

ETHNICITY, LABOR AND POLITICS
The Filipino Experience in Hawaii

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First of all, I would like to thank the Center for Filipino Studies and the Pilipino Students Association of the CSU-EB for inviting me to participate in today's symposium on political leadership in the Filipino-American community. I'm especially grateful to Prof. Rica Llorente, symposium chair, for giving me a sense of how this presentation can tie in with the goals of the symposium, which include building bridges between academics and the community, between theory and practice, between generation and among cultures. This is a lot of territory to cover in 20 minutes but a great beginning in setting the tone for discussing political leadership in the community especially at this time.

As we all know, an exciting political season has been upon us for the past 18 months, and in just four weeks, whoever and whichever political party wins, we will see some profound changes in the political landscape of this country. It is in this dynamic context that we must frame our future role as Filipino-Americans because as one of the fastest growing minorities in America, we cannot afford to be left behind in the critical events that will follow the November elections. We should see ourselves as major stakeholders in the future of American politics itself and this means getting together like this to think seriously about enhancing that possibility. It is largely in serious gatherings like this that we can sharpen our political education and self-consciousness to function more effectively in the larger American arena.

To focus this discussion more tightly, I will be guided by this framework, which basically consists of three parts: 1) forces that shape political participation in the American nation; 2) Filipinos in the fabric of American society; and 3) the Filipino experience in Hawaii. These should be seen as interrelated factors rather than as separate elements explaining the nature of politics in this country with reference to ethnic groups such as the Filipino-American community.

America

America has been characterized in a hundred ways, but a good point of departure in this morning's discussion is that, it is a nation of immigrants. This does not really need further explanation as just about everyone in this country today will not dispute the fact that immigrants over time have contributed to the history and development of "the American nation," equally

defined in various terms. We usually associate the term “immigration” with the late 19th century and early 20th century when scores of immigrants from Europe began to move to America in continuous waves. In fact, some observers go further back in time as to when the first people arrived in what is now America. There is still a vibrant debate today revolving around the possibility that the first human beings to set foot on the continents of North and South America came from Asia.

Because of continuous immigration to and settlement in America, Nathan Glazer has referred to this country as a “permanently unfinished society.” The attraction of America has not diminished and it remains as strong as when the first immigrants came many centuries ago. We the later immigrants are part of this seemingly contradictory condition of having found a permanent home, and yet are still part of an ever-changing society that continues to evolve and reconfigure itself. This issue is significant because it has implications for the larger question of ethnic identity, which is of particular concern especially to our younger generations.

Coming to America

There have been several books written on ethnic minorities in America but I can mention two of them for purposes of discussion, namely, *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America* (2001) edited by Ruben Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, and *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (1990) by Roger Daniels. Both are readable and insightful references, which make important theoretical and empirical contributions to the body of scholarship on the history of immigration and the development of American ethnicity through several generations of adaptation, acculturation, resistance and transformation. Both spring from the premise that migration is a fundamental human activity, which is central to the construction of immigration and ethnic history in this country.

Ethnicity

Rumbaut and Portes use the concept of “ethnogenesis” to frame their arguments on the nature of the newer immigration patterns in the U.S. notably from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. While the term sounds like the name of a disease, it is simply defined as the creation of a new ethnic group identity. Rumbaut and Portes define it as “the construction and evolution of American ethnicity.” This construction, the authors argue, has taken shape over several generations, “molded by the European conquest of indigenous and enslaved peoples and by massive ways of migration from all over the world.” (2001:4) This process, which has been institutionalized in academic culture as “race and ethnic relations,” has transformed the U.S. as one of the world’s most ethnically diverse societies. As we can see in this slide, the racial ethnic

categories used in identifying the diverse U.S. populations are: white, African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, and Other Race.

These social classifications are arbitrary, as we know, because what we are talking about go beyond these clear-cut distinctions. But we won't have time to analyze this issue more intensively, and I will just present them as further terms for discussion.

US Racial Distribution

The current (2006) census estimates of the U.S. ethnic distribution are: White (66%), Hispanic (14.8%), Asian (4.4%), American Indian (.68%), and Pacific Islander (.34%). Obviously, there should be an "Other" category here, which is not shown. The problem with this limited classification is where you put Middle East and migrants, for instance.

Daniels' main contribution to the literature is a discussion of the so-called "century of immigration" from 1820 – 1924, covering Irish, German, Scandinavian, Italian, Greek, Arab and Eastern European migrants. He also chronicles subsequent immigration to the U.S. from Asia, Central America, Caribbean and the former Soviet Union.

Daniels uses the term "Eurocentricity" to describe the "civilizing" processes of assimilation, mainstreaming, and "Americanization" typical of the earlier immigrants.

"Ethnic differences were to be thrown into the crucible," says Leonard Andaya, professor of History at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, who is the son of a first generation immigrant on Maui, Hawaii, "and melded to form the American." (Andaya, 1996:5). The overriding goal for ethnics then was to assimilate, to become "American" as conventionally defined by the school system, media and other institutions of American society. You lost your identity in the so-called "melting pot," which was American, of course, meaning "white."

In part this assimilation process was forced by what Daniels calls "the triumph of nativism" during the century of immigration. Alarmed by the massive influx of immigrants to the U.S., some forces raised the "red flag" invoking the specter of "mongrelization" and dilution of the American race. Several "exclusion laws" especially in the 1920s and '30s were enacted on mostly racist grounds. Harsh immigration quotas were imposed. Discrimination, miscegenation and anti-immigrant measures were legislated. There were strident cries to restrict the entry of aliens to the U.S. and the dangers of immigration, mostly imagined, were blatantly exploited. Nativist fears reached fever pitch proportions in the decades preceding the Second World War.

Despite the hostile climate and discriminatory treatment that early immigrants faced, massive immigration to the U.S. continued especially after the end of World War II. By 1997, there were approximately 27 million foreign-born residents in this country, most of them coming

after 1960. The majority (52%) came from Latin America and the Caribbean. And about a third (29%) came from Asia and the Middle East. The magnitude of Asian migration could be seen during this period as about 15% of the total number of post – 1960 immigrants was composed of Filipinos, Chinese, Indochinese, and other Asians. Currently the Asian population in the U.S. is estimated at 4.34%, approximately 13.1 million. Of these, 2.8 million are Filipinos and Filipino-Americans.

With the continuous influx of newer immigrants came a changing ethnoculture in America. Increasing socio-economic and educational opportunities gave a sense of confidence and optimism to the new members of American society. It was no longer as shameful before to acknowledge their cultural heritage. And to talk about their ethnic roots and national origins was no longer as divisive. While still a powerful force, “Americanization” was giving way to accommodation and understanding. American society was becoming more open.

Emerging Paradigms

Consequently, old paradigms gave way to new ones as concepts like diversity, multiculturalism, equal opportunity, affirmative action, inclusion and political correctness became part of the everyday language of American public policy and of the nuanced discourses on social relations. Educational institutions, particularly those receiving federal grants, had to diversity or liberalize their academic curricula, athletic programs, employment and hiring policies. The ‘70s and ‘80s saw the emergence of newer fields of studies, including what you have here in California, the Center for Filipino Studies, which has a counterpart in our Center for Philippine Studies in Hawaii. Ethnic studies was introduced as a legitimate field of academic inquiry. The new hyphenated-Americans found their ancestral heritage and historical roots becoming part of the emerging American ethnicity to a degree that had not been possible in the earlier days of Americanization and assimilation.

Finally, these incremental changes gradually led to the notion of “empowerment.” Filipino-Americans today, particularly the younger generations, are certainly feeling more empowered than their ancestors or forebears in the old plantation or farming days. They have more education, more economic opportunities, more political sophistication, and more social confidence based on a stronger sense of identity. The larger question now is whether this “empowerment” is real or an illusion. If it is illusory at this point, how can we make it real?

I inserted the term “diaspora” here because it is a component of the modern paradigms on ethnic minorities in international communities. Certainly the Filipino diaspora continues with vigor. Deployment and employment opportunities abound in some 135 countries, but the U.S. is still the primary destination of hundreds of thousands of more or less permanent migrants.

Globalization has exacerbated this outward migration trend of Filipinos now pursuing the “Global Dream.” Some have even used the term “Filipino Global Nation” to undertake international conferences and gatherings like to explore the contemporary phenomenon of the “Global Filipino.”

Civil Rights Acts

The emergence of dynamic social and political forces in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s crystallized a number of dramatic changes that radically transformed American society. The most earthshaking of these changes was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its subsequent amendments. The Act enforced the universal right to vote, expanded voting rights by eliminating literacy and language requirements, prohibited discrimination in public accommodations, integrated public schools and other public facilities, established a Commission of Equal Employment Opportunity, and liberalized rights of women, minorities, elderly, veterans and other previously underrepresented groups. Human and civil rights of all citizens are to be respected and protected. A more nuanced concept of American “citizenship” beyond its legal requirements was emerging.

According to Nathan Glazer again, three pieces of legislation – the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Acts and Immigration Act, both in 1965, “represent a kind of high-water mark in a national consensus of egalitarianism, one from which much of the country has receded in subsequent years.” (Quoted in Daniels 1990: 338) The ‘50s and ‘60s were decades of social ferment but also of creative and dynamic changes in American society.

All these initiatives were further strengthened by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which liberalized the basic immigration law of 1924, abolished the limited quota system and expanded the preference system to include entry of professionals and non-family members to the U.S.

In demographic terms alone, the effects of the liberalized immigration laws in 1965 have been startling. In 1940 Asian-Americans were less than four-tenths of one percent of the American population. By 1980, they constituted 1.5% of the American people, and currently they form nearly 4.5% of the U.S. population as previously cited. They were also becoming not only socially aware but more politically pro-active.

Subsequent developments after the 1960s reinforced the political status position of ethnics and immigrants in the U.S. The Immigration Reform Act of 1986 also legitimized some 2.7 million previously undocumented aliens. The new law “led to a number of important changes in the character and legal treatment of labor immigrants.” (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:278)

Map of the Philippines

I will shift gears here and return for a moment to the Philippines where it all began. Sometimes we forget that we need to have a sense of history to understand more critically the present situation of Filipinos in the U.S. I hope one of the byproducts of this symposium will be a book or reader to deconstruct Philippine-American history as a guide to a better understanding of the issues surrounding the complex relationship of the two countries over the past century.

The Philippines

As a colony of the U.S. from 1898 to 1946, the Philippines was a continuous source of cheap and abundantly available labor to meet the growing needs of a rapidly industrializing America. The transformation of Philippine society by the arrival of American colonizing influences and ideas has been told many times. And there is a constant factor in these narratives and that is the recruitment and exploitation of Filipino labor to serve a growing American market. Starting in 1906, the Hawaiian Super Planters' Association (HSPA) recruited agricultural laborers from the Philippines called "*sakadas*" to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations in Hawaii. There were only 15 *sakadas* in the beginning but in three decades they grew to more than 100,000. In fact they replaced the Japanese as dominant ethnic group in the plantations.

Other U.S. companies imported Filipino labor to work in the vineyards, farms, canneries, and other factories in California. As U.S. nationals, Filipino workers initially were free from immigration restrictions.

Waves of Filipino Immigration

Immigration to the U.S. from the Philippines is conventionally divided into "waves."

The first wave roughly covers the period between 1906 and before the outbreak of World War II for Hawaii and California. The vast majority of this first wave consisted of young and single men who had very little schooling and came from rural regions in the Philippines, particularly the Ilocos provinces in Northern Luzon. They lived in segregated or isolated camps with miserable facilities. They were impoverished, overworked, poorly paid, discriminated against, abused, and most of all, they were lonely with hardly any social or emotional support. There was a severe shortage of women and children in the plantations.

Sakadas

Sakadas shown here worked under deplorable conditions for as long as 12 hours a day with measly wages. By the time they arrived in Hawaii in 1906, the plantation way of life with its feudal structure was already entrenched. The plantation system meant involuntary servitude. Filipinos were often the victims of the plantation's oppressive system of justice. More than 50%

of those meted the death penalty until 1957, when it was abolished, were Filipinos charged with crimes. They had no adequate legal representation or protection.

Waves of Filipino Immigration

The second wave covers the post WWII period from 1946-64, during which time Filipinos were also recruited as members of the U.S. military forces, especially the U.S. Navy. Women were also coming in great numbers as war brides, teachers and professionals. The third wave coincided with the 1965 Immigration Act cited earlier, which abolished the national origin quota system, allowed entry of professionals, and liberalized previously restrictive immigration provisions. Between 1970 and 1976, for instance, 26,626 Filipinos were admitted to Hawaii representing 54% of all immigrants in the state.

The fourth wave covers 1986 to the present, coinciding with the increasing influence of globalization in which both “brains and brawn” immigrants are being pulled by economic opportunity and technological advances to leave the homeland.

As of the latest census, there are an estimated 2.8 Filipinos in the U.S. with 10 states, headed by California, accounting for 57% of the total.

Filipinos in U.S.A.

Their distribution is shown geographically on this map. The Filipinos are concentrated on the West Coast and Hawaii and on the East Coast. California and Hawaii have the two highest Filipino populations in the U.S.

Filipinos in California and Hawaii Populations

In terms of proportion to total state populations in California and Hawaii, out of nearly 37 million in the former, Filipinos, though estimated to number 1.093 million, constitute only three percent of the California total. The Hawaii Filipino percentage is 15%, but if the “part-Filipino” category is factored in, the figure rises to 275,000 or nearly 23% of the total Hawaii population.

Filipinos in Hawaii

I now turn to examining more closely the Filipino experience in Hawaii with particular reference to its development as a socio-political community. As cited earlier the current Filipino and part-Filipino community roughly constitutes 23% of the state population. Note that one island, Lanai, which is part of Maui County, has the largest concentration of Filipinos with 63%. The majority of Filipinos, however, live on the island of Oahu where they form 22% of the City and County Council of Honolulu population.

Labor Struggles in Hawaii

The young *sakadas* got involved in plantation labor activities within the first decade of their arrival starting in 1910. The Japanese workers who had preceded them in the plantations

started striking as early as 1903, demanding higher wages and better working conditions. Though there was some tension and mistrust between the Japanese and Filipinos, they would eventually coalesced in pressing their demands against the HSPA management through strikes and other labor actions in the 1920s and the 1940s. The most violent incident was the so-called “Hanapepe Massacre” on the island of Kauai in 1924 in which 16 Filipino *sakadas* and four policemen were killed in a bloody encounter. This is now the subject of many theses, and even a dissertation, because it was not clear what really happened in 1924.

Filipino Labor Organizing

The young *sakadas* were inspired by the militant leadership of Pablo Manlapit, an immigrant from Batangas, Philippines, who was only 19 years old when he arrived in Hawaii in 1910. He was immediately appalled and radicalized by the subhuman conditions he saw in the plantations and the miserable wages of the workers. By 1919 he had organized the Filipino Labor Federation, the first Filipino labor union in Hawaii. Later he and Japanese labor leaders organized the Higher Wages Movement, which demanded better work conditions, a minimum daily wage and “equal pay for equal work” regardless of race. Manlapit organized strikes in the 1920s for which he was charged many times. He was eventually deported to California and the Philippines, but he became the foremost Filipino labor leader in Hawaii who left a legacy of progressive activism in island politics.

Democratization and ILWU

The logical result of the *sakadas*’ increasing participation in plantation labor actions was their collective entry into the rank-and-file of the West Coast-based International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union, or the ILWU, which had established a “beachhead” in the sugar empire by organizing local chapters, composed of Japanese, Filipino and other ethnic workers. The ILWU introduced “democratic multi-ethnic unionism” in Hawaii based on control of the union by its members at the grassroots. Between 1940 and 1958 the ILWU continuously organized the workers and achieved landmark victories in the strikes in 1946, 1947 and 1949. By the time the last group of 6000 *sakadas* arrived in Hawaii in 1946, they were immediately organized by the ILWU. Their political education as part of Hawaii’s working class occurred early.

Jack Hall was the single most important leader of ILWU as regional director of Local 142, which had 25,000 members. He published the first labor newspaper in Hawaii called *Voice of Labor*. More than anybody else in ILWU, Hall gave the *sakadas* a voice. His strategy for ILWU was to try to wrest control of Hawaii from the Big Five, which had dominated the plantation economy for more than 50 years along with the Republican oligarchy. This meant

actively supporting the Democratic Party, which was pro-labor and supportive of the Union. The strategy worked and in 1954 the Democratic Party won the elections and took control of the Territorial Legislature. John Burns, the leader of the Democratic multi-ethnic coalition that toppled the Republican oligarchy, would be elected Governor in 1962.

First Generation

With the democratization and eventual modernization of Hawaii came the first generation of Filipino-American leaders. They belonged to the first educated class of Filipinos whose parents came as immigrants from the Philippines. They were incorporated in the 1954 Democratic “revolution” in Hawaii.

The first Filipino to be elected as Representative in the old Territory of Hawaii Legislature was Peter Aduja, a lawyer who arrived in Hawaii as a young boy from Ilocos Sur in northern Philippines. He was to be elected again later to the Legislature after Hawaii became a state in 1959.

In the Judiciary

Ben Menor, another lawyer who also arrived in Hawaii as a young boy from Ilocos Norte, gained the distinction of being the first Filipino to be appointed Justice of the Hawaii Supreme Court. He was also the first to be elected State Senator from the first generation group.

State Governor

The high point of Filipino political leadership in Hawaii was the election in 1994 of Benjamin Cayetano as Governor, the first of his ethnic group to be elected as such in the whole country. He was also the second Asian-American to be elected governor of a U.S. state. He was re-elected in 1998 and retired after that following 28 years of public service as Lt. Governor, state legislator and housing commissioner. The son of a struggling immigrant from Pangasinan and product of a broken home, Cayetano overcame adversities enough to earn a law degree from the Loyola University and a B.A. from UCLA.

The interesting point about Cayetano’s political career is that he was not running as a Filipino candidate. When he first won, he ran in a district that was predominantly Japanese-American. This underscores the fact that ethnicity alone is not a sufficient condition for one’s candidacy. It helps with your own ethnic group, but more importantly, reaching out, networking and forming broader interethnic alliances are crucial for political success.

Fil-Am Hawaii Mayors

Filipino-American political leaders in Hawaii have also left their mark on local politics. Eduardo Malapit became the first mayor of the U.S. county when he was elected Mayor of Kauai in 1974. Lorraine Rodero-Inouye, who traces her ancestral roots to one of the first 15 *sakadas*,

was the first female Chief Executive of a U.S. county when she was elected mayor of the Big Island in 1990. She went on to become a State Senator.

Honolulu Council Members

The Filipino representation in the City and County of Honolulu, which is the same geographically as the island of Oahu where 80% of Hawaii's Filipinos live, is not bad either. Three of the nine City Council members are Filipino-American: Romy Cachola, Donovan de la Cruz and Nestor Garcia. They are all experienced "old timers" in the Honolulu Council. Cachola is Philippine born and also served several terms as a representative. Both de la Cruz and Garcia are Hawaii-born.

State Senators

Currently, the Filipino representation in the Hawaii State Legislature is still the highest in the nation with five senators (out of 25) and nine representatives (out of 51). The senators who are all Democrats are Ron Menor, Lorraine Rodero-Inouye, Donna Mercado Kim, Will Espero and Robert Bunda. However, this number will dwindle to three in the next session as Menor lost his re-election bid in the September 2008 primary election, and Inouye, who gave up her Senate seat to run for her old seat as mayor of the Big Island, also lost. Menor's narrow defeat after 22 years of public office is attributed to his DUI citation in April 2007, for which he was fined and spent two days in jail.

State Representatives

The House Fil-Am membership as shown here is composed of seven Democrats: Lyla Berg, Della Bellati, Rida Cabanilla-Arakawa, Alex Sonson, Michael Magaoay, Roland Sagum III and Joey Manahan; and two Republicans: Kymberly Pine and Lynn Finnegan. They constitute roughly 17% of the House membership. Compared with other ethnic groups in the state, this is a fairly decent representation. They have formed a bipartisan Filipino-American Caucus in the House of Representatives, which is a sign of their increasing political clout. But Sonson will be out next session because he lost his Senate bid in the last primary. This was one of the most interesting races in the Sept. 20 primary elections. Five Filipino-Americans contested the seat vacated by Sonson in this heavily Filipino district called Waipahu. The winner is a former University of Hawaii at Manoa student, Henry James Aquino, who is a Democrat and 31 years old.

Reflections on the Hawaii Experience

I have tried to show the intersections and congruencies of factors like ethnicity, immigration history, labor and democratization in growth of political leadership in the Hawaii Filipino community. The continuous waves of immigration of Filipino workers eventually

created a critical mass needed to pursue political goals through mass labor militancy and coalition with other ethnic groups. A strong union movement organized Filipino workers systematically and a series of strikes under the leadership of the ILWU gained benefits that greatly improved their economic conditions and political image. Bigger changes in Hawaii society itself, such as the democratization movement in the mid-50s up to statehood and the early 60's greatly accelerated Filipino political participation in the larger community. Liberalized immigration laws reunited thousands of families and allowed the entry of more Filipinos from various classes and professions. Finally, the fact that Hawaii is a much smaller state compared with California or Florida or New York, has made it possible for Filipinos in the state to organize more easily and develop solidarity. In time, one of their own from the second-generation, Ben Cayetano, would be elected governor of the State with the support of other ethnic groups as well.

Other Filipino Leaders

Having said all that, it's instructive to look at other states here on the continent, which we call "mainland" in Hawaii, because several distinguished political leaders have emerged in the Filipino-American communities. The early 1990s saw the election of David Valderrama in the Maryland State Legislature, Velma Voloria to the Washington State Legislature, and Gene Liddell as Mayor of Lacey City in Washington State.

In San Francisco and Suburbs

In the Bay Area, several notable Filipino-American leaders have been elected for several terms, to significant positions, namely Jose Esteves as Mayor of Milpitas City; Michael Guingona as Mayor of Daly City and now Council member; Manny Fernandez as Vice Mayor of Union City; and Gertrude Gregorio as Board Member of New Haven United School District. In the City of Vallejo, a number of Filipinos have been elected to public service positions in education such as Rev. Dr. Tony Ubalde, Vice-President-Solano Community College Board, Larry Asera, Member-Solano County Board of Education and Dr. Rozzana Verder-Aliga, Member-Solano County Board of Education. There may be others I may have missed for which I apologize.

Critical Questions

In this discussion on political leadership, I have focused mostly on elective office on the state and local levels. But political leadership as we know goes beyond electoral campaigns. I would like to end with a series of questions that will be critical in assessing patterns of political leadership in our community in the future. These questions involve developing strategies that can increase Fil-Am political participation; the need to expand the Fil-Am economic base; the

possibility of replicating Cayetano's example and electing a Fil-Am to the U.S. Congress; and exploring the future of the Filipino diaspora in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. What do all these things mean? What is the future of Filipino political participation in the U.S.?

Mahalo

Thank you very much for your attention and I am certain that these questions can be answered fully and productively in the course of this symposium. Congratulations to Prof. Llorente and the organizers of this symposium for putting this together and doing a wonderful job.

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