Filipinos have played an important role in the US military for a long time. P. James Paligutan’s *Lured by the American Dream: Filipino Servants in the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, 1952-1970* explores the experiences of Filipino stewards in the US Navy and Coast Guard during the Cold War. At the same time, Paligutan recovers the voices of Filipino men who resisted their subservient status on US ships. By engaging in “counterhegemonic” resistance, Paligutan argues, these Filipino stewards turned themselves from postcolonial servants into self-empowered service members in a racially more equitable US military.

Paligutan’s conceptually rich book links various historiographies: military history, labor history, Asian American studies, and migration studies. Mixing oral history and military correspondence, the author paints a complex picture of Filipino stewards torn between the promise of the American Dream and the realities of racialized labor exploitation. Even after Philippine independence in 1946, most US officials continued to assume that Filipinos were a passive labor force, ideally suited for serving white Navy and Coast Guard officers. Yet, as Paligutan demonstrates, Filipino stewards defied these racist stereotypes and successfully pushed for the reversal of race-based policies and their differential integration in the US Navy and Coast Guard. In doing so, they forged links with African Americans struggling for equal treatment in the US military during the civil rights era.

The book is organized chronologically into six chapters that take the reader from the US occupation of the Philippines (1898-1946) into the Cold War, the main focus of analysis. In chapter 1, Paligutan argues that the continued US military presence after Philippine independence qualifies as a “neocolonial structure” that enabled the recruitment of Filipino citizens into the US military. Chapter 2 extends the discussion of the neocolonial Philippines as a legacy of US colonization and militarization. Paligutan highlights the Military Bases Agreement (1947), which, among other things, granted the United States the right to recruit Filipino citizens into its armed forces. Begin-
ning in 1952, hundreds of Filipinos wrangled to join the US Navy and Coast Guard, primarily to earn money for themselves and their families and pursue their American Dream. But, as chapter 3 attests, the hopes of many Filipino stewards were often dashed by the harsh realities on the job: racial subordination, disrespect, and lack of promotion. Beyond racialization, Paligutan emphasizes the gendering of servant labor, as Filipino stewards on US ships experienced “emasculating” in a “homosocial space suffused with hypermasculinity” (p. 89). Filipino stewards served white Navy and Coast Guard officers their meals, cleaned their bathrooms, and even tended to their family members on land. Faced with demeaning work conditions and little room for advancement, Filipino stewards engaged in various forms of resistance, as detailed in chapter 4. Their acts of resistance ranged from “passive” disobedience to formal complaints and even work stoppages. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Filipino stewards’ protest turned their plight into a public relations issue for US officials, who were eventually forced to abolish the system of racialized servant labor. In light of the Soviet critique of US hypocrisy on racial equality and the demands of the Vietnam War, the US Navy finally ended this form of racial discrimination in the early 1970s, a full quarter-century after President Truman’s official desegregation order of 1948. After 1973, Filipinos in the US Navy and Coast Guard were finally allowed to migrate into other ratings (specializations) and achieve a greater degree of social mobility.

Paligutan’s book offers a convincing argument that Filipino stewards brought about racial reform in the US Navy and Coast Guard. One of the book’s most important contributions is its linking of different fields of scholarship that, too often, remain isolated from one another. By centering on noncitizen, nonwhite members of the US military, Paligutan reveals a nuanced story of racialized labor, civil rights, and trans-Pacific migration. Above all, the author’s ability to weave personal stories together with larger historical forces makes for an engaging and informative account.

Paligutan’s concise book has only minor weaknesses. First, one would have wished for a more robust reflection on the use of personal sources and interviews with Filipino veterans, especially the author’s own father. As Paligutan readily acknowledges, his father’s “fortune was more the exception than the rule” (p. 142), which points to potential selection bias among the interviewees. Second, on occasion, academic jargon obscures the book’s important insights into Filipino military labor.

These shortcomings aside, Lured by the American Dream is a must-read for anyone interested in military history, labor history, and Asian American studies. Noncitizen, nonwhite laborers, Paligutan shows, played a crucial part in the expansion and maintenance of US military power during the Cold War. Paligutan has given historians a generative model for exploring similar forms of military labor in the shadow of the US empire.
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