



Full text

[Back to results](#)[Previous](#) Document **3** of 27528 [Next](#)

Back to the Roots: Filipino and Filipino American students reach out to each other in search of their cultural identity

Ulanday, Kawal R. **The Filipino Express** [Jersey City] 07 Apr 1996: 15.

[Hide highlighting](#)

Abstract (summary)

Full Text

[Turn on search term navigation](#)

Back to the Roots: Filipino and Filipino American students reach out to. each other in search of their cultural identity

On college campuses nationwide, Filipino students are building closer links with each other to examine their cultural identity and social conditions in this country. They're learning Tagalog, sharing forms of native art and becoming more interested in our people's history and continued struggle against colonial forces. Yet even in the midst of this cultural movement, this generation of students has yet to attain the political level demonstrated by Filipino college students only a generation ago.

Fueled by the Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement and Third World Liberation struggles, Filipino students in the U.S. launched themselves into political activism in the 60s.

"In 1967, Filipino students at San Francisco State were some of the first to organize into clubs with activist agendas," said Chris Flores, Com-munity Director for the Filipino - American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) at San Francisco State. "Being a working class college, it brewed progressive thought and political consciousness at a time when everyone was demanding freedom from oppression."

"Those students really united because they were conscious enough to understand how our struggle as Filipino people was linked to the events taking place in the 60s," Flores said.

After Marcos proclaimed martial law in 1972, students from San Francisco and Berkeley were among the founding members of the Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Filipino (KDP) on the West Coast. The KDP aimed to mobilize the broadest number of Filipinos in the U.S. to participate in the working class struggle against imperialism and capitalism. It sought to expand its ranks to embrace all Filipino activists opposed to U.S. imperialism and committed to the people's struggle for revolutionary change.

The KDP was community based, with chapters across the country. It was not a collegiate organization which further displays how the students held a larger view of the conditions Filipinos were facing around the world. In 1975, membership peaked to 300 as the KDP radicalized the Anti-Marcos movement with powerful demonstrations. But the ouster of Marcos in 1986 combined with a more conservative attitude emerging on college campuses somehow brought that particular chapter of the Filipino student movement as well as the KDP to a close.

Just as students joined the KDP as a natural extension of finding our identity as Filipino - Americans, today's students are becoming more active in Filipino collegiate associations and cultural events. In fact, "getting back to our roots," is a primary theme on the Filipino student agenda nationwide. Thus, Filipino - American students are able to find their cultural identity in their own schools. Locally, this generates much social and recreational activity between Filipino American students. On a more vital side, they are also demanding Filipino Studies in many East Coast colleges.

At Rutgers University in Newark, the Filipino Student Association (FSA) is preparing for its Barrio Fiesta on Mar. 31. According to FSA President Mike Faller, this miniature re-creation of the annual Filipino hometown festivity will include cultural skits, dances, singers, an Arnis Filipino stick fighting demonstration, of course food and much more. Rutgers is one of many local colleges which sponsor the fiestas. Fundraiser dances, sports festivals with other college Filipino associations, discussions of Filipino history and participation in Philippine Independence Day parades are also common among these students. They also produce publications reflecting many aspects of our culture.

"Organizing FSA can be demanding when you have a full class schedule, work and studying to do. We also have to raise money to supplement the minimal funding the college provides," said Faller, echoing similar sentiments of his peers who are also busy with the pursuit of "higher education" and future careers.

In the East Coast for the most part, this generation of Filipino students are doing what they set out to do. This differs somewhat from a generation ago, since most of them were born here and they have virtually no conception of the conditions experienced by many of our ancestors and families back home. As a result, Filipino students are uniting more culturally than politically.

"FSA started here in 1985-86 to culturally unite Filipino students, open up communication among us and provide support for freshman," said Lorenzo Geroso, known as "kuya" at Rutgers FSA in Newark due to his long involvement with the group. "These student associations expose Filipino American students to pieces of our culture which is very important since many of them don't know much about our homeland aside from what their parents tell them. And their parents' perceptions have changed since professional careers in the states have them highly occupied and isolated from the ongoing struggles back home. So

there is much to bridge in order to bring about a more politically conscious student movement."

There are other factors which prevent today's Filipino students from understanding the global political situation of Filipino people -- despite the existence of the same conditions which brought to life the previous more activist generation.

With the recent introduction of martial-law types of legislation in the Philippines, more human rights abuses at home and against populations of overseas contract workers, economic and environmental crisis, and a U.S. sponsored "total war" counter-insurgency effort being waged back home, Filipino students have many reasons to mobilize like before. Most agree that the process starts with education.

"We're currently working to advance a proposal for Asian and Filipino studies," said Adam Auriemma, a three-year member and officer of Rutgers FSA in Newark. "We need more education and awareness in our colleges in order to break down barriers and a near apathetic attitude among our students. Through education and genuine leadership, we'll be able to advance our true interests as a people."

This rallying demand for ethnic curriculum gave birth to Filipino Studies Departments at many California Colleges in the 70s. San Francisco City College alone offers an array of Filipino courses including history, humanities, culture and society (also through film), Filipino family, contemporary Filipino issues and several language sections. These course offerings have a likely relationship to the fact that students in the San Francisco area remain somewhat politically active.

Here in the East Coast, students are not waiting for college administrations to decide. At Columbia University, a student initiative has resulted in a Filipino history discussion series led and coordinated by enthusiastic Filipino historians and students. Weekend Tagalog courses are also available, thanks to interest generated by Filipino American students.

Alongside the fight for Filipino studies, these students are also shaping their sense of identity by addressing the growing issues facing Filipino Americans. Through the Filipino Intercollegiate Network Dialog (FIND), colleges along the Atlantic seaboard meet and discuss the prominent issues in our communities today. They do so at seasonal conferences, and on a more daily basis, through the World Wide Web/Internet.

On April 13, FIND's spring conference will be hosted by the Filipino student association at the University of Pennsylvania. This year's agenda includes many social issues such as domestic violence against Filipina women, mailorder brides, concerns in the gay community and more. Cultural themes will surround the event. Last year, 800 students attended the conference so at least that many are expected to participate next month.

"FIND was formed in part by Filipino students from the New York area who met at Yale in 1991 to establish a larger organization. Its purpose is to network and connect college-age students while keeping them in touch with our culture. FIND began an East Coast student dialog which addresses our common experience, not just historically but also in terms of the present," said FIND Chairperson Liren Legaspi. "Today, FIND links at least 100 Filipino college student associations along the East Coast from Boston to Florida and parts mid-east."

"We featured Fred Cordova's film, "Discovering Our Past for Our Future," at a recent event, "said Washington D.C. FIND representative Michael Reyes. "For a lot of those present, this was their first exposure to our early history in this country. They were shocked to learn how much they take for granted what so many Filipino immigrants fought for while facing ugly forms of discrimination," added Reyes, whose student involvement led him to become Program Manager of the Filipino Chamber of Commerce in New York City and owner of a Filipino mailorder book store.

Filipino Student associations have certainly been a primary vehicle for generating initial cultural interest and awareness among today's college generation. For Dean Coronado, former president of the International Filipino Association (IFA) at New York University, IFA members even became his family.

"I have no relatives here, so when I came to New York from California, I was ready to hook up with other Filipinos and get involved. IFA is in its tenth year 150 members so its exciting to take part in today's Filipino student movement," said Coronado. "We're breaking down barriers and making connections with older and younger generations of Filipinos. Our unity is on the rise."

"That's why we must take advantage of this period and lay down the groundwork needed to elevate the consciousness of the next generation of Filipino students," said FIND Historian Al Lotuaco. "It would be strengthening to see another generation willing to put it all on the line as students did in the West Coast during the 60s and 70s."

That time could be approaching as living conditions fail to improve in the Philippines and in many parts of this country. There is certainly no better symbolic year than 1996 to rejuvenate our spirit of resistance. This year marks the centennial anniversary of the Philippine revolution against Spanish colonialism. It is also the 10th year anniversary of the EDSA revolution back home. If history proves correct, we can expect to see a progressive move forward as more Filipino - American students realize that these historic events are powerful reminders of our people's continuing struggle for self-determination.

Photo (FIND members)

Copyright The Filipino Express Apr 7, 1996

Indexing (details)		Cite
Subject	Aliens; Asian Americans; Asians; Culture; Education; Immigration; Minority & ethnic groups; Organizations	
Location	United States	
People	Flores, Chris, Faller, Mike, Legaspi, Liren	

Ethnicity	Black, Black and Filipino and Filipino American students reach out to each other in search of their cultural identity
Publication title	The Filipino Express
Volume	10
Issue	14
Pages	15
Number of pages	0
Publication year	1996
Publication date	Apr 7, 1996
Year	1996
Publisher	The Filipino Express
Place of publication	Jersey City
Country of publication	United States
Publication subject	Asian/Pacific Islander
Source type	Newspapers
Language of publication	English
Document type	News
Document feature	Photo
Accession number	SFLNSFLPX0596FESB121000071
ProQuest document ID	212450379
Document URL	http://search.proquest.com/docview/212450379?accountid=14524
Copyright	Copyright The Filipino Express Apr 7, 1996
Last updated	2010-06-08
Database	Ethnic NewsWatch

Tags

[About tags](#) | [Go to My Tags](#)

Be the first to add a shared tag to this document.

Add tags

Sign in to My Research to add tags.

[Back to top](#)