



P7 Ordination Anniversary on Father's Day

PHILIPPINE Fiesta

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P8 FAVA's Picnic at Elk Grove Park

In troubled waters: Rising sea levels threaten sinking town's survival

BY JEZREEL INES

Sea level rise is a slow-onset disaster, and the gradual sinking of coastal communities in the Philippines serves as a stark reminder of the worst that is yet to come to other parts of the world

MANILA, Philippines – The 7 am sun shone bright and the sky was clear, but 35-year-old Sarah Bonghanoy started her day with an unwelcome but all-too-familiar visitor.

As the water seeped through the door crevice, Sarah turned her attention to the family calendar on

could not help but worry not about their belongings, but for the safety of her four small children.

"There are times when we are caught by high tides at night. My husband and I would wake up to clean up and forgo sleep because we need to keep an eye on our children. It doesn't matter if things get wet as long as the children are safe," she said in Filipino.

Sarah and the more than 5,000 residents of Isla Pamarawan have learned that dealing with flood waters is a small price to pay for living on



WATERWORLD. Residents of Isla Pamarawan are dealing with flood waters all year round as a result of rising sea levels in their area. Isla Pamarawan is one of the coastal communities in the country that is greatly affected by the fast sea level rise. Photo by Jezreel Ines

the wall. It forecasted a 4.9-meter high tide for the day, the highest in the month of June.

It's good that there is no typhoon today. If there was one, we would surely be submerged.

But in such an event when the tide or a storm surge inundates their home, Sarah carefully places what little they have – washing machine, clothes, electric fan – on elevated surfaces.

When the floods invade her home at night, Sarah curls up in her bed and

the Island, where the ebb and flow of water gives them food and jobs, and defines their collective existence.

In recent years, however, the sea has been rising faster and at levels they have not seen before. Their beloved island home is gradually sinking, along with their hope for a better future.

Knee-high and higher
Nestled in Malolos, Bulacan, Barangay Pamarawan is a 264-hectare

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Know Our History, Know Ourselves: The 2023 Manzanar Pilgrimage and Cross-Cultural Solidarity

BY MADELINE DO

"Know History, Know Self. No History, No Self".

Many Filipino American scholars and activists know this quote by José Rizal, a writer and political activist regarded as the national hero of the Philippines. It's a statement that emphasizes the significance of how understanding one's history is inevitably intertwined with understanding the self and one's sense of identity. Not just concerning Filipino and Filipino American history, this stands true regarding the complex relationships of marginalized communities within and with the United States.

During the 54th Annual Manzanar Pilgrimage, members of our community were able to engage in dialogue and learn about the experiences of Japanese American incarceration, Muslim Americans post-9/11, and community building within local Indigenous groups. Our pilgrimage was organized by members of the Florin Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (Florin JACL) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations – Sacramento Valley/Central California (CAIR – SV/CC).

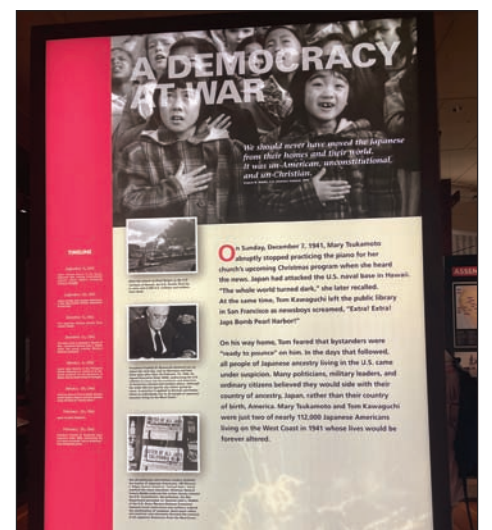
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Manzanar National Historic Site



Manzanar Mess Halls



Photos by Angela Alejandra
History of Japanese immigrants in America

Know Our History, Know Ourselves: The 2023 Manzanar Pilgrimage and Cross-Cultural Solidarity

BY MADELINE DO

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The Manzanar Pilgrimage is an annual event that takes place at the Manzanar National Historic Site in California and commemorates the experiences of Japanese Americans who were unjustly incarcerated by the government of the United States during World War II.



Taiko ensemble



Survivors during the World War II

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States government issued Executive Order 9066, which authorized the forced relocation and incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. Manzanar was the first of the ten concentration camps, and one of many detention facilities, where Japanese Americans were forcefully confined. The Manzanar Pilgrimage began in 1969 and has been held annually on the last Saturday of April since then. The event brings together former internees, their families, and members of the general public to reflect on the history of Japanese American incarceration and honor those who endured this injustice. It aims to promote understanding, healing, and the commitment to ensuring that such injustices are not repeated. It also provides an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue, allowing younger generations to learn from the experiences of those who were directly affected by incarceration and awaken their political consciousness.

As participants in the Manzanar Pilgrimage, we engaged in various activities, including speeches, performances, educational workshops, and tours of the Manzanar National Historic Site. Prior to our Saturday at Manzanar, we engaged in a cultural exchange with Sage Romero

and the AkaMya Culture Group, a Numa (Paiute) cultural group. They reminded us that they were the first displaced Americans, long before the WWII concentration camps. Through dance, drumming, and song, they showed us how they are building community, empowerment, and strength to secure justice today. As we learned from CAIR, suspicion, backlash, and hatred toward our fellow Americans didn't end with the concentration camps. Especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Muslim Americans were subject to the weaponization of misinformation and voices of hate. Taking in stories of the past and analyzing our actions in the present serve to be powerful reminders of the importance of showing up and showing out for other communities.

I was invited by one of the members of the Florin JACL Manzanar Planning Committee, Gregory Wada, to play taiko with current and former members of Bakuatsu Taiko Dan, a student-led taiko ensemble based in UC Davis, as part of this cultural exchange. Taiko is an art form that while originated in Japan, has roots in North American culture and the Asian American movement. Taiko

is protest music, music of immigrants—music of Americans. Through taiko, I learned about the political consciousness of Asian Americans and how to support and be in solidarity with other communities. As a Filipino-Vietnamese American, it may seem odd that I play with and engage with a community that I only identify with broadly under the umbrella term of “Asian American”. Friends in the Filipino American community had expressed confusion as to why I had chosen to take up a Japanese American form of musical expression, with comments such as “Japanese American drumming?”

You're Filipino. Japan colonized the Philippines at one point”. That is precisely the kind of sentiment and divide between groups that makes it difficult for learning and cultural growth. Examining histories like the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the experiences of Muslim Americans after the events of



Angela and Megan of Laban Group

9/11 can help the broader Asian American community, including Filipinos and Filipino Americans, who may be experiencing acts of racial aggression, violence, and othering to better understand the impacts of those on communities. This historical perspective promotes solidarity, provides historical context, offers valuable

lessons, highlights intersectionality, and inspires collective action toward addressing racial justice. Recognizing the shared struggles among different Asian American communities is crucial for understanding intersectionality, and by acknowledging the experiences of one group, it becomes easier to see how interconnect-

ed forms of oppression affect various communities.

The Manzanar Pilgrimage serves as a powerful reminder of the impact of discrimination, the importance of upholding civil rights for all individuals, and preserving the memory of past injustices to prevent their recurrence in the future. This specific instance of cross-cultural solidarity goes to show how much communities can accomplish and educate while working together.

Special acknowledgment and thanks to our survivors: Sam Shimada, Sachiko Louie, Christine and Stan Umeda, and Judy Fukuman.

Madeline Do
Laban Group Intern
Student at the University of California, Davis
Co-President of Bakuatsu Taiko Dan



Editor's Note

We're halfway done in the year! It's amazing how we bounce forward from the nightmare of the pandemics. We finally can see our faces free and clear from wearing protective masks. Out in the open, we can finally breathe, mingle with people, and see their smiling faces. A great feeling to free ourselves from the worries of getting sick, and to welcome and celebrate, the 4th of July, as America's Independence Day celebration. Benjamin Abaya takes us back to July 4, 1776, on page 5.

Exciting travels, events, concerts, family celebrations are lined up without restrictions. They're just the normal ways we've known and lived, hoping we can do so much more, and spend time with our families and friends.

Our Filipino community in Sacramento and around is no different. In this issue are our contributing writer Dale Esperante's coverage of the Filipino American Veteran Association family picnic at Elk Grove Park and the 17th anniversary celebration of Father Julio Rapada Orpilla, as St. Joseph Catholic Parish' pastor for all those years.

Let's also welcome Madeline Do, as one of Laban Group interns student at UC Davis, in her coverage of Manzanar Pilgrimage, in commemoration of the Japanese Americans unjust incarceration during World War II.

Let's continue to make stories remembering the past and hoping to make more wonderful stories of our future existence. And let's not forget, there are those who are not contributing to the equations to better our lives. We must continue to show that we exist: Asian American community, LGBTQ+, the oppressed, and the under-represented.

Please follow the Laban Group's activities and projects for our community.

With love always,
Dinnah San Pedro

In troubled waters: Rising sea levels threaten sinking town's survival

From page 1

island barangay situated approximately 26 kilometers north of Manila.

Part of the vibrant fishing communities along Manila Bay, it is among the coastal areas in the Philippines that face the threat of gradual submersion amid sea level rise due to climate change.

Dr. Laura David, director of the UP Marine Science Institute and an oceanographer who has studied sea level rise in the Philippines, said the country is grappling with a sea level rise that surpasses the global average threefold.

“Through our observation spanning three decades, we have noted a consistent upward trend in the surrounding waters of the Philippines, with a rate of sea level rise ranging from 7 to 10 centimeters per decade,” David said.

David emphasized that sea level rise poses a significant threat to the entire Philippines, especially in coastal regions facing the Pacific and the west-northwest side, including Manila Bay.

In their study, David and colleagues identified all coastal areas in Bulacan to be at a “very high risk” of sea level rise and moderate flooding.

“As a result, Bulacan is recognized as a highly sensitive region when it comes to the challenges posed by sea level rise,” she added.

In 2050, Pamarawan and neighboring barangays and cities along Manila Bay are projected to be submerged by floodwater, with flooding extending towards Valenzuela City, according to data from Climate Central, a non-profit group of scientists and communicators specializing in climate change visualizations.

Sea level rise is a slow-onset disaster, but higher tides in combination with a powerful storm can wreak havoc on communities, like when Sarah almost lost her then three-year-old son to Typhoon Pedring in 2011.

There was a typhoon at that time, along with the high tide. We were busy evacuating that night, running around. I later realized that my child was missing, I thought he was drowned in the flood. Thankfully, he was rescued by the village watchers.

In the last 65 years, from 1951 to 2015, the Philippines has



MOST VULNERABLE. Children in Isla Pamarawan joyfully play in the flooded streets caused by the rising tides in their area. Photo by Jezreel Ines

experienced more frequent and more intense tropical cyclones, with wind speeds exceeding 170 kilometers per hour.

This trend has caught the attention of experts and is expected to persist in the future, as highlighted in the comprehensive report on Observed Climate Trends and Projected Climate Change in the Philippines.

At the forefront of the devastating impacts of powerful cyclones and swift rise in sea levels are coastal communities and fisherfolk, who remain the poorest sector in the Philippines as of 2021, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. There are almost 1.9 million fisherfolk in the Philippines as of 2015.

But it is young people in coastal areas who are most vulnerable to sea level rise, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef).

Robi Ann Roxas, a 17-year-old Grade 11 student on the island, wades through knee-deep waters every single day, carefully placing each step and braving the challenging conditions that transform her path to school into a waterlogged maze.

When that happens, we just bring our school uniforms and get dressed there.

This constant exposure to flood waters gives Roxas discomfort, causing sore feet and occasional muscle cramps.

It is truly painful because I constantly get soaked. We were

advised to purchase school sandals, but we cannot prioritize buying them over food at home.

Not just climate change

On top of rising sea levels and increasingly more powerful storms, the inhabitants of Isla Pamarawan find themselves locked in a battle not only against the forces of nature, but also against the consequences of the construction of an airport.

Benny Bonghanoy, 46, reminisced about the bygone years when fishing was easier in the waters surrounding the island.

A few decades ago, they did not have to devote an entire day to fishing, but they could easily catch crabs, fish, and shrimps locally called paraw – after which the island was named.

He and his fellow fishermen, however, noticed that their catch declined and the waves were stronger when the construction of the neighboring New Manila International Airport (NMIA), situated merely eight kilometers away, commenced in 2021.

Now that it was being excavated [for the airport construction], the water level rose rapidly. Now, during high tide, the water quickly increases within half an hour. It has become that fast.

Set to become the largest airport in the Philippines and meant to help decongest the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), the NMIA is

currently being constructed along the coastal areas of Bulakan, Bulacan, and is situated approximately 35 kilometers north of the Philippine capital. (READ: Airport City displaces Bulacan fisherfolk)

As a key initiative under President Rodrigo Duterte's “Build! Build! Build!” program, the NMIA, developed by San Miguel Corporation (SMC), is hailed as a “game changer” and is ex-

pected to create a million jobs and boost Bulacan's local economy.

However, for fisherfolk like Benny, the construction of the new airport does not hold the same promise of bringing development and progress to their lives.

Fernando Hicap, national chairperson of the fisherfolk alliance Pamalakaya Pilipinas, expressed concern about the reclamation projects taking place along the Manila Bay coast, particularly the development of the new airport.

“The situation is truly a disaster. The reclamation activities in Bulakan, Bulacan are causing irreparable damage to the mangrove areas. By destroying the natural habitats and breeding grounds of fish, the very sources of livelihood for the local communities are being compromised,” Hicap told Rappler.

Charlie Javier, barangay kagawad of Brgy. Pamarawan, revealed that the affected individuals of the new airport construction were provided with a financial compensation amounting to a mere P30,000 by the developers.

“They [SMC] assured us that they would provide employment opportunities to our fellow island residents once the airport is completed, as a way to support our community,” Javier said.

But for Benny and other fishermen on the island, fishing

and the ocean have been their way of life and have become a vital part of their identity.

We no longer speak up because, of course, they are the ones who know better, they are the ones in power. If we complain, we cannot do anything about it.

Changing the tides

David stressed the importance of the government taking proactive measures in revising development plans and consistently taking into account the dangers posed by sea level rise.

“As we advance in our pursuit of new development plans, encompassing the placement of an airport, roads, hospitals, and schools, it is crucial to prioritize their locations at significantly higher elevations, preferably five to seven meters above the sea level, particularly in coastal areas,” she said.

Hicap further mentioned that the ongoing reclamation projects will not only have an impact on marine life, but also jeopardize the food security of the nation.

“If these circumstances persist, not only will the livelihoods of our fishermen be jeopardized, but our overall food security will also be significantly impacted. Thus, the consequences are far-reaching and have a profound effect on us,” he explained.

Beyond the allure of urban development and progress, Benny's simple aspiration is for them to continue fishing and for their island to flourish and stand resilient.

Sarah, however, holds on to the hope that when the time comes the airport is completed, the government will provide assistance and support to allow them to sustain their way of life on the island.

It's a pitiful situation for us poor residents. What will happen to us when the airport is constructed? Will we just be thrown away and relocated to the city?

But for Pamarawan's youth like Roxas, there is a humble yet profound dream for their cherished island home.

“Sana sa pagtanda ko may maabutan pa rin akong Isla Pamarawan,” she said. (I hope that when I grow old, Isla Pamarawan will still exist.) – Rappler.com

A Retirement Fact Sheet on Social Security and Medicare

Presented BY MARITES AVILA

Obtaining Your Social Security Benefits

To determine the optimal age for activating your social security payments, work with your financial advisor. You're eligible to begin collecting social security retirement benefits at age 62, but you may wish to defer taking them to increase your benefits. If you collect your benefits early, a permanent reduction of 25–30 percent will apply to your payments. The definition of "early" depends upon your "full retirement age." You can substantially increase your monthly benefits by delaying them until age 70. On average, your benefit at age 70 will increase by 124 percent to 132 percent. (Again, the amount depends upon your full retirement age.)

When to File

It's important to file for your benefits three months (and no more than four months) prior to the month in which you want to start receiving a check. The Social Security Administration (SSA) pays benefits one month in arrears. This means if you want to start receiving a check in July, you should file for benefits in April. When you file, you'll need to specify the month in which you want to start receiving benefits.

When Are Checks Deposited?

Generally, your monthly social security checks are deposited to your account based upon your date of birth, as shown in the following table:

Date of Birth	Check Deposit Day
1st to the 10th of month	Second Wednesday of month
11th to the 20th of month	Third Wednesday of month
21st to the 31st of month	Fourth Wednesday of month

How to Apply

There are three ways to apply for benefits:

- Call the SSA toll-free at 800.772.1213, Monday through Friday, from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.
- Visit the SSA website at secure.ssa.gov/iClaim/rib.
- Make an appointment at your local SSA office. To find an office near you, visit secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp.

Information Needed

When you apply for social security benefits, you'll be asked for the following information:

- Personal. You'll need to provide your date of birth, place of birth, and social security number (SSN) for yourself (and your spouse, if applicable). If you're applying for the benefits of a divorced spouse, you'll also need to provide the spouse's name and SSN, as well as the date of your marriage and divorce. If your spouse is deceased, you'll need to provide the date of your marriage and the date of your spouse's death.
- Bank. To have your checks deposited

TIMELINE FOR RETIREMENT BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY	
AGE 62	Eligible for social security retirement benefits If you elect to claim social security benefits at age 62, your benefits will be permanently reduced by 25% to 30%.
AGE 65	Age eligible for Medicare in retirement Do you or your spouse still work? If yes, is your health insurance coverage considered Medicare creditable (i.e., your employer has 20 or more employees)? If no, you must apply for Medicare to avoid being assessed a penalty on Part B. Although COBRA, retiree health, TRICARE inactive, and health insurance through employers with fewer than 20 employees (exception: association plans) are noncreditable for Part B, many may be considered creditable for Part D. Be sure to check with your carrier.
AGE 66	Full retirement age (FRA) if born before 1955 Add 2 months to age 66 FRA for each year if you were born between 1955 and 1960. Living spousal benefits are based on 50% of the FRA benefit.
AGE 70	Delayed retirement credits of 8% per year cease

directly into your bank account, you'll need to provide your bank account number and the bank's routing transit number (the nine-digit code that identifies U.S. banks).

- Employment. You'll be asked for the name and address of your employer or employers for the past two years, as well as the amount of money you earned over that time period. Also, it's important to share any employment in your career, such as railroad employment or international employment, that entitles you to a pension.
- Military service. If you were in the military, be prepared to provide the beginning and ending date of any service prior to 1968.
- Benefit start date. Be prepared to state the month in which you want your social security benefits to begin.
- Medicare enrollment. If you're within three months of age 65, you'll be asked whether you want to enroll in Medicare Part B. Please note: If you collect social security benefits and are age 65, you'll be automatically enrolled in Medicare Part A and B.

Documentation Needed

Generally, you'll need your original birth certificate (or a certified copy), a copy of your U.S. military service Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (if applicable), and a copy of your W-2 and/or self-employment tax return for the prior year.

Obtaining Your Medicare Benefits

Generally, you're eligible for Medicare benefits at age 65. To determine when to apply for benefits, consult with your financial advisor. In some situations, you don't need to apply for benefits as soon as you're eligible. If you or your spouse is still working and covered by employer health coverage, you may not need to apply as soon as you become eligible. If you do not have health insurance that meets the definition of "creditable coverage," however, you should apply for Medicare when you become eligible.

In another possible scenario, once you reach age 65, your health plan might become a secondary payer to Medicare. This means if you're not covered by

Medicare, you could experience a gap in coverage and higher out-of-pocket costs. To avoid this issue, it's important to check with your health insurer to confirm whether your coverage is considered "creditable."

Coverage Paths

You have a choice of two paths for Medicare coverage:

- Original Medicare Part A and Part B combined with Part D (prescription drug coverage)
- Medicare Advantage Plan (also known as Medicare Part C)

Each path has pros and cons, so you should carefully consider your decision. If you select Medicare Part A and Part B, you'll also want to consider adding a Medigap plan. Medicare Advantage plans provide coverage for expenses not included under Original Medicare, such as out-of-pocket costs, vision care, and hearing aids, as well as emergency care during international travel.

If you're already collecting social security benefits at age 65, you'll be automatically enrolled in Medicare Part A and Part B. You'll receive a letter confirming your enrollment and notifying you of the premium cost for Part B. Typically, you won't pay a premium for Medicare Part A because you paid for this coverage through payroll taxes when working.

If a spouse does not have enough credits for Medicare coverage under their own record, they may be eligible under a spouse when they are age 65. Additional information on Medicare can be found by visiting www.medicare.gov.

When to Apply

There are specific enrollment periods for Medicare plans, and each one has certain rules and deadlines. It's important not to miss the enrollment deadline that applies to your personal situation. If you do miss a deadline, you may be subject to a premium penalty on your Medicare coverage. The enrollment periods are as follows:

Initial enrollment period. If you're age

65 and no longer working, your initial enrollment period is a total of seven months, including the three months before your 65th birthday, the month of your 65th birthday, and the three months after your 65th birthday.

Special enrollment periods. If you continue to work and have creditable coverage that allows you to defer enrollment in Medicare, you'll qualify for a special enrollment period. This means that once you're no longer employed with creditable coverage (and are age 65 or older), you have eight months to enroll to avoid a possible penalty. You'll also want to time your enrollment to avoid any gaps in health insurance coverage. Open enrollment period. Each year, Medicare's open enrollment period generally runs from mid-October to early December. You should review your Medicare selections on an annual basis to be sure your plan meets your current needs. If you'd like to change your Medicare coverage, you can do so during open enrollment.

Information Needed

Generally, you will need your original birth certificate (or a certified copy), a copy of your U.S. military service Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (if applicable and you served prior to 1968), your driver's license, and a copy of your W-2. You should also provide information on your current health insurance plan and coverage dates. If you're already receiving social security benefits, you may be asked to provide your social security information.

Please note: Do not hold off applying for benefits if you do not have all the required documentation! The SSA will advise you on what documentation is missing and can sometimes assist you with obtaining the necessary information.

This material has been provided for general informational purposes only and does not constitute either tax or legal advice. Although we go to great lengths to make sure our information is accurate and useful, we recommend you consult a tax preparer, professional tax advisor, or lawyer.



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BY BENJAMIN ABAYA

July 4, 1776, A Date Remembered

For most Americans, July 4th holds immense significance as it marks one of the most pivotal moments in the history of the United States to become the ultimate democratically progressive and powerful country on earth. It's a day when American families with their neighbors and friends gathered in every nook and corner to celebrate and enjoy the day to show their love and patriotism of the country where they found peace and comfort to reside and raise their children to become good and useful citizens.

The celebration by both young and old alike are so colorful that most of them choose to wear the colors of the American flag red, white and blue as they hold the miniatures of the same during gatherings and parades either as spectators or participants. The people's celebratory spirit can be found, likewise, in their backyards where they created noise making gadgets and legally purchased firecrackers. By the evening, the celebrators have their sumptuous dinner of hotdogs, barbecued chicken, steak and many other typical American food with beer and wine to wash them out. As expected, the evening sky is magnificently brightened with colorful ear deafening fireworks display. It is indeed a momentous occasion that commemorates the birth of a nation since 1776.

However, the intense euphoria of celebration by all Americans regardless of national origin, race, social status and religious belief was not achieved easily but paid human sacrifices by those who desired their children to ultimately enjoy it. After the 13 colonists originally referred to as the United States failed to reconcile with England on many issues principally Taxation and Slavery, the

Continental Congress declared its independence on July 4, 1776, thereby, severed all political relationship with England. The new nation was immediately recognized by many European countries, especially, France that gave necessary aids to secure its independence. Eventually, after so many years of political non-committal, England and allies finally recognized the independence of the United States.

As expected, the new nation expanded its political influence and territorial landmark through treaties with other colonists, land purchases from other countries, conquests against native Indian on their ancestral lands and other territories of colonial powers. The independence and territorial expansion of the United States did not help to have peace with other States on several political issues such as culture and economy, race, slavery and form of government. The irreconcilable differences made some number of States to secede from the United States and formed their own government called Confederate United States, as a result a civil war between the two political entities ensued.

The Confederates believed that the white race is superior and supreme over other races especially the black people whom they divested of their human dignity by considering them as chattel to be sold in public auction for any purpose the new owner to consider. Ambiguous culture and tradition shall continue without let up and they also despised the democratic form of government where people are free to perform lawful acts or even to elect their leaders. All such issues were contrary to the platforms of the United States union forces. The civil war ended only after four bloody years of skirmishes between the two protagonists which also joined by some factions of several tribes of the Indian nations. After more than



4 years of bloody war, the Confederate United States finally surrendered, and all their aspirations were abolished or relegated to oblivion. Undoubtedly, throughout the war between the Confederate United States and Union forces, the celebration of July 4th as the United States Independence Day continued unbending just like the men who fought bravely during the war who were ready to make the ultimate sacrifice to let this day be celebrated as a symbol of freedom for all Americans.

Throughout history, July 4 celebration has been shaped by the diverse contributions of various communities, including Asian-Americans. From the early immigrants who played vital roles in building the nation's infrastructure to the countless individuals who have fought for freedom and equality, Asian-Americans have left an indelible mark on America's Independence Day. Their stories, struggles and triumphs have not only enriched the fabric of American society but have also influenced the way we understand and commemorate this significant day. By examining the profound impact of Asian-Americans on America's Independence Day, especially Filipino-Americans, we gain a greater appreciation for the diverse tapestry that makes up the United States and its ongoing pursuit of liberty and justice for all.

Before the coming of the Americans, the Philippines was a colony of Spain for more than 300 years. During that period, the colonial power never gave semblance of any possible self-rule for the Filipinos be-

cause all powers usually emanated from ruling monarchy of Spain. The colonial power did not consider the Filipinos as citizens but subjects of the ruling Monarchy whom they usually referred to as "indios".

Eventually, the war between the United States and Spain broke out when Spain warships on February 15, 1898, sunk the battleship Maine in the harbor of Havana, Cuba that made the United States to mobilize its forces against all Spanish colonists nearby and as far as the Philippines. The battle of Manila Bay, Philippines was decisive and destructive against Spanish armada which was annihilated by the powerful United States sea power. The Treaty of Paris ended the War, and the Philippines was annexed by the United States as its colony.

In the later part of the 1800 century during the Spanish colonial period, many sporadic regional revolts occurred that deeply weakened the Spanish forces who were on retreat and about to be defeated, but this trend was stopped when the United States armed forces decisively defeated the Spanish forces in all fronts of the war.

Most of the Filipinos were skeptical on how the Americans will govern that made many revolutionary leaders to defy the American desired for peace and with just small misunderstanding the Philippine-United States war started, and the armed conflict lasted for 3 years formally ended with the capture of the Filipino leaders. The memories of the war between the two countries did not last long because the Unit-

ed States Congress passed several laws promising ultimate independence of the Philippines. Subsequently, World War II broke out between the Axis power represented by Germany, Japan and Italy against the allied forces led by the United States, France, England and Russia. Military mobilization was called by the United States that included the Philippines

being a colony of the same and thousands of Filipinos entered the military service which was later integrated with the United States Military Service. When the most destructive war ended with the defeat of the Axis countries, the United States true to its promised gave the Philippines its Independence and became at least a democratic form of government nearly modeled like the United States' three-branches-form-of-government with free elections to choose its leaders.

The United States, likewise, recognized the military services of thousands of Filipinos who were given priority to enter the United States as citizens or immigrants. They were the war veterans who fought bravely side-by-side with American soldiers in all the battle fields during the war against the enemies. The US government also opened immigration to Filipino laborers, skilled workers, professionals in all fields of endeavor who significantly contributed to America's development and progress.

Those early Filipinos who first arrived in the United States as immigrants worked in various industries, including farming, fishing, and canning, thereby, played crucial role in the economic growth of California and other states. Indeed, their hard work and dedication helped fuel America's industrial expansion and progress. This is how we always remember our descendants who greatly contributed everything they had, the reason why we are now celebrating and enjoying our Independence Day.

Photograph by Andri Tambunan



YOUR LIGHT YOUR TRUTH

YOU ARE MULTIFACETED, YOU ARE BRIGHT, YOU ARE SEEN AND YOU ARE NEEDED. DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHINE YOUR LIGHT THE WAY ONLY YOU CAN.

"To exist and be visibly queer, it allows the world to know that we exist and always have existed. I wish the Filipino community knew that spirituality can be more than Catholicism or organized religion. It can look like journaling, reflecting, meditating, energy cleansing, or being a steward to the land." **NIKKI ABELEDA**

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Ordination Anniversary on Father's Day

BY DALE ESPERANTE

Father Julito Rapada Orpilla celebrated his 17th Anniversary as a catholic priest on Father's Day, June 18, 2023. He is the Pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Parish in Elk Grove for 7 years now.

Fr. Julito's anniversary coincided with Father's Day, a Sunday. He celebrated mass to pray for all the fathers, that they may continue to receive the spiritual guidance and blessings of the Holy Spirit. He also prayed for the Holy Spirit to continue to guide him as a Reverend Father of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Father Julito delivered a homily and repeated a line from the Gospel that reads, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few." That line captured the Church's need for more priests, as well as others, to serve the rapidly growing community of faithful. The Reverend Father is asking all to pray for more vocations of priesthood and religious life.

Later that day, the parishioners of St. Joseph organized a potluck party in the Msgr. O'Connor Social Hall to celebrate their Beloved Pastor's 17 years of priesthood. Fr. Julito's family and friends from near and far away arrived to congratulate and be with him on his special day.

Fr. Julito was born in Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur, but he grew up in Vigan City, Ilocos Sur. He started his seminary formation in the Immaculate Conception Minor Seminary in Vigan City (high school) and studied 2 years (college) at San Pablo Major Seminary in Baguio City. In 1999, Fr. Julito joined the Diocese of Sacramento. He then attended Mt. Angel Seminary, St. Benedict, Oregon to continue his college, earning his bachelor's degree in philosophy. Continuing to graduate studies, Fr. Julito attended St. Patrick's Seminary and University, Menlo Park CA where he earned his master's degree in theology and divinity, and bachelor's degree in sacred theology. He was ordained at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, in Sacramento, on June 18, 2006, at the age of 26. He is now 43 years old.

His first assignment was in St. Basil Parish, Vallejo, as pa-



Photos by Dale Esperante

rochial vicar for 6 months. He was then reassigned to the Holy Spirit Parish in Fairfield for 3 years. Followed by an assignment to St. Patrick's Parish in Grass Valley and St. Canice Church in Nevada City for 2 years. He then served at St. Joseph Parish in Yreka and Sacred Heart Parish in Fort Jones with their mission churches for 3 years. Now he is the pastor of St. Joseph Church in Elk Grove and Mission Church of St. Vincent de Paul in Rancho Murieta for 7 years already.

One of Fr. Julito's special joys is to travel when given the opportunity and time. He recently traveled on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with friends and parishioners, and he said: "Every visit there is special, there is always something new. One highlight is to concelebrate the High Mass in the Tomb of Jesus and his place of resurrection, truly a divine encounter. It reminded me of Jesus' transfiguration to witness his divine glory. Being present there feels like 'timeless,' I was really 'out there', and I wanted

it to be endless. Forever will I treasure that very moment and will serve as an inspiration as I continue serving God's people being a priest. I am able to reach my 17 years in the priestly ministry all because of God's grace and because of the laity, because we cannot do all the work on our own. We certainly need people who are willing to embrace a life of service and sacrifice. Despite the challenge, there is joy in serving...there is contentment and fulfillment.

We pray that the young/youth

will open their hearts to respond to the invitation of Jesus to work in His vineyard. We encourage them and pray for them."

The Diocese of Sacramento, the community of Elk Grove, and Philippine Fiesta Online Newspaper congratulate Father Julito on his 17th Anniversary of Priesthood, and his 7 years of being the Pastor of Elk Grove's St. Joseph Parish. May we all be blessed with many more years of having a pastor like Reverend Father Julito Rapada Orpilla.

FAVA's Picnic at Elk Grove Park



Photos by Dale Esperante

BY DALE ESPERANTE

FAVA stands for Filipino American Veterans Association, an organization established by the Filipino American community's veterans of the Vietnam War/Era. United States veterans of any war involving the United States, not only Vietnam War/Era veterans, are welcome to join FAVA.

For many years now, Elk Grove Park has been the favorite picnic spot for FAVA. The weather on the day of the picnic, June 17, 2023, was refreshing throughout. The temperature may have reached the 80s, but the breeze and the shade of the trees rejuvenated our appreciation of being outdoors. The aging veterans, including myself, appreciated the feeling of rejuvenation. Together with old friends, their growing families, and meeting their invited guests made the day super special as observed by this writer.

Arriving for the picnic, we found several veterans busy with barbecuing duties. Hats off to BBQ Chefs Elmer Dy, Mike Demayo, Ed Peluso, Rolando Castaneda, Bill Bostock, Bill Versoza, and others that I may have missed. Hamburgers and Polish sausages sizzled on the grill inviting a quick look from the new arrivals. Set on the long tableclothed tables were bowls of picnic-fare food such as rice, breads, salads, beans, Filipino rice cakes, sweets, and fruits. A boom box, set a few feet away from the table, played lively music, encouraging animated conversations among friends who haven't been social for the past few years because of the pandemic. Today, we eliminated the new in new normal, it was just plain normal.

Every arriving member of FAVA somehow gravitated their way to a very special lady, seated under the shade of the trees. Some would talk with her while others would talk and pose for photos with her. Everyone wanted to have some time with Manang Ched Descargar.

Situating myself next to Manang Ched after lunch, I sat with her for a little bit while watching Ato Delacruz review some dance steps with the line dancing aficionados. Swayed by the music, the fun, and exercise enjoyed by the dancers, I joined the group. Dancing in the park under the canopy of the tall trees and feeling the

breeze feels so exhilarating! Hopefully this annual FAVA picnic will continue every year for many more years, even though the veteran members are getting older every year. The members are almost exclusively Vietnam war/era veterans. The Filipino American Veterans Association (FAVA) must continue in contributing to the community through their main programs: *Filipiniana Community Fund-raising Ball*, *Scholarship Program*, *FAVA Annual Picnic, an invitation for other veterans to join the association.*, *Participation in the Annual Filipino Fiesta of Sacramento*

Events' Flag/Honor Guard Detail when requested or required., *Christmas Party for the members' and their little ones.*, *Members may bring guests.*, *Veterans Day Participation*, *Final Roll Call - A Memorial Service*

This year's picnic was another successful outdoor in the park experience for FAVA's members and friends! Philippine Fiesta Online Newspaper wish to acknowledge the leadership of FAVA: President Jess Velasco, Vice-President Fortunato "Ato" Delacruz, Secretary Yollie Delacruz, Treasurer Beth Velasco, Auditor Sonia Delizo, Director Ed Peluso, Di-

rector Dick Weitzenberg. The membership is acknowledged for their continued support and service in the community. The first president of FAVA when it was established approximately thirty years ago, Gualberto Aglubat, and his lovely wife, Elma, enjoyed the day reminiscing with their old friends, and fellow members. Lifetime member Dave San Pedro came to witness the continuation of this annual tradition. Dave and Dinnah San Pedro, owners of Philippine Fiesta Online Newspaper, are greatly appreciated for publicizing newsworthy community photos and events. Mabuhay FAVA and Salamat Philippine Fiesta!

Photograph by Andri Tambunan



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YOU ARE MULTIFACETED, YOU ARE BRIGHT, YOU ARE SEEN AND YOU ARE NEEDED. DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHINE YOUR LIGHT THE WAY ONLY YOU CAN.

"Trans and non-binary Filipinos exist. Our pre-colonial ancestors had spiritual leaders, the Babaylan (femme priestesses of any gender). They didn't follow colonial ideas of gender and gender roles and were highly respected in their communities. Today, they continue to challenge the status quo and fight for freedom. Knowing this history of our people makes me feel proud to be who I am." **KIANA AQUINO**

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LGBT Pilipinas Gathers in Malacañang for a Colorful Reception

BY LALA SINGIAN

In the Heroes Hall of Malacañang Palace, various council members of the LGBT Pilipinas party list from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao gathered in celebration of Pride Month. On June 29, 2023, the reception offered a platform for an alliance of LGBTQIA+ organizations to push for the creation of a commission or an advisory council for gender equality to the Office of the President.

The reception began with welcome messages by Maria Renan Eusebio, Secretary-General of LGBT Pilipinas, and Director Norman Baloro, the National Chair. This was followed by a multi-colored Festival of Lights Performance, the Bailes De Luces. To top the multi-colored display, a flagbearer from Negros Occidental waved a light-adorned rainbow flag. Ms. Tourism Philippines Winners in Attendance.

The reception continued from the morning to the afternoon with solidarity messages by multiple speakers and figures in the minority community pushing for gender inclusivity. These included Maria Corazon Abalos, Hon. Vice Mayor Gefree Alonsabe, Hon. Mayor Florence Fawa-Batula, Hon. Vice Governor Eufemia Ang Dacayo, Hon. Vice Governor Karen Agapay, Administrator Arnell Ignacio, Usec. Patricia Yvonne M. Caunan. The solidarity message ended with Hon. Congresswoman Geraldine



Various LGBT Council Members from the South.



A surprise visit from the President. Photo by Liam Labrooy.



The Council of LGBT Pilipinas with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and First Lady Louise Araneta Marcos. Photo by Partylist LGBT Pilipinas.

Roman, who is well-known as the first transgender person elected to Congress. For the official PRIDE speech, USEC Py Caunan from the Department of Migrant Workers took to the stage.

First Lady Louise Araneta (Liza) Marcos shared on the podium that the first family has a tradition every Christmas to ask for one wish, indicating that for the upcoming holidays,

she will offer her wish to give a national commission to the LG-BTQIA+ community.

She said in her speech:

"I was going to talk about the different bills... But instead, I will talk about love and why we are so blessed to wake up every morning with the people we love. Kayo (you) fought for love. No one should dictate

who you love. So let's always remember to support one another in unity."

While President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was not scheduled to attend the reception, he surprised the crowd with a sudden appearance.

Since 2016, LGBT Pilipinas has been a grassroots alliance and a national network of LGBTQ+ individuals and

organizations. The community has long sought for national measures to penalize discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). In an appeal to the Office of the President, the colorful reception revolved around a continued push for inclusive policies for the LG-BTQIA+ community in the country.

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Bruno Mars to Philippines crowd: 'Miss na kita, mahal!'

BY CHARMIE JOY PAGULONG

If Bruno Mars were “your man,” he would not only “(buy) you flowers” or “(hold) your hand,” but he would also serenade you with his heartfelt songs, impress you with his sexy dance moves and give you his warmest smile.

The Filipino-American hitmaker did all these during his two-night concert at the Philippine Arena in Bulacan last weekend with his band members The Hooligans.

The STAR attended Day 1 of the Live Nation Philippines-produced show that was replete with pyrotechnics, props and bright lighting effects on stage. Bruno and company left the Filipino audience in awe with their stellar and unforgettable performances amid the massive traffic and heavy down-pour in the area.

The Filipino-American hitmaker Bruno Mars and his band The Hooligans deliver a memorable performance during their two-night concert at the Philippine Arena.

The loud cheering and chanting from the crowd were expected as he opened and ended the show with a bang. Bruno started off with the song 24K Magic and then followed it with some upbeat tracks, slow medley tunes and Uptown Funk as his parting song.

“You look beautiful, Philippines,” the singer told the concertgoers before crooning Finesse. “We traveled a long way to come back to this place because we love this place so much. And we hope, we hope we can get this audience front and back, left and right to singin’ and dancin’ all night. Can we try that?”

He went on performing his hits, one after another, including Treasure, Billionaire, Marry You and Locked Out of Heaven. He even changed the part of the lyrics of Billionaire, a collaboration with Travie McCoy, to “I see my name in bright Filipino lights.”

Bruno further mesmerized the fans when he crooned Calling All My Lovelies and put a local spin on it. He pretended to be talking to someone on the phone and seductively said, “Hey baby, I’m in the Philip-



The singer-songwriter sits down behind the piano to take the audience on a ‘little trip down memory lane,’ rendering a few bars of his collaboration with CeeLo Green, F**k You; Snoop Dogg and Wiz Khalifa’s Young, Wild & Free, Grenade (with smoke effect on stage), Talking to the Moon, as well as the ‘chords that changed my life,’ referring to B.o.B’s Nothin’ on You.



Pyrotechnics, props and lighting effects add excitement to Bruno’s performances at the Live Nation Philippines-produced show.

pines right now. And it’s been a while. It’s been four, five years since I’ve been here. But I still feel the same about you. And it’s still... Miss na kita, mahal. I said miss na kita, mahal.

“You don’t believe me yet? Watch this,” he continued and repeatedly sang the phrase “Miss na kita, mahal” with his bandmates. “Let me tell you, I miss you, girl. Remember we used to come out here...”

The Filipino-American musician afterwards briefly played Wake Up in the Sky and That’s

What I Like and enamored the spectators with his dance moves in Please Me.

Members of The Hooligans had also their solo moments in between, displaying their respective skills in playing their musical instruments, such as, guitars, saxophones, drums and piano.

After a short break, Bruno came back with the sensual Versace on the Floor and carried on with the classic Be My Baby by The Ronettes, the ditty that his “parents would listen to” while he was “growing up back home.”

The 37-year-old’s father Peter Hernandez is half-Puerto Rican and half-Jewish, while his mother is a Filipina, Bernadette San Pedro Bayot. Bruno, whose real name is Peter Gene Hernandez, was born and raised in Hawaii.

Using a megaphone, Bruno continued with Runaway Baby and checked on the audience, “Masaya ba kayo?”

“I’d like to take this opportunity to play a little game with you, alright,” he uttered. “This game is called let’s see if you remember this one. I was very

fortunate and very blessed to work with some incredible artists (and be) part of the songs that I’m so proud of.”

He explained the mechanics of the “game,” saying, “The way this game works is if you know the words in any of these songs that I’m about to sing I need you all singing it at the top of your lungs.” He asked the audience, “Can we try it?” and received a resounding yes for an answer.

He subsequently sat down behind the piano and took the audience on “a little trip down memory lane,” rendering a few bars of his collaboration with CeeLo Green, F**k You; Snoop Dogg and Wiz Khalifa’s Young, Wild & Free, Grenade (with smoke effect on stage), Talking to the Moon, as well as the “chords that changed my life,” referring to B.o.B’s Nothin’ on You.

The Grammy award-winning artist kept going with Leave the Door Open, his collaboration with Anderson .Paak under their duo Super Sonic, and teased the audience with a “fantasy in my head (with) the Filipino women.” Verbalizing the lines from the song, he said, “Tell me that you’re coming through,” and added, “All the Filipino girls that I’m coming... Bruno, I’m coming. Can we try?” He later on quipped, “Stop ladies. I’m shy. I’m shy. Nahihya ako.”

Bruno proceeded with When I Was Your Man, a track from his second album Unorthodox Jukebox, which he admitted was “the hardest song for me to write and the hardest song for me to sing until this day.”

Toward the end of the show, he thanked the Filipino crowd for “allowing us to come back to sing” and dedicated Just the Way You Are to the thousands of people who attended the music event.

“I always wanted to play here. Thank you guys so much... I hope we can come back real, real soon. I’d love to see you all again. But it’s tradition every time we come by here (that) we got to have this place singing this song one last time...”

He then requested to turn the lights up and chorused with the audience, “When I see your face/There’s not a thing that I would change/Cause you’re amazing/Just the way you are.”

Photograph by Andri Tambunan



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"In Filipinx culture, image is everything. How you present yourself to the world (and conversely, how the world perceives you) is a reflection of your character, your values, and your upbringing. My parents taught me to always present myself honorably, which means making sure to filter out parts of myself that are considered transgressive or imperfect. I would like this portrait to show that I have no shame in my image and how I present myself. I am femme. I am fat. I am loud. I am imperfect. And I should be able to share who I am without shame." **JEFFREY BONGGA**

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