

# What does Philippine Independence Day Mean to FilAms?

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO  
AJPress

Photos by BERT C. JAURIGUE

A few days from now, the 111th Philippine Independence Day will be celebrated on June 12. The celebrations will not only be in the Philippines but in many countries around the world, wherever there are large pockets of Filipinos.

Here in America, from the East to the West Coast, tens of thousands of Filipinos and those with some Filipino blood in their ancestry are going to have their own festivities to mark the special day. More than a century ago on June 12, 1898, General Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed the Philippine Declaration of Independence from the colonial rule of Spain in Kawit, Cavite. The event saw the first unfurling of the National Flag of the Philippines, and the performance of the Nation's National Anthem, now known as *Lupang Hinirang*.

The declaration, however, was not recognized by the United States or Spain, as the Spanish government ceded the Philippines to the United States. The United States recognized Philippine independence on July 4, 1946 in the Treaty of Manila. Thus, Independence Day was observed in the Philippines on the July 4 anniversary of this event until 1962 when, upon the advice of historians and at the urging of nationalist politicians, President Diosdado Macapagal designated June 12 as the country's Independence Day.

In the United States, earlier generations of Filipino immigrants did not celebrate Philippine Independence in significant ways. However, during the past two decades, Philippine Independence has been widely celebrated among Filipinos in the United States and is now a major event for many FilAms to rekindle their roots and heritage and generate cultural awareness for Filipinos.

The largest among Philippine Independence celebrations in America takes place in New York City every first Sunday of June. Traditionally held along Manhattan's Madison Avenue from 23rd to 40th Streets, the culmination of the preparation, the Grand Parade, Street Fair and Cultural Show, is the biggest celebration of Philippine Independence outside the Philippines. The 2009 Philippine Independence Day Parade in New York City took place last June 7th. The celebration in Northeast U.S.A. includes not only New York but also the twelve states under the jurisdiction of the Philippine Consulate General in New York, namely, Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

In 2008, about 30 NYPD officers of Filipino descent participated in the parade. NYPD police officer Tony Roxas told the Asian Journal last year, "I look forward to this event every year. I'm so proud to be a Filipino. I'm one of the proudest Filipinos you'll ever meet."



show the world that we can be good stewards of our independence. Like most Filipinos who have immigrated to America, I have changed. I have imbibed the American culture and have become more disciplined and have had the American mindset --that of being open to ways I can help the government serve the majority, rather than always asking what the government can do for me. I pray that our kababayans back in the Philippines will also have this inner change, no more corruption, ningas kugon and crab mentality," said Angelo.

"The importance of remembering where you came is what we celebrate during Philippine Independence Day," said Alberto Cordero. "For Filipinos, wherever we are in the world, it is important to know who we are. Our culture is what makes us distinct as a people. It is the way we connect with people in society. If we don't preserve and celebrate our Filipino culture, we will be lost in an ocean of cultures," he said.

For state employee and US citizen Cristy Cardeno, Philippine Independence Day will always be meaningful. "My roots are in the Philippines so I'm happy to celebrate the day with the rest of Filipinos around the globe. We should celebrate the fact that we have independence, that we have our own government and that we Filipinos can decide whatever is important to our country," stated Cristy, who also plans to have dual citizenship in the near future. "It's funny how, since I have come here to the US, I love watching Filipino shows and movies. When I was still living in Manila, I hardly ever watched Filipino TV shows, preferring to watch Western shows. *Parang hindi ka class* when you watch *Tagalog* telenovelas and variety shows. But now, I enjoy watching TFC. It connects me to my homeland," admits the young mother of two.

The same patriotism is shared by Joriza Valenzuela, an immigrant and office manager in LA. "I do consider Philippine Independence Day a very significant day. In fact, much more now that I am in the US, rather than when I was still living in the Philippines. It is ironic that I have become more Filipino when I immigrated to California. *Dati-rati mapanglait ako sa Pilipinas*. But now, I have become so defensive when people speak negatively about the Philippines," shared Joriza.

Willy C, an employee of a Bank of America subsidiary and an American citizen, is excited to celebrate Independence Day. "We will go to our church on Sunday with the men wearing *Barong Tagalog*, and our ladies wearing *Filipiniana*. That will identify us as Filipinos and we're proud of that, of what we are and where we came from. We must celebrate our culture and preserve it. That is why I teach my two children to speak *Tagalog*, specially at home, although they were born here," says Willy. "My wish is that we will have a big, grand celebration every June 12 in LA --with parades, marching bands

etc --so that people of other races here in LA will be more aware of Filipino culture," he added.

Theresa Lejano Cordero, a marketing executive from the Valley, says celebrating Independence Day for her "is not so much remembering what happened (111 years ago when Aguinaldo proclaimed Philippine independence), but it's more of being reminded that I am Filipino and will always be Filipino, even if I have been an American citizen for many years now. We celebrate Independence Day to remind us and our children about our Filipino culture."

Yes, the same nationalistic spirit lives within each Filipino, wherever he is in the world. Celebrating Philippine Independence Day is more than coming out in our *Barong Tagalogs* and *Ternos* on June 12, unfurling our flag, singing *Lupang Hinirang*, and partaking of an array of Filipino delicacies. By celebrating as one people in America, we can revive our love for our homeland, generate more awareness and appreciation for our culture in our community and connect to mainstream America. We may be Americans now, but we will always be Filipinos. Let's celebrate! ■



For community leader Loida Nicolas Lewis, the celebration is much needed in the community because "it encourages us to be proud that we are Filipinos."

In California, there will also be festivities to celebrate the event. The Bay Area Philippine Independence Day Celebration 2009 will be held this weekend from June 13-14 at the Civic Center Plaza, San Francisco, CA. This annual celebration is the Bay Area and California's best and grandest celebration of Philippine Independence.

In Los Angeles County, a grand celebration will be held at the Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center grounds on June 9. In the evening of the same day, an Independence Grand Ball will be held at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel & Suites, Downtown Los Angeles, which will be graced by Filipino dignitaries and the who's who in the LA FilAm community. Invitations to the event call for all Filipinos "to manifest a deep sense of national commitment and patriotic connection to our country, the Philippines."

Angelo Lagumen, Assistant Vice President of a Korean-owned mortgage company and now a US citizen, admits that he celebrates the day along with other FilAms. "I take pride in being Filipino, that is why I am planning to soon apply for dual citizenship. However, I do hope to see some major changes in our government and in our people to

Filipinos across the United States and all over the globe will be celebrating the 111th year of Philippine Independence this Friday. Some will celebrate with lavishness, others with a simple, yet meaningful commemoration. However which way, one fact glaringly remains -- our national pride and love of country will stay with us wherever we may be. The Asian Journal MDWK Magazine joins our kababayans in proudly waving our flag, our roots and our identity through this week's issue. ■

Publisher's Note

In Commemoration