

Haole women, Whites were angered and troubled by their willingness to contest the racial status quo and their subjugated economic position therein through labor organizing.

Instead of ethnic identity construction, labor organizing served as the principal means for Filipinos to advance their collective economic interests prior to statehood in 1959. In addition to the 1920 and 1924 strikes, Filipino labor militancy manifested itself again in 1937 when 1,500 workers organized a strike at the Pu'unene plantation on Maui, the last major strike in Hawai'i by laborers from a single ethnic or nationality group (Beechert 1985: 226–229). Filipino labor organizing continued in the 1930s, spurred on by increasingly difficult economic conditions for them during the Depression since they comprised a majority of sugar and pineapple laborers. Filipinos started a Pineapple Workers Union on Moloka'i and organized a successful strike. In 1938 two short strikes were held on the Hamakua Coast on Hawai'i Island, and others at Kahuku Plantation on O'ahu and Kekaha Plantation on Kaula'i. It took World War II and the declaration of martial law to bring a temporary halt to such de-termined labor organizing efforts on the part of Filipino workers.

The demonization of Filipinos did not end with the last of their hangings in 1944. Such racist representations had other sources in Hawai'i society, and the executions themselves had a lasting impact on perceptions of Filipino Americans. In the poststatehood period, the sources of Filipino stereotyping continue to be the print media, augmented by television evening news programs, and new sources such as ethnic humor and local literature. Nonetheless, some of the same denigrating stereotypes have persisted over time due to their perpetuation by non-Filipinos. Thus, while the execution of Filipinos ended in the 1940s, their lynching by the news media and local comedians and writers continues unabated.



Ethnic Humor or Racist Stereotyping?

Being historically an economically and politically subordinate minority, Filipino Americans have found it especially difficult to contest their stereotyping that is so pervasive and frequent that many people in Hawai'i do not consider it offensive or problematic. Nonetheless, such stereotyping is the principal problem that Filipino Americans encounter in seeking to construct and assert their ethnic identity and to advance themselves socioeconomically. One of the major contemporary sources of denigrating stereotypes of Filipino Americans in Hawai'i is joke telling about them. While in the continental United States, Filipino American comedians, such as Rex Navarrete, make fun of their behaviors and experiences in the United States, in Hawai'i it is especially non-Filipinos who target Filipino Americans as the butt of their jokes. Such joke telling about ethnic groups is referred to as "ethnic humor" or "local humor"

in Hawai'i and is claimed to be one of the primary reasons that island residents get along especially well with each other because supposedly everyone laughs at such jokes, even those made at the expense of their own ethnic group. As strong advocates of the Hawai'i multicultural model, Grant and Ogawa (1993: 150) contend that ethnic joke telling is one of the major "points of commonality" among ethnic groups that historically have fostered positive ethnic relations. An editorial in the *Honolulu Advertiser* ("Island Ethnic Humor Is What Keeps Us Together" 1998) maintained that "it [ethnic humor] is the glue that holds our multi-ethnic society together; it is the lubricant that lets us touch each other daily with a minimum of friction. . . . [I]sle-style humor is a time-honored product of ethnic mixing, and an indication of a healthy society." However, joke telling also can serve as a way of expressing critical or even harsh comments about another ethnic group that otherwise cannot be said publicly.

Not surprisingly, since it is the source of their livelihood, local comics also have provided their own justifications for ethnic humor. In his compilation of ethnic jokes, *Frank Delima's Joke Book*, subtitled *Having Fun with Portages, Pakes, Buddha Heads, Bak Baks, Ballahis, Soles, Yobos, Haoles, Tialahs, Pit Bulls, and other Hawaiian Minorities*, local comedian Frank Delima (1991: v), one of the pioneers of island comedy, presented his rationale for ethnic humor: "Here in Hawaii, we laugh at ourselves more than most people do in other places. Hawaii is a chop suey nation—Portage [Portuguese], Pake [Chinese], Buddha Head [Japanese], Sole [Samoan], Yobo [Korean], Kanaka [Native Hawaiian], Haole [White], all mixed up. Nobody is in the majority here. We are all part of at least one minority group. Some of us are part of several minority groups. And we all laugh at ourselves."¹⁰ While listing all of the above ethnic groups may seem inclusive, the problem with ethnic jokes is that we laugh at others who are the object of the jokes, not necessarily only at ourselves.¹¹ Local comics probably never consider how their jokes can hurt others since they foolishly believe everyone finds them funny, even those who are being made fun of.

The basis of the humor in ethnic jokes is common stereotypes of different ethnic groups in Hawai'i; if one is unaware of the stereotype, the joke is not likely to be very funny. With remarkable consistency (or lack of originality), local comedians represent Chinese Americans as money-hungry tightwads, Native Hawaiians as criminally inclined and physically large, Japanese Americans as knowing martial arts and having squinty eyes, Korean Americans as hot-tempered and sexually loose (young women only), Okinawan Americans as hairy and short, Portuguese Americans as loud-mouthed and not very intelligent, Samoans as violent and living in public housing, Whites as pushy and pretentious, and local people in general as also not very bright and of low-income status. But because local humor is based on ethnic stereotypes, it

serves to reinforce and disseminate them at the expense of some ethnic groups that are not just being made fun of but are also being denigrated. As anthropologist Roderick Labrador (2004: 312) has argued: "Explanations and justifications of the persistence of ethnic humor view language, culture and identity as objective facts in the natural order of things rather than constructions embedded in a network of social relations and underscored by struggles of power." Stereotypes about the language, culture, and identity of an ethnic group also are constructions that reflect the unequal power relations among groups.

While the claim of many local comics that they tell jokes about all ethnic groups in Hawai'i is true, it is also the case that not all groups have the same social status or power in society. Whites, Japanese Americans, and Chinese Americans hold such high political and socioeconomic positions that jokes about them by Waikiki comedians are hardly going to affect their well-established status in society. In contrast, oppressed and therefore vulnerable ethnic minorities, such as Filipino Americans and Samoans, are far more likely to suffer harmful consequences, such as in employment and interpersonal interactions, as a result of jokes told about them, which are sometimes repeated to them in person. As an example, Delima's jokes about "Buddha Heads" (Japanese Americans) in his joke book, videos, and CDs are primarily about Japanese nationals, including tourists, and not Japanese Americans. Local Japanese Americans know that island residents are aware of the difference between themselves and Japanese nationals and thus are not very offended by that type of joke because it is not about them and thus does not affect their ethnic identity and status and how they are perceived by non-Japanese Americans.

But Delima is far less cautious with his jokes about Filipino Americans that are based on stereotyped notions of the supposedly strange foods they eat, their accented English, the menial jobs they perform, and the colorful clothes they wear. One of his compact discs, *Babooze*, includes a live comedy routine with the same title in which Delima refers to "Filipino janitors arguing over a dead dog at an animal shelter" (Delima 1995). In this one ostensibly funny line, not only are Filipino Americans represented as dog eaters, they also are stereotyped as janitors given to violence. Some of his jokes about Filipino Americans imply that they are deficient in some way or are not very intelligent and therefore reinforce other common perceptions of them, such as asking why there are no Filipino doctors, or what is a Filipino failure called (Delima 1991: 69). Why not a joke that begins, "Did you hear the one about the Filipino American lawyer?"

Delima (1993) resurrected the "poke-knife" stereotype of pre-World War II Filipino men in his song titled the "Purple Danube." In this parody of the "Blue Danube," the first verse refers to Filipinos wearing purple and brown,

eating goat, and holding a knife to one's throat. While some may find supposed Filipino American color and food preferences to be funny, I have great difficulty finding any humor in the depiction of a Filipino American or anyone else wielding a knife at one's throat.

Another purveyor of jokes about Filipino Americans is popular local comic "Augie T" (Tulba) who says he has a Filipino father and a Portuguese mother. While his professional career as a comedian began in the late 1990s, two decades after Delima began his, Augie's jokes about Filipino Americans include the same stereotypic references to them as wearing bright clothes, speaking English with an immigrant accent, eating dogs, and using knives. In "Crank Call: Movies" on one of his CDs (*Locally Disturbed*), he plays the role of an elderly male Filipino immigrant who calls a video rental shop to ask if they have certain martial arts videos (Tulba 2002). After becoming frustrated by the clerk's inability to understand his accented English and to locate the videos he wants, the caller angrily replies with a threat that he will come back with a knife and his dog that will bite her. The specter of the knife-wielding, violence-prone, and temperamental Filipino male from the plantations before World War II once again makes his menacing appearance but ostensibly to make one laugh.

A number of non-Filipino local comedians also disseminate jokes about Filipino Americans based on the same old stereotypes. Appearing live in a video, *Hawaii's Comedy Stars* (1997), Japanese American comic Paul Ogata does a routine about Filipino Americans eating in his words, "that weird Filipino food" in this case, *dinuguan*, a pork dish cooked with pig's blood among other ingredients. He displays his ignorance of Filipino cuisine by describing *dinuguan* as a "soup" and claiming that it consists of fresh pig's blood; of course, such lack of knowledge does not stop him from publicly making false assertions.

Another local comedian, Gregg "Hammer" on his CD, *Plain Brown Wrapper* (1998), sings a tune called "In Kalihi" in the heavily accented voice of a male Filipino immigrant who lives in that inner city area of Honolulu. Kalihi is a multiethnic, working-class community in which Filipino Americans, especially post-1965 immigrants, are the largest ethnic group. Rudy, the immigrant Filipino, is depicted in the song as a janitor working for \$4.25 per hour at a McDonald's restaurant who is arrested for cockfighting.¹² No doubt many Filipino immigrants live in Kalihi, work at McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants, and speak with accents; however, many more live elsewhere, including middle-class suburban communities, have white-collar jobs, speak with a local accent, and have never been arrested, let alone been to a cockfight.

As apparent from the above examples, so-called "Filipino jokes" by local comics tend to be variations on prevalent stereotypes about them as eating dogs, holding menial service jobs, speaking strongly accented English, and not

being very smart. To some extent, the jokes are not so much about Filipino Americans but about jokes concerning Filipino Americans insofar as they are based on other familiar jokes. Nonetheless, as jokes purportedly about Filipino American behavioral and cultural practices, they still have the harmful effect of reinforcing demeaning stereotypes. Being based on these stereotypes, jokes about Filipino Americans tend to represent them as males, often elderly immigrants, particularly in terms of the *manong* (older Filipino man) who speaks with a heavy accent and holds a menial job that Labrador (2004: 300) considers "a dominant Filipino character type" in local comedy. Indeed, such jokes are more about immigrant rather than Hawai'i-born Filipinos who constitute a majority of the Filipino American population. But by making racist jokes about Filipino immigrant language, culture, and behavior or what they imagine them to be, comedians contribute to the false notion that Filipino Americans are predominantly immigrants and therefore less local, less culturally competent, less educated, and less qualified for employment than other Hawai'i residents.

Filipino American objections to racist jokes made about them have been expressed for some time. For an article titled "Filipinos' Dilemma with Frank Delima" that appeared in a community newspaper, the *Hawaii Filipino Chronicle*, Rex Quidilla and Dennis Galolo (1994: 4-5) interviewed Filipino American community leaders who found Delima's "Filipino jokes" demeaning. The article was occasioned by a parody Delima released in December 1994, "A Filipino Christmas," sung with a strong accent to "Chestnut Roasting on an Open Fire," that substituted his lyrics, such as those referring to black dogs cooking on a fire. Filipino American business owner Eddie Flores remarked of Delima's song (cited in Quidilla and Galolo 1994: 4): "I find it very offensive. It belittles Filipinos and looks only at their weak points. He doesn't have a Chinese or a Japanese Christmas [song]. He stereotypes Filipinos much more than other ethnicities and it's usually more heavy-handed and degrading—like we talk funny and eat dogs. He says Chinese are tight, but that's not so degrading. It implies they're rich, so what?"

It is especially ironic that the release of Delima's song and its ample radio airplay came less than a month after Ben Cayetano was elected as the first Filipino American governor of Hawai'i and in the United States. Cayetano's election was a major breakthrough for Filipino Americans as a community that historically has viewed itself as unfairly excluded from the power and privileges enjoyed by other island ethnic groups. It indicated to many, both Filipino American and non-Filipino, that Filipino Americans finally "had made it" in Hawai'i, at least politically, in attaining the highest elective office in the state. But the fragility of Cayetano's victory as governor in enhancing the power and prestige of the Filipino American community was made painfully apparent the very next month by the release of Delima's song.

Ethnic humor is a contemporary version of the historical practice of promulgating racist representations of Filipinos engaged in by the Honolulu daily newspapers beginning in the 1910s. Insofar as it perpetuates denigrating stereotypes of them, local comedy is a major factor that precludes Filipino Americans from asserting their own ethnic identity. Jokes about Filipino Americans are discursive acts of power against them and need to be understood as cultural representations that maintain their structural subordination in Hawai'i and derive from that subjugation. As noted by Labrador (2004: 312), ethnic humor "points to struggles over representation, in terms of which images, signs, and jokes are produced, consumed and distributed. Who makes the jokes, who is made fun of, and who laughs involves discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Jokes can effectively tell us who belongs and in the process, they construct order and hierarchy and are thus invariably linked to power." As such, ethnic humor is very much related to ethnic inequality in Hawai'i insofar as it links the cultural representations of aggrieved ethnic groups in the jokes made about them to their subordinate status and power in society.

Representations by the News Media and Local Literature

The print media are another source of inaccurate representations of Filipino Americans in Hawai'i. Fortunately, the newspapers no longer engage in the blatant racist portrayals of Filipinos that was a regular practice of theirs before World War II. A newer stereotyped depiction of Filipino Americans by the news media is as a model minority of hardworking and struggling immigrants determined to make it in Hawai'i. Although Filipinos began immigrating to the islands in 1906, they were included in a series on "Hawaii's Newest Immigrants" by one of the Honolulu daily newspapers (Nii and Creamer 1999: A1, A8). The authors described Filipino Americans as "Struggling to adjust to a strange new homeland. Struggling to earn a living and support family here and in the Philippines. Struggling to earn the respect and power often denied them, no matter how they paid in sweat and heartbreak. . . . Their story is becoming one of determination to succeed." They then related the hardships of a "straight-A student" who graduated at the top of her 1998 class at Farrington High School in Kalihi only a year and a half after emigrating from the Philippines. While attending community college as a full-time student, she works sixty hours a week at a Walkki convenience store and a restaurant to save money "toward her dream" of studying at a local private university to become a registered nurse (A1).

Typical of model minority stories, in seeking to emphasize Filipino American self-help initiatives through hard work, higher education, and perseverance,