As American as Jackrabbit Adobo

Cooking, Eating, and Becoming Filipina/o American before World War II

DAWN BOHULANO MABALON

My father Ernesto Tirona Mabalon arrived in Stockton, California, in 1963 to be reunited with his father, Pablo “Ambo” Mabalon, who had left their hometown of Numancia, Aklan, for the United States in 1929. My lolo (grandfather) Ambo ran a popular Filipino American diner, the Lafayette Lunch Counter, in the heart of Stockton’s Little Manila. Almost immediately after he arrived, my tatay (father) was “itching to have dried fish” and craved his favorite variety, called tuyo. When my lolo stepped out one afternoon, my father threw some tuyo on the restaurant’s hot grill. The reek of the fried, fermented fish wafted down Lafayette Street. Lolo rushed back to find angry patrons and warned Tatay never to fry tuyo again. After he ate, Tatay lambasted the customers. “I said, Mabaho pala kayo!” (You’re the ones who stink!), he remembered.

I said: When you left the country you were eating dried fish, were you not? This is what made you what you are! Dried fish! Because you are here [in America], you hate the smell of dried fish? You did not come to this country if you were eating steak in the Philippines!

For him, tuyo was a powerful symbol of his culture, his class, and his identity as a provinciano, or person from the provinces. To him, the old-timers were arrogant traitors who thought themselves too good for rice and fish.

After this tuyo debacle, he swore that “wherever I am, I will always eat dried fish, the old dependable.” My tatay’s story continues to intrigue me as a historian of Filipina/o American culture and community. If these immigrants come to despise the fish of their youth, then what kinds of foods sustained the 150,000 Filipinas/os who settled in the United States before World War II? How did American colonialism transform Philippine diets? Which recipes survived the journey, and which ones were transformed? Moreover, how did
the experience of farm and cannery work influence what they cooked and ate? What roles did gender and class play in production and consumption?

This chapter explores these questions by discussing what Filipina/o immigrants on the West Coast and in Alaska produced and consumed, and argues that what they cooked and ate made possible not only their survival but also the formation of a collective ethnic identity as Filipina/o Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century. The lack of specific Philippine ingredients and the poverty that forced cooks to improvise, embrace, and creatively adapt local resources, the extreme sex ratio imbalance in which few women immigrated before World War II, the migratory nature of Filipina/o life, and the intermarriage and the close social ties of Ilocanos/os, Tagalogs, and Visayas gave birth to a unique Filipina/o American cuisine with cultural ties to the Philippines but with roots in the campos, canneries, and plantations of Hawai‘i, Alaska, and the West.

Previous scholarship on Filipina/o Americans focused heavily on labor experiences, immigration exclusion, and race relations, with less emphasis on family formation, gender, class, community formation, and cultural production. In exploring the ways in which Visayan, Ilocano/o, and Tagalog emigrants became Filipina/o Americans through their food, I take to heart the call of the late historian Steffi San Buenaventura, who insisted that Filipina/o American history “should be as much a narrative of the cultural world they brought with them as it is an account of their life in the new country.” Studying Filipina/o American foodways allows us to explore the cultures and community that these immigrants created. “Foodways include food as material items and symbols of identity, and the history of a group’s ways with food goes far beyond an exploration of cooking and consumption,” writes historian Hasia Diner. “It amounts to a journey to the heart of its collective world.” Filipinas/os turned to their family networks and kin and to fellow immigrants to survive, constructing a social world and ethnic identity grounded in their provincial ethnic and class identities and shaped by new cultural traditions borne of the world they now inhabited. The unique Filipina/o American cuisine they created was a powerful symbol of their collective struggle to survive despite overwhelming odds.

What Filipinas/os produced in the fields and canneries and cooked and ate in the decades before World War II was shaped by the brutality of industrialized agriculture, the grinding poverty of the Depression years, pitiful agricultural wages and conditions, anti-Filipina/o racist violence, exclusion and deportation, labor repression, and an extreme sex-ratio imbalance. That Filipinas/os insisted on staying in United States demonstrated that the ethnic
community that they had built together in the 1920s and early 1930s gave them the resources that allowed them to survive and even flourish. Just as the Mexican Americans of whom George Sanchez writes created new identities and possibilities for themselves in the 1930s and 1940s, so did Filipina/o immigrants develop and assume "a new ethnic identity, a cultural orientation which accepted the possibilities of a future in their new land" by the 1930s. The Filipina/o American community survived and insisted, even demanded, that they be part of the nation. As they built this community and created new cultural traditions, Filipina/o immigrants, like the European immigrants that Diner studied, were able to enjoy more food than ever before. In this light, food became more than sustenance. According to food scholar Doreen Fernandez, food has been "a vital field of study—even only as a vestige of war, as index of struggle."

Eating in the Philippines at the Turn of the Century

After a brutally violent, protracted imperialist war against Filipina/o nationalists that began in 1898, the United States maintained the Philippines as a formal colony until 1946. The Philippine diet that American imperialists encountered at the turn of the century was a Southeast Asian one, with influences from China, Spain, and Mexico. More than eighty dialect and language groups and seven thousand islands meant that countless regional and local methods, resources, recipes, and styles of food proliferated. For example, the rocky soil of the Ilocos region produced a cuisine based on vegetables, including pinakbet (vegetables with pork and bagoong, a fermented, salted fish paste). According to Doreen Fernandez, four flavors dominate in Philippine cooking: salty, sour, sweet, and bitter. Rice is central, she writes, and probably the most important food in the entire archipelago.

Before Spanish colonial rule began in 1565, people of the archipelago depended on staples such as seafood, goat, pork, chicken, carabao (water buffalo) meat and milk, rice, and fruits and vegetables such as coconuts, bananas, and mangoes. Beginning in the eleventh century, Chinese traders brought noodles, bean curd, bean sprouts, soy sauce, and such dishes as lumpia, a roll of juliened vegetables and meats in a flour-based wrapper. Filipinas/os indigenized these Chinese dishes into such dishes as pansit (sauteed noodles). Spanish friars and officials brought olive oil, wine, ham, tomatoes, and sausages. N. S. Fernandez notes that Spanish food became fiesta cuisine. Spain ruled its Southeast Asian colony by way of Mexico, for the center of Spanish colonial rule was the galleons trade linking Mexico and the Philippines. Filipinas/os who jumped ship
from the galleons in Acapulco as early as the 1500s and 1600s and made their way to Louisiana began shrimping in the bayous. From Mexico came dozens of new terms, foods, dishes, and techniques: cacao, guava, avocados, cassava (sweet potatoes), singkamas (jicama), and tamales. From Mexico came the term adobo, for an indigenous pickled dish in which vegetables and/or protein are stewed in vinegar, salt, garlic, and spices, a method that flavors, tenderizes, and preserves, historian Felice Prudente Sta. Maria pointed out. Fernandez explains that in the Philippines, adobo came to mean anything—pork, chicken, seafood, vegetables cooked in the adobo style. By the time Americans arrived, elite Filipinas/os were enjoying imported cheeses, Spanish sausages, and paté. The sugar barons in the province of Pampanga, considered the culinary capital of the Philippines, Filipinized Spanish recipes such as arroz a la Valenciana (sweet rice and meats cooked in coconut milk and olives), menudo (diced liver, pork, and vegetables), afritadang manok, and chicken braised in a rich tomato broth. These dishes became fiesta food and Sunday fare for elites. Fiesta desserts included leche flan, or crème caramel, and a variety of desserts, including biko and suman, that were made of newly harvested sweet rice, sugar, and coconut milk, called kakanin.

Hungering for America

But these foods of the elite were not everyday fare for the vast majority of the emigrants from the provinces of Luzon and the Visayas who arrived in the United States before World War II. Seafood, rice, and/or saba bananas, corn, or cassava and vegetables formed the basis of their diets. The poorest of the poor might eat only rice, bagoong, and/or salt. The hunger and poverty the writer Carlos Bulosan experienced and witnessed in his province of Pangasinan in the 1910s and 1920s haunted his memories. In the first part of his 1946 novel, America Is in the Heart, Carlos accompanies his mother to the market, where she traded her bagoong for rice, beans, and the rare chicken and eggs in neighboring villages. A starving woman approaches them and asks to dip her cracked, dry hands in their jar of bagoong. What happened next shocked and humbled Carlos:

The woman . . . ran into her house and came back with a small earthen bowl half-filled with water. Quickly she put her hands into my mother’s can of salted fish, and taking them out as quickly, she washed them in her bowl of clean water. There was agony in her face. When the water had reached the deepest recesses of the cracks in her hands, the woman looked at me with forgiving eyes. Suddenly
she lifted the bowl to her mouth and drank hungrily of the water where she had
washed her hands that had been smeared with salted fish. When it was empty
she scraped the sediment in the bottom of the bowl with her forefinger; then she
rushed into her hut to look for rice.  

Whether fictionalized or drawn directly from Bulosan's own experiences, the
story illustrates the horrors of provincial poverty and hunger that early immi-
igrants yearned to escape.

Bulosan was one of the thousands of lower-middle-class pre-World War II emi-
grants from families with small landholdings who relied on subsis-
tence-level farming of rice and vegetables, bartering, fishing, hunting, and
gathering. They lived in the densely populated provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos
Sur, Pangasinan, Tarlac, and La Union and on the islands of Panay and Cebu,
which had almost five hundred residents per square mile but whose land-
holdings averaged only about an acre. American colonial rule led to massive
dislocations in the provinces as the local economies shifted from subsistence
farming to export-oriented agriculture. Because the soil of the Ilocos region in
Luzon lacks the fertile richness of the rice and coconut-growing lands directly
to its south, those who managed to eat three times a day and owned a little
bit of land considered themselves fortunate. One immigrant recalled that his
family survived by trading with fishermen the bananas, rice, corn, and sweet
potatoes that their tenant farmers shared with them. "So there's no exchange
of money," he said, "It was only a matter of exchanging fish for a staple food so
that everyone could live. This was the way we lived in that small village . . . a
beautiful thing, yeah."

For Filipinas/os in the province, a diet of fish, rice, and vegetables was not
monotonous and tiresome; only hunger was unbearable. True hardship meant
having no food at all. "We were lucky in that we managed to eat three times a
day," recalled my lolo Ambo of his turn-of-the-century childhood in Numancia,
Capiz province (later renamed Aklan province). There were no special family
meals or celebrations. "We always have lots of fish," said Camila Labor
Cardio of her childhood in Himundayan, Leyte. "But we never complain, "How
come fish all the time?" For breakfast, they ate hot rolls such as pan de sal
from the town baker. For lunch, Camila was sent to the market (palengke) for
fresh ginamus (salted and fermented fish or shrimp paste) to be eaten with rice
and vegetables. "Fish all the time, and maybe in a blue moon, chicken," she
said. Every night, she pounded rice clean for the next day.

At Christmastime and fiestas, the wealthier landowners and the middle-
class shared their bounty with their tenant farmers and less fortunate
neighbors. This was when the poor could eat fiesta food and holiday desserts, such as sweet rice steamed in banana leaves, rice cakes, and drink hot chocolate. "Christmas was the most beautiful thing in my life back home because of all the goodies like suman and rice cake," remembered one Stockton old-timer: "It didn't matter how poor you were, they always prepared something for that occasion because it was special for us. . . . When we finished our meal, someone would give us coffee—real coffee, and then some chocolate, pure chocolate from the cocoa tree."53

Crop failures, typhoons, and droughts were disastrous for the provincial poor surviving on subsistence farming. A 1904 drought killed the crops of the family of Alberta Alcoy Asis of Carcar, Cebu, whose father farmed a few acres of sugarcane, corn, and vegetables like sitaw (long beans), langka (jackfruit), ube (purple yam), and munggo (mung beans). Her father's death in 1908 was catastrophic. "I'm very poor," she remembered. "My dad left the five acres of land to us. But we cannot plant something because we are small yet. We are seven brothers and sisters." In Cebu City, Alberta's mother encountered a recruiter for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association. Within weeks, the family left to work in the sugar plantations in Hawai'i, where work was plentiful but grueling.44 Families like the Alicys and thousands of other Ilocanos/os and Visayans responded to the burdens of population pressure, colonialism, land loss, and poverty with massive emigration.59

Civilization via Chiffon Cake: American Colonial Education and Food

At the center of the American colonial regime was a national public school system, with its goal of shaping loyal servants of the empire under the premise of preparation for eventual self-rule. As scholar Alex Orquiña notes in chapter 8 of this book, free public school for girls in the Philippines sought to civilize them through a curriculum of domestic science courses, which required girls to adopt white, middle-class gender roles and learn American cooking and baking, knitting, sewing, and household hygiene and sanitation. Domestic science was central to the colonial project and its civilizing mission. "That to have good government we must first have good people; that in order to have good people we must first have good homes," wrote Alice Magong, a teacher charged with drawing up the domestic science curriculum in Zamboñas in 1902.66 Domestic science (later called home economics) was a nineteenth- and twentieth-century movement of white middle-class women who sought to professionalize the domestic sphere by applying the scientific and managerial techniques of modern industrialization to domestic labors.67
In every town, domestic science buildings were erected. Camila Labor Carido remembers bitterly how domestic science and pressure to conform to gender roles, instead of reading and arithmetic, dominated her education. "We are not educated," she remembered angrily.

We go to school [only] to learn how to write [our] name. You are prepared [only] to take care of your husband and your children. We are just taught how to be a good wife, darn and sew, cook for your husband. That's our life in the Philippines, to serve your husband even if he kills you for not doing it.

If Filipina/o bodies were deemed racially inferior to American ones, so too were their native foods. Students were taught the nutritional superiority of refined sugars, red meats like beef, animal fats, hydrogenated fats like shortenings, and highly processed foods. As a result, American food was increasingly seen as "hygienic, practical, and 'modern,' fit for the new generation," explains Doreen Fernandez. Moreover, the students were instructed to eat three square meals (and avoid merienda, or afternoon snacks), use forks and spoons, and end the traditional practice of eating with their hands. In agriculture classes, teachers pressed students to abandon crops thought inferior to American varieties. As Orquiza contends in chapter 8, a combination of domestic science curricula and the marketing of American corporations like Nestlé, Lea & Perrins, and Heinz encouraged a generation of Filipinos to crave canned products such as corned beef and SPAM, white bread, pies, chiffon cakes, cookies and biscuits, salads made of American canned fruit, and mayonnaise-slathered macaroni salads. But few Filipinas/os could afford canned Dole fruit, Nestlé condensed milk, and a freezer for "Frozen Pampanga Fruit Salad"; or gas ovens, imported nuts, dates, and cracker meal for a cookie called "Food for the Gods," both of which were popularized by *Culinary Arts in the Tropics* (published in 1922 by the wives of American colonial officials). Nonetheless, the domestic science curricula and American advertising made an indelible impression on young Filipinas/os by portraying life in America as a paradise in which macaroni chicken salads, steaks, biscuits, pies, cakes, and frozen fruit salad were abundant. Such a country must have seemed irresistibly delicious.

Going to the Land of Baking Powder Biscuits

To paraphrase my father, in the 1910s and 1920s, Filipina/o emigrants who were eating steak in the Philippines did not come to America, but those whose diets
relied on tapioca and rice made their way to the United States by the thousands. The influence of American public schooling and the poverty and deteriorating economy of the provinces, coupled with the attractive prospect of gaining a college education in the United States, drew more than 150,000 Filipinas/os to Hawai‘i, Alaska, and the United States by 1946. As American nationals, they could enter freely, unchecked by Asian exclusion laws. Moreover, because of traditional gender roles, most emigrants left their wives and children behind. The result was a sex-ratio imbalance of fourteen men to one woman in California before World War II. Planters in Hawai‘i and farmers on the West Coast were in desperate need for cheap labor. Filipina/o populations swelled wherever there was agricultural work: the sugar plantations in Hawai‘i, the salmon canneries in Alaska, and the fertile farmlands of California and Washington state. Filipinos in the navy were drawn to bases in Vallejo, San Diego, and Brooklyn. Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco attracted busboys and domestics, and hundreds of Filipinas/os attended colleges and universities.

Luckily for these immigrants, rice was abundant. Earlier Asian immigrants had pioneered rice farming in California and truck farming Asian vegetables. Large-scale rice production exploded in the California Delta in the 1910s with Japanese short-grain varieties, known now as Calrose.29 Other familiar foods and staples such as soy sauce (toyo or suyo), noodles, and vegetables like bitter melon,
EATING FILIPINA/O AMERICAN

eggplant, okra, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and coconuts were grown or imported by Asian immigrant tenant farmers. The sweet short-grain rice called malagkit, prized for kakanin (rice desserts) was already being grown and used for mochi by Japanese Americans. Bay leaves, ginger, peppercorns, vinegar, and garlic were readily available. But not until after World War II could Filipina/o-owned grocery stores import products like bagoong, banana leaves, and patis (fish sauce). In those intervening years, Filipina/o cooks creatively adapted local ingredients and made substitutions when necessary. Because of the sex-ratio imbalance, Filipinos were forced to learn how to cook for themselves, which challenged traditional gender roles, and most campo cooks were men. Filipina immigrants’ lives were grueling: they worked as laborers and campo cooks, in addition to raising children, keeping house, and maintaining ethnic culture.

When the Depression pushed farm labor wages down to ten cents per hour and service-sector work disappeared, Filipinas/os crowded into tiny rooms in residential hotels and shared grocery and cooking expenses. As aliens, they were ineligible for New Deal relief. Often the one or two Filipinas/os in a group of friends or relatives who had a job would support the rest. To exclusionists, reports of dozens of Filipinos crowding into hotel rooms and eating unfamiliar foods in squalid conditions were further evidence that they were morally and culturally unassimilable and racially unfit for citizenship. In a front-page declaration in the Watsonville, California, newspaper Evening Pajaronian, Judge D. W. Rohrback claimed that Filipinos had a “low standard mode of housing and feeding.” “Fifteen Filipinos will live in a room or two, sleeping on the floor and contenting themselves with squatting on the floors and eating fish and rice,” a horrified Rohrback wrote. Editors of The Torch, a Filipina/o American newspaper based in Northern California, dismissed Rohrback’s insults. “To discuss the Filipino diet is stupid,” the editors responded. “Each nation has a particular diet.”

Perhaps the uncles who loudly protested my father’s stinky dried-fish lunch were attempting to distance themselves from the stereotype of dirty, emasculated, barbaric, rice-and fish-eating savages popularized by Rohrback (and by Samuel Gompers in his inflammatory 1906 tirade against Chinese workers, “Meat vs. Rice”). Some Filipinos took to extremes the relationship between consumption and Filipina/o fitness for independence. Hilario Moncado, founder of the powerful Filipino Federation of America (FFA), insisted that his members eschew red meat, labor unions, dance halls, drinking, and gambling in favor of a mostly raw, vegetarian diet. The most spiritually dedicated members subsisted on peanut juice they called mug-mug and a compressed bar of honey, oats, and raisins. Filipino labor union leaders, whose strikes were often broken by federation scabs, derisively claimed that the diet made FFA
members too weak for farmwork. But the second-generation children of FFA members, like Jean Hipolito Labuga, sometimes bent the rules. In the 1930s, Labuga used to trade her peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to her classmates for bologna sandwiches and hot dogs.39

Jackrabbit Adobo: Working, Cooking, and Eating in the Campo and the Cannery

By the mid-twentieth century, Filipinas/os, along with Mexicans and other Asians, had transformed California into an agricultural empire and one of the world’s largest economies. By 1930, Filipinas/os comprised more than 80 percent of the total number of asparagus workers in the San Joaquin Delta region and almost 14 percent of the total farm labor force in California.40 Filipinas/os traveled as far north as Alaska for salmon cannery work in the early summer, and as far south as the Imperial Valley to pick grapes in the early fall. Filipinas/os also followed the crops to across California to Washington State, Idaho, and Montana. These laborers picked asparagus, grapes, lettuce, sugar beets, prunes, tomatoes, peaches, apples, berries, melon, potatoes, celery, brussels sprouts, artichokes, onions, hops, and more. Because Filipinas/os occupied the lowest rung of the farm labor racial hierarchy, they received the lowest wages and substandard working and living conditions.

The America about which their domestic science teachers had bragged in the Philippines was far from the reality of the campo, the Filipino nickname for the farm labor camp. Filipina/o workers in the Delta and the San Joaquin Valley lacked electricity, running water, and flush toilets. They lived in segregated ramshackle wood bunkhouses, old barns occupied by animals, or abandoned boxcars. In addition to working on farms, the women also had jobs as bookkeepers, contractors, and campo cooks.41 Filipina immigrants expecting gleaming, modern American kitchens were shocked to find that they had to cook over open fires and gather their own firewood and water. “I cooked for about fifty men,” recalled Camila Carido.

We used to complain because they had a bathroom in the [farmer’s] house and electricity, but we had a butane stove. I used to have to carry the wood. You have to burn it because you have to cook rice, but I didn’t complain. I had to help my husband. I made thirty five cents an hour.42

Farmers and contractors charged up to seventy-five cents per day for room and board and served the cheapest possible food—fish and rice—at a time
when most workers made a dollar a day. “You have no choice,” said George Montero. “You get what they cook ... I had no car. I had no money.” Workers fell into debt because they were charged for room and board during the off-season. Once Filipinas/os rose in the ranks to become contractors, many took advantage of the enclosa system, in which workers deducted expenses for things like groceries and work tools from their total earnings. The cook, who was sometimes the wife of a laborer or contractor, would also receive a cut. George Montero’s workers used the enclosa system and took turns cooking. All the expenses were divided. “We just get what we want to eat,” he said. “If the men want to have roast pig, we get roast pig. Or if they want chicken, we'd just go and buy chicken.”

To many Filipina/o immigrants, life in America, even in the campos and canneries during the Depression, still occasionally afforded a richer and more varied diet than what they had subsisted on in the province. Campo cooking was basic: fish, either fried or in soups, stews, or stir-fries (gisas) of meat and vegetables. Leftover rice was fried for breakfast, with eggs and coffee. Chicken’s feet, fish heads, and pigs’ necks, bellies, tails, and feet were cooked as sinigang, adobo, as flavoring in monggo/bulatong (mung bean stew), or nilaga (boiled), since these cuts were flavorful and cheap or free from the butchers and grocers who supplied the camps. A dish in Angeles Monrroy Raymundo’s campo cooking repertoire in the 1920s and 1930s was pigs’ feet cooked adobado style (braised with vinegar, soy sauce, and pickling spices). In their parents’ farm labor camp in Winton, California, Henry Dacuyan and his sister Helen remember a kitchen that consisted of two giant iron kawa (woks) set on brick foundations with gas jets under them and a wood stove. Helen Dacuyan Villaruz remembers cutting vegetables and washing stacks of dishes in the campo kitchen.

To supplement these meals, Filipinas/os might enjoy the fruits of their labor: surplus peaches, grapes, asparagus, tomatoes, celery, potatoes, and other fruits and vegetables. “I used to help our boss bake bread,” Segunda Reyes remembered. “And then, for the rest of our food, my husband gets potatoes, celery. He would go over there and pick up potatoes by the sack and that’s what we eat all day.” Filipinas/os raised chickens and planted gardens. In the 1930s and 1940s on the Juanitas family farm in the Delta, the family grew long beans, patola (Filipino squash), bitter melon, bell peppers (the young leaves were also eaten), a green called alubati, onions, garlic, water cress, okra, gowg (another Filipino green vegetable), beets, squash, Chinese lettuce and cabbage, and tangelad (lemongrass). Violet Juanitas Dutra remembers. Her father Cirilo even made wine from local grapes.
Filipinas/os took advantage of their surroundings to feed themselves. In the 1920s and 1930s, the waterways of the San Joaquin Delta teemed with wildlife and wild vegetables. The forests and mountains surrounding Seattle, Dorothy Cordova remembers, were rich in game such as deer, as well as greens, birds, and exotic mushrooms. Filipinas/os fished in Delta rivers for salmon, catfish, and sea bass, gathered river snails (Filipinas/os called these sisi) and frogs, hunted pigeons and rabbits, and foraged for greens and mushrooms. "It was great because we really weren't hungry when we lived out there [in the Delta]," remembered Anita Bautista, who was raised in the Delta in French Camp, California. "There were jackrabbits. There were cottontails. There were pheasants. There were ducks that flew in. We had the river there. The bass would be huge." Bautista's Ilocano father did most of the cooking for their large family in the campo. "I remember my father making the jackrabbit adobo," she remembered. "And him shooting those illegal swans out in the asparagus field. Vegetables were out there growing wild. The pigweed, mustard greens." The family also had a garden, chickens, and goats.49

In his memoirs, Alejandro Raymundo recalled that his family subsisted on rice, soy sauce, and mushrooms during the hardest years of the Depression: "1931 was depression time, and boy was it tough," he wrote. "Those who have
money would buy me a sack of rice and a bottle of soyo and that would last me over a month." Raymundo collected tree mushrooms from willow trees. "Rice and fried mushroom," he wrote. "That's all we eat 3 times a day. Sometimes I wonder how we survived." Foraging could be dangerous, however. In 1934, sixteen Filipinos died from eating poisonous toadstools they had found near their lettuce camp in San Luis Obispo County. If Rizaline Raymundo's father Alejandro Raymundo was terrified that his family might starve, his children did not sense it. Many Filipinos growing up during the Depression felt fortunate to have any kind of food and shelter. "Hard times I wasn't aware of, we always had food on the table and a roof over our heads," Rizaline Raymundo said. "Most of the time the food was rice and mushroom, rice and fish—whatever was on the table we ate." Raymundo said she learned how to eat fish head, shells from the river, tripe, fried intestines, chickens' feet, and frogs' legs. "You name it, we ate it," she laughed. "Filipinos have a knack for making any kind of food edible and delicious." When their supply of rice fell, Raymundo's mother turned to the campo cook's supply of tutong, the crispy bottom of the rice pot, which he stored in burlap.

The wild salmon swimming through Delta streams and rivers were prized catches, although fishing for them was illegal. In her diaries, Angeles Raymundo recorded the happy fall day in 1928 when her husband Alejandro and his buddies caught huge salmon by hand as the fish struggled from the ocean up a shallow stream to lay their eggs. "He made sinigang out of the head and we fried some of the stomach," she wrote. The rest of the fish was cleaned, salted, and preserved to be shared with neighbors. Jean Hipolito Labuga of Livingston, California, remembers that her father and his friends would leave at night to fish illegally. "They did this so they could feed their families," she remembered. Labuga's parents would salt and dry the fish to make it last through the winter, and Labuga's mother also dried and pickled eggplant. Lillian and Violet Juanitas helped their uncles and cousins clean, salt, and dry fish. "The fish were dried on the roof and when they were stiff and completely dried, they were stacked and bagged and used to help stretch food supplies," Lillian recalled. The fish were stinky, she remembered.

Massive celebrations marked the end of asparagus season in June in the Delta, and the end of lettuce in the Salinas area in early December. The centerpiece of the party would be a lechon, or whole roasted pig (or several, depending on the size of the work crew), cooked in a pit dug in the fields. "When we finished the crop, we would celebrate the end of the season, [because] that's when everybody gets paid," remembered Moreno Balantac, who was born and raised in Stockton. Every part of the pig was used. Balantac remembered that
they used the blood and organs to make diniguan, or pork blood stew, and
tied the belly for baguet, an Ilocano specialty. Balantac also learned different
methods that Visayans and Tagalogs used to make biko, a brown-sugar rice
cake. "What I learned to do was squeeze the coconut, fry the juice, and mix the
residue with the rice and then bake it," he said.57

Seal Adobo, Bear Nilaga, and Salmon Head Sinigang: Cooking in Alaska

From the 1910s to the 1970s, Filipinas/os constituted the main labor force in
Alaska's salmon canneries. Bunkhouse cooks prepared cheap and monotonous
meals of rice alongside salmon, bottom fish, and dried seafood, according to
historian Donald Guimaya. Contractors closed the kitchens at 8 P.M., hoarded
supplies, and forced workers to buy expensive snacks like chocolate and biskits from the company stores.58 Sinforoso L. Ordana remembers that in 1935
in Alaska, his work crew nearly starved. "We had those biscuits with no butter,
no jelly, no coffee, no sugar, no milk, just jet black coffee and we work twelve,
fourteen hours," he said. "We only have one biscuit, no eggs for breakfast." For
lunch, the cook made a pot of munggo beans with only a handful of pigs' tails
to be shared among several dozen men. "We have to fish for the pig tail, no
kidding," he recalled.59

Filipina/o workers in Alaska scavenged and foraged for additional food. The
salmon heads and tails that the cannery discarded were turned into sinigang
(sour soup). Local crabs were caught and eaten. Ordana remembered. Workers
planted vegetable gardens and scavenged for the local wild peas that Filipinas/
os called bukayong. Some would also raise pigs, he remembered. Filipinos also
resorted to illegally hunting deer, which they had to hide from their cannery
supervisors. "We even kill a bear, a bear to eat, a black bear," Ordana recalled.
"It's like beef." Ordana remembers that men were so hungry that they were eating
berries and raw mussels, clams, and sea snails they plucked from the shore.
Only a telegram reporting the death of a friend by tainted seafood stopped them.60 Workers in the salmon canneries improvised their own bagoong and
patis (fish sauce) by salting and fermenting salmon scraps in barrels. "I would
salt the salmon, layer by layer, into a 25 gallon barrel made of wood," Sleepy
Caballero of Stockton remembered.

Some of the old timers would get a full size salmon and let it dry out in the
shower room, or some would hang them in the enclosed porch. . . . After I filled
my barrel, I would immediately go down to the post office and mail it home to
my mother in Stockton.61
When Filipino cannery workers unionized in 1937, their food demands reflected their newfound power, their long years in America, and their desire for a more varied diet. In the late 1930s, union representative Prudencio Mori of Local 37 told the supervisor at the Sunnypoint Cannery that their meals did not make for happy workers. “We are served eggs and rice every morning,” Mori remembered. “Rice and boiled salmon at noon, rice and boiled salmon or fried salmon at night. That was the menu throughout the whole season and many people are not fed properly. They are quite unhappy.” Mori demanded bacon and eggs, and jam with bread for breakfast. “Because there are some of us who have been here in the United States for so long, do not eat rice for our breakfast, we would like some bread, bacon, and eggs,” he said. Mori also won his demand for turkey or chicken every Sunday.

Filipino men who married Native Alaskan women adapted Philippine techniques to local ingredients. My father would “hunt moose, porcupine, ptarmigan, geese and ducks for our food,” said Lisa Dolchok, daughter of a Cebuano father and a mother of Aleut and Yup'ik heritage. “He cooked with bagoong. He taught us to cook adobo: beaver meat, moose, goose, duck, or whatever meat there was at home. We ate seal meat, seal oil, and dried fish, and rice.” Dorothy Larson, the daughter of Jacinto Tagabao Pelagio, a native of Vigan,
Ilocos Sur, and an Inupiat Eskimo, Lucille Gabriel, remembers well her father's cooking in Alaska. "My father did most of the cooking," she recalled. "And he used local meats for his adobo: moose meat, porcupine meat, beaver meat... He dried seal meat and called it tapa, or jerky. And of course, we had rice."95

Adobo "At Least Once a Week": Eating and Surviving in the City

Beginning in the 1920s, Filipina/o cooks opened restaurants, grocery stores, and even soda fountains in Chinatowns and Filipina/o American neighborhoods. "In the United States the Filipinos never get quite satisfactorily fed unless they eat adobo at least once a week," declared writer Manuel Buaken in his 1948 memoir I Have Lived with the American People. Buaken's favorite was the Universal Café, opened in 1938 on Second Street in Los Angeles's Little Manila. There, Buaken feasted on gulay Ilocano (Ilocano vegetables), ampalaya manok (chicken with bitter melon), escabeche isda (fish cooked with peppers and tomatoes), and bagoong with onions. "Here is a place where the pressure of racial differences is relaxed.... Here is a place where one hears and speaks one's own dialect without hostile or curious glances. ... Here is a place to feed your body and relax your mind and feel at home."96

The Universal Café was only one of several dozen Los Angeles Filipina/o American eateries. According to scholar Carina Monica Montoya, there were many Filipina/o- owned restaurants in and around Los Angeles's Little Manila, including the Ace Café, Busy Bee, Luzon, La Divisoria, LVM Café, La Union, Lucky Spot, Moonlight, Three Stars, and My-T-Good Café.97 More than a dozen Filipina/o restaurants also could be found in Stockton’s Little Manila neighborhood from the 1910s to the 1940s, including a soda fountain, Filipinas Café, International Café, Luzon Café, Lafayette Lunch Counter, La Union Café, and Mayon Restaurant. As early as 1927, Filipinos in Brooklyn, New York, could satisfy their cravings for adobong baboy (pork adobo), sinigang isda, and sinigang isda (fish in sour broth) at E. G. Lopez’s Manila Karihan Restaurant at 47 Sands Street.98 San Francisco’s earliest Philippine restaurants were Las Filipinas Restaurant in Chinatown at 623 Pacific and the Manila Restaurant at 606 Jackson, both opening in 1930, and the Luzon Café, the New Luneta Restaurant, and the Baguio Café, all located in Manilatown near and/or on Kearny Street.99 In San Diego, Filipinas/os patronized the Manila Café, downtown on Market Street in the 1930s, and then after World War II, the Bataan Café on Island Street.100 By the 1940s, Filipinas/os in Alaska ran more than a dozen Filipino restaurants.101

Most of these restaurants melded regional styles and cooked very basic Philippine classics in order to appeal to the widest possible audience, while
others specialized in Visayan or Ilocano cooking. In the 1930s, the LVM Café in Little Manila on First Street in Los Angeles served Ilocano specialties like *gulay Ilocano* (Ilocano vegetables), along with *singgang hipon* (shrimp in sour broth), each for sixty-five cents. Also in the 1930s, Bibiana Castillano’s Philippine Café in Seattle’s Chinatown catered to Seattle’s heavily Ilocano/o community, often featuring an Ilocano favorite, *calding* (goat meat). Her daughter Dorothy Cordova recalled the time her uncles brought a goat to her house in Seattle on their way to the restaurant. “The goat just break in that door and run all over,” her uncle Sinforoso Ordonez recalled. “We chased him.” They eventually caught and ate it.

Filipino/o restaurants, grocery stores, and other ethnic businesses in Little Manilas also served as informal banks, community post offices, social halls, employment centers, and gathering points for Filipinos/os. One example was my *lola’s* Ambo Mabalón’s restaurant, the Lafayette Lunch Counter, which became one of the most enduring businesses in Stockton’s Little Manila. In 1931, my *lola* Ambo bought the restaurant, located at 50 East Lafayette Street, from Margarita Balucas, an Ilocano entrepreneur who had opened it in 1929. Mabalón offered credit and a permanent address to which customers could send their mail while they followed the crops. Lolo Ambo served food familiar to most Filipinos/os, like chicken and pork adobo, *diniguan*, *pancit*, *singgang*, beef *nilaga* (boiled beef soup), and *sariado* (meat braised in tomato sauce). He saved cooking fats to make his own soap, which he sold, and made his own dried beef, or *tapas*. By using local ingredients and/or ingredients like salmon and asparagus that were harvested and brought in by Filipino/o workers, he helped create a distinctive Filipino/o American cuisine in Stockton. Filipino jazz bands on their way to gigs at the Little Manila dance halls or at community events would stop first to eat at the Lafayette Lunch Counter. “The first spot [we hung around at] was Ambo’s Lafayette Lunch,” Policarpo Porras remembered. “So that Lafayette Lunch is the oldest Filipino restaurant in Stockton!” My grandfather sold the restaurant to a Filipino/o couple in 1979, and they ran it until 1983. It then was a Mexican restaurant until the city tore down the building for a McDonald’s in 1999.

Many immigrants became dishwashers, busboys, and pantrymen in the hotels and restaurants of major cities, with a handful working their way up to becoming head chefs. For example, Cavite native Paul Paul worked his way up from a dishwasher to the head chef at a fine Los Angeles restaurant, eventually becoming the head chef at the luxurious Hotel Stockton in the 1940s. In his retirement, he even had his own cooking show on Sacramento local television in the 1970s. Ilocano immigrant Pete Valoria became the head chef of
Figure 7.4. Bibiana Castillano (center) ran the popular Philippine Café in the Chinatown district in Seattle, Washington. She specialized in Ilocano food. This day’s specialty, advertised in the window, was caldado, or goat. Photograph courtesy of Dorothy Cordova.

Pioneer Tamale in the 1940s, a popular restaurant in Stockton, a position he held for three decades. Miguel “Mike” Castillano became the head chef at Seattle’s finest restaurants and retired as the executive chef of the legendary Seattle seafood chain Ivar’s in the 1970s.

Let’s Go Chop Suey!

Filipina/o American restaurant food was satisfying, but on special occasions, many Filipinas/os would “go chop suey.” For many Filipinas/os, going out for Chinese food was an important symbol of their Americanization. In the Philippines, “they used to kid us, saying, ‘When you go to America you will not see any more rice there,’” recalled one immigrant who arrived in San Francisco in 1926. But “the first thing my father did when he met us was to take us to a chop suey house where there was lots of rice.” Anita Bautista’s favorite chop suey place was Gan Chy, in Stockton’s Chinatown. “We would go to celebrate special occasions such as paydays, birthdays, Christenings, end of the asparagus season, [and it was] a place to take our relatives from Hawaii,” she recalled.

Filipinas/os developed a taste for Chinese food in the Chinese gambling houses. “In the afternoon, there is a table full of all kinds of food—you just
help yourself,” remembered Alfonso Ysonia of Lumban, Laguna, of the gambling houses in 1920s Seattle. In the Delta’s Chinese gambling houses, owners served tea and coffee, doughnuts, rice gruel, chow mein, soup, rice, and chop suey. As scholar Heather Lee writes in chapter 3 of this book, by the turn of the century, Chinese American restaurants exploded in popularity. Most of them, as historian Renqi Yu notes, stoked the national craze for “chop suey,” the stir-fried “Chinese” dish of diced meats and vegetables. By tweaking their menus and popularizing “Oriental” decor and curtained booths, these restaurants gave the impression of being sophisticated and exotic.

Chop suey restaurants were popular for several reasons. Because of the long presence of Chinese in the Philippines, many immigrants already were familiar with Chinese food, and Chinatowns often were the only places Filipinas/os could live. The food was served family style (in large bowls or platters for sharing) and with rice, so the food could be stretched. But most important, as scholar Dorothy Cordova points out, Filipinas/os were never refused service, insulted, or segregated in the back rooms, as they were at white-owned restaurants. In Stockton, Filipinas/os patronized Gan Chy Restaurant at 215 S. El Dorado Street, New China Cafe, and, for banquets, the glamorous On Lock Sun restaurant on 125 East Washington Street. Many of the most popular chop
suey houses, such as Seattle's Tai Tung (which opened in 1935) and San Francisco's Yat Gan Low advertised in Filipino American ethnic newspapers across the West Coast.

In 1934, the editors of the Salinas-based Philippinuses Mail chided Filipinas/os for abandoning their karithans (informal restaurants) for chop suey. "Rizal Day celebrations, birthday, wedding and farewell festivities are not complete without taking a trip to some chop suey establishment," the editors complained.⁸⁶ Sure, "we go to [Lafayette Lunch Counter] and Mr. Canelario's restaurant [the Luzon Café]," said Concepcion Lagura of Stockton. But "when they say, 'Let's go and eat! We go to the chop suey place.""⁸⁷ This attitude enraged the Luzon Café's owner-cook Claro Canelario, whose café in Little Manila was featured in America Is in the Heart. "One thing about the Filipino, if he has no job, he comes to beg you to feed him," he recalled. "But when he has some money, he does not go to you! You see him eating at the Chinese restaurants!" Canelario would seek out his debtors inside crowded chop suey joints. "I go to the guy and ask, "Hey, when will you pay! And he says, 'You're embarrassing me!'" he recalled. "I says, "You owe me already about $15, and here you are eating!'"⁸⁸

"Up to My Elbows Washing Rice": Filipina/o American Home Cooking

In addition to the restaurants, campos, and canneries, the roots of early Filipina/o American cuisine can be found in Filipinas/os' creative and resourceful adaptations. The Filipina/o American gender roles expressed in the sexual division of labor meant that food work—the labor of preparing meals—was placed largely on women's shoulders, usually mothers or oldest daughters. As Valerie Matsumoto explains in her research on Japanese American women in chapter 13, these responsibilities gave Filipinas more power to shape Filipina/o American ethnic culture. Filipina/o families often shared their meals with large extended families of male cousins, neighbors, distant relatives, and even strangers, which increased women's burdens and responsibilities. In these settings, Tagalog, Visayan, and Ilocano/o families socialized with and married each other, blended regional favorites, and shared recipes. Accordingly, these meals shaped the ways in which Filipinas/os thought about food, ethnic culture, and their families.

The improvisation of the early Filipina/o American kitchen was a result of demographics. The lack of both elders and many ingredients gave women the burden—and also the freedom—to adapt American ingredients to Filipino recipes and to use substitutions, creativity, and improvisation. "My mother was so young when she came, she had to learn from the other women how
to cook,” said Eleanor Galvez Olamin, whose mother arrived in California as a young girl in the 1910s. Asuncion Nicolas left Jaro, Iloilo, to join her mother and stepfather in San Francisco in 1929. “I hate cooking,” she said. “When I came to the United States, I [had] never cooked in the islands, and my mother did all the cooking.” When Nicolas married at age nineteen, her thirty-two-year-old husband, a barber, gave her a cooking pot. For dinner each evening, she would copy a pretty table setting she found in Life magazine and boil meat and vegetables in the pot. “To me it was delicious,” she laughed. Each night, Nicolas said her husband would take one look inside the pot, and say, “Dress up! Let’s go chop suey!”

Camila Labor Carido, who arrived as a teenager from the Visayas, learned from her friends.

I learned from other cultures, especially cooking here [in America]. . . . The woman who cooks the guinataan [coconut milk soup, either savory or sweet] is from Luzon, where Manila is. . . . And the women who come from the southern part, Mindanao, they have different cooking, too, because they have Moros [Muslims] there. They use different utensils. The women also taught the other[s] the American customs.

Some Filipinas, like Cebuana former schoolteacher Segunda Reyes, grew up with servants, so campo life was a rude shock.

Over here, I have to get up early in the morning, especially when cooking for the boys in asparagus—1 o’clock in the morning or 2 o’clock. . . . I have to get up and make [a] fire. We get our wood outside and we get our water outside. And I was crying. Oh, it was sad.

To feed families and guests, resourceful Filipina/o cooks used animal parts that butchers, fishmongers, and grocers discarded, and they stretched food creatively. Dorothy Cordova remembers that the slaughterhouses in Seattle gave away for free pigs’ heads, tripe, bellies, tails, and feet. “Pig tail makes the best adobo,” she remembered. Her mother cooked lots of vegetables, using meat as a flavoring. She recalled that in Seattle, Filipinas/os would catch fish called “shiners,” eaten raw with lots of ginger, vinegar, salt, pepper, spices, and chilies. Canned goods required no refrigeration and could be stretched; a can of corned beef (carne norte) sautéed with onions, garlic, potatoes, and cabbage eaten with rice could feed many people. The cans of salmon that workers brought as gifts were treats. Dorothy Cordova and
her siblings would eat the salmon with hot rice, a fried egg, and chopped tomatoes.\textsuperscript{39}

Evangeline Canonizado Buell's grandmother's poker group in Oakland, California, was a mix of women of Tagalog, Visayan, and Ilocano ancestry who shared recipes and brought their specialties to the weekly game. Buell recalled that the \textit{biko} and \textit{bibingka} they brought "came steaming hot out of the oven, the aroma rich and tantalizing. I could hardly wait to eat." As they played, they drank Rainier ale and talked in their different dialects about cooking "American." "When it came time to eat, I could hear all the different dialects' terms for cooked rice: \textit{kanon} [Cebuano and Waray], \textit{nasi}, \textit{inapoy} [Ilocano], and \textit{bugas} [Waray, Cebuano, and Aklanon for uncooked rice]."\textsuperscript{38} Buell's grandmother taught her how to cook Filipino foods, particularly how to grate coconuts by squatting over a special iron grater attached to a box called a \textit{kuskus}. Her grandmother devised her own recipe for \textit{lumpia} wrappers, and she substituted canned tomato sauce for the \textit{amatto} seeds traditionally used for coloring.

In many Filipino/o American families, Filipino food was a mix of different regional favorites or cooking styles. For Deanna Daclan Balantac, a second-generation Pinay from Stockton, Filipino food consisted of her mother Paula's Capangpangan specialties and her father Rosaura's Cebuano favorites. In Cebu, corn and sweet potatoies were the preferred starches. Rice fields and sugar plantations dot Pampanga Province in central Luzon, but compromise meant that they did not have rice at every meal. Her mother Paula Dizon Daclan was proud of her Capangpangan specialties, like cured pork called \textit{tocino}, \textit{lumpia}, and \textit{puto} (rice cakes). "The other thing was, my dad, in the Visayas they cooked with a lot of coconut," she remembered. "So we would have lots of coconut kinds of stuff for our celebration. So it was a combination of our Kapampangan and Visayan Cebuano type cooking."\textsuperscript{38}

Regional dishes and cooking styles were also shared widely with different groups because of \textit{campo} cooking and the large gatherings at Filipina/o homes for dinners and celebrations. Seattle-based nurse Maria Abastilla Beltran and her brother and husband regularly hosted up to ten additional people for dinner every night. "We would cook for seven people and then [at the table] we are sixteen! . . . That's why we always cook more, because you don't know who was coming."\textsuperscript{38} When she was first married in 1932, Camila Carido and her husband Leon rented a tiny apartment for $11 a month in Little Manila in Stockton, where they fed up to five extra guests per night. "They would say, 'Can we sleep with you and we can help pay the grocery?' How could they afford to go to the hotel at 25 cents a night?" She remembered that one hundred pounds of rice cost $1.95 and three pounds of sea bass cost twenty-five
cents. She cooked simple meals of rice, fish, and, occasionally, a fried pork chop on a kerosene stove in a kitchen without a refrigerator, with only a barrel for storage. Evangeline Canonizado Buell explained that Filipinos would bring her grandmother crates of fresh vegetables and fruits, like asparagus and tomatoes from Stockton, to repay her hospitality. Deanna Daclan Balintac said that it was a family tradition to cook extra and to set the table for ten or twelve, even though her family consisted of seven.

That's why I never thought we were poor, because we always had all these foods to feed all these people. . . . I was always up to my elbows washing rice, because you never knew who would come through the door. . . . I just knew that whenever we cooked, we had two pots of rice.99

Second-generation Pinay Angelina Bantillo Magdael remembered her parents whispering in the kitchen.

My mother would say, "You don't realize our meal tonight is so limited, lucky we have enough for the children." . . . And my father would say, "Do you know that these men had not eaten for several days?" and he would say, "I'm sure our food could stretch." And somehow it did.

Dinner was sometimes only boiled rice with some milk and a little sugar.

My sisters and brother liked it, but I could hardly swallow it and my mother would always say, "Be thankful, at least we have something to eat, when we don't have a grain of rice in the rice can, then that's when we are in trouble." And to this day, I just don't like rice pudding. It gives me sad memories.

Many Filipinas in communities throughout Hawai'i and the West Coast capitalized on Filipinas/os' craving for home cooking, developing lucrative side businesses in which they sold lumpia, rice cakes, binangkal (a Visayan sesame doughnut), Ilocano favorites like cascaron (sweet rice doughnuts), banana fritters, and other desserts, or even surplus vegetables from their gardens, on the streets of Filipina/o American neighborhoods, at dances, in pool halls, and at cockfights. These businesses popularized Ilocano, Tagalog, and Visayan regional cooking amongst Filipinas/os with roots in other regions. Lucia Cordova, whose roots were in Iloilo, brought her successful fried lumpia—making business from Stockton to Seattle in the 1940s. When Fred Cordova brought a
basket of his mother’s lumpia to a Filipino Club gathering at Seattle University, they were a great hit, as his mostly Ilocano/classmates had never seen lumpia before. When Dorothy Laigo, an Ilocana, married Fred Cordova, one of her first tasks was to learn how to make the paper-thin balat, the lumpia wrapper, on a cast-iron griddle. “I burned all my fingers,” she laughed.

To make ends meet, Virgilia Bantillo sold Tagalog snacks like lumpiang sariwa (fresh lumpia) and maruya (banana fritters) in Stockton. “My father went out with baskets to the pool hall and even to the restrooms, and he really sold it!” Angel Magdael remembers. It was an all-day affair for Bantillo to make the delicate lumpia wrappers, using flour, water, and eggs. She sold the wrappers at ten cents apiece to other Filipinas. Her younger daughter, Leatrice Bantillo Perez, sometimes walked several miles across town to deliver them. “She’d make a hundred, so she made $10, I think, for that,” Leatrice Bantillo Perez explained. “That helped the expenses, a little extra.” But even with side businesses, money was a constant worry for the Bantillos and other families in the 1930s. “Very unlucky day for us,” Virgilia wrote in her diary on March 19, 1939. “Broke like anything. I feel blue. I shed tears.”

By the 1930s and 1940s, the food at Filipina/o American family celebrations had evolved into a typical Filipina/o American buffet: Philippine foods from various regions, Filipina/o American adaptations, and American foods. At Evangeline Canonizado Buel’s home, a birthday party in the 1930s featured potato salad, fried chicken, sheet cake, a whole baked salmon, roast duck, meat and seafood dishes, biko, fried lumpia, adobo, and pansit (noodles). Virgilia Bantillo’s family celebrations usually included biko, lumpia, lechon, and maruya, as well as roast chicken, Virginia ham, and a sheet cake. She served roast turkey and pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving dinner, and she cooked breakfasts of grapefruit, oranges, cereal, eggs, ham and sausage, and buns with butter.

World War II

World War II profoundly transformed Filipina/o American life and, as a result, the Filipina/o American table. Wartime rations meant more sacrifice and deprivation for a community still recovering from the Depression. The incarceration of Japanese Americans on the West Coast allowed Filipinos take over their empty stores and farms, and Filipino-owned restaurants and grocery stores flourished. After initially being turned away, Filipinos were allowed to join the U.S. Army, and special Filipino regiments were activated in Salinas, California, and were sent to Ford Ord in San Francisco. At the fiesta they
threw when their training was over, soldiers introduced their white commanding officers to lechon. After the war, the community was transformed. Citizenship enabled Filipinas/os to buy land, so hundreds throughout the West Coast began farming. The Filipinas who streamed into the United States in large numbers after the war further transformed Filipina/o American cuisine. Indeed, the food these new immigrants tasted on arriving may have seemed foreign. Seal adobo? Salmon sinigang?

What these newcomers could not have known was that this new Filipina/o American cuisine had taken shape as a result of several factors. Through the public schools, the American colonial regime transformed how Filipinas/os thought about food. The sex-ratio imbalance forced Filipino men to learn how to cook, a task usually left to women in the Philippines. Moreover, the lack of Philippine ingredients; conditions in the fields and canneries where Filipinas/os were forced to cook and eat; the abundance of unfamiliar yet delicious local foods foraged from the land and water; the coming together of Ilocanos/os, Tagalogs, and Visayans around dinner tables; and their migratory life all determined what early Filipina/o immigrants and their children cooked, ate, and considered “Filipino.” The American born-children of these families ate this cuisine and knew it not as Visayan, Tagalog, or Ilocano but as Filipino. This “bridge generation”—those Filipinas/os born in the United States before World War II—connected the consumption of these foods to their identities as Filipina/o Americans and attached memory, cultural pride, and family to their consumption.

I return to my father’s tuyo. By the 1960s, perhaps stinky tuyo was no longer a favorite for these Filipina/o Americans, when they could choose from an array of foods, including beef, chicken, pork, goat, a variety of vegetables, processed and canned goods, and restaurant fare. Perhaps this is why they turned against the dried fish, my father’s “old dependable,” that had sustained them in their provincial youth and during the deprivation of the Depression. But they never abandoned their rice. In June 1946, a rice shortage brought on by wartime rationing pushed hundreds of Filipino workers to demand rice in their daily diets or otherwise walk off the Delta asparagus fields. In fact, hundreds of the five thousand Filipinos working the asparagus that spring left their jobs, devastating the farmers. My father was only partly wrong when he lambasted Filipino Americans for forgetting their roots in fish and rice!
Notes

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4. The Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934 reclassified Filipinos from "nationals" to aliens and limited immigration to fifty per year. Until 1946, Filipinos were barred from becoming naturalized citizens.
11. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 35.
22. Carido, interview.
24. Alberta Alcy Asis, Interview, Demonstration Project for Asian Americans (DPAA), Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS), Seattle, WA.
27. Laura Shapiro’s survey of the domestic science movement is the classic work on this movement. See her *Perfection Salad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
30. Fernandez, “Food and War,” 241. See also Fernandez, *Palayok*; and her essays in *Tikim*.
31. From “Forks Are Progress: Domesticity, Women, and American Education in the Philippines,” paper presented by Elisa Miller, Rhode Island College, at the 123rd annual American Historical Association meeting, New York City, January 3, 2009; also see the posters of the Board of Education, General Classified Files, 1896–1945, General Records, 1914–1945, Box 746, File 1092, Record Group 350, National Archives, College Park, MD.
35. Fred Floresca, DPAA interview, FANHS Seattle.
41. Field notes, Box 2.
47. Segunda Reyes, interview with Mary Inosanto, DPAA, Stockton, CA, 1981.
48. Violet Juanitas Dutra, e-mail to Dawn Bohulano-Mabalon, November 8, 2011.
52. Rizaline Raymundo, interview with Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, August 2001, San Jose, CA.
55. Lillian Juanitas, e-mail to Dawn Bohulano-Mabalon, November 8, 2011.
56. Interview with Angelina Bantio Magdael for DPAA, July 1, 1981, Stockton, CA.
57. Moreno Balantac, interview with Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, July 2001, Stockton, CA.
60. Ordos, interview.
64. Buchholdt, Filipinos in Alaska, 81.
65. Ibid., 98.
DAWN BOHULANO MABALON

84. Dorothy Cordova, interview with Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, November 12, 2011, Seattle.
86. Concepcion Lagura, interview with Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, July 8, 2003, Stockton, CA.
90. Reyes, interview.
91. Cordova, interview, November 12, 2011, Seattle.
99. Deanna Balantac, interview.
100. Interview with Fred and Dorothy Cordova by Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, November 15, 2011, Seattle.
102. Interview with Angelina Bantillo Magdael and Leatrice Bantillo Perez, December 2000, Stockton, CA.
103. Diaries of Virgilia Morella Bantillo, 1926–1946, Bantillo Family Papers, Stockton, CA.
104. Evangeline Canonizado Buell, Twenty Five Chickens and a Pig for a Bride (San Francisco: T’Boli Publishing, 2006).
106. Stockton Record, June 9, 1946.