced to three buildings on one street block facing the crosstown freeway. San Luis Obispo’s historic “Chinatown” is similarly only two buildings, now situated next to a luxury hotel. Yet as I found myself wandering these places with a newfound appreciation for their history, I could not help but feel a sense of reverence for what all those that came before had done and offered the world. I was proud to be a part of it.

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