

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Underside of Independence Politics Filipino Reactions to Anti-Filipino Riots in the United States

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Philippine Studies vol. 60 no. 3 (2012): 307–35

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Underside of Independence Politics

Filipino Reactions to Anti-Filipino Riots in the United States

This article reexamines the historical implications of Philippine independence politics in the first half of the 1930s. It looks into the reactions of Filipino elites toward the grave plight of Filipino migrants in the United States and the anti-Filipino riots there. Exclusion measures intended to bar the entry of Filipino migrants to the United States made it virtually impossible for Filipino elites to discuss these issues and confront American racism in their formal negotiations with the Americans. The absence of such confrontation left the benevolence of US colonialism unchallenged, even as the Philippines took a step closer to political independence.

KEYWORDS: FILIPINO MIGRANTS · AMERICAN RACISM · INDEPENDENCE POLITICS · PHILIPPINE COMMONWEALTH · FILIPINO ELITE

The first half of the 1930s was a crucial period for the Philippines. It was a high time for independence politics. Filipino elites negotiated with American statesmen and high-ranking bureaucrats and obtained the Philippine Independence Act (Tydings-McDuffie Act). However, during the same period, Filipino immigrants in the United States (hereafter referred to as US Filipinos¹) were subjected to rampant discriminations and there were frequent eruptions of anti-Filipino riots. This article looks into the plight of the US Filipinos and how Filipinos both in the US and the Philippines reacted to it. I will clarify that, although their plight did not really affect the course of independence politics, the Filipino elites were deeply concerned about the welfare of the US Filipinos. I will further argue that this aspect of independence politics illuminates the historical process in which it was fundamentally impossible for Filipinos to criticize US racism. This article aims to add to already abundant studies on US Filipinos in the 1930s² by placing them in the wider historical context of independence politics. Following Paul Kramer's (2009, 209) insightful statement, "Decolonization would be racial exclusion by other means," I would like to investigate what historical implications emerged from "exclusion by other means" as the Philippines moved into Commonwealth status.

First, this article will briefly trace the experiences of US Filipinos in the early 1930s, especially of those in the Pacific coast states. Second, it will examine the congressional discussion as well as speeches and messages made outside of the US Congress from January 1930 up to May 1934, when the Independence Act was approved by the Philippine legislature, paying particular attention to discursive limits as to what was allowed to be expressed and how it was expressed. Third, it will examine varied responses to anti-Filipino violence from then Senate Pres. Manuel L. Quezon as well as those of the middle-class Filipinos in the Philippines. By delineating the discursive limits of the negotiations and varied responses, I will argue that given the political circumstances the Filipino elites simply could not raise the issue of racism, and consequently the benevolence of US colonialism as expressed in the phrase "benevolent assimilation" was left unchallenged.

The Trajectory of Filipino Experiences in the US

Widely documented in several studies, the Watsonville riot of 1930 is the best-known anti-Filipino riot in the United States because it was the first

incident that resulted in the death of a Filipino.³ The summary of this incident is rather straightforward. A mob of several hundred whites, who resented the Filipinos' dancing with white women in a taxi-dance hall,⁴ started to attack the Filipinos in the township of Watsonville and its vicinities in January 1930. The mob violence continued for about four days. Then in the early morning hours of 23 January a bullet shot by someone in the mob killed a 22-year-old Filipino, Fermin Tobera. In the postincident trial, among the eight alleged perpetrators charged with Tobera's death, four were let go due to their being underaged and the other four released on probation after serving one month in a county jail.

This incident is often taken to represent the intensity of racial hatred against Filipinos in the United States. But it was not the only incident, as anti-Filipino riots recurred with undeniable gravity at least until 1934, as seen in Table 1. Fig. 1 visually expresses the intensity of the hatred in one of the riots. These riots were certainly due to the widespread economic downturn at the time. With the exception of Filipinos, there was a legal ban on the entry of Asians to the United States as a result of the Johnson Reed Act of 1924, which was the first comprehensive immigration act to completely

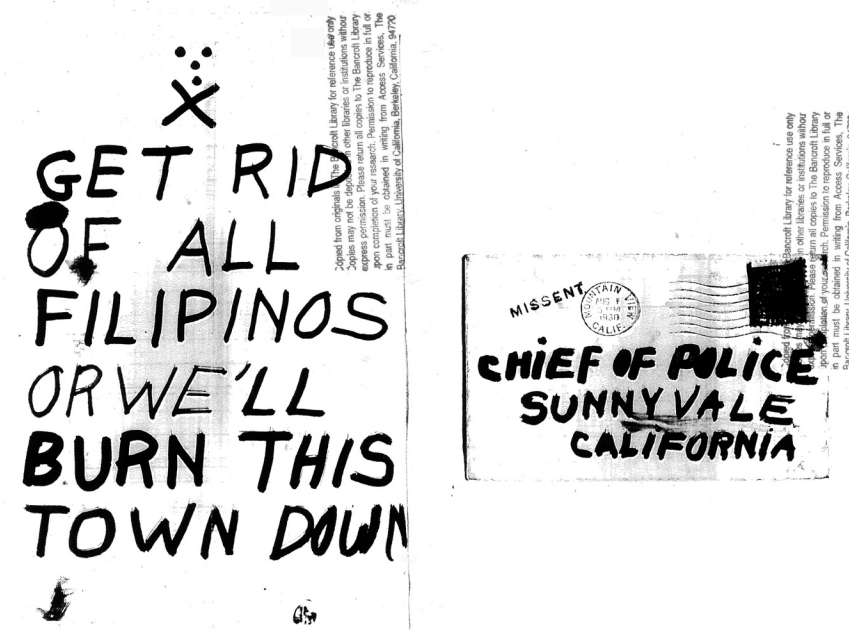


Fig. 1. Anti-Filipino pamphlet, unpublished, in microfilm.

Source: File "2:18 Testimony, Statements, etc. relating to Filipinos in California," Reel 4, pp.73–74, JEW.

Table 1. Anti-Filipino riots in the United States, 1927–1934

CASE NO.	DATE	MAIN LOCATION	MENTIONED PLACES	DESCRIPTION	NO. IN US NARA FILE 26671	OTHER SOURCES*
1	Oct. 1927	Ctr. WA	Yakima Valley	White settlers tried to round up 11 Filipinos. Filipinos were put in jails for safekeeping. Many Filipinos fled the area.	58, 62, 80	WS 1927a; WS 1927b
2	Sept.–Oct. 1928	Ctr. WA	Wenatchee, Yakima Valley	A few dozen Filipino workers were driven away by local workers.	64–65, 68–70, 72–73, 80	<i>MDB</i> 1928 and other articles; Lasker 1931/1969, 13, 365–68
3	Oct. 1929	Ctr. CA	Exeter	A transient white worker harassed Filipino workers for walking with white girls at a local carnival. An altercation developed. Filipinos stabbed two whites. A mob of 300 whites gathered and burned barns. 200 Filipinos left.	112, 113	Lasker 1931/1969, 13
4	Jan.–Feb. 1930	Ctr. CA	Watsonville, Stockton, San Francisco, Oregon	Several hundreds of local whites attacked Filipinos. Closure of a dance hall was demanded. A Filipino community center was blown up in Stockton. There were some altercations in San Jose, San Francisco, and Oregon.	79, 114	Various newspaper articles; Lasker 1931/1969, 358–65
5	Mar. 1930	S. CA	Los Angeles	A fight broke out between about 50 Filipinos and whites. A Filipino stabbed a policeman.	79	NYT 1930
6	May 1930	ID	Blackfoot	Filipinos clashed with whites.	114	
7	May 1930	Ctr. WA	Kent, White River	Laid-off white workers abducted four Filipinos and drove away a dozen of them from the farm.	79, 114	Lasker 1931/1969, 17
8	Aug. 1930	S. CA	Alta Loma	A Filipino stabbed a 15-year-old daughter of a prominent local resident. Filipinos left the area fearing reprisal.	79	LAT 1930c, 9

Table 1. (continued)

CASE NO.	DATE	MAIN LOCATION	MENTIONED PLACES	DESCRIPTION	NO. IN US NARA FILE 26671	OTHER SOURCES*
9	Aug.–Sept. 1930	Ctr. CA	Agnew, Bakersfield, Delano, Dinuba, Exeter, Fresno, Lodi, Monterey, Reedley, Santa Clara, San Jose, Stockton, Sunnyvale, Yuba, Marysville	Several hundreds of Filipinos were attacked by whites in a wide area. A Filipino Joaquin Somera was burned to death. There were 3 unconfirmed deaths by lynching.	79, 138, 114	Various newspaper articles; Lasker 1931/1969, 18–19
10	Nov. 1930	ID	Idaho Falls	49 Filipinos were abandoned in a desolate area.	114	
11	Dec. 1930	S. CA	Imperial, El Centro	Four whites blew up a barn and killed Ariston E. Lampky.	79, 114	<i>Filipino Nation</i> , 1931, 19–28; Lasker 1931/1969, 19
12	July–Aug. 1931	IL	Chicago	Italian immigrants attacked Filipinos. Filomeno Montejo was shot to death. One was beaten to death, with another unconfirmed death. One more suffered from severe injuries.	114	
13	Aug. 1931	Ctr. CA	Scotts Valley	150 whites and Indians drove away 85 Filipinos.	114	
14	Mar. 1932	N. OR	Hood River	3 Filipinos got arrested for allegedly attempting to molest a 12-year-old girl. 80 white ranchers demanded Filipinos to leave the area.	79	<i>MDB</i> 1932b,

Table 1. (continued)

CASE NO.	DATE	MAIN LOCATION	MENTIONED PLACES	DESCRIPTION	NO. IN US NARA FILE 26671	OTHER SOURCES*
15	Apr. 1932	N. OR	Banks	After Japanese ranchers replaced white workers with Filipinos, white ranchers drove 84 Filipinos away from the area.	79	NYT 1932a; MDB, 1932e
16	June 1932	N. OR	Hillsboro	A clash erupted between Filipinos and whites after the latter tried to drive Filipinos away from the area. Arrested were 12 Filipinos and 5 whites.	79	MDB 1932d
17	June 1932	N. CA	Half Moon Bay	Filipinos and Mexicans clashed over unpaid wages. Three were injured but their nationalities were unknown.	79	MDB 1932f
18	July 1932	FL	Everglades, West Palm Beach, Canal Point	Some 50 Filipino sharecroppers were disbanded upon the demand of 150–200 white farmers. They fled to Cuba.	79, 114	Various newspaper articles, NYT 1932b; PH 1932a
19	Dec. 1932	MT	Jens	26 Filipino workers were stranded without food in a remote area due to unpaid wages.	79, 114	MDB 1932h; PH 1932b
20	Aug. 1933	Ctr. CA	Escalon	Some Filipinos were driven away by 6 night riders.	114	A newspaper article
21	Oct. 1933	Ctr. CA	Modesto, Lodi, Gilroy	Widespread violence took place. Night riders attacked Filipinos. Vigilantes broke up the demonstration of 1,000 communists and fruit workers.	114	Various newspaper articles
22	June 1934	Ctr. CA	Lompoc	Americans attacked Filipino Valentino Reyes, who suffered serious injuries.	114	
23	Sept. 1934	Ctr. CA	Salinas	Filipinos were wantonly beaten and clubbed by patrolmen and ejected from the camps. A Filipino camp was raided by vigilantes and burned down.	114	LAT 1934, 1; NYT 1934, 6; WP 1934.

*Most newspaper clippings are from the same docket.

Source: Based on reported incidents in RG350, Entry 5, File 26671, US NARA.

exclude “Orientals.” Filipinos were then the only Asian population that could migrate to the United States and hence became a target of American racism.

Although Filipinos were the victims in many of these incidents, some of the riots were of a complex character. In some instances Filipinos also resorted to violence, and the violence by both sides resulted in a riot (cases 5, 6, and 17). A mob could be made up of local whites, but it could also be composed of white but poor, migrant workers (cases 2 and 3). As in the Watsonville riot, several cases identified women as the immediate cause of the riots.⁵ What is more, several cases went beyond the Filipino–white binary and appear to have involved conflicts of Filipinos with other ethnic minority groups such as Mexicans, native Americans, and Italians (cases 12, 13, and 17).

The other disturbing aspect regarding the US Filipinos was the abundance of newspaper articles on their criminal behavior. These articles appeared on both sides of the Pacific. There were cases of fights over girls (MDB 1930c, 1; LAT 1930c, 9; TR 1931, 2; MDB 1931d, 6; LAT 1932b, A3; LAT 1935, A3), mafia-style murder (LAT 1931a, 11), murder at a party or over gambling (LAT 1931b, A8; LAT 1931d, 1), assaulting police (MDB 1930c, 1; LAT 1931c, A18), and interethnic conflicts (MDB 1931a, 1; MDB 1931e, 10; MDB 1931f, 1). There were also Filipinos who got killed under mysterious circumstances (TR 1930, 1; MDB 1932a, 14). Some Filipinos were on death row (MDB 1932c, 1), including one who was charged with “infidelity killing” of his wife, a white woman (LAT 1930b, A14; LAT 1932a, 4). The most striking incident occurred in Seattle when a Filipino named Julian Marcelino went berserk after losing US\$200 in a street robbery and believing his Filipino roommate also took another US\$100, causing him to murder a total of four Filipinos and two white men and injuring a dozen at random (cf. MDB 1932g, 1; LAT 1932c, 3; Fujita-Rony 2003, 142–43).

Concerning these crimes, one contemporary writer put it thus: “[M]ore of the blame should be laid upon the situation than upon the individuals who are victims of the situation” (Rojo 1937, 447). The Filipino population was predominantly comprised of young males,⁶ who worked as migrant farm workers in the Pacific coast states. Understandable for their age, the lack of Filipino women led them to find female partners among non-Filipinos. However, there was social stigma attached to being a Filipino in the 1930s, which made it difficult for them to form interracial

and interethnic families. Discrimination took the form of racist statements against them,⁷ a ban on marrying whites,⁸ exclusion from respectable places such as middle-class neighborhoods and fine restaurants (Posadas 1981), and a formal and informal ban on entering professions (Lasker 1931/1969, 83; *Sacramento Bee* 1930, 7). Major labor organizations not only excluded Filipinos from membership, but were also manifestly antagonistic to Filipinos as a “race.”⁹ Commercial and civic organizations and local legislatures adopted resolutions to exclude Filipinos on racial grounds.¹⁰ In addition to these discriminations, their life as migrant farm workers contributed further to their oppressed status.

Previous studies cite education as a motive for the migration of Filipinos to the United States (cf. Lasker 1931/1969, 258–62; Cordova 1983, 123). However, it was estimated that only 1,500 of the 56,000 US Filipinos were attending schools of any kind.¹¹ In California, according to the 1940 Census, 60.8 percent of the Filipinos were “farm laborers” (Posadas 1981, 35). These numbers suggest that, in the first half of the 1930s, most of the US Filipinos in the Pacific coast states were migrant farm workers. During the agricultural off-season, they tended to find accommodation in crowded apartments in red-light districts, which became prevalent in American cities in the Progressive era but were looked down upon by the middle-class Americans as a necessary evil (Shumsky 1986). Other studies amply show that the life of migrant workers resulted in the sense of solidarity in red-light districts and the formation of a male-oriented culture as symbolized by McIntosh suits and suave manners toward women (Cressey 1932/1968, 155–60; Takaki 1989/1990, 335–43; España-Maram 2006, 105–33).

The milieu and culture of US Filipinos provided the background for acts of criminality. However, Filipino criminality was overrepresented due to stereotyping and racism. A contemporary sociological study found the criminal behavior of Filipinos to be exaggerated when it was compared with the crimes committed by the native white population (Hayner 1938). As early as 1928, a Catholic welfare society reported that Filipinos were targeted by the police as potential criminals (Dolan 1928). In the case of anti-Filipino riots, white America tried to justify its own violence by portraying Filipinos as a “menace” to the community because they tried to seduce young women of other races.¹² This pattern of portrayal in the media and the ensuing racial violence became prevalent and were reflected in many of the citations presented in Table 1. By 1934 the so-called labor question became

such commonplace that one Filipino in Sonoma county wrote to Quezon, albeit ungrammatically, “please do something that may . . . protect us from this ‘Racial Labor Question’” (Tomaneng 1934). The newspaper clipping attached to the letter showed the usual pattern of the Filipino “menace” and “citizens” protection of the community.

Previous studies on Philippine independence politics mention the Watsonville riot only fleetingly (Churchill 1983, 235–36; Nakano 1997, 35, 53); it was not a major point of contention in the formal negotiations. Neither did the situation of US Filipinos receive appropriate attention. Given their grave plight, it is worthwhile to look into why these issues were not taken up as important topics in the formal political process.

Discursive Limits of Independence Politics

In the wake of the Watsonville riot Resident Commissioner Pedro Guevara testified in the US Congress in 24 January 1930 that, had a Filipino mob attacked Americans in the Philippines, the United States would have sent an army or battleships to quell the riot (US Congress 1930b, H2323; LAT 1930a, 4). Guevara implied that there had to be some reciprocity of respect, namely, as the Americans lived in the Philippines without facing antagonism, the Filipinos should also be able to do the same in the United States.

When the US Congress convened in April 1930 to discuss issues regarding Filipinos, the notion of racial reciprocity was almost completely gone. The discussion rested on whether it was possible to stop the immigration of Filipinos without changing their status. Congressman Welch¹³ of California reintroduced an exclusion bill on 16 January 1930 (US Congress 1930a, H1761). Likewise, Senator Shortridge of California proposed an exclusion bill on 16 April 1930 (US Congress 1930c, S7104). These bills were designed to exclude Filipinos from entry to the United States by amending the Johnson-Reed Act.¹⁴ Although these exclusion bills did not get legislated, they were proposed in the midst and aftermath of the Watsonville riot. In other words, in the eyes of the exclusion proponents the anti-Filipino riots were seen as a sign of the Filipinos’ inability to assimilate and they propelled the exclusion movements rather than weakened them.

Retrogressively, the congressmen and senators started to discuss the legal status of Filipinos (cf. US Congress 1930d, S10273–5). According to Aguilar (2010), Philippine citizenship, which became operationalized in 1902, remained ambiguous. Other than the Immigration Act of 1917 and

the Johnson-Reed Act, both of which ruled that Philippine citizens were not aliens, no US law categorically determined whether or not Philippine citizenship was the same as US citizenship. The exclusion efforts rested on the removal of this ambiguity by placing Filipinos in the alien category.

However, these efforts to legally ban Filipino immigration by amending the immigration law could not be legislated on its own. What got repeated in the congressional discussion was the notion of “under the American flag,” which was perhaps most eloquently summarized by Senator Bingham of Connecticut: “Their flag is our flag. . . . or whether we establish a new policy of saying to them, ‘We can go to your country, but you can not come to ours, because, forsooth, you can not become citizens of the United States’” (US Congress 1932b, S14274–75). This statement dictated that the United States had a moral obligation to accept the right of Filipinos to migrate to the United States as long as the Philippines remained a US colony.

As the thesis of “exclusion by other means” implied, the independence bills were attempts to sever the logic of “under the American flag.” As time passed, exclusion efforts were incorporated into the independence bills in the form of immigration restriction. When Senator Hawes of Missouri proposed the first significant independence bill in March 1930, it did not have a section on immigration.¹⁵ After it was reintroduced and amended in February 1932, it had the section allowing 100 “nonquota” immigrants annually from the Philippines.¹⁶ By March 1932 this section had been modified to allow 100 quota immigrants but, when it was merged with the Hare bill in December 1932, the quota was cut down to fifty immigrants annually.¹⁷ With essentially the same provision for an annual quota of fifty immigrants,¹⁸ the Tydings-McDuffie Act was implemented after it was approved by the Philippine legislature on 1 May 1934.

As far as the contents of the negotiations are concerned, there is no doubt that the Filipino negotiators accepted this restriction. During the heated congressional discussion in April 1930, in the House Committee of Immigration and Naturalization, Manuel Roxas claimed that, if the United States considered the exclusion of Filipinos justifiable, then it would have to concede independence to the Philippines (Churchill 1983, 236–37). In his conference with US Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson in the summer of 1931, Quezon showed willingness to accept the immigration quota (*ibid.*, 250). In the crucial month of January 1932, it was the Osmeña-Roxas mission that recommended the annual quota of 100 immigrants with the approval

of Quezon (*ibid.*, 266). Again in his meeting with Stimson in December 1933, when the annual quota of fifty immigrants was deeply embedded in the independence bill, Quezon accepted it (Nakano 1997, 76).

How did the Filipino political elites come to agreement with the US demands for immigration restriction? After all, at least on one ground, this immigration restriction was not justifiable. The Philippines did not gain formal independence until 4 July 1946 and the Commonwealth government was established only on 15 November 1935, but the immigrant restriction was implemented on 1 May 1934. In other words, even before any change in political status, Filipino immigration became restricted despite the thesis of “under the American flag.” Furthermore, why did the immigration restriction prevail rather than other means to confront anti-Filipino racism? Racial violence historically has been a problem of American nativism more than of ethnic/racial minorities or immigrants. Why was it that the Filipino elites could not come out more strongly on the accusation of this long-standing American problem? To answer these questions, it is necessary to look into the actual exchanges between the Filipino negotiator and his American counterpart.

Soon after the Watsonville riot, on 29 January 1930, the first official exchange of opinions took place in the US House of Representatives. In his speech Resident Commissioner Camilo Osias (1930a) cited the prevalence of newspaper articles on anti-Filipino riots. Then he stated, “I am not going to discuss who is to blame for these troubles Some say the Filipinos are to blame; others say that the white laborers have been the aggressors.” He claimed, “The anomaly is that we are under the American flag and we are not eligible to American citizenship, which is the greatest benefit that the flag confers.” In response to this assertion Congressman Barbour of California queried, “If you put up your own flag over there, will you keep your people at home?” Osias replied, “when we are granted independence the Philippine Islands would, ipso facto, be under the category of a foreign nation. Then, for purposes of immigration, we shall be placed on a quota basis, like the people of other foreign nations.” He blasted the exclusion measure by saying, “If that [exclusion] bill passes while we are under the American flag, it will be a great injustice. . . . The only proper remedy to this and allied problems lies in granting us complete independence (applause)” (*ibid.*). These remarks indicate that the Filipino elites were concerned about the actual enactment of exclusion measures and used the logic of “under the American flag” in an attempt to prevent their enactment.

The fear of exclusion without independence intensified from November 1930 to February 1931 because Senator Reed of Pennsylvania introduced a resolution to halt all immigration including those of Filipinos for two years (WP 1930, 1; MDB 1931b, 12).¹⁹ Quezon stated his fear that this resolution might get adopted and, on 21 November, asked Resident Commissioner Pedro Guevara to monitor it carefully (Quezon 1930a). On 25 November he then wrote to Gen. Frank R. McIntyre that such exclusion would reflect “the lack of logic” and “the injustice involved in the proposition” (Quezon 1930b). Resident Commissioner Osias (1930b) reported on the same day that Reed’s resolution “will prove very popular in view of the widespread depression and unemployment,” and “I have been following some of the editorials written on the subject, and they seem to favor such a measure.” Quezon (1930c) revealed his thoughts in an encrypted cablegram to his private secretary on 27 November stating, “We will do . . . our utmost to get our friends in Congress to introduce Philippine independence as an amendment or exclude Filipinos from the resolution, although I am not hopeful of success.” Quezon (1930d) subsequently wrote a dozen letters to congressmen and senators as well as to Stimson (1930) and Chief of Bureau of Insular Affairs Francis Lej. Parker (1930), urging them to help stop the exclusion measure.

In the crucial month of February, Parker made detailed rebuttals against the exclusion measure in the congressional discussion. He advanced four points: (1) Based on a report of the Commonwealth Club of California, Filipinos were not a health “menace”; (2) Statements about Filipinos’ sexual desire were very much exaggerated; (3) Immigration statistics were not precise enough to provide the basis for assessing the claims of job competition between Filipinos and the local white people; and (4) Given the small population and the underdevelopment of its land, it was not likely that there would be a huge labor migration from the Philippines to the United States, which would not be the case in regard to China or Japan (PH 1931, 4). These developments indicated the weakness in the argument of the Filipino elites and their allies. For them the choice was not between independence without immigration rights and continued colonial relation with immigration rights, but rather the choice was between exclusion with or without independence. In order to defend the right of Filipinos to migrate, they had to appeal to the US congressmen and senators that Filipinos were neither criminals nor threats to the Americans. In this light, evidently they

did not bring up the issue of American racism and neither did they advance the claim that Filipinos were the victims.

When Quezon returned to the Philippines in the fall of 1931, he had limited space within which to make political maneuvers. Prior to leaving for the Philippines, Quezon (1931a) had a personal conference with one of the staunch supporters of Philippine independence, Senator King of Utah. By this time, Quezon was convinced of the merit of independence after some sort of transitional period and the continued preferential entry of Philippine goods to the US in order to ensure economic stability. To this conviction, King said that it would provoke “no little opposition.” Quezon (ibid.) retorted that the economic condition “was imposed upon us not only without our approval but against our opposition” and “Now let me make this clear. If the choice is between wealth without freedom and freedom with starvation, I choose the latter. Naturally if we could have freedom without poverty we are not such fools as not to welcome it.” King surmised that the stance other than absolute independence would result in opposition from the labor sector, sugar interests, and some sections of agricultural interests in the United States. Quezon replied, “There are ways of satisfying these elements. If we get our independence now or a fixed date for the early grant of independence, we could control the influx of Filipino labor from our end effectively.” Quezon was walking a fine line between gaining political independence and ensuring economic stability. And to defend this position, he was willing to concede the rights of immigration.

In his report to the Philippine legislature in November 1931, he disclosed his idea of transitional independence and it got severely criticized by different sectors of Philippine society, most vehemently by Emilio Aguinaldo (Churchill 1983, 258). Regarding this situation, Quezon wrote in late 1931, “certainly the masses are all against me and . . . the only reason why there is no general upheaval and denunciation of my stand is because the people have still faith in me . . .” (Quezon 1931b). On the one hand, despite this comment, the idea of transitional independence would become a historical reality as seen in the establishment of the Commonwealth government. On the other hand, there were continuous oppositions to this idea from wide ranging sectors of Philippine society and these oppositions partly relied on the claim that immigration restriction was unacceptable. In October 1933, the Philippine legislature “declined to accept” the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Bill

(H-H-C Bill) partly due to its disapproval of the immigration quota, for it was “objectionable and offensive to the Filipino people” (Churchill 1983, 290). The Association of the Veterans of Revolution (AVR) claimed that the trade-off between independence and immigration restriction had “wounded, as was natural, our national feeling as Filipinos in its most sensitive part” (US Congress 1934, S5016). These statements emphasized that immigration restriction was in fact humiliating to the Filipinos as a nation.

However, this sense of humiliation did not cause a rupture in the negotiation process. A close examination of the speeches of the political elites shows that they were careful to appease and contain the opposition to immigration restriction. The Quezon papers at the Philippine National Library contain Quezon’s (1933a) speech on the H-H-C bill that was aired on American radio in January 1933. The text emphasized that both the pros and the antis earnestly wanted independence but he himself considered the bill as merely promising independence rather than granting it. He went on to talk about trade inequality but did not refer to the issue of immigration restriction. In the same file, there is a draft of an undated speech addressed to “My fellow countrymen.” In this speech, in addition to discrepancies between the H-H-C bill and the Jones law and the issues of territorial integrity as opposed to the establishment of military and naval bases, Quezon (1933b) stated, “under the new Act Filipino immigration is restricted and later prohibited to a point of national humiliation.”²⁰ Given that both of these speeches were probably delivered in the same year and through radio, these differences imply that the immigration issue was useful to incite the sense of unfairness and humiliation among Filipinos, but sensitive enough to be avoided when addressing the American public.

While the text of these two speeches of Quezon show the strategy of shifting emphasis to achieve different purposes, the text of another speech, this time by Elpidio Quirino, shows that the implication of the immigration restriction could be softened even within the same text. This speech was delivered in Chicago on 20 December 1933, to explain why the Philippine legislature “declined to accept” the H-H-C bill (Quirino 1934). As the majority floor leader of the Philippine Senate, Quirino stated, under this bill, “Filipino immigrants to the United States would be treated as bona fide foreigners under the quota basis during the transition period, and thereafter as undesirable foreign elements to be absolutely excluded from the mainland.” At the same time, he continued, Filipinos would be encouraged to migrate

to Hawaii to serve the interests of sugar planters and required to respect “the existing rights of the American citizens and corporations in the Philippine Islands to the same extent as if they were of Filipino citizens and corporations” (ibid., 7). He then stated, “Certainly, we cannot conscientiously understand why we should be considered undesirable foreigners.” However, at the end of the speech, he concluded that Filipinos were encouraged “by the lofty traditions and ideals of the United States as a liberty-loving country whose liberating mission among other weaker and subject peoples has not failed” (ibid., 8). Even when the immigration restriction was touched upon, it was framed in a way that would be acceptable to Americans and covered by euphemisms supposedly extolling America’s virtues. As a whole, although inequities between Filipinos and Americans were acknowledged, they were not used as the basis of accusation, but were expressed as a deep, inevitable pain that Filipinos felt in dealing with the Americans.

It is an oversimplification to say that these strategies of the elites came solely out of political expediency and their desire to retain political power. Quezon (1931c) wrote to his confidante, Resident Commissioner Guevara, that he thought “friendly feelings [should] be established between our people and the American people” and it would be better “for us to have the moral support of a great world power, and for America to have the gratitude of one nation in the Far East.” The purpose of independence politics was to attain political independence, but in a way that Filipinos and Americans would maintain good relations thereafter.

In the negotiations the Filipino elites could not raise the issues regarding US Filipinos. Likewise, in Philippine society, there was no enduring pressure on the Filipino elites to demand the protection and fair treatment of US Filipinos. In the section below, I would like to look into the logic that prevented the middle-class Filipinos from taking a more active stance on the issue of US Filipinos.

From National Humiliation to Minimization

As soon as Fermin Tobera was shot dead, the Watsonville riot became a much-discussed topic in the streets of Manila as well as on the Pacific coast. University students held protest parades in Manila (LV 1930a, 9). The 2nd of February was declared as “National Humiliation Day.” On this day, politicians Varona and Confesor, Tagalog poets de Jesus and Collantes, well-known educator Jorge Bocobo, and Manila city board councilors were

riots would eventually come to a halt. This perspective was reflected by the illustration published in the *Philippines Free Press* in September 1930 (fig. 2), which showed a gamut of newspaper headlines about anti-Filipino racism and implied the repetitiveness and pervasiveness of anti-Filipino violence. But it also signaled the lack of newsworthiness as suggested by its headline, “This cut needs no heading,” and its caption, “Read them if you want to. . . .” These observers were Americans and their accounts certainly reflected their own interest. At the same time, these accounts minimized the gravity of the anti-Filipino riots as they were reported and circulated in the media.

A few years later, the authoritative account on the US Filipinos did not convey the gravity of the situation either. *The Commonwealth of the Philippines* edited by George A. Malcolm contained a section called “‘Pinoy’ in the United States” written by Resident Commissioner Francisco Delgado, who succeeded Osias (Malcolm 1936a, 380–81; Cornejo 1939; 1667–68, 1985–86). The main storyline is that Filipinos went to the US, made decent money especially in Alaska, became enticed by “some blonde siren (sic),” fell into poverty, and came back to the Philippines as “charity passengers.” Although there is no mention of any of the anti-Filipino riots or US Filipinos’ criminal behavior, the galley proof included the sentence, “The returned adventurers are all agreed that there is no place for Filipinos in the United States” (Malcolm 1936b, 580). This sentence was crossed out and did not appear in the published text (Malcolm 1936a, 381).

The waning of interest was due partly to the image of criminal behavior on the part of the US Filipinos. The editorial in the *Manila Daily Bulletin* (1930d, 14), titled “Crime and Sentiment,” suggested that immigrants were prone to commit crimes due to their unstable family structure, as a result of which “crime is playing a prominent part in the anti-Filipino sentiment in California.” Similarly, Jorge Bocobo (1930), who made an inspection tour in and around Los Angeles, blamed the low regard for Filipinos in the United States on criminality. These articles revealed that the newspaper-reading middle class of the Philippines became ambivalent in their sense of solidarity with US Filipinos, partly due to the image of crimes, and reluctant to use the anti-Filipino riots and oppression of US Filipinos as nationalistic grievances.

Obviously the underside of this ambivalence was that the US Filipinos continuously suffered from daily acts of discrimination and frequent eruptions of violence. In the next section, we will look into how the Filipino elites reacted to the plight of US Filipinos.

Filipino Elites’ Concern for the Oppressed

In some of the personal letters sent to Quezon,²⁴ the sense of fear and pain is palpable. As Amis (1931) wrote, “If I should visualize to you clearly the terrible sufferings and miseries of the Filipino citizens in America undoubtedly you will be amazed with horror.” Another wrote, “We expect another anti-Filipino riot, shooting, murdering and beating in California after you accept the Philippine Law [sic] . . . we are still suffering with more than enough trouble by starving to death [sic] we want to keep away of it if there is any one [who] could save us” (Batista 1934). Regarding these concerns, the Filipino elites made concerted efforts to improve the situation.

There were at least three different investigations carried out by Filipinos in 1930 (Abcede 1930; Llorente 1930; Sumulong 1930). Of these reports, Philippine Senator Juan Sumulong’s was most penetrating and constructive. He recommended the establishment of a “Filipino labor commissioner” or “duly incorporated Filipino Welfare Association” (Sumulong 1930). As for the former, the “Filipino labor commissioner,” according to Sumulong, should be “a man of national prestige in the Philippines” who would be able to exert much influence upon US Filipinos and local authorities. The letters to Quezon in the fall months of 1930 show that there was already some vying for the political office of labor commissioner among the US Filipinos (cf. Liuanag 1930). As for the “Welfare Association,” it never materialized.

Given the absence of these official institutions, it was Resident Commissioners Guevara and Osias who tried to ensure the safety of the US Filipinos. In the summer months of 1930, central California was the hotbed of anti-Filipino violence (case 9),²⁵ prompting the commissioners to save the Filipinos under attack by repeatedly urging the California governor to take more aggressive measures to prevent violence. However, they could not prevent many injuries and the death of Joaquin Somera.

Furthermore, Quezon himself was deeply concerned about their plight. In late 1930, while Quezon was recuperating from tuberculosis in Monrovia, a small town in Southern California, he sent his subordinates to the Filipino victims of racial violence. In Ariston Lampky’s case (case 11), Quezon (1931d) even wrote a personal letter of apology for the misconduct of one of his subordinates, and it would appear that he allowed his name to be used so that the surviving brothers could collect enough donations to send Lampky’s remains back to the Philippines (Atadero 1931).²⁶

Quezon also seemed to be sympathetic toward the Filipino inmates charged with serious crimes. In one exchange in 1919, one inmate who was found guilty of murder complained to Quezon that there had been a miscarriage of justice, since he did not really understand English and thus found the courtroom proceedings confusing, and that his lawyer was incompetent (Lacsamana 1919). Quezon replied that, since the inmate committed a crime in the United States and the sentence had already been given, he could not help him. At the same time, in this letter he wrote that he studied the case with “a great deal of interest,” expressed his hope for the inmate’s good behavior in prison, and ended the letter by writing, “Again regretting that I am not in a position to help you, believe me” (Quezon 1919). Quezon’s concern for the oppressed lasted for a long time. In 1938, when Quezon met with the representative of the Communist Party of the United States at the Malacañang Palace, he said that he “would welcome” the cooperation of the American communists to help improve the situation of Filipinos in the United States (Allen 1985, 61).

This aspect of Quezon never played a prominent part in his official political career. As an astute politician, who was credited with bringing back the Independence Act, he might have thought that the overt critique of American racism would not improve the plight of the US Filipinos; rather it could intensify anti-Filipino sentiment. It could also jeopardize the cooperative relations that Quezon had with his allies in the US Congress. Instead of the overt critique, he expressed his personal concern for the victims of racial violence as well as for the oppressed Filipinos, including the criminals.

In the final analysis, despite their efforts and personal concern, Filipino elites in the US did not have enough power and authority to directly improve the situation. Although the situation of US Filipinos improved in the second half of the 1930s (cf. Varona 1940), how it happened will be a subject of another study.

Conclusion

In the big picture of Philippines–US relations, racism always accompanied colonialism. The very discourse of the US granting the Philippines independence out of its benevolence and the Philippines’s acceptance of it depended on the inherent superiority of the Americans. It also concealed racism beneath the veneer of benevolent colonialism. The anti-Filipino riots

posed a real threat to this relationship and had a possibility of tearing apart the veneer and laying bare the underlying racism. However this never happened. Practically speaking, in order to attain independence through negotiations, the Filipino elites, most notably Quezon, did not have a choice but to avert from the issues of racism in the formal discussions. Instead of confronting racism, they tried to ameliorate the situation of the oppressed US Filipinos through personal and unofficial means. Although such forms of care was a sign of solidarity with fellow Filipinos and of affection for compatriots between the elites and the oppressed, it did not open a way for the radical reinterpretation of US colonialism since it did not question the fundamental cause of their suffering, namely, American racism. In concrete terms, such aversion meant that the benevolence of US colonialism was left unchallenged as the Philippines took an important step toward independence.

Abbreviations used

AVR	Association of the Veterans of Revolution
BIA	Bureau of Insular Affairs
DIR	Department of Industrial Relations
FD	Filipiniana Division, National Library of the Philippines, Manila
JEW	James Earl Wood Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, USA
LAT	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
LV	<i>La Vanguardia</i>
MDB	<i>Manila Daily Bulletin</i>
MS	Multimedia Section, National Library of the Philippines
NLP	National Library of the Philippines
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
PFP	<i>Philippines Free Press</i>
PH	<i>Philippine Herald</i>
PNIF	Personal Name Information Files
QP	Manuel L. Quezon Papers, National Library of the Philippines, Manila
RG	Record Group
TR	<i>The Tribune</i>
US NARA	United States National Archives and Records Administrations, College Park, MD, USA
WEP	<i>Watsonville Evening Pajaronian</i>
WP	<i>Washington Post</i>
WS	<i>Washington Star</i>

Notes

- 1 I use the term “US Filipinos” because, given their status in the 1930s, they cannot be called “Filipino Americans.” “Filipino immigrants” would not indicate their location. The fact that they were in the continental US is important.
- 2 I have included relevant secondary studies in the citations throughout this article. For recent studies, cf. Ngai 2004, ch. 3; Bonus 2000, ch. 2; Kramer 2006, ch. 6; and Lee and Yung 2010, ch. 8.
- 3 For the details of this incident, cf. Bogardus 1930/1976; DIR 1930, 73–76; Lasker 1931/1969, 358–68; DeWitt 1976, 46–66; DeWitt 1980, 30–48 as well as the issues of *WEP* from Dec. 1929 to Feb. 1930.
- 4 In a taxi dance, a male patron paid a ten-cent ticket to a female taxi-dancer for a few minutes of dance; patrons were all males, while taxi-dancers were all females (Cressey 1932/1968, 27). It was very costly and exploitive of the Filipino laborers (España-Maram 2006, 115).
- 5 News reports and/or police reports in RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671, US NARA, show that white women played some role in case nos. 1, 3, 4, 8, 12, and 14.
- 6 Of the 24,123 Filipinos who went to the United States via either San Francisco or Los Angeles, between 1925 and 1929, there were 22,767 men, and of these 19,200 were below 30 years old (DIR 1930, 18–22, 36–38).
- 7 For a collection of essays surrounding this theme, see Tiongson et al. 2006.
- 8 In 1933, after a number of court cases, the California state legislature decided no license would be issued for marriages between a white person and a “member of the Malay race.” The original bill, “Senate Bill No. 176,” could be found in File “3:1 U.S. Congress: Acts, Bills, Reports, etc.,” pp. 110–150, Reel 4, JEW. Cf. Foster 1932.
- 9 American Federation of Labor and California State Federation of Labor adopted proexclusion resolutions (RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671–92, 93, US NARA).
- 10 Commonwealth Club of California in RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671–80a, US NARA; California State Legislature, “Assembly Joint Resolution No. 15,” “filed with Secretary of State May 15, 1929” in File “3:1 U.S. Congress: Acts, Bills, Reports, etc.,” pp. 110–150, Reel 4, JEW.
- 11 The estimated total number is found in Lasker 1931/1969, 21. Enrolled in colleges and universities were 905 Filipinos, and it was estimated that only 1,500 were enrolled in schools of any kind (*MDB* 1931c, 1, 8).
- 12 In the issues of *WEP* before and after the Watsonville riot, Filipinos were portrayed as oversexualized threats to the community (cf. *WEP* 1929a, 1; *WEP* 1929b, 4; *WEP* 1929c, 1; *WEP* 1930a, 1).
- 13 For the biography of US senators and congressmen, see *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present*, n.d.
- 14 Welch tried to exclude the Filipinos by designating them as “alien” and amending Sec. 28(b) of the Johnson-Reed Act. The text of the bill, “H.R. 8708,” can be found in File “3:1 U.S. Congress: Acts, Bills, Reports, etc.,” pp. 110–150, Reel 4, JEW. Shortridge tried to require the issuance of permit to travel to the United States by amending Section 28 (f) of the Johnson-Reed Act (US Congress 1930c, S7104).

- 15 S. 3822. File “3:1 U.S. Congress: Acts, Bills, Reports, etc.,” pp. 110–150, Reel 4, JEW.
- 16 S. 3377 Sec. 8 (US Congress 1932a, S3514).
- 17 H. R. 7233 Sec. 8a(1) (US Congress 1932c, S877–881).
- 18 Sec. 8a(1) of the Tydings-McDuffie Bill. The text of the bill can be found in Coloma 1939/1974, 80–90.
- 19 Many articles on this issue are found in RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671–79, US NARA.
- 20 “And later prohibited” was inserted as a handwritten correction in the draft.
- 21 The BIA file contains resolutions from the Chamber of Commerce of the Philippine Islands, the AVR, and four municipal councils (Magsingal, Ilocos Sur; Zamboanga; Calinog, Iloilo; and Carles, Iloilo) denouncing the Watsonville riot; these resolutions were adopted between January and March 1930. RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671–114, US NARA.
- 22 A resolution adopted by the Negros Occidental branch of the AVR, dated 7 Feb. 1930 (RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671–114, US NARA). The Manila branch also adopted a presumably similar resolution (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1930, 28).
- 23 An organization called Visayan Circle adopted a resolution protesting Joaquin Somera’s death on 28 Sept. 1930 (RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671–114, US NARA).
- 24 Similar letters are found in abundance in RG 350, Entry 5, File 26671, US NARA. They were addressed to the Resident Commissioners.
- 25 The records of exchange are from a bundle of letters dated from July to September 1930, in Entry 5, RG 350, File 26671–79, US NARA.
- 26 The letter in which Quezon mentions his name and asks for cooperation is, “To whom it may concern,” 9 Dec. 1930. QP, Series VII, Box 136, File S, FD, NLP.

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Filipino worker in a cauliflower farm near Santa Maria, California, 1937. Photo by Dorothea Lange.
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