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Introduction

Critical Considerations

U.S. Filipinos and their indeterminate forms critically pose the problem of “unassimilability” and unrepresentability to a range of U.S. discursive fields, or more importantly, cannot be so “assimilated” without these discourses themselves being disrupted or transformed altogether.

—Oscar V. Campomanes

FOR MANY FILIPINOS TODAY, the phrase “positively no Filipinos allowed” continues to resonate, a reminder of the anti-Filipino practices and sentiments the *manong* generation encountered at a particular historical moment in the United States. Displayed prominently on doors of hotels and other business establishments throughout California in the 1920s and 1930s, it was a sign Filipinos frequently encountered in their day-to-day lives symptomatic of their racialization—as nationals and aliens through state-sanctioned practices and policies, and as cheap labor by capital interests and imperatives—that resulted in their disenfranchisement and disempowerment. As a consequence, Filipinos were denied not only public accommodation but also access to rights and entitlements, including citizenship, the franchise, and property ownership. In this regard, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed* lends itself to a reading of Filipino history that evokes the historic exclusion of Filipinos from the U.S. national polity and their location outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the nation.

But in titling the anthology *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*, we seek to provide an alternative reading of Filipino history in the United States as a way to think through the main concerns of this volume and put into focus the kinds of interventions we hope to accomplish with it. More to the point, we deploy “positively no Filipinos allowed” to signify the ways Filipinos endure the burdens and legacies of empire past and present, which cannot be understood simply in terms of exclusion but more in terms of the coerced incorporation of Filipinos into the nation, underwritten by the violence of conquest, empire building, white supremacy, and global capital.¹ Additionally, we wish to underscore how Filipino social formations are not coextensive with U.S. national borders, just as “the United States” is not commensurate with a nationalist focus but determined by the international dynamics of empire and global capital. Thus, the racialization of Filipinos as nonwhite (or,

just as problematic, “Asian American”) cannot be properly addressed by merely referencing the internal dynamics of any one nation or by considering the United States as a discretely bounded entity.

As a number of scholars have noted, in the United States an inability and unwillingness to account for its imperial legacy has given rise to cultural aphasia in relation to the enduring and pervasive effects of empire on colonized peoples and its significance to the self-definition of the nation.² Notwithstanding the centrality of imperialism to the national formation, this history has effectively been expunged from the historical record and the collective memory of the nation and constructed as antithetical to the U.S. experience. William Appleman Williams, for example, has noted the elision of U.S. imperialism within dominant U.S. historiography, while Amy Kaplan has noted the elision of U.S. empire building from the study of U.S. culture and the United States from studies of empire.³ This elision is also evident in the use of qualifiers such as “insular,” “sentimental,” or “benevolent” to refer to U.S. imperialism, with the effect of mitigating U.S. complicity and sanitizing its effects.⁴ U.S. culture, therefore, is characterized by a repression of its imperial history that obscures the link between freedom and expansion and the formation of an American identity and the violent conquest of nonwhite peoples.⁵

The historical amnesia surrounding U.S. imperialism has proven to be deeply consequential not just for the United States but also for those colonized by the nation. For Filipinos, it has come to mean grappling with the “spectre of invisibility” themselves, precisely because a full accounting of their presence necessitates a full accounting of a largely unthinkable history.⁶ Just as the notion of the United States as an empire has not fared well in dominant U.S. historiography, neither has the notion of Filipinos as colonized subjects. Within standard historical accounts, for example, Filipinos have all but disappeared, as evidenced by the erasure of the Philippine-American War and Filipino insurgency against U.S. imperial rule; if Filipinos appear at all, it is usually as objects of derision—savages unfit for self-government, economic threats displacing white labor, sexual deviants obsessed with white women, or ungrateful recipients of U.S. beneficence.⁷ It has also come to mean being made to fit into a discursive framework and narrative like that of immigration and settlement that serves to elide the historical and material specificities of Filipinos and to efface the very processes and relations that have shaped Filipino subject and community formation.

At the same time, *Positively No Filipinos Allowed* is intended to mark the tenuous position that the study of Filipino social formations occupies in the academy. As Lisa Lowe comments in the Foreword: “Filipino American racial formation continues to be relatively illegible in the university within traditional scholarly disciplines like history, anthropology, sociology, law, or literature, and even somewhat still obscure in emergent interdisciplinary fields like ethnic studies, American studies, and Asian American studies.” Within Asian American studies and Filipino

American studies, for example, empire has yet to be integrated as a critical frame, while U.S. imperialism has been conspicuously absent from the purview of post-colonial studies.⁸ In both traditional and emergent disciplines, then, the study of Filipino social formations on its own terms has yet to materialize, remaining outside the disciplinary focus and scope of these fields.

Put another way, Filipinos constitute a disturbing presence to be contained or effaced because of the challenge they pose to the coherence of these fields that revolves around a refusal to know. A case in point is the 1998 Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) annual meeting, when Filipinos literally became a disturbing presence, at least in the eyes of the AAAS executive board members, in the wake of the granting of the Best Fiction book award to Lois-Ann Yamanaka for *Blu's Hanging*, notwithstanding criticisms leveled at the book for its purported racist representations of Filipinos. While some see the award and ensuing “controversy” as matters of artistic freedom and censorship, we see them as symptomatic of a broader dynamic, a reflection of the marginalized status of Filipinos in the association and, more generally, in Asian American formations, and as yet another manifestation of Filipino illegibility, as evidenced by the inability or unwillingness of board members to come to grips with anti-Filipino racism in the association.⁹

Oscar V. Campomanes has also written about this issue, alerting us to the illegibility of Filipino social formations in various academic fields and linking the marked absence of Filipinos in both academic and popular discourse to the profound silence and denial surrounding the history of U.S. imperialism. He reflects on the issue of Filipino unassimilability and unrepresentability in both traditional and emergent disciplines and in particular on how the specificities of Filipinos defy disciplinary paradigms and categories. But rather than focus on Filipinos themselves, he directs our attention to historical and institutional conditions that render Filipinos and their forms unassimilated and unrepresented in the first place. In other words, the issue has less to do with Filipinos themselves and deficiencies in their constitution or culture than with a particular set of social relations and historical circumstances that define their terms of intelligibility, but only at the cost of a certain epistemic violence that elides their particularities.

Lowe's reflections on the kinds of challenges that a critical consideration of Filipinos and their formations poses to the constitutive basis of Asian American studies and related disciplines and Campomanes's work on the imbrications of empire, disciplinary production, and Filipino social formations have proven to be tremendously productive in terms of making sense of the unassimilability and unrepresentability of Filipinos. They problematize the narratives of Filipino history and subjectivities and the inscription of Filipinos as “national” subjects or an “immigrant” group because of the way this kind of formulation fails to exhaustively account for the realities of empire and global capital. Together, these critics

foreground the stakes involved in the production of knowledge and the complicity of disciplinary formations in the erasure of empire and the illegibility of Filipino social formations.

But as both Lowe and Campomanes suggest, Filipino intelligibility demands more than incorporation in already established frameworks; it necessitates a reconfiguration of grounding assumptions (based on the frame of nation) and foundational narratives (based on the narrative of immigration and settlement) of various disciplines. In other words, a critical and substantive consideration of Filipino social formations is not simply a matter of “recovery” or “inclusion,” for that leaves in place the same practices of historical narration of Filipino subject and community formation that have proven problematic. Instead, Filipino assimilability is predicated on the disruption and dissolution of these disciplines as presently constituted. What is at stake, therefore, is not simply integrating Filipinos as objects of study into preexisting disciplinary paradigms but questioning the terms of their production and inscription and calling into question the coherence and constitutive basis of various fields of study.

A central focus of this volume is the study of historical and contemporary Filipino social formations in various realms—political, economic, cultural, juridical, academic—as well as the historical and social conditions out of which they emerge. By “social formations” we are alluding not only to the ways Filipinos have been historically constituted—fashioned into a particular kind of subject in order to fulfill U.S. imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist context imperatives—but also to the contradictory ways Filipinos themselves have negotiated the very terms through which they have historically been defined, acknowledged, and recognized. Moreover, the volume puts into focus the competing claims made on Filipinos and the various interests they serve, as well as how these claims figure in broader debates about national identity, citizenship, and culture.

Additionally, this volume grapples with a key problematic conceived around the term “Filipino American,” in particular, the troubled and uneven coupling of these two signifiers and their emergence into being under conditions characterized by extreme imbalances of power. As E. San Juan, Jr., points out: “The Filipino American subject-position cannot be defined without elucidating what the problematic relation is between the two terms which dictates the conditions of possibility for each—the hyphen or nexus which spells a relation of domination and subordination.”¹⁰ It is this historically determined relationship we wish to highlight in this volume as continuing to loom large in the lives of Filipinos in the United States and around the globe and indispensable to understanding the formation of Filipino subjects and communities.

Rather than look to “Filipino American” as a neutral or innocent descriptor of Filipinos in the United States, we locate and read this signifier within a much broader historical context, in imperial and global terms that take into account the

imbrication of U.S. national formation and its imperial history. Our aim, therefore, is not to insist on the commensurability of the two terms, to engage in what Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa describe as “a politics of claiming legitimacy and rights as Americans,” for doing so just ends up reinforcing the myth of exceptionalism that underwrites the United States and disavowing the very conditions that made possible its emergence.¹¹ Instead, in placing these terms alongside one another and in quotes, we wish to shed light on those historical and material conditions that underpin their incommensurability, as well as on the specificity of each term.¹²

Taken together, then, the essays in this volume set out to provide a theoretical and historical understanding of the emergence of Filipino subjects and communities and the forces that shape and constitute them. Investigating a number of sites and contexts—the 1896 Filipino Revolution, Stockton’s Little Manila, and Balik-Aral (Back-to-Study) summer programs, to name a few—the book brings together scholars grounded in a wide range of disciplines, including ethnic studies, history, literature, and legal studies. The volume also brings together scholars who engage with emerging themes that have yet to be taken up substantively in the academy and that touch on ongoing sites of tensions and debate, including comparative racializations, the constitutive powers of law, and genocide as an analytic frame.

By the same token, contributors to this volume demonstrate that a critical consideration of the collective experience of Filipinos not only deepens our comprehension of their social and historical formation but also points to intriguing analytic possibilities that extend beyond the specificities of their history. In an interview included here, Rick Bonus describes the broad social and theoretical relevance of the study of Filipinos this way:

It is about American empire, about wars and colonization, about popular culture and representation, about global capitalism and the recruitment of particularized labor, the processes and consequences of racialization, the productions and use of gendered and sexualized subjects, the formations of collectives and solidarities, the building and maintenance of communities of resistance—all using the complexities and specificities of Filipino/Filipina experience as both products and productive of uneven relations of power.

Building on Bonus’s insight, a critical consideration of the specificities of Filipinos is crucial and needed precisely because the history of this group has become paradigmatic of the majority condition in today’s late capitalist age. The collection of essays and interviews we have gathered in this volume aims to illuminate this history and its broader resonance in terms of the theoretical positions they stake out, the analytic frames they utilize, and the kinds of questions and lines of inquiry they put into focus.

Despite addressing a varied set of concerns, common to them all is their interrogation of conceptual frameworks and dominant narratives that have historically

informed the study of Filipinos and the articulation of emergent paradigms better suited to make sense of the specificities of Filipinos. This volume, in other words, aims to more than just fill a gap, that is, to compensate for the dearth of scholarship on Filipinos, which usually takes the form of uncovering Filipino “accomplishments” or, just as problematic and insidious, documenting Filipino “firsts” (what Campomanes describes as “insignificant although comforting fictions”), as in the notion that Filipinos are the first Asian American group to settle in the United States via the Manila galleon trade between Mexico and the Philippines. Instead, it aims to engage in the more difficult but necessary task of delineating the contours of what it means to exhaustively account for the specificities of Filipinos.

This means continuing to be a disturbing presence by placing the burden on institutional formations and practices to begin to consider Filipino social formations on their own terms, and frustrating institutional and disciplinary expectations by looking to other institutional spaces and arrangements—Chicano studies, Puerto Rican studies, Native American studies, and Pacific Islander studies—and exploring the potential of aligning with these fields of study and the kinds of possibilities these alignments open up. That this volume is being published as part of a series on Asian American History and Culture has not escaped our attention. It reflects the institutionalization of the category “Asian American” and the subsumption of Filipinos within this category. But as Bonus notes in his contribution to this volume, it also reflects the expectation that Filipino scholars draw upon Asian American scholarship, or at least have a conversation with it.

Our aim, however, is to frustrate this expectation, for to continue to conceive of “Filipino American” and “Asian American” as commensurate at this historical juncture overlooks not only the arbitrariness of placing Filipinos within the Asian American category but also connections between Filipino subjects and other colonized subjects, which have yet to be adequately considered and theorized.¹³ Filipinos may indeed share some affinities with Asian American groups, but because of their status as colonized subjects, it makes more sense to group them with Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Conflating “Filipino American” and “Asian American,” therefore, forecloses the potential of generating alternative ways of narrating Filipino history and subjectivities informed by the histories and situated knowledges of other colonized groups that speak to the violence of conquest and empire building and the realities of globalization and that, ultimately, better illuminate the particularities of Filipinos.

IMPERIAL LEGACIES AND FILIPINO SUBJECTIVITIES

The anthology is organized in four sections, each of which addresses a particular theme. The first part, “Imperial Legacies and Filipino Subjectivities,” theorizes the significance of empire as a core category of analysis. The history of U.S.

imperialism constitutes a particularly important site for understanding the subjectivity and self-activity of Filipinos. It created cultural, military, economic, and political ties between the United States and the Philippines, inaugurating, in E. San Juan, Jr.'s words, "this long, weary, tortuous exodus from the periphery to the metropolis with no end in sight."¹⁴ U.S. imperialism also transformed the Philippines into a major source of cheap labor and raw materials, paving the way for the incorporation of Filipinos within the circuits of global capital. In short, U.S. imperialism set in motion a process that structures the lives of Filipinos today, a process that reaches into their lives "not so much like a shadow as like a chain."¹⁵

Tracing the varied articulations of empire in different sites and contexts—the 1896 Filipino Revolution and its resonance with Filipinos today, the figure of the Filipino savage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the experiences of manongs in the 1920s—contributors in Part I demonstrate how U.S. nation building and U.S. empire building are inextricably linked and mutually constitutive, how genocide, conquest, and expansion have been pivotal to the formation of the nation. In doing so, they deepen our understanding of the ways purported "national" categories of race/ethnicity/gender have been shaped by the "international" dynamics and logic of empire building. Empire building, therefore, does not constitute a "tragic but exceptional" episode in U.S. history. At the same time, "the United States emerged not simply through a break with European imperialism but through the establishment and elaboration of its own imperial cultures."¹⁶ In their consideration of the social and historical formation of Filipinos within the context of empire, contributors show in compelling and powerful ways that imperialism is not a social phenomenon of the past. Rather, imperial practices past and present continue to structure social relations today, despite the deep and pervasive denial of the imperial history of the United States.

Jody Blanco's essay, which revisits and reconsiders the legacy of the 1896 Filipino Revolution, starts off this section. In it, Blanco looks to the centennial as an opportunity for reflection on Filipino identity, history, and agency and explores the relevance of this period to the struggles of Filipinos today. According to Blanco, the revolution provides us with a prism to view not only the past but also the future, to consider the changing inflections and elaborations of the term "Filipino," what it meant to nineteenth-century Philippine-born intellectuals, and what it means to contemporary Filipinos. He goes on to assert that a careful and critical reading of the revolution illuminates the interrelated histories of Filipinos and other marginalized groups and anticipates later social movements. This history, then, is significant because it points to what Blanco describes as "new ways of seeing and speaking," to possibilities and prospects for social change as Filipinos continue to grapple with the legacies of imperialism and the machinations of global capitalism.

Blanco's essay is followed by an interview with Oscar Campomanes, who discusses the implications of the self-effacements of empire, which he characterizes not so much as profound and far-reaching but as obvious. Directing our attention to the specificity of U.S. imperialism, Campomanes makes the point that it is this obviousness that makes possible the self-effacements of empire in the first place. He also delineates the ways U.S. imperialism constitutes a particularly important site for understanding the subjectivity and self-activity of Filipinos, including their struggle for "independence" and engagement in a politics of recognition and representation. Finally, Campomanes discusses the limitations of narratives and paradigms that have historically informed the study of Filipinos and points to alternative accounts, including those developed by Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders that situate their analyses of social formations within the context of empire.

In her essay, Nerissa S. Balce contextualizes the emergence of the figure of the Filipino savage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examining discourses of degeneracy and savagery coded in the language of the U.S. Empire, Balce links the figure of the Filipino savage to earlier grammars of American otherness. She elaborates on the notion of the phenomenon of reciprocity, delineating the ways racialized and gendered representations of black and red savagery prefigured and structured representations of Filipino savagery. Balce concludes with a consideration of what she calls postcolonial African American critique, writings of black women writers and ordinary soldiers that illuminate the connection between empire and lynching, between imperial domination abroad and racial violence at home, as a means of establishing and maintaining white supremacy "over the darker races."

In the final selection in Part I, Ruby C. Tapia theorizes the experiences of manongs in California during the early twentieth century in her attempt to illuminate the workings of power and patriarchy and the convergence of race, class, gender, and sex in the lives of this marginalized group of men within the context of European/American imperial discourse. Elaborating on and engaging with feminist critiques of masculinity and nation building, Tapia examines the form that this convergence took in both popular and political discourse and suggests that the mode of racialization specific to manongs cannot be understood in isolation from other social categories but only in relation to them. She is particularly concerned with the violence that it produced, as evidenced by the representation of manongs as an economic threat and sexual menace, which served to consolidate national and racial boundaries and maintain domination. She ends with a discussion of how the history of manongs "reminds us that this nation—and the intersectionality of race-class-gender-sex that reinforces it—always possessed the qualities of its (now postmodern) ghost."

PUBLIC POLICY, LAW, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FILIPINOS

Part II, “Public Policy, Law, and the Construction of Filipinos,” is concerned with the constitutive powers of political institutions and social policies, as well as the historical conditions which give rise to them. Considering a range of public policy issues and their broader implications and significance, it documents how a series of acts and judicial rulings are implicated in shaping the contours of Filipino subjectivities and communities. Filipinos have been subject to immigration quotas, citizenship restrictions, alien land laws, antimiscegenation legislation, and urban renewal policies that helped define and consolidate their nonwhite status. Filipinos, in other words, have been subject to what Sharon K. Hom describes as law’s violence: “Through immigration and citizenship narratives, a system of state-sanctioned death, and an impoverished and partial vision of welfare and social security, law and legal discourses define community and belonging, dignity and survival, and life and death.”¹⁷

To think of law and legal discourse solely in terms of sanctions and prohibitions, therefore, denies and obscures their constitutive powers. In uncovering the historical subjection *and* construction of Filipino subjects on the basis of debates on and enactments of social policies in different historical and social contexts, contributors in this part of the book trace the various manifestations of law’s violence on Filipino bodies, lives, and communities—the construction of Filipinos as a racial and sexual menace, as inhabitants of “blighted” neighborhoods, and as a foreign presence. They are especially concerned with the ways social policy, in the form of particular pieces of legislation and court rulings, has served as a central locus where the racialization and the sexualization of Filipinos have taken place, a vehicle for both consolidating and undermining dominant meanings associated with particular notions of difference. In their readings of pieces of social policy, these works not only shed light on the relationship among and between law, culture, identity, race, gender, and sexuality—as well as on the contradictions and arbitrariness inherent in the establishment of these categories—but also alert us to the role of law as a generative and legitimating social force.¹⁸

Dawn Mabalon assesses the impact of urban policies after World War II on a section of downtown Stockton, California, known as Little Manila, home to the largest number of Filipinos outside the Philippines for most of the twentieth century. Little Manila residents created a neighborhood that thrived until urban redevelopment projects, “slum” clearance, and freeway construction decimated the community beginning in the 1960s. Mabalon documents how the community responded to demolition, pointing out that in the absence of organized opposition, two Filipino immigrants spearheaded efforts for the construction of a Filipino center that eventually became the focal point of the community. Incorporating

personal narratives of Little Manila residents in her analysis, what she describes as “personal stories of loss and grief,” Mabalon notes how the ongoing struggle over Little Manila is a battle not just over space, power, and policy but also over history and memory.

In the final selection in Part II, Angelo Ancheta examines the color lines that have shaped discrimination against Filipino Americans. Ancheta is particularly interested in historical and contemporary manifestations of what he calls “foreigner discrimination” along the lines of race, national origin, language, culture, and citizenship that have served to reinforce a norm of racial exclusion rather than inclusion and to mark Filipino Americans as foreigners excluded from full membership in the nation and the national community. Scrutinizing a number of key court decisions and pieces of legislation, he focuses on major forms of anti-Filipino discrimination—immigration and naturalization restrictions, citizenship-based and language-based discrimination, and the racialization of Filipinos as “perceptual foreigners”—to elaborate on the notion of foreigner discrimination and demonstrate problems associated with it.

RECONFIGURING THE SCOPE OF FILIPINO POLITICS

Part III, “Reconfiguring the Scope of Filipino Politics,” delineates the broad contours of Filipino politics and maps their implications. Precisely because of a long history of political exclusion and institutional neglect, Filipinos have pursued a wide range of political activities and practices that exceed conventional notions of politics. These include participating in anticolonial struggles, labor movements, radical politics, student movements, and homeland politics, as well as engaging in cultural politics in their effort to negotiate with, challenge, and reconstitute power.¹⁹ In doing so, Filipinos show that politics cannot be considered within a narrow framework that reduces the political to a particular mode (e.g., through middle-class institutions or organizations), a limited set of activities (e.g., electoral politics), a fixed geographic space (e.g., the domestic), or a particular site of contestation (e.g., the state or the everyday).²⁰

In documenting the ways Filipinos have engaged in various forms of political activities and practices—namely, those that encompass both national and international contexts, look to culture as a site of political critique and intervention, and take into account multiple colonial histories—the contributions in this section broaden and reconfigure the scope of what is considered political. Additionally, contributors in Part III provide a critical evaluation of Filipino politics, elucidating oppositional possibilities but also collusions and complicities, while at the same time demonstrating that Filipino political activities and practices cannot be understood simply in terms of dichotomies like domination and resistance precisely because of the complexities and contradictions that constitute the political.

This section starts out with an interview in which Theodore S. Gonzalves interrogates the politics of Filipino youth culture, speaking to both the reactionary and the liberatory potential of culture. Given the elision and distortion of Filipino history in conventional historical accounts, Gonzalves specifies how expressive forms of culture take up this burden and serve as important vehicles for the enactment, narration, and expression of history. He also discusses the importance of culture as a generational marker, a way for Filipino youth to negotiate with the values and worldviews of their parents, as well as to claim their own distinct identity. Moving away from celebratory and uncritical readings of cultural forms and practices, Gonzalves makes sense of the participation of Filipino youth in a wide range of expressive forms, including Filipino Cultural Night and theater and their attendant politics, and reflects on the long history of Filipino involvement in black and Latino cultural forms such as the blues, jazz, hip-hop, Latin jazz, and Latin rock.

Dean Itsuji Saranillio examines Filipino “American” politics in Hawai’i—more specifically, the way it serves to both maintain and disrupt the colonial system there and the colonial status of Native Hawaiians—through his analysis of contrasting visions of Hawai’i and Filipino settler history. Situating his critique within the history of the U.S. conquest of Hawai’i, Saranillio contends that in their efforts to assert their Americanness, Filipinos unwittingly align themselves with the U.S. colonial state. He calls for a critical consideration of the position of Filipinos in Hawai’i, in relation not just to haoles but also to Native Hawaiians, and recognition of U.S. colonization not just of the Philippines but also of Hawai’i. He ends his essay with a discussion of the collective efforts of a group of Pinays engaged in a form of anti-imperialist activism that recognizes the intimate link between the colonization of the Philippines and Hawai’i without losing sight of the very different relations of Filipinos and Native Hawaiians to the colonial state.

RESIGNIFYING “FILIPINO AMERICAN”

Part IV, “Resignifying ‘Filipino American,’” provides a critical interrogation of the term—the historical and material conditions that made its emergence possible, the complex forms of negotiations and identifications taking place, and the various contexts in which it is mobilized to designate a wide range of social formations, subject positions, and cultural practices. Notwithstanding the currency of the term and its ahistorical and acontextualized deployments, “Filipino American” constitutes a fluid and contingent social formation with shifting boundaries and meanings. In the same way, “Filipino” is not reducible to a constellation of traits with the Philippines serving as the originary and privileged site of Filipinoness. Instead, it is a signifier that evokes a multiplicity of positions that cannot be construed in the singular.

Taking as the starting point of their analysis the normative claims and boundaries of “Filipino American,” contributors in this section demonstrate that the production, deployment, and redefinition of “Filipino American” continues to be conditioned by a history of U.S. conquest and empire building, U.S. racial formations, and diasporic displacement. They foreground the contingent and discursive nature of “Filipino American,” its various inflections and elaborations, and the ways these are inextricably bound up with questions of empire, nation, race, gender, and class. In doing so, contributors provide us with frameworks whereby we can have a deeper and more theoretically and historically specific understanding of the term “Filipino American” and its usage as a signifier of identity, culture, and community.

Dylan Rodríguez’s essay, which analyzes the constitutive basis of Filipino American studies, begins this section. Taking as his starting point the U.S. genocidal conquest and colonization of the Philippines, Rodríguez aims to map what this encounter means for the field of Filipino American studies in terms of its theoretical and structural coherence. He contends that it is precisely this historical condition that is elided in the field’s conception of “Filipino American” relation and subjectivity. Instead, Rodríguez argues, the field is implicated in and relies on the production of a kind of sentimentality that effaces Filipino American studies’ originary location in genocide for the sake of continuity and coherence. He goes on to make the point that a critical consideration of white supremacist genocide in the Philippines entails a rupturing of the logic of the field that disavows the very conditions that made possible the emergence of the “Filipino American.”

Next, in an interview, Rick Bonus maps the contours of Filipino American studies, a field he characterizes as “heterogeneous, multiply defined, and relationally constructed.” Bonus notes the standard assumptions, categories, and analytic frames that inform Filipino American studies, as well as the many shifts taking place in Filipino American scholarship, including the move beyond the United States as the principal locus of identity and community formation and the framework of immigration and settlement as a way of making sense of the historical realities of Filipinos. He also addresses the basis of the vexed and contentious relationship of Filipino scholars to the institutional formation of Asian American studies, which, for Bonus, is as much a matter of identity as of power, as much a question of stronger identifications with other groups as of the marginal status of Filipinos within Asian America. Putting into focus the creation, processes, and consequences of categorization, Bonus concludes the interview with a discussion of the many ways we can understand the signifier “Filipino American” while recognizing each term’s and each combination’s inflections and elaborations.

An essay by Elizabeth Pisares explores the skepticism over Jocelyn Enriquez’s racial authenticity and loyalty and what this says about the racialization of Filipinos in the United States. Interested in theorizing Filipino invisibility, Pisares contends

that the racial ambiguity surrounding this popular Pinay freestyle artist is actually a condition familiar to Filipino Americans, who, as she points out, “are seen as everything and anything but Filipino.” Enriquez had to deal with accusations of passing first as Latina, then as black, but rather than center her analysis on the question of Enriquez’s culpability, Pisares focuses on the broader context wherein this dance-music artist’s racial fidelity becomes an issue. She argues that Filipinos’ invisibility stems from their classification as Asian American, while their experience of racial ambiguity stems from not conforming to others’ perceptual expectations of Asian Americans. Pisares concludes with a discussion of the ways Filipinos counter invisibility, examining different modes of Filipino self-representation.

Concluding this section is an essay by Lily Mendoza that focuses on the ambiguities of homeland “re-turnings” among college-age second-, third-, and fourth-generation Filipino American youths, what she describes as “the phenomenon of a different breed of *balikbayans* or homeland returnees.” Looking into Balik-Aral (Back-to-Study) summer programs designed to take Filipino American youths to the Philippines to learn about Philippine history, society, and culture, Mendoza examines what it means for these youths inspired by the Philippine indigenization movement to undertake not merely a symbolic but a literal return to a place they have never set foot on yet consider “home.” She asserts that these programs serve as the basis for the reclamation of a previously disavowed history and the emergence of a newfound Filipino subjectivity. As Mendoza notes, however, this process is far from straightforward and unproblematic, providing possibilities for both reproducing and disrupting commonsense identifications with the signifier “Filipino.”

“FILIPINO AMERICAN” CRITIQUE

In putting this volume together, we included contributions from established scholars who have profoundly shaped the scholarship on Filipinos, but the bulk came from emerging scholars. This cohort of young scholars is producing what we consider exemplary scholarship, which bodes well for the future of the study of Filipino social formations precisely because they are in a position to shape the contours and trajectory of this scholarship. We consider their works exemplary for placing under careful and close scrutiny disciplinary formations and epistemologies and highlighting their limitations. In the process of doing so, these scholars are producing works that not only generate new theoretical insights but also suggest new directions and analytic possibilities. We consider their work to represent the best of an emergent body of scholarship that suggests what it would look like to exhaustively account for the specificities of Filipinos.²¹

The publication of this volume takes place as Filipino social formations, as well as the historical and social conditions out of which they emerge, remain largely illegible in both academia and the larger culture, and as Filipinos themselves

continue to grapple with the spectre of invisibility. This elision is neither innocent nor benign but symptomatic of a kind of cultural aphasia that operates in various fields of study and underwrites the theoretical and structural coherence of these disciplines. Nonetheless, we hope that in its vigorous pursuit of “Filipino American” critique, this volume will provide the kinds of critical engagements necessary to render Filipino social formations intelligible on their own terms.²²