

## PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

### Velma Veloria

*Politician, Human Trafficking activist, Labor organizer*

*"My own experience as an immigrant living with racism, discrimination, and American imperialism encouraged me to seek out leadership and advocacy opportunities"*

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COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

#### Background Information

Born: October 22, 1950

Velma Veloria was born in Pangasinan, Philippines. As a child, her family emigrated to the United States in 1962. Velma earned a degree in Medical Technology from San Francisco State College in 1976.

#### Resistance

During a visit to the Philippines, Veloria witnessed the oppressive treatment of its citizens. She observed that the Filipino government had become a harsh dictatorship under President Ferdinand Marcos. Determined to spread awareness in the United States, she joined the Union of Democratic Filipinos or KDP.<sup>i</sup> The organization urged the U.S. government to end its political relationship with the Philippines until its dictator was removed. Veloria's global activism also extended to her local community. After several union organizers and KDP activists were assassinated, Veloria began organizing in Seattle, Washington.<sup>ii</sup> Despite the risks Veloria continued to advocate for worker rights and better pay in the cannery industry. During the 1970s and 1980s, she worked as a labor organizer for cannery workers across Washington.<sup>iii</sup> In 1992, Veloria became the first Filipina American elected to a State Legislature in the United States.<sup>iv</sup> As a State Representative, Veloria worked tirelessly to end violence against women. After a gunman murdered three Filipina women inside a Washington courthouse, she collaborated with other lawmakers to pass HB 1175. The legislation made Washington the first state in America to criminalize human trafficking on a state level.<sup>v</sup> Veloria continues advocacy for the Filipino community in Washington state, working to create and sustain affordable housing developments.

#### Achievements

Veloria is the first Asian American woman and the first Filipina American elected to the Washington State Legislature.<sup>vi</sup> She served six terms as a state representative in the House of Representatives, until 2004. For her commitment to activism, the Equity in Education Coalition (EEC) honored Velma Veloria with a lifetime achievement award in 2022.<sup>vii</sup>

## Essential Questions

1. As an immigrant, Velma Veloria faced discrimination in the United States and witnessed civil unrest in the Philippines. How did she use her experiences in both countries to make impactful change for others?
2. Velma decided to accept a job organizing in Seattle, Washington after several other activists were killed. Why do you think organizers continue to advocate for the rights of others, despite real threats of violence?
3. How did Velma Veloria use her role as a State Representative to impact the lives of Filipina women?
4. ***"My own experience as an immigrant living with racism, discrimination, and American imperialism encouraged me to seek out leadership and advocacy opportunities"***
  - a. What does this quote mean to you?
  - b. How can a person use their challenging experiences to create change for others?

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<sup>i</sup> <https://honors.uw.edu/news/2019/velma-veloria-honors-curriculum-and-community-innovation-scholar/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://usa.inquirer.net/108338/washington-education-coalition-honors-life-long-activist-velma-veloria>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/veloria.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://uw.pressbooks.pub/badasswomxninthepnw/chapter/velma-veloria/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://eec-wa.org/velma-veloria/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://aes.washington.edu/people/velma-veloria>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://usa.inquirer.net/108338/washington-education-coalition-honors-life-long-activist-velma-veloria>