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# Finding Manilatown: The Search for Seattle's Filipino American Community, 1898 – 2016

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**Finding Manilatown:  
The Search for Seattle's Filipino American Community, 1898 – 2016**

A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation  
Undergraduate History Program of the University of Washington Tacoma

by

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## **Abstract**

Filipino presence in the United States has a long history from the time of the Spanish Empire. Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War (1898) resulted in American acquisition of the Philippine islands. By granting Filipinos 'national' status, a new wave of post-Spanish Colonial immigration began to the United States. As Filipinos immigrated for education and work to the U.S., they began settling within urban areas and created Manilatown. These Manilatowns were almost always settled in conjunction with other ethnic enclaves, most of these being Chinatowns. In this paper, I examine the rise and fall of Seattle's Manilatown and its role for the Filipino community. I explore oral histories and newspapers in order to discuss the physical areas of Manilatown. Additionally, I analyze the literature regarding Filipino immigration, unionization, and socialization to address the histories of the Filipino community. Because of external pressures and internal changes within the neighborhood, Manilatown ceases to exist. However, the society and culture the Filipinos created within Manilatown was more important than Manilatown itself. Therefore, although I argue that Manilatown did not physically exist, Seattle's Manilatown is nevertheless present in the discourse of a community.

## Introduction

The 1898 Treaty of Paris between the United States of America and the Spanish Empire resulted in ending the Spanish-American War (1898) and with American acquisition of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. The signing led to immediate rebellion by the Filipino people in ensuing the Philippine-American War (otherwise known as the Philippine Insurrection), lasting from 1899 until 1902 with the United States as victor, ending the First Philippine Republic and further expanding the United States.

Filipino migration to the U.S. followed suit. In 1908, 141 Filipinos were recruited to work on Hawaiian sugar plantations and by 1930, approximately 100,000 Filipinos were present throughout the United States, none of whom were granted citizenship.<sup>1</sup> Across the Pacific Coast, Filipinos worked in the agricultural sector and as domestic “house boys.” In the Pacific Northwest, Filipino migrant workers were known as *Alaskeros* because of their work in the Alaskan canneries. Known by one another as *manong* (literally “older brother” in Ilocano/Ilokano), Filipino migrant workers were subjected to racism from outside, leading to solidarity and unionization. As “*manong*” implies, the Filipino migrant workers, like all migrant working communities before and after them, were in a “bachelor society.” Their migratory nature then prevented them from fully settling and assimilating into the cities. However, established ethnic enclaves supported and served migrant workers, which resulted in creating a Filipino neighborhood: Manilatown.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Filipinos able to settle within cities established their own areas outside of the migrant workers’ neighborhoods in order to create their own political identity. By the end of the Second World War, Filipino immigration shifted in becoming more

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<sup>1</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., “Configuring the Filipino Diaspora in the United States,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1994): 119.

family-oriented. This resulted in a split between the migrant workers, the newly arrived immigrants, and the American Born Filipinos. The Filipino community therefore split apart. Yet, it was never actually homogenous. Because Manilatown was unable to solidify in Seattle, it disappeared, leading to questions on where it was located and questions on whether it actually existed. External pressures and internal changes of the neighborhood led to the Manilatown's disappearance. However, the community remains, not physically, but as a mental dialogue between Filipino Americans. Therefore, results in the belief that the society and culture the Filipinos created within the community was more important than the physical neighborhood itself.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars studying Filipino American history cover three key aspects: immigration ranging from the end of the Philippine-American War to the Post-Vietnam era, Filipinos as migrant workers and their rise in union activism, and building the Filipino community. Since scholars in the field are mostly Filipino American writing mostly to a Filipino American audience, Filipino history in the United States is political and interdisciplinary which discusses race, labor, and to a lesser extent, gender. Thus Filipino American studies was produced by activist writing with an emphasis on contemporary issues of the time, ranging from Philip Vera Cruz's labor movement and Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* to scholars such as Fred Cordova and his 1983 pivotal work *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans, a Pictorial Essay/1763-circa-196*, which is used extensively throughout Filipino American studies.

Cordova's work displays the growth of the Filipino community in the United States and informed American Born Filipinos of the immigrant lifestyle. Cordova's essential finding about Filipino immigration to the United States during the twentieth century displayed Filipinos as

students rather than mere migrant workers looking to expand their education.<sup>2</sup> However, as the Great Depression deepened, many Filipinos moved away from the college setting and entered the labor force, which leads scholars to discussing the bulk of Filipino immigration: migratory work.

E. San Juan Jr.'s works examine key aspects of Filipino labor immigration and argued Filipino American difference from Asian groups.<sup>3</sup> However, Filipino American studies falls under the overarching immigration discussion and is linked to the overall Asian American identity. Rick Baldoz's *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration of Filipino America, 1898 – 1946* compared Filipino immigration to Chinese, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans. By using the phrase “Third Asiatic Invasion,” Baldoz intentionally highlights the similarities the Filipinos faced in comparison to the Chinese, Japanese, and other immigrant groups. The Filipino movement into the urban ghettos of Chinatown which had substandard sanitary conditions stereotyped all Filipinos with other Asian American groups.<sup>4</sup> The debate continued as Stephanie Hinnershitz found differences in how Filipinos were categorized as *Malay* rather than *Mongoloid* in the law books. Filipinos however, saw themselves as the “‘mouthpiece and spokesman for the whole Oriental group,’” showing Asian solidarity.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the discourse, labor and race played an important role in Filipino immigration to the United States. Looking to highlight community building, Michel Laguerre's work, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown, and Manilatown in American Society* discussed how different ethnic enclaves intermingled and interacted. The Filipino male diaspora during the early years of immigration to the United States created male dominated Manilatowns,

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans, a Pictorial Essay/1763-circa-1963* (United States of America: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983), 123-125.

<sup>3</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., 119.

<sup>4</sup> Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America. 1898 – 1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 116.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Hinnershitz, “‘We Ask not for Mercy, but for Justice’: The Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers’ Union and Filipino Civil Rights in the United States, 1927-1937,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2013): 138.

the same as Chinatowns. Linda España-Maram's *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s – 1950s* examines the male roles in the domestic sphere and values the everyday life of the Filipino immigrant. The communities which they created therefore display activism through different forms of political belief systems.

The political nature of Filipino American studies uses activism through labor and community to discuss the Filipino presence in the United States. The negative working conditions of ethnic minorities led to labor unrest. Labor unrest led to unification. Unification led to community building. It comes full circle to Fred Cordova's section in *Forgotten Asian Americans* titled "Growing Up" in which the second and third generation *Pinoys* (Filipino Americans) tell their own stories. Cordova displays one aspect which Filipino American scholars have come to forget: the fall of these communities at their own hands. Literature discussing defunct Manilatowns as in Estella Habal's *San Francisco's International Hotel*, concludes that the community had already dispersed throughout the cities. However, it seems that problems from both within and without led to the dispersions of these Manilatowns.

### **Immigration, Education, and Labor**

Filipino immigration to modern day United States began with Philippine-made Spanish ships crossing the Pacific during the Spanish colonial rule in 1565. Boarded on these ships, the first wave of Filipino servants, stowaways, and mariners landed in New Orleans, Vancouver Island, and Hawaii from 1763 until Spain's colonial claim to the Philippines ended. By 1883, the first Filipino in Washington Territory worked in a sawmill in Port Blakely on Bainbridge Island.<sup>6</sup>

As a Spanish territory, the Philippines remained under colonial rule from 1521 to 1898, when the colony was sold to the United States, and remained a U.S. territory until 1946. Over

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<sup>6</sup> Cordova, 9.



three hundred years under Spanish colonialism and forty-eight years under the United States prevented the Philippines in creating a self-sustaining sovereign government, remaining an agriculturally based and economically poor colony.<sup>7</sup> This was enough incentive for immigration. Whether it may be education, economics, adventure, or a combination of all three, the second wave of Filipino immigration from 1906 through the Second World War was supplemented by the “American Dream” vision. As residents of an American territory, the most promising Filipino students from elite Filipino families were granted subsidized American education under the 1903 *Pensionados* Act. These college students, otherwise known as *pensionados* arrived with the intention in obtaining college degrees and eventually returning as U.S. colonial government officials for the Philippines. Coming from elite Filipino backgrounds, the *pensionados* were often described as “well-mannered, well-groomed, and knowledgeable of white American etiquette.”<sup>8</sup> This was to display American imperialism characterized as, what president President William McKinley called, “benevolent assimilation.”<sup>9</sup> This small movement of Filipino college students invited the next incoming groups during this era: the self-supporting students.

Among the Filipinos in the United States after the *Pensionados* Act, two-thirds were not *pensionados*, but rather self-sustaining students.<sup>10</sup> For many Filipinos, U.S. education was pivotal in opening opportunities in life. Trinidad Rojo, who received a Bachelor of Arts in English, Comparative Literature, and Drama and a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Washington, stated that he saw “the opportunities for self-supporting, [and that a] self-supporting student was better [in the United States].”<sup>11</sup> For others like Ponce Torres, education fueled

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<sup>7</sup> Cordova, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Cordova, 124.

<sup>9</sup> Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 176.

<sup>10</sup> Cordova, 125.

<sup>11</sup> Trinidad A. Rojo, interview by Carolina D. Koslosky. *Pinoy Pioneer: Union Reformer*. Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, February 18 & 19, 1975.

immigration: “most of our desire and purpose [for] coming [to the U.S.] was to continue ... our studies because ... the information that [a] student can finish their studies without the help of the parents” was important in becoming adults.<sup>12</sup> As self-supporting students Rojo and Torres did not receive government “pensions” for their education. Instead they worked. Rojo worked as houseboy during the school year and migrated for labor in the Alaskan canneries and eastern Washington farms during the summers. His plan was simple: “before I graduated, the routing was, during school days I worked in a sorority or fraternity or family, then I go to school. After three quarters I went to Alaska. Then I worked on the farm for about a month more before I went to school.”<sup>13</sup> Rojo and many other students moved back and forth to establish their education and themselves in the U.S., but receiving a college education was not simple.

Upon arrival in 1926, Rojo noticed the large amount of Filipinos who were required to return to high school. Rojo called it “cultural prejudice. Maybe [American universities] have arrived at the conclusion that our schools were inferior.”<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Rojo attended the University of Washington without returning to high school. As time passed, more and more Filipino self-supporting students struggled through college. Among them was Torres who reminisced on his passion for education: “Unfortunately that purpose [was] in vain [for] many of us because very few ... succeeded ... because of the difficulty of finishing in the economic situation a few years after we [arrived]. ... [I came] here in 1925 and ... after three or four years the [Great] Depression began and then we [could not] get any job[s] and we [could not] support

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<sup>12</sup> Ponce M. Torres, interview by Teresa Cronin. *Pinoy Pioneer: Union Organizer*. Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, October 7, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> Rojo.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

ourselves going to school.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, their purpose for coming shifted as they searched for job opportunities in the limited market.

The self-supporting students were more than equipped for work in the Alaskan canneries during their summer quarter and the canneries indeed granted them with valuable income. Their residence at the University District in Seattle also shifted to residence with the Seattle Chinese and Japanese workers in Chinatown. Like the Chinese and Japanese, the Filipinos entered to fill labor needs in the U.S. market. Unlike the Chinese and Japanese, however, the Filipino workers by 1924 immigrated to the U.S. in substantial numbers. The 1924 Immigration Act and its quotas set on immigrant groups entering the country had no effect on the Filipinos. Instead of annexing the Philippines, Congress ruled that Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines would remain as “unincorporated territories” calling their people American ‘nationals’ who were allowed to travel to the United States, but could not hold American citizenship and the benefits that came along with it. As ‘nationals,’ citizenship remained unattainable. Additionally, Filipinos lacked political rights in the United States because the Philippines lacked a sovereign government to defend Filipino interests.<sup>16</sup> Thus Filipino labor immigration was unprotected, but Filipino immigration to the United States remained legal unlike the limited numbers allowed for immigrant groups to legally enter. Indeed, Erika Lee claims that “the Philippines was identified as the next site in the United States’ ongoing search for Asian labor.”<sup>17</sup> Filipinos thus began filling the void in migratory labor, leading to skewed ratios between men and women in the Filipino population. However, the skewed ratio was typical in the immigration story to the United States.

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<sup>15</sup> Torres.

<sup>16</sup> Rick Baldoz, “Volarizing racial boundaries: Hegemony and conflict in the racialization of Filipino migrant labour in the United States,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 6 (2004): 971-972.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, 177.

Young Filipino men living in rural regions in the Philippines utilized this work opportunity. One of these men was Mike Castellano. His reasons for immigration came from thinking “about ... when there's lots of boys coming [to the U.S.,] I heard about them making good money. So, I made up my mind to tell my father, my grandfather, that I would like to come to the United States.”<sup>18</sup> The stories Castellano heard benefitted the Filipino vision of the “American Dream.” Moreover, peer pressure was involved. Marino Guiang recounted what his aunt told him, ““All your friends are gone to America now, I think you better be going.””<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the growing need for “cheap and docile” labor in the agricultural sector drove Filipino immigration to the U.S., specifically the West Coast. Hawaii’s growing sugar plantation industry fueled Filipino immigration. In 1930, 64,000 Filipinos worked in the Hawaiian plantations while 45,000 Filipinos worked in California, Oregon, Nevada, Wyoming, and Washington.<sup>20</sup>

There were jobs in the agricultural sector, the canneries, and later in the domestic sphere as Filipinos began working as house-boys. Regardless, the community began with the scholars or those who sought to be scholars. As they began realizing the growing needed in labor, they began shifting away from education to enter the labor market. Less *pensionados* came as more migrant workers entered. Thus, the community took a radical shift away from the scholarly venues towards the labor corridors of the city, leading to a migratory Manilatown.

### **“Positively No Filipinos Allowed:” A Moving Community**

As Filipino immigrants came for labor, public opinion shifted. The self-supporting students took to manual labor positions in sawmills, farms, and the Alaskan canneries which

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<sup>18</sup> Mike Castellano, interview by Frederic A. Cordova, Jr.. *Pinoy Pioneer: Restaurant Business*. Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, July 2, 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Marino F. Guiang, interview by Dorothy Cordova. *Pinoy Pioneer: A Boxer's Career*. Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, September 24, 1976.

<sup>20</sup> Baldoz, “Volarizing,” 972.

resulted in a lesser presence in the college districts. Additionally, the seasonal labor of Filipinos made them prone to a migratory lifestyle. With their presence established in the United States as migrant workers, public opinion against Filipinos worsened, forcing them to move away from the college campuses to the ethnic enclaves within the city. These communities, already established, were the product of immigrant laborers. Because a certain ethnic group remained in a portion of the city, others of the same group flocked to that enclave for comfort reasons. Additionally, restrictive covenant practices prevented certain ethnic groups from leaving these areas altogether.<sup>21</sup>

Arguably the most known Asian enclave within large American cities is the “Chinatown.” As the first mass of Asian immigrants to the United States, the Chinese faced immigration limitations by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The United States Congress faced issues when addressing Chinese immigration. In efforts to remove the term “white” in acts of Congress, Massachusetts Republican senator and radical abolitionist, Charles Sumner, met fervent opposition from western senators of his own party. Senator George H. Williams warned that language that made Chinese eligible for naturalization in any acts of Congress would allow “millions of heathens and pagans power to control [American] institutions,” even though there were only 60,000 Chinese among the 39 million people living in the United States.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the 1870 naturalization statute differed from the 1790 language from “free white persons” to “aliens of African nativity” and “any persons of African descent” which in turn did not allow Asian naturalization to the United States.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the West, laws granted little protection

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<sup>21</sup> Doug Chin, “The Origins of Seattle’s Chinatown.” *International Examiner (1967-1987)* 9, no. 3 (1982), accessed February 6, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/docview/371474776?accountid=14784>.

<sup>22</sup> Roger Daniels, “Who is an American? Placing Immigration and Citizenship in Historical Perspective,” *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* 28, no. 4 (2014-15): 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

for Chinese. As anti-Chinese ideology increased, massacres and riots against the Chinese spread out through the West, from Los Angeles to Denver to Tacoma, Washington. As the transcontinental railroad building project ended, many Chinese faced movements demanding that the “Chinese must GO.”<sup>24</sup>

As these anti-Chinese movements became powerful, many Chinese found comfort within the established Chinatowns. In Seattle, there were anti-Chinese riots. However, by 1900, 439 Chinese lived in Seattle around the intersection of Second and Washington Streets while over 3,000 resided in Washington state.<sup>25</sup> It was only after the 1910 Jackson Street Regrade Project that Chinatown moved to its current location. As the Chinese population living around Second and Washington grew, “old Chinatown” became crowded forcing many Chinese to new spaces. The place where the city felled trees, known as “skid road,” became open real-estate for Chinese. By 1910, the West and East Kong Yick buildings were erected between Seventh and Eighth on King Street. By 1920, “old Chinatown” was abandoned. As the population in the “new Chinatown” grew, Chinese families began settling along First Hill and Beacon Hill as these were the only areas not covered by restrictive covenants.<sup>26</sup>

With a Chinatown established in Seattle, other ethnic enclaves moved to its vicinity. Japantown appeared along Jackson and Main Street, next to Chinatown’s King Street. A bustling African American presence appeared along Twelfth and Jackson with the the Black and Tan Club. With all these different ethnic groups in the same area, Chinatown, with efforts from newer generations from 1970 onward would begin calling the neighborhood the “International District (ID),” creating its current official name as Chinatown-International District.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Chin.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

It was this that led Filipinos to reside in Chinatown. Additionally, because businesses discriminated against Filipinos, placing signs stating, “No Filipinos Allowed” on their windows or doors, Filipinos began moving to places which welcomed them. In other cities with Chinatowns, many Filipino neighborhoods sprouted up. San Francisco’s Manilatown was adjacent to Chinatown leading to beliefs that Manilatown was Chinatown. Indeed, “outsiders tended to see Manilatown not as a distinct neighborhood but rather as part of Chinatown because of Manilatown’s Chinese residents, Chinese businesses with distinct Cantonese commercial signs, and the lack of a physical separation between the two communities.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, for a Manilatown to exist, a Chinatown must be present for its formation. It is through this commonality that Manilatowns operate in conjunction to a city’s Chinatown that leads Michel Laguerre to claim that San Francisco’s Manilatown “was influenced by the existence of Chinatown, which served as a magnet because it offered affordable housing and social services.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore Manilatown became what Laguerre calls a “*marginalized global ethnopole*” or ethnic enclave.<sup>29</sup> Filipinos were marginalized due to the restrictive covenant laws and “global” in that Manilatown based itself along other ethnic enclaves.

Similarly, Chinatown’s globalized population in Seattle attracted Filipinos. Upon arrival in 1925, twenty-year-old Ponce Torres stayed in Seattle’s YMCA on Fourth and Madison:

During those days we were walking around downtown and looking for some place to eat, where we can eat some Filipino or Oriental food and we were hungry for Oriental food. One evening we happen to be walking as far as King Street where the Chinatown was. ... then at the same time we began to be meeting more and more Filipinos because for those early, earlier Filipinos who came here, they found the Chinatown as ... more or less a

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<sup>27</sup> Michel S. Laguerre, "Manilatown: Global Exclusion and Global Margins," in *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown, and Manilatown in American society*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), 93.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Laguerre, 76-77.

home for Oriental people. So first thing we did was to transfer our beddings from the YMCA down to one of the hotels in Chinatown. . . . We went to Hops Hotel.<sup>30</sup>

As other Asian immigrant groups learned that businesses to serve them existed, they moved into this neighborhood. There were laundry businesses, bath houses, and restaurants. For those looking for Asian cooking, Chinatown was the only place. Hotels that catered towards Asian workers lined King Street. The Hops Hotel, where Torres stayed, was on the corner of Maynard and King. The Filipino dominated Eastern Hotel was on Maynard.

Ponce Torres' account also displays the Filipino discussion on Manilatown. Rather than claiming Manilatown, Torres and many other Filipinos living in the area called the neighborhood, "Chinatown." In Bob Santos' autobiography, *Hum Bows, Not Hot Dogs! Memoirs of a Savvy Asian American Activist*, he writes the word "Chinatown" to refer to the Filipino neighborhood within rather than using the word "Manilatown."<sup>31</sup> Thus, Manilatown was incorporated into Seattle's Chinatown, not separated from it.

The Filipino migrant population played an important role in both establishing and destabilizing the neighborhood. For Ponce Torres and Trinidad Rojo, Chinatown was merely a place for them to return during the end of the work season. Both Torres and Rojo moved throughout the Pacific Northwest, finding work in the agricultural industry, the Alaskan canneries, and as house-boys around the Greater Seattle area. Since Filipinos were perpetually moving with the seasons in which their work was based, Manilatown remained unstable and had to work in conjunction with, rather than compete against Chinatown.

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<sup>30</sup> Torres.

<sup>31</sup> Bob Santos, *Hum Bows, Not Hot Dogs! Memoirs of a savvy Asian American Activist* (Seattle: International Examiner Press, 2002), 14-31.



### **The Emergence of “Community”**

While Filipino workers migrated back and forth to Seattle’s Chinatown, a growing number of Filipinos began settling within the area. Similar to the businesses catering Chinese workers, Filipinos created their own service industry within Chinatown. Between Yesler Street and Lane Street, along Second through Seventh Avenue, Filipino businesses, union buildings, and hotels sprouted. Thus, the community spread within Chinatown and Japantown. However, one Filipino business remains as of 2016: Bayani Commercial on 526 South Jackson Street. Two housing spaces in the neighborhood dedicated to the Filipino community also remain: The Eastern Hotel with its Carlos Bulosan Memorial Exhibit on 506 Maynard Avenue and the Domingo Viernes Apartments at 721 South Lane Street. (See Map)

From 1911 onward, Filipino businesses ranging from restaurants, barbershops, hotels, and groceries spanned across Chinatown. Social improvement clubs, athletic clubs, and recreational clubs were present within the neighborhood. Along Jackson, the Filipino businesses consisted of Rizal Clothing, United Café, Filipino, the Leyte Hotel, along with an employment office and pool and billiard parlor. These businesses tended to the male migrant workers moving back to Seattle after the seasonal work finished.

Both Seattle’s Eastern Hotel on Maynard Avenue and the International Hotel (known as I-Hotel by locals) in San Francisco’s Manilatown were used to house Filipino migrant workers within their respective Chinatowns. San Francisco’s Manilatown spanned Kearny Street as cafes, restaurants and barbershops served the neighborhood. Thus, both the businesses in San Francisco’s Manilatown and Seattle’s Filipino neighborhood operated in conjunction with the Chinese businesses which also catered to Filipino workers. The interethnic relationships between the communities were therefore complex and affected by prostitution, saloons, opium dens, and

poor living conditions.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, living within larger cities rather than on the farms was much more desirable for the Filipino workers. By the end of the work season, “the seasonal workers congregated in the Filipino centers in major cities such as Kearny Street in San Francisco, the International District in Honolulu, Chinatown (now known as the International District) in Seattle, and Bunker Hill in Los Angeles ... [because] many Filipinos preferred to live and work in the cities because the conditions on the farms were horrible.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, Filipinos during the off seasons “were restricted to domestic-service work as janitors, valets, kitchen helpers, pantry men, dishwashers, and busboys. In 1930, about 25 percent of the Filipinos (11,441 men and 336 women out of 45,200) on the U.S. mainland were service workers.”<sup>34</sup>

Upon arrival in Seattle on June 17, 1926, Mike Castellano stayed with those he called “the boys from the club” in a building on East Terrace and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue. After a few weeks, he moved to Montesano near Aberdeen, Washington where he worked for a lumber company making \$2.75 a day. Yet, every Saturday he and his coworkers drove to Seattle’s Chinatown where they stayed in the hotels lined along King Street. It was through these visits when he began courting his future wife, whom he eventually married in 1938.<sup>35</sup>

Filipino women in the United States, however, were still scarce. In 1930 California, for example, there were only 2,500 Filipino women out of a total of 42,500.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, there was a small population of Filipino families. The Jenkins family, a mixed-race family of Filipino, African American, and Mexican origin was the first Filipino family to settle in Seattle. The family lived with the Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes in Ballard, displaying their efforts to

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<sup>32</sup> Estella Habal, "Manilatown, Manongs, and the Student Radicals" in *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 11-12.

<sup>33</sup> Habal, 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Castellano.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, 179.

assimilate in the broader Seattle community.<sup>37</sup> Other Filipino families, however, tended to reside in or around the Chinatown neighborhood.

After marrying his wife, Castellano left Aberdeen and lived in Seattle, where he found work as a cook in restaurants and hotels around the area. Castellano, nonetheless worked in Sand Point, Alaska in the canneries only to quit after the season ended. Upon his return to Seattle, he and his wife began integrating themselves with the Filipino community. He recalled that there were “dances, cards, banquets” usually by the Maryknoll Church by Capitol Hill.<sup>38</sup> A formal “community” was thus beginning.

According to Fred Cordova, “The ‘Filipino Community’ is a [Filipino American] phenomenon. ‘Community,’ according to Filipino Americans ... has meant a formal organization in a particular locality of members of Filipino ancestry and their spouses, governed by a charter, authorizing duly elected officers to achieve specific objectives.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, a community was more similar to benevolent societies in which it was seen as a political movement to protect Filipino American interests and ideologies rather than create a physical area. Indeed, the Filipino Community of Seattle, Incorporated, was established in 1935 to “serve as an ‘umbrella’ organization for ... special interest groups within Seattle.”<sup>40</sup>

The Filipino community in Seattle was not looking for a physical space similar to Chinatown, but rather representation for Filipino people in the United States. Representation meant the ability to take political stances and to pursue recreational activities and entertainment. Sylvestre Tangalan, one of the founders of the Filipino Community of Seattle, recounted that the

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<sup>37</sup> Jerry Large, “First Filipino family is a rainbow,” *The Seattle Times*, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/first-filipino-family-is-a-rainbow/>.

<sup>38</sup> Castellano.

<sup>39</sup> Cordova, 175.

<sup>40</sup> Cordova, 177.

community “started very, very strongly around 1930, '31. ... I know in '27, '28 we use to celebrate Rizal Night, at the old Broadway High School in auditorium. So there is then a group of interested Filipinos joining together as a nucleus of Filipino unity.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, by 1935, Filipinos established their own community in order to display Filipino solidarity and representation.

However, for the community to establish itself as a political force in Seattle, a physical space was necessary. Instead of using the Filipino businesses in Seattle’s Chinatown as an anchor for the community, Filipino community leaders sought other areas of the city. This in part was to shift attention away from the negative images of Chinatown and display Filipinos as separated from it. Filipino students hoped to create the Filipino Club House in the University of Washington, but prices were too high. Thus, the community purchased a lot located on Cherry Street and Eleventh, where Seattle University is currently located.<sup>42</sup>

The Filipino Community of Seattle, Inc. was first established by early Filipino families. However, by creating a community center outside of Chinatown, the Filipino community split between the “community” and the “neighborhood.” The Filipino “community” looked to sponsor Filipino voices in political matters while the “neighborhood” looked to sponsor Filipino workers’ social needs. Those settling in Seattle and looking to be accepted established a community center outside of Chinatown to voice their opinions, while those a part of the migrant industry and those who serviced the migrant workers were consolidating a neighborhood within Chinatown. Two separate trajectories were then created: one for Filipino families settling in Seattle moving away from the migrant work and the other sponsoring the bachelor Filipino society. This established a

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<sup>41</sup> Sylvestre A. Tangalan, interview by Carolina D. Koslosky. *Pinoy Pioneer: Community Organizer*. Washington State Oral/Aural History Program, August 27, 1975.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Filipino presence in Seattle, but also destabilized the physical area of Manilatown as support for the neighborhood came from migrant workers instead of the settled families.

### **Taxi-Dance Halls and Boxing Arenas**

The Filipino community began separating even before the Second World War. Though Filipinos moved fluidly between the “community” and the “neighborhood,” in that they were members with the Filipino Community Center and members living in Manilatown, two separate cultures emerged. As Filipino families integrated with Seattle, the bachelor society remained. Over time the single Filipino male denizens of Chinatowns would receive the titles of *manong* (literally older brother in Ilokano). These single males would find their own entertainment industry from the taxi-dance halls, the gambling clubs, and the boxing arenas, which were looked down upon by the settled Filipino families in Seattle.

As Manilatown settled within Chinatown, young Filipino migrant workers not only found restaurants and laundry shops, but also found Chinatown as an entertainment district. As Ray Corpus recounted, “we were all males at that time, from L.A. to Seattle. ... So what do we have to do? ... We go to Chinatown ... Taxi dances, prostitution, whatever, they were there.”<sup>43</sup> Considering that the migrant population of the Filipino community was all male and that “80 percent of the Filipino immigrants [in Los Angeles between] the 1920s and 1930s became migratory laborers,” the skewed ratio of men to women made it evident that there was sexual intimacy.<sup>44</sup>

Among the best known entertainments were the taxi-dance halls available to all migrant workers ranging from Filipinos, Mexicans, and European migrant workers. The taxi halls

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<sup>43</sup> Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 54-55.

<sup>44</sup> Maram, 110.

employed mostly poor white women, otherwise known by the upper middle class societies as “white trash” and Latinas. The “halls functioned simultaneously as places of employment and as recreation centers, [and] they became significant public arenas for an emerging working-class culture that fostered alternative presumptions associated with notions of work, leisure activities, and interethnic gender relations.”<sup>45</sup> Filipino patrons were seen dancing sexually with the white taxi-dancers, questioning the notions of masculinity and sexuality among Asian men. The dance halls were then found to be spaces which allowed Filipino men to be who they were: “young men in search of the proverbial wine, women, and song.”<sup>46</sup> Seattle’s African American jazz seen in Chinatown provided Filipinos their want for wine, women, and song. The Freedman building on Maynard became a popular Filipino dance hall.

Thus, the taxi-dance halls became prime spots where Filipino men and white women intermingled not just through dance, but also through intimate relationships. Due to the gender ratio among Filipinos, interracial relationships between Filipino men and white women emerged.<sup>47</sup> Regardless, these practices were often risqué, not only because of the hyper-sexual dancing being conducted by both patron and dancer, but also because of the anti-miscegenation laws which prevented ‘Mongolians’ from marrying white women. Since some of these young women began entering romantic relationships with Filipinos, questions arose over the legality of marriage and whether Filipinos could settle in restricted neighborhoods. Nonetheless, Filipinos were considered of the ‘Malay’ race and therefore did not classify under the term ‘Mongolian.’<sup>48</sup>

In the 1933 case *Roldan vs. Los Angeles County and the State of California*, Salvador Roldan and his fiancé, Marjorie Rogers, sued due to being denied a marriage license. Their

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<sup>45</sup> Maram, 109.

<sup>46</sup> Maram, 111.

<sup>47</sup> Baldoz, “Volarizing,” 975.

<sup>48</sup> Baldoz, “Volarizing,” 977.

argument relied on the taxonomy developed by Blumenbach where humans fall into five distinct categories: white or Caucasian, black or Ethiopian, yellow or Mongolian, brown or Malay, and red or Indian. As a Filipino, it was argued that Roldan fell under the Malay category and the anti-miscegenation law adhered only to Blacks, Indian Americans, and ‘Mongols.’ The Appeals Court thus ruled that “the state's anti-miscegenation laws were deemed inapplicable to unions between Filipinos and whites.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, loopholes allowing ‘Malays’ to enter marriage unions with white women were filled, nulling previous interracial marriages involving Filipinos. By closing loopholes, these laws not only prevented interracial marriages, but also prevented Filipino immigrants in assimilating. Because of this, the Filipino bachelor society was unable in solidify their American identity in establishing a neighborhood with interracial families. Additionally, because there was a lack of single Filipina women in the United States, the Filipino bachelors were unable to consolidate their own community. Instead, the bachelor society remained conjoined with Chinatown.

One of the only methods for Filipinos to reach national fame came with the boxing tournaments. Among the boxers was Marino Guiang, who arrived in Seattle in 1924. As a student at Franklin High School he attended boxing tournaments every Friday around Ninth and Olive at the Austin and Bishop Gymnasium. By 1926, Guiang entered boxing tournaments himself.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Filipino boxers used their careers to provide for themselves. It became a living outside of the canneries, farms, and domestic work. The boxing arenas then became highly important for Filipinos to highlight their physicality and display masculine archetypes.

Not only did the taxi-dance halls, gambling centers, and boxing arenas entertain and support Filipinos, but these businesses also provided a forum for unionization. So while Filipinos

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Guiang.

saw these recreational activities as an escape from harsh realities, they also used these activities as a means to protest against societal factors. The gambling clubs, with hopes to earn cash quickly boosted the American fantasy of fortunes for Filipinos. The taxi-dance halls and the interracial dancing scene between Filipino customer and White taxi-dancer introduced interracial romance while combatting anti-miscegenation laws. The boxing arenas and the prize winning Filipino boxers like Guiang, established notions of Filipino masculinity.

### **Subjugation, Protest, and Unionization**

By rebelling against societal stereotypes in mass numbers, Filipinos were challenging their subjugated roles as ‘nationals.’ However, when Filipinos returned to their seasonal jobs, they realized their subjugation within the labor force, leading them ultimately to unionization. Filipino workers living in Washington state and working in Alaska found themselves discriminated against with no real representation. The unionization and civil rights movement strengthened the comradery between Filipino workers and to a lesser extent all workers in the agricultural and canning industries. The efforts to fully establish a physically solidified Manilatown in Seattle were then overshadowed by the mass movement for unionization.

Initial immigration to the United States by the *pensionados* and then the self-sustaining students brought little complaints by the non-Asian community, even though there were discriminatory practices against Filipinos. Yet Filipinos found their ethnicity overruled any of the limited freedoms they enjoyed. *Pensionados*, seeing their role as Filipino ambassadors in the U.S. attempted to create Philippine autonomy, began thinking twice about openly criticizing American practices towards Filipinos while Chinese and Japanese spoke about the discrimination they faced in newspapers and other ethnic venues.<sup>51</sup> Thus, criticizing the term ‘national’ was

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<sup>51</sup> Hinnershitz, 134.



unheard of by these Filipinos students. But as the community shifted from the colleges to the labor force, tensions arose between white workers and Filipinos, leading Filipinos to openly question their nationality, their position in society, and strive for civil rights. ‘National’ status was therefore in question. *The Commonwealth Times* in 1939 challenged the status stating that the ‘national’ “occupies a queer and anomalous twilight zone in which, though born in the Philippines ... is now a part of America and just as much an American as anyone – he is neither an alien nor a citizen! ... [Nationals] provide taxes, providing they can accumulate anything to tax. But they cannot vote.”<sup>52</sup> The Filipino migrant workers movement was set into motion.

It is interesting that the first to protest against discriminatory practices were the Filipino students themselves. Students writing in *The Chomley Spectator* on July 13, 1929 denounced the segregation policies of Alaska's Chomley cannery, which purposefully segregated Filipinos away from white workers due to beliefs that Filipinos carried diseases.<sup>53</sup> Earlier, in April 15<sup>th</sup> of that year, a petition was sent to the Seattle City Council stating that “passengers from the Philippines, who arrive in Seattle, are afflicted with spinal meningitis, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases” which the council accepted.<sup>54</sup> These racial tensions between white employers and Filipino employees were exasperated when a group of young Native American women went missing in Chomley, Alaska. The cannery supervisors locked down all Filipinos only to find that the ‘missing’ women had only failed to report home by curfew. Instead of brushing this aside, cannery supervisors reprimanded the Filipino workers and illegalized the weekly or monthly dances between all employed cannery works and Native American women. Filipino student workers reacted angrily as they released newspaper articles claiming, “In

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<sup>52</sup> “Filipinos in America Entitled to Citizenship,” *The Commonwealth Times*, Nov. 15, 1939.

<sup>53</sup> Hinnershitz, 137.

<sup>54</sup> Cordova, 118.

constitutional interpretations we have the freedom to live, the freedom to speak and the freedom to pursue his happiness and be happy. These are rights inalienable because they are inherent and emanating from man himself. ... It will be both a mistake and a failure on our part if we let this order go unnoticed.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the breaking point was reached by 1930 when Filipino workers “recognized the promotion of civil rights for Filipinos was directly connected to the promotion of labor rights ... [and thus] the formation of the [Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers' Union].”<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the Pacific coast, Filipinos began protesting against these adverse conditions. Along with the work conditions placed onto Filipinos, the 1913 Alien Land Law “prohibited all ‘aliens ineligible to citizenship’ from purchasing or owning land” and by 1920 and 1923 loopholes were closed that allowed Asians to purchase land under the names of their American born children or white intermediaries.<sup>57</sup> Because Filipinos resided as ‘nationals,’ a title in between alien and citizen, laws towards Filipinos buying property were similar to the marriage laws, in which Filipinos were under murky circumstances.

Due to alien land laws and the inclusion of Filipinos in those laws, the option in buying property was not readily available and instead Filipinos began focusing on protest instead of community consolidation. Ponce Torres recounted his involvement with the protests claiming, “[Workers] went out, strike with us, we demonstrated a long parade of strikers for maybe two, three miles long from Kent ... from Renton and up-down to South Tacoma, most every day for whole month during spring when the farmers were about to be ... or busy ... and [in] need [of] workers right away.”<sup>58</sup> Subjugation was therefore apparent in certain places and times.

Unionization then followed. The Cannery Worker’s and Farm Laborer’s Union (CWFLU) was

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<sup>55</sup> Hinnershitz, 138-139.

<sup>56</sup> Hinnershitz, 141.

<sup>57</sup> Rick Baldoz, “Volarizing,” 979-980.

<sup>58</sup> Torres.

established in 1933 and began organizing the both workers in the canning and agricultural industry.

### **Political Problems and the Rise of Families**

As the Filipino cannery unions rose to power in Seattle, so did corruption. Additionally, the Second World War's end ushered in a new wave of Filipino immigrants, moving the community further away from the neighborhood. These new immigrants, detached from the migrant workers, established, incorporated, and began to assimilate into Seattle society. Because the split between Filipino "neighborhood" and Filipino "community" already existed in Seattle, political tensions between Filipinos arose. Consequently, newer immigrants and American-born Filipinos shifted their attitudes away from both the "community" and "neighborhood" in attempts to incorporate them.

The Allied victory in the Second World War brought the end of Japanese occupation over the Philippines, Philippine independence, and the immigration of Filipino soldiers and their families to the United States. As these newer families entered with no connection to the *manongs*, they were unsympathetic movements by the migrant workers living in the Filipino quarters of Chinatown and Manilatown. Immigration changed and "the veterans came as 'settlers' to the United States rather than as 'sojourners' who expected to return to their homeland. Many, like [the Estella Habal's father], came with nuclear families and established small Filipino military communities ... They were not compelled to live in isolated agricultural camps or rundown urban areas, as the *manongs* did."<sup>59</sup> By 1968, American born Filipino college students, coming from farm-worker families or U.S. veterans of World War II, had forgotten or were not taught, the Filipino migrant stories.

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<sup>59</sup> Habal, 25-26.

Born in 1952 in Seattle, Silme Domingo attended schools in Ballard. Though both his parents were active within the Filipino community, Domingo, along with many other second generation Filipinos felt detached from Filipino American community, especially the *manongs*. It was only after graduating from the University of Washington when Domingo began affiliating himself with Asian Americans. When he and Gene Viernes began working in the Alaskan canneries, they both realized the harsh working conditions intermingled with racial discrimination towards Filipinos. These younger Filipinos, noting the large amounts of discrimination were refused help from the unions. So the second generation Filipino cannery workers began their own political movements, which at times opposed the established community. When Silme Domingo became the first leader of Seattle's chapter of the Union for Democratic Filipinos (KDP), an anti-Marcos socialist coalition, members within the community, such as Tangalan, himself a Marcos advocate, were surprised at the political activity by this new generation of American-born Filipinos.<sup>60</sup> The differing views between Filipino Americans in Philippine politics and the views on then Filipino president Ferdinand Marcos aided in splitting the community. However, first generation migrant workers living in the neighborhood of Manilatown supported Domingo and Viernes' efforts. Indeed, due to the large amount of Filipino activism in the United States, the U.S. government abandoned its support for the Marcos government in the Philippines.<sup>61</sup>

Political antagonisms therefore began, not only within ideologies of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, but also within the unions. Mixing these antagonisms with the Filipino gang rivalries became volatile. The Tulisan (Bandits), consisting of younger Filipino Americans from

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<sup>60</sup> John Stamets, "The Cannery Murders: The slaying of two Filipino union reformers in Seattle sheds light on decades of tormented labor history in Alaskan salmon-packing industry," *The Weekly*, August 4-10, 1982.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, 365.

poorer families began staking turf in Seattle's Chinatown, and provided "protection" to gambling houses along King Street. A once minor gang with its inception in 1976 as a rival to the Unggoys (Monkeys), the Tulisans became one of the most powerful gangs in Seattle as it infiltrated the union ranks through political maneuvers to counter anti-Marcos union leaders.<sup>62</sup> As the Tulisans gained power within the union, Domingo and Viernes became key rivals looking to end corruption and bribing within the union. Nonetheless, Domingo and Viernes were gunned down on June 1, 1981 in front of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) building by members of the Tulisan gang.

The new waves of immigration after the Second World War and the rise of the gangs contributed Manilatown's fall. More Filipinos began moving away from these areas as restrictive housing ended in Seattle. Additionally, in other areas Manilatowns were forcefully removed by outside factors. In 1952, Stockton, California's Little Manila was destroyed due to the city's effort to "clear out 'infested' areas" in order to build Interstate-5.<sup>63</sup> San Francisco's International Hotel tenants were all evicted by 1977 and the building was demolished in 1981 to usher in new development. Seattle's Chinatown also faced growing gentrification, from the building of the Kingdome leading to Asian American protests and the building of Interstate-5. Yet, Chinatown remained, but the Filipino neighborhood inside diminished by the movement away from the neighborhood to create a broader Filipino community. The neighborhood of Manilatown, whether or not it was known as that in Seattle, is now merely a memory. However, the community was always unstable.

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<sup>62</sup> Stamets.

<sup>63</sup> Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, "Losing Little Manila: Race and Redevelopment in Filipina/o Stockton, California" in *Positively no Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, eds. Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 77-80.

### **The Discourse of Community and Neighborhood**

Seattle's Manilatown was created by the migrant workers and faded due to various reasons. Among them was the movement away from the neighborhood in order to create a community to address the socio-political needs of the Filipino families in Seattle. Because the neighborhood never solidified, in that it catered to mostly the migrant workers, Manilatown was present only when it was necessary. As Filipino families began settling, a service industry to support migrant workers was no longer needed and the neighborhood was unable to transform into a family-oriented space in part due to negative sentiments towards the labor district and in part due to gang violence. Thus Linda España-Maram states, "Today nothing remains of the Filipino settlements ... But the historical significance of these spaces cannot be erased. When they *needed* to exist, they provided valuable sites for the vibrant and complex negotiations for viable ethnic identities and solidarity."<sup>64</sup>

Yet, Manilatown still needs to exist in that Filipinos have settled and created their communities along the Pacific Coast. While there are businesses representing the Filipino neighborhoods in Seattle that are closing (such as the infamous Inay's Kitchen which shut its doors on January 29, 2016 due to rising rents), gathering spaces are sprouting up to serve Seattle's current Filipino community. The Filipino Island Pacific Supermarket on Martin Luther King Jr. South, a few miles away from the historic Manilatown opened in 2016. On the outskirts south of Seattle, in Tukwila, Westfield Southcenter's Seafood City Marketplace which opened in 2010 is still going strong with plenty of Filipinos meeting there on a weekly or daily basis to do their local shopping. There is still a need for a meeting space as a new influx of Filipino immigrants arrive in Seattle. As this new wave of Filipino immigrants arrive under the title of

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<sup>64</sup> Maram, 169.

*balikbayan* (Filipino citizens living outside of the Philippines for at least a year), they come economically tied to the Philippines, showing their new attempts to create Filipino communities within the United States.<sup>65</sup> The new *balikbayan* wave of immigrants has also helped create connections between Filipinos in the Philippines and the U.S.-born generations.<sup>66</sup> As these American-born Filipino millennials grow into adulthood, the discourse of community and neighborhood is once again introduced as Filipino Americans seek to have a political say and physical space. Therefore, Manilatown can no longer be called a physical area with borders that signify where it begins and where it ends. Instead, it lives in the public discourse of what it means to be a community.

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<sup>65</sup> Lee, 363.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, 364.

## Historic Manilatown<sup>67</sup>



Modern Map representing the historic Filipino businesses marked as flags. The highest amount of density represented in the square with King Street having the most Filipino businesses. This is the west portion of Chinatown and Japantown. Map depicts Seattle circa 1916 and 1935 through 1975.

Map based on Fred Cordova's research from 1998 supplementing Wing Luke Museum's Filipino American Historical Walking Tour.

<sup>67</sup> *Filipino-American Historical Presence in Seattle's Chinatown/International District*, 1998, scale represented on map, generated by Filipino American National Historical Society; using Google Maps, <http://goo.gl/maps/JqRDj>.





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