

SCREAMING MONKEYS

Critiques of
ASIAN AMERICAN IMAGES

EDITED BY
M. EVELINA GALANG

— IN COLLABORATION WITH —
NONFICTION EDITOR SUNAINA MAIRA
POETRY EDITOR EILEEN TABIOS
ART EDITOR JORDIN ISIP
FOUND IMAGES EDITOR ANIDA YOEU ESGUERRA
AND MONKEY'S COMPANION CONTRIBUTOR LESLIE BOW
WITH ASSISTANCE FROM AIMEE BROWN,
TOIYA KRISTEN FINLEY, AND LAURA VASSER



COFFEE HOUSE PRESS
MINNEAPOLIS

MIN086/37

COPYRIGHT © 2003 by M. Evelina Galang
COVER ILLUSTRATION © Jordin Isip
COVER & BOOK DESIGN by Linda Koutsky

The rights to the individual works are held by each author, or their publisher. Permissions information and credits can be found in the back of this book.

Coffee House Press books are available to the trade through our primary distributor, Consortium Book Sales & Distribution, 1045 Westgate Drive, Saint Paul, MN 55114. For personal orders, catalogs, or other information, write to: Coffee House Press, 27 North Fourth Street, Suite 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401.

Coffee House Press is a nonprofit literary publishing house. Support from private foundations, corporate giving programs, government programs, and generous individuals help make the publication of our books possible. We gratefully acknowledge their support in detail in the back of this book.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CIP INFORMATION

Screaming monkeys : critiques of Asian American images / edited by M. Evelina Galang ; in collaboration with . . . [et al.].
p. cm.

ISBN 1-56689-141-8 (alk. paper)

1. American literature—Asian American authors. 2. American literature—Asian American authors—History and criticism. 3. Asian Americans—Literary collections. 4. Asian Americans—Intellectual life. 5. Asian Americans in literature. 6. Asian Americans. I. Galang, M. Evelina, 1961– II. Tabios, Eileen.

PS508.A8S37 2003
810.9'895—DC22

2003061251

Printed in Canada



Maraming Salamat sa Inyó

This anthology, this dialogue, would not have been possible without the help of many. First and foremost thanks to Ann Christenson who opened the conversation with her article, "Philing Station," and Manuel R. Galang for being the first to scream and pass the story on to the community.

Thanks too to *Milwaukee Magazine's* John Fennell.

For Angelica Varona and her family. Maraming salamat sa inyó.

Special thanks to Eileen Tabios and Nick Carbó as well as poets and writers of FLIPS, a Filipino/Fil-Am listserv of writers who kept the dialogue flowing. Tabios and Carbó helped conceive this book in a fury of e-mails and wild conversations. FLIPS disseminated the story to our colleagues around the globe and got everybody writing.

A big loud shout—what am I saying—a SCREAM—to the contributing editors—Sunaina Maira, Anida Yoeu Esguerra, Jordin Isip, and Eileen Tabios. For their patience, devotion, and most of all their time.

To the found images and text crew that worked many hours gathering, processing, choosing, and delivering material to us. We couldn't use all of it, but you sure gave us plenty to choose from. Thanks to these behind-the-scenes researchers in Chicago: Anna Kong, Daphne Kwok, Gita Reddy, Mario Santos, Jr., Sean Butay, Aya Seko, Sophoan Kheun, Jay Monteverde. And to the lone researcher in Milwaukee, thank you, Miguel T. Galang.

Thanks to Leslie Bow for coming on board and sifting through the material to make sense of all this screaming. Your contribution is an awesome way to enter this text.

A special thank you to editorial assistants Toiya Kristen Finley, Aimee Brown, and Laura Vasser. You kept the monkeys from drowning. You kept the monkeys from chewing up their tales.

To all our contributors—thank God for your voices—beautiful and angry and forgiving and scholarly and visual and visionary, and so many other things I have not space to list—Thank God we are not all the same (no matter what they say).

To Coffee House Press—Maraming Salamat.

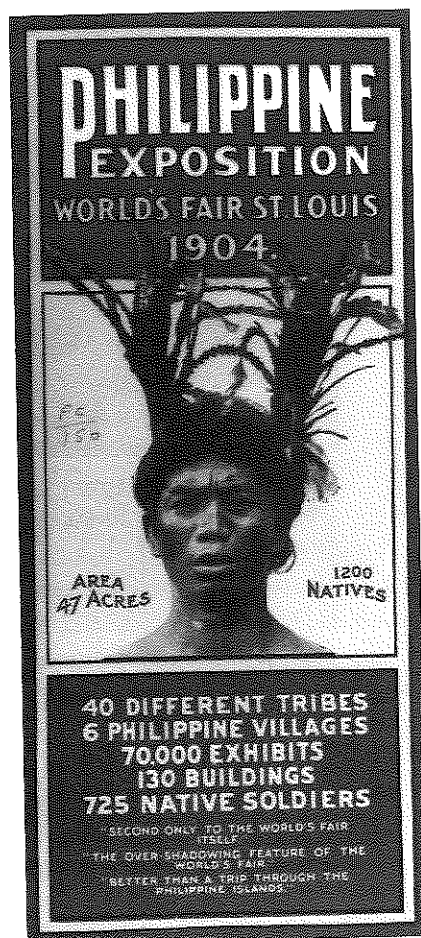
And to Jane Davis, Oliver de la Paz, and José F. Grave de Peralta who have heard the monkey scream—not always so prettily—but always with great passion.

Lastly, thanks to Miguel and Gloria Galang for teaching me the value of the voice—how to make it sing, how to make it scream!

MAKIBAKA!

PS
508
A8
S37
2003

A HISTORY OF "THE SAVAGE"

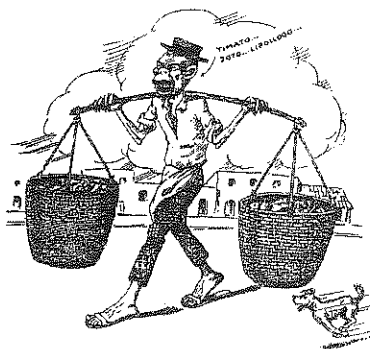


1904 — Dubbed the “overlord of the savage world,” anthropologist W. J. McGee supervised the display and study of two thousand “primitive peoples” at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. “Human culture is becoming unified,” wrote McGee, “not only through diffusion, but through the extinction of the lower grades.”

The Century by Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster, 1998, p.19.



1876–1932 — Caricature of an Asian reprinted in *Amerasia Journal* (Fall/Winter 1982) under the title of “Racism & Anti-Chinese persecution in Senora, Mexico from 1876-1932,” Volume 9, No.2, p.21.



1876–1932 — Caricature of an Asian reprinted in *Amerasia Journal* (Fall/Winter 1982) under the title of “Racism & Anti-Chinese persecution in Senora, Mexico from 1876-1932,” Volume 9, No.2, p.22.

SALVAGING THE SAVAGE

On Representing Filipinos and Remembering American Empire

A Taste of Empire

Several months ago, while riding the bus to the University of Minnesota, I saw the billboard for the first time. Perched high on the corner of the busy intersection at Franklin Street and Hennepin Avenue, the advertisement for the new restaurant named Chino Latino consisted of a seemingly simple phrase spelled out in larger-than-life letters: “As exotic as food gets without using the dog.” In a moment of double consciousness¹, a stream of images entered my mind: Filipino, savage, dogeater, monkey. I wondered who else on the bus had looked at this advertisement. I wondered if they were looking at me, a Filipino, savage, dogeater, monkey.

While the term Chino Latino historically refers to the longstanding presence of Chinese in the Americas, the peoples of mixed heritage there (such as Chinese Cubans and Chinese Peruvians), and the intermixing and fluidity of cultures, the Minneapolis restaurant Chino Latino reduces this complex history to a trendy, exotic menu of dishes inspired by cuisine from different parts of Asia and the Americas. Restaurant Chino Latino is the latest successful venture of Parasole Restaurant Holdings. Parasole’s company partners—Don Hays, Pete Mihajlov, and Phil Roberts—own several restaurants in Minneapolis’s downtown and its trendy Uptown neighborhood.

As an American historian who specializes in Asian American Studies and as a Filipino American woman, I interpret the advertisement as one form of the persistence of U.S. colonial narratives of white supremacy and Filipino inferiority in contemporary everyday life. The racist narratives implied in this particular advertisement are no accident. This billboard is only one piece of the restaurant’s cohesive advertising strategy that exoticizes and degrades Asians and Latinos. Several days later, I see another Chino Latino billboard in another busy intersection of Minneapolis’ trendy Uptown neighborhood. This one reads: “All the flavors without all the vaccines.” Translation: You (meaning you white young adventurous Americans) can eat the delicious “street foods from the hot zone” (Chino Latino’s tag line) without having to go through the trouble of visiting those diseased (meaning backward and uncivilized) places. As yet another insidious billboard points out, these places exist ambiguously somewhere out there to provide mysterious, yet tasty dishes for “your” pleasure. It proclaims that the restaurant specializes in “hard to pronounce food from hard to pronounce places.”

Restaurant reviews construct a favorable image of Chino Latino as hip and cool precisely because of its global features without critiquing the unequal

and exploitive power relations this globalization entails. As one review claims:

Arguably the cleverest new restaurant in town, Chino Latino drew hipsters, foodies, and Uptown neighbors alike to its opening weekend in mid-February 2000. . . . bring your pals . . . The wild, complicated décor is a perfect match for the global menu . . . It's crowded and loud and wild like a street festival.²

I imagine that the owners of the restaurant, the creators of the advertisement, and the reviewers of the restaurant might vigorously disagree with my analysis above. I imagine that they will insist that some of their best employees, customers, and friends are Asian and Latino. They may rely on historical amnesia: "We don't even know anything about u.s. imperialism in the Philippines! How could our advertisements about street foods from the hot zone have anything to do with that?" And they would not be alone. In general, American scholars across disciplines have denied the existence of u.s. imperialism and its important connections to American culture. u.s. history textbooks barely mention the Spanish-American War of 1898, which led to the u.s. annexation of the Philippines, the Philippine-American War, and four decades of u.s. colonial rule in the archipelago. As Amy Kaplan has astutely observed, three salient absences contribute to this ongoing pattern: "the absence of culture from the history of u.s. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism."³

I imagine that the owners of Chino Latino might also refute my claims above by arguing that Chino Latino has nothing to do with Filipinos specifically. Its "street foods from the hot zone" include dishes from many different parts of the globe bordered by the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Its "Philippine Paella" is only one dish among the "carne asada ala moreliana," "Montego Bay jerked chicken," and "Bali fertility feast." However, this lumping of Asian and Latino cultures is especially dangerous as it restructures, but ultimately strengthens our historical amnesia, what Matthew Frye Jacobson has referred to as "the modern art of forgetting."⁴ It erases the salient uniqueness of Filipino culture and history (in particular its colonial relationship with the United States)⁵, while reminding us of the oppression that groups of racialized peoples share in America.

At first glance, some of these contemporary representations seem to have nothing to do with Filipino bodies because they make these bodies invisible through the focus on white Americans' adventure and consumption of exotic food, for example. Yet Filipino bodies are central to the narratives implicated in such references as "all the vaccines" and "using the dog." In the early twentieth

century, the quarantine and vaccination of Filipino bodies paralleled u.s. colonial military aggression and control in the archipelago, and American medical personnel and scientists constructed Filipino bodies as carriers of disease. At the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, exposition organizers exhibited Igorots (one group of Filipino indigenous peoples) and newspaper accounts highlighted their dogeating rituals to educate American masses about Filipino savagery as well as American "civilization."

This essay uncovers some of the pivotal moments of the representation of Filipino as savage in twentieth-century American history. Specifically, it traces this representation to the oppressive use of u.s. science and medicine by American colonizers in the Philippines and the exhibition of Filipinos in the 1904 World's Fair at St. Louis. In these historical contexts, the words and the images of savage, monkey, and dogeater are inextricably linked to racism, resistance, and violence. I then connect colonial narratives of the Filipino as savage with Filipino men's experiences of racism in the 1920s and 30s in the American West and the persecution of two Filipino immigrant nurses (Filipina Narciso and Leonora Perez) who were accused of conspiracy, poisoning, and murder in the mid 1970s in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The examples I present here by no means comprise a comprehensive historical study of Filipino representations as savage. I have chosen these examples specifically in order to illustrate how racialized images have shaped the experiences of different groups of Filipinos across class, gender, and time.

In this essay, I argue that it is politically imperative to "salvage the savage," to remember the history of representations of Filipino bodies as savage, sub-human, inferior, and to contest the irresponsible perpetuation of these representations. By salvaging the savage, I refer to the importance of rescuing the representation of Filipino as savage from contemporary historical amnesia about America's violent imperialism in the Philippines. While this history is ugly and painful, it helps us identify the racist traces of u.s. imperialist ideology in contemporary representations and provides a foundation for strategies of resistance. Through salvaging the savage, we learn a language with which to critique these representations, strip them of their innocence, and construct counter-narratives that challenge the imperialism and racism that inflict our everyday lives.

I will tell you that as I write this essay, I am physically and emotionally tired. As an assistant professor, wife, and mother of an infant, I find that the hours of the day are never enough to take care of work, family, myself, let alone protest successful restaurant owners and advertisement executives. When I saw the first Chino Latino billboard, I wanted to scream, to petition, and to picket. One of my colleagues in American Studies told me that she wrote the restaurant owners and criticized their advertisements, but they did not respond. Her experience reminded me of the importance of employing multiple strategies of resistance. So in writing this essay, I chart the intersections between the personal,

the popular, and the historical in the hope that this is one small, but integral step that contests contemporary racism. This essay is my scream.

The Social and Scientific Construction of the Savage Filipino Body

Disease and "suffering" among Filipinos as well as Americans in the Philippines justified American colonial intervention in the Philippines in the form of medical practice. After American victories over cholera in the United States in the 1830s and 1850s, an outbreak of cholera in the Philippines in the early 1900s gave the U.S. colonial government represented by its American military surgeons and sanitation personnel a righteous purpose in their surveillance of the islands.⁶

The perception of Western science and medicine as progressive is so pervasive that even Filipino anti-colonial, nationalist writers have praised U.S. colonial health projects in the Philippines. For example, Teodoro Agoncillo and Milagros Guerrero documented the bloody Filipino struggle to defend their independence in the Philippine-American war of 1899-1902, but then later noted:

When the Americans came, they immediately set to work to minimize the spread of diseases and to improve, on the other hand, the health of the people. Epidemics that used to migrate to the Philippines were either prevented or minimized by the establishment of the Quarantine Service supervised by competent American doctors and public health officers.⁷

However, Warwick Anderson and Reynaldo Ileto have persuasively argued that American scientific and medicine-related practices, such as laboratory studies, vaccination, and quarantine, furthered U.S. colonialism in the Philippines and racialized Filipino bodies.⁸ My research on the development of Philippine professional nursing further revealed that Americanized nursing justified the white woman's (as well as man's) burden in the Philippines and imposed physical and social control on Filipinos.⁹ American nurses actively participated along with other medical personnel in constructing a cultural and racial hierarchy with Americans on top and Filipinos below by imagining and contrasting their "progressive," "clean," and "modern" ways with the "backward," "dirty," and "primitive" practices of Filipinos.

Steeped in their belief in their "power" to heal, American medical personnel simultaneously linked Filipino social practices to ignorance and societal backwardness and Western ones to intelligence and civilization. An American chief quarantine officer contrasted Filipinos who ignored American anti-cholera measures such as quarantine with "intelligent Americans or Europeans."¹⁰ Although the introduction of American nursing

in the Philippines differed from previous American medical intervention as it involved the agitation and participation of American women in the Philippines, nursing education reinforced many of the functions and beliefs of previous forms of colonial medicine. In her history of Americanized nursing in the Philippines, Lavinia Dock reified the beliefs of other American medical personnel that medical knowledge was elusive to Filipinos as a result of interrelated factors such as "native stupidity" and "dirty" indigenous social practices. According to Dock, young Filipino women who were targeted to train as nurses suffered from a lack of "rudimentary knowledge" about sanitation as a result of the prevailing Filipino "primitive customs."¹¹

Colonial medicine penetrated the colonized's bodies through statistical and laboratory studies, and then used these studies to authenticate cultural and racial hierarchies. In the early 1900s, the U.S. colonial government had established laboratories to study Filipino and American bodies in the archipelago. American scientists in government laboratories in the Philippines conducted studies of Igorots' stools in order to study parasites. These laboratory studies then linked native bodies to dirt and disease. For example, Philippine Commissioner of Health Victor Heiser referred to Filipino bodies as "incubators of leprosy."¹² At the same time, these studies enabled American medical personnel to biologically and socially re-invent American bodies and social practices. Colonial laboratory studies "re"-discovered American bodies as a resilient racial type and concluded that American bodies could survive the tropical climate, once thought to be the source of the "white man's grave."¹³ Thus, the denigration of Filipino bodies was inextricably linked to the "health" of white Americans.

Displaying the Savage, Consuming the Savage

The knowledge of Filipino savage bodies was not confined to American colonial medical personnel and other officials. Rather, they shared the results of their scientific and personal observations with American masses in the United States through popular representations in travel literature and public exhibits. As Fatimah Tobing Rony astutely notes, "the exotic is always already known."¹⁴ She refers to the "average museum goer" who "views a group of Hopi dancers handling snakes," but does not see these images for the first time. Rather, he or she has become familiar with these images through narratives that link indigenous peoples with the exotic. Similarly, the Filipino savage is always already known by the "average American." In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the conditions that made this knowledge possible involved the popularity and mass consumption of travel literature and photography. During this time period, travel literature and U.S. colonial agendas in the Philippines were linked in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Photographs of Filipino bodies on postcards and in books, magazines, and newspapers were an integral part of this travel literature. They functioned as “spatial and temporal bridges” from the Philippine colony to the imperial United States, enabling masses of Americans to consume the Philippines and its peoples visually.¹⁵ In their visual consumption of the Philippines, “average Americans” imbibed American colonial officials’ construction of the Filipino savage. For example, Fred Atkinson, the first General Superintendent of Education in the Philippines, shared his purportedly accurate and comprehensive observations about Filipinos in his book, *The Philippine Islands*, published in 1905. According to Atkinson, non-Christian Filipino tribes—Negritos, Igorots, Moros—comprised the archipelago’s savage races. Photographs including those of a scantily clad Negrito boy shooting a large bow and arrow and a group of Igorots drumming and dancing wildly in a circle reinforced Atkinson’s descriptions of their savagery through their illustration of stereotypically primitive social practices.¹⁶ Other photographs of squatting Negritos and Igorots depicted them as subhuman and monkey-like.¹⁷

Atkinson’s written text reaffirmed the narratives of savagery in the photographs. He characterized the Negritos, for example, as “true savages”: “These people seem to be the survival of the unfittest, and are physical and mental weaklings; their legs are like broomsticks; their feet are clumsy and large, and their bodies are covered with tattoo marks in the form of long gashes” (241). Again, the use of the Filipino body to illustrate u.s. colonial narratives of diseased, and thus racially inferior, Filipino savages is foregrounded in these representations.

Colonial travel literature and photography were not the only modes of the corporeal colonization of Filipinos. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century World’s Fairs exhibited Filipino bodies in ways that reaffirmed Filipino savagery and American civilization for the average fair goer. Exposition directors displayed Filipino bodies at multiple fairs throughout the United States. However, the Filipino display at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis was unprecedented in its scale. At that fair, exposition directors, with the full support of the federal government, organized the Philippine Reservation, which displayed nearly twelve hundred Filipinos living in villages on a forty-seven-acre site. According to Robert Rydell, the exhibits of the Filipino “wild tribes”—Bagobos, Negritos, Igorots, and Moros—were the most popular displays of the reservation. Newspaper accounts of these displays exoticized Filipino savagery by highlighting the dogeating rituals of Igorots. As one account of the Filipino exhibit claimed: “See the Igorotte. . . To the Igorotte a Dog with any other name will taste as sweet. . . After the Igorotte gets hold of a dog it is Dog-Gone.”¹⁸

While such accounts popularized Filipino savagery through the veil of humor, Americans’ inhumane treatment of Filipinos resulted in the disease,

deaths, and dismemberment of Filipino bodies. Two Filipinos died on a train while traveling to the St. Louis fair after train crewmen turned off the heat in their cars despite freezing weather. Others died from disease contracted during the fairs. Furthermore, American academics and museum officials strategized about the dissection and distribution of these Filipino corpses’ body parts. According to Rydell, after discussions with Columbia University anthropologist Franz Boas, Aleš Hrdlička (the head of the Department of Physical Anthropology at the United States National Museum) “proposed obtaining as many corpses as he could lay hands on and dividing the bodies in such a way that Columbia and the American Museum would receive ‘the soft parts’ and skeletons while the United States National Museum would receive the brains” (Rydell 165).

In other parts of the United States, university officials expressed interest in obtaining Filipino body parts. During the research for his acclaimed experimental documentary, *Bontoc Eulogy*, about Filipinos’ experiences at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, Marlon Fuentes came across a letter from University of Minnesota President Cyrus Northrup to the War Department’s Bureau of Insular Affairs. Northrup inquired about the possibility of obtaining the skeletons of Filipino natives buried in St. Louis and justified his request with the belief that “they were buried where their friends would never visit their graves, and the matter may be carried through without arousing a sentimental cry in objection.”¹⁹ Northrup’s letter reveals one important historical connection between Minnesota’s imperial interests and Filipino bodies as well as the significance of memory—and, more specifically, a purposeful forgetfulness—in American imperial agendas. The absence of a “sentimental cry in objection” to this inhumane treatment of Filipino bodies is justified by the inability of the Filipino dead’s family members and friends to visit, and thus remember through this act, their loved ones. Equally important, the absence of objection is also based on Americans’ purposeful forgetfulness, their denial of Filipino humanity through the commodification of Filipino bodies. Ultimately, the Smithsonian obtained three Filipino brains and, according to Fuentes, the presumption is that the brains are from three Igorots who died of pneumonia in the Philippine Reservation. In the early twentieth century, Americans displayed and consumed Filipino bodies living and dead.

The (In)dispensable Savage

Throughout the twentieth century, Filipinos have comprised an indispensable labor force in specific American industries. However, despite these important contributions, Filipino workers faced racist hostility from white workers in the forms of jeers, slurs, exploitation, and violence. Filipinos’ lived experiences of racism in America have been inextricably linked to the social and scientific constructions and popular representations of their savagery.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the numbers of Filipinos in the mainland United States increased exponentially from 5,603 in 1920 to 45,208 in 1930.²⁰ As U.S. nationals (given the U.S. annexation of the Philippines), these Filipinos—primarily young, male, and working class—comprised an inexpensive, yet crucial labor force in American agricultural, canning, and service industries after U.S. racist legislation had excluded the entry of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and South Asian migrants. During this time period, most Filipinos worked in agriculture, planting and picking various crops, such as tomatoes, celery, and in particular, asparagus. Farmers viewed them as ideally suited for “stoop labor,”²¹ a belief that hearkened back to late nineteenth-century stereotypes that cast native peoples’ posture and gestures as racially inferior. As ideal stoop laborers, Filipinos were expected to tolerate highly exploitive, dehumanizing labor conditions that punished their bodies. As one laborer recalled, “I worked about six hours that first day . . . my back was hurting . . . the next day I could hardly sit down because my back and all of my body was sore.”²² Another described conditions of one of the camps where Filipino migrant workers were housed during busy agricultural seasons. These conditions reveal that employers provided these Filipinos in America with subhuman, animal-like living quarters. He explained, “The bunkhouse . . . was crowded with men. There was no sewage disposal. When I ate swarms of flies fought over my plate . . . I slept on a dirty cot: the blanket was never washed.”²³

While Filipinos increasingly suffered from violent attacks by white workers in the late 1920s, one must not underestimate the pain of the day-to-day racism Filipinos faced in the United States. The racism of ordinary life sheds light on the intersecting politics of food, labor, and discrimination that challenges the perception that food is used innocently for entertainment and pleasure. During this time period, Filipinos planted and picked food for Americans, but were excluded from some American restaurants. They suffered from racist segregation practices, which denied them access to hotels and swimming pools. As one hotel sign in Stockton, California during the 1930s emphasized: “POSITIVELY NO FILIPINOS ALLOWED.”²⁴ Furthermore, Americans publicly taunted Filipinos during this time period by calling them “monkeys.” As George Pimentel recalled, “Some would stare. . . . They would even call us monkeys.”²⁵ According to Ray Corpuz, even American children participated in these racist jeers: “At school, my schoolmates as young as they were, wouldn’t talk to me. Mostly every other day we fight. They don’t address me directly. They tell me, ‘Hey, where did that monkey come from?’”²⁶

While the difficult economic conditions of the Great Depression hastened the repatriation of Filipinos and, ultimately, their exclusion from the United States, American exclusionists justified their actions by referring to Filipinos’ savage and unsanitary ways. For example, in 1930, Justice of the Peace D.W. Rohrback endorsed a resolution that proclaimed, “The unrestricted immigration into the

State of California of natives of the Philippine Islands is viewed with alarm both from a moral and sanitary standpoint while constituting a menace to white labor.”²⁷ In an interview for a local newspaper, Rohrback characterized Filipinos as “little brown men about ten years removed from a bolo and breechcloth . . . fifteen of them will live in one room and content themselves with squatting on the floor eating rice and fish.”²⁸ In the 1920s and 1930s, Filipinos may have supplied an integral source of labor, but American exclusionists refused to incorporate them into the life and culture of the United States. Perceptions of Filipino savagery ultimately rendered them dispensable at least until other labor shortages necessitated future migrations.

A Savage Is a Savage

While men dominated Filipino migration flows to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, Filipino women began to migrate in significant numbers by the second half of the century. Many of these Filipinas entered the United States as occupational migrants who ameliorated critical labor shortages in the United States. During this time period, the most visible occupation of Filipino women in the United States was nursing. Post-World War II critical nursing shortages in the United States, the passage of new American immigration legislation in 1965 (which encouraged the migration of nurses and other professionals to the United States), and the implementation of Philippine labor export policies in the 1970s shaped a significant Filipino international nursing labor force. By the late 1960s, Filipino nurses comprised the overwhelming majority of foreign-trained nurses in the United States, replacing decades of numerical domination by nurses from Canada. Thus, Paul Ong and Tania Azores have argued that “a discussion of immigrant Asian nurses, indeed of foreign-trained nurses in general, is predominantly about Filipino nurses.”²⁹

Studies about more contemporary migration flows from the Philippines often emphasize that, unlike early-twentieth-century Filipino migrants, newer migrants are highly educated and professional. Although this difference is important, the common perception of a professional is of someone who is judged on his/her training, credentials, and expertise, and not on his/her race or national origin. While some histories have foregrounded how classism and racism have shaped the development of the nursing profession,³⁰ little scholarly attention has been paid to the barriers faced by Filipino nurses in the United States. The case against Filipina Narciso and Leonora Perez illustrates how the stereotype of the Filipino savage has persisted in the second half of the twentieth century.

Between July and August of 1975, approximately thirty-five patients suffered from respiratory arrest at the V.A. Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan and approximately ten of these patients died.³¹ Because the V.A. is a federal institution, the

FBI launched an investigation and accused two Filipino nurses, Filipina Narciso and Leonora Perez, of committing the crimes. In June 1976, Narciso and Perez were arrested and indicted for ten counts of poisoning, five counts of murder, and one count of conspiracy.

At the time of her arrest, Narciso was a thirty-year-old permanent resident who had applied for U.S. citizenship. She arrived in the United States from the Philippines in May 1971 and worked as a registered nurse at University of Alabama Hospital before she began working at the V.A. in Ann Arbor in November 1972. Perez was a thirty-one-year-old permanent resident who had also applied for U.S. citizenship. She arrived in the United States from the Philippines in March 1971. At the time of her arrest, Perez was married to Epifanio Perez, Jr., also a Filipino-American permanent resident, and they had a three-year-old son, Christopher. Perez was also four months pregnant. Neither Narciso nor Perez had a criminal record, and during the initial stages of the investigation, they cooperated with the investigation by testifying before a grand jury on two occasions and appearing in a line-up.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Delonis admitted from the beginning of the investigation that the case was "highly circumstantial" as murder weapons, direct eyewitness testimonies, confessions, and fingerprints were unavailable and/or non-existent. However, the U.S. government's strong motivations for solving the case of the V.A. murders, its use of seemingly unlimited resources of money and manpower, and racist stereotypes about Filipinos helped shape a powerful case against Narciso and Perez.

At the beginning of the case, defense lawyers for Narciso and Perez were optimistic. Attorney Thomas O'Brien believed that Narciso and Perez "looked innocent."³² Even the prosecuting attorneys admitted that it would be difficult to prove that Narciso and Perez—"small, soft-spoken, young women"—could be involved in such a crime.³³

However, these positive images of Narciso and Perez co-existed with negative ones conjured by mainstream news media and a popular non-fiction book. Narciso and Perez's gender, race, and national origin could invoke multiple and dangerous images of savagery. Such images became popularized in a non-fiction book by Robert Wilcox entitled *The Mysterious Deaths at Ann Arbor* published in 1976. In this account, Wilcox highlighted the nurses' Philippine origins and linked them to stereotypes of savagery. Although Wilcox acknowledged that Narciso was a U.S. permanent resident, he emphasized that "in plain language, until [U.S.] citizenship is granted, she is an alien" who "in the meantime . . . retains her Filipino citizenship."³⁴ Both Narciso and Perez were from the Philippines, which Wilcox described as "for the most part, jungly, hot, and steamy."³⁵ And the image of "jungly" savage natives committing the V.A. murders appeared in the opening chapter in

which Wilcox informed his readers that Pavulon, the poison allegedly used in the crimes, was "a poison derived from special tropical plants and used, for instance, by South American jungle Indians on the tips of darts shot to kill game."³⁶ Wilcox concluded that the nature of the V.A. murders suggested "a real and monstrous savagery in the killer."³⁷

In the popular narratives of America's benevolent colonialism in the Philippines, American nurses and doctors trained young Filipino women to create a healthy and modern nation, and saved them from continuing their native, dirty, and backward ways. Yet although Filipino nurses may have clothed their native bodies in white uniforms, the symbol of professional expertise in their field, they were still savages. Their academic degrees enabled them to practice professionally, but the potential for these professional women to act as deadly natives remained in Americans' imagination.

These stereotypical images of Narciso and Perez as dark, deadly natives were not confined to Wilcox's text, but also made their way into mainstream publications, prosecution witness testimony, and the prosecution attorneys' questions and statements in court.³⁸ For example, mainstream magazines such as *Time* also referred to the drug Pavulon as jungle poison, "the lethal plant toxin used by South American Indians to tip poison darts."³⁹ Despite the presentation of "highly circumstantial" evidence, the jury convicted Narciso and Perez of conspiracy and three counts of poisoning in July 1977.

In February 1978, a new U.S. Attorney dismissed the case against them after the defense team successfully appealed the verdict. However, Narciso, Perez, and other Filipino nurses in the United States endured incalculable hardship as the result of the indictment, trial, and short-lived conviction. In a *Detroit Free Press* interview before the trial commenced, Filipina Narciso characterized her experience as a "nightmare."⁴⁰ Leonora Perez revealed the painful ways in which her husband and son had been affected by the publicity of the case. Her son was "too young" to understand what was happening with the investigation of the V.A. murders, but old enough to see his mother's arrest on television. "You can't erase it from his mind," she lamented. As for her husband, "he just cried and cried and shut off the TV."⁴¹ In late 1976, as they awaited trial in their homes, both women had their phones disconnected after receiving harassing phone calls.⁴²

After the jury convicted Narciso and Perez in July 1977, Filipino nurses across the United States suffered from public doubt about their nursing abilities and public suspicion about their professional intentions. One V.A. hospital nurse in Philadelphia reported that she received a phone call from someone who threatened to kill the Filipino nurses of the hospital.⁴³ Filipino nurses across the United States reported instances of patients refusing to take medication from Filipino nurses and of hospitals developing policies not to

hire Filipino nurses. Stereotypes of Filipino savagery had buried the very important professional contributions of these Filipino nurses out of view, rendering them invisible and forgotten.

On Recollecting the Buried and Forgotten

In his analysis of Filipinos in the United States and their literature of exile, Oscar Campomanes critiqued what he argued to be "the repetitious and unreflective use of the modifier 'forgotten'" to describe Filipino invisibility in American history. He queried, "What is being forgotten?"⁴⁴ In this essay, I have argued that what is forgotten is the exploitation of Filipino bodies through American medicine, popular representations, and Filipino immigrant labor, and, as a result of this exploitation, the material and psychological benefits of racial superiority and inexpensive labor reaped primarily by white Americans. The present day Chino Latino advertising I analyzed at the beginning of this essay is only one disturbing example of how "what is forgotten" is reconstructed to be humorous, trendy, and chic. Thus, it is politically imperative to confront what is forgotten by analyzing the history of American imperialism and its connections to contemporary everyday life. For me, the salient question then becomes: After recollecting what has been forgotten, how can we sustain these very important memories?

—CATHERINE CENIZA CHOY

Notes

- 1 Reflecting on a childhood memory, W.E.B. DuBois argued that a young person of color in the United States is forced to develop a double consciousness, the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989, 3.
- 2 "Chino Latino: editorial profile."
<<http://twincities.citysearch.com/E/V/MINMI/0009/34/06/>>.
- 3 Kaplan, Amy. "Left Alone With America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease. Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993, 11.
- 4 Jacobson, Matthew Frye. "Imperial Amnesia: Teddy Roosevelt, the Philippines, and the Modern Art of Forgetting." *Radical History Review* 73 (1999): 116-127.
- 5 The dish, Philippine Paella, for example, with its jumbo shrimp, adobo chicken, mussels, chorizo, calamari, and saffron-anatto rice, reflects an exoticization of the colonial mixing of Spanish and Filipino cultures. However, a similar dish that combines u.s. and Filipino cultures is not to be found on the menu. The feature of Philippine Paella and the absence of Philippine Apple Pie, for example, reveal our modern selective memories as well as our forgetfulness about imperialism.
- 6 Iletto, Reynaldo C. "Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order in the Philippines." *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*. Ed. Vicente L. Rafael. Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1995, 60-61.
- 7 Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People*. Quezon City, 1977, qtd. in Iletto, Reynaldo C. "Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order in the Philippines," 51-52.
- 8 See Reynaldo C. Iletto, "Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order in the Philippines," and Warwick Anderson, "Where Every Prospect Pleases and Only Man Is Vile": Laboratory Medicine as Colonial Discourse," *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*. Ed. Vicente L. Rafael, 51-81, 83-112.
- 9 I have analyzed some of the ways in which American colonialism and its use of medicine in the Philippines functioned similarly to British imperialism and its application of medicine in Africa and India in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. See Catherine Ceniza Choy, "The Usual Subjects: Medicine, Nursing, and American Colonialism in the Philippines," *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 5:2 (Fall 1998): 1-28.
- 10 Iletto, Reynaldo C. "Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order in the Philippines," 58.
- 11 Dock, Lavinia L. *A History of Nursing: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day with Special Reference to the Work of the Past Thirty Years*, vol. 4. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912, 313-314.
- 12 Anderson, Warwick, "Where Every Prospect Pleases and Only Man Is Vile," 100.
- 13 Ibid., 84, 95-99.
- 14 Rony, Fatimah Robing. *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1996, 6.
- 15 Ibid., 81.
- 16 Atkinson, Fred W. *The Philippine Islands*. Boston: Ginn & Company, 1905, 239, 241.
- 17 As Rony noted, a French physician writing in the late nineteenth century concluded that race is written on the savage body through posture and gesture: "Savages squat whereas Civilized people sit, explained the doctor: a Batak, [for example] because of

- this is akin to a monkey," Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye*, 3.
- 18 Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair*. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984, 195-196.
- 19 Blumentritt, Mia. "Bontoc Eulogy, History, and the Craft of Memory: An Extended Conversation with Marlon E. Fuentes." *Amerasia Journal* 24:3 (1998): 81.
- 20 Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, rev. ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998, 315.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 320.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 319.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 320.
- 24 A photograph of this hotel sign is pictured in Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*. Seattle: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983, 114.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Ong, Paul and Tania Azores. "The Migration and Incorporation of Filipino Nurses." *The New Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring*. Ed. Paul Ong and Edna Bonacich and Lucie Cheng. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1994, 165. For a history of Filipino nurse international migration, see Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*. Duke University Press, Durham: 2003.
- 30 See, for example, Barbara Melosh, "The Physician's Hand": *Work, Culture, and Conflict in American Nursing*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1982 and Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989.
- 31 Different accounts offer several different sets of statistics regarding the number of respiratory arrests and related deaths at the V.A. Hospital during the summer of 1975. According to defense attorney, Thomas O'Brien, 35 patients suffered from unexpected breathing failures on 51 occasions between July 1 and August 15 and 10 of those patients died. See Thomas C. O'Brien, "The V. A. Murders," *The Advocate* 28:4 April 1985: 12. *The Detroit News* reported that 56 arrests had occurred and 16 patients had died. See Charlie Cain, "Hospital Probe Called Nearer," *The Detroit News*, 19 October 1975. *Time* magazine claimed that 27 patients suffered respiratory arrests and that 11 of them died. See "The Michigan Murders," *Time*, 22 March 1976, 47. And *The New York Times* estimated that between 51 and 63 patients suffered respiratory failure and that 13 of them died. See Martin Waldron, "Trial Starts Today for Nurses in Michigan Hospital Death," *The New York Times*, 1 March 1977, 12.
- 32 O'Brien, Thomas C. "The V. A. Murders," 12.
- 33 Cheyfitz, Kirk. "Trial to Revive V.A. Nightmare." *Detroit Free Press*, 22 August 1976: 6A.
- 34 Wilcox, Robert K. *The Mysterious Deaths at Ann Arbor*. New York: Popular Library, 1977, 161.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 8-9.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 38 For a more detailed analysis of the case, see chapter five in Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*. Duke University Press, Durham: 2003.

- 39 "The Michigan Murders," *Time*, 22 March 1976: 47.
- 40 Cheyfitz, Kirk. "Trial to Revive V.A. Nightmare," 3A.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 6A.
- 42 Simpson, Esther. "Narciso-Perez Hearing Postponed." *Ang Katipunan* 16 Dec.-15 Jan. 1977: 8.
- 43 "Filipino Communities Organize Support," *Ang Katipunan*, 1-15 August 1997, p. 7.
- 44 Oscar V. Campananes, "Filipinos in the United States and Their Literature of Exile," in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*. ed. Shirley Lim and Amy Ling, Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1992, 53.