

## Gary Greaves Oral History Interviews Digitization Project

## University Of Washington Libraries Special Collections

## Fred Cordova Interview

Cordova: We see a bright minds we see uh bright minds particularly in the students and the high school kids. We do have a problem right now with gangs. We got a lot of wannabes. They're not as sophisticated as your Vietnamese or getting into extortion and then and whatever other kind of meetings they end up doing. A lot of our Filipino kids right now are a bunch of young punks. Wannabe types. Toughies. Shoot a gun and back around you know. But though it is a main network of crack-dealing -- A lot of those things which a lot of gangs want. You got some blood. I mean, we are getting into it big time. You guys are just little like I said wannabes. But there's gonna come a time and we've already suffered from this already. One death. Ummm. A shooting death. What we've had to face -- and that's why we created the Filipino new gang activities 37 years ago. It was a bad time just a leisure time program. We wanted to keep kids off the streets. We wanted to give them recreational pursuits. We wanted to teach them folk dancing. We wanted to expose them to the culture. Much to the detriment or to the resistance of our community leaders who couldn't see why in the hell we were doing this because we were not doing their own power plays. That was 37 years ago. Now it's one of the only united agencies among Asian groups. It's a pioneer here in the city, in the country. And that this is the first organization that is ordered solely to use in a deal to get kids out of slammers. You need no slammers and so on, there's a lot of advocacy that's going on. It's limited and underpaid basically because funding sources don't know what the hell Filipinos are and don't choose to give them that. I can tell you a lot of other horror stories when it comes to grantsmanship and needs and so on. The Filipino families backing is there. To try and you know to create jobs, relationships with police, relationships with gangs, as well as running folk dance programs with volunteers and it's possible. And I had for 20 years felt guilty. And the parades. That was my own thing. Personally I had given up that religion and having converted to a new religion. And it this sense I feel more like missionaries. The new religion is called Filipino American because teaching kids to march in parade. Give them a ideal sense of teamwork that they can do it together. And we've done this, one of the best in the city. But unfortunately these kids have a bad habit. The bad habit is that they eat. And when they eat they grow up. And their brains get a little larger. And they advance in school. And then they come to you and say I want to do a paper. Something that's Filipino. Who's in television. Who's in sports. And up until 1984 beginning we couldn't tell them nothing. Oh we could tell them Philippine heroes. And the bridge. WE could tell them about Amalga, for whatever hell she was worth. Or Corey. We could talk about the landscape and waterfall. But what could we tell about our own experiences as Americans in this country beginning since 1763. If the schools aren't doing it. If the researchers aren't doing it. If the authors aren't doing it. And if they keep on saying Asians and Asian Americans are Japanese and Chinese -- there are textbooks -- you know restarted all of us

restarted all on this damn ass bag together. We're up on 7th avenue we're up there demonstrating we're up there with police surveying us watching us and everything else because all of a sudden we were such societies opponent. The FBI had our wires tapped and so on. But when it came time for the Asian-American movement to give us its graces the damn Japanese and Chinese still got it. And this is the problem I have with my other Asian brothers and sisters and this is what makes me stick out like a sore thumb. I mean, those Asians, regardless of what they were, are not talking about affirmative action when it comes to their Filipino brothers to be hired as a professor at the UW. I don't see them coming in and letting call and demanding. And when they expect us to march with them? Housing? Tests? All these are the things, you know. When you look at some of the hard voices in the beginning of the Asian American movement in this city it was Filipino so exemplified by Bob Santos, whom for many years if you look through his file is still quote unquote Asian.

Greaves: Yeah.

Cordova: Two of those political things included Hemworth cause he ran for state senate on the GOP ticket, he ran for state senate as well for the republican ticket, and then he went for consult, hell if all of the damn ass Asians supposedly would have voted for him he would have made it! Delores who is our other role model and when she was in the Seattle city council was the only one in the whole damn country holding an elective in a major American city because we had none in the state legislature in the main land. So she was fighting the fact of what we think city councils are. From George Duncanson and Tom Weak and all these guys. But for us with the laws she was a giant.

Greaves: So what she do for the Filipino psyche do you think?

Cordova: Well, by the time she got to be mayor she didn't make it.

Greaves: Yeah. Yeah.

Cordova: Yeah. If there is a large voting population of Asian Americans here I don't think they voted for her. She would have been mayor today. It would have been nice. Some say when it comes time to do things for the brothers and sisters we're all expected to pitch in. Particularly in the 70s. Particularly when at it's height, when you imagine the Indians were having to do their stuff and the blacks were having to do their stuff. And certainly if it weren't for the blacks we wouldn't have had nothing at all. But when it came time for little Graces, and I'm saying this all over the country, we're just ruminating on this right in Seattle. So where the pieces of pie come to you what the hell the Filipinos got. In terms of affirmative action, in terms of supervisory so on and so forth. Think about the qualified votes here. So what do all the kids think? What do these high school kids think? We're all dumb and stupid because they're not around. And as it is, if we don't realize that our people are hard workers, they we may -- how many blacks were superstars in basketball? Are so graceful that it's like fluid and poetry done on the -- but they don't realize that they're using every ounce of muscle that they've got and it looks so easy.

Greaves: Mhmm.

Cordova: So a Filipino, regardless of whether he's in the office, or whether he's still in the cannery has also the same fluidity of everything else. And if he's capable of doing a 8 hour job in 6 hours and taking it easy the other two he's a lazy man and should be working harder. Yeah. Or, if they recognize the fact that he is a good worker, let's not promote him because if we promote him we lose a good worker. So let's have him train, have him train. And I've seen that many times. Including me. Including me. How many times I've trained my directors. Read you a script to who in the state legislature. And over my back eventually.

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