

The Contours of a Filipino American History

This book examines the unique and dynamic relationship between the professionalization of nursing and the twentieth-century migrations of Filipinos to the United States. Specifically, it analyzes the creation of an international Filipino professional nurse labor force primarily in the historical context of U.S. imperialism. In doing so, it asks us to reevaluate our most cherished cultural associations and assumptions about nursing (in particular, women's selfless and seemingly innate ability to care) as well as U.S. immigration (such as the inevitable assimilation of all immigrants) by acknowledging the complicated histories of nursing's role in U.S. colonialism and the racialization of Filipinos in the United States. It is my hope that this project helps us to confront the continuing legacies of U.S. imperialism as well as to better understand the dynamics of contemporary U.S. migration and labor.

In U.S. hospitals today, nursing is no longer exclusively practiced by white and black women in white uniforms. Between 1965 and 1988, more than seventy thousand foreign nurses entered the United States, the majority coming from Asia. Although Korea, India, and Taiwan are among the top Asian sending countries, the Philippines is by far the leading supplier of nurses to the United States.¹

The late 1960s marked the beginnings of a profound racial and ethnic transformation of the foreign-trained nursing labor force in the United States when the increasing migrations of Filipino nurses ended decades of numerical domination by foreign-trained nurses from European countries and Canada. Paul Ong and Tania Azores estimate that at least twenty-five thousand Filipino nurses migrated to the United States between 1966 and 1985. They go so far as to suggest that in the United States "it could be argued that a discussion of immigrant Asian nurses, indeed of foreign-trained nurses in general, is predominantly about Filipino nurses."² By 1989, Filipino nurses comprised the overwhelming

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majority (73 percent) of foreign nurse graduates in the United States, and Canadian nurses comprised the second largest group (12 percent).³

Filipino nurses provide a critical source of labor for large metropolitan and public hospitals primarily in the states of New York, New Jersey, California, Texas, Florida, and Massachusetts.⁴ In New York City, Filipinos comprise 18 percent of RN (registered nurse) staff in the city's hospitals.⁵ Filipino nurses are also geographically clustered in Mid-western urban areas, in particular Chicago.⁶

Although the United States has been the leading destination for Filipino nurse migrants historically and its early twentieth-century colonial relationship with the Philippines distinguishes it from other receiving countries of Filipino nurse migrants, the international migration of Filipino nurses is inextricably linked to the larger processes of global restructuring in which the increased demands for services in highly developed countries as well as the export of manufacturing to developing countries have contributed to increasing worldwide mobility. In 1979, the authors of a World Health Organization report observed that the geographical distribution of the international migration of nurses was highly imbalanced.⁷ Of an estimated fifteen thousand nurses moving each year, over 90 percent went to eight countries, mainly to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The authors also observed that, among the nurse-sending countries, the largest outflow of nurses "by far" was from the Philippines.

These observations suggest that, first, the phenomenon of Filipino nurse migration to the United States is only one window from which to view the global dimensions of this predominantly female gendered migrant flow that emanates from the Philippines. As James Tyner points out, "Whereas early Philippine immigration consisted predominantly of male laborers to the United States, current flows are directed to more than 130 countries, each revealing distinctive sex differences in composition."⁸ Second, although the WHO report's observations might be read in a celebratory way that speaks to the ability of the nurses' highly skilled training to cross national and cultural borders, it also illustrates how these professional migration flows are embedded in a global structure of power in which nurses from countries with comparatively even higher nursing shortages are migrating to provide professional nursing care for populations of primarily highly developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. According to the WHO re-

port, “Nurses are even more inequitably distributed around the world than are physicians.”⁹ When two-thirds of the world’s population living in developing countries have only a small fraction, 15 percent, of the world’s nurses, international nurse migration patterns only exacerbate these inequalities of health services, inequalities that I refer to as an “empire of care.”

Despite the important role that Filipino nurse migrants play in the United States and other countries, we know little about the development of this phenomenon as well as the nurse migrants themselves. Although renewed interest in the migration of highly trained persons to the United States has produced a number of studies that have *included* Filipino nurse migrants, these studies often lump them together with flows of other Asian professional migrants.¹⁰ These studies provide valuable information about the national origins and highly skilled nature of contemporary migration patterns to the United States, but the lumping of Filipino nurse migrants with professional migrants from other Asian sending countries and/or other professional migrants from the Philippines produces some troubling effects. First, it tends to foreground the uniqueness of the United States as a receiving nation of a diverse group of highly skilled migrants. Many of these studies generally refer to contemporary U.S. immigration legislation and economic opportunities to explain the phenomenon of Filipino nurse migration. In particular, they highlight the 1965 U.S. Immigration Act’s new visas allocated to workers with needed skills and critical U.S. nursing shortages in the post–World War II period. Second, although some studies have emphasized the unique situations of the Asian countries that send professional migrants, they continue to emphasize an economic logic to explain professional migration, often referred to as “brain drain.” These studies argue that the inability of Asian countries to provide professional and economic opportunities to their professionals commensurate with their skills and training combined with economic opportunities in the United States produce these professional migrant flows.¹¹ Third, the statistical nature of these studies renders Filipino nurse migrants impersonal, faceless objects of study, an objectification that prevents an understanding and appreciation of these migrants as multidimensional historical agents, and consequently hinders an identification with them as professionals, women, and immigrants.

I characterize these effects as troubling because the emphasis on U.S.

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immigration legislation and economic opportunities reinscribes the popular notion that these contemporary Filipino nurse migrations are spontaneous flows made by individual Filipino nurses who rationally calculate professional earnings in both countries, and then migrate because the nursing salary in the United States is higher. This notion obscures the very important and complicated roles that both Philippine and U.S. governments, recruitment agencies, and professional nursing organizations, as well as the Filipino nurse migrants themselves, have played in facilitating this form of migration. Rendered invisible is the *culture of migration*, the ways in which narratives about the promise of immigration to the United States — narratives circulated by the media as well as Filipino nurse migrants already in the United States — shape Filipino nurses' desire to migrate abroad. Also rendered invisible are the ways U.S. hospital recruiters have collaborated across national boundaries with Philippine travel and recruitment agencies in their aggressive recruitment of Filipino nurses to work in their hospitals, collaborations that illuminate what Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist have called the *institutionalization of migration*.¹² The lack of study about this culture and institutionalization of Filipino nurse migration to the United States, then, perpetuates a critical void. Little has been written about the exploitation faced by Filipino nurses from Philippine and American recruiters and their American hospital employers, the scapegoating of Filipino immigrants in the United States during difficult political times, and the absence of professional solidarity between Filipino and American nurses. All of these issues complicate and critique the popular narratives about the promise of American immigration.

The studies that include Filipino nurse migrants also marginalize and simplify the very complex and dynamic history of the colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines. When the history of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines is mentioned, it is often in the context of an Americanized educational system that ambiguously predisposed Filipinos to American culture and customs. At stake here is the insidious persistence of the interrelated myths of U.S. exceptionalism and benevolence, which claim that Americans embraced their “little brown brothers” in the Philippines with what Vicente Rafael has called “white love.”¹³ According to these myths, America's tutelage of Filipinos bestowed on Filipinos the enlightened American systems of education, infrastructure, and public health, thus distinguishing Americans from their brutal Euro-

pean colonial counterparts. Rendered invisible are the ways U.S. colonialism in the Philippines created an Americanized training hospital system that eventually prepared Filipino women to work as nurses in the United States as opposed to the Philippines. Furthermore, despite their reformist intentions, American physicians and nurses in the Philippines during the U.S. colonial period helped shape, as they were shaped by, a culture of U.S. imperialism that created racialized hierarchies, with Americans on top and Filipinos below.

Michael Salman and Matthew Jacobsen have astutely observed that these pernicious myths of U.S. exceptionalism and benevolence persist in more contemporary times through the erasure of the violent conquest of the Philippines in Stanley Karnow's sentimental history of America's empire in the Philippines and in David Grubin's profile of Theodore Roosevelt for the PBS *American Presidents* series.¹⁴ In addition, these myths are refashioned and perpetuated today in U.S. immigration narratives popularized by the media, which claim that the United States continues to incorporate the "Third World" into its national borders to the benefit of Asian, Latino, and African immigrants, but at the expense of "Americans," a racialized identity most often portrayed as the industrious white worker who supports immigrants through taxes, but then suffers job losses and social services to these "foreigners."¹⁵ While the campaigns for California's Proposition 187 illustrated how working-class Mexican immigrants served as the quintessential racialized and classed scapegoats in this narrative, the highly educated and highly skilled backgrounds of professional Asian immigrants have not made them immune to similar anger and resentment, most recently demonstrated in the racialized persecution of nuclear physicist Wen Ho Lee.¹⁶ Such anger and resentment are also directed toward foreign nurses and, by extension, Filipino nurses. For example, in the late 1970s, when a U.S. nursing commission proposed creating and financing an examination for foreign nurses before their migration to the United States, one American nurse responded bitterly, "Scholarships and traineeships for *our own students* are always in a precarious state . . . yet there are these thousands of dollars to spend on having foreign-trained nurses immigrate."¹⁷

Such narratives erase the history of U.S. imperialism by suggesting that Filipino nurse migrants exploit America (and not the other way around); equally disturbing is the benevolent rhetoric used to describe contemporary Filipino nurse migration as another, more recent "good"

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outcome of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines. For example, at the 1998 roundtable on U.S. immigration history at the American Historical Association annual meeting, Rudolph Vecoli commented, “The Filipino nurses . . . who migrated to the United States surely enjoyed improved life opportunities because of the colonial history of the Philippines. Is it possible that some good could have come from imperialism?”¹⁸ Although Filipino nurses did benefit from colonial nursing training in specific ways and at specific times, Vecoli’s comments take the “good” that came out of colonialism out of its global and historical context, and simplify the complex and dynamic colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines by romanticizing America’s ability to provide opportunities for Filipino nurse migrants and erasing U.S. imperialism’s, as well as the contemporary international labor market’s, racist and exploitive effects.

The major objectives of this book are to fill a gap in our knowledge about a unique and important form of contemporary professional migration to the United States and to challenge these myths of U.S. exceptionalism and benevolence through a transnational history of Filipino nurse migrations to the United States throughout the twentieth century. This book locates the formation of this racialized, gendered, and classed transnational labor force in the U.S. colonial presence in the Philippines; analyzes its development into a form of mass migration in the 1950s and 1960s; and critically explores how the experiences of recent Filipino nurse migrants have challenged some of the “promises” of American immigration: citizenship, opportunity, and equality. This book pays close attention to the voices and experiences of the Filipino nurses themselves and treats them as historical agents to contest the ways in which Filipino nurse migrants have been represented as commodified units of labor. It also highlights the multiple subjectivities involved in this migration — the views of American nurses and their professional nursing organizations; Philippine government and health officials; and American government officials and hospital employers — to show how nursing and migration in the twentieth century has meant different things (professional advancement, cheap labor, nation building, and national betrayal) to different individuals and collectivities on both sides of the ocean at specific moments in time.

I make four major arguments. First, the origins of Filipino nurse migration to the United States are not new, but rather, lie in early

twentieth-century U.S. colonialism in the Philippines. Second, the desire of Filipino nurses to migrate abroad cannot be reduced to an economic logic, but rather reflects individual and collective desire for a unique form of social, cultural, and economic success obtainable only outside the national borders of the Philippines. Third, the culture of U.S. imperialism—specifically, its racialized social hierarchies—does not end with Philippine independence from the United States in 1946, but persists even in more recent times and continues to inform and shape the reception and incorporation of Filipino nurses in the United States. Fourth, although the development of a Filipino nurse migrant labor force has been shaped by ideologies of Philippine and U.S. nation building, Filipino nurse migrations to the United States need to be understood fundamentally as transnational processes, involving the flow of people, goods, services, images, and ideas across national boundaries.

Through its broad chronology, transnational emphasis, feminist analysis, and Philippine and Filipino American focus, this book engages with and hopes to expand and reconceptualize Asian American, migration, labor, and women's studies in multiple, interrelated ways. First, my emphasis on the imperial origins of contemporary migrations to the United States revises Asian American histories that have marginalized Asian professional migrations as a post-1965 phenomenon.¹⁹ The liberalization of U.S. immigration policy codified in the 1965 Immigration Act does not explain why so many Filipinos, and specifically Filipino women, have become nurses. Broader questions are left unanswered: Why has the “developing” country of the Philippines emerged in the late twentieth century to provide professional nursing care for “developed” countries such as the United States? What enables and compels so many Filipino nurses to work abroad? Furthermore, although recent studies, most notably Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's anthology *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, and Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore's anthology *Close Encounters of Empire*, have brought more scholarly attention to the cultural dimensions of American imperialism, the intersections between American imperialism and U.S. immigration patterns have not been fully explored.²⁰ Sociologists such as Alejandro Portes and József Böröcz have importantly acknowledged the roles that conquest and colonization have played as precursors to labor migration patterns, yet they do not analyze the ways these themes endure in more contemporary times. Rather, they treat previous Western colo-

nial penetration and its resulting migration flows as an earlier stage distinct from more contemporary “spontaneous labor flows,” which they argue are primarily a result of worldwide cultural diffusion.²¹ In the field of U.S. immigration history, the links between U.S. imperialism and immigration are barely acknowledged. As George Sánchez observed, “While the United States has clearly developed as an imperial power, and that imperialism (as well as previous colonial adventures) has directly and indirectly led to specific migrations to the United States, few American immigration historians have critically distinguished these forms of colonial migrations.”²²

Second, this study participates in the project outlined by Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, who argue in their anthology on the new Asian immigration to Los Angeles that new immigration and labor trends, in particular the shift toward higher-educated, professional immigrants from Asia, need to be explained.²³ My study pushes the theoretical framework for this project further by taking seriously gender as a category of analysis. The ways in which race, nationality, gender, and class have shaped the experiences of Asian professional immigrant women have been virtually ignored in both ethnic and women’s studies. The study of professional migrant women workers is often subsumed under the categories of highly educated laborers *or* migrant women workers in general. For example, although the Asian American and migration studies scholarship on Asian highly educated labor migration has included women, it has not paid close attention to gender as a useful category of analysis. In other words, this scholarship has tended to focus on the historical, economic, and demographic commonalities of all Asian professional migrant workers regardless of gender. And although the feminist scholarship on migrant women workers takes gender seriously in its analysis, the unique educational and socioeconomic backgrounds of professional migrant women workers are often lumped together with those of domestic workers and prostitutes.

The migration of Filipino nurses offers a unique lens through which to view the *intersections* of some of the most salient racialized, gendered, and classed dynamics of contemporary migration to the United States: the unintended exponential increase in immigration from Asia, the feminization of contemporary labor migration, and the significant percentage of highly skilled/professional immigrants. Although U.S. politicians did

not expect the Immigration Act of 1965 to increase immigration from Asia, by the late 1980s the Philippines became the second largest sending country of immigrants to the United States, second only to Mexico.²⁴ Contemporary immigration patterns also reveal that women can no longer be marginalized in migration studies as wives, children, or other relatives that male migrants leave behind. In the United States, almost two-thirds of the 4.4 million documented immigrants between 1966 and 1978 were women.²⁵ Finally, between 1961 and 1972, approximately three hundred thousand scientific, technical, and professional workers from “developing” countries migrated to Western nations, primarily to Australia, Canada, and the United States. Asian countries played a significant role in this “brain flow,” accounting for 72 percent of this type of migration to the United States.²⁶ Although these contemporary demographic shifts in the United States are often looked at separately, Filipino nurse migrants embody all three of these major changes.

Third, this book reconceptualizes the field of the history of nursing through its exploration of a new racialized and gendered professional labor force. In the historiography of American nursing, Darlene Clark Hine conceptualized the American nursing profession as an arena for racial conflict and cooperation in *Black Women in White*.²⁷ My work continues Hine’s critique of the American nursing profession and, at the same time, provides a new international and transnational framework for this critique by analyzing factors such as national origin and citizenship as well as race. I re-present contemporary U.S. nursing as an *international* arena for the conflict and cooperation of predominantly women workers worldwide.

By continuing Hine’s critique of American nursing as well as providing a new context for such a critique, I acknowledge the significance of race as a category of analysis in the history of nursing, but I also resist the way a U.S. black-and-white dichotomy has dominated American analyses of race. By conceptualizing a new international and transnational framework from which to view the nursing profession, I argue that the significance of a history that takes into account the experiences of Filipino nurses in the United States is qualitative and not simply quantitative (i.e., including another “minority” group in the picture of American nursing for more equitable representation). Indeed, taking into account the experiences of Filipino nurses in the United States changes that

picture. For example, in the early twentieth century, while white American nurses excluded African American nurses from their training hospitals and professional organizations in the United States, they also established nursing training schools in the Philippines and actively recruited young Filipino girls to train under their supervision. This benevolent treatment of Filipino nurses was no less racist in the contexts of American colonialism, manifest destiny, and the white (wo)man's burden. However, in the early twentieth century, race and nursing functioned quite differently — on social, cultural, political, and institutional levels — for African American and Filipino nurses.

Finally, given my emphasis on international and transnational contexts, this book engages with the concerns raised by American studies and Asian American studies scholars in the past decade about the U.S.-centric nature of these fields. American studies scholars have questioned the limitations of the study of American experiences within the United States and have expressed the need to critically analyze the paradigms and assumptions of U.S. nationalist thinking, a move that Barbara Brinson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Mailloux, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sánchez, Shelly Streeby, and Henry Yu have termed “post-nationalist American studies.”²⁸ Similar concerns have emerged in the field of Asian American studies, where conferences and symposia at Harvard University, University of Washington, and California State University have focused on re-“visioning” Asian American studies. Until very recently, Asian American studies scholarship has privileged the experiences of Asian Americans within a U.S. nation-bound context and has expressed ambivalence about Asian Americans' transnational linkages to Asia.²⁹ Scholars have done this in part to make the important point that Asian Americans have lived in the United States for over 150 years, yet contemporary demographics have compelled Asian American studies scholars to rethink their methodological approaches.

Contemporary Asian migration to the United States has shaped a very different, diverse, and complex Asian America. In the late twentieth century, Asian America has grown considerably from the influx of immigrants and refugees from Southeast and South Asia. By the late 1980s, the Philippines, Vietnam, and India were among the top ten sending nations of immigrants to the United States. A majority of the contemporary Asian American population is foreign-born. New Asian American

communities have been established on the West Coast and in New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Minnesota, Texas, Virginia, and Georgia.

These recent dramatic demographic shifts, combined with the accessibility of new technologies such as international air travel and electronic mail, have brought heightened awareness to the transnational dimensions of new American immigrants' lives. However, transnational frameworks are also useful for an understanding of earlier periods of migration. For example, Madeline Hsu's study of transnationalism and migration between the United States and South China focuses on the period from 1882 to 1943. For Hsu, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration patterns of Taishanese Americans highlight the need to study migration beyond the borders of nation-states and through the contexts of transnational and global processes.³⁰ Similarly, I argue that, although contemporary demographics and technologies raise more awareness about the need for new frameworks of analysis that go beyond national boundaries, the transnational context for Filipino nurse migration to the United States emerges in the early 1900s, and not after World War II or 1965.

This book is organized chronologically and thematically in three parts. Part I, "Nurturing Empire," explores the ways ideologies of gender intersected with those of race and class and shaped and informed U.S. colonial practices and agendas, in particular its medical practices and agendas. Chapter 1 examines the introduction of nursing in the Philippines during U.S. colonial rule from the multiple perspectives of American and Filipino nurses. Chapter 2 analyzes the ways in which the creation of an Americanized training hospital system in the Philippines established several preconditions that enabled Filipino nurse mass migration abroad in the late twentieth century.

Part II, "Caring Unbound," focuses on the development of Filipino nurse migration into a form of mass migration to the United States after World War II and the often contradictory motivations, agendas, and outcomes that accompanied it. In Chapter 3 I explore the complexities of the U.S. Exchange Visitor Program of the 1950s and 1960s, a program rooted in cold war politics, which inadvertently facilitated the first wave of Filipino nurse mass migration to the United States. In Chapter 4 I analyze contemporary government policies in both the United States and the Philippines—specifically, the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965

and the Philippine government's institutionalization of labor export in the early 1970s—that furthered the mass migration of Filipino nurses abroad and to the United States in particular.

Part III, “Still the Golden Door?,” challenges celebratory narratives about professional migrants’ international mobility and the promises of American immigration through an examination of the scapegoating of two Filipino immigrant nurses, Filipina Narciso and Leonora Perez, and the exploitation of Filipino nurses with temporary work visas, also known as H-1 visas. Chapter 5 compares two mass-murder cases in the United States involving Filipino nurses: the 1966 Richard Speck massacre, in which two of Speck’s victims and the only survivor of the massacre were Filipino exchange nurses, and the 1975 Veterans Administration Hospital murders in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in which Filipino immigrant nurses Narciso and Perez were convicted, though later acquitted, of poisoning and conspiracy. I illustrate how the representations of Filipino nurses in these cases reflected the dynamic stereotypes of Filipino nurses, stereotypes steeped in a culture of U.S. imperialism. Chapter 6 traces the development of Filipino nurse organizations in the United States in the late 1970s, organizations that formed partly as a response to the exploitation and discrimination faced by Filipino nurses with temporary work visas. I conclude with a brief discussion about more recent controversies surrounding Filipino nurses in the United States regarding illegal migration and English-only policies and the ways in which contemporary U.S. migration patterns, specifically its recruitment of Filipino nurses, illustrate how much the United States has become similar to, as opposed to distinct from, other developed countries.

I am intellectually indebted to the pioneering work of Asian American historians such as Sucheng Chan, Gary Okihiro, and Ronald Takaki, who have persuasively argued that the histories of Asian Americans matter, not only to Asian Americans, but to all students of American experiences. Yet I have been distressed by the scarcity of scholarly production in Filipino American history and the ways Chinese and Japanese American historical experiences have become almost synonymous with Asian American history.³¹ As Sucheng Chan concluded in her essay on Asian American historiography, “Despite the steady progress in Asian American historical scholarship, significant gaps remain. The most glaring is the absence of book-length studies on Filipino Americans.”³² As I write this introduction from my office at the University of Minnesota, Twin

Cities, and reflect on my research and writing here during the past three years, the need for more scholarly work on Filipino American history has become painfully apparent to me. In terms of Filipino American history, one may not think of the state of Minnesota, with its comparatively small Filipino population as well as the West Coast–centric nature of Asian American studies scholarship. But recent events in this state reflect what Matthew Jacobsen has called the “modern art of forgetting”: Americans’ erasure of their imperial history.³³

Minnesota’s most recent claim to national fame has been its election of the “refreshing” Independent Party governor, former professional wrestler and commentator Jesse “The Body” Ventura. In his best-selling autobiography, *I Ain’t Got Time to Bleed*, Ventura waxed nostalgic about his good old days as a Navy Seal stationed in the Philippines: “I loved the Philippines. I was stationed at Subic, and I loved going into Olongapo. It was more like the Wild West than any other place on earth. In Olongapo, there’s a one-mile stretch of road that has 350 bars and 10,000 girls on it every night. . . . To the kid I was then, it was paradise. . . . When a girl went with you in Olongapo, there was no question about what you were going to do. In the States, you had to wine ’em and dine ’em. At that point in my life, I was barely out of my teens; I wasn’t into wining and dining. The libido was still in charge. A lot of my buddies felt that way too.”³⁴

As I have argued elsewhere, what is important about Ventura’s representation of the Philippines is what it excludes as well as includes.³⁵ The use of Filipino women to embody a feminized Philippine “paradise” for the heterosexual desires of American men is a central part of this depiction. The rhetoric of “love” elides the history of a violent U.S. dominance in the archipelago. Invisible are the colonial and neocolonial relationships of inequality between the United States and the Philippines, and more specifically the history of U.S. military presence in the islands and its legacies of prostitution, disease, and environmental destruction. Also invisible are the migrations of Filipinos to the United States that have been shaped by this U.S. military presence in the Philippines, such as the active recruitment of Filipino men into the U.S. Navy, which, by 1970, contributed to a larger number of Filipinos in the U.S. Navy (fourteen thousand) than in the entire Philippine Navy.³⁶

More recently, the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota spearheaded a campaign to install a correction to a historically inaccurate plaque in the

Rotunda of the Capitol Building in St. Paul, which commemorated the service of Minnesota volunteers in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. According to the original plaque, these Minnesotans “battled to free the oppressed peoples of the Philippine Islands, who suffered under the despotic rule of Spain.” The Philippine Study Group together with other Filipino American organizations successfully convinced the Minnesota legislature to correct the text of the plaque to acknowledge that the Spanish-American War “was fought to defeat Spain, not to free the Filipinos” and that, soon after Spain’s surrender to the United States in 1898, Filipinos fought unsuccessfully for full independence against the United States in the Philippine-American War.³⁷ Although the plaque correction is a victory in this particular struggle, legacies of empire and war continue to haunt Filipino Americans, most notably Filipino American war veterans who served under the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East during World War II but continue to struggle for their veterans’ benefits. These examples of America’s “forgetfulness” become especially important in light of the powerful impact they have on the lived experiences of Filipinos and Filipino Americans.

Thus, it is my hope that this book contributes to shaping the contours of a Filipino American history, a history that is unafraid to cross national as well as disciplinary boundaries; that rigorously critiques the exploitive and enduring legacies of U.S. imperialism and colonialism in the contemporary lives of Filipinos and Filipino Americans; and that sustains, but also moves beyond, a critique of Filipino Americans as “forgotten” Asian Americans through the analytical study of those cultural terrains where Filipinos have made an impact on American society and global history. By focusing on the imperial origins of Filipino nurse migrations to the United States and their connection to the more recent experiences of the Filipino nurse migrants themselves, this book is one step in this direction.