

Securing our place in history through education

*Significant contributions of Filipinos
in WWII remain obscure in US history*

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Bataan Legacy Historical Society

THE road to history is long and winding and requires vigilance and utmost will. Filipinos have been part of the fabric of the United States even before the 1700s with the first recorded settlement in Louisiana. Since then, Filipinos have made significant contributions in the labor movement, during World War II (in the US and the Philippines) and in the civil rights movement. But why

is it that our place in the history of the United States remains obscure? There are approximately 3.4 million Filipinos in the US as of the 2010 census, making it the second largest Asian population in the country and the largest in California. While we are making some strides in the local level in California, we have yet to have representation in the US Con-

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Mrs. Donna Ray, Bataan Legacy Historical Society Board Member (BLHS) Robert Hansen, Bataan Death March survivor PFC David Tejada and VA Admiral Charles Ray during the opening of the BLHS exhibit at the San Francisco Public Library.

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gress or Senate.

Bataan Legacy Historical Society (BLHS) was conceived and created to address the lack or even absence of information about the Filipino defenders of WW II. Most textbooks only mention American defenders, but seven-eighths of the main line of resistance in the Bataan Peninsula were manned by Filipinos. After President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war against the Empire of Japan after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the ravages of war did not reach the continental United States. In-

stead, the war was fought in the Philippines, its colony from 1898 to 1946, where thousands of Filipino and American soldiers died and a million civilians perished. But this seminal part of US history is not yet taught in high schools in the nation.

In 2011, the California Legislature passed AB199, which "encourages for the inclusion of the role of Filipinos during World War II in the social sciences curriculum for Grades 7-12 in California." One would think that the Filipinos will finally find their place in American history but unfortunately the legis-

lation has not yet been implemented. While the bill had the intention of giving credit to the Filipino soldiers of WW II, the tenuous verbiage in the bill ("encourages" instead of "requires") is probably one of the main reasons why it has never been implemented.

Last year, BLHS initiated a petition to the California Department of Education through change.org to implement this legislation by including it in the social sciences curriculum for Grades 7-12. It so happened that the social sciences curriculum was in the process of being revised by the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC), an advisory body to the California State Board of Education (SBE)

on matters related to curriculum, instructional materials, and content standards in accordance with Education Code Section 33530-33540. The IQC received many emails and letters of support for the implementation of AB199. In November, 2014, the IQC proposed a two-line edit to the curriculum framework to include the following: "Students should also study the contributions and sacrifices of the Filipinos and Filipino-Americans who fought for the defense and liberation of the Philippines, including events such as the Bataan Death March and the liberation of Manila."

Last week, the History-Social Science Subject Matter Committee of the IQC had an open meeting to discuss edits to the draft curriculum framework for the History-Social Sciences Curriculum. This time, the IQC proposed a one-page edit describing the Bataan Death March and World War II in the Philippines. While the Department of Education clearly intends to implement AB199, the process of revising the curriculum framework is a long, arduous process involving ten steps. Last week's meeting was only Step 6 and the proposed curriculum framework has yet to be approved by the entire Instructional Quality Commission in November and will be submitted to the State Board of Education for final approval some time in May, 2016. The last time the History-Social Sciences curriculum was revised was in 2005.

The topic of civil rights movement in California and the role of the Mexican-Americans were brought up during the October 9 meeting. But there is no mention of the seminal role of the Filipinos in the proposed curriculum for the civil rights movement. Filipino students at San Francisco State University took part in an unprecedented strike that demanded the establishment of the first Ethnic Studies Department in the country. Members of the Philippine-



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American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) organized effectively in getting high school students to apply for college through the Equal Opportunity Program. They also fought for the rights of the "Manongs" as well as other issues concerning the Filipino American community. These are great contributions that have enriched the fabric of California but unless we work together in getting these included in California's history, no one will know about them except the Fil-Am community.

During last week's meeting, there were around 20 speakers

from the American Hindu community during the public address. They are working on the inclusion of Hinduism in the curriculum section for World Religion. Perhaps we should take a lesson from this. Unless we invest time, money and resources to ensure that our own history is learned by students before the university level, we cannot be seen as a viable force in the community. Aside from working on getting Fil-Ams in strategic elected positions, in the local, state and hopefully in the national levels, we should ensure that our contribution to the history of California and the

US is embedded in the curriculum for high school levels. This has a wide and long-term impact on how society perceives the Fil-Ams. But this will not be possible if we do not present a united front behind these issues.

We should also collaborate with other groups, including mainstream ones, so that they can learn about our contributions to history. In trying to get AB199 implemented, BLHS has collaborated with other groups with similar goals. It has presented the stories not just of Filipinos, but of Americans who fought in the Philippines during WWII as well as other Allied forces that helped during the liberation. It opened a 4-month exhibition on WWII in the Philippines on Sep-

tember 12 at the San Francisco Main Library in collaboration with Memorare Manila 1945, the Philippine Consulate General of San Francisco and the San Francisco Public Library. A conference on the same topic will take place on October 24 at Koret Auditorium at the San Francisco Main Library featuring speakers from different perspectives.

Let us hope that the legacy of our Filipino ancestors will bind the Filipino community not just in the US but also in the Philippines. We have a proud and illustrious history that is worth fighting for. Let us act now!

(For more information about the Exhibition and Conference, please visit www.bataanlegacy.org) ■