


The Filipino American Experience: Martial Law and the American Dream

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Writing 101: Asian American
Narratives



Abstract

My project explores Filipino Americans' experience of martial law in the Philippines and their subsequent migration to the United States through the oral histories of my Nanay (grandmother) and my mother.

Born only three months after President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in the Philippines, my mother was known as a “martial law baby.” My research explores how my grandmother and her family survived the economic hardships and military restrictions during this time. I also discuss how the Philippines became one of the largest suppliers of medical professionals to the United States, which connects to my mother's pursuit to work as a physical therapist. Moving to the San Francisco Bay Area, my mother and grandmother found themselves part of a large Filipino American community. Despite the difficulties of immigration, my project shows how they maintain their Filipino American identity as part of a multiracial family.

Introduction

Evangeline Samson Vasquez

- My Nanay
- Born in the Philippines on September 18th, 1946
- Lived and raised a family in the Philippines
- First visited U.S. in 1993
- Became a citizen in June 2014

Cecile Mari Vasquez Coaker

- My Mom
- Born in the Philippines on December 12th, 1972
- Entered San Francisco, United States on July 7th, 1999
- Became a citizen on July 8th, 2008
- Works as a licensed Physical Therapist



Life in the Philippines (Nanay)

- Antipolo Rizal, Philippines
- Worked for Carlos J-Valdez and Co. CPAs (1968– 1976)
 - Auditor then Audit Supervisor
- Central Bank of Philippines - Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (1976 – 2002)
 - Bank officer then Manager of Department of Loans and Credit
- Raised a family with her husband, Fransisco Vasquez, and their three children



President Ferdinand Marcos

- President of the Philippines from December 30, 1965 – February 25, 1986
- Proponent of constitutional authoritarianism
- Member of the Nationalist Party
- One of the most famous dictators due to his implementation of a strict, 14-year Martial Law policy



FM DECLARE MARTIAL LA

The nat'l situation in brief

- This is not a military takeover. Civilian government will function. The officials and employees of the national and local government continue to discharge their duties as before within the limits of the situation.
- All executive departments, bureaus, offices, agencies and instrumentalities of the government, as well as government-owned or controlled corporations, government-owned enterprises, municipalities and service agencies continue to function under the present officers and employees in accordance with existing laws.
- The judiciary shall continue to function under the present organization and personnel and try and decide all criminal and civil cases with certain exceptions.
- All schools will be closed for one week beginning this Monday for all levels.
- Carrying of firearms outside the residence area is continued by license but without possession of the armed force is prohibited.
- Curfew will be imposed from 12 midnight to 4



PRESIDENT MARCOS addresses nation in television broadcast.

But civilian g still functions military take

President Marcos announced last night that the entire country under martial law is under the control of the military.

The Chief Executive said he signed Proclamation No. 1081 last Sept. 21 in implementation of the military at 11:58 p.m. "I am utilizing the proclamation for one purpose alone: to save the society."

•To save the Republic and form a new

In imposing martial law, Mr. Marcos said this emergency power to establish for the period of the writ of suspension and inquiry. The President stressed the imposition of a military takeover. The government of the declared, adding that the officials and employees continue to discharge their functions as before.

Nation is calm; business, life go on normal

The nation has taken President Marcos' declaration of martial law calmly. There was some concern of some provinces in the declaration of martial law. The declaration of martial law was not a military takeover, but that is what the people mean. The declaration of martial law was not a military takeover, but that is what the people mean. The declaration of martial law was not a military takeover, but that is what the people mean.

Marcos Martial Law

- Enacted September 22nd, 1972
- Marcos claimed the government was in danger of being overthrown by communism and armed rebellion
- Military control of public utilities and the media, along with an imposed curfew
- **How Marcos successfully implemented Martial Law:**
 - Control the military, police, and Supreme Court
 - Undermine the public's faith in democracy
 - Exaggerate Communist threat
 - Obtain U.S. support
 - Hijack the Constitutional Convention of 1970

How My Nanay Survived Martial Law

Combating the suppression of civil liberties

- Supposed enemies of the regime were sent to safe houses
- Confined, tortured, and murdered
- “I was always aware of who I was talking to, especially at the workplace. I became more reserved of my ideas.”
- Movement was limited, especially at night
- Completed all necessary activities earlier in the day



The Birth of My Mom

- Born only three months after the enactment of martial law
- Known as a “Martial Law Baby”
- Nanay had to leave the house late at night to go to the hospital; in labor
 - Had to get multiple doctors notes in anticipation of this possibly occurring
 - Was scared that she would be questioned
 - Stopped in the middle of the route by officials



Surviving the Economic Crash

- The number of families above the poverty line increased 20%
- Theft and looting were relatively common
- Inflation also spurred throughout the public

- "I would always live within our means. We had to limit our spending to only food, shelter, and absolute necessities"
- Nanay had a close friend who could give 2 kg. fish and beef and 12 eggs every week
- Switched jobs during the Marcos regime



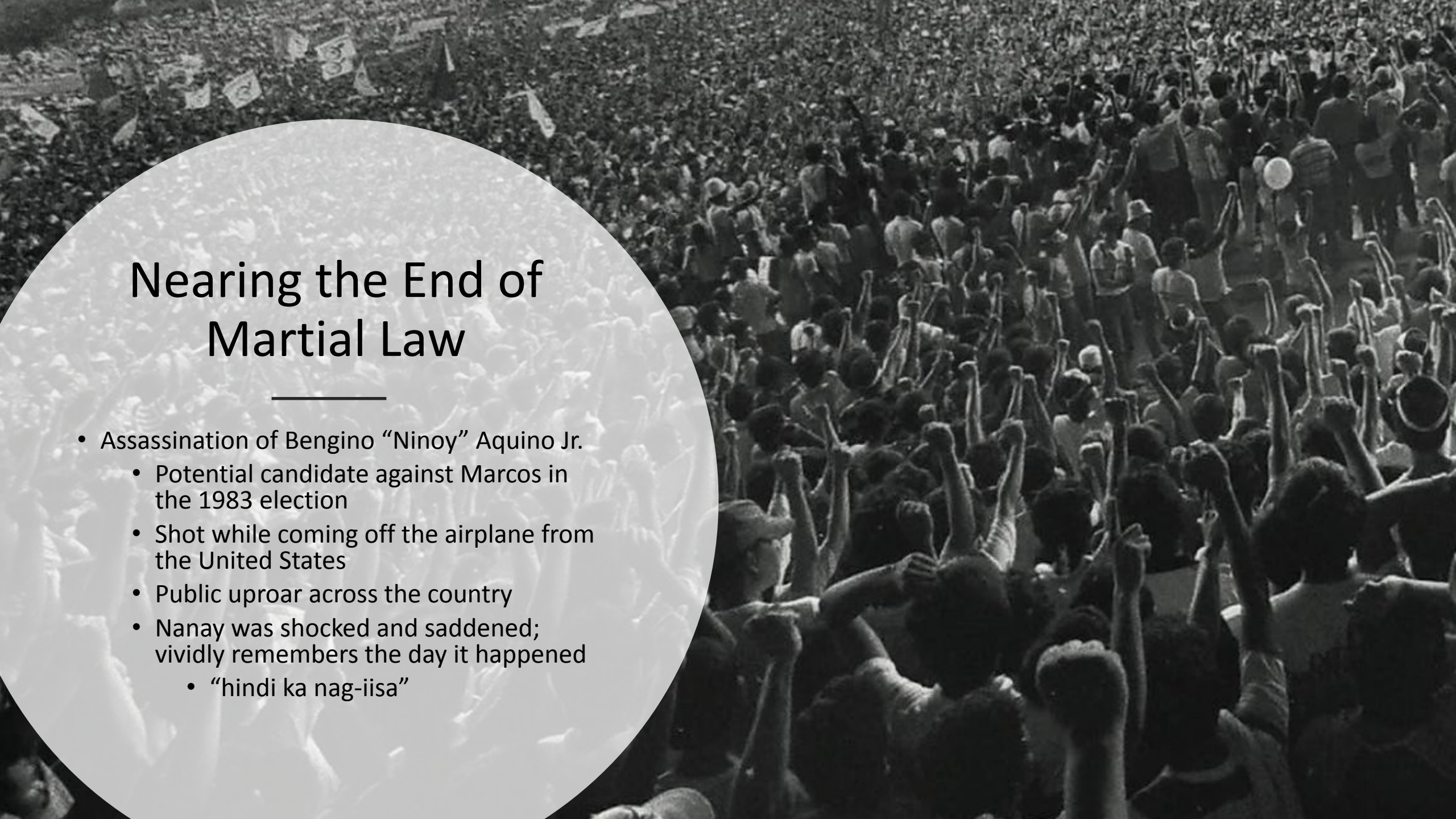
Remembered Experiences

Student Protests - Mendiola Bridge

- Entrance to the palace
- Officers used fire hoses
- Barricaded with barbed wires
- Saw on the news; Marcos called it a demonstration of the power of his regime
- Protests were very widespread, especially at the capital

• Personal Feelings

- Liberal Party voter
- Angry and frustrated about the tortures and deaths
- “A lot of my habits changed, even after the Marcos regime. I didn’t go out late, I completed things earlier in the day, and was more reserved about who to talk to”

A black and white photograph of a massive crowd of people, many with their arms raised in a gesture of protest or solidarity. The crowd is dense and fills the entire frame. In the foreground, several individuals are seen from behind, their arms raised high. The background is a sea of heads and shoulders, extending far into the distance. The overall atmosphere is one of intense public demonstration.

Nearing the End of Martial Law

- Assassination of Bengino “Ninoy” Aquino Jr.
 - Potential candidate against Marcos in the 1983 election
 - Shot while coming off the airplane from the United States
 - Public uproar across the country
 - Nanay was shocked and saddened; vividly remembers the day it happened
 - “hindi ka nag-iisa”

My Mom, the United States,
and Her Experiences as an Asian
American

Colonial Relations with the United States

- Colony of Spain until 1898, ceded power to the United States
 - “Little brown brothers”
- Reshaping the Philippines
 - Democracy
 - Capitalism
 - Public school system
- World War II disrupted independence plans
 - Japanese forces took control until 1945
 - Official independence in 1946
- Still maintained close relationships with United States



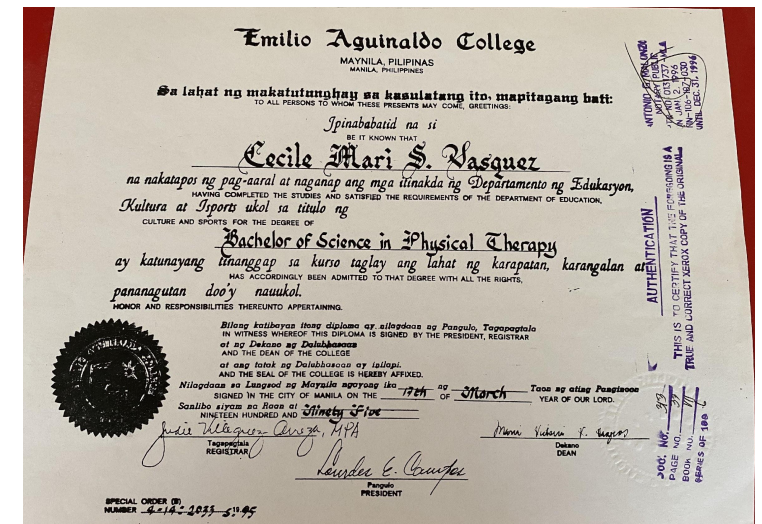
Schooling and Career Aspirations

- Dominican School and Stella Maris College
 - Learned and spoke **English**
 - Place for **U.S. public influence**
- Emilio Aguinaldo College (**B.S. Physical Therapy**)
 - Nursing **too competitive**
 - **Physical therapists needed** in the United States



Filipino Medical Professionals and the U.S.

- Filipino medical practitioners helped alleviate shortage of medical personnel in the U.S. from the 1980s – 2000s
- $\geq 60\%$ overseas workers are women
- Philippines the largest supplier of health professionals to the U.S. since 2010

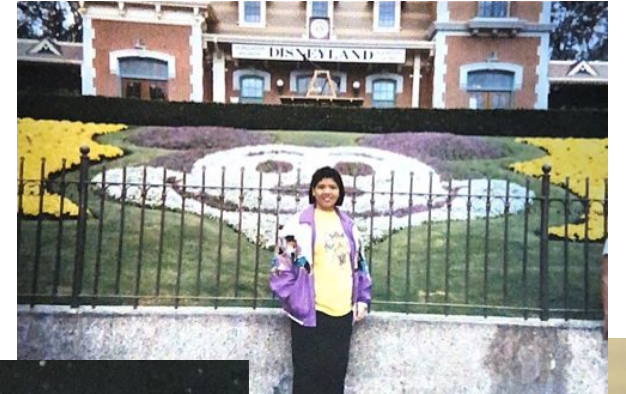
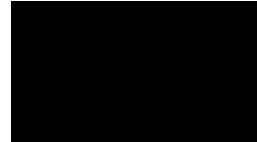


Personal Impressions of the United States

**Overall, extremely positive and hopeful:
“Super clean, cold weather, and very safe”**

- Camp John Hay (1987)
 - Similar to the United States
 - Americanized food
- “PX Goods”
 - Food: Pringles, Nestle
 - Clothing: “Made in the United States”
- Movies and media

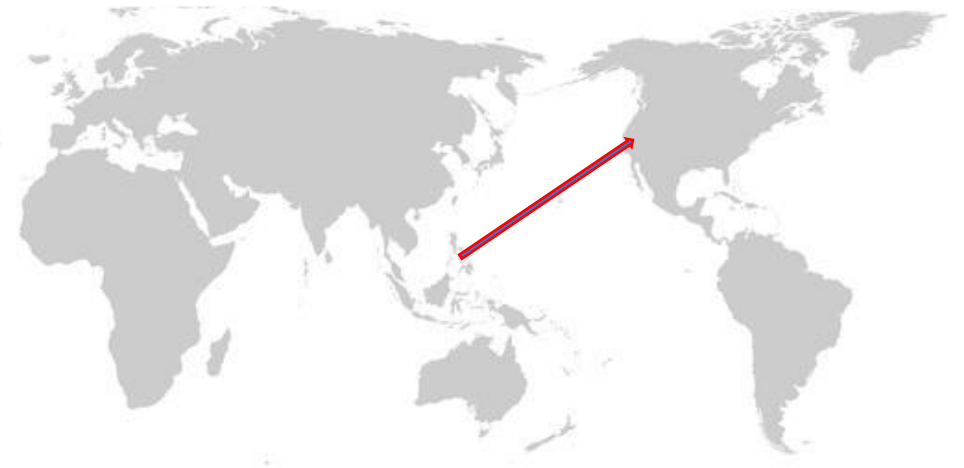
Wanted to move for a better life and career



Pre-Moving to the United States

- Physical therapy more difficult in 1995
- Agencies to sponsor
 - Ensure officiality
 - Richard's Healthcare
 - Took 3 years
- **Mixed emotions:** Excited yet scared

“You just need to be brave. If you really want to do it, you need to work hard”



Early Life in the United States

Point of entry: San Francisco, CA on July 7th, 1999 on an H-1B Visa

- Lived with her aunt in San Jose, CA
- Worked as a Physical Therapy Aid

U.S. Board Exams: *Required* to become a Physical Therapist

- First test (August 1999): **Failed**
 - “I remember seeing the giant, Manila envelope with tears on it and my mind filled with doubts”
- Second test (May 2000): **Failed**
 - “I felt like a burden, slowly failing my dream to live here in the U.S.”



Cultural and Social Difficulties

California (Bay Area, San Jose, Oakland) was home to more Filipinos than any other state, *but*:

Experiences with English

- Did not talk with people unless *had* to
- Unconfident with grammar and accent
- Found it difficult to communicate thoughts effectively

Cooking Filipino Food

- Not enough money to buy ingredients
- Hard to find nearby stores to shop at
- Desirable stores were too far



The Start of a New Beginning

- Third U.S. Board exam (February 2002): **Passed**
 - Met my dad 2 years prior, assisted with studying and speaking English
 - Experience as physical therapy aid helped with clinical portion of test
 - Became a Licensed Physical Therapy Applicant
- Permanent resident on October 15th, 2002
- Had me in December 2002
- Attained her first job as a Physical Therapist in May 2003



Conclusions and Takeaways

Family maintains **Filipino-American culture**

- Going to church on Sundays
- Frequently visiting family-friends
- Eating Filipino cuisines for weekend brunch

Mom and Nanay both experienced **difficulties** that demonstrate their unique **Filipino-American experiences**

Proud to be a part of the growing **multiracial families** here in the United States

