

The Filipino Texans



Colonel Melecio Montesclaros (right) accepting the flag of Ft. Sam Houston at the change of command ceremonies, 1973

Most of the Filipinos in Texas are comparatively recent arrivals. Strong economic and political ties with the Spanish empire from the 16th to the 19th centuries brought few known individuals to the Americas, but United States control in the early 20th century was responsible for Filipino settlement in every metropolitan area in the state.

Considering the Spanish trade with the Philippines—the Manila galleons operated between Acapulco and Manila from 1565 to 1815—individuals from the islands may have been in Mexico after the mid-16th century.

The first Filipino known by name in Texas arrived in 1822. Francisco Flores from

Cebu, a cabin boy on a merchant ship, decided to make what would become Port Isabel his home. Some time later he owned a fishing business

with two schooners. At 40 Flores married Augustina Gonzales and moved the family and business to Rockport. He witnessed a long span of Texas history, dying in 1917 at the age of 108.

The Spanish-American War, at the end of the 19th century, was responsible for the first substantial entry of Filipinos to Texas. The United States, acquiring the Philippines from Spain by military conquest—and for a payment of \$20 million for Spanish improvements—maintained a substantial number of servicemen in the islands. Military rule lasted until 1907, after which a civil government was instituted. A large number of Filipinos were hired as servants, mainly by military officers, and when the servicemen returned to the United States, some employees followed. Many came to the perennial military city of San Antonio.

During World War II many Filipino men joined the United States armed forces. At the independence of the islands, granted by the U.S. in 1946, these men could become citizens because of their service. Many did, some continuing their military careers. And language was never a problem. Filipino and English were official languages, and Spanish was still present in the homeland.



Captain Anita Perdiz Satterly, c. 1983



Dr. Anatolio B. Cruz Jr.

A Cultural Mix

Filipino society for centuries has been a mix of native, invited, and imposed influences. This remains the case in Texas today.

In the Philippines, Spanish conquest added Catholic festivals and the observances of saints' days to the regional celebrations of the 7,100 islands making up the archipelago. United States control, from 1898 to 1946, with continuing influence after independence, added

Protestant beliefs (in small quantity) and North American music, holidays, and dress.

Even the traditional formal male shirt, the barong tagalog, is an imposed dress. In the 19th century, rich Filipinos began wearing Western frock coats. But as a sign of servitude, the Spanish forbade them to tuck in their shirttails. The Filipinos obeyed but produced shirts of beautiful embroidery and wore them with pride. Today, the shirt is a modern national costume.

Filipinos thus wear a mixture of regional and Western dress and celebrate Catholic and Protestant occasions and national observances. The 4th of July became Philippine-American Friendship Day.

In Texas several Filipino performing arts groups replicate and modernize traditional dances. Earlier Filipinos were known for dances of harvest, battle, death, marriage, birth—all the seasons and passages of life. Much of their original costume and ritual combined Hindu, Arabic, Malayan, Spanish, and "American" sources as well as native forms.

The modern dances involve distinctly new costumes influenced by centuries-old design; the dances are altered to fit the modern world but are related to older ritual in the Philippines.

Most Filipino homes in Texas contain art and crafts as much a part of life as memory.



Filipino Community float in a Fiesta San Antonio parade

After 1945 the United States became attractive to Filipino professionals: doctors, engineers, nurses, bankers, architects, accountants, pharmacists... Some Texas locations were favorable for those entering with work visas. Other arrivals to Texas were second-generation, born in the United States. A few Filipinos, moving from other parts of the United States, remarked that Texas made a good home because of the climate.

Captain Anita Perdiz Satterly, born in the U.S., became a nurse and administrator for the Public Health Service in Galveston and Nassau Bay. Melody de Guzman Barsales served for 18 years on the heart-transplant team of Dr. Michael DeBakey of Houston. Lucy Naguit Pendon, born in Bataan during World War II, became a hospital administrator in Freeport. Dr. Anatolio B. Cruz Jr., a surgical specialist from Rizal, a province of Luzon, advanced to the academic rank of full professor of surgery at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. Houston became home to around 2,000 Filipino nurses, San Antonio to somewhat fewer.

Today, thousands of Filipinos live in Texas. Until the last three decades, most were foreign-born. And most are urban settlers who are succeeding in preserving a significant number of Filipino customs.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives *push* them to leave, and things in a new place *pull* them. *Instructions: Decide what political factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.*

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Filipino Settlers in Texas

The Philippines are a series of over 7,000 islands located off the coast of Malaysia. For centuries the islands were controlled by other nations: first by China, then by Arab and Indian traders, then by Spain and lastly by the United States. In 1946 the United States granted independence to the Filipino people.

There were 30 Filipinos in Texas in 1920. Most were male students who came as a part of a program to learn about democracy and the American way of life.

By 1960 there were 1,623 Filipinos living mostly in Texas cities such as Beaumont, Port Arthur, Dallas and Houston. Many new immigrants were professional women trained as nurses and men who became doctors. Others were children of American servicemen who had been stationed in the Philippines and married local women.

Unfortunately, many Asian Texans faced discrimination because others saw them as strange and different. Laws existed that stopped Asians from coming to the United States. Not until the 1965 Immigration Act were large numbers of Filipinos allowed to immigrate to the U.S.

What countries controlled the Philippines before they were granted independence in 1946?

Where did early Filipino immigrants live in Texas?

Why was Filipino immigration to the U.S. slow until 1965?

Digging Deeper

Using **Texans One and All: The Filipino Texans**, answer the following questions about why Filipino immigrants moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state.

Why did the first significant wave of Filipino immigration to Texas happen after the Spanish American War?

What role did World War II play in Filipino immigration to Texas?

What languages were spoken in the Philippines?

What religions influenced the culture of the Philippines?

The *barong tagalog* became a national costume representing Filipino culture. Explain the origins of this shirt.

Describe one way that Filipino Texans celebrate their culture.

Geography Skills

Use your textbook to find the locations mentioned as significant to the Filipino experience in Texas, and label them on the map below.



- Beaumont
- Port Arthur
- Dallas
- Houston
- San Antonio
- Freeport
- Galveston

How is Filipino culture similar to or different from other cultures in Texas?

Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Filipino Texans and political push and pull factors.
