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Peter Jamero. *Growing Up Brown: Memoirs of a Filipino American.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. xiv + 331 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-98642-5.

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The Bridge Generation

When I was a kid and feeling overwhelmed by something or other, my mom used to quote–a bit inaccurately, I have since learned–William Ernest Henley's *Invictus* to me: "You are the captain of your ship," she would say, "you are the master of your destiny." At other times, she reminded me that we were Filipino, and that I would therefore always be a second-class citizen. This tension, between a sincere desire to believe that America's promises about individuality and merit are universal and the painful understanding that really they are not, informs Peter Jamero's recounting of his life, from his childhood in the 1930s and 1940s through his retirement in the mid-1990s, in the pages of *Growing Up Brown*.

A second-generation Filipino American, Jamero begins with his family background: his parents' individual migrations from the Philippines, their meeting, and marriage in the United States. He then discusses his early years, as a "campo" boy, born in the midst of the Great Depression and growing to young adulthood in the farm labor camps his parents operated in California's Central Valley. After high school, Jamero spent four years in the U.S. Navy, during a period that included the beginning of the Cold War and outbreak of the Korean War. Honorably discharged in 1952, Jamero decided to go to college. He trained in social work, first at San Jose State College and then went on to graduate school, earning a master's degree in social work from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1957. Most of the book, however, focuses on Jamero's several successful careers, mainly as a Filipino American community activist and an executive administrator in both public and nonprofit sectors, but also (briefly) as an academic at the University of Washington. Along the way, Jamero links his personal story to world, national, and community events, and to Philippine and Filipina/o American history and culture. He also includes descriptions of family happenings and other milestones in his private life, like the births of his children and his trips to the Philippines, and even discusses recreational interests, such as his passions for jazz and baseball.

In scope and structure, *Growing Up Brown* is thus less the memoir of childhood, that its title suggests (only about one-third of the book deals with Jamero's early life, time in the navy, and education through college), and more a traditional autobiography. Like many autobiographies published as much for their content as their literary value, Jamero's includes a good deal of extraneous material that, although no doubt valuable and interesting to family and friends, frequently weighs down the main narrative. That *Growing Up Brown* reads like a family document was not unintentional, however. "My primary purpose," Jamero writes, "was to provide my children and grandchildren with a resource from which they could gain a more complete understanding of my experiences growing up brown in America" (p. 318). In his preface, Jamero locates his experience within the larger story of the shifting meanings of race in twentieth-century America and of the color "brown," in particular. "Having lived through its various iterations," he notes, "I believe that 'brown' is a perfect description of my life experiences as a Filipino American. It captures the hurt of being likened to an ape, of being considered inferior to whites, of being excluded from social activities, of being ashamed of my color, and of being discriminated against in employment and housing. 'Brown' also encompasses my subsequent pride in my ethnicity and, finally, in who I am as a Filipino American" (pp. xiii-xiv).

"It was also my hope," Jamero continues, "that my story could begin to address the lack of documentation on the experiences of Bridge Generation Filipino Americans, ignored by historians and often unknown to recent arrivals from the Philippines" (p. 318). Although precious little has yet been written about Filipina/o American history, the field has been developing at an admirable rate in recent years, and *Growing Up Brown* is a useful contribution to its expanding archive. Much of the historical scholarship that does exist concerns early twentieth-

century migrants, like Jamero's parents–the generation of the *manongs* and *manangs* (terms of familial respect in Ilocano and Cebuano): "those intrepid souls who left the Philippines in the 1920s to work in the pineapple fields of Hawaii, the croplands of California, and the fish canneries of Alaska" (p. xiii). This literature continues to grow.[1] Recent work has also begun to explore the origins and consequences of the profound changes in Philippines-U.S. migration that so thoroughly transformed the demography of the Filipina/o American population since World War II, and especially since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act.[2]

Jamero, by contrast, is a member of what he and his peers have labeled the "Bridge Generation," the children born to the *manongs* and *manangs* from the 1920s through the early 1940s, about whom virtually nothing has been written. Deploying a traditional theme, Jamero writes: "I coined the term ... to call attention to my generation's unrecognized contributions to America" (p. 308). Their contributions were many. By his retirement in 1995, Jamero had become one of the more successful–and, at the height of his career in government service, nationally visible–members of a cohort that included the likes of former governor of Hawai'i Ben Cayetano, the first Filipina/o American to be elected governor of any state. Jamero, too, amassed a respectable list of what he calls "Filipino Firsts." To cite a few: in 1962, he became the first Filipina/o American to rise to the level of division chief in Sacramento County government; ten years later, he became the highest ranking Filipina/o American government executive in the United States, when he was appointed director of the Washington state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; in 1979, he became the first Filipina/o American to hold a full-time faculty position in the University of Washington's School of Medicine (in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine); and ten years after that, Jamero became the city and county of San Francisco's first Filipina/o American department head, when Mayor Art Agnos appointed him to lead the S.F. Human Rights Commission.

Perhaps more significant to social historians, over the course of his adult life, Jamero became ensconced in many of the networks that Bridge Generation Filipina/o Americans developed for reasons at once communal and political: to socialize with other people "growing up brown" in America, as well as to force their concerns and the concerns of their communities onto the political agenda of a country that tried very hard to explain away its racist past and deny its racist present. Of particular interest here are Jamero's discussions about the "Young Turks" of Seattle–politically engaged members of the Bridge Generation who did much to move Filipina/o American issues into the mainstream of local politics. *Growing Up Brown* thus opens a window onto the experiences, motivations, activities, and activism of a group even less well known than the well-nigh historically invisible *manong* /*manang* generation. It should be of interest to scholars in U.S. racial, ethnic, and immigration studies generally, as well as in Filipina/o American studies and Asian American studies, in particular. Because of his training in social work, moreover, and because Jamero spent much of his professional life in the public sector (his first job, in the late 1950s, was with the Adoptions Unit of Sacramento County), *Growing Up Brown* might also be of some interest to students of the welfare state.

In courses in Filipina/o American or ethnic studies, Jamero's autobiography might be assigned, as the back cover of the paperback edition suggests, as a "sequel of sorts to Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* [1946], with themes of heartbreaking struggle against racism and poverty, and eventual triumph." Leaving aside issues related to the authenticity of *America is in the Heart* as autobiography, the two texts certainly go together chronologically.[3] While Bulosan explored the experiences of the immigrant generation in the years before World War II, Jamero helps us to understand those of their children, from the 1930s onward. In other ways, however, the two could hardly be more different. Bulosan's oeuvre, and *America is in the Heart* in particular, occupy canonical places in the literary criticism as well as the curricula of Filipina/o, Asian American, and ethnic and racial studies, at least partially owing to the raw power of his writing. *America is in the Heart* assaults readers with a potency, it must be said, that *Growing Up Brown* does not match. More to the point, but related, the two writers approach anti-Filipino racism in fundamentally different ways. For example, in a 1938 letter, penned some eight years after he arrived in the United States (the same year that Jamero was born), Bulosan wrote: "'Do you know what a Filipino feels in America? I mean *one* who is aware of the intricate forces of chaos?"' "'He is the loneliest thing on earth. There is much to be appreciated all about him, beauty, wealth, power, grandeur. But is he a part of these luxuries? He looks, poor man, through the fingers of his eyes. He is enchained, damnably to his race, his heritage. He is betrayed, my friend."'[4]

Jamero, by contrast, concludes *Growing Up Brown* with a profession of faith that will not sound unfamiliar to scholars in ethnic and immigration studies. "My story could only happen in America: the eldest son of immigrant parents learns about life growing up in a farm-labor

camp, goes on to experience the world, and achieves success in his work and personal life" (pp. 317-318). *America is in the Heart* also concludes with a profession of faith, to be sure, but whereas Bulosan's rests uneasily at the end of a mind-numbing catalog of displacement, deprivation, and horror, Jamero's serves as the apotheosis of a journey ending in "eventual triumph," (back cover, paperback edition) in "pride in my ethnicity and, finally, in who I am as a Filipino American." (p. xiv)

Jamero's successes were not achieved without much struggle and heartbreak, of course. His memoirs testify, at times eloquently, to the difficulties of growing up brown in an America so normatively white. My point, rather, is that it is difficult to reconcile the relatively linear and progressive narrative that Jamero presents with what critic Sau-ling Cynthia Wong called the "impossible map" that Bulosan compelled readers to traverse. "[T]hough the book-length work ... ends with a declaration of undying faith in America," Wong observed, "the events leading up to it are a confusing blur that is virtually impossible to chart." Bulosan concluded that "America is in the heart," Wong and others have suggested, because he found it nowhere in reality.[5]

The two narratives are difficult to reconcile, that is, without resorting to the very myths of assimilation and progress that Bulosan so emphatically challenged. Indeed, Jamero's concluding self-identification as the "son of immigrant parents" who achieved "success in his work and personal life" (p. 318) recasts his story from one about "growing up brown" to one that is almost, but not quite, about growing *un-brown*. This concluding move summarily–and unfairly–reframes the prior three-hundred-odd pages as a colorized version of the only partially applicable, yet almost universally seductive, European immigrant assimilation narrative.[6] Care would have to be taken to lead students away from the crude conclusion that things just got better over time, a conclusion that a simple coupling of the two texts invites. Certainly, things did get better for Filipina/o Americans and other peoples of color, but, as Jamero's discussion of Bridge Generation Filipina/o American political activism demonstrates, they did not do so all on their own.

Perhaps the book's greatest value, then, is as a source for investigating the development of Bridge Generation social and political sensibilities and community formations, especially against the backdrop of post-World War II demographic changes, for close attention to Jamero's deployment of the "Bridge Generation" concept suggests that he intended *Growing Up Brown* to function not only as a family document and historical contribution, but also as something more. Early on, Jamero provides what seems, at first glance, to be a neutral, if somewhat precise, definition for the Bridge Generation: "children born before 1946 with at least one parent who was a Filipino pioneer" (p. xiii). Jamero does not explain this definition. Why did he choose 1946 as a cut-off date for Bridge Generation membership? Why "at least one parent"? More significant, in what sense did this birth cohort serve as a "bridge"?

A casual glance at Filipina/o American history suggests some possible answers. "At least one parent" is perhaps most easily explained. Owing to the very selective nature of early Philippine-U.S. migration–only able-bodied young men needed to apply–the gender ratio in the Filipina/o American population was highly skewed for much of the twentieth century, leading to exogamous relationships, on the one hand, and antimiscegenation laws, on the other.[7] Given the rarity of children of even partial Filipina/o descent before at least the 1960s, a more restrictive line here would have been impractical. Jamero's description of the origins of Bridge Generation consciousness demonstrates his cohort's openness in this respect. "To be Filipino American," he remembered, "all that mattered was to want to hang around with other Filipino Americans" (p. 77).

The Bridge Generation's historical openness makes Jamero's retrospective chronological precision somewhat puzzling. He may have chosen 1946 as a cut-off date because in that year the U.S. Congress, acknowledging the allied status of the Philippines and wartime military service of Filipinos, passed the Luce-Celler Act. The act allowed Filipina/o immigrants, including his parents' generation, to become naturalized citizens, thus marking an important change in the U.S. official treatment of Filipina/os, as did the granting of independence to the Philippines, also in 1946.[8] Solely in terms of the dominant society's attitudes, Filipina/o American childhoods after World War II were substantially different than those before.

Just as significant, however, the Luce-Celler Act, in conjunction with other pieces of federal legislation, such as the War Brides Act of 1945 (which allowed Filipino American veterans to travel to the Philippines and return to the United States with spouses), and with federal programs, like the U.S. Exchange Visitor Program, began to change the demography of the Filipina/o American population. Together, these pieces of federal policy underwrote a Filipina/o American baby boom, on the one hand, and a modest renewal of migration from the Philippines, on the other. Hence, in Jamero's account, the develop-

ment of Bridge Generation subjectivities–much like the development of second-generation Filipina/o American subjectivities today–played out on a complex social and cultural terrain organized primarily, but of course not solely, by their perceptions of their parents' generation, by the attitudes of the dominant society on questions of race and ethnicity, and by their perceptions of and interactions with recent Filipina/o arrivals. "We were definitely Americans, but with a difference. We were brown Filipino Americans, with our own identity and peculiarities.... [W]e did not buy into the biases of Filipino regionalism.... Our generation also rejected our parents' adherence to Filipino practices of colonialism.... We did not assume that white people were superior or blindly accept their views.... We found that we had our own intraethnic biases. We resented the condescending attitudes of some Philippine-born people who were disdainful of our generation's failure to learn Cebuano, Ilocano, or Tagalog.... In cities, open conflicts occasionally broke out between American- and Philippine-born young Filipinos.... We did not know it at the time, but this was the beginning of the Bridge Generation" (pp. 77-78).

"Our experiences were not unique," Jamero commented. "In talking with other ethnic Americans of my generation, I have found that they had similar experiences" (p. 78). This is one sense in which Jamero locates his generation: as a cultural bridge, a midway point between the culture of their parents, the culture of the newer immigrants, and that of the United States at mid-century. But the renewed migration of the post-World War II years featured a key demographic difference from the migration of the 1920s and 1930s, a difference that only became more apparent as time passed. Whereas the vast majority of the *manongs* and *manangs* had been recruited in the Philippines for–and relegated in the United States and Hawai'i to–manual labor, postwar migration included growing numbers of Filipina/os positioned by class background and educational attainment to take advantage of economic opportunities mostly out of the reach of the *manong*/*manang* generation. Moreover, these relatively lucrative opportunities, like those available in nursing, for example, were available only through great effort to members of the Bridge Generation. State policy began to encourage, in other words, the arrival of a generation of Filipina/o Americans for whom the struggles and sufferings of the *manongs* and *manangs*, and, indeed, of their children, were not necessarily very relevant or even interesting.

In addition to his progeny and historians, it is to these recent, relatively more privileged immigrants and their children that Jamero addressed *Growing Up Brown*, and it is here that his autobiography functions not only as family document and historical contribution, but also as historiographical intervention; not simply as community history, but also as community politics and pedagogy. Jamero's use of the term "pioneer" to describe his parents' generation is a minor indication of this; the term is commonly used in Filipina/o American studies scholarship. Another more telling indication of his historiographical and political positioning lies in Jamero's recounting of how and why he invented the "Bridge Generation" concept: "I coined the term 'Bridge Generation' for the 1994 FANHS [Filipino American National Historical Society] conference to call attention to my generation's unrecognized contributions to America. It was certainly understandable for non-Filipinos to be unaware of the Bridge Generation; however, some Filipinos, particularly those who had come to America since immigration was liberalized in 1965, had no sense of our history in America" (p. 308).

Jamero goes on to describe a couple of his encounters with the recent immigrants' ignorance. The first involved his being told that he was not Filipino because he spoke unaccented English. The second involved an October 1994 article in *Filipinas* magazine that reported, according to Jamero, "that first-wave Filipino immigrants of the 1920s and 1930s did not produce families" (p. 308). Incensed by the writer's error, Jamero complained to editors. When he received no response other than "lip service," he canceled his subscription. The *Filipinas* article that so offended Jamero, however, does not say quite what Jamero says it does. Certainly it suggests that there were few if any children born to the *manongs* and *manangs*, but this suggestion comes as part of an overall examination of contemporary Filipina/o invisibility in U.S. public and political discourse, and it appears specifically within the context of a discussion about the kinds of racism that the thousands of early Filipina/o migrants faced. "Why is it," the article asked, "that despite such a significant early presence, Filipinos today still do not cast a big shadow?" "The answer lies in the broken historical continuity between that first wave of immigrants and our present community. Racial exclusivism encoded in U.S. government policy and law prevented this link.... The Filipino workers were brought here for their labor, but they were not allowed to integrate into the economic, social and political fabric...–they were not allowed to become Americans in law and in fact. *The mass of itinerant bachelor workers, therefore, could not start families and produce new generations of Filipino Americans.* Without families, Filipino pioneers could not establish a stable, permanent, deeply rooted Filipino American community that could,

over time, become an acknowledged economic, cultural, and political force."[9]

In a turn of phrase that may have inspired Jamero, the article argued that: "[w]ithout a bridge from the '20s and '30s, the community that we know today is in reality quite young.... This very youth poses unavoidable hindrances to empowerment."[10] Thus, the article does not say that the early immigrants "*did not* produce families." It says that most *could not*, which is true.[11] The article implies, however–and here, I suspect, is what so riled Jamero–that what few children the early immigrants did produce were *too few to matter*, too few to form the basis for "an acknowledged economic, cultural, and political force."[12] On balance, the article is accurate, and it takes a perspective, moreover, with which Jamero probably does not disagree, for it is in fact very similar to his own. Enumerating the list of Bridge Generation "firsts" by the early 1970s, for example, Jamero commented, "To put it in proper perspective, however, these modest achievements were just a beginning. And sadly, the great majority of Filipinos were still on the outside looking in" (p. 198). Jamero's grievance, then, is one of interpretation, of historical judgment. For Jamero, the Bridge Generation's struggles to move into arenas and activities previously denied to Filipina/o Americans, however modest their results, formed the foundation on which later generations' (American-born as well as immigrant) successes were built. Here, then, is another meaning, related to the first, of the "Bridge Generation": they provided the channel by which Filipina/o Americans were able to cross into the mainstream.

Finally, Jamero suggests that his generation's struggles to establish a bridge into the mainstream can furnish important lessons to recent immigrants and their children, can serve as a kind of pedagogical bridge between pre- and post-World War II generations. "While it was disconcerting to realize that recent Filipino immigrants were blind to the existence of the Bridge Generation," Jamero wrote, "I wondered if they were similarly in the dark about the lessons our generation had painfully learned.... For example, did they have a realistic view of the role that their color brown played in this country, particularly in the workplace, in school, and in housing? Or did they buy into the myth of the melting pot? What about the old boys' club? Or did they believe that succeeding on the job is wholly dependent on hard work and keeping one's nose clean? Did they truly appreciate their own Filipino culture and values here in America? Or did they adopt the values of our materialistic society so that they could be 'American'? From whom will they seek advice when their color brown becomes an issue? I only hope that a Bridge Generation Filipino American will be nearby to help." (pp. 308-309)

It is unfortunate that Jamero chose to adopt an indignant tone here. Born of the frustration at not being accorded the recognition that he feels is his and his generation's due, Jamero's indignation, however righteous, ultimately undermines his pedagogical intent. Recent Filipina/o immigrants and their children who seek advice from *Growing Up Brown* would find the rebukes Jamero offers in this passage–rebukes for their naivete, for their cultural self-abnegation–disconcerting, to say the least. It is all the more unfortunate because Jamero does, in fact, have much to teach. Throwing up warning signs in this way can only limit access along the bridges he is trying to build.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Arleen de Vera, "Constituting Community: A Study of Nationalism, Colonialism, Gender, and Identity among Filipinos in California, 1919-1946" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2002); and Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, "Life in Little Manila: Filipinas/os in Stockton, California, 1917-1972" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2003).

[2]. Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[3]. See Marilyn Alquizola, "The Fictive Narrator of *America is in the Heart*," in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies: Writing, Research, and Commentary*, ed. Gail M. Nomura (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), 211-217; and Marilyn Alquizola, "Subversion or Affirmation: The Text and Subtext of America is in the Heart," in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives*, ed. Shirley Hune (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1991), 199-209.

[4]. Quoted in E. San Juan, ed., *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 173.

[5]. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 33-135. See also

Alquizola, "The Fictive Narrator of *America is in the Heart*"; Alquizola, "Subversion or Affirmation"; and San Juan, *On Becoming Filipino*, 10-11.

[6]. Paul R Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-28.

[7]. Rudy Guevarra, "Mexipino: A History of Multiethnic Identity and the Formation of the Mexican and Filipino Communities of San Diego, 1900-1965" (PhD diss, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007).

[8]. It should be noted that other parts of the book, like Peter Bacho's introduction, broaden the definition to children born in the 1920s and 1930s.

[9]. Rene P. Ciria-Cruz, "How Far Have We Come?" *Filipinas*, 31 (October 1994), http://proquest.umi.com/pqdlink?index=5&did=494078301&SrchMode=3& (Accessed August 24, 2007). Emphasis added by reviewer.

[10]. Ciria-Cruz, "How Far Have We Come?"

[11]. Fujita-Rony writes: "In general, heterosexual nuclear families were more the exception than the rule. The existence of these families tended to be an indication of privilege rather than the expected lot of most heterosexual men. Most Filipino workers simply could not afford to get married." Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power*, 135.

[12]. Ciria-Cruz, "How Far Have We Come?"

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