

The Centennial of

A Filipino boy toiled in a cauliflower field near Santa Maria, CA, in March 1937.



Philippine President Gloria M. Arroyo (standing 2nd from L) was at the Philippine Embassy in Washington, D.C., for a Memorandum of Understanding meeting to expand consular assistance to distressed Filipinos living in the United States.



Fil-Ams in Honolulu circa 1950.



Philippine Vice-Consul Felipe S. Lamdagan (standing 2nd from L) entertained guests in his Los Angeles residence in the 1950s.

CORBIS

PHOTOS BY PEDRO LAMDAGAN

the Great Migration



by Miriam Bustamante Riedmiller

Why Filipinos Call This Country Home

BURIED IN THE FOLDS OF AMERICAN HISTORY—FROM 1906 TO THE PRESENT—is the unique story of Filipino migration to the United States, shaped by annexation and colonial ties, the aftermath of World War II (WWII), alliance, and vicissitudes in the Philippine and world economies, politics, and legislation. The Philippines is prominently and perpetually listed in the U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Visa Bulletin as having oversubscribed visas—along with China, India, and Mexico. Very few understand this phenomenon because of the country's geographical distance to the United States and its population size of approximately 89 million people (see the Philippine National Statistics Office estimate at www.census.gov.ph). However, history reveals an explanation to this Visa Bulletin prominence—one that traces the Philippines' long-standing relations with, and support to, the United States in times of war and peace.

The Filipino-Americans (Fil-Ams) stand on the shoulders of their predecessors who came to the United States under trying circumstances and unusual visa categories. From U.S. nationals contracted to work in Hawaiian plantations, to WWII veterans being granted U.S. citizenship, to lawful permanent residents (LPRs) with derivative status, and employment-based beneficiaries, Filipinos have entered this great nation by virtue of the alphabet soup of visa categories from A to Z.

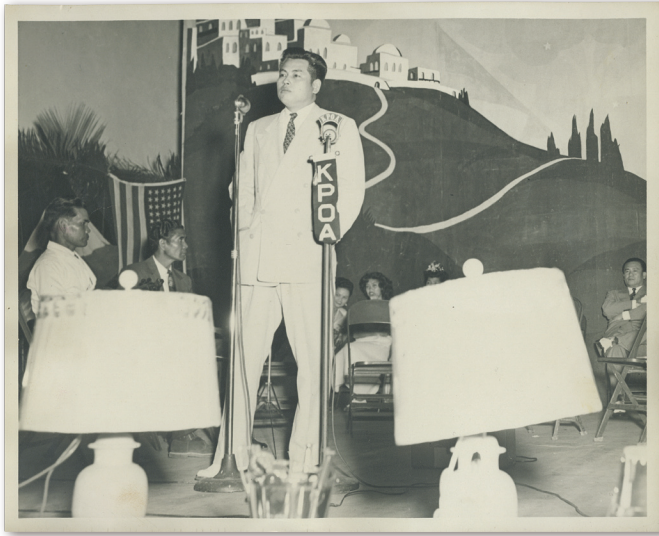
The Pervasive Presence of Fil-Ams in America Today

The Fil-Am community is the second largest Asian-American group in the United States (following the Chinese-American community) and the largest Southeast Asian-American group.

According to DOS, four million Filipinos account for this country's population as of 2007 (see www.state.gov). This number is expected to rise, as more than 80,000 Filipinos immigrate to the United States annually.

Filipino presence in this country is traced back to 1587 in California during the Galleon Trade between the Philippines and the "new world," as advance scouts for the Spanish expedition. However, mass migration did not occur until the end of the 19th century, when labor disputes in Hawaiian plantations and California farmlands created the surge of Filipino men to fill the need for good, cheap labor. Historically, this migration event is known as the first among the three official waves of Filipino migration to the United States. →

The Centennial of the Great Migration ■ Why Filipinos Call This Country Home



Philippine Vice-Consul Felipe S. Lamdagan hosted a Visayan-dialect program at KPOA radio station in Honolulu in the late 1940s.

The First Wave: From Open Borders to 50-Per-Year

The U.S. borders were flung wide open to the Filipinos' first wave of migration around 1906–1934, when the archipelago islands of the Philippines were a U.S. territory. Filipinos were categorized as U.S. nationals as a proximate result of the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War. In the Treaty of Paris of 1898, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States as a territory after 300 years of Spanish colonial rule. Not long after came the ensuing Philippine-American War from 1899 to 1902, in which President Theodore Roosevelt declared U.S. victory—effectively making the Philippines a U.S. territory. In contrast to the multi-faceted Filipino immigrants of today, the first wave of immigrants were all men and proved to be the perfect solution for American labor unions looking to fill Hawaiian sugarcane and pineapple plan-

tations with more efficient and affordable workers. These immigrants also worked in California and Washington farmlands, Washington lumber yards, and salmon canneries in Alaska.

However, centuries of colonial rule did not quench the Filipinos' fight for freedom and a mere 73 years ago, the Tydings-McDuffie Act (officially the Philippine Independence Act, Pub. L. No. 73-127) gave the Philippines its taste of independence. The Tydings-McDuffie Act was approved on March 24, 1934, and provided for the drafting and guidelines of a Constitution for a 10-year "transitional period," which recognized a government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines before the United States granted Philippines its full independence. During this time, the United States would maintain military forces in the Philippines. Furthermore, the American president was granted the power to call into military service all military forces of the Philippine government.

The act also reclassified all Filipinos that were living in the United States as "aliens" for the purposes of immigration to America. Filipinos were no longer allowed to legally work in the United States, and an annual quota of 50 immigrants was established.

The Second Wave: Soldiers and War Brides

WWII dictated the second wave of Filipino migration to the United States. President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Executive Order on July 26, 1941, calling members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East with the promise of U.S. citizenship and other benefits. More than 200,000 Filipinos served in the war with distinction and fought with Americans against the Japanese, including Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Army Sgt. Jose Calugas.

Timeline: How Filipinos Came to the United States

1587—first Filipinos in North America landed in Morro Bay near San Luis Obispo, CA.

1763—first permanent Filipino settlements established in North America near Barataria Bay in southern Louisiana.

1781—Antonio Miranda Rodriguez was among the first group of settlers to establish the city of Los Angeles.

1898—United States annexed the Philippines.

1899—Philippine-American War began.

1903—first *pensionados*, Filipinos invited to attend col-

lege in the United States on American government scholarships arrived.

1906—first Filipino laborers migrated to the United States to work on the Hawaiian sugarcane and pineapple plantations, California and Washington asparagus farms, Washington lumber, and Alaska salmon canneries.

1920s—Filipino labor leaders organized unions and strategic strikes to improve working and living conditions.

1933—California Civil Code §60 was amended to prohibit marriages between white

persons and members of the Malay race (*i.e.*, Filipinos). (Stats. 1933, p. 561).

1936—the Philippines became self-governing as the Commonwealth of the Philippines.

1939—Washington Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the Anti-Alien Land Law of **1937**, which banned Filipino-Americans (Fil-Am) from owning land.

1946—the Philippines became completely independent; *America Is in the Heart*, by Carlos Bulosan, is published.

1955—Peter Aduja became the first Fil-Am to be elected as

a member of the Hawaii State House of Representatives.

1956—Bobby Balcena became the first Fil-Am to play Major League baseball for the Cincinnati Reds.

1965—Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendment of Oct. 3, 1965, facilitating the ease of entry for skilled Filipino workers.

1965—Delano grape strike began when members of Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee—mostly Filipino farm workers in Delano, CA—walked off the farms of area table grape-growers and

Filipinos' Call to Action

The WWII Filipino soldiers were promised the same benefits afforded to those serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. However, Congress yanked the rug from under the feet of these veterans when it passed the Rescission Act of 1946, signed by President Harry Truman. The law stripped Filipinos of their U.S. veteran status (except for a few who died or were wounded in battle). The Rescission Act singled out Filipino WWII veterans—the only group—from among the 66 countries allied with the United States during the war that did not receive equal military benefits from the United States. Since the passage of the Rescission Act, Filipino veterans persist to lobby for their earned benefits. Numerous “full equity bills” have been introduced in Congress only to die before reaching the Senate or House floor. Veterans and their supporters remain hopeful for the two bills that are pending in Congress: the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 (S.57) in the Senate and a bill of the same name in the House (H.R. 760).

Out of the 200,000 Filipino soldiers who fought during WWII, 6,000 survivors are living in the United States and 12,000 remain in the Philippines. Those remaining in the Philippines are hopeful that these two pending bills will “restore their U.S. veteran status and make them eligible for a full range of U.S. veteran’s benefits,” said Eric Lachica, Executive Director for the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans. In June 2007, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee passed the equity bill legislation for final approval on the Senate floor. If the House approves this, and President Bush signs it into law, it will restore these unsung Filipino soldiers’ veteran status and overturn the adverse effects of the Rescission Act of 1946.

Filipinas' Call to Duty

The second wave of Filipino immigrants did not exclusively consist of men. The women also comprised this wave during WWII because of the War Bride Act of 1945. Filipino women were literally swept off their feet to marry their Filipino sweethearts already living in the United States. This law sought to relieve the tensions caused by the Filipino men’s dilemma under anti-miscegenation laws, which prohibited certain interracial marriages.

The Third Wave: Professionals and Their Families

The third wave of Filipino migration departed from the first two waves, as the new immigrants flowed in much larger numbers to fulfill America’s need for professionals. These educated Filipinos arrived in the third preference category carved by the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendment of Oct. 3, 1965 (Pub. L. No. 29-236, 79 Stat. 911).

It is relatively easy for Filipino nationals to enter the American healthcare workforce. Although many hospitals employ their fair share of Filipino doctors, physical therapists, and medical technologists, to name a few, Filipino nurses are the most prevalent professional exports from the Philippines. Nursing education in the Philippines is highly regarded world-wide; therefore, Filipino nurses are preferred by many American hospitals. (O. Bocunana, “Filipino Nurses Preferred,” *The Philippine Inquirer*, Jan. 5, 2004). With the shortage of American nurses beginning in the 1980s, clinics and hospitals in the United States have been directly hiring from the Philippines and offering substantial salaries. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 60,000 Filipinos migrated to the United States every year in the 1990s to take advantage of such professional opportunities.

The third wave of Filipino migration continually →

demanding wages on level with the federal minimum wage. Labor leader Philip Vera Cruz subsequently served as second vice president and was on the managing board of the United Farm Workers.

1974—Benjamin Menor was appointed Justice of the Hawaii State Supreme Court, the first Fil-Am to serve in a state’s highest judiciary office.

1975—Governor John A. Burns (D-HI) convinced Benjamin J. Cayetano to run and win a seat in the Hawaii state legislature, despite Cayetano’s doubts about winning office in a white—and Japanese-

American-dominated district; Kauai’s Eduardo E. Malapit was elected first Fil-Am mayor.

1981—Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes were both assassinated on June 1, 1981, inside a downtown Seattle union hall. The late Philippine dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, hired gunmen to murder both ILWU Local 37 officers to silence the growing movement in the United States opposing the dictatorship in the Philippines.

1987—Benjamin J. Cayetano became the first Fil-Am and second Asian-American to be elected as a Lt. Governor in the United States.

1990—David Mercado Valderrama became the first Fil-Am to be elected to a state legislature on the mainland United States, serving Prince George’s County in Maryland.

1991—Seattle’s Gene Canque Liddell became the first Fil-Am woman to be elected mayor, serving the suburb of Lacey City, WA.

1994—Benjamin J. Cayetano became the first Fil-Am and second Asian-American to be elected governor of a state of the Union.

2000—Robert Bunda was elected as Hawaii Senate presi-

dent, and Simeon R. Acoba, Jr., was appointed Justice to the Hawaii State Supreme Court.

2003—Philippine Republic Act No. 9225, also known as the Citizenship Retention and Re-Acquisition Act of 2003, is enacted, allowing natural-born Filipinos naturalized in the United States and their unmarried minor children to reclaim Filipino nationality and hold dual citizenship.

2006—Commemoration of the 100 Years of Filipino migration to the United States.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipino_American

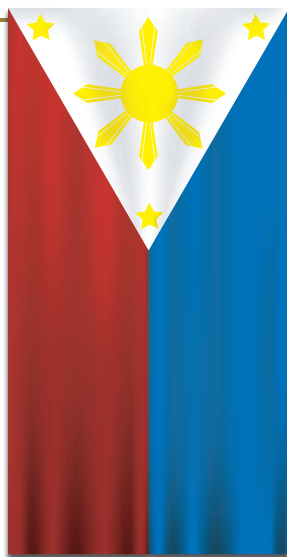
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produces immigrants who are eligible under the extraordinary and exceptional ability alien category (EB-1 and EB-2). One inspiring example is former Maryland State Legislature Delegate David Valderrama (D-District 26), who represented Prince George's County for more than 12 years. Valderrama was the first Filipino to be elected to a state legislature in the mainland United States in 1990. According to Valderrama, he initially entered the United States on an A-visa as a household member of his diplomat brother, Nick Valderrama. Because Valderrama was an attorney in the Philippines, the U.S. Library of Congress hired him as a senior legal specialist, and he became an LPR through this employment-based petition. Valderrama's U.S.-born and educated daughter, Delegate Kris Valderrama (D-District 26), continued this political legacy when she won the seat in 2006.

Furthermore, American schools are hiring highly qualified Filipino teachers and instructors. More states have been looking to the Philippines to recruit and fill the need of their respective schools—particularly North Carolina, Kansas, Maryland, and Virginia. These schools and other employers hire Filipino professionals because they are fluent in English—an ability that is largely due to continued U.S. presence in the Philippines and its educational system's insistence on a bilingual education of English and Tagalog. Hence, Filipino immigrants still account for a large slice of the employment-based category pie.

The Visa Priority Wait

After riding out the immigration fluctuations brought by historical events, the Philippines stands out in the DOS Visa Bulletin with oversubscribed visas along with China, India,



and Mexico (see <http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin>). Because the number of qualified green card aspirants far exceeds the statutory visa numerical limits that are periodically set by the U.S. government, Filipinos must stand in one of the longest queues to obtain LPR status.

Compared to its counterparts in the visa waiting list, the Philippines shows a greater presence in the United States when viewed in perspective of the country's population size and geographical distance. The Philippines has the smallest home population size among the four countries at approximately 89 million compared to China's 1.3 billion, India's 1.1 billion, and Mexico's 107 million (see www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html). Hence, by ratio and proportion, the Philippine immigration impact on the United States far outweighs those of the largely populated China and India, and that of the geographically proximate Mexico. Evident from history, this Philippine phenomenon is a result of the country's long-standing relations and support to the United States in times of peace and war.

Evading the Three- and Ten-Year Bars

Despite the Fil-Ams' new place in mainstream America and their 101-year impact in U.S. history and economy, this community has its share of undocumented and illegal aliens whose future remain in a quandary under the existing and upcoming laws. Undocumented Filipino aliens continue to live in limbo even though most of them hold employment, pay their taxes, send their children to school, and contribute to the American economy in a positive way.

Unfortunately, the strong push to pass comprehensive immigration reform laws (CIR) fell short, and proponents for this action tasted bitter defeat when the Senate was unable to garner enough votes for CIR. Although not completely dead, CIR might not be resurrected until after the 2008 presidential election, if ever. Hence, the present climate of immigration relief is nil under the existing Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) (Pub. L. No. 104-208, div. C, 110 Stat. 3009, 3009-546 to 3009-724).

Specifically, IIRAIRA has created a segment of Filipinos in the United States caught in a catch-22. With the penalties of three- and ten-year bars to admissibility, Filipinos deserving of green cards based on approved family or employment-based petitions—but meanwhile are out of status—are trapped. Stuck in the DOS visa pipelines due to backlogs, they are unable to return home, since their departure triggers inadmissibility to the United States for three or ten years.

The Continuing Push for Immigration Reforms

Fil-Ams are active participants in the congressional and public debates over immigration reforms. They witness a great divide in Congress and in their own communities. Like most Americans, Fil-Ams are divided between the need to legalize the millions of undocumented aliens on the one hand, and the preservation of border security on the other.



The Philippine-American Bar Association of Greater Washington, D.C., Inc. marched at an annual Philippine Independence Day parade in Washington, D.C. This nationwide event takes place every June 12 and celebrates Philippine independence from 300 years of Spanish colonial rule.



Filipino-American fondness for festivities has led to the establishment of community-wide festivals celebrating the Filipino culture. The author, Miriam Bustamante Riedmiller, and her late husband, Michael Riedmiller, participated in the popular Flores de Mayo parade—a Roman Catholic harvest feast in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Guest Worker Program or Its Equivalent

While largely perceived as a Mexican cause, President George W. Bush's proposal of a guest worker program hits home among Fil-Ams who occupy a significant place in today's U.S. demographics. This proposal would allow the more than 12 million illegal immigrants to legally work in the country on a temporary basis and pay a heavy fine for a possible path toward naturalization or be forced to go back to their home country. (See www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases).


In the spring of 2006, the Philippine Embassy in Washington, D.C., commemorated the centennial of the Filipino migration, and hosted a community discussion and informational campaign to discern the Fil-Am community's position on CIR and the guest worker program. Surprisingly, the community united toward a goal in favor of Filipino immigration to the United States and took divergent positions on the guest worker program.

The Different Perspectives

The Guest Worker Program is a "glass half full" solution to many Fil-Am community sectors, which prefer to have this or a similar legislation enacted in the absence of more favorable relief. On the other hand, sectors such as the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) expresses protest against the program. APALA's position is that "the program will create another tier of vulnerable workers who will be unable to neither unionize nor enjoy wage and benefits available to citizens and residents," according to APALA Board Director Jon Melegrito.

In between the two viewpoints are those with neutral views of the program, and those who see it as a source of unfairness for Filipino workers and relatives standing in line for decades for their green cards. They are apprehensive that newcomers under the program might "leap frog" over their beneficiaries abroad or in the United States who were waiting for LPR status.

A Century of Service

To commemorate the centennial of the Filipino migration, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., honored the event in 2006 with symposia, exhibits, and cultural events, to showcase the three waves of official Filipino immigration to the United States. Each presentation displayed a consistent theme throughout history: the tie that binds the Filipino people to the United States. From plantation and farm laborers and WWII soldiers, to today's professionals and domestic help, Filipinos were brought to this country for one form of employment or another. Many Filipinos consider the United States as their promised land, and they come here in search of a better life and a better future for their family. While they share the dreams and aspirations of many immigrants coming from other countries, history reveals how a tiny island nation from far across the Pacific has preserved a unique relationship with this great nation, and has helped shaped its economy and public policy. 

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