In the immediate wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack, Congress held hearings to evaluate U.S. airport security. Kenneth Mead, inspector general of the Department of Transportation, testified that 80 percent of the airport security screeners were not U.S. citizens. In response, Republican Representative Harold Rogers queried, “What is wrong with this picture?” The Congressman’s statement questions whether non-citizens can be trusted with security work. In major metropolitan airports throughout the United States, low-wage immigrant workers of color have largely performed airport security jobs. This went unquestioned until September 11. Ultimately, what became wrong with the picture of non-U.S. citizens working as airport screeners in America’s airports was one thing: these workers were not white.

In Immigrant Acts, Lisa Lowe argues that “In a manner unprecedented in the twentieth century, the Vietnam War (1959–1975) shook the stability and coherence of America’s understanding of itself.” But in the early twenty-first century September 11 has likewise shaken the “stability and coherence of America’s understanding of itself,” and in ways that far surpass the tumultuous period of the Vietnam War and associated social movements of the time. In the face of worldwide protests and condemnation from allies, the United States has recently bombed and occupied Iraq, as one of the many fronts in the “global war on terror.” Simultaneously, the U.S. has engaged in repressive “anti-terrorist” campaigns domestically, policing the “coalition of the willing,” both at home and abroad.

Ultimately, non-white, “foreign” bodies pose the immediate threats to America, jeopardizing the body politic from within and without. Race, of course, is not the only factor determining state loyalty, the possession of which now constitutes legitimate American citizenship. As the so-called “Patriot Act” and attacks against dissenting Americans make clear, true American citizens are those who support this global war. Yet, as Muneer Ahmad argues, “even for the native-born, citizenship remains a contested notion, frequently mediated—and eroded—by race.”

Despite wistful claims of American innocence lost justifying state terror in multiple forms and on multiple fronts, the “profiling” of people of color and immigrant workers has a history that belies nostalgia. Recalling the chilling words of General Dewitt, Western Defense Commander in charge of the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, “[R]acial affinities
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are not severed by migration. The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born in the United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become “Americanized,” the racial strains are undiluted.” Dewitt’s statement, uttered more than half a century ago, resonates in the post-9/11 period, as hate crimes and immigrant scapegoating underscore how hegemonic notions of undiluted “racial strains” and an “enemy race” remain. In the war on terror, Filipinos and other brown-skinned immigrants are the enemy races.

Americans of Asian descent and Asian immigrants have long been viewed with suspicion and scorn in the U.S. In recent memory, the campaign finance scandal, in which the Clinton administration was accused of illegally accepting monetary donations from Chinese officials, rehearsed anti-Chinese or “Yellow Peril” sentiments from the early twentieth century. The donations were regarded as tainted money that would “undermine the American political system.” Another case that riveted the nation was the indictment of Chinese American research scientist Wen Ho Lee, who was falsely charged by the U.S. government of spying for the Chinese government. His subsequent release from prison, and the revelation of the government’s impropriety in pursuing this case, highlights the perception of Asians as security threats to the white American nation.

To highlight this further, we examine herein two cases involving Filipino immigrant airport screeners and the conscientious objector Stephen Eagle Funk, a mixed-race gay Filipino and Marine reservist. This will allow us to explore the limits and problematics of American citizenship for Filipino Americans. We recognize the campaign finance scandal and the trials of Wen Ho Lee as examples of the violence of racialization stemming from historic, anti-Chinese sentiments once prevalent in American culture. But our discussion focuses on working-class Filipino immigrants who occupy a different, in fact less-privileged, economic position than Chinese professionals and scientists. In other words, issues of patriotism and loyalty become particularly salient for working-class Filipino immigrants and people of color in this moment of George Bush’s war.

The post-9/11 period imposes uneven and unequal effects on immigrant communities. As Ahmad points out, the “profiling” of an Arab or South Asian professional on a commercial flight is very different from being assaulted or murdered. He argues, “It is, then, not enough for these communities to appreciate that race matters if they do not also appreciate how it matters more for some than others.” We contend that Ahmad’s observation—that race matters more for some than others—is especially relevant for Filipino immigrant communities severely affected by Bush’s new world order after September 11, defined by hyper-racialized surveillance, forms of punishment under the guise of “national security,” and the ever-increasing naturalization of militarization as “an American way of life.”

Though we will highlight how the post-9/11 period has had very specific and often uneven consequences for Filipinos, we will also discuss the various ways a radical Filipino community politics has been forged since that fateful day. We call these community formations “radical” because they link contemporary struggles with seemingly disparate campaigns that U.S. Filipinos and Filipinos in the Philippines have faced in the past. We argue that the genealogy of post-9/11 Filipino radicalism lies in two sites connected by empire—the Philippines and the
The Aviation Transportation Security Act (ATSA), passed very shortly after 9/11, led to the mass firing of over 28,000 airport screeners, affecting over 1,000 Filipino immigrant workers concentrated in San Francisco Bay Area airports. Indeed, 75 percent of all airport workers in the Bay Area (that is, San Francisco International, Oakland, and San Jose airports) are Filipino. The ATSA federalized the process of hiring airport security screeners, which previously had been handled by private contractors. Contractors for Bay Area airports favored immigrant workers, whom they paid low wages and often overworked. Many of the Filipino airport screeners were elderly immigrants. In some cases, several family members were working as screeners (that is, husbands and wives, parents and children). The loss of jobs was incredibly devastating. In San Jose there were workers who had suffered from lay-offs just the year before. As the Silicon Valley's bubble burst, many electronics workers were put out of work. Some found jobs at the San Jose airport, only to lose them again.

The new federal stipulations for hiring are notable: citizenship, English proficiency, and high school education. Many of the airport screeners were not U.S. citizens and therefore found themselves unemployed despite the fact that they had many years of experience, some having even earned commendations for their work.

If ATSA's new requirements were meant to eliminate non-citizen workers, they also eliminated Filipinos who are U.S. citizens. For the San Jose airport screeners, for instance, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Assessment Test Center where new applicants and existing airport screeners were to (re)apply was closed down due to a major budget deficit. Indeed, the TSA's budget crisis led to reports that many newly hired screeners were getting as little as 15 minutes of instruction despite ATSA's requirements that screeners have a minimum of 40 hours' classroom and 60 hours' on-the-job training. Experienced Filipino American citizen workers were therefore deprived of the chance to reapply for their jobs, which were then filled by inexperienced, inadequately trained workers. In cases where Filipino American citizen workers did have an opportunity to reapply and test for their positions, they were only able to do so after new applicants were tested, hence allowing the TSA to fill positions with new hires rather than experienced Filipino screeners. Finally, two months before ATSA's November 19, 2002 deadline to replace all airport screeners, it became clear that essentially only whites were being hired, since both the citizenship requirement and the culturally and racially biased pre-employment test (which included, for example, an English diction test) effectively excluded immigrant applicants.

As Filipina airport screener Emiliana put it, "If we do not pass many strict new standards or pass a series of difficult tests and personal background checks, our citizenship means nothing. Simply being Filipino seems to be the crime." Emiliana's assessment makes strikingly clear that beyond Filipinos' citizenship status, their ability to speak English, or their level of education, immigrants of color pose critical threats to American security because they can never be full and loyal members of the American polity.

Clearly, the question of airport security was of critical significance for the
United States. But airports such as Dulles (the airport in question at the Congressional hearing mentioned above) or San Francisco or Los Angeles also act as U.S. national borders. As immigrants of color, the previous screeners could never truly secure America’s borders from undesirables, and especially from terrorists. For officials, these border sites are viewed as being inadequately policed by non-citizens who themselves require policing. Indeed, the Department of Transportation’s Kenneth Mead proposed the introduction of “an automated profiling system that takes into consideration factors including an individual’s place of birth.”

Ultimately U.S. borders can never be fully secure in the hands of those who are not American. Even if they become Americans (through the naturalization process), their place of birth can be of lasting consequence: a source of suspicion and mistrust. Interviews with Filipino workers revealed to what extent they became targets of suspicion, as when “the National Guard was supposed to be guarding the airport but they were more interested in us.” Lorena, a Filipina airport screener, explained that there was a general feeling among workers that they were under scrutiny, and, according to Helen, “After 9/11 they blamed us ... as if we’re responsible.”

Besides the airport screeners, the media also focused on a particular Filipino during the war on terror. Racial bias and the discourses of race and sexuality were played out in the case of Lance Corporal Stephen Eagle Funk. On April 1, 2003, the 20-year-old mestizo Filipino made national news. Accompanied by his Filipina immigrant mother, 49-year-old Gloria Pacis and a group of peace activists, Funk reported to his San Jose military base as the first public conscientious objector in the war on terror. News of Funk circulated: he appeared on an NBC morning news show interviewed by Matt Lauer and Soledad O’Brien and was featured in the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Seattle-Post Intelligencer, and reports by the Associated Press and Agence France Press.

In Funk’s nationally televised interview, Matt Lauer began by mentioning that Funk was “from Seattle originally,” and that he was “half Filipino.” This aspect of his roots was picked up by a journalist from Seattle, who wrote a sympathetic feature article. News regarding Funk even reached the Philippines. A day after the media blitz, the Associated Press reported that Funk had “given himself a second way out” by announcing he was gay. Since Funk admitted being gay, he had violated the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell policy,” which could strengthen his chances of being discharged as a conscientious objector.

But more interesting than his coming out was how Funk articulated his anti-war politics with his identities as a gay man and as a Filipino of mixed racial descent. In an online interview for Advocate, a gay magazine on news and culture, Funk explained his position as a conscientious objector:

I believe that as a gay man ... I have a great deal of experience with hatred and oppression ... I was raised to respect, not hate, others who are different than me. I was appalled by the amount of hatred I found in the military. Of course I couldn’t “come out” in boot camp, but everyone pretty much knew that I was gay, and many hated me for it. The military cultivates antigay sentiment among its enlisted, but I also believe it perpetuates feelings of hatred against all that are different either culturally, ethnically, or
otherwise. I think that is the way the military dehumanizes the enemy (whomever that may be) so that its members won't be averse to killing them. Coming to that realization about war disgusted me and made me completely opposed to military action.

Funk's "coming out" occurred on three levels of identity: as the first public conscientious objector of the war against terror, as a mixed race Filipino, and as a gay man—all in that order. Funk's statement implicitly ties his identities as a gay man and as a Filipino American. When he describes how he's someone who has been "misunderstood by much of the general population," and how the military cultivates what he describes as "feelings of hatred against all that are different either culturally, ethnically or otherwise," Funk speaks to the historical experience of gay and lesbian communities as well as Filipino immigrant communities.

Not all media reports about Stephen Funk were sympathetic. A female journalist from Connecticut wrote that she was glad that "Funk punked out," suggesting that Funk was not man enough to be part of military service. And one article published in Manila suggested that Funk was using his 15 minutes of fame for personal advancement, presenting himself as a Filipino Muhammad Ali who happened to be "good looking and kinda hunky," the kind of man who attracted the attention of women and men.

In American popular memory, heterosexual soldiers are revered as idealized sons and daughters of the U.S. nation. Indeed, patriotism has been defined as a love of the patria or country, and patriots are heterosexual individuals who are willing to risk their lives in the name of the nation. But for the conscientious objector, love of patria can also mean love and respect for human life. As chronicled in the recent documentary film The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It, directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores, the 40,000 American male citizens who refused to fight during World War II believed that their love of country could not extend to killing another human being. The numbers of conscientious objectors reached their height during the Vietnam War, when 170,000 Americans applied as conscientious objectors. As acts of protest, the objectors burned their draft cards or left the country.

In the 1990s, conscientious objectors continued their peaceful dissent. During the Gulf War in 1991, 111 Americans were recognized as conscientious objectors, a fact rarely mentioned by the media during then President Bush's term in office. But according to the Central Committee on Conscientious Objectors (CCCO), an American GI-rights group based in Oakland, California, as many as 2,500 men and women applied as conscientious objectors against the Gulf War.

Funk's media moment recalls Walter Benjamin's formulation of how moments of crisis erupt and challenge official narratives of the nation. The disparate discourses surrounding Stephen Eagle Funk challenge the U.S. narratives of patriotism, ethnicity, sexuality, class, masculinity, and militarization as a way of life. Men of color like Funk are enticed to join the military out of economic and personal needs. As Teresa Panepinto of CCCO put it, reservists in the U.S. Army volunteer through a kind of "economic conscription as young men and women join the armed forces for job skills or tuition ... The ads for the military are sold as scholarship tools. There is no footage of combat ... It is a real
bait-and-switch that is costing young people their lives.” For conscientious objector Jon Jablonski, son of European immigrants, joining the Navy was a way to enter Boston University on scholarship: “For me, it was a full ride to a private university.”

Currently, 40,000 non-citizens serve in the U.S. Army. Filipinos in particular have long been part of the U.S. armed forces, since the Philippines was a U.S. colony in the Pacific for 40 years. From the U.S.-trained Philippine Constabulary during the early 1900s to the Filipino Americans who fought during World War II and in Vietnam, Filipinos have historically been not only patriots but also active members of the American military. Recent stories about the death of Marine Gunnery Sergeant Joseph Menusa, who was killed in Iraq, and the successful rescue of Private Joseph Hudson, cohort of Private Jessica Lynch, are examples of Filipinos as patriots. Stephen Funk, however, offers a counter-narrative of patriotism that emphasizes peace rather than war. But Funk’s American citizenship will not protect him from the consequences or the punishment he will receive for critiquing the army as a racist and homophobic institution. As of this writing, despite the high profile of his case, Funk has received six months in the brig for his anti-war politics, which he’s serving in a military fort in Louisiana.

Lisa Lowe’s formulation of American citizenship helps us understand the multiple forms of violence discursively connected with citizenship. She argues, “Insofar as the legal definition and political concept of the citizen enfranchises the subject who inhabits the national public sphere, the concept of the abstract citizen—each formally equivalent, one to the other—is defined by the negation of the material conditions of work and the inequalities of the property system.” Though we have focused primarily on how ideas of race and citizenship have affected Filipinos since 9/11, our project—as critical Filipina/o studies scholars—highlights how empire, capitalism, and liberal notions of citizenship mask, as Lowe suggests, the inequalities upon which security, profits, and rights depend. The airport screeners, while directly victimized by post-9/11 immigrant scapegoating, had already been victimized by the collapse of “dot.com” firms. The violence of capital is the violence of exploited, highly dispensable, immigrant labor; a violence that pre-dates September 11. And, as in the case of Stephen Funk, working-class men of color have been conscripted into the U.S. army with promises of education but at the cost of internalizing racism, homophobia, and the violence of militarization.

While immigrant screeners and Stephen Funk were viewed with scorn and suspicion, immigrant working-class soldiers dying in the deserts of Iraq have been valorized as heroes in their death. A Washington Post article states this plainly: “Seeking Life, Finding Death.” We would contend that for working-class immigrants of color, full American citizenship can only be achieved in death, which explains why, despite their service on the side of the Americans, Filipino World War II veterans will not and perhaps will never be given the veterans’ benefits they deserve, while dead soldiers are granted citizenship posthumously. Empire refuses citizenship and, therefore, responsibility to the living.

But there is also a violence committed, in the name of “community,” when critical class issues are deleted from Filipino American community formations.
For instance, while the National Association of Filipino American Associations (NaFAA) supported the airport screeners by launching a class-action lawsuit contesting the ATSA’s citizenship requirement, it simultaneously supported Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s call for global Filipino “unity,” which included her support of the Bush administration’s global war on terror. A progressive community politics, however, must recognize that the violence suffered by Filipino communities, whether through racist lay-offs or gay baiting, is linked to a larger history of gendered U.S. imperialism and collusion with the Philippine neocolonial state. Indeed, there are radical Filipino community formations that offer an alternative to this problematic U.S. patriotism and Philippine nationalism.

Say yeah, yeah, yeah; yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah (Chorus 1)
Say no, no, no; no, no, no, no. (Chorus 2)

1. From the Bay to the Philippines, we’ve gotta stop this war machine (repeat).
   (Chorus 1)
2. We are here with our demands, join us now and take a stand.
   We don’t want your stinkin’ war, we the people say no more.
   (Chorus 2)
3. GMA [Gloria Macapagal Arroyo], you gotta know, U.S. troops have got to go
   (repeat).
   (Chorus 1)
4. Immigrants are not to blame, no deportation in our name (repeat).
   (Chorus 2)
5. Red, black, brown and yellow, we gotta stand up and say no (repeat).
   Say no more war! No, no, more war!
   “People’s Choir,” by the Filipinos for Global Justice Not War Coalition

Blaring from a mobile sound system, the “People’s Choir” echoed throughout the streets of San Francisco during the numerous anti-war rallies that have been held since George W. Bush’s declared his “global war on terror.” The chant is led and sung by several hundred Filipinos dressed in red to symbolize both the bloodshed of war and their left-wing politics. The Filipinos for Global Justice Not War Coalition was formed in the wake of the September 11 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York as well as in response to the almost immediate attacks on Filipino immigrant communities in the San Francisco area, most notably the thousands of Filipino immigrant workers employed as airport screeners in the Bay Area’s three major airports. Moreover, the Coalition came together to respond to the increased U.S. military presence in the Philippines. The coalition comprises a large array of organizations, including campus and community-based youth organizations (such as the League of Filipino Students [LFS] and Bagong Bayan), human rights organizations (such as the Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines [CHRHP]), immigrant worker organizations (such as the People’s Association for Workers and Immigrants [PAWIS]), and a scholars’ group—the Critical Filipina/o Studies Collective (CFSC). Some of the organizations existed prior to the 9/11 attacks while others were formed in their wake.

The lyrics of the “People’s Choir” as well as the Coalition’s member organizations clearly show how Filipinos have attempted to link the various issues they face locally and in the diaspora, thus representing an alternative to the kinds of
patriotisms (both Philippine and U.S.) that are currently offered as the more appropriate responses to war and empire. For example, the “People’s Choir” condemns both Bush’s war on terror and the Philippine government’s willing partnership in it. Furthermore, it recognizes how the global war on terror has domestic implications for Filipinos and other immigrants of color and condemns racist profiling and deportation, which have heightened and increased since September 11, 2001.

Finally, the “People’s Choir” ends with a call for action, rallying Filipinos as well as other communities of color to take a stand against the war. Meanwhile, the Coalition’s organizational membership reflects the analysis of imperialism, neocolonialism, and racism elaborated in the lyrics of the “People’s Choir.” Organizations like the CHRP have, long before 9/11, protested U.S. militarization in the Philippines and have decried the neocolonial linkages that continue to characterize U.S.–Philippine relations. The CHRP, along with other established Filipino organizations, such as the LFS, took the lead in mobilizing other existing Filipino organizations, such as the Filipinos for Affirmative Action (FAA)—a longstanding community-based non-profit organization.

Newer organizations were specifically formed after 9/11, such as PAWIS, which was born out of the struggle of Filipino airport workers at Bay Area airports to retain their jobs. Though they failed to keep their jobs, PAWIS was successful in securing the “Patriot” bonus they were promised if they kept working until the final day before federalization. For several months after their lay-off in November 2002, many workers had still not received their bonuses. On February 26, 2003, PAWIS held a major action at San Francisco’s Federal Building, demanding that the government give workers their bonuses and their jobs back. Eventually many workers in San Jose, the largest PAWIS chapter, were able to secure their bonuses. Though some of the former screeners have secured jobs, as members of PAWIS they continue to struggle for the rights and welfare of all low-wage immigrant Filipino workers.

Likewise, CFSC was formed as young Filipino scholars, assistant professors, and graduate students at San Francisco Bay Area universities, meeting regularly to march together at anti-war rallies, recognized the importance of organizing. The CFSC works to expose histories of imperialism and neocolonialism and their consequences for past and present Filipino migrations. It does so through the members’ collective writing as well as by politicizing the spaces they inhabit professionally, namely the classroom and professional organizations. In one major campaign, the CFSC introduced an anti-war resolution at the 2003 Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) Annual Meeting in San Francisco, which was successfully passed. Besides the resolution, the CFSC organized a panel on “Filipino Bodies and the Violence of Capital: Texts and Sites,” which produced this essay. Finally, the CFSC put on a benefit, which included an anti-war photo exhibit, to raise funds for PAWIS.

Many veteran peace activists in the Bay Area have noted that the Filipinos for Global Justice Not War Coalition represents a new generation of anti-war activism. Composed of 20- and 30-something-year-old activists as well as high school students, the Coalition is a youthful crowd. Along with the “People’s Choir,” Coalition members have turned commercial hip-hop and rap tunes into anti-war mantras. Other commentators, however, have sardonically described
the Coalition as a group of "retro-Maoists," colorful yet ineffective activists whose protest actions are largely unsuccessful, especially at capturing the attention of mainstream media. Both characterizations, however, are problematic. To trace the Coalition's political genealogy to anti-war and radical movements of the 1960s is to isolate the history of Filipino radicalisms, which can be traced to the 1930s and which continued, albeit unevenly, during protests against the U.S.-sponsored Marcos dictatorship from the 1970s to 1980s.

Filipinos have engaged in continued radical movements from the 1930s to the present. By the second half of the 1930s, as Filipino laborers were organizing farm workers strikes in California and across the United States, Filipino peasant farmers in Central Luzon organized chapters of the National Society of Peasants in the Philippines (Katipunan Pambansa ng mga Magsasaka sa Pilipinas), which staged farmers' strikes, pickets, rallies, and even armed uprisings in the Philippine countryside. As Benedict Kerkvliet wrote, "By the 1930s, discontent had grown to a rage that united a few hundred thousand peasants." Kerkvliet adds that many of the leaders and members of these peasant organizations took part in the revolutions against Spain in 1896 and against the United States in 1899. The temporal convergence of Filipino radical movements in the colonial metropole and in the U.S. colony illustrate an important but neglected history that few Asian American studies scholars and radical labor historians discuss. By the 1960s, in the San Francisco Bay Area specifically, Filipinos were at the forefront of the San Francisco State University strike for ethnic studies, the fight to save the International Hotel, and the struggle against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos.

Filipino radicalism in America has been transnational in its organization and consciousness, as Filipinos have worked in solidarity with radical movements of the Philippines and have articulated their critiques of American domestic policy as linked to the project of U.S. imperialism. Today, organizations such as the LFS share the same name and mission as the Philippine-based student organization, while CHRP provides direct support for Karapatan, a human rights organization in the Philippines. Their transnational links are, on one hand, a consequence of Filipinos' inability to claim Americanness because many do not have recourse to U.S. citizenship. On the other hand, Filipinos who are U.S. citizens refuse the imperialist and racist patriotism that U.S. citizenship often requires.

In conclusion, we've outlined a different genealogy of Filipino radicalisms and presented new community formations that articulate a historical and diasporic consciousness, which links the political work of Filipino activists and intellectuals in the Philippines and the United States. The promise, the burdens, and the denial of U.S. citizenship—all inaugurated by a colonial war of conquest in 1899—have historically affected the lives of Filipinos both in the past and in the present. A Filipino radical politics in this "war with no end" era requires a commitment beyond common-sense notions of citizenship and patriotism. As in the words of the "People's Choir," the war machine must be stopped and the political work of stopping the violence of empire and capital must be waged everywhere, "from the Bay to the Philippines."
RECOMMENDED READINGS


Carney, Timothy P. 2001. “80% of Airport Screeners Non-citizens: Congressmen Ask of Statistic, ‘What Is Wrong with This Picture?’ ” Human Events. October 1. Online: http://www.mail-archive.com/ctrl@listserv.aol.com/msg78574.html


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