

Keynote Speech Presented at the City of Carson Filipino American History Month Kick Off Event
Oct. 1, 2016 – Carson Community Center, Carson, CA by Florante Peter Ibanez

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today about Filipino American History Month.

In the handout I passed to you can read all about the different waves of our people and their journey from the Philippines to Hawaii and the mainland. Starting with the first Luzones Indios who set foot on North America and came as slave/sailors on a Spanish Manila Galleon to Moro bay. And then those who built hugh shrimp drying platforms in the bayous of new Orleans and started Manila Village & St. Malo in the 1700s even before there was a United States of America.

Our story continues after the Philippine American War with **Pensionado** students who attended NYU, University of Washington and other great American colleges sponsored by the U.S. Colonial Government so they could go back and help run the new Philippine Commonwealth democracy.

More young Filipino young men were recruited to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii and later the Salmon Canneries of Alaska and agricultural fields of the West Coast. Men like Larry Itliong , Philip VeraCruz, and Carlos Bulosan who later devoted his life to writing about the experiences he faced along with his compadres, most notably in his novel “America is in the Heart”. Facing racism and laws barring marrying White women, most of them grew old in a Bachelor Society, but served as collective Uncles to a Bridge Generation of the few American Filipino children who grew up among them on the farms and community centers like Stockton and Walnut Grove.

My dad Cleto Yabes Ibanez, arrived thru Honolulu in 1925, attended jr. college and worked as a domestic worker until Pearl Harbor Day when he enlisted in the US Navy only to join all the other Filipinos and African Americans, who could not advance beyond the rank of steward. There were very few exceptions to this. Later during the peak of the Vietnam War about 2,000 Filipinos per year were

recruited to the US Navy and my father-in-law, Pete Estepa was among those who served and continued even later as a civilian to work at the Naval Training Center (NTC) in San Diego. Both of my fathers and many other veterans brought their brides to America and started the seeds of today's Filipino communities in places like Long Beach, National City, Salinas and Vallejo.

In 1965 with the liberalization of immigration laws, our quota exploded from 50 to 20,000 a year, but was limited to professionals and skilled technicians needed to boost American labor during the Cold War. It was also the year that elderly manongs in Delano went on strike against the Grape field growers and led to the creation of the United Farm Workers Union for better living conditions and a decent wage for the dusty, hot, back breaking work. I along with many student and union volunteers went to Delano to build Agbayani Village as a retirement home for our UFW Manongs.

My generation of Filipino Americans born and raised here after WWII later became influenced by the civil rights movement, we joined in the anti-Vietnam War and Peace Movement, and called out for community empowerment and social justice. In the 1970s we started Filipino American and Asian American student clubs on campuses. We attended annual Filipino People's Far West conventions to discuss and share community building strategies'. We demonstrated and organized sit-ins to bring about Ethnic studies and more faculty of color. Many became community leaders and started community non-profit groups like SIPA (Search to Involve Pilipino Americans), FilAm ARTS, People's Core, Filipino American Library, and the Pilipino Workers Center. With the 1972 Marcos declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines, many also moved their energy to oppose his dictatorship, even though it was an ocean away. Some were even Blacklisted, including myself. My life partner Rose and I both joined the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP) to fight against Marcos in the Philippines and fight for Social Justice here in the US.

We can all probably recognize the names in entertainment of, Tia Carrere, Bruno Mars, Lou Diamond Philips, APL, Lea Salonga and Alex Mapa. And we have had our own Olympic Gold medalist with Vickie Manalo Draves from the 1948 London Olympics winning 2 Golds in Diving. She and Dr. Sammy Lee, the men's platform winner and a Korean-American, became the first divers of Asian American descent to win Olympic gold medals. I had the honor to speak at another Oct. FilAm History month event at Cal State Dominguez Hills in 2010 along with Mona Pasquil, who served as our interim Lt. Gov. and our Calif. Supreme Court Justice, Tani Cantil-Sakauye at a special event sponsored by our good friend and former assemblyman, Warren Furutani, who by the way needs your vote in November to be our next state senator for our 35th district.

Here in Carson and the South Bay we have had our share of advances, with an elected Filipino Mayor, various councilmen, including our friend Elito Santarina and the our youngest elected councilwoman, Lorelie Olaes. And did you know that Hawaii's past Governor Ben Cayetano lived here and attended Harbor College before going on to UCLA and Loyola Law School (where I now work).

But even in our forward motion we have had our setbacks and sacrifices, in the [1930 Watsonville Riots](#), [Fermin Tobera](#), age 22, was killed when racist White vigilantes shot up his farmworkers bunkhouse. I didn't discover it until recently but Fermin was from my parents hometown of Sinit, Ilocos Sur. The body of Fermin Tobera was sent to Manila, where he was considered a martyr, a symbol of the Filipinos' fight for independence and equality. 35 years ago, my two friends and kasamas [Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes](#), both officers of their ILWU local 37 in Seattle, were gunned down in their union hall by assassins who's blood money was eventually traced back to the Marcos Dictatorship. The month before they had proposed and successfully won resolutions at their Longshoreman's Convention held in Honolulu, that a labor investigation team be sent to the Philippines to witness the treatment of workers under Martial Law. In 1999, hate crime victim, Filipino American postal worker, [Joseph Ileto](#) was shot

and killed by a white supremacist, who also had just shot five people at a Jewish community center in West Los Angeles. While his family organized and still campaigns today against hate crimes. Joseph Iletto's name was spelled out to read "Join Our Struggle, Educate to Prevent Hate, Instill Love, Equality, and Tolerance for Others."

So I believe that we can all agree that Filipinos Americans are fighters of injustice, promoters of peace, and have the Bayanihan spirit to join together to overcome challenges. Later this month we'll be celebrating Larry Itliong Day at Veterans Park in the morning and at the Carson Library in the afternoon. The 1st Philippine International Film Festival starts next weekend at the Cinemark theaters in the Carson South Bay Pavillion. But for this whole month of Filipino American History let us celebrate our collective experience as immigrants and our culture which has been and still is an important and significant contribution to our Greater American Society. We are NOT the Terrorists who should be kept from immigrating to the US as a certain Presidential hopeful has announced.

As Carlos Bulosan wrote. "If you want to know what we are, look at the men reading books, searching in the dark pages of history for the lost word, the key to the mystery of the living peace. We are factory hands, field hands, mill hands, searching, building and molding structures. We are doctors, scientists, chemists discovering and eliminating disease, hunger and antagonism. We are soldiers, Navy men, citizens, guarding the imperishable dreams of our fathers to live in freedom. We are the living dream of dead men. We are the living spirit of free men."

I am proud to be a Filipino American.

I am proud to serve the City of Carson.

I am proud to be an American.

God Bless America

Thank You