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Positively No Filipinos Allowed:

Building Communities and Discourse

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Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. 258 pages.

In her book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minnesota University Press, 1997), Avery Gordon (1997, 1) writes that “to study social life one must confront the *ghostly* aspects of it”—the experiential realities of social and political life that have been systematically hidden or erased. To confront the ghostly aspects of social life is to become tellers of ghost stories: to pay attention to what modern history has rendered ghostly and to write into being the seething presence of the things that appear to be not there (ibid., 7–8). The essays in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed* do just that: they write into being the forgotten wars, the erased imperial legacies, the forced incorporation and assimilation of Filipinos into the U.S. nation—and, importantly, the uncelebrated social spaces of Filipino political activism and organizing. For readers in the Philippines, the anthology provides a critical lens for understanding the ways in which Filipino American social formations are shaped and constituted not only by the social, economic, and political conditions in the United States but also by U.S. (neo) colonialism in the Philippines.

Taken together, the essays in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed* vigorously challenge the specter of Filipino invisibility—the marked absence of Filipinos in both academic and popular discourse that is intimately linked to the historical amnesia surrounding the history of U.S. imperialism. Calling attention to the centrality of imperialism to the U.S. national formation, the authors in this groundbreaking anthology put forth an alternative reading of Filipino history that forces a revisiting of the U.S. empire and its simultaneous exclusion and coerced incorporation of Filipinos into the nation. Drawing on a wide range of disciplines, including ethnic studies, history, literature, and legal studies, these scholars are less interested in writing a definitive history of Filipino Americans than in exposing the constructedness of that history. Their goal is not to bring Filipino Americans into visibility, but rather to write a genealogy of unbelonging, “unassimilability,” and “unrepresentability”—a genealogy that exposes the gap between the U.S. promise of immigration, citi-

zenship, and assimilation, on the one hand, and its genocidal conquest and colonization of the Philippines (see Dylan Rodriguez’s essay) and the legal exclusion of and citizenship restrictions against Filipino and other Asian immigrants, on the other. In Part I, for example, Jody Blanco, Nerissa Balce, and Ruby Tapia, in their fresh analyses of the 1896 Filipino Revolution, the figure of the “savage” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the lives of the *manong* (oldtimer) in the 1920s, link U.S. genocide, conquest, and expansion to U.S. nation building and show how U.S. imperial practices past and present continue to structure Filipino American lives today. In Part II, focusing on the constitutive powers of political institutions and social policies, Dawn Mabalon and Angel Ancheta show how a series of legislative acts and judicial rulings against Filipinos helped define and consolidate their nonwhite status and contributed to their racialization and sexualization.

Another important theme of the edited volume is the historical and intersectional nature of Filipino racial formation. By locating the history of Filipinos and the Philippines within the larger context of U.S. conquest, annexation, and invasion, the volume contributors call attention to the ways in which Filipino lives both then and now parallel and intersect the lives of other subjects of the U.S. empire. In so doing, they remind us that processes of racial formation need to be understood in relation to international histories and locations. As an example, Dean Saranillio’s piece on Pinay anti-imperialist activism in Hawaii calls attention to the intimate link between the U.S. colonization of the Philippines and Hawaii, but it does so without overlooking the very different relations of Filipino “American” settlers and Native Hawaiians to the colonial state.

In all *Positively No Filipinos Allowed* provides its readers with a cross-section of scholarship that connects Filipino American social formations to historical and material conditions, links politics to cultural practices, and critically examines the role that U.S. imperial practices have played in the global context of migration. Writing against claims of American exceptionalism that produce and reduce immigration to the United States as a unidirectional and voluntary phenomenon, the authors in this collection situate the originary location of Filipino American Studies in genocide, empire building, white supremacy, and global capital. They also charge that the extension of U.S. citizenship to Filipinos must be understood as a product of the unequal relationship between the dominant white Ameri-

can citizens and the subordinated, colonized, and racialized Filipinos—and not as a fulfilment of the liberal promise of equal access and equal representation.

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JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA. JOHN EDWIN COWEN, ED.

Doveglion: Collected Poems

Introduction by Luis H. Francia
New York: Penguin Classics, 2008. 260 pages.

José Garcia Villa was undoubtedly one of the most significant poets in Philippine literary history. A rebel in his day, Villa paved the way for modern poetry in the Philippines. When his poems were published in the United States, they received praise from Edith Sitwell, Marianne Moore, and E. E. Cummings, among other writers. In 1973 he was named National Artist by the Philippine government.

Doveglion: Collected Poems, edited by Villa's longtime student and literary executor John Cowen, comes as a timely publication and a fitting homage on the centenary of his birth.

The book gathers together the best of Villa's poems. Reprinted in toto are the aptly titled *Have Come, Am Here* (his first collection of poems to be published in the United States and in hindsight his most significant work) and *Selected Poems and New* (which includes selections from *Volume Two*). Also included are selections from *Appassionata: Poems in Praise of Love* and, most important, previously unpublished material, namely, works exemplifying what Villa called Duo-Technique and the "Xocerisms," Villa's brand of aphorisms ("pithy, inventive, philosophical insights told with a dash of Tabasco" [241]).

In poem after poem, Villa's astounding way with words leaps out, and one is reminded of why he was ahead of (and misunderstood by) the pat moralists and sentimentalists of his day. His lyricism is evident even in the first lines of the first page:

It is what I never said
What I'll always sing—

A Villa poem, as the lines suggest, does not state but rather engages the reader's senses and the imagination; hence, the challenge that its persona poses: "Invite a tiger for a weekend" (22), "bring the watermelons pigeons" (21), and "Imagine God a peacock" (59). To enter Villa's poetic landscape is to encounter a "radio made of seawater" (28), a "bright,Centipede" come from "What,celestial,province!" (79), or "God,dancing,on,phosphorescent, toes, / Among,the,strawberries" (105), as naturally as one finds very old men with enormous wings crashing in backyards in Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

In what he called the "divine poems," Villa reveals, in oracular language, a mystical vision ("The,zeta,truth—the,swift,red,Christ" [137]) where God is humanized—sometimes as friend, sometimes as rival, sometimes as the poet's alter ego. The imagery startles and challenges received pieties, as, for example:

Today,the,spirituality,of,the,devil,
Challenges,the,deviltry,of,God. (93)

Or

Christ,upon,a,
Ball: Saltimbanque,perpetual,in,beauty. (89)

Such poetry as Villa's does not make for easy reading. Some poems are more accessible than others, but throughout his work is a vitality at once reined in and propelled by craft. As Luis H. Francia, Villa's student, notes in the introduction to the book, "In his hands [the cause of poetry] evolves into a mighty engine of flight, winged with an exacting spiritual and aesthetic vision and an abundant lyrical gift honed by a keen critical intelligence" (xxxi).

The book also foregrounds Villa's innovations. In *Have Come, Am Here*, he introduced reverse consonance, a rhyme scheme where the "last sounded consonants of the last syllable, or the last principal consonants of a word, are reversed for the corresponding rhyme" (74). In *Volume Two*, he placed a comma after almost every word (hence, the "comma poems"). And in *Selected Poems and New*, he introduced what he called Adaptations, "experiments in the conversion of prose, through technical manipulation, into poems with line movement, focus, and shape" (147). Whether these innovations will withstand intensive critical scrutiny in the future is open to debate, but undeniably admirable is the unflinching desire to find new ways of expression.