

## **The SAGE Encyclopedia of Filipina/o/x Studies**

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### **The War of 1812**

The War of 1812 between the United States (US) and Great Britain was fought from 1812 to 1815 in North America. The war ended with the Treaty of Ghent, which the US ratified on February 16, 1815, shortly after the Battle of New Orleans. The War of 1812 helped shape the nation's identity, providing it with an anthem—the Star-Spangled Banner—, a national personification— Uncle Sam—, and a firmer belief in America's "manifest destiny" to expand across North America. The story of Augustin Feliciano, a Filipino who volunteered to fight at the Battle of New Orleans, makes the War of 1812 significant for Filipino Americans. Feliciano's story is unverified and contains elements of legend, yet it intersects with important historical events in an area Filipinos first settled and provides insight into the concerns and anxieties of Filipino Americans at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Augustin Feliciano**

#### **Filipino Baratarian**

Augustin Feliciano fought in the War of 1812 as a Baratarian, a band of men based in Louisiana's Baratavia Bay, one of the first places Filipinos settled in the US. The Baratarians followed Jean Lafitte the legendary pirate. In 1814, the US raided Lafitte's base, captured some of his men, and took possession of his ships and goods. Louisiana offered Lafitte and his Baratarians pardons if they volunteered to defend the state. More than 100 hundred Baratarians joined the fight.

After the war the Baratarians were pardoned, and their image rehabilitated. A standard narrative described them as former criminals who were compelled by nationalist fervor to give up the life of crime and defend the nation against the invading British. Jean Lafitte became a folk hero and now has a town and a US national park named after him. In the Town of Jean Lafitte, the history of the pirate and Filipino Americans converge, with a museum that honors Lafitte and historical markers memorializing Clark Cheniere and Manila Village, Filipino shrimping villages once located in the area.

#### **Battle of New Orleans**

The Battle of New Orleans was fought from December 14, 1814 to January 8, 1815. It started when the British attacked and defeated US ships guarding the mouth of Lake Borgne, gaining

access to a land route to New Orleans. A few days later the Baratarians joined and were assigned to artillery lines with General Andrew Jackson's main force, forts along the river, and the *USS Louisiana*. Baratarians who had experience shooting cannons on pirate ships were assigned to man artillery batteries. Feliciano, who sailed with the Spanish fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar, served on the *Louisiana*, a converted merchant ship fitted with 22 cannons.

On January 8, 1815 the British made an all-out assault on Jackson's position on the Chalmette battlefield. British troops advanced in three columns across an open field. Artillery batteries, riflemen, and musketeers in Jackson's main line fired upon the advancing British troops. The *Louisiana* fired from the Mississippi River. Although greatly outnumbered, US forces were able to handily defeat the British who at the end of the day had more than 2,000 casualties, while the US had less than a 100.

### **Public Memory**

Victory at the Battle of New Orleans was celebrated in Louisiana as a significant historical event. For decades after the war, Louisiana marked January 8th as a holiday and commemorated the victory with a parade. Interest in the war waned after the US Civil War, but was revived by the United States Daughters of 1812, a group formed to promote US rather than confederate patriotism. In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century around the 100-year anniversary of the war, public interest in the Battle of New Orleans grew, which sparked Filipino American interest in the story of Augustin Feliciano.

### **Community Story**

Feliciano's story was shared in Filipino American communities in Louisiana in the first decade of the 20th century when rhetoric that inferiorized Filipinos was prominent. Media accounts of the Philippine-American War and US colonization of the Philippines depicted Filipinos as uneducated, uncivilized, and incapable of self-rule. Filipino Americans, including over 2,000 in Louisiana, were compelled to articulate an identity that refuted the negative descriptors. During the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War, Filipino Americans were regularly asked to demonstrate their allegiance, leaving them little choice but to praise the US and dismiss her enemies. The story of Feliciano's service in the War of 1812 and defense of the US in the Battle of New Orleans was a subtle way to counter stories of Filipinos fighting for independence in the Philippines. It served as a ready answer for questions of belonging and patriotism. Feliciano's story dated Filipino arrival in the US to before 1812, the year Louisiana became a state, and demonstrated a history of fighting in support of the nation.

## **Manifest Destiny**

Although the War of 1812 was thought to be a draw, defeating the British at the last major battle fueled the patriotism and expansionism that pervaded US foreign policy in the 19th century and justified the annexation and colonization of the Philippines. With victory at the Battle of New Orleans, the nation no longer saw the British as a hinderance to western expansion. During the war Native Americans who wanted to stop expansion allied with the British. With the war over,

Britain was no longer an impediment. Without a major European power to block western expansion, Americans started to believe it was the nation's destiny to stretch her borders to the Pacific Ocean. Throughout the 19th century the ideology of manifest destiny would be used to justify war, occupation, and colonization.

Randy Gonzales

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