

Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California

By Dawn Bohulano Mabalon

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In the early twentieth century—not long after 1898, when the United States claimed the Philippines as an American colony—Filipinas/os became a vital part of the agricultural economy of California's fertile San Joaquin Delta. In downtown Stockton, they created Little Manila, a vibrant community of hotels, pool halls, dance halls, restaurants, grocery stores, churches, union halls, and barbershops. Little Manila was home to the largest community of Filipinas/os outside of the Philippines until the neighborhood was decimated by urban redevelopment in the 1960s. Narrating a history spanning much of the twentieth century, Dawn Bohulano Mabalon traces the growth of Stockton's Filipina/o American community, the birth and eventual destruction of Little Manila, and recent efforts to remember and preserve it.

Mabalon draws on oral histories, newspapers, photographs, personal archives, and her own family's history in Stockton. She reveals how Filipina/o immigrants created a community and ethnic culture shaped by their identities as colonial subjects of the United States, their racialization in Stockton as brown people, and their collective experiences in the fields and in the Little Manila neighborhood. In the process, Mabalon places Filipinas/os at the center of the development of California agriculture and the urban West.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Little Manila Is in the Heart* is a triumph of Filipina/o American history and American studies. There is no other scholarly analysis of the dynamic and vibrant Filipina/o American experience central to the development of Stockton's urban life and the larger San Joaquin Delta, a key area of California's agribusiness. Moreover, Dawn Bohulano Mabalon is a masterful storyteller. She draws on oral histories to illuminate the pain and joy of building, sustaining, losing, and attempting to preserve Little Manila in Stockton, weaving in with great finesse family history, archival research, and her own activism on behalf of Little Manila's preservation."—**Catherine Ceniza Choy**, author of *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*

"Offering new and exciting insights into the Filipina/o American experience, *Little Manila Is in the Heart* is a painstakingly researched history of the Filipina/o American community in Stockton. Dawn Bohulano Mabalon connects that local history to national and global phenomena; examines in depth the roles of gender, religion, and community organizing within Stockton's Filipina/o American community; and carefully documents the role of development on an urban Asian American community over the past several decades."—**Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony**, author of *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919–1941*

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“[An] engaging account of the Filipino American experience in the 20th century. . . . It expands and deepens our knowledge of that past beyond Bulosan’s riveting account of the Filipino American experience in the first half of the 20th Century. Of course, it helps that Dawn Mabalon is retelling the history of her own family and her own community.”
(Benjamin Pimentel *Phillipine Daily Inquirer*)

“Mabalon’s text is not merely a history of a community, but a study of how that community has been remembered and forgotten, given the redevelopment and gentrification policies that demolished most of Little Manila’s buildings after the 1960s.”
(Christopher Patterson *International Examiner*)

“Mabalon’s work reminds us of the precious importance of engaging in conversation with our elders. As a fellow third generation Filipina American, almost twenty years older than the author, I had often felt alone in seeking out the stories of my grandparents and ancestors, then writing about them in order to keep them alive for all generations. Mabalon—author, professor, and community activist—sets the bar for projects such as these to new heights. Justly so, because ‘A community worth saving is a community worth writing about. And vice versa.’”

(Lisa Suguitan Melnick *Positively Filipino blog*)

“This extensive book has valuable information for multiple audiences, including ethnic studies academics, students of ethnic studies, and general readers interested in labor, gender, intergenerational relations, urban studies, race, and the everyday lives of Filipina/os in the twentieth century.”
(JoAnna Poblete *Journal of American History*)

“I expect that *Little Manila* will become a staple in courses focused upon histories of California, immigration, and labor.”
(Allison Varzally *American Historical Review*)

About the Author

Dawn Bohulano Mabalon is Associate Professor of History at San Francisco State University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Williams:

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