

Filipino Americans in Chicago

by

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For almost one hundred years, Filipinos have lived and labored in Chicago and in smaller communities in Illinois. During the twentieth century, official Filipino numbers, as enumerated in the United States census, grew from three in the Windy City in 1910 to over 29,309 in the city and 63,182 in the Chicago metropolitan area in 1990. [See Table: Filipino Population in the United States & Chicago.] Reflecting a national pattern, substantial increases among Filipinos in the Chicago area will likely be noted in the census of 2000.

Unlike the Hawaiian experience in which Filipinos were recruited for plantation labor during the opening years of the century, the first Filipinos to arrive in Illinois came as college students. Overwhelmingly young and male (given social conventions that restricted the travel of Filipinas across the Pacific), the earliest students were the sons of Filipino elites who willingly acquiesced in the American acquisition of the Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. Although their schooling had begun under Spanish rule, given the socio-economic position of their families and their status as the presumptive heirs of current Filipino leaders, their incorporation into the emerging American colonial system through education in English in the United States became a priority. Their tiny numbers were soon overshadowed by the arrival in 1903 of the first *pensionados*, government-sponsored scholarship students chosen from each Philippine province for education in the United States. After a year (1903-04) of high school as a group in California during which the students adjusted to life in the United States and learned English, the *pensionados* were dispersed to colleges and universities, especially on the East Coast and in the Middle West. A second group followed in the next year. Thus, in January 1906, six *pensionados* were enrolled at the State Normal School in DeKalb, Illinois: Lino Arreza (Surigao), Santiago Bautista (Nueva Ecija), Mariano Carbonell (La Union), Gregorio Manuel (Cebu), Antonio Nera (La Union), and Gregorio Ramirez (Bulacan). Thirty-six other students attended other Illinois schools—the University of Chicago, Lewis Institute, and Armour Institute in Chicago, and the University of Illinois, the State Normal Schools at Normal and Macomb, and Dixon Business College outside the city.

These first Filipino students established an ongoing association between education and Illinois, especially Chicago. A pattern developed naturally from the presence of so many Filipino students in Illinois during the first decade of the century—42 of the 178 *pensionados* enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education in January 1906 studied in Illinois. During subsequent years, even after the abandonment of the *pensionado* program, young Filipinos associated Chicago with a community of students. By contrast, the West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii became identified with Filipino workers who labored in fields and canneries and on plantations.

Early Filipino students also established another pattern that would persist for the next several decades—defense of their people and their homeland as worthy of independence. The original impetus for this defense arose at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, where, fresh from their year in California, the first *pensionados* spent the summer working at the Philippine Reservation. Nearly 1,200 Filipinos occupied a forty-seven acre site. Among the exhibits designed to introduce the American public to its newly acquired colony, the most popular by far were the villages of the "wild tribes" where scantily clad Igorots and Negritos lived. The message conveyed to the public portrayed these Filipinos—and by implication, all Filipinos—as "savages" incapable of self-government. After the fair, a number of mountain Filipinos remained in the United States to work at being "exhibited" in stage shows and carnivals. Their appearance in the Second City in the early 19teens prompted the members of Chicago's Filipino Association (founded in 1905 as the Filipino Students' Club) to publish a pamphlet in 1914. "The Truth about the Philippines: History, Facts, and Affairs of the Country Briefly Told by Filipinos" sought to show Filipinos and the Philippines in a much different light. Rather than a nation of "savages" and "tribes," the Philippines was a civilized nation capable of producing highly educated exemplars such as Philippine national hero Dr. José Rizal who had been executed by the Spanish in 1896.

By the 1920s and the 1930s, the identity of Filipino students coming to the United States altered to include not only those supported by family or government funds, but also the self-supporting—those who expected to work their way through school while attending part-time. The successes of the *pensionados* who had returned from the United States to fill positions in education and in the civil service in the Philippines fueled their dreams of mobility, as did American teachers in the Islands who stressed the value of an American education and the feasibility of self-support. While some attended schools that had welcomed the early students, other students now attended institutions with night programs. In Chicago, the city's tuition-free Crane Junior College on the near West side enrolled a considerable number until, during the depths of the Depression, economics forced the school's closure.

During these years, although a very few found work in factories or in offices or practiced their professions after completing their education, most Filipinos in Chicago worked at a variety of jobs categorized as service employment. They became cooks, waiters, busboys, bellboys, and chauffeurs. The most secure sources of employment were with the United States post office as clerks sorting the mail and with the Pullman Company as attendants on first class railway sleeping, club, and dining cars doing work previously done exclusively by African American porters. Typically, Filipinos in Chicago prior to World War II remained low-ranking service workers with a high level of formal education—12.2 years on average in 1940—an average substantially higher by comparison with 9.4 years of schooling for native-born white Chicagoans and 7.5 years for foreign-born whites. The average Filipino in Chicago was a high school graduate; the average white Chicagoan, be he native- or foreign-born, was not. As they worked, many shifting from job to job and trying to combine schooling with employment, most found a college diploma increasingly out of reach and settled inadvertently into life as "unintentional immigrants" who would not return to their homeland for years to come.

Prior to Pearl Harbor, Filipinos in Chicago also married and formed a large number of voluntary associations that sustained their interests and enhanced their ethnic identity as Filipinos. Unlike the West Coast, where state anti-miscegenation laws precluded marriage between white women and Filipino men, no such legislation was enacted in Illinois. Hence, in the absence of single

Filipinas, most Filipino men who married chose white women as their brides, women who were typically native-born—young migrants to the city or the daughters of European immigrant parents. Some met in the city's taxi dance halls where Filipinos paid ten cents a dance for female companionship. Although no precise statistics regarding the number and the durability of these interracial marriages are available, some marriages survived as lifelong partnerships and produced a mestizo second-generation of Filipino Americans. In addition, a tiny number of Filipino men came with or sent for wives or fiancées prior to the virtual closing of the United States to migration from the Philippines after passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934. Tydings-McDuffie established the Philippine Commonwealth, promised the Philippines independence in ten years (delayed until 1946 because of World War II), and restricted migration from the Philippines to a fifty-per-year quota, thus effectively shutting the door previously wide open to "nationals" from the Philippines.

Sometimes incorporating their wives and children, Filipinos in Chicago also established clubs and associations based on provincial origin, religion, and occupation such as the Nueva Vizcaya Association, the Ilocos Sur Club, the Filipino Gibbons, the Filipino Postal Club, and the Filipino Pullman Club. In addition, Filipinos established a chapter of the Knights of Rizal, a fraternal organization begun in the Philippines, and took pride in presentation of a bust of Rizal to Chicago's Newberry Library. Each year, Filipinos in Chicago, like Filipinos elsewhere in the United States, celebrated Rizal Day, sometimes in multiple venues, with banquet, dance, speakers, and the ubiquitous contest for Rizal Day queen.

Throughout these years pre-World War II years, Filipinos in Chicago sought to work, marry and raise their children, and find camaraderie with kin, town and province mates, and countrymen while constantly confronting the restrictions of race. Their identity as non-white shaped their lives on a daily basis, determining the jobs that were open to them, the buildings and the neighborhoods in which they could live, and the difficulties encountered when they appeared in public with their white wives. On the near West side, they confronted young Italian men jealous of their turf. On the near North and Northwest sides, they searched for landlords willing to rent to interracial families. Middle class white neighborhoods and suburbs remained inaccessible even during the years immediately after World War II when these early Filipino Chicagoans enjoyed their highest levels of prosperity.

By the close of the Second World War, those Filipinos who arrived in Chicago prior to 1935 probably numbered fewer than 2,000. The war had drawn many of the approximately 5,000 Filipinos unofficially estimated to be in the city in 1940 into military service or into better paid war industry work on the West Coast. Wherever they lived, Filipinos noted a diminishing of racial prejudice, as Americans made common cause with Filipinos against the Japanese in the Pacific war. In 1946, Filipinos already in the United States became eligible for naturalization as U.S. citizens, as had Filipinos serving in the United States armed forces in 1943. As citizens, Filipinos could now travel back to the Philippines without fear of being barred from re-entry, and many did, eager to see parents, brothers and sisters, other kin, and their old hometowns. Others, who had never married in the United States, or whose marriages to white women had ended, returned to the Philippines in search of wives. U.S. immigration law facilitated such marriages with the Fiances and War Brides Acts passed immediately after the war and with the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 which exempted the spouses and children of citizens from the quota system that now gave the Philippines an annual quota of one hundred. Thus, in Chicago in the 1950s and early 1960s, a second second-generation with Filipino fathers and Filipina mothers was born.

During the decade and a half following the end of World War II, the number of Filipinos in Chicago grew slowly. In 1960, the United States census recorded the presence of 2,725 Filipinos in Chicago. Filipino professionals, especially nurses, began arriving in Chicago, some temporarily as they improved their skills, and some permanently as they either married U.S. citizens or found other ways to remain. The mass murder of seven student nurses, including two Filipinas, in a Chicago townhouse in 1966 put their presence in the Windy City on the front page. Petite Corazon Amurao survived by sliding under a bed and became the state's star witness against drifter Richard Speck who was sentenced to life in prison.

Passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 dramatically altered the ability of Filipino to settle permanently in the United States during the remaining years of the century. The law eliminated the quota system based on national origin that had limited non-exempt Filipino immigration to one hundred per year since 1952. Instead, immigrants now qualified for admission based on occupational and family preferences. Most notably, physicians and nurses benefited from the preferences that designated their occupations in short supply. Inner city hospitals and rural communities were especially active in recruiting Filipino medical professionals. By contrast, family preferences functioned on the assumption that family members should not be permanently separated. Thus, an immigrant who acquired U.S. citizenship could ultimately be joined not only by a spouse and minor children, but also by parents, adult children, and siblings. "Old timers" and the Filipinas they had married after World War II might now bring parents, brothers, and sisters, as might newer immigrants, once they too became citizens. Thus, the 1965 law set in motion multiple chains of extended family immigration that intertwined when in-laws began their own family chains.

By 1990, the Chicago metropolitan area was home to 63,182 Filipinos, 29,309 of whom lived in the city. Scattered throughout the metropolitan area, Filipinos nonetheless tend to concentrate on the North and Northwest sides in the city and in suburban Skokie, Glendale Heights, North Chicago, Morton Grove, and Bolingbrook. Fifty-six percent of those over age twenty-five in 1990 held a bachelor's degree or higher, although ten percent did not have a high school diploma and twenty-seven percent did not speak English very well. In sharp contrast with the pre-World War II Filipino population in Chicago, thirty-one percent held professional or managerial occupations in 1990; fewer than three percent were employed at laboring jobs.

More so than in the pre-World War II era, Filipino Chicagoans are a diverse population. Although the "old timers" have largely passed from the scene, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are second, third, and fourth generation Filipino Americans; many are only partly Filipino in heritage. More recent immigrants from the Philippines themselves vary with regard to provincial origin, religion, occupational and financial status, and age. Some arrive married to a countryman or woman; some marry within the ethnic group after arrival; and still others choose spouses who are not Filipino. Some define their world exclusively through immediate family and extended kin; others seek identification with a broader Filipino American community through organizational affiliations; others look for strength through Asian American panethnicity.

Now, as then, Rizal Day is celebrated throughout the community with banquets, dances, speakers, and queen contests. Based on the affinities of province of origin, college and university attendance, occupation, fraternity, and religion, associations and organizations number in the dozens. Many come together under the umbrella of the Filipino American Council of Chicago,

based at the Dr. José Rizal Memorial Center at 1332 West Irving Park Road, a formerly Swedish club building that was purchased in 1974 through the efforts of the aging "old timers."

The concerns of Filipino American Chicagoans no doubt mirror those of Filipino Americans throughout the nation. "Making it" in America still challenges many immigrants who worry about jobs, mortgages, children, and aging parents, much as do other Americans, but balancing being Filipino and American, as well as dealing with subtle and sometimes not so subtle instances of discrimination, can pose special difficulties. Many Filipino immigrants are also waiting for their family networks of migration to be completed. Because the time necessary for approval of a visa application for a brother or sister has grown longer and longer with each passing decade, a Filipino who originally "petitioned" a sibling in 1979 would now, over twenty-one years later, be just preparing to welcome that newcomer in 2000.

FILIPINO POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES & CHICAGO

YEAR	U.S. POPULATION	CHICAGO POPULATION
1910	406	3
1920	5,603	154
1930	45,208	1,796
1940	45,876	1,740
1950	61,645	1,249
1960	181,614	2,725
1970	336,731	9,497
1980	774,652	n.a.
1990	1,419,711	29,309
2000 est.	2,100,000	

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