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The Filipino American Experience in Hawai'i

**In Commemoration of the 85th Anniversary
of Filipino Immigration to Hawai'i**

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This special issue on the Filipino experience in Hawai'i represents joint efforts involving students, staff, faculty, and allied parties in the larger community to provide descriptions and interpretations of the past, present, and future of this major community in this setting. To grasp more fully the significance of this experience, both persons who have grown up "inside" of the population and those who work from "outside" of that community are represented in these papers. This is in the best sense of the work supported by *Social Process in Hawaii*. This journal emerged as an occasional paper series which engaged students as editors working closely with faculty to encourage the development of research and scholarship on the diverse peoples who have migrated to Hawai'i and how and why they have come to terms with the challenges of living in the Hawaiian setting.

We have not been able earlier to devote a whole issue to the Filipino experience in Hawai'i. This gathering of works by students, faculty, and community persons on the process, parties, and outcomes of individual, family, and community developments and movements involving Filipinos in and around Hawai'i can only encourage further understanding and works on a people who have and will continue to contribute much to grounded understanding of individual and group relations under diverse conditions. These papers document a range and some forms of effective participation in the polity, the educational setting, the economy, and in family and community life in Hawai'i under extremely restrictive and difficult conditions which have conditioned the life of Filipinos and their descendants in Hawai'i.

Kiyoshi Ikeda, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Preface

The articles in this special issue of *Social Process in Hawaii* were written to commemorate the 85th anniversary of Filipino immigration to Hawai'i which began in 1906. On December 20 of that year, fifteen Ilokano men arrived for a short tour of plantation working and living conditions at O'laa Plantation on the Big Island, thus beginning another major chapter in the history of labor migration to Hawai'i. All told, some 127,000 Filipinos, the great majority of them single young men, came to Hawai'i between 1906 and 1946 when plantation labor recruitment came to an end. Large scale Filipino immigration to Hawai'i did not commence again until after 1965 when U.S. immigration laws were liberalized to provide for the reunification of families.

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the approximately 168,700 Filipinos in Hawai'i represent 15.2 percent of the state population (*Honolulu Advertiser* 1991: A1). They are thus the third largest ethnic group after Whites (33.4%) and Japanese (22.3%) and are followed by Native Hawaiians (12.5%), Chinese (6.2%), other Asians and Pacific Islanders (5.6%), African Americans (2.5%) and Others (2.4%). Since 1980 Filipinos increased their absolute number in Hawai'i by 26 percent from 133,940 and their relative representation from 13.9 percent of the state population. These increases are largely due to continued immigration from the Philippines of almost 4,000 persons each year since 1985 such that Filipinos account for a majority of immigrants to Hawai'i (Hawai'i Dept. of Business and Economic Development 1991).

For the United States as a whole, Filipinos number about 1.4 million and thus are the second largest Asian American group after Chinese (1.6 million) (*Honolulu Advertiser* 1991: A16). Filipinos increased their population by more than 80 percent from approximately 775,000 in 1980. Most of this increase can be attributed to Philippine immigration to the United States which totals approximately 50,000 persons each year. A majority of Filipino Americans are in California where they number 732,000 and are the largest Asian American group (*Los Angeles Times* 1991). California receives about one-half of the Filipino immigrants to the United States, while about 10 percent settle in Hawai'i (Carino et al. 1990: 62). Other states besides Hawai'i and California with significant Filipino populations are Illinois, New York and New Jersey.

Several of the authors in this Volume (Agbayani, Alegado, M. Forman, S. Forman, Kerkvliet) also had contributed to a book, *Out of This Struggle: The Filipinos in Hawaii*, which was published in 1981 in observance of the 75th anniversary of Filipino immigration to Hawai'i. During that year, voices of concern were frequently expressed in the Filipino community about the elabo-

rate celebratory activities which were being held to mark the anniversary. Given the subordinate social status of Filipinos at that time and the social and economic problems which they faced as a community, a common question raised by these concerned individuals was, "What are we celebrating?"

Ten years later one might ask the same question of the Filipino community. New social problems have surfaced with the emergence of youth gangs in the mid 1980s and with the consequent negative stereotyping of young Filipino males as gang members. Furthermore, old problems still remain; e.g., discrimination in employment against Filipinos, particularly immigrants, continues to be a major concern (see article by S. Forman in this Volume). The 1990 U.S. Census data may well indicate a lack of significant socioeconomic mobility for Filipinos as a whole given the tourism dependent economy of Hawai'i.

This compilation does not pretend to address all of the social and economic problems faced by the Filipino community, but it does highlight some of the historical and more recent achievements and contributions of Filipinos to Hawai'i and its peoples. As evident from the articles by Agbayani, Alegado, M. Forman and S. Forman, Kerkvliet, San Buenaventura, and S. Forman, these contributions are especially noteworthy in the areas of labor organizing, civil rights advocacy and immigrant struggles. Filipinos have been at the forefront of these economic and political struggles in Hawai'i as leaders, organizers and supporters, and their persevering and hard fought efforts over the years have brought material benefits and guaranteed rights not just for themselves but for all the people of Hawai'i.

The contributions of Filipinos to the effort to obtain equality of access in education, particularly higher education, are made evident in the articles by Cablas, Castillo and Minamishin, Chattergy and Ongteco, and Okamura. These papers demonstrate how Filipinos, especially at the University of Hawai'i, have been working towards creating a more culturally responsive and equitable setting for Filipino and other minority students in the educational system from the elementary to the college level.

The article by Boylan on Filipino participation in local politics is one of the first such studies and brings together a range of data, much of which had been obtained through recent personal interviews, and presents them in a highly perceptive analysis of the historical evolution of the Filipino politician in Hawai'i. Similarly, the bibliography by Mak presents a wealth of information

on recent publications, theses and other media sources, including newspapers and audio-visual materials, on Filipinos in Hawai'i that have appeared since 1976, the last year encompassed by a previous bibliography on Hawai'i Filipinos.

In our initial planning of this compilation almost two years ago, it was our intention that it would serve as an instructional and research resource for those interested in gaining new knowledge of the multifaceted and evolving Filipino American experience in Hawai'i. We believe that we have met this objective, and we hope our readers will share this view. We also believe that the Volume should prove useful for those concerned with the larger issues and areas of ethnicity and ethnic relations, minority education, labor and immigration history, Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies.

The authors and editors look forward to 1996 and the 90th anniversary of Filipino immigration to Hawai'i when we hope to collaborate again on another publication that will similarly highlight the accomplishments and contributions and mark the socioeconomic progress of the Filipino community in Hawai'i.

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Justice Ben Menor Scholarship Fund

By collective agreement of the authors and editors, all proceeds and donations from the distribution of this compilation will be contributed to the Justice Ben Menor Scholarship Fund of the Operation Manong Alumni and Friends Association. We encourage our readers to contribute to this scholarship fund for the benefit of Filipino youth.

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