Filipinos in Hawai‘i

Demography. Today’s Filipino community in Hawai‘i traces its roots to 1906 when 15 sakadas (contract laborers) were recruited from the Philippines to work on the sugar plantations in the then US Territory of Hawaii. Migration, particularly after the close of the Pacific War, has increased their numbers.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Filipinos and part-Filipinos constitute 275,728 or nearly 23 percent of the state population, slightly more than the Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian population. About 70 percent of the Filipino population live on the island of O‘ahu. While they are a minority population in the state, they form the majority (at least 60%) on the island of Lāna‘i.

Filipinos are the fastest growing ethnic minority in Hawai‘i, due to continuous immigration from the Philippines and high birth rates in the Filipino community. About 3,500 immigrants from the Philippines, mostly children, come to Hawai‘i every year.

Language groups. The vast majority of the Hawai‘i Filipino community, at least 85 percent, are Ilokanos coming from Northern Luzon, whose native language is Ilokano. There is also a significant number of Visayans (from the central region of the Philippines), and Tagalogs, whose native language is the basis for Filipino, the national language of the Philippines.

Economic status. There is an emerging middle class, but the vast majority is still working class. Recently numbers are growing in management, professional and related occupations, with slightly over a fifth of adults reportedly found in this category. These professionals include doctors, nurses, therapists, lawyers, engineers and business executives. Sales and administrative support groups constitute 41 percent, while hotel workers, housekeepers, police and others in the service sectors make up 30 percent.

Health care areas. Among professionals in the Filipino community, medical doctors constitute a significant group. Other health professionals like nurses, medical technologists, and medical aides also form a sizable group. It is noteworthy that 95 percent of the care home owners or operators in the state are Filipinos, helping the state to deal with problems of the elderly and disabled.

Politics. Filipino-American politicians are also increasing in both houses of the State Legislature. There are three state senators (out of 25) and three representatives (out of 51) of Filipino ancestry in the Hawai‘i State Legislature. Two of the nine City Council members for Honolulu are Filipino. Hawai‘i also produced the first governor of Filipino ancestry in the US, Benjamin Cayetano (1994-2002).

Academe. Under-represented, relative to state population ranking, Filipino teaching faculty at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa constitute barely one percent, particularly tenured or on tenure-track. There are an increasing number of students of Filipino ethnicity entering the University of Hawai‘i system; they constitute a target recruitment population for the University.

Arts and entertainment. The Filipino population is strongly represented in the arts and the entertainment industry, particularly jazz, Hawaiian music, hula, hip-hop, and dance crews. For example, pop singer Jasmine Tria and singer-actress Tia Carrere, both from Hawai‘i, have attained national and international recognition.

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