

The Filipino Community

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The Filipino Community in the greater Los Angeles Area

FILIPINOS HAVE been part of the greater Los Angeles landscape since the early 1900s. Since then, a number of Filipino enclaves have developed throughout the Southern California region. As decades progressed, the members of the Filipino community who have chosen to make the greater Los Angeles area their home showed a trend of gravitating towards Filipino enclaves. In the past decade, however, there has been a pattern of Filipino population decline within the same enclaves and a move towards newer and multiethnic enclaves.

Brief Look at the Filipino Community in Southern California

Though most of the Filipinos living in Southern California today made their residence in the United States after the Immigration Act of 1965, immigrants from the Philippines established settlements in the region decades before. A 1924 immigration law prohibited any immigration from Asian countries. Since the Philippines was U.S. territory, however, immigration to the United States was not restricted for Filipinos. Between the years of 1924 and 1934, an additional law restricted the number of Filipinos who could enter the States to 50 per year. The first substantial wave of Filipinos settled in Los Angeles in the 1920s. By the first quarter of the 20th century, a small Filipino enclave was developing in the impoverished Downtown area, between Main and Los Angeles Streets. Due to racially restrictive covenants and discrimination, this was the only area in Los Angeles that the rental market allowed them to rent at that time. As time progressed, however, Filipinos began to leave that area and move north towards Sunset Boulevard and northwest towards Temple and Alvarado Streets. By the 1940s, new U.S. laws helped improve the assimilation of Filipinos into American society. Laws prohibiting interracial marriage with whites were overturned and the U.S. Supreme Court declared "the restrictive covenants on property deeds that had legally prohibited homeowners from selling or renting to people who were not white" unenforceable (Allen + Turner 1997, 146). Though more new housing was being built in the city at that time, Filipinos who wished to buy houses still faced opposition from some owners who were reluctant to sell property to them. Since the turn of the century, immigration from the Philippines has been low, yet steady. Immigration from Asian countries was low in comparison to that from Western nations, until U.S. immigration policies were changed in the 1960s.

The Immigration Act of 1965 widened the door for immigration from Asian countries like the Philippines. The Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act nullified a system of quotas favoring Western countries and established a limit of 20,000 immigrants per year for each country in the Eastern Hemisphere (Allen + Turner 1997, 38). The law favored relatives of Asians who already lived in the United States, allowing them to be the primary Asians eligible for application for entry into America. With a growing economy in Southern California and the changes in immigration law, the number of Asians in the Los Angeles region multiplied over the years following 1965.

As the number of Filipinos in Los Angeles grew, Filipino predominant areas, or enclaves, developed. One of the oldest enclaves in the City of Los Angeles is the district that is now known as "Historic Filipinotown." Filipinos began to make a more visible presence in the area just before the 1950s when they were poorer and restricted from renting elsewhere. The population of Filipinos in the area increased in the early 1960s as Filipino residents of Bunker Hill were evicted to make way for upscale office, bank and hotel developments. By the 1970s, newly arrived Filipino professionals were settling the area. Filipino organizations and establishments catering to the increasing Filipino population, such as Luzon Plaza, also sprung up. The Temple-Alvarado area, however, was not the only region in Southern California that became visible and known as a Filipino enclave.

With the help of the United States Navy, large concentrations of Filipinos also developed in West Long Beach and Oxnard. Young Filipino men, who enlisted in the U.S. Navy since the beginning of the 20th century, viewed the Navy as a way to improve their position and technical expertise. They also saw it as a means to quick U.S. citizenship for themselves and entry for their close relatives as U.S. permanent residents. The primary Filipino enclave connected to enlistment in the U.S. Navy is in West Long Beach. According to The Ethnic Quilt, a few hundred Filipinos were recorded to have lived in the same area in the 1940 census. It is not clear, however, whether or not these Filipinos lived close to the harbor as cannery workers or Navy personnel. During the 1950s and 1960s, the number of Filipino U.S. Navy personnel stationed in Long Beach grew. Another location that has a large Filipino population with ties to the U.S. military is Oxnard in Ventura County. The Filipinos stationed in that area are connected to either the Point Mugu Naval Air Station or the Construction Battalion center in Port Hueneme. By the end of the 20th century, however, the Filipino population connection to the U.S. military has waned as more Filipinos, not directly related to the U.S. Navy, have begun to immigrate to the States and into the same enclaves.

A Closer Look at Historic Filipinotown

One of the oldest Filipino enclaves in the City of Los Angeles can be found in an area near the W. Temple St. and S. Alvarado St. intersection. On August 2, 2002, a dedication ceremony was held upon the unanimous approval by the Los Angeles City Council for the designation of this area as "Historic Filipinotown."



Historic Filipinotown is situated in a multi-ethnic area northwest of Downtown L.A. This area is bounded by U.S. Highway 101 to the north, Glendale Blvd. to the east, Beverly Blvd. to the south and Hoover St. to the west (Figure 1). It stretches approximately 1.5 miles from east to west and 0.5 miles from north to south.

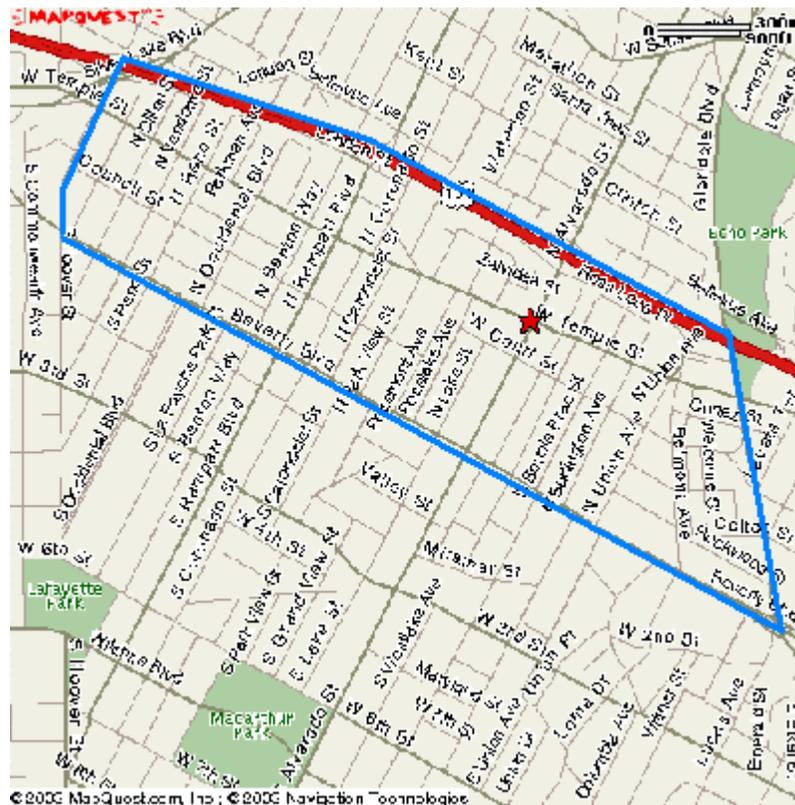


Figure 1 Boundaries of Historic Filipinotown

Due to its close proximity to the downtown area, many who work in Downtown L.A. and live in the surrounding communities to the north and to the west, such as Glendale, Silver Lake and Hollywood, have to drive through Historic Filipinotown on a daily basis. As a result, many businesses and restaurants can be found on or around the three major arteries of the area — Temple St., Beverly Blvd., and Alvarado St. The residential areas, which lie between the heavily traveled roads, are populated by a combination of single-family houses, duplexes, low-rise

condominiums and townhouses. A majority of which were built prior to 1950 and are aging, in need of maintenance and repair.

A Drive Through Historic Filipinotown

Driving through the major arteries of Historic Filipinotown, one can see the commercial vitality of the area and can get a feel for the different ethnic groups that are predominant there. Heading south on Glendale Blvd., just past Echo Park, we drive under the 101 Highway overpass and come upon the Temple St. and Glendale Blvd. intersection. To the right, on the northwest corner is a Chevron gasoline station. It is one of two gas stations that used to service that intersection. The gas station that used to be located on the southwest corner is now an empty lot. To left, on the northeast corner, are tennis courts, where Filipinos are known to occupy most, if not all courts on the weekends, especially during the morning and afternoon hours. Continuing south, we pass by a few auto shops and come to the end of the main portion of Glendale Blvd. and reach the point where the old, concrete 1st St. bridges connect to Beverly Boulevard (Figure 2).



Figure 2 1st St. Bridge (a downtown skyscraper in background)



Figure 3 Shot of Downtown LA's Skyline from Atop the 1st St. Bridge

Just to the east of the bridges on 1st St., sits the troubled Belmont Learning Center. Turning right and heading west on Beverly Blvd., we drive up a rather steep incline — to the left (south) is the Belmont High School campus and to

the right is the United Firefighters of Los Angeles City headquarters. Continuing west, towards Union Ave., we come upon a Filipino mural to the left (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Filipino Mural Along Beverly Blvd.

To the right, north on Union Ave., is the fairly large Our Lady of Loretto parish (Figure 5) and elementary school (Figure 6), the closest parish to the sparkling new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Downtown L.A.



Figure 5 Our Lady of Loretto Church



Figure 6 Our Lady of Loretto Elementary School

Back at the intersection of Union and Beverly, is a small Filipino restaurant on the southwest corner, Little Ongpin. A couple years ago, a driver lost control of his/her car and inadvertently drove into the restaurant one afternoon. Thankfully, no pedestrians on the sidewalk or patrons inside the restaurant were struck. Still heading west, we come upon Alvarado St. To the right, is a gas station on one corner, and a medical clinic housing several doctors and a pharmacy on the other. To the left, on the southwest corner is a plaza with a few stores including a Winchell's donut shop (Figure 7).



Figure 7 Intersection of Beverly Blvd. and Alvarado St.

Just to the south of that intersection, at the next major intersection (3rd St. and Alvarado), is St. Vincent Hospital. Continuing west, we begin to see less of a Filipino presence and more of a Latino flavor. Before the next major intersection, on the left hand side, sits a one-story building that used to house a Filipino nightclub. Approaching Rampart Blvd., we see the "World Famous Tommy's Burgers" stand to the right. On the opposite corner is a Taco Bell. Further west on Beverly are a few Ranch markets (Figure 8) and several other small shops.



Figure 8 One of Several Ranch Markets in the Area

Turning right on Rampart, heading north, we head to back to Temple St. Just north of the intersection is an on-ramp to the 101 South. To the left is a Mobil gas station and the next block over sits the infamous L.A.P.D. Rampart police station. In a comment about the local precinct, a resident within the area said, "I find it hard to trust the local LAPD due to the scandals with some of the officers from the Rampart precinct that were exposed. I don't know if you'll be calling the proper peace officers when you call the police." Also at the intersection, are a few restaurants and businesses such as a Pizza Hut, a Chinatown Express, and a closed-door pharmacy that primarily supplies medication to hospitals and convalescent homes. Making right-hand turn, we head east on Temple. At this point we can definitely see the meshing of the Latino and Filipino populations. On the right hand side, are a few Filipino businesses including two restaurants — Nanay Gloria and Bahay Kubo — and a small Filipino market. In between these establishments however, are Latino establishments such as a Ranch market. To the left, along Temple, is Rosemont Elementary School. According to The Ethnic Quilt, there is a wall mural across from the school that was created by "about twenty young Filipino Americans" that "dramatizes the choices between a good life and a bad one that today's youth must make." The mural, could not be seen, however, as we drove by. Traveling further east on Temple, we come upon Alvarado St. Many years ago, there used to be four different gas stations on each corner of the intersection. Today, only two remain, one Shell and one Arco station. About 10 years ago, a McDonalds opened up on the northwest corner that a gas station vacated. The southwest corner was also a site that was left undeveloped for a very long period of time since the gas station there went out of business. Not too long ago, however, new buildings have been springing up on and near to that corner, including a few apartments and an EI

Pollo Loco that just opened last week. This intersection was also the site of a horrifying accident about a decade ago. One afternoon, as a school bus full of children was eastbound on Temple, across from the McDonalds, a part protruding from a westbound city garbage truck that had suffered a mechanical failure, tore through the left side of the bus, injuring numerous children. Such a memory is emblazoned into the minds of those familiar with the area. Continuing east, we approach Bonnie Brae St. To the left is the Filipino owned Luzon Plaza and Ramos Villages (Figure 9). To the right is a Carnation factory from which sweet, warm aromas radiate.



Figure 9 Luzon Plaza and Ramos Villages

Further on east, heading back towards Glendale Blvd., is a hospital (formerly known as Cigna) on the left-hand side. On the hospital's gates, by the sidewalk, are Spanish advertisement banners from the hospital. Across the street, to the right, is "the oldest ethnic organization," the Filipino American Community of Los Angeles and continues to function as a social-service center. Past the center, also on the right-hand side is a bright green building that formerly housed a Chinese ran market called BCD Market. The Chinese family that ran the market moved away to Alhambra a few years ago. The building now is home to a Latino managed business. Driving down the hill on Temple, more Latino owned business could be seen on the both sides of the streets.

Though the area has been designated as Historic Filipinotown, it is predominantly Latino, where Filipinos "constitute only about a fifth of the population" (Allen 146). Despite its boundaries, numerous other Filipino restaurants and businesses can be found surrounding Historic Filipinotown such as Goldilocks Bakery on Vermont Ave.

Historic Filipinotown Census Indicators

There are several census tracts that make up Historic Filipinotown. The five tracts that are analyzed in Table 1 are 1958.02, 2084, 2085, 2086.10 and 2086.20. Although the area is bordered by Glendale Blvd., Beverly Blvd., Hoover St. and the U.S. 101 Highway, the census tracts spillover into the surrounding blocks of Historic Filipinotown.

The data from the census supports the predominantly Latino cues that can be seen throughout Historic Filipinotown. Compared to the population of the entire United States, where the Latino population is only 12.5%, the Latino population of the area is approximately 60%. The White population of the area is a mere 4%. The Asian population at 30%, while greater than the White population, is still significantly less than that of the Latino.

Another characteristic of the area is the higher majority of renters who occupy the housing available in Historic Filipinotown. The percent of owner occupied housing units in the five census tracts is only about 10%, compared to

the national figure of 66%. The percent of renter occupied housing units in the area is a whopping 90%, compared to the city's figure of 61% and the nation's value of 33%. Such housing characteristics certainly reflect the visual contrast of Historic Filipinotown (Figure 10) to other districts in the Greater Los Angeles area such as Hancock Park (Figure 11) and Alhambra.



Figure 10 Housing in Historic Filipinotown



Figure 11 Housing in Hancock Park

Historic Filipinotown — A Community in Development

From a political and community planning standpoint, Historic Filipinotown resides within LA's Thirteenth District, represented by Councilmember Eric Garcetti. It lies right in the middle of, and even divided by, the two larger neighboring communities of Westlake and Silver Lake-Echo Park. It is also a mixed-use area comprised of commercial areas and high density, single-family residential neighborhoods.

The key players in Historic Filipinotown are LA Councilmember Eric Garcetti, the Historic Filipinotown Chamber of Commerce, and the local businesses and homeowners. Eric Garcetti, who lives in Echo Park, represents a number of other communities within the Thirteenth District such as Silver Lake, Echo Park and Atwater Village. Through LA Council's Thirteenth District, a four-month planning process was initiated to explore the possible impact the designation of Historic Filipinotown could have on the community. As a result of the designation in August of 2002, the Historic Filipinotown Chamber of Commerce (HFCC) was formed to address the issues pertinent to the vitality and growth of the community.

Chito Tenza, Field Deputy of Eric Garcetti, heads the HFCC office, which is located on Beverly Blvd. According to Chito Tenza, the HFCC "was organized to advance the general welfare and prosperity of the newly designated Historic Filipinotown community, specifically to promote economic, civic, commercial, cultural, industrial, and educational interests and common wealth of local residents, business owners, and other stakeholders. It will also serve as a forum to provide guidance and valuable contacts for business opportunities in Historic Filipinotown" (Weekend Balita).

The stakes within the community encompass economic, concrete and even abstract gains. Upon receiving the city designation, Historic Filipinotown community leaders identified "economic development, streetscape, and Filipino American history and culture as the three major interests in planning for the future of this neighborhood." The report

set forth by the four month planning process initiated by the Thirteenth District listed the existing community needs and concerns, which included affordable housing, unity among citizens, personal safety and the strengthening of organizational relationships. Community plans drawn up for Historic Filipinotown also impact the community plans of Westlake and Silver Lake-Echo Park. As a result, Historic Filipinotown must compete with these other localities for services and benefits while avoiding any conflict with their larger community plans. With a proper plan, the HFCC can bring about economic growth to the community by attracting and maintaining businesses that offer services and products to the multi-ethnic population.

Although the area is known as one of the oldest Filipino enclaves in the City of Los Angeles and is now referred to as "Historic Filipinotown," the predominant ethnic community in the area is still Latino. As a result of the ethnic makeup of the area, "strategies for business development must be inclusive of all ethnicities and sensitive to the interests of all community members in order to be truly successful and beneficial for the community as a whole." The strategies for business development in the community are also based on the players and the stakes they hold in the area. The HFCC along with the Thirteenth District Office, the two largest players in the community, must take into account the housing stock and other assets within the area. The neighborhood's assets include several retail stores, medical and educational facilities, and a few public facilities. Since its inception, HFCC has been taking a proactive approach to increasing community involvement in the community's redevelopment process. Their activities include monthly luncheons and mixers, seminars and workshops, member opportunity receptions, and even annual sports events. Membership to the HFCC is open to "any individual, company or entity that plans to do business in the community or to support the Historic Filipinotown Chamber of Commerce." The HFCC plans to hold meetings with the local business owners and with representatives of different government agencies to discuss issues "regarding incentives, policies, guidelines and assistance available to help local business owners." The other issues the HFCC plans on discussing with the business owners and government agencies include "gangs, drug pushers, homelessness, and other factors that affect peace and order and the viability of business in the service area." They also want to meet with officials from the Philippine government "to explore the possibility of encouraging firms in the Philippines to come to and set up their business in Historic Filipinotown."

Aside from the local businesses, the community must also take into consideration the existing housing stock, demographics and zoning ordinances set forth by the city as they pertain to open space, housing, safety, population density and the distribution of land uses within the area.

A portion of Historic Filipinotown has also been designated as a Renewal Community. As a result of this title, Historic Filipinotown is eligible to receive regulatory relief and tax breaks from January 1, 2002 to December 31, 2009. The area west of Union Ave. and east of Alvarado St. was the only portion of the area to be designated as a Renewal Community. Mr. Selso Santiago, a homeowner within the Historic Filipinotown area, was not aware of the designation and said "It's inappropriate and even unfair that only a part of Historic Filipinotown received that designation."

Decline of Other Filipino Enclaves within Southern California

Despite the redevelopment of the Historic Filipinotown area, similar Filipino enclaves that sprung up in the early 1900s, have been in decline. In the 1990s, there was a decline of Filipino population in the older, poorer enclaves and a shift towards the "economically better" residential areas such as Glendale and Cerritos. A few factors can be attributed to this shift in population from these enclaves to the surrounding regions. The first factor is an improved economic status for the Filipinos within the Southern California region. Compared to the Filipinos who resided in Los Angeles in the early 1900s, many of whom assumed only menial positions, the Filipinos who live in America today are more educated and financially stable. The residents of the older enclaves like the Temple-Alvarado area have moved into "more attractive neighborhoods" — including Silver Lake, Glendale and Eagle Rock — where they were either able to rent or buy homes.

Just last year, there was a move to rename a portion of Eagle Rock as Philippine Village. Such a move, however, spurred a lot of controversy within the area. In November of 2002, a community meeting was held regarding the movement for an official city designation of Philippine Village. At the meeting several residents of Eagle Rock thought that a second city designation would only be divisive to the Eagle Rock community and to the Filipino community that already had an area officially designated as Historic Filipinotown.

Neighborhood development, or the lack thereof, is the second factor of the shift in Filipino population. The decline of Filipinos near the Long Beach area can be attributed to the closure of the Long Beach Naval Shipyard and other the nearby naval facilities in the 1990s. Many Filipino residents of West Long Beach simply had to relocate a few miles north to the City of Carson, in which a sizable and very active Filipino community resides in, to improve their situation. With regards to the Temple-Alvarado area, the economic and public safety decline of that district became a concern for affluent Filipino immigrants who didn't want the area to be identified as "Filipino Town." Perhaps, it was with that same concern that prompted Filipino community leaders in the area to name it "Historic Filipinotown" last year.

An increase of Filipinos in the San Fernando Valley, particularly in Panorama City, in the past few decades, can be credited to the Kaiser Hospital in that city, in which many Filipinas (female Filipinos) residing in the valley are employed as nurses. A similar pattern can be seen where many Filipino health care professionals gravitate towards the large hospitals in the greater Los Angeles area — Kaiser Hospital Hollywood, Children's Hospital, Hollywood Presbyterian and Loma Linda University Medical Center. This is due to the fact that a good number of the Filipinos employed in Los Angeles have professional medical backgrounds. According to The Ethnic Quilt, the Filipino's "strongest niche occurs among clinical laboratory technicians, where Filipino men and women constitute one-sixth of all such workers in Southern California."

The third and final factor in the dispersal of Filipinos from the more traditional enclaves is education. Since Filipinos were schooled in English in the Philippines, many of the immigrants from the Philippines were well versed in the English language and had little problem assimilating into mainstream America. "The majority of Filipinos in Southern California do not live in ethnic enclaves. Partly because most Filipino immigrants enter with advanced English-language skills and earn the incomes of professionals, most have less need to settle in enclaves. The result is that Filipinos are neighbors of Southern Californians in a wide range of suburban areas" (Allen 37).

Integration Into Multiethnic Asian Communities

Through the decades, Filipino enclaves, which were once "socially distinct," have become interconnected. The distinction between the enclaves is due to the fact that some of these enclaves can be associated with different generations of Filipinos who immigrated to the United States at different points in history — pre-world war era, post-World War II, post-1965. The distinction, however, has diminished since the 1980s through the preservation of "personal ties in the Philippines" and an increase in mobility. The result has furthered the dispersal of Filipinos into newer suburbs and multiethnic Asian communities.

In the past few decades, the assimilation of Filipinos into the Southern California region has increased. Though Filipinos naturally gravitated toward enclaves in the middle of the 1900s, several factors — economic, city development and education — led to the decline of the Filipino population within the same enclaves and diffusion to the surrounding areas and suburbs. An increase in mobility and continued communication with relatives and associates in the Philippines, however, has interconnected the various Filipino clusters and populations even as they have scattered throughout the greater Los Angeles area.