

# How Philippine Studies Began

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Although they are complementary and often used interchangeably, Philippine Studies and Filipino American Studies have separate origins and different scopes. The earlier of the two, Philippine Studies, or studies on Philippine society and culture, started in the early 1900s when the country became a colony of the United States. Commodore George Dewey's defeat of the Spanish fleet in the Battle of Manila Bay and the subsequent annexation of the archipelago in 1898 aroused great interest in American circles.

The historical documents in the Spanish archives were translated into English by Emma Blair and James Robertson, and published in 55 volumes as *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1803*. U.S. President William McKinley subsequently created the Philippine Commission to collect whatever data were available on the new American colony in Asia. It was headed by Jacob Schurman, then president of Cornell University, a prestigious Ivy League academic institution.

Another professor, Dean C. Worcester of the University of Michigan, who had been in the Philippines in the 1890s, got other American academics like David Barrows, Albert Jenks and N. M. Saleeby to conduct ethnological studies on the indigenous tribes of the Mountain Province and the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu. In time a group of scholars, mostly anthropologists, made their careers in Philippine studies. This group included H. Otley Beyer, Roy Barton, Fay Cooper Cole, Laura Benedict, and John Garvan.

## **Beginnings of Philippine Studies**

In 1916 Beyer, who was to remain in the Philippines until his death, put out a landmark volume, *Population of the Philippines*. The book expressed the hope that "educated Filipinos will awake to the importance of preserving for future generations the history of their own race, and that scientists of other countries may grasp the fleeting opportunity to record knowledge of interest to the world at large." Beyer eventually became a big name in Philippine archaeology and inspired other Western academics to study the Philippines.

Carl Guthe headed the University of Michigan Expedition in 1922-25, which called attention to the country's relationship with China and Southeast Asia in pre-Hispanic times. Linguists compiled a number of grammar books and dictionaries like the one on the Ibaloi language in Benguet by Otto Scheerer. A pioneering contribution, *Tagalog Texts*, by Leonard Bloomfield, was published by the University of Illinois at Urbana in 1917.

The 1930s saw a flourishing interest in Philippine Studies, in part due to the efforts of Joseph Ralston Hayden, another University of Michigan professor who had been appointed Vice Governor General of the Philippines. The Philippine Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations requested Felix and Marie Keesing to undertake a study of government and culture in Northern Luzon. It was also in the 1930s that one of the earliest Filipino scholars in the U.S., Serafin Macaraeg, obtained a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. During this period Filipino government "pensionados" were coming to the U.S. for further education and training.

## **The Second World War**

World War II and its aftermath accelerated Philippine Studies largely due to the experiences of American servicemen who saw action in the Philippines. U.S. policy-makers began to see the need for area and language programs for political and military purposes in the “Far East” or the “Orient.” (The politically correct term now is “Asia”.) Hayden was attached to the office of General Douglas MacArthur and had plans to establish a Center devoted to Philippine Studies at the University of Michigan because of the rich Filipiniana library collections in that campus. But a fatal heart attack aborted the project, and it was only years later that a Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, which include the Philippines, was established.

## **The Fifties to the Present**

A real breakthrough came in the 1950s when Professors Alexander Spoehr and Frederick Wernstedt got funding from the Carnegie Corporation for research on the Western Pacific and the Philippines. A Philippine Studies Program was instituted as part of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. Many Filipino anthropologists were trained by Professor Fred Eggan of the Department. Eggan’s death effectively discontinued Philippine Studies in Chicago. But Southeast Asian Programs at other major American universities, such as Cornell, Yale, Berkeley, Michigan, Stanford, Northern Illinois, Syracuse and Hawaii included the Philippines in varying degrees in their academic curricula.

Cornell, for instance, had a long-standing exchange with the University of the Philippines in Los Baños (UPCO project) to train Filipino agricultural scientists. Michigan specialized in training Filipino Ph.D.s in history. A Clyde DeWitt program at the same university provided graduate training for Filipino lawyers. And as early as 1963-64, there had been courses on Philippine Anthropology and Tagalog at the University of Hawaii. The university also produced dictionaries and grammar books on Tagalog, Ilokano, Pangasinan, Kapampangan, Cebuano, Bikol and Hiligaynon, a monumental work of Philippine language specialists. Some of these specialists had served in the Philippines as Peace Corps Volunteers in the 1960s. In 1969 the First National Colloquium on the Philippines was chaired by Charles Houston of Western Michigan University.

A major development field came in 1975 when the Hawaii state legislature passed a resolution authorizing the University of Hawaii to establish a program which was the forerunner of the current Center for Philippine Studies.

Thus, Philippine Studies in the U.S. was spurred mainly by annexation at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following America’s empire-building ambitions in the Pacific. Studies on the newly acquired colony revolved around the traditional fields of culture, history, language, geography, archaeology, literature, arts and religion. Many of these works reflected the “cold war” thinking of the time. Research on tribal groups and cultural communities in remote areas was particularly fascinating for Western scholars from academic and religious circles. Dictionaries and language resources were developed. Archaeological diggings and expeditions before and after World War II were undertaken in an effort to document the Philippine past.

A “special relationship” developed between colonizer and colonized even in the academic arena. Some like to call this a “love-hate” relationship. Appropriately, a favorite topic of research or contention was the state of Philippine-American relations, mainly on the issue of the U.S. military bases in the Philippines. A resurgent wave of Philippine nationalism in the early 1960s, among other factors, was changing the ideology and direction of Philippine Studies on both sides of the

ocean. More contemporary fields like politics, international relations, drama, economics, sociology, psychology, and demography began to be popular in the postwar period.

### **Ethnicity as a Central Concern**

Civil rights, the anti-war movement, women, ethnic minorities, and other groups forced dramatic social changes in American society in the 1960s. These “sea-changes” spilled over into academia. In time, non-traditional fields of study were asserting themselves as legitimate areas of intellectual inquiry.

For Philippine Studies, it was no longer enough to focus on a country 10,000 miles away across the Pacific. The Filipino community in America was growing much faster than its Asian counterparts, especially after the 1965 liberalization of immigration laws. Local-born, second, third and even fourth generation Filipino Americans were coming on their own as distinct entities with different cultural and educational needs. The question of ethnicity or cultural identity, usually taken for granted by immigrant or Philippine-born Filipinos, became a central concern for the American-born.

The experiences of their pioneering ancestors in the sugar plantations of Hawaii, the canneries of the Pacific Northwest, and the lettuce or artichoke fields of California needed to be told to the burgeoning Filipino American communities and to the larger society. Not that the Philippines was no longer important or relevant. The home country was always there, albeit only as a memory or vignette of imagined community. It had to be supplemented by knowledge on the Filipino experience in America. This experience embodied stories of survival and strength, which the younger generations needed to know to bolster their own ethnicity. “Our history” became the underpinning of many of the ethnic studies programs across the country in the 70s.

Thus Filipino American studies programs or centers have emerged in some campuses in America, combining the more traditional Philippine Studies offerings like history and language with newer courses on the continuing Filipino American experience. In addition to Hawaii, the post-secondary institutions with such programs are the City College of San Francisco, California State University at Hayward, University of San Francisco, San Francisco State University, and Old Dominion University. Among the bigger universities, the University of Wisconsin-Madison is particularly strong in research on the Philippines, especially history and politics. Berkeley, UCLA, San Diego, Arizona State, Kansas State, SUNY Buffalo, Washington State, Oregon and Northern Illinois also have Philippine specialists on their faculty.

The downside is, in current American academia, ethnic or area programs are the first to be cut or eliminated in times of budget crisis. They cannot compete with the newer or market-oriented programs like computer science, information systems, management, communications, science and technology, and so on. As universities continue to downsize their area studies programs, it is hoped that the ethnic communities themselves will help keep them alive in some way. Endowments, donations, gifts, scholarships, and other resources from the various Filipino American communities can augment the diminishing funding for such programs in universities across the nation. At the University of Hawaii at Manoa, for instance, benefactors like Robin Campaniano, a Filipino American alumnus of the University of Hawaii and University of San Francisco, help to keep the Center for Philippine Studies afloat with their occasional donations. Of course, we could use more, as our responsibilities increase without corresponding support.

In the long run, sustained financial initiatives from the outside will be critical to keep Philippine Studies and Filipino American Studies viable on any campus. We live in an increasingly competitive and insidious world. And it is somewhat disappointing that for all the long decades of the so-called “special relations” between the United States and the Philippines, Philippine Studies in America is sporadic and has not been institutionalized. The promising programs in earlier decades have died a natural death either from attrition or lack of viable support.

But they say it’s never in the Filipino spirit to end on a bitter note. And I suppose I echo the resolve of my colleagues when I say that the show must go on – we must keep Philippine Studies alive.

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