

IN AMERICA YOU SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

WALLACE STEGNER

I FOUND out about the hospitality of Filipinos by trying to take a group of them to dinner. Five of the group from the American Philippine Foundation in Stockton, California—America's "Little Manila"—accepted with alacrity. There were a labor contractor, a bazaar-keeper and his wife, a Southern California graduate in anthropology, and a Columbia graduate in economics. When they wanted to know whether I wanted to eat American, Chinese, or Filipino, I naturally chose Filipino. They chose the restaurant.

It was a small place with a counter and booths, run by a Filipino, his Finnish wife, and their pretty *mestiza* daughter. Knowing nothing of Filipino food, I asked the group to order for me. But while we waited for the food, I suggested a drink. Sure, they said, they would love a drink. The wife of the bazaar-keeper rose and started to get a bottle, because the restaurant had no bar.

I tried to make her let me go for it, and, failing that, tried to give her a five dollar bill. She slipped out with a shake of the head and a miraculous, winning Filipino smile, to come back shortly with a bottle of Vat 69. Again I tried to give her the bill.

They all protested at once. "You're our guest," they said.

"But I asked you to dinner," I said, "and I suggested the drink."

"But you are in Stockton," said the economist from Columbia, "and Stockton is our town."

That, I thought, was graceful of them.

But I had been asking them questions and using up their time all afternoon, and I did want to take them to dinner. So I whispered to the *mestiza* that under no circumstances was the check to be given to anyone but me. Then I approached the Filipino dinner.

There was about a bucketful of rice apiece, and a tableful of assorted bowls and platters served like Chinese food for everyone to dip from. The cookery was clearly derivative of Chinese cookery, with an indefinable mixture of Spanish. My plate was heaped with rice, vegetables in sauce, roast pork, an egg dish that hung uncertainly between a Spanish omelet and an egg *foo yung*, another that looked and tasted like a cross between a Mexican *arroz con pollo* and a Chinese chicken-meat-white-vegetable. All of it was good, and it was more than plentiful. When I had just about cleared the gargantuan plate, they filled it up again, and just as I was getting hopeful of finishing that they ladled out more. I remembered reading of Chinese banquets that went on for six hours and wondered if that custom had been borrowed by Filipinos along with the cookery.

All my companions were small people, and none was fat. Yet long after I was gorged and unable to move, with half my bucketful of rice untouched, they were nibbling tidbits, sampling a bit of spare rib, a small slice of pork, a spoonful of rich gravy on an extra helping of rice.

They were worried that I did not eat more, that I might not be enjoying Fili-

pino food. They pressed tasty trifles on me, threatened my three-times-cleaned plate with further helpings. When I finally convinced them that I liked the food very much, that I had eaten barrels of it, that I had stopped only from inability to eat more, their concern dissolved in good humor and much laughter. The economist, a slight, engaging young man with the merest trace of a clipped accent, summed up the situation for me.

"In America," he said, "you say it with flowers. In P'ilippines, we say it with fuud."

I believed him.

Toward the end of the meal, while I was jadedly toying with an almond cookie, a field laborer came in and spoke to the anthropologist in swift dialect, probably Tagalog, though it could have been any of the dozen or more Island dialects. It was a language, at any rate, in which the syllables were as distinct and separate as grains of dry rice in a bowl, and just as numerous. When the stranger left, with a wide grin and a wide motion of his arms as if he were embracing us all, the anthropologist asked if I'd like to go to a party at one of the celery camps on the delta. We had all just been invited.

Nothing, I said, would please me more. But I would have to make a telephone call first. And when I came back from the booth, the pretty mestiza was just giving the economist his change on the dinner check.

"But it's mine!" I said. "I asked you all. This is on me."

"Anyone who visits us in our town is our guest," the bazaar-keeper said.

I had been neatly out-manuevered, and betrayed by the girl to boot. But when I cast a reproachful look at her, all I got was an utterly captivating smile.

So now we were on our way to the party, driving across the flat, monotonous, incredibly fertile stretches of the San

Joaquin delta. The light was almost gone, so that the endless vineyards, the endless tomato and celery fields with boxes piled at the row-ends, the endless asparagus fields now long gone to straggly fern, merged in gray dusk before we reached the camp. The Filipinos sang all the way, native songs, Spanish songs, crooner songs. I preferred the Spanish and Filipino singing; they gave the crooner songs so much of the juke-box groan technique that I was reminded too much of my own digestive problems.

Two Filipinos, the hosts apparently, steered us into a parking place and led us toward the cookhouse. But one of them said something at the door, crooked a finger at me, and led me on around the cookhouse. Behind the bathhouse, with its fire burning alarmingly under the floor, was a pit of coals, over which were two suspended poles, and on each a golden-brown, crackling-crisp suckling pig. The red glow lighted the browned skin, and glinted in the eyes of the Filipino who squatted at the far end. As he turned the poles, the dripping fat hissed and popped in the pit.

"This is all strictly orthodox for a feast or a party," the anthropologist said. "Come on inside."

The hosts hustled us all to the front, held wide the screen door, shouted our names to the two dozen people seated at a long table and around the walls. Some rose and bowed; others lifted their plates in greeting. A little dazed, I followed the anthropologist and economist along a kind of serving table against the south wall. It was about twenty feet long, and there was not a square foot of it unoccupied with food or drink. There were platters of brown ribs and slices of meat. "Roast goat," said the economist, aside. There were two great platters of omelet, a great tub of rice, gallon jugs of California burgundy, pitchers full of knives and forks,

skyscrapers of plates, battalions of glasses. And, at the far end, a Filipino in a white apron was carving a third roast pig with a big triangular knife. He held up a slice on the point of the knife and waved it at me, grinning.

One of the hosts grabbed a plate and put it in my hands. I shook my head and tried to give it back to him, explaining that I had just got up from a very large dinner. He waved my objections away. Some one nudged me. It was the economist. "In P'ilippines," he said, "we say it with fuud." He was grinning from ear to ear. In a kind of glazed desperation I let my plate be heaped, staggered to the table, sat down, and ate a second enormous meal on top of the first.

That was a very good party. I had never been among people with such a fund of natural gaiety, such a faculty for laughter, such solicitude for a guest, such enjoyment of the rites of hospitality. People came up to watch me eat, and share in my enjoyment of the delectable pig. Men starting to take a glass of burgundy would notice across the room that my glass was empty, come over with a jug, pour my glass full, and stand to clink glasses with me before they drank. The three women who were cooking and washing dishes in the kitchen were constantly coming to the door with dishtowels in their hands, to stand and watch with broad smiles the fun other people were having.

And all the time I was enjoying that hospitality, and for the week thereafter during which I continued to enjoy it, I was constantly reminded of the sour contrast between this open-handed friendliness and the treatment which Filipinos have received in America ever since they began coming in the '20s. Masters of hospitality themselves, they have received no welcome and enjoyed no hospitality from America.

In the Philippines, and in Filipino communities in America, they say it with food, but in America we have not said it with flowers. We have said it, for the Filipinos, with dislike, suspicion, and restrictive laws. We have said it with the label of "un-naturalizable alien" which we put on the Filipino immigrant in spite of his allegiance to the flag of the United States. We have said it with alien land laws that prevent Filipinos from owning farm land, or leasing it for more than a brief period, in most of the western states. We have said it with laws against issuing marriage licenses to Filipinos who wish to marry Caucasian women, and with similar laws forbidding the performance of a marriage ceremony for such a mixed couple. We have said it with signs on hotels, saying "Positively No Filipinos Allowed." (There is at least one such hotel in Stockton itself.) We have said it with the refusal to serve Filipinos in some cafes and restaurants. We have said it with a whole collection of uncomplimentary and stereotyped beliefs about the Filipino people, and with the kind of exclusionist conspiracy which, especially in California where more than two-thirds of our Filipinos live, prevents them from participating in the society on whose fringe they live. We have said it with an immigration quota of fifty per year, a quota which is an arbitrary and insulting compromise between exclusion and equality with other races and nationalities. Since the Philippines Independence Act of 1934, which established both the ridiculous quota and the principle of Filipino "undesirability," Filipinos have been in an impossible position, neither citizens nor quite aliens, neither admissible nor quite excluded.

The ways in which America has expressed its hospitality to the Filipinos have affected these "Pinoy" in various ways. Unable to own land, they are chained to migrant wage-labor, which is extremely

profitable during the war, but which in normal times is not. Without women of their own race to marry (men outnumber women fourteen to one among Filipino Americans) they have a choice between marrying Mexican and Negro women, marrying white women by going to New Mexico where there is no miscegenation statute, or remaining permanent and unwilling bachelors. None of these solutions is adequate to take care of more than forty thousand men of marriageable age. Most have not married, and as a consequence the stability of home life has not developed among them, except in Stockton where the year-round nature of the crops and the presence of most of the Filipino women in the United States have allowed a settled community to grow up. Home for most of the Pinoy, however, is a hotel room, a boxcar, or a bunkhouse, and no place is likely to be home longer than any single crop lasts.

Since General MacArthur's re-invasion of the Philippines, I have seen letters in many California papers from local service men who have discovered the friendliness, warmth, and hospitality of the Filipino people. Nobody could find fault with these letters, or with the spirit in which they are written or published. May they multiply. But it is sad that California boys should have to go to the Islands to make those discoveries, when there have been Filipinos scattered over their own state for more than twenty years.

It is sad too that though almost everybody in America admires the courage, loyalty, and tenacity of the Filipino resistance to Japan, and though the friendship between America and the Philippines is closer, probably, than it has ever been, we should still cling to the laws which prevent the Filipinos in America from becoming citizens, owning farm land, marrying whom they please, or moving

freely in society and in the economic world.

According to the Philippines Independence Act of 1934, the Islands are due to become independent on or before July 4, 1946. What the war has done to that prospect remains to be seen. The New York Daily News has already suggested making the Philippines the forty-ninth state (presumably the Filipinos would be delighted) instead of granting the promised independence. There will undoubtedly be other suggestions, grounded in the fact that American bases in the Philippines appear to some to be essential for security in the Pacific.

But whether the Islands become an independent republic or decide, on invitation, to join the United States, there is an immediate and serious need for revising our domestic attitude and our domestic restrictions against the Filipino people, and the direction of that revision is so clear I am unable to understand why it has not been taken before now.

One act of Congress would clear up two-thirds of all the Filipino troubles in America, and there is already a precedent for that act. The revocation of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which from 1882 to 1943 was a constant irritation in our relations with China and a constant humiliation to the Chinese people and Chinese Americans, marked a turning point in our attitude toward Oriental immigration. Without altering in any important way the population of the United States, it removes the stigma from a great people, strengthens our war-forged bond with China, and moves us closer to peace with the Orient. The obvious next step is an act placing Filipinos on a normal quota, removing the bars to their naturalization, and permitting them the full rights of citizenship we have extended to most other immigrants.

They have earned that kind of recog-

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dition, and the Philippines have earned recognition as a steadfast and gallant ally. Though I do not have the official figures, about 13,000—almost a third of all the Filipinos in America—are in the armed services. The bulk of the others are in essential agriculture, doing a skilled and important job. Many of the Filipino students in this country offered their services to the OWI immediately after Pearl Harbor, and for over three years have been broadcasting information, news, and hope to the embattled Islands in ten native dialects, besides Spanish and English. The importance of those programs to the guerrilla bands and to the Filipino civilians who never lost hope through three years of Japanese occupation can hardly be overestimated.

The whole conduct of the Filipinos, in the Islands and in the United States, during the war has been admirable. They have much to contribute to this country, and

they can contribute more as citizens and equals than as menials and migrant wage slaves of an "inferior" caste. One thing they could certainly teach us is the art of hospitality. It is time we in America started saying it with flowers.

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FOR FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

PAULI MURRAY

*A lone man stood on the glory road,
Peered through the shadows,
Made sure he was alone—at last,
Then drank a new-found solitude,
Drank long and deep of the vast
Breath of lilacs and honeysuckle.*

*He stumbled a pace,
Groped about in the April twilight
As one who feels his legs beneath him
For the first time,
Tests them on solid earth
And finds them worthy of a good sprint.*