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The Filipino Century in Hawaii: Out of the Crucible

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How does one capture the essence of a hundred years? We are reminded of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Nobel Prize-winning, *Cien Años de Soledad: A Hundred Years of Solitude*. Using his signature literary style called "magical realism," Marquez crafts a brilliant epic story of love, loss, death and renewal in the mythical village of Macondo, covering a hundred years of the original protagonist, Jose Arcadio Buendia, and his descendants. It is highly comic but at the same time deeply tragic. Solitude or not, it isn't just another story. It's a story that engages our sense of human survival. It is about the indestructibility of the human spirit, the enduring theme of all great literature.

The world of the plantation in Hawaii wasn't so mythical as Macondo. It was starkly real. For the first 15 bewildered Filipino *sakadas* (migrant workers) who got off the *S.S. Doric* on December 20, 1906, amid stares of curious onlookers, the world before them was one of foreboding. The feudal plantation system and its oppressive need for abundant cheap labor was already entrenched when they arrived. Life for them would be much more than solitude. It would be more like a crucible serving up the severest of tests for human endurance. Ten to 12-hour days of backbreaking work in the canefields under a searing sun, a miserable dollar-a-day wage, homelessness, rootlessness, isolation, loneliness, vulnerability to the *luna's* wrath, suffering and other human hardships would be the essence of their existence.

Even so, the 15 pioneers would soon be joined by thousands of their compatriots, thanks to the relentless recruitment and aggressive propaganda of the Hawaii Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA). The HSPA showed movies of idyllic plantation life with opportunities for easy riches. Hawaii was portrayed extravagantly as *kasla gloria* (like paradise). Innocent Filipinos, wrote Bruno Lasker, were easily duped into mortgaging properties or borrowing from relatives to pay their passage to Hawaii. Once in Hawaii, the *sakadas* would send money to the homeland, giving the impression that they had struck it rich in Hawaii. These young *sakadas* were mostly single and without the benefit of schooling. The recruiters used only one criterion: "no read no write," as the educated ones were potential "troublemakers." Labor unrest on the

plantations was beginning to escalate toward the 1920s, and the strikes would continue on through the 30's, 40's and 50s. Eventually becoming the largest plantation workforce, Filipinos would be very much a part of this turbulent period of Hawaii's history.

In turn the exaggerated *glorya* stories spurred more recruitment to Hawaii, particularly from the impoverished Ilocos region in northern Philippines, where the vast majority of today's Filipinos in Hawaii came from. Between 1906 and 1930, the HSPA had brought in approximately 120,000 Filipinos to Hawaii, dramatically altering the territory's ethnic demographics. Comprising only 19 percent of the plantation workforce in 1917, the *sakadas* jumped to 70 percent by 1930, replacing the Japanese, who had dwindled to 19 percent as the '30s approached. This caused some tension between the two groups.

Labor Unionism

By 1919, the fiery labor militant Pablo Manlapit had organized the *Filipino Labor Federation*. This was followed by the *Higher Wages Movement*, which demanded better working conditions, a minimum daily wage and equal pay for equal work regardless of race. Joining the Japanese workers, the Filipinos waged a strike in 1920. The Philippine Government sent an emissary, Cayetano Ligot, to look into the Filipinos' labor problems, but Ligot ironically sided with the planters, urging the Filipinos to cooperate with management. He undermined his fellow Filipino Manlapit, who was arrested for his labor activities. Filipino oldtimers in the Hawaii community still recall the joke "Mistake Ligot" (instead of Mister Ligot) regarding the mediation role that he was supposed to have played.

The most violent strike happened in 1924 on the island of Kauai when 16 Filipinos and 4 policemen were killed in the infamous "Hanapepe Massacre" encounter. Manlapit was again arrested and exiled to California only to return in the early 1930s to renew his organizing efforts, this time focusing on Maui. The 1937 strike by thousands of Filipino workers on Puunene resulted in major benefits but again the organizers were arrested and Manlapit was deported permanently. After 1937, an interracial industry-wide union, the ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union), expanded tremendously and had about 30,000 members by 1947. The ILWU eventually became a powerful political force taking on the Big Five corporations, which had historically controlled the Hawaii plantations. The union waged bigtime strikes in 1946, followed by the 1947 pineapple-related shutdown, and finally by the 1949 longshore strike. As late as 1958, there was a four-month long sugar strike. It was the end of an era. Filipino workers began to move out of the plantations with some going back to the Philippines or moving on to the U.S. mainland. But the post-World War II period accelerated immigration from the Philippines, with the last 6,000 *sakadas* arriving in Hawaii in 1946.

Immigration Reform

Immigration reform in 1965 further intensified Philippine immigration allowing the reunification of families and the entry into the U.S. of Filipino professionals and skilled workers. Of the 1990 U.S. Census Filipino population estimated at 1.7 million, 71 percent were post-1965 immigrants, mostly doctors, nurses, medical technologists, accountants, engineers, military, religious, teachers, lawyers, dentists, and other professionals. Between 1965 and 1977, 85 percent came as professionals, majority of whom were women. The new immigrants' proficiency in English, familiarity with American values, college education and employable skills enabled them to integrate into the mainstream relatively easily.

This gradually reversed the pre-1965 plantation experience when racism, harsh working conditions, lack of a stable family life, feelings of isolation and inferiority, and poverty combined to block the Filipino workers' integration into the larger American social fabric. All that began to change as the post-'60s multiple "revolutions" in civil and women's rights, representation, multiculturalism, ethnic studies and other changes in American society itself began to alter the consciousness of younger generations of Filipino-Americans.

According to writer Rene Ciria-Cruz, the "Fil-Am baby boomers" became "visibly receptive to the ideals of the civil rights and anti-war ferment of the '60s." Now as young adults, they sit on public commissions, lead advocacy groups, manage their own business enterprises, run for public office, go to graduate school, teach Philippine or ethnic studies, and become productive members of the larger community.

"Powerlessness" in the Filipino Community

Community leaders in Hawaii often speak of "powerlessness" and the perennial issue of "lack of unity" among Filipino groups because of regional, linguistic, generational, professional and other differences, despite the fact that they have been around for a hundred years, so the argument goes. We Filipinos are sometimes our own worst critics. This "self-flagellation" goes on in community gatherings usually in relation with the more economically advanced ethnic groups like the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, bringing up the classic example of comparing apples and oranges.

These observations are flawed in that they fail to note the "broken continuity" of the Filipino community in America and Hawaii the last 100 years. The plantation pioneers and their children were unable to sustain a continuous and stable community because of racist exclusion and the other negative factors cited above. They were referred to as the "invisible minority" or "forgotten Filipinos." It took the post-1965 immigration reforms to re-establish a modern Filipino community capable of holding its own. In our characteristic impatience, we tend to

berate the community for "sleeping too long." But Ciria-Cruz cogently points out that, "Without a bridge from the '20s and '30s, the community that we know today is in reality quite young, but our expectations of it are already quite mature. Its very youth poses unavoidable hindrances to empowerment." There was a "disconnect" somewhere that impeded Filipino progress in Hawaii.

The Filipino Community Today

Today, the Hawaii Filipino community, though not yet in the economic mainstream, actually leads the nation in other indicators of social and political advancement. It has produced the first U.S. governor of Filipino ancestry, Benjamin Cayetano, who not only served one but two terms. It has produced the first Filipino-American Justice of a state Supreme Court - Benjamin Menor. Similarly, Hawaii has produced the first Filipino-American Speaker of a State House of Representatives and President of a State Senate - Daniel Kihano and Robert Bunda, respectively. Unknown to many, Pulitzer Prize winner Byron Acohido was born and raised in Wahiawa. The much-acclaimed General Antonio Taguba, who courageously exposed abuses of inmates in Iraq, was born in Sampaloc, Manila and graduated from Leilehua High School on Oahu. Another unusual "first" was the filing of a lawsuit against the City and County of Honolulu for "accent discrimination" by a Filipino applicant, Manuel Fragante. He topped the written exam but was denied a job because of his "heavy Filipino accent."

The first Filipino-American mayor of a U.S. county was Eduardo Malapit of Kauai. And the first woman Filipino-American mayor of a U.S. county was Lorraine Rodero-Inouye of the Big Island, who is now a Hawaii state senator. The first Filipino-American to be appointed U.S. District Judge is Alfred Laureta. The first Filipino-American chair of a City Council in the U.S. was the late Rudy Pacarro. There were even cases of "unusual firsts." In the 1988 election for the 39th Representative district on Oahu, two Filipino candidates - Romy Cachola and Connie Chun - ended up with a tie! The tie was resolved in favor of Cachola with a 13-vote edge over Chun. Cachola eventually won a seat in the Honolulu City Council.

The "boy genius" Kiwi Camara, son to Filipino parents, both medical doctors, graduated from Harvard Law School at age 20, an amazing "first." The first Filipino lawyer, Pablo Manlapit, fought the windmills in the early 1900s, but now there are more than 200 lawyers of Filipino ancestry in Hawaii. The doctors are even more numerous. Internationally-known ophthalmologist Dr. Jorge Camara has received several prestigious awards.

The media field proudly boasts Emme Tomimbang, the first Filipino-American woman anchor of a TV newscast in America. Longtime *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* editorial artist Corky Trinidad, a nationally syndicated cartoonist, has received numerous prestigious awards as well.

The list is endless and it will not be possible to mention all these landmark developments and distinguished individuals in the Filipino community since the 1900s. Other marks of distinction can be found in the *Chronology* that follows this article.

Conclusion

After a hundred years, the 15 *sakadas* would certainly be thrilled that the trail they blazed has led to a world-class community with its own “firsts” in politics, celebrity and popular culture. Now more than 275,000 strong, the Filipino and part-Filipino community is 23 percent of the Hawaii population and becoming increasingly visible. The current state senate has five Filipino-Americans: Robert Bunda, Will Espero, Lorraine Inouye, Donna Mercado-Kim, and Ron Menor. At the House of Representatives, there are six Filipino-Americans: Felipe “Jun” Abinsay, Lyla Berg, Rida Cabanilla, Lynn Finnegan, Michael Magaoay, Kymberly Pine and Alex Sonson.

Angela Baraquio, daughter of an immigrant couple from Pangasinan became the first Filipino-American to win the Miss America title.

The Filipino community in Hawaii has produced outstanding finalists and semi-finalists for the national *American Idol* contest: Jasmine Trias, Camille Velasco and Jordan Segundo.

Athletics has turned out Filipino-American world champions and role models: Ben Villaflor, Jesus Salud and Brian Viloria in boxing, Benny Agbayani in professional baseball, and the World Champion Little Leaguers from West Oahu, whose coach is also Filipino-American.

The solitude has passed, the isolation has ended, and the world of the *sakadas* has changed tremendously. The first generation of *manongs* has passed on, but their enduring legacy of triumph and survival lives on. They lit the torch and led the way amidst so much sacrifice, deprivation, and humiliation. Theirs was a world of pain and adversity, which they suffered in silence.

I started this essay by referring to a Nobel Laureate. It is fitting to cite another one by way of ending. As William Faulkner would say, they, our forebears, not only endured. They prevailed. And this is the real bittersweet meaning of the Filipino Century in Hawaii.

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Chronology: Filipinos in Hawaii

(Note: The following chronology is meant as general guide to the Filipino experience in Hawaii in the past 100 years. It is not exhaustive or complete due to limitations of space. It is derived from a number of general references which are listed at the end of the chronology.)

- 1898 Aguinaldo proclaims first Philippine Republic on June 12 at Kawit, Cavite, after U.S. naval forces under Commodore George Dewey destroy Spanish fleet in a mock battle. In December the Treaty of Paris is signed by the U.S. and Spain without any Filipino representation. U.S. buys the Philippines for \$20 million.
- 1899 Philippine-American War starts in February and lasts through 1902 but Filipino resistance continues until 1908. At least 250,000 Filipinos die in battle or from starvation, disease and other wartime hardships.
- 1901 U.S. establishes first civil government with William Howard Taft as Governor. The Hawaii Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) explores recruiting Filipino labor for the Hawaii plantations.
- 1906 The first group of 15 *sakadas* (migrant workers) recruited by HSPA arrive in Honolulu harbor on Dec. 20 and sent to the Ola'a plantation on the Big Island. No recruitment in 1907 – 08.
- 1909 A group of 554 *sakadas* arrive in Hawaii, followed by 2,653 in 1910 and 1,363 in 1911.
- 1912 *Sakada* recruitment intensifies with 4,319 arriving in Hawaii, followed by 3,258 in 1913.
- 1915 The Philippine Government (under U.S. colonial rule) expresses concern about labor outflow and recruitment abuses. HSPA works out a system of individual contracts.
- 1919 Pablo Manlapit organizes the *Filipino Labor Federation* to demand higher wages and better working conditions for *sakadas*. HSPA warns of “Filipino violence” in canefields.
- 1920 Labor leaders form the *Higher Wages Movement* but HSPA rejects demands. Filipino and Japanese workers strike separately, and nearly 12,100 workers are evicted.
- 1924 Strike called by Manlapit and 16 Filipino workers and four policemen are killed in the “Hanapepe Massacre” incident on Kauai. Manlapit is convicted and exiled to California.
- 1926 *Sakadas* comprise 50 percent of all plantation workers, replacing the Japanese as majority.
- 1932 Manlapit returns to Hawaii and revitalizes the *Filipino Labor Federation* with Antonio Fagel and Epifanio Taok. Organizing focuses on Maui and union is renamed *Vibora Luviminda*.
- 1934 The Tydings-McDuffie (Philippine Independence) Act declares Filipinos “aliens” and limits their entry to Hawaii and U.S. to 50 persons yearly. Later increased to 100.
- 1936 Filipino strike starts at Puunene plantation on Maui. Strikebreakers, also Filipinos, are used. HSPA is forced to negotiate with strikers this time.
- 1937 Four-mile procession on May 1 of Filipino strikers stretches from Kahului to Wailuku on Maui. Fagel is charged with conspiracy and *Vibora Luviminda* collapses.
- 1940 Half of first-wave *sakadas* (1906 – 1930s) leave Hawaii, either for the U.S. mainland or back to the Philippines.

- 1941 World War II breaks out and martial law stops all labor organizing. The First and Second Filipino Regiments of the U.S. Army see action in the Philippines.
- 1944 The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) under Jack Hall's leadership becomes a strong political force by organizing ethnic workers, including Filipinos. ILWU grows to more than 30,000 in 1947.
- 1946 ILWU strike paralyzes the island economy. HSPA imports the last group of 6,000 Ilokano *sakadas*.
- 1947 Philippine Consulate is established in Honolulu with Modesto Farolan as head. Filipina writer Ligaya Reyes Fruto joins staff and also writes for the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*.
- 1949 Longshore strike breaks out and lasts 157 days. Establishes ILWU as an "entrenched power" in Hawaii politics.
- 1951 Filipino workers on Lanai led by ILWU business agent Pedro de la Cruz call a strike lasting 201 days. Major worker benefits are won.
- 1954 Lawyer Peter Aquino Aduja becomes the first Filipino to be elected Representative in Hawaii Territorial Legislature.
- The Filipino Chamber of Commerce is founded with Pastor Pablo as president.
- 1958 De la Cruz is elected to the Territorial Legislature representing Lanai and Bernaldo Bicoy is elected to represent West Oahu.
- 1959 Hawaii becomes the 50th State of the United States of America. Juan C. Dionisio organizes first statewide Filipino convention resulting in future formation of the United Filipino Council of Hawaii (UFCH).
- 1962 Alfred Laureta is appointed director of the state's Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, the first Filipino-American to hold a state cabinet position in Hawaii. Also appointed later as first Filipino U.S. district judge (in Saipan).
- Benjamin Menor is elected to the State Senate, the first Filipino immigrant to win a seat in that body. His son Ron Menor would later be elected Hawaii senator.
- 1965 Liberalized Immigration Law allows family reunification and professionals to enter U.S. increasing the number of Filipinos to 11 percent of the total Hawaii population.
- 1972 Ferdinand Marcos declares Martial Law in the Philippines, which would last for 14 years, dividing the Filipino community. Anti-martial law movement is active in Hawaii.
- 1973 KISA, the first Filipino-owned radio station in the U.S. opens in Honolulu, owned by Dr. Henry Manayan. A core group of radio personalities host Tagalog, Ilokano and Visayan programs. Emme Tomimbang starts radio career with *Morning Girl* program and father Tommy Tomimbang is engineer and has *Maligayang Araw* show.
- 1974 Benjamin Menor is appointed Justice of the Hawaii Supreme Court, the first Filipino to hold that position in any U.S. state Supreme Court.
- 1975 Eduardo Malapit is elected mayor of Kauai, the first Filipino-American to become mayor of a U.S. county.

The Center for Philippine Studies is established at the University of Hawaii.

- 1979 Geminiano "Toy" Arre, Jr. is appointed Director of Finance, the first Filipino to hold a cabinet post in the City and Council of Honolulu.
- 1981 Filipinos in Hawaii celebrate their 75th anniversary. The Second International Philippine Studies Conference is held in Honolulu with Justice Benjamin Menor as guest speaker.
- 1982 Eight candidates of Filipino ancestry are elected to the Hawaii State Legislature.
- 1983 The Aloha Medical Mission (AMM) is established and volunteer doctors treat indigent patients in the Philippines. Would later send missions to other countries.
- 1985 Emme Tomimbang is named KITV anchorwoman, the first Filipino-American woman in the country to become a TV news anchor.
- 1986 The Marcos dictatorship is toppled and he arrives in Hawaii in exile. In 1989 he dies and his remains stay in Hawaii until 1992.

Sister Grace Dorothy Lim, originally from Ilocos Sur, Philippines, is named the first woman chancellor of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu.

- 1987 Daniel Kihano is elected Speaker of the Hawaii State House of Representatives, the first Filipino-American to occupy the position in the U.S. His term ends in 1992.
- 1990 Lorraine Rodero-Inouye is elected mayor of the Big Island (Hawaii), the first Filipino-American woman to become mayor of a U.S. county.

Filipino population in Hawaii reaches 170,000 or 14 percent of state population.

- 1994 Benjamin J. Cayetano, son of an immigrant from Urdaneta, Pangasinan, is elected Governor of Hawaii, the first Filipino-American to occupy the highest office in an American state. He would be re-elected in 1998.
- 2000 Darolyn Lendio is appointed Corporation Counsel, the first Filipina to be named to a cabinet position in the City and County of Honolulu. Another Filipina-American lawyer, Abelina Madrid Shaw, is appointed Deputy Corporation Counsel, also a cabinet position.

Six Filipino-American candidates win State Senate seats.

- 2001 Robert Bunda is elected Hawaii State Senate president, the first Filipino-American in the U.S. to fill the position.

Abelina Madrid Shaw is appointed Chief of Staff to Honolulu Mayor Jeremy Harris, in the Office of the Mayor, the first Filipino-American woman to occupy the position in the City and County of Honolulu.

Angela Perez Baraquio becomes first Filipino-American to win Miss America title.

- 2002 The Filipino Centennial Celebration Commission is created by the Legislature to oversee 100th anniversary of the first Filipino arrivals in Hawaii in 2006.

The Filipino Community Center (FilCom) is completed and inaugurated after several years of fundraising through government grants and private donations.

Five Filipino-American candidates are elected State Senators and six win House seats.

2004 Five Filipino-American candidates for the State Senate and seven candidates for the House win. Robert Bunda is re-elected as Senate President.

2005-2006 Yearlong observance of the Filipino Centennial starts on December 10, 2005 and ends December 17, 2006.

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