

# OPINION & FEATURES



## It's always the thought that counts

WITH the faltering economy and cash-strapped consumers, most are now wondering if the spirit of gift-giving will still be alive this holiday season. In fact, kids will probably be a little disappointed to find that 'Santa' didn't give them the latest favorite (and expensive) toy under the tree.

In a report by the *New York Times*, it pointed to the serious problems facing the US economy—consumer spending is falling, and no engine of growth seems like to replace it in the near future.

Many economists expect consumer spending to continue to fall in 2009. American consumers have been cutting back on spending by over 3 percent in the last quarter, the first quarterly decline since 1990 ahead of the 1991 recession and steepest since 1981, also according to the *New York Times*. So, for most of us who have downsized our budget for our Christmas gift lists, we still have a number of options to still make giving a special tradition. One of the things to keep in mind is to be creative and inventive and that is, to look for gifts that cost less but mean more. If all else fails, always remember that it's always the thought that counts—the mere act of remembering to give is a far memorable gift than anything else. (AJP/Press)

**EDITORIAL**

## Filipinos in Obama's America

ON the night of Nov. 4, when Barack Hussein Obama was elected president of the United States, journalist and book author Benjamin "Boying" Pimentel took his eldest son to downtown Oakland where thousands of people were waiting for the official results. They found people celebrating with cheers and tears. After more than 200 years, Americans had chosen a person of color to lead them forward.

*Pareng Barack: Filipinos in Obama's America*, Pimentel's latest book, is about Obama's amazing rise to the presidency and, more importantly, about how Filipinos responded to his campaign and victory. "Often with excitement, sometimes with fear and dread," Pimentel writes.

*Pareng Barack* is also about the Filipino journey in America, "how it has intersected, sometimes collided, with those of other communities, and how it has taken a dramatic turn as America enters a new era of anxiety and hope."

This book came out a few weeks after Obama was elected but it didn't take just a few weeks for Pimentel to write it. He had been pounding the streets and watching the groundswell. With or without Obama's win or defeat, this book could still stand alone to show those intersections and collisions that Pimentel describes. But Obama's win provides Pimentel a starting point, and for Filipinos who chose America to be their home, it also offers landmarks on a cultural and historical landscape, that is, from there to here. Also a timeline from then

to now. that her daughters were about to join her in the United States, she wanted a 'strong leader.' But eventually she also admitted to Fran, she simply could not vote for a black man. 'I just don't trust them. 'Di ba sila 'yung laging nanggugulo? Aren't they troublemakers? They're so violent.'"

In the chapter *American in Living Color*, Pimentel writes about how Nobel Prize winner for literature, Toni Morrison, a black woman, noted that many newcomers readily embraced American society's long-held prejudices against blacks. He also shares what Asian-American civil rights lawyer Bill Lee told him: "Immigrant communities generally tend not to know the history and to buy into the biases and prejudices of the dominant group. Unfortunately, becoming American often means buying into the prejudices. They want to identify upward. They don't want to identify with those at the bottom."

Something like that fable about the fly that alights on a carabao and suddenly thinks he's a carabao. (It's better told in Filipino.)

But it's not that way all the time. Pimentel digs into the "racial wedge" that Asian-Americans occupy, that uncomfortable in-between mezzanine position where they are expected to be loyal to their superiors and demanding of those below.

Pimentel's book also deals with other racial and ethnic groups. He writes, "Obama's victory is significant for another important reason. With the steady growth of Latino and Asian communities, there will no longer be a racial or ethnic majority in the United States in less than 50 years. A biracial leader with a deep personal experience of life in the Third World, Obama, many hope, could prepare the nation for that coming change."

*Lessons in Patriotism and Forgiveness* is a poignant chapter. Here Pimentel explores his experience as a Filipino whose father endured suffering during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, and then reflects on his own encounter with Japanese-Americans who suffered ostracism and internment in the US.

In *From the I-Hotel to Powell Street* Pimentel revisits the bygone milieu of Carlos Bulosan (*America is in the Heart*) and enters into the world of the aging World War II Filipino veterans. Powell Street in San Francisco is where these veterans spend their winter years. I have been there myself and it's really a tearjerker.

Toward the end, Pimentel writes about his family and waxes sentimental. He muses: "In the end there were more people who were ready to move on, to break ground, to reimagine the United States, to redefine America. It will be Obama's face and voice that my sons will see and hear on television and on the Internet over the next four years, maybe longer. It will be *Pareng Barack* who will play a critical role in defining my sons' future in America." (*Inquirer.net*)

## Liking America again

PAGE A1 ◀

through the media shaped a lot of what we defined as sexy.

There was something about American women in the movies that was especially attractive to the Filipino male. Unlike Filipinas, they seemed aggressive, much more expressive and overtly affectionate, not to mention more abundantly endowed physically. They had an ephemeral "bitch-goddess" quality that defined what we adopted as our standards of beauty and lust.

America was also the source of good music. I memorized the original album of *West Side Story* from beginning to end. I thought it was one of the greatest musical works ever created. I still do. I remember my dad playing George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* on the piano. I adored pop music as well.

Pop and rock-and-roll have been constant influences and sources of joy and inspiration to me all these years. They were powerful forces in molding my musical taste. I thought Motown's soul music was one of the greatest musical genres ever. Jazz was simply out of this world. My musical idols were mostly American—Stevie Wonder, Frank Sinatra, Frank Zappa, Billy Joel, Duke Ellington, Quincy Jones, Ella Fitzgerald, Steely Dan, and so many others.

The greatness of America extended to other fields as well, such as sports, science, fashion and style, and the arts. Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Albert Einstein, Any Warhol were just a few of my personal idols. But to me, the greatest gifts that America exported to the world were the humanist concepts of equality, justice, opportunity, freedom and self-determination—values I held deep in my heart. Because of these, I held America in the highest esteem and affection.

America was the land of the possible where cutting-edge ideas were conceived and made flesh. I wanted to spend my life there. After I got married, my wife and I had planned to settle there. We even got green cards.

But as my love affair with the "land of the free" was going on, there were events taking place in the Philippines that demanded a wider, more realistic view of my sentiments and relationship towards the US vis-à-vis my own country. The First Quarter Storm in the early '70s opened my eyes to America's imperialist motives in coming to the Philippines—something the Zaide history

books we read in school never discussed honestly. Its support of the Marcos dictatorship was a shocking reality to me, who thought that the very existence of the dictatorship was a stark contrast to everything America professed to hold dear.

In fact, it was during the last days of Marcos when Ronald Reagan was still vacillating on whether the US was going to recognize the new Cory government that I first contemplated giving up my green card. I could not believe that Reagan, who was scheduled to visit the Philippines, had said that there was cheating on both sides! Luckily, Senator Lugar's message to Marcos to cut and cut clean saved the day somewhat for the US, although many of us felt it had no other choice but to do what it did.

During the Cory years, I campaigned against the renewal of the US bases treaty. A song I wrote for APO called American Junk said it all as far as I was concerned. The euphoria of people power ringing in a new government was a political, cultural and a seminal coming-of-age for me. Senator Manglapus put it so well when he used the metaphor of "killing the great white father" to describe our process of weaning away from the security of having American bases in our country. I felt that we, as a people, were coming into our own.

America in my eyes was still a great nation, but I had now fallen in love with my own country. I promptly gave up my green card after the failed December coup led by Honasan where we almost lost our newfound freedom. I felt that I personally had to be present here to protect our freedoms by giving up my escape hatch.

The Clinton years were great as far as my sentiments about America were concerned; I thought that the US generally stood up for the right values as far as world affairs were concerned. Except for a few places, the world loved America. Clinton epitomized American charm at its best. In my eyes, the Lewinski affair did nothing to diminish Bill Clinton's reputation. Politically speaking within the US context, I am a deep, left-of-center Democrat who is more forgiving of sexual peccadillos than war crimes.

When George W. Bush came to power, I was close to losing all my affection and respect for America. I was angry at this nation that professed the values of Lincoln and JFK but acted out the rhetoric of Rush Limbaugh and

other Neo-cons. The sympathy generated by 9-11 quickly dissipated after Bush's invasion of Iraq under false pretenses. I was awakened to the reality that with its invasion of Iraq, the suspension of some of the human rights of its own citizens, its policy of torture, Guantanamo and its arrogant treatment and disdain for the UN, America was, like Germany under Hitler, capable of becoming a fascist state.

America, she of the Statue of Liberty, the country of Jefferson and everything associated with an open and free society, was not a special idea after all. It, too was fallible and had its own fatal weakness like every other nation. Many times, I pondered with great distress on the fate of the world—with the only super power behaving so badly.

The Bush legacy with its hypocrisy and right-wing excess will hopefully be just be a blip, an aberration—though a costly one—in America's history.

The spectacular rise and triumph of Barack Obama has made a lot of people, including myself, take a second sympathetic look at America. The US, with its image battered all over the world, its morale sunk so low, and its power and influence diminishing, could still spring a fabulous surprise on the world—and on itself.

I was ecstatic when Barack Obama won the presidency. To me it was a sign that America had come back to its senses, awakened to its greater self and touched base with what it preached. A black man with the middle name of Hussein, of mixed parentage and an alien past, has won. That makes me consider that perhaps the American dream is not yet a spent force.

This single event has turned the world around a considerable degree. Once again, I am in awe of the US and its capacity to correct itself. I have started to revisit American authors, artists, books and movies that I sometimes consciously bypassed in protest during the Bush years. I am liking America once again.

The world is on to a new beginning. The world's most powerful person is black, the richest is an Indian, and the fastest-rising region is Asia. A still-powerful though more benign America playing its part in it will hopefully be of great benefit to the world. ■

### HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

**ASIAN JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS**

**Main Office:**  
1150 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90017-1904  
Tel: (213) 250-9797 • Fax: (213) 481-0854  
e-mail: info@asianjournalinc.com  
http://www.asianjournal.com

**Manila Office:**  
Suite 208, The Manila Bank Corp., Bldg.  
6772 Ayala Ave., Makati City 1226  
Tel.: (632) 893-1720 • Fax: (632) 813-8746

**New York and New Jersey:**  
5 Penn Plaza, Ste. 1932, New York, NY 10119  
Tel.: (212) 655-5426 • Fax: (212) 655-9241

**Northern California:**  
841 San Bruno Avenue West, Suites. 12-14  
San Bruno, CA 94066  
Tel.: (650) 583-6818 • Fax: (650) 583-6819

**Las Vegas Sales Office:**  
3700 W. Desert Inn Road  
Las Vegas, NV 89102  
Tel.: (702) 792-6678 • Fax: (702) 792-6879

**2500 Plaza Five, Harborside Financial Center,**  
Jersey City, NJ 07311  
Tel.: (201) 484-7249 • Fax: (201) 484-7201

<b>ROGER LAGMAY ORIEL</b> Publisher & Chairman of the Board	<b>CORA MACABAGDAL-ORIEL</b> President & Executive Editor
<b>BELLE M. SISON</b> Executive Vice President Los Angeles Asian Journal	<b>MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA</b> Senior Vice President Los Angeles Asian Journal
<b>IVY MANALANG</b> Vice President - Marketing	
<b>MOMAR VISAYA</b> Editor-in-Chief	<b>JOSEPH PERALTA</b> Associate Editor
<b>SHARON ANN BATHAN</b> Features Editor	<b>MARIA LOURDES HALILI</b> Advertising Editor
<b>DANTE SAMBLAY</b> Art Director	<b>ANDY TECSON / TED TALAG</b> Photographers
<b>BANDER LAW FIRM, LLP</b> Legal Counsel	

**ADVERTISING AND ADVERTORIAL POLICIES**

Asian Journal Publications, Inc. ("AJPI") reserves the right to refuse to publish, in its sole and absolute discretion, any advertising and advertorial material submitted for publication by client. ("Client's Material")

Submission of an advertisement or advertorial to an AJPI sales representative does not constitute a commitment by AJPI to publish a Client's Material. AJPI has the option to correctly classify any Client's Material and to delete objectionable words or phrases.

Client represents and warrants that a Client's Material does not and will not contain any language or material which is libelous, slanderous or defamatory or invades any rights of privacy or publicity; does not and will not violate or infringe upon, or give rise to any adverse claim with respect to any common law or other right whatsoever (including, without limitation, any copyright, trademark, service mark or contract right) of any person or entity, or violate any other applicable law; and is not the subject of any litigation or claim that might give rise to any litigation.

Publication of a Client's Material does not constitute an agreement to continue publication. Client agrees and covenants to indemnify AJPI and its officers against any and all loss, liability, damage, expenses, cost, charges, claims, actions, causes of action, recoveries, judgments, penalties, including outside attorneys' fees (individually and collectively "Claims") which AJPI may suffer by reason of (1) Client's breach of any of the representations, warranties and agreements herein or (2) any Claims by any third party relating in any way to Client's Material.

AJPI will not be liable for failure to publish any Client's Material as requested or for more than one incorrect insertion of a Client's Material. In the event of an error, or omission in printing or publication of a Client's Material, AJPI shall be limited to an adjustment for the space occupied by the error, with maximum liability being cancellation of the cost of the first incorrect advertisement or republication of the correct advertisement.

Under no circumstances shall Asian Publications, Inc. be liable for consequential damages of any kind.

ASIAN JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS, INC. publishes the Los Angeles Asian Journal, published twice a week; the Orange County and Inland Empire Asian Journal, Northern California Asian Journal, Las Vegas Asian Journal and the New York / New Jersey Asian Journal which are published once a week and distributed to Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange Counties, Northern California, Las Vegas and New York and New Jersey respectively.

Articles published in this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher. Letters to the Editor are welcome. Letters must contain complete name and return address. The materials, however, are subject to editing and revisions.

Contributions and advertising deadlines are every Mondays and Thursdays. For advertising rates and other information, please call the L.A. office at (213) 250-9797 or the Las Vegas Sales Office at (702) 792-6678 or send us an email at info@asianjournalinc.com