

## How Filipinos Came to Be Called the "Brown Americans" - MabuhayRadio

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

Monday, 14 May 2007 01:44 - Last Updated Friday, 15 June 2018 17:30

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Our columnist, Jesse Jose, wrote in his latest piece that sometimes critics label him as a "little Brown American." Is it really an insult to be called "Brown American," even without the adjective "little?" According to anecdotal sources, the term "little Brown American" is neither derogatory or considered as racial slur and not originally intended to be such. Some people tend, however, to use the term to insult Americans of Filipino descent or Filipino citizens who work for American firms or who defend the policies of the United States. These detractors think "Brown American" means a lackey or a tool of the American Establishment.

The term, "Brown American," actually was coined by the first American civil governor in the Philippines, William Howard Taft. He supposedly called sometime in 1902 the Filipinos as his "brown brothers." Many historical accounts are wrong when they claim that Governor Taft used the adjective "little" in his statements.

But some oral narratives say that the Buffalo soldiers (AKA Black-American or now called the Afro-American soldiers) were the ones that called the Filipinos the "Brown Americans." More so, when their marriages to Filipino brides produced offsprings that were really "Brown Americans."

The truth was that American and Filipino journalists added the adjective "little" as a pun (intended), for Mr. Taft weighed close to 300 pounds.

Remember that photograph that showed Governor Taft riding a carabao (a Filipino water

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buffalo). The governor was almost the size of the carabao. Mr. Taft's size was more-than half the normal weight of the average Filipino. Of course, everybody, including many Americans, was "little" as compared to Mr. Taft, who was not only big physically but soon became an American political giant. He became the 27th American President in 1909 and then chief justice of the United States Supreme Court. He is the only American to hold both positions in a lifetime.

Somehow the term "brother" became interchanged with "American." And often, Filipinos in the United States were first called "Brown Brothers" and then later as "Brown Americans," no matter what their height and weight were.

### **Browns for Brown**

In fact, there are Filipino Americans who think that it is about time for them to be identified as "Brown Americans." Some of them say that it is not a question of "reinventing" the image of the Filipinos as "Brown Americans" because it is a fact that many of them are brown-skinned.

Filipinos as "Brown Americans" came to prominence when now California Attorney General Jerry Brown was a candidate for governor in 1974. Filipino-American leaders enthusiastically

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supported Governor Brown. In fact, in Southern California they called themselves, "Browns for Brown," which was indeed a very cute and witty name for a political-action committee. And the "Brown Americans" supported again his successful reelection bid in 1978.

When he became governor, Jerry Brown fulfilled his promise to the Filipino-American community, especially its dentists, nurses, and physicians. Governor Brown moved for the removal of a state requirement that mandated that all foreign medical practitioners go back first to the medical school before they could take the board exam for nurses, dentists, and physicians, respectively. Governor Brown made it possible for foreign (medical-, dental-or nursing-school) graduates to immediately take the board exam and if they passed, then they would be licensed automatically in California. Other states copied this practice.

Actually, the "Browns for Brown" promoters got the idea from history books and anecdotal sources about then Governor Taft.

There is also a group of Filipino-American singers in Los Angeles, California, who call themselves "Brown Brothers USA." (To learn more about this 26-man chorale, please visit its web site, [www.brownbrothers.org](http://www.brownbrothers.org) or send an e-mail to [info@brownbrothers.org](mailto:info@brownbrothers.org) or call up 866-893-0028.)

### ABER Filipinos

There is, of course, the minority in the Filipino-American community that does not want to be called by the hyphenated term. The members of this group want simply to be called the "Americans of Filipino ancestry (descent)." Because they say that many of them are natural-born American citizens and they have to be behaving like true Americans who owe their loyalty and allegiance only to the country of their birth and the land where they grow (or are still growing) up. I have dubbed them the ABER Filipinos. ABER as in American-Born, Educated and Raised.

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Today even Americans of Mexican or South American descent call themselves also as "Brown Americans." But American history will always associate that term or tag to Filipino Americans. The term can be the Filipino equivalent of "Black American," although the latter now prefers to be called "African American."

So, relax, Jesse Jose. When your critics call you as a "Brown American," it simply means that you are a brown-skinned brother of a distinguished American statesman, William Howard Taft. And a friend of a former California governor and presidential candidate named Jerry Brown. # #  
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