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Common Destiny: Filipino American Generations

by Juanita Tamayo Lott

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reviewed by Luceli C. Cuasay

The Filipino Americans provide a scene by which others may view the history, customs, traditions, and values of Filipinos. *Common Destiny* serves as an account of the Filipino American's history, as well as a framework for understanding the future of the United States. Juanita Tamayo Lott provides an analysis of the complex and diverse American society and its destiny through a vista of four generations of Filipino Americans, of which she is a part. The author gives a glimpse of the Filipino mind and character and calls attention to the significant contributions made by Filipino Americans to the American society, culture, economy, and politics. She succeeds in depicting Filipinos, the second largest immigrant population in the United States, as persevering, resilient, family-centered, caring, and hospitable people.

Through this book, the author connects the past, present, and future. She begins with the first annual Tamayo family reunion in Vallejo, California in May 2005. It is a "moment of pride and recognition" for four generations of Filipino Americans, ranging in age from 6 months to 90 years old. She recounts relationships with family and describes her father and uncles to be among the pioneer generation of Filipino Americans, who had dreams and aspirations as teenagers and twenty-year-olds. They were not afraid to speak up as a minority in the U.S. and paved the way for the next Filipino American generations. Through personal and historical narratives, the author highlights, that for at least four generations, the Filipino Americans have been active participants in the U.S. She recreates the four generations in detail, making good use of the analysis of scholars and interviews with surviving Filipino Americans in their 60's to 90's, including her own relatives. Her style of using names of individual family members when referring to a particular generation is effective. *Common Destiny* brings to life the story about the Filipino Americans' struggles, courage, and determination in pursuit of the American dream. One deficiency in this otherwise fine book, however, is the lack of photographs to illustrate Filipinos who have immigrated to the United States, to make them more real.

After an introductory overview of the four distinct Filipino Americans generations, a chapter is devoted to each one, with a witty title that is descriptive of the generation, such as "Flying Across Skies: The Post-1965 Immigrant Generation". The chapters narrate changes in the Filipino American experience over time and present important historical basis for understanding some of the issues facing Filipino

Americans today. Although Lott focuses on the post-1898 migrants, she mentions the first wave of Filipino migration (1565-1815) to the United States, by Filipino seamen, who jumped ship off Acapulco, Mexico during the Galleon trade era and settled along the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico. Then, she describes the next wave of migration, that is, the pioneer generation. Her allusions to the different generations may be confusing to the reader at times, as there are two pioneer generations, and more than one generation are discussed in later chapters.

The first pioneer generation migrated to the U.S. during the first three decades of the 20th century to find opportunities for employment, education, and adventure. They are the "pensionados" (scholars), non-sponsored students, unskilled workers, who mostly found job opportunities in Hawaiian plantations, California agricultural fields, and Alaskan canneries, and the second wave (1946-1965) of military personnel who served with the U.S. Armed Forces in the Philippines during World War II. They are the "Manong" generation of farm workers and manual laborers in lowest-paid occupations, who were subject to social, economic and political discrimination on the basis of race, color, and citizenship, yet later succeeded as active civic participants, citizen soldiers, and an important labor force in the American society. The second pioneer generation comprise the post-1965 migrants, also called expatriates, who were mostly professionals—doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, and entrepreneurs. These two pioneer generations gave birth to the second generation who were American citizens by birth or naturalization. They were minority Americans, but were taught by their parents to be proud of their Filipino heritage and of their extended families in the U.S. and the Philippines and foremost, to believe in their power to achieve their dreams. Their mastery of the English language and of the American educational system helped them survive as minority citizens. Lott and her cousins are members of this second generation, described as "Children of the Pioneer Generation" in the third chapter.

I share the author's view, that the post-1965 Filipino American generation was crucial in ensuring that the Filipino Americans did not decline demographically and decrease by the third and fourth generations. They are beneficiaries of chain migration resulting from evolving immigration laws to meet the needs of the country and are instrumental in producing subsequent multiple generations of Filipino Americans. The fourth chapter provides interesting comparisons of the post-1965 immigrant upper or middle class professionals and the working class domestic workers; the voluntary and involuntary immigrants; as well as realistic discussions of dual allegiance. Being part of the post-1965 immigrant generation, I would have appreciated a more in-depth analysis of the experiences of my generation, our successes and struggles, compared to second generation American-born Filipinos and the pioneer generation.

Generation X, millennial generation, and digital generation are appropriately labeled as "Fast-Food Take-Out" multicultural, multiracial children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of the pioneer generation. Whether they can be expected to build upon the successes of prior generations remains to be seen. Their ability to obtain higher education, in her view, will play a major role in how their lives will unfold. The author seems optimistic about these generations' ability to be major players towards the formation of a common destiny. The final chapter centers on civic participation in the U.S. and becoming world citizens who play a part in ensuring future generations in a common destiny. I concur with Lott's theory that "the 21st century will be defined not so much by the color line, as by a more basic human relationship – the adult/human connection, the continuity and change from generation to generation that allow survival of the species." Furthermore, "Common destiny, emanating from common ground, shared principles, and shared values, reaffirms the connection from one generation to the next."

Lott imparts a complimentary message that "the Filipino Americans' history can be valuable in shaping the common destiny of freedom and equality for multigenerational Americans in the 21st century. The Filipino American generations' contributions towards the common destiny are their renowned skills of caring and hospitality, and interpersonal skills rooted in Filipino heritage and nurtured in full civic

participation in the U.S.” The rich heritage of diverse customs and traditions make the Filipino presence a welcome addition to the American society. This a good book for younger generations to learn the history of Filipinos in the U.S. and build upon the good lessons from prior generations. The author's description of the distinct periods of Filipino immigration to the U.S. is well-researched and very educational not only to Filipino Americans, but also to other Americans. It provides Filipino Americans with a much-needed glimpse of their past and a window to their future..

Luceli C. Cuasay, Dr. PH, is a biostatistician / epidemiologist at Westat, Inc., Houston, TX. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of the Philippines and is active in alumni affairs and Filipino-American community and cultural affairs.

The book author, Juanita Tamayo Lott, is a member of the senior staff, Human Capital Management at the U.S. Census Bureau. She is a trained social scientist from the University of Chicago and has held numerous policy analyst / demographer positions in a three-decade career in the U.S. federal government. She has been active in Filipino and Asian-American affairs and has been particularly interested in the general transition of Asian Americans. She has authored several books on Asian American demography and serves as an Associate Editor of FUTUREtakes.