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#### Repository Citation

Baldoz, Richard. 2004. "Valorizing Racial Boundaries: Hegemony and Conflict in the Racialization of Filipino Migrant Labour in the United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(6): 969-986.

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# Valorizing racial boundaries: Hegemony and conflict in the racialization of Filipino migrant labour in the United States

Rick Baldoz

## Abstract

This article examines the role of the “racial state” in delimiting the socio-economic mobility of Filipino immigrants in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. I illustrate how racial statecraft was deployed to restrict the access of Filipino immigrants to citizenship, family formation and land ownership through exclusionary racial criteria. I argue that the state instituted ascribed racial categories as the principal means of differentiating the civic status and social resources available to racialized collectivities. Filipino immigrants in the United States offer an interesting case study because of their status as colonial subjects of the United States. The precarious political and racial status of Filipinos made the enforcement of racial boundaries a complex issue that was contested by both whites and Filipinos and eventually led to a prohibition on Filipino immigration to the United States in the 1930s.

**Keywords:** Filipino-Americans; colonialism; immigration; racialization; racial state.

The influx of large numbers of Filipino migrant workers into the United States during the first half of the twentieth century was a direct consequence of American imperial expansion into the Asia-Pacific frontier. As American colonial subjects, Filipinos were exempted from the ‘Asiatic barred zone’ that prohibited other Asian nationals from legally migrating to the United States during this period. Upon arrival, Filipino immigrants would encounter the same racialized system of governance and stratification faced by previous groups of Asian immigrant workers.

Historical studies of racial inequality in the United States have focused on the role that race has played in structuring hierarchical relations between different groups. Unequal access to and allocation of resources and opportunities and the codification of racial boundaries are seen as a key to understanding the dynamics of patterned social inequality. Recent scholarship has explored the transformation of racial categories and meanings across time and space, examining how ideologies of territorial expansion, manifest destiny and cultural hegemony were inextricably fused with notions of racial and national identity (Bonacich 1984; Saxton 1990; Almaguer 1994; Sanchez 1999). The unique history of Filipinos as colonial migrants in the US offers important insights into the evolving nature of racialized boundaries and the reproduction of institutionalized social differences across different historical and political contexts (San Juan 1998; Espiritu 2003; Fujita-Rony 2003).

This article argues that the politics of racialization in the United States was dialectically linked to the process of nation building, demonstrating how the rituals of boundary construction and social closure inherent to both phenomena were mutually constitutive. I use the term racial statecraft to describe how the state codified, enforced, and recalibrated immigration and nationality controls that determined the political and civic standing of racialized collectivities. Following the 'racial formation' perspective developed by Omi and Winant (1994), the struggle for hegemony appears as a central analytical concern, illuminating how struggles over political consent, social authority and entitlement are interfused in the race-making process (Almaguer 1994; Omi & Winant 1994). By examining the enforcement of racial controls regulating access to citizenship, property rights and family formation, this article illustrates how the state constructed and enforced racial hierarchies that delimited the social and political opportunities available to Filipino immigrants who were incorporated into the American social hierarchy during the first half of the twentieth century.

### **Subjects or citizens?**

A succession of exclusionary crusades carried out against Asian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1892 and the Gentleman's Agreement with Japan in 1907. Anti-Asian sentiment would reach its zenith with the creation of the so-called 'Asiatic barred zone' by the US Congress in 1917 that sought to prohibit all Asian immigration to the United States. The nativist lobby would continue to pressure Congress to close various loopholes in the exclusion laws that permitted the entry of Japanese 'picture brides' and allowed Chinese to

circumvent the laws through exemptions for family reunification. A seemingly comprehensive solution was instituted with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, that established the infamous 'national origins quota' which formally merged national and racial identifications into mutually corresponding categories. In practice, the 1924 Act promoted and sanctioned large-scale immigration from Europe as an instinctive and affirmative component of national development. At the same time it unilaterally barred immigrants from Asia, consolidating their status as unassimilable 'aliens ineligible to citizenship' who could not and should not become coequal solidary members of the national community (Hing 1993; Lowe 1996).

The politico-legal trajectory of racial sanctions specifically aimed at Filipinos took multiple forms, adapting to changing political imperatives. At the time of the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, the population of Filipinos on the West Coast was relatively small, mostly limited to *pensionados*, well-educated young men, from the privileged classes of Philippine society who came to the United States to attain a college education. In the years immediately following colonial rule, American sugar interests would recruit Filipinos to work in the large sugar plantation industry in Hawaii. They quickly made up a large segment of the plantation labour force (around 64,000 by 1930) but found themselves stratified into the lowest sectors of the plantation order controlled and disciplined by the Euro-American (haole) directed plantation regime (Sharma 1984). Like other Asian immigrant workers in Hawaii, Filipinos inevitably sought to leave the regimented and racialized world of Hawaii's sugar kingdom in search of better socio-economic opportunities on the US mainland.

By the time of their arrival on the West Coast in the 1920s, Filipinos were already quite familiar with the racialized character of American statecraft. The colonial subjugation of the Philippines had been buttressed by a venomous discourse of national and racial supremacy that legitimated the repressive nature of the American occupation. The annexation of the Philippines raised questions for American authorities about the political status of the newly acquired colonial subjects. Concerns were raised about the potential 'race problems' that might emerge if Filipinos were to be granted US citizenship as a result of colonial acquisition. To circumvent this issue, the US Congress ruled that recently annexed territories such as the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Cuba would be treated as 'unincorporated territories' whose residents were not entitled to American constitutional rights or protections. As a result Filipinos would be classified as American 'nationals' who were free to travel in the United States but were deemed ineligible for naturalized citizenship. In a series of legal challenges during the decades following annexation, Filipinos who had served in the US Navy would challenge the constitutionality of their

subordinate political standing. The US Supreme Court, however, reinforced the colonial ward status of Filipinos through a series of rulings known as the 'Insular Cases'. Filipinos in the US remained ineligible for citizenship until the political exigencies of WWII forced a policy change for those serving in the military (Alegado 1999).

The demand for cheap and docile labour in the burgeoning agricultural sector on the West Coast was the 'pull factor' that led to the influx of Filipinos in the region. The need for Filipino workers gained urgency as previously available labour pools began to dry up, due to the various legal prohibitions barring Chinese and Japanese immigrants who up to that point had been a key reservoir of labour for agribusiness. Filipinos were able to sail under the radar of the 1924 Immigration Act and immigrate to the United States without restriction because of their status as American 'nationals'. Filipinos lacked any formal political rights in the United States and unlike Chinese and Japanese immigrants they had no sovereign national government that could protect their interests abroad. Filipinos were favoured by employers who desired inexpensive, pliable migrant labour who could be disposed of easily after the crop harvest. By 1930, there were more than 45,000 Filipinos working on the West Coast, with most of them living in California, Washington, Oregon, Nevada and Wyoming. The presence of Filipinos did not go unnoticed by nativists who had worked to exclude other groups of Asian workers. Conflicts would quickly emerge over the precise racial status of Filipinos, leading to a series of political battles illuminating the complex and contingent nature of racial statecraft.

Civic leaders, nativist organizations, and union officials responded to these challenges by organizing a 'racial project' aimed at building a hegemonic consensus on the political-legal status of Filipinos in the United States. Using privileged access to the media and their institutional power within civil society, this coalition shaped the public discourse on Filipino immigration. Sensationalized newspaper stories depicting Filipinos as prone to vice and crime with a deviant and often 'aggressive' attraction to white women were accompanied by strident denunciations by opportunistic public officials who warned of an impending 'race crisis' resulting from unrestrained Filipino immigration. These moral panics served as racialized signifying practices that depicted Filipinos as a social and symbolic threat to the American social order. In response to the 'crisis' attributed to unrestricted Filipino immigration, these groups demanded stricter enforcement of the racial boundaries that regulated the inclusion and exclusion of different groups within the national community.

### **Administering the racial state**

Decisions regarding how to classify Filipinos within the American racial hierarchy were the subject of intense political contention. The precise racial status of Filipinos was in a constant state of flux, defined and re-defined, in sometimes contradictory ways at the federal, state, and local levels and within different political, regional, and institutional contexts. This study will draw on recent scholarship emphasizing the primary role played by the modern state in constructing and managing the American racial hierarchy (Omi and Winant 1994; Glenn 2002). The administrative apparatus of the state is endowed with the politico-legal authority to assign different social collectivities into discrete racial categories that shaped their life chances. The 'racial state' ascribes national and racial boundaries with their legitimacy and codifies these socially constructed categories as normative and consensual.

The nation-state regulates the incorporation of foreign immigrant labour in three important ways. First, it institutes a formal standard of exclusion/inclusion, defining who is eligible for entry into the territorial boundaries of the nation. Second, the state adjudicates who will be included within the political community of the nation, through the regulation of access to citizenship rights. Third, the state determines how migrant workers are allocated and incorporated into specific positions in the relations of production and the organization of the labour market (Satzewich 1991). Beginning in the late nineteenth century, racial criteria were given increasing importance in the construction of federal immigration and naturalization policies. This practice suggests a dialectical correspondence between national and racial formation as political and economic elites sought to use the state as an instrument to differentiate categories of the national labour supply along racial lines. The construction of a 'racial state' served a number of political functions that served the interests of Euro-American elites. It valorized a rational and normative system of ascriptive hierarchy that became the basis for white men of all classes to claim full political and economic rights from the state. At the same time the 'racial state' differentiated non-white immigrants, such as Filipinos, as immutably alien and inferior, restricting their access to American citizenship and social resources and protections that came with it (Lowe 1996; Glenn 2002). The politico-legal subordination of Asian immigrants and settlers has been an enduring feature of the racialized construction of American national identity for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Discrimination and segregation targeting Asian immigrants in the United States has fallen under three general categories;

(1) Federal naturalization laws that imposed a racial barrier on Asian immigrants seeking United States citizenship; (2) federal immigration laws limiting migration from Asian and Pacific Island countries; and (3) state and local laws discriminating against Asians, often based on their ineligibility for citizenship (Ancheta 1998, p. 22).

**‘The vile scourge of miscegenation’: Racial purity and the white standard**

Anti-miscegenation laws had been a fixture in the United States dating back to the seventeenth century, and later became a decisive legal sanction that reinforced white hegemony after the Civil War. The purpose of such laws was to prevent the putative ‘race degradation’ that resulted from inter-racial unions as well as to protect the sanctity of white womanhood. The creation and enforcement of these racialized proscriptions reinforced the hegemonic masculinity that conferred status and authority within asymmetrical gender relations during this period. Euro-American men regularly engaged in (often coercive) sexual relations with black, Native American and Chinese women and were rarely subject to prosecution. Similar inter-racial relations were considered perilous and unimaginable for white women whose sexuality was to be carefully managed and protected by male authority figures. These asymmetrical gender entitlements were tacitly endorsed by male authorities as a ‘patriarchal dividend,’ according white men of all classes some measure of control over female sexuality (Pascoe 1991, 1996).

Inter-racial sexuality was considered a dangerous practice in a social order predicated on the immutability of racial difference, calling into question the legitimacy of biologically determined racial boundaries. Originally aimed at criminalizing intermarriage between blacks and whites in the American South, anti-miscegenation laws in the West were modified to fit the racial and ethnic composition of the region. Prohibitions outlawing inter-racial marriage between Asians and whites were first instituted in California as part of the raucous anti-Chinese movement that was sweeping the state during the 1870s. By 1880, the state passed a law adding ‘Mongolians’ to the list of racial groups (blacks, Native Americans) excluded from intermarriage with whites. Later amendments to this law would retroactively invalidate marriages between whites and ‘Mongolians’ that had taken place before the passage of the law as ‘illegal and void’ (Osumi 1982). The elasticity of socially constructed racial boundaries was evidenced by the capacity of the state to transform its institutional hierarchy of racial privilege to fit the changing racial/ethnic demography of the American West.

Filipinos, like other Asian immigrants, were ascribed with a subordinate racial status and, like the Chinese and Japanese before them, they engaged in a series of political and legal struggles to challenge their disenfranchisement. The ambiguous racial status of Filipinos would quickly become the subject of intense public debate, played out during a series of court cases in the 1920s and 1930s in which Filipinos challenged the racialized hierarchy they encountered. The popular scholarly consensus during this period classified Filipinos as members of the 'Malay Race' a category that was different from the 'Mongolian' classification ascribed to Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Filipinos had been a relatively small population during the time of the passage of California's anti-miscegenation laws aimed at Asians, so their unusual racial status was of little concern to the anti-Asian forces who had successfully added 'Orientals' to the miscegenation laws in 1880 and 1908 (Hing 1993, Ancheta 1998). Not surprisingly, the skewed gender ratio of the Filipino immigrant population, which was over 90 per cent male, and the presence of a growing bachelor community led them to cross artificially imposed racial boundaries that denied them access to public life. Social venues such as taxi-dance halls, town carnivals, and movie theatres became contested public spaces where Filipino men sought social interaction and companionship with white women. Taxi-dance halls became common in communities with large Filipino migrant populations. At these events, promoters hired local white women to dance with Filipino men who would purchase tickets at the door, which in turn were exchanged for the privilege of dancing with a female partner for one song. The taxi-dance halls became a notorious site for inter-racial boundary crossing and soon became a key source for anti-Filipino agitation on the West Coast.

Filipinos who attempted to engage in more formal relationships with white women were confronted with the spectre of anti-miscegenation laws that barred inter-marriage between whites and Asians. A number of Filipinos took to the courts, however, questioning the validity of these laws, arguing that the prevailing scientific racial taxonomies of the period exempted them from anti-miscegenation prohibitions. Formal decisions regarding the Filipino 'race question' were often confusing and were interpreted in contradictory ways by local courts and municipalities that initially ruled on the matter. One early opinion on the racial status of Filipinos was recorded in a Los Angeles County Court in 1921 by a Filipino man seeking to marry his white fiancée,

While there are scientists who would classify the Malaysians as an offshoot of the Mongolian race . . . ordinarily when speaking of the "Mongolians" reference is had [sic] to the yellow and not the brown people and we believe that the legislature . . . did not intend to

prohibit the marriage of the Malay race with white persons. We are further convinced of the correctness of our conclusion when we regard the history of the situation . . . at that time (1880) the question of the marriage of white persons with members of the brown or Malayan race was not a live one, and there was no call for a solution. We do not believe that members of the Malayan race are “Mongolians” as that word is used in the . . . Civil Code (Empeno *et al.* 1976, p. 66).

A number of subsequent court rulings would further complicate the racial status of Filipinos as it related to cohabitation with whites. Conflicting interpretations by local courts over the status of Filipinos continued to make enforcement of such laws uneven and ambiguous. In 1933, the ‘Filipino problem’ would finally receive a definitive hearing in the California State Court of Appeals where the higher court’s ruling would set an authoritative legal standard regarding the racial classification of Filipinos, with *Roldan vs. Los Angeles County and the State of California*, serving as the test case. The litigation involved a Filipino named Salvador Roldan and a Caucasian woman named Marjorie Rogers who were denied a marriage licence in Los Angeles. The legal manoeuvring in the case centred on the debate over Filipinos’ contested racial status. The court relied upon the racial classification schemas provided by two of the leading encyclopedias of the time (*Britannica* and *Nelson*) as well as the testimony of various ethnological experts in the field of ‘racial science’. The court’s opinion relied heavily on the work of world-renowned German scientist Johann Blumenbach considered by the court to be ‘the first great ethnologist’. The racial taxonomy developed by Blumenbach divided humans into five distinct races; 1) white or Caucasian, 2) black or Ethiopian, 3) yellow or Mongolian, 4) brown or Malay 5) red or Indian (*Roldan vs. LA County et al.* 1933, p. 4). Under this schema Filipinos were considered ‘Malays’. and were clearly distinguished as a separate category from ‘Mongolians’. The case also featured the testimony of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka who was described in the court proceedings as ‘probably the best known and ablest anthropologist in the United States’. Previous testimony given by Hrdlicka before the US. House of Representatives during its *Hearings on the Non-Assimilability of Asian Races in the United States* was cited in the *Roldan* trial record:

**Chairman:** Neither Filipinos, the Malays, the Chinese, the Koreans, the Japanese, nor the Mongols . . . can be classified as whites?

**Dr. Hrdlicka:** No

**Chairman:** They all belong to the yellow-brown race?

**Dr. Hrdlicka:** They all belong to the yellow-brown race or *mongoloid* race.

**Chairman:** The term ‘Mongolian’ was applied to all the yellow-brown people?

**Dr. Hrdlicka:** To all of the yellow brown people, yes, except that originally the Malays and the American Indians were kept separate, until they were sufficiently studied and shown to possess the same basic characteristics . . . (*Roldan vs. LA County et al.* 1933, p. 5)

Hrdlicka’s testimony was used by the prosecution to buttress their argument that Filipinos should be subject to the anti-miscegenation provision that barred other Asians (Mongolians) from intermarrying with whites. The Appeals Court eventually ruled that Blumenbach’s racial classification system was the dominant racial nomenclature used during the period when the original Asian-white marriage prohibition was passed in 1880. In the light of this decision, the state’s anti-miscegenation laws were deemed inapplicable to unions between Filipinos and whites, and this opened up the possibility of legal marriages, an important entitlement for this largely male, Roman Catholic immigrant population. This victory for the Filipino bachelor community was short lived, however, as nativist forces would quickly press for legislation to close the loophole that allowed Filipinos a temporary respite from one of the institutional barriers that abridged their freedom.

### **Nativist responses**

The anti-Filipino movement gained momentum, as the public presence of Filipinos became more visible. The nativist coalition expressed great interest in the legal challenges initiated by Filipinos who actively contested the racialized practices and institutions that buttressed white hegemony. The anti-Filipino movement was led by a group of battle-tested racial activists who were veterans of previous exclusion campaigns aimed at Chinese and Japanese immigrants. A number of well established nativist groups, labour interests, and patriotic organizations such as the Native Sons of the Golden West, the California Joint Immigration Committee, the American Legion, and the American Federation of Labor [AFL] joined forces, united in their opposition to Filipino immigration. The coalition counted among its members prominent elected officials as well as business and civic leaders that gave the anti-Filipino movement legitimacy.

This elite driven movement wielded tremendous influence due to the power derived from the privileged status and public legitimacy of its members. The coalition’s primary strategy was to lobby state and federal lawmakers to enact restrictive legislation that would further regulate Filipino immigration and settlement (De Witt 1976; Osumi 1982). The *Roldan* case was viewed with alarm by the nativist

coalition, which quickly applied pressure on political officials to pass new legislation to prohibit Filipino-white intermarriage. Within two months of the *Roldan* decision two amendments were introduced in the California legislature that sought to place Filipinos under the same racial proscriptions that applied to other Asian groups in the United States. Resolutions 175 and 176, which called for a prohibition of intermarriage between Filipinos and Caucasians, were quickly ratified in the California State Senate and soon after in the State Assembly, passing in the latter legislative body by votes of 66-1 and 63-0 (Osumi 1982, p. 20). The speedy passage of the resolutions and the nearly unanimous support that the amendments received from the state legislature, was indicative of the hostile social climate encountered by Filipinos on the West Coast during this period. California Governor James Rolph quickly signed the bills into law, which not only prohibited Filipino intermarriage with whites but also retroactively invalidated unions that had been entered into legally before the prohibition was signed into law. The bill mandated that, 'All marriages of white persons with negroes, Mongolians, members of *the Malay race*, or mulattoes are illegal and void'.

Governor Rolph was himself a prominent member of the Native Sons of the Golden West, a nativist organization that sought to make California a 'White Man's Paradise'. The temporary legal victory won by Filipinos in the *Roldan* decision was rendered null and void by the quick and effective organization of the powerful political forces seeking to reinforce the racial boundaries that kept Filipino immigrant workers socially and politically disenfranchised. Similar laws barring Filipino intermarriage were passed in most of the Western states including Colorado, Oregon, and Arizona. Some states went so far as to criminalize informal relationships between Filipinos and whites. For example, in Nevada, Filipino 'co-habitation and fornication' with a Caucasian was considered a crime punishable by 'a fine of up to \$500 and up to one year in jail' (Quinsaat *et al.* 1976, pp. 69-70). Utah, which was one of the last states where marriages between Filipinos and Caucasians were legal, was sent a resolution passed by the California legislature imploring Utah state legislators to quickly pass an anti-miscegenation law aimed specifically at Filipinos. The objective of the California resolution was to prevent Filipinos from surreptitiously evading the strict racial boundaries enforced by more restrictive states, such as California, that had already criminalized race-mixing.

The effects of anti-miscegenation laws aimed at Filipinos extended beyond a simple prohibition on the social relationships of Filipino immigrant workers. These laws functioned as social closures, erecting legal barriers restricting family formation and permanent settlement, and they had decisive ramifications in limiting the socio-economic mobility of Filipinos in the United States. The Filipino population was

predominantly made up of single young men with an unusually high male to female ratio, reaching as high as 40 to 1 in some areas. With such a small population of marriageable Filipina women available, the large population of single young Filipino men, most of whom were Catholic, had few options for family formation within their own community. This limited the potential for dual wage earner households and hindered immigrant entrepreneurship strategies that are dependent on the exploitation of familial labour. Racialized prohibitions on inter-marriage served to differentiate the channels of socio-economic mobility available to Filipinos and white ethnic immigrants in the American class structure.

### **‘This is white man’s country’: The logic of alien land laws**

Anti-miscegenation laws were not the only way in which the racial state sought to proscribe Filipino settlement and mobility in the United States. The implementation of the infamous Alien Land Laws in California illustrates how new social closures were developed to differentiate the access of Asian immigrants to the American opportunity structure. The origins of these land laws prohibiting Asians from owning land or commercial property in America date back to 1913 in California, and similar regulations were quickly adopted in many other West Coast states. The laws were first enacted as a mechanism to deny Japanese immigrants access to ownership of farm land on the West Coast. The Japanese had become the focus of intense anti-Asian sentiment in California where their presence in commercial agriculture was seen as a threat to white farmers. Japanese immigrants frustrated by discrimination and segmentation in the labour market sought independence by entering into small-scale commercial agriculture. This move was looked upon with disdain by many white yeoman farmers, as well as nativist leaders who saw the Japanese presence as unscrupulous competition. The early success of Japanese farmers with certain crops such as fresh fruits and flowers allowed them to gain a measure of market control for these products in certain areas. The growing visibility of Japanese in western agriculture was seen by many as evidence of their sinister designs to dominate the industry and ‘crowd-out’ whites in the process.

The state responded to the pressure from white constituents who felt threatened by the encroachment of Asian immigrants in commercial and community life. The result was the passage of the Alien Land Law in 1913 that prohibited all ‘aliens ineligible to citizenship’ from purchasing or owning land. California Attorney General Ulysses S. Webb made the intent of the legislation clear, claiming the laws were needed to curtail ‘race undesirability’ and were meant to discourage permanent settlement of Asians in the United States. Further

amendments to the Alien Land Laws were passed in 1920 and 1923 to close loopholes used by Asians who purchased land under the name of their American born children or through white intermediaries. Similarly restrictive land laws were established in many other Western states to restrict or discourage the settlement of Asian immigrants. These laws and the racial antagonism they represented were commonplace in the western states by the time of large-scale Filipino migration in the 1920s. The enforcement of these land laws in Washington state illustrates the complex and often contradictory role played at different levels of state apparatus in constructing, valorizing, and policing racial boundaries.

### **‘Orientalizing the reservation’**

The settlement of Filipinos on the Yakima Indian Reservation in eastern Washington State created a peculiar challenge for the enforcement of the state’s Alien Land Laws. Because the Yakima tribe was granted limited sovereignty over the land on the reservation, state and federal authorities faced a jurisdictional problem regarding implementation of the exclusionary land laws. The application of these laws on the reservation faced opposition from Native American landowners who were interested in leasing their land to Filipinos. Filipinos had been recruited to the Yakima Valley to work as farm labour in the region’s booming agricultural sector, which specialized in apples, pears and other fresh fruits that required a mobile and disciplined labour force to harvest the highly perishable crops. The settlement of Filipinos in the region quickly became a source of antagonism leading to a backlash from local white residents who saw the newcomers as an unwelcome menace. The earliest recorded anti-Filipino race riot in the United States occurred in Yakima during 1927. Tensions had been building for some time over the employment of Filipinos in the region and these anxieties came to a boiling point in November 1927. Headlines in the local newspaper described the tense situation, ‘Gang Action Climaxes Weeks of Growing Ire Against Imported Labourers in Competition With White Men... Improper Relations with Girls and Women Aggravates Anger of Townsman’ (*YMH*: 11, Nov 1927). Large armed mobs of men ‘swarmed’ into the town of Toppenish and attacked Filipino workers for two successive days. On the first night of the riots, armed gangs of men broke into the homes of Filipinos smashing up furniture and beating the residents. The Filipinos were rounded up by the mob and ‘told to leave the valley as soon as possible under threat of violent death’. They were then ‘forcibly deported’ by the mob who forced them on to trains leaving the valley. Those Filipinos who remained after the first night of mob action were instructed that ‘they would be hung if found in the valley

after dark' (*YMH*: 11, Nov 1927). The riot was sparked by news that the police in the nearby town of Toppenish,

had uncovered instances where Filipino men have had improper relations with white women and girls. The Filipinos are also said to have repeatedly bothered white women and girls on the streets of Toppenish despite efforts of the police department (*YMH*: 11, Nov 1927).

One Toppenish resident expressing the sentiments of the mob claiming, 'The Filipino has become a nuisance, with their parading up and down the streets and standing on the corners speaking to white girls. . . We do not want the [Yakima Indian] Reservation Orientalized' (*YDR*, 12, Nov 1927). The rioters were eventually contained by a sheriff's patrol when they located a large mob forming outside the neighbouring town of Wapato. The members of the agitated gang 'were heavily armed and apparently determined to kill every Filipino they found'. Sheriff L.D. Luce played down the racial volatility of the confrontations, stating that organized vigilantes were simply 'young men desirous of excitement'. The few Filipinos who remained were placed in police custody and put in jails in nearby Sunnyside to 'protect' them from the roaming mobs (*YMH*, 11, Nov 1927).

Community leaders hoped that the implementation of the alien land law in Washington state would help to diffuse the situation by placing limits on Filipino settlement, which in turn, would help to end the violent confrontations. In 1932, the state's Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs suggested that the unique status of Filipinos as American 'nationals' gave 'strong reasons for relaxing as to them [Filipinos] the restrictions which do not exist in favor of aliens who are barred because of their color or race'. Yakima Reservation Superintendent C.R. Whitlock opposed the relaxing of the alien land laws for Filipinos and received the support of federal authorities to prohibit Filipinos from land ownership. Unable to obtain land through traditional channels, Filipinos began the practice of subleasing land either through white intermediaries or through secret labour agreements with Native American owners in which Filipino farmers were listed as 'employees' of the Yakima tribal allottee. Superintendent Whitlock vehemently opposed these labour agreements, arguing that 'alien subterfuge' allowed Filipinos to illegally circumvent the law.

Racial tensions in the Yakima Valley grew among white farmers who feared competition from Filipino farmers and workers. The growing presence of Filipinos in the region led to fears that 'The colonization of a large number of Filipinos on these lands might easily create moral equities and political pressures that would be hard to overcome' (Nomura 1986-7, pp. 101, 112). Farmers and landowners who

employed Filipinos were subjected to a series of arson attacks and dynamite bombings for cooperating with the 'barbaric black natives'. Superintendent Whitlock, frustrated by the ingenuity of Filipinos in circumventing the law, pushed for an amendment to the alien land law 'to prohibit alien employment as well as ownership, leasing, renting, and sharecropping'. Whitlock received the backing of the local white farmers' organization as well as support from Governor Clarence Martin and US Congressional representatives Marion Zioncheck and Knute Hill. Officials at the US Department of Interior, however, did not offer a clear position on the issue, leaving the question of Filipino leasing rights in limbo. Stalled by the lack of cooperation from the federal government, Washington state officials took matters into their own hands. In 1935, the Governor ordered the State Attorney General to bring charges against individuals who violated the alien land law through the leasing of land to Filipinos. The legality of the prosecutions would again spark a debate about the definition of Filipinos' racial status. The deputy prosecutor of Yakima County argued that Filipinos' unique status as American subjects might possibly exempt them from being defined as 'aliens' in regard to the alien land laws. The prosecutor placed a moratorium on prosecutions until the state could make a definitive ruling on the racial status of Filipinos. In 1937 the state legislature amended the alien land laws to include Filipinos as 'non-citizens of the United States and who are ineligible to citizenship by naturalization'. Labour and cropping agreements between the Yakima tribe and Filipinos were declared illegal, and a small Filipino farmers' cooperative on the reservation organized by community activist Roy Baldoz was shut down by local authorities (Nomura 1986–87, 103–06).

Alien Land Laws barring land ownership and leasing agreements in the western states would continue to restrict Filipino migrant workers from gaining a foothold in small-scale commercial farming. This left them vulnerable to the discriminatory practices in the labour market at the hands of unscrupulous employers. The prohibition on land ownership was yet another barrier erected through the domain of racialized citizenship that limited the opportunity structures available to Filipino migrant workers and forced them to develop parallel paths of social development.

### **Closing the gate**

The nativist lobby saw the increased social and political presence of Filipinos as evidence of a growing problem that threatened to destabilize the volatile social order of the West Coast during the early 1930s. Beginning in 1927 West Coast branches of the American Federation of Labor [AFL] passed resolutions calling on the federal

government to pass legislation barring the entry of Filipino immigrant labour to the United States. Paul Scharrenberg, Secretary-Treasurer of the California State Federation of Labor [CSFL] wrote a number of articles and later testified before Congress on the menace posed by the influx of Filipino labour. Scharrenberg, representing the AFL, argued that Filipinos should be excluded,

First, because they represent cheap and irresponsible labour of a type that cannot be assimilated, and as such they threaten American standards of wages and living conditions.[and] Second, because they have given serious offense to communities in which they have congregated because of their moral conduct (Scharrenberg 1929, p. 52).

The pressure applied by labour and nativist interests paid off, attracting the support of sympathetic allies in the US. Congress. In 1930 Senators Samuel Shortridge of California and Clarence Dill of Washington state introduced an amendment in the US Senate that sought to place severe restrictions on Filipino immigration to the United States. The amendment was later defeated because of concerns that changes to the political status of Filipinos would be unconstitutional. The anti-Filipino movement would continue to push its 'racial project' in the succeeding years, urging state and federal officials to enact legislation that would restrict the 'uncontrolled flood' of Filipino immigration to the United States. The movement adopted a shift in strategy in the early 1930s, declaring their support for Philippine independence as a means of achieving exclusion. Without their 'privileged' status as colonial wards of the US, Filipinos would no longer be exempt from the 'Asiatic barred zone' that prohibited other Asian immigrants from entering the country.

The Filipino exclusion movement allied itself with powerful American commercial and manufacturing interests who sought to gain a competitive advantage by ending the inflow of inexpensive Philippine products into American markets. This strategy paid off with the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934, which granted the Philippines its independence after a ten-year probationary period. With the passage of the bill Filipino immigration to the United States was immediately placed on a quota of 50 persons per year, even less than the 100 per year allotted to China and Japan. The Filipino exclusion movement would not remain satisfied with a prohibition on Filipino immigration alone. The perceived social and political recalcitrance of Filipinos already in America and fears surrounding their growing labour militancy called for harsher measures by the state to manage the continuing social problems posed by Filipino immigration. In response to these concerns, the US Congress passed the

Filipino Repatriation Act in 1936. The Act offered Filipinos living in the United States a free one-way ticket back to the Philippines paid for by the US government. Filipinos who accepted this offer would have to sign an agreement promising never to come back to the United States (less than 2,000 Filipinos actually took up this offer).

### **Conclusion**

The racial state played a fundamental role in structuring the incorporation of Filipino migrant labour as a racialized labour force during the first half of the twentieth century. The immigration and nationality controls implemented by the state codified Filipino migrant workers as a racially distinctive category of the national labour supply denied the same rights and protections accorded to white ethnic immigrant workers. As racialized colonial immigrants who were excluded from access to naturalized citizenship (and the entitlements included with this civic status), Filipinos were subject to strict controls in the labour market as well as in civil society.

The state wielded the power to assign social collectivities to a subordinate classification that circumscribed their access to social resources and entitlements. The state institutionalized an ascriptive hierarchy that maintained white privilege and power through the valorization of socially constructed racial boundaries. The racial state, however, is not simply a monolithic entity, but instead acts as a dynamic and often contradictory constellation of institutions that managed the interests of competing political forces such as agri-business, organized labour and nativist leaders.

More recent studies on Filipino Americans suggest that they continue to occupy a relatively disadvantaged position in the United States compared to other groups in the American racial/ethnic hierarchy (Okamura 1998; San Juan 1998; Espiritu 2003). These scholars have suggested that the legacies of colonialism and under-development experienced by Filipinos at the hands of the US during much of the twentieth century is a key factor in explaining the disadvantaged position of Filipinos in the contemporary American stratification order. Focusing on 'transnational relations', these studies have explored global hierarchies of power, the regulation of Filipino immigrants through restrictive work visas, labour market segmentation and cultural exclusion. These approaches offer important insights into the historicity and pervasiveness of racial hierarchies and challenge the cultural explanations often touted to explain the 'model minority' success story of Asian immigrants in the United States (Choy 2003; Espiritu 2003).

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Jonathan Okamura, Yen Le Espiritu, Michael Omi, Miri Song and Manfred Steger for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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