

Celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Month

E Pluribus Unum. Out of the Many, One.

Many Cultures, One Voice: Promote Equality and Inclusion

Partial Text (abridged) of Report (Paper) Delivered by

Emy Delgaudio

Chairman, Philippine American Heritage Council

May 26, 2015, for NAVSUP (Naval Support) Assembly on the Theme,

Many Cultures, One Voice: Promote Equality and Inclusion

Mechanicsburg, PA

(abridged version to fit time constraint delivered orally at Assembly)

Full Text to be available later at PhilippineAmericanHeritage.org

Full Text Original: 10,637 words; Remarks at Assembly 2,993 words

Thank you.

In behalf of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community, I want to thank those who authorized today's event to focus on our special month and theme, Many Cultures, One Voice: Promote Equality and Inclusion.

Thank you Admiral Jonathan Yuen, Mr. Goodhard, Mr. Mark Bennington, Ms. Sandra Jumper, Ms. Lynn Kohl.

Special thanks to the leadership of the Cultural Awareness and Diversity Committee including Zachary Currier, Walter Brown, and Lila Howell.

And to my guests starting with my husband Richard.

The Philippine American Heritage Council or PAHC which I represent as chairman, has two of its leaders here from Virginia representing the parent, non-profit organization, Kevin Peterson and Ronald Wilcox.

We have Emma Miller, Valerie Shutt, Irene Whittenberger and Susan Ortiz representing the Filipino American Community and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community.

I salute those here from the Korean American community.

pause

Most Americans know about December 7, 1941, the day that will forever live in Infamy.

Few know that the next day marked the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, actually part of the United States.

Within one month Japanese forces captured the capital city, Manila.

My Uncle, Sergeant Javier S. Ranin, was one of those captured. He learned an important lesson that you of the United State Naval Supply Systems Command, the Supply Corps of the United States Navy, already know.

If you do not have an advance plan in place with contingencies mapped out, then when American military forces and their allies suddenly come under attack, it could be too late.

It was too late for My Uncle Javier and the American and Filipino forces in Bataan and Corregidor in 1941.

Starved, crippled by disease and with some dying every day, after four months of battle they were forced to surrender to numerically superior and better supplied Japanese military forces.

Thus began one of the most infamous episodes of military history, the Bataan Death March, where my Uncle, Sergeant Ranin and 75,000 sick, starving, weak, diseased Americans and Filipinos already near death, were marched 65 miles at bayonet point. Many died.

Thankfully, my Uncle Javier survived his captivity to become an attorney.

With my uncle captured because of lack of resupply and reinforcements, other Filipinos, inspired by America's promise to return, took to the jungles to fight on. But they too, didn't have ammunition and supplies.

E PLURIBUS UNUM (Out of the Many, One)

Japanese Admiral Yamamoto said at the time, “I feared we have awakened a sleeping giant.” Slowly, the supplies started to come.

Those supplies – such as lighter weight carbines for Filipinos instead of heavier rifles, plus bullets and medical supplies – were unloaded from U.S. Navy submarines, PBY seaplanes, fast PT boats.

I thought of this again many years later I saw the words at the Korean War memorial, “freedom is not free”. It brought tears to my eyes.

But what really gets me emotional is another statement etched in stone at that monument, “Our nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew, and a people they never met.”

This applies just as well to the Americans who helped us in the Philippines in World War II.

Vietnamese and Koreans know the price Americans paid to try to help them keep their freedom.

My Uncle didn’t get help in time. But later my father did.

Jeremias Ibarreta, Sr., served in the Filipino Scouts, the equivalent of today’s U.S. Army Rangers, trained to fight behind enemy lines. His unit got some of those supplies provided by the U.S.

I thank you and I salute you, in behalf of my father, my uncle and all Filipinos whose freedom and independence you helped secure.

Papa passed away in 2013. The letter from our Congressman, Scott Perry, was read at the funeral service, where he called my father “a Veteran and fellow brother-in-arms,” a “warrior” who “served under America’s Flag during World War II.”

There are critics of America in the world. Some would kill you.

The character Maximus played by Russell Crowe in The Gladiator movie said of them, “I’ve seen much of the rest of the world. It is brutal and cruel and dark. Rome is the light.”

America is the light of the world. You who support its military keep that torch burning.

Now I will speak of diversity as well as freedom of speech which is closely associated with it, and which makes America exceptional.

I can celebrate St. Patrick’s Day and appreciate the music and heritage of Ireland without feeling any insult or slight to my Filipino heritage. We can enjoy General Tso’s Chicken or pizza, meatballs and spaghetti, Hawaiian fresh poke, Chamorro’s kelaguen, or some chili or nacho’s with guacamole.

It may shock you to learn that the top heritage foods were invented for Americans, by new Americans.

Perhaps not as well-known but popular among a large number of Americans, are recipes for Korean Kimchi, Filipino adobo, Chinese spring roll or egg roll, Malaysian, Indonesian or Thai curry, Japanese sushi, Vietnamese Pho, Laotian or Cambodian noodle soup, Singaporean Dim Sum.

And with our friends of Korean ancestry here today, I ask, who hasn’t heard of Korean taekwondo, not to mention other Asian martial arts?

Hundreds of thousands of American students have learned what so many Asian parents already teach their children – self-discipline, respect for authority, hard work, practice and sharing with others as you advance.

This is one of many contributions Asian Americans have made to make America a better place.

It is my pleasure to help you focus attention today on Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, in the words of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute “to help recognize the challenges faced by Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians and their vital contributions to the American story.”

The Philippine American Heritage Council, strongly supports the complaint filed this past Friday against Harvard University by a coalition of 64 Asian American organizations.

The complaint says that in the name of diversity, Harvard “discriminates against Asian-American applicants by setting a higher bar for admission than that faced by other groups.”

E PLURIBUS UNUM (Out of the Many, One)

I was asked to cite examples of the continuing challenge we Asian Americans face in America today. There you have one. This strikes at our hearts because it hurts our children.

I am not here to debate whether freedom or diversity is more important –both are.

There is a reason that encouraging diversity can be difficult. You don't want to discriminate against someone else who has earned higher grades in school.

But you do want to help those reach college who otherwise might not.

Maintaining balance is a challenge.

Why is it that so many who are so new to America, who happen to come from Asia, who have to learn English as a second language, do so well in high school compared to others already here?

Again, focusing on California as an example, over a third of their high school students lack the most basic math skills. 28% are deficient in reading.

The worst thing is that in America today, the vast majority of what they call “long term English language learners” – those struggling to learn English – are actually born in America.

I was shocked to learn that one third of Americans with low cognitive and language skills in their native language, are third generation Americans, not newcomers.

Why?

Asian students have parents who focus very strongly on American values like hard work, making sure their kids do their homework and pay attention to the teacher, and respect authority.

When their kids work hard on this, they are assimilating into the American system that rewarded these values. And we are doing it while keeping faith with our own heritage.

Yes we want diversity – we want to encourage people with different cultures, colors, faiths, country of national origin to feel at home in America.

My husband eight years ago told me as I began my American adventure, that he was learning or being reminded more and more about what is truly wonderful about America, because of my observations about what most Americans take for granted.

He said, those like me, made a big sacrifice to come to America. We left behind our family and our birthplace and the familiar towns, stores, churches - everything and everyone we had become familiar with in our life. To become Americans. He got all this by being born American, in contrast.

Naturalized Americans – which I am not yet – have to pass a written and oral test showing our knowledge of America.

I have seen the TV “man on the street” interviews where college students could not tell you how many U.S. Senators there are, how many Supreme Court Justices there are, what war did General George Washington fight in, what country we fought during the American revolutionary war.

We new Americans by choice, must answer these sort of questions correctly or fail the test.

I hope my remarks here today will give you a greater appreciation of what it means to be an American, as my husband says being married to me has given him.

Some of you who have visited the Philippines know we think highly of Americans.

Let me fill you in on some of the nice things about my country of origin.

We have two major languages which most people speak in some form, Tagalog and English. And 175 local dialects.

Although most consider us to be a part of Asia, we are on the edge of the Pacific Islands and have strong European roots also.

Many Filipinos do not even realize that it was only with the support of the United States, that we won our independence from Spain during the Spanish-American war.

We later became part of the United States.

E PLURIBUS UNUM (Out of the Many, One)

When the Japanese invaded the Philippines at the start of World War II, it was an American territory they conquered.

I started learning about America from that Uncle who survived the Bataan Death march and the war to help instill in me a reverence for freedom and a strong thirst to learn more about America, the birthplace of freedom.

But the most profound influence in my life was my own parents.

I mentioned my father, who was a quiet and unassuming man. He never did put in for U.S. military retirement or benefit payments after the war.

Papa always felt grateful to America, that you paid enough already for our freedom, and he didn't want to be a burden.

My mother exhibited similar courage, entering politics to challenge the corruption and anti-democratic policies of President Ferdinand Marcos and his party.

Inspired by my parents and uncles, I graduated with honors and special awards from both elementary and high school and then was on the Dean's List at college with a full double scholarship.

After school, I managed fashion boutique chain stores, my own business, managed four branch stores of a top beauty salon company, was partner in a music concern production company. And I became the Philippines country manager of for the largest Amway organization in the world.

Meeting one of the visiting Americans of Amway who spoke at several of those conferences, he returned to learn more about me and the Philippines, and after two years and many hundreds of hours together by phone, in person, by email and instant message, and I must add, finding that both of us were very much in love, I accepted his marriage proposal.

For the past four years I have grappled with the idea of balancing freedom and diversity after having co-founded the Philippine American Heritage Council, a project of that non-profit organization I mentioned.

On the one hand our Council fosters a better understanding of freedom, American exceptionalism and individual responsibility, especially for first generation Americans such as those from the Philippines but also with all Americans who may take for granted, these freedoms you were born with.

On the other hand, we also want to share with others what we love about our country of origin.

We have an annual picnic gathering which has had guest speakers such as our Congressman, Scott Perry, state legislators and candidates for office as well as local elected officials.

We have had a display booth to share our culture as well as our foods. The local York County newspaper ran a story about our work to send disaster relief to the Philippines two years ago. Our website tells you more about what's great about the Philippines and the longer version of these remarks will be posted there telling you about more it.

Our Council also reminds our fellow Americans of your own heritage and defends the idea that America is truly exceptional, which is how we became associated with United States Public Policy Council.

Of course, there are some biased people all over the world, not just in America.

Most biases are benign or amusing. Some annoying.

But some biases threaten jobs and promotions. Some forms of discrimination are more than just irritants.

A recent report about "Cultural Heritage Training in the U.S. Military" flat out predicts that diversity training "contributes to unified operations, and it may save lives and dollars."

This report states that learning more about other nation's cultures and beliefs is very important and that "the relevance to the military may need further strengthening for some."

Now I mentioned earlier the importance of balance. It is perhaps the most critical point of my talk.

How can you accomplish the harmony between being self-confident on the one hand, yet still avoid being insulting or disrespectful of others, on the other hand?

To achieve this respect it would be helpful to keep in your mind that it isn't a matter of which idea or culture is superior, but rather, to remember the word DIFFERENT, when you are comparing.

When we speak of assimilation in America, to some it means that everyone should have the same beliefs and views, the same approach. That gets us back to the conformity I mentioned earlier.

E PLURIBUS UNUM (Out of the Many, One)

My own views on assimilation are influenced by the bestselling author of *Dress for Success*, John T. Malloy.

The longer version of my remarks to be posted at our website, once again, goes into more detail on this but let me summarize Malloy's principal point. To be successful in America you need to make your speech and dress fit in where you are hoping to be successful.

A southern accent hurts you in seeking a job in New York City and vice versa, for example. Those who wear a dark blue, black or gray suit have a better chance of making a positive impression and achieving success than those who don't. I guess you can see who influenced my choice of attire today.

I and most of us born and raised in Asia with English as a second language, have an accent to your ears. So, according to Malloy, I would face some problems in seeking a job in many places in America.

But in the context of my remarks today, my being obviously a new American, who both looks and sounds different, should be perfectly in harmony with my message to you about diversity.

A respect for diversity means we should work to overcome the bias Malloy warns of.

On the other hand, my respect for the views of Malloy means that I worked harder to fit in with you here today.

Diversity means respect for others, who are after all, created by the same God who made you, and who are therefore your brothers and sisters, even if they are in some ways different.

Respect cuts both ways. I ask others to respect my differences from them, even as I try to be respectful to them.

Diversity means you should celebrate differences, not be threatened or angered by them.

Balance means that the goal of diversity must stay in balance with freedom.

America has color, flavor, taste, vibrancy, precisely because we encourage diversity and welcome immigrants.

As today's event theme emphasizes, you can have "Many Cultures but One Voice." It is possible to "Promote Equality and Inclusion" even as we celebrate what is special about the United States.

But we must never allow diversity to be used as a politically correct weapon to silence, suppress or keep people down in order to help a favored group.

One example of this suppression that has me alarmed happened just ten days ago when Governor Greg Abbott was the commencement speaker at the University of North Texas.

A petition was signed by 2,000 students protesting him as the speaker because he did not represent diversity they complained.

Two well-known liberal Fox TV commentators have written books about how so many of their liberal-left allies are wrong to try to suppress the free speech of those with whom they disagree, especially when this is done in the name of diversity.

Since when is it controversial to defend free speech?

I love many things about America besides free speech.

One of my favorites is the message which appears on the great seal of the United States and for many years before In God We Trust replaced it, was the de-facto motto of the United States.

E Pluribus Unum, Out of the Many, one, meant that the 13 colonies and different ethnic backgrounds and cultures of the American revolutionaries of 1776, were now together in the new united States they formed when they signed their Declaration of Independence.

In the modern context, it means that out of many different beliefs, cultures and backgrounds, we are still proud to be one united States, of America.

In our zeal to make sure that conformity does not crush diversity we must never forget these three short Latin words.

E Pluribus Unum. Out of the many, one.

We of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community thank you for this assembly and ask that God bless each of you, the United States of America, and our countries of origin.