

Written by Bobby Reyes

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In

1993 on the occasion of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, I lifted a line from his famous “I have a dream” speech and paraphrased it. I wrote, “I hope that history shall judge Filipino Americans by the content of their character and not by the color of their tuxedos or party gowns.”

In some American cities like Los Angeles, California, catering managers and hotel executives are some of the best supporters of the Filipino-American community. Why? Because some of the hotel industry’s biggest customers are Filipino-American associations that hold annual grand balls. In Southern California hardly a Saturday night passes without three to five Philippine-American gala dinner-and-dance events in luxurious or five-star hotels. There are more than 500 Filipino-American associations in Southern California alone. In addition to the hotel events, there are smaller Filipino functions held in civic centers and at the social hall of the Filipino-American Community of Los Angeles (FACLA) from Friday night to Sunday evening. In fact at the FACLA, Filipino-American seniors hold at least four other dances during the rest of the week.

Many Filipino Americans joke that the Philippines will finally have a gold medal at the Olympic Games if and when ballroom dancing becomes a sporting event.

Readers should not get me wrong for this exercise of humor. There are lots of individual success stories of Filipino immigrants in the United States of America. There are countless stories of good deeds by, and achievements of, the more than 500,000 Filipino nurses, the 22,000 Filipino physicians and the tens of thousands of other Filipino medical, accounting and other professionals. Some of these Filipino physicians are even teaching in American medical schools. There is a growing number of qualified and often well-liked Filipino teachers, college professors, engineers, computer whiz kids, priests and ministers in the United States. Yes, these professional people are the pride and joy of the Filipino-American community.

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“The ‘Historic Filipinotown’ is neither historic nor Filipino,” said Filipino-American historian Hector Santos.

Then there are the ABER Filipinos. ABER, as I coined, means the “American-Born, Educated or Raised.” The ABER Filipinos are the second- and third-generation Filipino Americans, who are having their fair share of achievements. Many of them graduate as class valedictorians and/or salutatorians in high school and many more continue to shine in college and at work.

Monumental Works

But as a community, the Filipino Americans have still to do and build something monumental to be remembered by the Americans of all races, creed or color. The French have built the Statue of Liberty. Black Americans are noted for their successful fight for human rights and equality, as best exemplified by Dr. King and Company and of course in sports. The Mexican Americans are known for pioneering the labor movement among agricultural workers, although their famed labor leader, Cesar Chavez, had a few Filipino-American lieutenants. The Latino Americans are also carving a niche in the sporting world. The American Native Indians are now etching their names in modern American history by organizing gaming-oriented mega-resorts in their reservations. The Chinese Americans have built their China Towns in many American cities and of course they helped extend the American railroad to the West. In the 1840s, more-than 10,000 Chinese workers toiled in bringing the Iron Horse to California. The Japanese immigrants have built their Japanese National Museum and their Little Tokyo enclave in Los Angeles. Even the late comers from Asia have built in Southern California their Korea Town, Thai Town and Little Saigon.

The City Council of Los Angeles declared in a resolution on Aug. 2, 2002, the so-called “Historic Filipinotown,” where the FACLA Social Hall is located. But nearly six years later, the Filipino Americans remain the minority in their “Filipinotown” and they do not even own many properties in the area. And there is hardly any real-estate development activity by Filipino Americans in what is supposed to be their town. There is not even a Filipino museum in the “Filipinotown” or anywhere else in the United States. It may be a “Filipino Town” only in paper. My prediction is that unless Filipino Americans start buying parcels of land and developing them, pretty soon Korean-American companies would purchase most of the available real estate in the “Historic Filipinotown” and turn it into an extension of Korea Town.

In fact, Hector Santos said that the “Historic Filipinotown” is neither historic nor Filipino. Mr.

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Santos is the venerable Filipino historian in Southern California and together with Victor Nebrida cofounded the Philippine History Group of Los Angeles.

Batting for Philippine Centers in the United States

This writer has penned essays that called for the “reinvention” of the Historic Filipinotown and the FACLA among other sites. I discussed for so many times online and in the “Mabuhay, Las Vegas” radio talk show that I hosted at KRLV-AM station in Southern Nevada the concept of building new Philippine Centers in the United States. In 2006, I crafted a proposal to construct a “Philippine Center” in the present property of the FACLA. The proposal was submitted by a Panama City (Florida) Filipino-American entrepreneur but the FACLA Board of Directors did not act on it. # # #

To read Part Two of this series, please go to [Turning a Dream of a Philippine Center into a Viable Reality \(Part 2\)](#)

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