

May 2022

## Rising Voices: Filipino American Culture

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### Recommended Citation

Ray, Angel (2022) "Rising Voices: Filipino American Culture," *Writing Waves*: Vol. 4, Article 19.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/writingwaves/vol4/iss2/19>

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# **Rising Voices: Filipino American Culture**

Angel Ray

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Keywords: Filipino, Filipino American, Education, Social justice, Identity

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## **I. Educate**

Since the arrival of Filipino people to the US, they have made numerous contributions to American Society that have been overlooked almost every single time. Every culture deserves to be celebrated and recognized, yet not many people know much about Filipino culture, let alone what they have contributed to this country. This subject is personal to me because I am a Filipino American, yet I did not know much about my culture. Now is the time for me to start advocating for my culture. Though often overlooked and sometimes erased, the lives and struggles of Filipinos in America deserve to be talked about.



Black and white image of adults sitting around a sign that reads, "Citizenship Class of 1947, Vallejo, Calif." from the Filipino American National Historical Society

Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova and her husband Fred Cordova had the drive and initiative to recognize and celebrate the Filipino people. They were both Filipino activists in the '50s and started the Filipino Youth Activities. Additionally, Dorothy became the director of the Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, which conducted research on Asian American problems. After it closed, they made a new organization, the Filipino American National Historical Society, which centers around education and activism for Filipino people.



Dorothy Laigo Cordova sits to the right of her partner Fred Cordova. Dorothy is wearing a red dress and Frank is wearing a black hat. They are holding hands.

Just as repetition in mass media is crucial to self-worth, so is having an education on your culture in schools. School is a major source of learning in your formative years and learning about your own and other people's cultures helps build a foundation of self-awareness and pride that people who are not able to learn about their culture do not have. Jerome Bruner, a professor at Harvard says "Culture shapes mind, it provides us with the tool kit by which we construct not only our world but our very construction of ourselves and our powers". He brings up the point about how we view the world by learning about ours and different cultures as well which is true because you can make your own inferences etc based on the facts and patterns of history and how it has shaped the different cultures today. Most people in the US Filipino Americans have no clue about the contributions we have made to this country nor does the US have an educational curriculum built for it besides in California. I am acting as an advocate for us because I was ignorant of

almost everything I explained before I started researching.



A black and white picture of the Evening Pajaronian Newspaper that reads, "Filipino Murdered, Victim of Rioters"

## II. Accomplishments Hardships

Not many people are aware of this, but Filipino people were the first group of Asian peoples to arrive in America. The first documented Filipino presence in the US was on October 18, 1587, under Spanish rule, the "Luzones Indios" arrived in Morro Bay, CA making us the first group of Asians to come to the US. Additionally, not many people acknowledge the fact that there was a heavy presence of Filipino people who served in WWII. President Roosevelt promised them veteran's benefits and in 1946 he agreed to lower the American flag in the Philippines, yet there are still American bases there. Even after this, Filipino American veterans were still waiting on the benefits promised to them by Roosevelt.



A black and white picture of the First Filipino Infantry Regiment during a naturalization at Camp Beale on February 20, 1943

From the arrival of Filipino people to the US in the 1500's to the Farmworkers Movement in the mid 90's to the accomplishments of Filipino Americans today, they have proven to be overlooked despite the hardships they overcame to achieve their goals. There are countless examples of accomplishments made by Filipino American to talk about, however, one of the most prevalent examples to talk about is Larry Itliong with the United Farmworkers because despite his hard work and dedication, Cesar Chaves received the credit that was not due to him, and Larry was cast to the side receiving no recognition for what he did. Gayle Romasanta confirms in her article from the Smithsonian, "Chavez took the limelight, but co-founder and former assistant director Larry Itliong has been cast in the historical shadows. This was one of the most important social justice and economic movements in American history, yet so many inside and outside the Filipino American community are unaware." The point is not to frown on the Mexican community, but to celebrate both parties equally so that neither are left in the dark. At first I thought I was the only person who thought this way but in reality, other Filipinos recognize that Filipino people do not like being the center of attention or anything that draws attention to them in the slightest, which could also be a reason why most of our history is not acknowledged or talked about.



A black and white picture of Larry Itliong wearing black-framed glasses in front of a microphone

### **Honorable Mentions**

Pedro Flores invented the yo-yo. Fe Del Mundo was the first Filipino as well as Asian, and female to attend Harvard medical school.



A black and white photo of Pedro Flores in a suit



A black and white photo of Fe del Mundo

### **III. Cultural Identity**

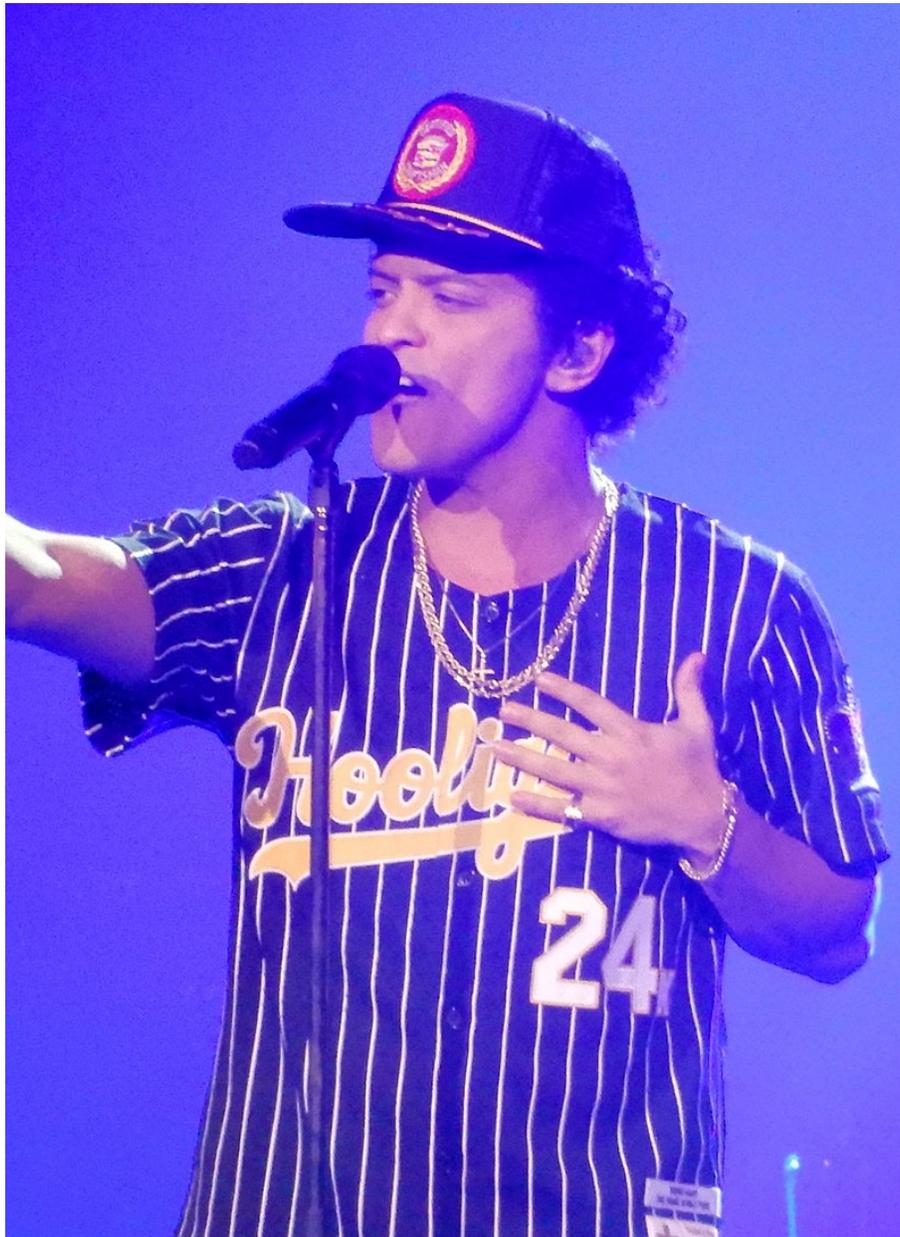
Having a sense of belonging is a part of human nature, no matter how independent you think you are, at the back of your mind you hope for a community of people like you that you can share identity with different aspects. Without community, we feel isolated and lonely because we feel nobody has anything in common with us. The same is true with having racial identity insecurity. If you are not taught about your culture, you feel discordance with your culture which makes you less prideful. Being a Filipino American and barely

knowing anything about the history and culture of your own people besides modern public figures and food causes discordance within our cultural identity.

Especially with parents from generation X either emigrating from the Philippines or their grandparents immigrating to America, for the most part they do not share the roots of the culture with their children which causes them to feel this disconnect. Kevin Nadal wrote an article on Buzzfeed where he explains, "we didn't really know much about what it meant to be Filipino-American... At home, my immigrant parents didn't talk much about being Filipino..." He spends much time explaining how he knew of the foods, or Filipino TV, media, etc. but he still felt that was surface level things and he wanted a deeper connection to the culture that he did not have. This testimony resonated with me because before I started doing more research, I did not know much about the culture besides mainstream media and foods.

#### **IV. Famous Filipino Americans**

Bruno Mars is a proud Filipino American music artist. His mom is Filipina and his dad is Puerto Rican. Ever since he started gaining fame he has claimed his Filipino Roots at multiple shows and TV interviews and has had shows in the Philippines.



Bruno Mars sings into a microphone with his left arm extended and right arm over his chest above a baseball jersey that reads "Hooligans"

H.E.R. is also a Filipina American music artist who has Filipino

American Pride. In an interview, she explains how her Filipino family has always been supportive of her craft and acted as an inspiration for her music. Having this cultural identity is important in making genuine content and is inspirational to the youth to be represented in the media.



H.E.R smiles for the camera in tinted orange sunglasses and large gold hoop earrings with long curly hair down her left shoulder

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