KAIN NA!
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CARLOS BULOSAN

A Thesis

Presented to the faculty of the Department of History
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

by

Donald Estrella Piring, Jr.

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2016
Kain Na!

The Life and Times of Carlos Bulosan

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

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Department Chair

Dr. Jeffrey Wilson

11/7/16
Date

Department of History
Abstract

of

KAIN NA!

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CARLOS BULOSAN

by

Donald Estrella Piring, Jr.

Statement of Problem

Carlos Bulosan, Filipino author and labor organizer, fabricated or embellished many details of his life story. Government blacklisting efforts caused him to disappear from the literary scene.

Sources of Data

Archival materials used to cross-reference Bulosan’s autobiography. Anthologies of Bulosan’s work, edited by different authors, will also be used.

Conclusions Reached

In embellishing life details, Bulosan gave a name, a face, and a voice to Filipino migrant workers.

Dr. Joseph Palermo, Committee Chair

Date

11-17-16
Preface

This thesis, *Kain Na!*, began as a project in Fall 2015.¹ It was based on a historic community of Filipino migrant workers and shopkeepers – Little Manila in Stockton, California. America’s legalized racism and American citizens’ individual prejudices segregated Asian migrant workers to designated districts, one of which was Stockton’s Little Manila. The immigrants were expressly forbidden from leaving these districts, except for work or out-of-town travel. The history of just one community is too broad for one paper, and so the project was repurposed to examine just one individual – Allos “Carlos” Bulosan, Filipino writer and labor organizer.

There are some limitations to the study. Attempts were made to contact Dr. Dawn Mabalon at San Francisco State University and Conor M. Casey at the University of Washington, Seattle. Most of the materials consulted during the Fall 2015 semester were fiction and prose written by Bulosan. One year later, archival materials were consulted and this thesis was written. There was insufficient time to reread all the materials with new evidence and insights.

Not all of the known Bulosan materials (in the UW Seattle Special Collections or elsewhere) were examined. Microfilm and audio cassettes were not consulted, lest they become damaged in the research process. Boxes upon boxes of Bulosan’s poetry, short stories, prose, and so forth, were not studied. Most of the discussed documents were written throughout the mid-1930s to the 1950s, so materials prior to 1930 are largely

¹. *kain na*, Tagalog expression meaning “let’s eat”
missing. Furthermore, any collections from the Philippines and other West Coast cities were not consulted, due to limited time and finances. The University of Chicago also holds some of Bulosan’s original manuscripts, which are not discussed here. Bulosan kept a private journal and was working on a sequel to his autobiography, entitled *My Letter to the World* – neither of these have been found.

Bulosan’s creative writings had a stronger influence on the greater American and Philippine publics than did a series of letters or labor organization projects, which must be taken into account. Because this thesis is a work of history, and because the author is trained as a historian, literary analysis is confined to a few of Bulosan’s fictional pieces. They are examined in order to extract major themes which appear throughout Bulosan’s life. The focus of the project is expository information and analysis, to open or guide new avenues of research.

Correspondence makes up most of the source material. That being said, not all the documents in the collections of Aurelio Bulosan, Chris Mensalvas, and Josephine Patrick were examined. Only communication to or from Bulosan is included in discussion. Since Bulosan was an author, an interdisciplinary approach (e.g. history and literary studies) can also prove fruitful. The papers of P.C. Morante, Carey McWilliams, the Babb sisters, Larry Itliong, Mary Hatten Gibson, or any of Bulosan’s other friends or colleagues, can also be used in reconstructing his story.

*Mabuhay, kababayan* (Live, countrymen).

- Don Piring, November 2016
DEDICATION

For the future.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to extend very special thanks, first and foremost, to friends and family, especially my mother. My grandparents continued to support me throughout my work throughout the project, and I cannot be more grateful. I have no idea what my life would be like had they not migrated from the Philippines. My Uncle H. told me about our family’s role in Filipino history, and I may start a new project based in that information. My Uncle M. verified the rise of Ethnic Studies in the 1970s, which is discussed in the last chapter. A warm thanks to my best friend since the first day of kindergarten, who also helped finance my first research trip in Seattle.

I would not be the scholar I am today without the help and support of some wonderful teachers and professors. I want to thank Ms. L.S. for encouraging my writing, especially in popularly disapproved subjects and unorthodox interpretations. Thanks to Drs. S.L. and F.H. for writing recommendations for my entry into the Master’s program. My gratitude to Dr. C.B., who helped me look into financial options and defended my independence and reserved behavior. Appreciation goes out to the History faculty at CSU Sacramento, for sharing their wealth of knowledge. Thank you to the members of my Thesis Committee, for their patience and guidance in the writing process.

The members of the FANHS get a special mention, for their work saves us Filipinos from obscurity.

Lastly, I want to thank myself for enduring such ambitious projects and for drinking excessive amounts of coffee.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

... the poor man does not write books; he is too busy looking for something to fill his stomach. And when he comes to it, his mind is too weak, his recollection too short, his imagination too blurred, etc. Thus the history is not yet written.
– Carlos Bulosan

An individual must fulfill their basic necessities – food, clothing, shelter – before developing their other capacities. Early Filipino immigrants in America (also referred to as Pinoys) struggled to meet their needs on a daily basis, and so they wrote very little. As such, Filipinos virtually do not exist in the multietnic canon of American historical literature, but only within the broader category of “Asian Americans.” Much like the history of the early Filipinos in America, the achievements of Allos “Carlos” Bulosan remain largely obscure.

Bulosan was a Filipino writer and labor activist who lived in numerous cities along the American West Coast. He is best known for his written work, especially his autobiography, America Is in the Heart. It is doubtful that Bulosan experienced all the brutalities and criminal acts described in his writings, including those in his autobiography. Arguably, he must have witnessed some of these events, or that a

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3. Bulosan’s given name is Allos, whereas Carlos is his Christian name. For simplicity, the name Carlos will be used throughout this paper.

4. Carlos Bulosan, America Is in the Heart: A Personal History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014). The autobiography raises several concerns. It is important to note that his autobiography is not based on complete fact. He embellished some details about his life and left out others, which will be explored or clarified later. Bulosan wrote and published this book in 1946, and so projected his later perspectives on earlier memories. The book does not document the last decade of his life. For these reasons, if Bulosan is to be studied as a historical figure, America Is in the Heart should be read carefully.
Filipino was the victim of such incidents. Bulosan fictionalized parts of his autobiography, and wrote endlessly, to express Pinoy sufferings. In doing so, he has given a name, a face, and a voice to the countless and anonymous Pinoys.

Even if treated as pure fiction, *America is in the Heart* highlights various themes Bulosan explored throughout his writing career, such as racism, capitalism and empire, and worker liberation. His published works appeared in newspapers, journals, poetry

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5. “Carlos Bulosan, ca. 1940s,” photograph, Carlos Bulosan Photograph Collection, folder 1, Coll. PH1156, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
collections, and magazines, in both the United States and the Philippines. Some of his writings were translated into foreign languages and published in their respective countries. Bulosan primarily sought to project the Filipino immigrant experience to his audience, whoever they were: migrant workers, native Filipinos, or his students.⁶

Like other Filipinos of his generation, Bulosan left the Philippines at a young age to seek better economic opportunities in the United States. Although Bulosan did not know at the time, America’s white hegemony looked down upon Filipinos as sources of cheap labor, as well as troublemakers. Some Filipinos resorted to crime – robbery, bootlegging, thievery, assaults – in retaliation for their constant poverty and the anti-Filipino legislation.⁷ They also turned to gambling in attempts to win their fortunes. Their behavior was not entirely without merit, since Filipinos struggled to survive in a society that largely did not accept them. Bulosan’s close friend and biographer, Panteleon Cambio “P. C.” Morantte, summarized the treatment of Filipinos in this way:

(American society) was a hostile and inflexible one, determined to shut them out from the living room, determined to let them in the back door but keep them in the kitchen. They must remain menials. And their social status must forever remain at the bottom.⁸

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⁶. Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, 311. Bulosan claims he started a small school for farm workers. No evidence of such a school was found, other than in the autobiography.

⁷. Ibid., 165. Bulosan does not indicate whether they were involved in large-scale riots or murder, like some of the white mobs. Bulosan claims he engaged in criminal activity, but testimonials from friends indicate he did not. Anti-Filipino legislation will be discussed in full in the next chapter.

Ultimately, white Americans wanted Filipinos to only perform the physically demanding and unskilled labor. This included picking seasonal crops, dishwashing, housecleaning, and packing and canning. Americans took many steps, legal and extralegal, to keep Filipinos (and other minorities) from climbing the social ladder.

Carlos Bulosan was both a writer and labor activist. In the broad sense, he is significant in that he represents a unity of thought and action. In a letter to his colleague (and later girlfriend) Josephine Patrick, he writes about how he finds it a stupidity “when people spend so many years learning how to read and write but never use that knowledge throughout their lives.” Bulosan saw education as more than just one’s acquisition and retaining of facts; for him, knowledge must be applied. Bulosan utilized his English writing skills when working in labor unions, thereby bringing about societal change.

In the specific, Bulosan is a voice for the early Pinoy, the Manong generation. The American public was indifferent to or ignorant of the abuses and destitution of numerous unknown Pinoyos. Bulosan took on these struggles for himself, and wrote as if he experienced them firsthand. He struggled endlessly, through creative writing and labor organization, to better conditions for Filipino workers. His work was the foundation upon which later labor organizers and civil rights activists built.

Bulosan wrote constantly and on everything, including napkins and envelopes, and never kept hard copies for himself (see Figure 1.2, next page). Instead, he usually


10. *manong*, Ilocano word for one’s older brother, cousin, or member of extended family.
tried to get his work published, or gave them to friends. Some of his poems were dedicated to his friends and colleagues. Bulosan submitted original manuscripts to publishers, who would seldom return them, and he cared little for editing or rewriting his work. In a letter written to friend Florentino Valeros, Bulosan admits he gave away or destroyed hundreds of poems, stories, and articles. Bulosan also had no stable home in the United States; he lived in numerous apartments, hotel rooms and offices, and oftentimes forgot his manuscripts.

Figure 2 - “ILWU Local 37 Envelope.” Bulosan wrote on everything: napkins, envelopes, paper bags, and so on. This envelope is from a labor union where Bulosan was employed during the early 1950s.


In addition to discarding much of his work, Bulosan embellished or fabricated certain parts of his life story, as clearly seen when comparing *America Is in the Heart* to the archival sources (a discussion fully developed in Chapter 3). There are at least two possible reasons for this: 1) He may have created a constructed space in which he could write or express himself freely. Many artists do this to avoid the pressures of criticisms based on their older works, or comparisons to other artists. 13 2) Bulosan knew the FBI was spying on him. Bulosan wrote with a radical bent, and in combination with his connections to many labor and civil rights activist circles, the FBI perceived him as a national and international security threat. The FBI felt it necessary to conduct surveillance on Bulosan and all his activities, through which they hoped to gather enough information to justify his deportation. So, he may have falsified his background to create an air of mystery, a means of self-defense, through which he could evade the FBI. In addition, he used the pen names / aliases “Cecilio Baroga” and “Julie.” For these reasons, it is likely that Bulosan’s story will never be fully uncovered.

What were the important problems or themes Bulosan addressed in his work? Who were his family members, friends, or significant others? Was he married or survived by anyone? What were his labor and political connections? Why and to what extent was he hounded by the FBI? Given he disappeared from the American literary scene, how was he rediscovered? What lessons can be extracted from his life’s story? What does the future hold for the Filipino community?

In answering these questions, the thesis will be laid out as follows: Chapter two examines the relations between the Philippines and the United States, and zooms in to view relations between Filipinos and Americans in the American West Coast states. This was Carlos Bulosan’s world: a Philippines that experienced perpetual economic subservience, and a Filipino people subject to many abuses in America. Chapter three is an extensive biography of Bulosan. It presents information about his life, as stated in his autobiography and in archival materials. Details about Bulosan’s childhood in the Philippines must be taken from *America Is in the Heart* because the original records were lost or no longer exist, a likely and unfortunate consequence of the Japanese occupying the Philippines during World War II. The chapter then goes to pick apart some fact from fiction, determining his relatives and circles of friends and colleagues.

Chapter four discusses Bulosan historiography. That is, literature and interpretations about Bulosan, presented by other authors. These authors pull much of Bulosan’s biographical information from *America Is in the Heart*, but they also remain wary of its half-truths. In addition, they mainly look at his writings – poetry, short stories, prose – to reconstruct Bulosan’s life and mindset. Chapter five is some literary analysis. The goal here is to extract themes that play throughout Bulosan’s life, as seen in a select few of his creative works and reflected by the correspondence.

The next three chapters (6-8) are the main focus of the project. Each chapter focuses on a specific category, and Bulosan’s activities within those categories. The events within each of these chapters are organized chronologically, and so dates may
overlap or are missing. Chapter six looks at Bulosan’s mainstream success. He published some work in the 1930s, and was known in minor literary circles. His creative drive was propelled by his political activism. Bulosan’s fame skyrocketed during World War II, only to fall just as quickly when the Cold War began. Chapter seven examines Bulosan as a labor organizer and civil rights activist, arguably his most profound impacts on the world. Bulosan joined these movements through voracious reading, association with American progressives, and his own life experiences. This combination of his written work and political activism caught the attention of the United States and Philippine governments. Chapter eight is a survey of Bulosan as a political figure, his relationships with those governments, and his involvement with the international Communist movement. The FBI conducted surveillance on Bulosan, and some of their declassified information will be discussed.

Chapter nine examines the conditions of Bulosan’s death, and impacts he made. Shortly after his death, a Carlos Bulosan Manuscripts (CB MSS) Committee was formed. Few people in the Philippines and in America were affected by the news of his death, and these will be examined. Bulosan’s legacy and the continuation of his work culminate in the formation of the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) and the 1965 Delano Grape Strike. Larry Itliong, who helped form the UFW and served as its Vice President under Cesar Chavez, will be lightly discussed here. The chapter will briefly touch on the rift between UFW’s Filipino and Latino members, and stresses the Filipinos’ vital role in the UFW’s foundations.
Chapter ten, the conclusion, restates earlier findings and emphasizes new interpretations. Government blacklisting caused Bulosan to disappear from the literary scene. The chapter will examine the conditions of his rediscovery in the 1970s. The Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) and modern Filipino scholars will be discussed to some extent. The project ends with many questions unanswered, incomplete, and open-ended.
Chapter 2
BULOSAN’S WORLD

This chapter is a survey of the history of Filipinos’ destitution. It follows Bulosan’s organization of Philippine history into four periods, as outlined in a letter written in March 1955:

- pre-Spanish (antiquity - 1521)
- Spanish (1521 - 1898)
- American (1898 - 1946)
- Filipino (1946 - present)

Bulosan does not consider the Japanese occupation (1942 - 1945) a distinct period, and skips this time completely, because it was a “time of hostilities and war the world over.” Pre-Spanish times are beyond the scope of the project, and so they are not included in discussion. The Japanese occupation of the Philippines is briefly mentioned. This is because the Hukbalahap, a Communist guerilla group who play a critical role in Bulosan’s later years, have roots as an anti-Japanese movement. Filipino and American relations along the West Coast states will be heavily scrutinized.

The Philippines’ economic subservience began when Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan landed in the Philippines in 1521. Magellan and early Spanish colonizers were concerned with spreading Christianity throughout the islands, as compared to large-scale economic domination. Bulosan cites the Spanish monarchy and

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church as the groups responsible for tyranny and Philippine stagnation.\textsuperscript{15} The Spanish damaged the Philippines in at least three ways: economic / natural, cultural, and social.

The Spanish enriched themselves using appropriated natural resources from the Philippines and their other colonies.\textsuperscript{16} Urbanization of the Philippines meant clearing huge tracts of land – timber could be used for buildings or ships. The native Filipinos could expect little social mobility; only Spanish elites, and the few wealthy Filipino families who could afford bribery, were permitted to become educated or part of the colonial government. Native Filipino practices and beliefs were replaced by those of Spanish and Catholic origins. Later, smaller-scale economic exploitation came in the forms of sharecropping and usury – both within the Philippines and abroad. An older Carlos Bulosan stated that absentee landlordism was the immediate cause of the Philippine economy’s devastation.\textsuperscript{17}

With the outbreak of the 1898 Spanish-American War, many Filipinos anticipated independence and liberation. After the war, Spain relinquished the Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States for $20 million. President William McKinley was originally uncertain about whether to take the Philippines, but later stated that he came to his decision through these reasons:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Carlos Bulosan, “The Growth of Philippine Culture,” in Carlos Bulosan, \textit{On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan}, ed. Epifanio San Juan, Jr., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 115. While Bulosan was not a trained historian, the essay is an accurate overview of Philippine history.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Expropriating resources from colonies was a worldwide phenomenon at this time, though that discussion is surely beyond the scope of this project.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Bulosan, \textit{America is in the Heart}, 58.
\end{itemize}
1. That we could not give them back to Spain— that would be cowardly and dishonorable;
2. That we could not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable;
3. That we not leave them to themselves— they are unfit for self-government and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's wars; and
4. That there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died.\textsuperscript{18}

The Filipinos did not feel the same way, and, under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo rebelled against their new American overlords in 1899. The Philippine-American War lasted three years, with heavy casualties on both sides. With the rebellion crushed, the Philippines left even more destitute, the United States questioned whether it should embrace its own overseas empire. Looking at McKinley's second reason why the Philippines should be kept, it is clear the United States had its own economic interests. Senator Albert Beveridge supported empire, stating that it was for the political and economic benefit of the United States:

\textsuperscript{18} Howard Zinn, \textit{A People's History of the United States}, (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 313.
“Mr. President, the times call for candor. The Philippines are ours forever and just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world. The Pacific is our ocean. Where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus? Geography answers the question. China is our natural customer. The Philippines give us a base at the door of all the East. No land in America surpasses in fertility the plains and valleys of Luzon. Rice and coffee, sugar and coconuts, hemp and tobacco. The wood of the Philippines can supply the furniture of the world for a century to come. At Cebu the best informed man on the island told me that 40 miles of Cebu’s mountain chain are practically mountains of coal. I have a nugget of pure gold picked up in its present form on the banks of a Philippine creek.”

The Philippine Islands are considerably close to China and the rest of Asia, so the United States was able to maintain markets and establish new ones across the Pacific Ocean. To enforce its imperial domination, the United States was able to reuse the Subic Bay, a naval base in the Philippines, originally built by the Spanish in 1885. The American Empire stretched across the Pacific: Hawaii, Midway and Wake Islands, Samoa, Guam, and elsewhere.

United States President William McKinley took on the “white man’s burden,” claiming he was told by God to educate and uplift the Filipinos. The American colonial system, under the leadership of Governor-General William Howard Taft (later the 27th President of the United States), brought new, albeit limited, career opportunities for

19. Ibid., 313.

20. For more information on the relations between the United States and China at this time, look for Secretary of State John Hay’s “Open Door Policy.”

Filipinos who could afford to go to school. The U.S. offered some small measure of hope to Philippine society, as the U.S. tasked itself with improving the Filipinos’ health, education, agriculture, infrastructure, horticulture, and animal husbandry.\textsuperscript{22} The Philippines experienced educational and population booms, but the Philippine economy still suffered from damage caused by the Spanish.

In November 1903, Governor-General Taft passed the \textit{Pensionado} Act, allowing qualified Filipino students to study at American colleges and Universities. They studied at the expense of the provisional government, hence the name \textit{pensionado} (pension). Filipino students learned that freedom, democracy, and social equality were found in the United States. Through the colonial education, the United States promised a better life for the Filipinos, even though it was a capitalist nation, like Spain.

The American provisional government touted its ideals of a benevolent democratic government to a largely illiterate and “culturally backward” country. The colonial ideology of America and other Western nations justified itself, masking the economic exploitation and racial exclusion of the colonized. Much later, in works such as “My Education” and “Terrorism Rides the Philippines,” Carlos Bulosan argued that the Filipinos could not exercise their right to self-determination, when the Philippines

\textsuperscript{22} “Carlos Bulosan letter outlining the history of the Philippines and the Filipino people”, March 10, 1955, Box 4, Folder 16, Carlos Bulosan Papers, Pacific Northwest Historical Documents, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, \url{http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/pioneerlife/id/23362/rec/8}
were colonized by a world superpower – a power that boasted of democracy but whose society practiced discrimination on every conceivable level.\textsuperscript{23}

In the eyes of many Filipinos, racial equality and economic salvation were found in America. The \textit{Pinoys} traveled to the United States, and settled primarily along the West Coast and Hawaii. Their experiences differed: the Filipinos in Hawaii had to compete only with the Japanese, but the Filipinos on the West Coast faced the oppression and discrimination of a racist white working class. Filipinos found that they were only allowed to work in manual labor, even if they were college educated. Not even the \textit{Pensionados} were able to pursue their professions in California.\textsuperscript{24} California law barred Filipinos from entering the professional workplace, and so some of the \textit{Pensionados} returned to the Philippines.

White farmers found Filipinos ideal for “stoop labor,” a racial remark on their heights.\textsuperscript{25} In the San Joaquin Delta region, agriculture employers usually paid Filipinos less than half of what a white male received for the same work. The Filipino presence was tolerated only because they were needed as field workers. A shortage of labor caused by anti-Chinese and Japanese legislation prompted the \textit{Pinoy} immigration.

As stated before, Filipinos struggled to survive in a society that did not accept them. The \textit{Pinoys} faced oppression, both legislative and social. The \textit{Pinoys} were considered neither American citizens nor complete foreigners, but “nationals,” left in a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Bulosan, \textit{On Becoming Filipino}, 36.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Morantte, \textit{Remembering Carlos Bulosan}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Takaki, \textit{Strangers from a Different Shore}, 320.
\end{itemize}
sort of limbo. Because of their status, they could not reap the benefits of American citizenship. Samuel Gompers, the president of the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL), called Filipinos “barbaric” and “uncivilized,” which implied that the AFL or other larger labor unions did not accept Filipinos in their ranks. Furthermore, in 1927, the AFL urged Congress to bar Filipinos from entering the United States. Filipinos had few chances to climb the social ladder, even in America.

The stock market crash of 1929 marked the beginning of the Great Depression, the longest and deepest economic depression of the 20th century. It lasted for roughly a decade, and its effects were felt across the world. In the United States, banks and businesses closed, citizens suffered wage cuts and layoffs, and industrial production fell steeply. Some placed the blame on individuals such as the Robber Barons or President Herbert Hoover. Others blamed laissez-faire capitalism, and opted instead for socialism.

Regardless of who was really responsible for the Great Depression, ethnic minorities were in the worst position. They were cited as “stealing” jobs from American citizens. White Americans took legal and extra legal steps to exclude Filipinos from society. The California Supreme Court case Roldan v. Los Angeles County (1933) ruled that Filipino-Caucasian marriages were legal, but the California Civil Code was


28. To avoid an enormous tangent, it must be pointed out here that American history is riddled with racial discrimination, especially against African-Americans.
rewritten shortly after to make such marriages illegal. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 granted Philippine independence in 10 years, but reclassified Filipinos as “aliens” and set the Filipino immigration quota to 50 per year. The following year, the Repatriation Act was passed, which offered Filipino immigrants a free one-way ticket back to the Philippines, on the condition that they never return to the United States. The 1946 Rescission Act denied benefits, but not pay, to Filipino World War II veterans. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act was passed, revising immigration laws to favor “good” Asian countries. In Bulosan’s words, it was a crime “to be Filipino in California.”

White Americans also discriminated against Filipinos on a social level. They imposed restrictions on where Filipinos could go within a city. White business owners refused to serve Filipinos: hotel signs read, “Positively No Filipinos Allowed” or “No Dogs and No Filipinos Allowed.” One sign in Salinas, California read, “This is a White Man’s Country. Get Out of Here if You Don’t Like What We Pay.” Whites viewed Filipinos and other immigrants as easily corruptible, giving into vices and pleasures, like other immigrants. Filipinos spent most of their small earnings in places owned or run by other “Orientals,” usually disreputable establishments: bars, pool halls, dance halls, gambling dens, and brothels. But these activities helped Filipinos forget the humiliations, abuse, and white mob violence.

29. Bulosan, America Is in the Heart, 121.

30. Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore, 323. Is this still a prevalent attitude?

31. Working-class whites usually went to pubs for the similar reasons: forgetting their troubles, winding down from the work day, etc.
Figure 3 - “Positively No Filipinos Allowed.” This Stockton, CA hotel, photographed in 1945, was one of many establishments that barred Filipino entry. Filipinos found that they were unable to frequent certain restaurants, stores, and other public places.

White men saw Filipinos as a double threat: economic and sexual. Clearly, the influx of Filipino workers meant job competition, even when Filipinos were restricted to only blue-collar work. Filipinos were seen as a threat to white “racial purity,” but ethnic purity was not an issue for Filipinos, coming from a *mestizo* (mixed-blood) ancestry due to the Spanish colonization. The Filipino immigrant gender male-to-female ratio was 14:1 in California, 47:1 in New York. Strict Filipino Catholic gender roles also prohibited unchaperoned *Filipina* travel.\textsuperscript{33}

In addition, agricultural work was not ideal for family life. Many Filipinos envisioned that they would get rich quick, and return home. Again, the American colonial education system stated that America was a land of plenty, and Filipinos further imagined they would be picking gold off the streets (hence, El Dorado Street in Stockton). The word *balikbayan* refers to ethnic Filipinos who are citizens or residents of overseas countries, who periodically return to the Philippines – it remains a common social trend. Like other *Pinoys*, Bulosan also expected to make his fortune and return home, and he had no solid plan on how to implement those goals.

At the time, the only organizations willing to defend Filipinos and other minorities against white mob violence were the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and its affiliated labor unions, such as the Cannery and Agricultural Workers’ Industrial Union.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 7. Among Filipinos, there is a gender distinction between the words *Filipino/Filipina* and *Pinoy/Pinay*. But for simplicity’s sake, they will just be referred to as Filipinos here. No suggestions are being made about downplaying Filipina roles, feminism, or anything of that nature.
The Communist Party had a pivotal role in the emerging Filipino working class consciousness: they taught Filipinos how to organize and recruited them in various places throughout California. The CPUSA also recruited African-Americans into their ranks, a strong indicator of the inclusiveness of their party and political platform. By the mid-1930s, Filipinos formed labor unions independent of the larger organizations such as the Communist Party or the AFL. However, it is important to note that a majority of Filipino participants did not become Party members. The Filipinos likely preferred only equal treatment to whites, or limited capitalism.

The Filipinos also clashed with other ethnic minorities. The better-established Chinese and Japanese communities, as well as Filipino labor contractors, largely exploited the Pinoys. In *America Is in the Heart*, Carlos Bulosan expressed the ways the Chinese gambling lords would cheat and swindle Filipino farm workers in games such as Pai Gow. Filipino-Japanese conflicts were mainly limited to competition in the fields, especially in Hawaii. The Japanese controlled gambling houses in other areas, such as Walnut Grove, and also cheated the players. Filipinos also fought against Chinese and Japanese gangs from time to time.

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36. Ibid., 129. Verified by P.C. Morantte.
As seen through many of Bulosan’s works, Filipinos were exploited by the capitalist system and the other ethnic minorities. Filipinos realized the need to organize into unions, regardless of their dialects or home provinces, and their assistance from the CPUSA proved fruitful. The Filipinos referred to each other as kababayan, or countrymen. And when they attempted to establish themselves, other ethnic groups attempted to undo their work. A prime example was the Chinese burning down the Filipino Federation building in Stockton. Further, worker bunkhouses were segregated by ethnicity, in order to ensure no worker alliances. With all the infighting and use of vices, Bulosan eventually recognized that “minorities became the national scapegoat.”

The American public’s attitude towards Filipinos turned around during World War II. Both Filipinos and American soldiers were fighting against the Japanese in the Philippines. Carlos Bulosan, and Filipinos in general, were viewed in a much more positive light, as Americans became concerned about the Philippines as part of the Pacific theatre. Americans believed that the Filipinos had some sort of “local knowledge” of the Philippines. The Bataan Death March began in April 1942, where the Japanese killed over 21,000 Filipino and American POWs.

After President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 (Japanese internment), Filipinos established themselves in the “abandoned” stores and

37. Most evidence suggests that it was two whites who bombed the FFA building in January 1930. Bulosan was told that the Chinese were responsible, which may indicate further inter-ethnic conflicts. See Bulosan, America Is in the Heart, 117.

other businesses formerly run by the Japanese. They renamed the businesses to reflect their patriotism. Bulosan viewed World War II as a clash between Japanese imperialism and American imperialism, which in turn victimized all colonial subjects and members of the working class everywhere. In Marxist terms, the war signified the failure, but not total collapse, of finance capitalism and its hold on colonial territories.

The Philippines remained an economically dependent colony for over four centuries: first to the Spanish, and then the Americans. Filipinos were misled twice by America’s promises of freedom and opportunity. Along the West Coast, Filipinos were subject to abuses and exploitation from white Americans and other more established minorities. It seemed that Filipino and American tensions were finally relieved during World War II, but America resumed its racial exclusion after the war. This was Carlos Bulosan’s world: an endlessly subservient Philippines, and an intolerant and cruel America. The Philippine peasantry and the Pinoys in America were in the worst positions in their respective countries, and Bulosan felt compelled to expose their suffering.

39. See V. I. Lenin’s “Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism.” It is unclear if Bulosan read this essay, but his views on imperialism seem akin to Lenin’s.
Chapter 3

BIOGRAPHY

Bulosan’s autobiography, *America Is in the Heart*, was originally published in 1946, and remains his best-known work to date. It has been used as a textbook in American college courses and is cited as an indispensible part of Filipino and California labor history. P. C. Morantte estimated it is roughly 30% autobiography, 40% case history of Pinoy life in America, 30% fiction.\(^{40}\) In it, Bulosan took on Pinoy sufferings and abuses for himself, and wrote as if he endured each of these pains. What he meant to imply was the general patterns of worker lives; what “happened” to him in an instance was routine for the Filipino workers.

In April 1947, Bulosan asked P. C. Morantte to write “a true picture” of his life.\(^{41}\) Morantte was the prime candidate, being both a close friend of Bulosan’s and a fellow writer. He wrote the requested biography, *Remembering Carlos Bulosan*, some 30 years after Bulosan passed away. Good historical practice aside, Morantte wanted to write something about Bulosan. Archival evidence shows that Bulosan was blacklisted by the Philippine government, for whom Morantte worked at the time.\(^{42}\) The “true picture” Bulosan asked for was shelved because P. C. Morantte did not want to risk his career.

The first part of this chapter describes Bulosan’s life and family in the Philippines. It must be clarified that *America Is in the Heart* is used to extract details

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41. Ibid., 5.

42. “Letter to Aurelio from Dee Feria,” October 03, 1959, Accession 2329-001, Box 1, Folder 3, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
about his childhood, and the papers of Aurelio Bulosan (Carlos’s oldest brother), and P.C. Morantte’s *Remembering Carlos Bulosan* will be used to cross-examine the information where applicable. Bulosan’s autobiography proves itself useful here because there are no surviving records of his early childhood; the Binalonan records were either lost, or destroyed during the Japanese occupation. This part of the chapter ends with a listing of Bulosan’s known family members, verified by primary sources. Many names will be introduced here; hopefully, these will open up new paths to studying Bulosan.

The second part of the chapter details Bulosan’s life once he arrived in the United States. P. C. Morantte, Aurelio Bulosan, and correspondence will pull apart fact from fiction, determining what Carlos Bulosan did versus what he said he did. Some of Bulosan’s friends and love interests will be examined, not just to determine whether he was survived by anyone, but also because they were established authors and activists in their own right. So not only could they provide insight into Bulosan’s life, but they also had their own observations of America. Bulosan’s medical history will also be inspected, because his health is reflected in his work.

Allos “Carlos” Sampayan Bulosan was born November (1911 – 1914) in Mangusmana, Binalonan, Pangasinan, Philippines. There is some inconsistency with Bulosan’s birth date. Susan Evangelista, author of *Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry*, indicates that Bulosan’s birthdate was November 02, 1911, verified by baptismal record
and by Carlos Bulosan’s (actual) sister, Escolastica Bulosan.\textsuperscript{43} Epifanio San Juan, Jr., who edited many of Bulosan’s posthumously released anthologies, and P. C. Morantte place the date as November 24, 1913.\textsuperscript{44} Morantte also states that Bulosan’s baptismal record does not exist. In the First Supplement to \textit{Twentieth Century Authors 1955}, Bulosan himself wrote down the date as November 24, 1914.\textsuperscript{45} Morantte’s date seems the most accurate, seeing as how he knew Bulosan personally, and Bulosan already fabricated some of his life details in \textit{America Is in the Heart}.

Bulosan’s parents were peasants of Filipino Malay origin. His father Simeon Bulosan was a sharecropper, who could barely afford what little land he had. Bulosan’s mother, Autilia Sampayan, caught fish, salted them, and sold them at the town market.\textsuperscript{46} An older Bulosan stated that middle-class Filipinos class looked down on and mistreated his mother.\textsuperscript{47} They sneered at her, putting her down for being a poor peasant. The Filipino middle class also engaged in conspicuous consumption on a large scale, and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Susan Evangelista, \textit{Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry: A Biography and Anthology} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Morantte, \textit{Remembering Carlos Bulosan}, 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} “\textsc{Biographical Sketch for 20th Century Authors},” ca. 1955, Box 1, Folder 1, Carlos Bulosan Papers, Pacific Northwest Historical Documents, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Bulosan does not give his parents’ real names or their ethnic origins. This information appears in Morantte’s \textit{Remembering Carlos Bulosan}. Bulosan’s declassified FBI file identifies his parents as Simeon Bulosan and Marta Sampeyan.
  \item \textsuperscript{47} Older, because these are memories Bulosan wrote about in \textit{America Is in the Heart}.
\end{itemize}
Autilia always coveted their fine things—clothes, jewelry, shoes. So Bulosan’s anti-capitalist feelings were rooted in the apparent class injustices of his childhood.

In his autobiography, Bulosan claimed that his parents were poor and illiterate. Primary sources confirm that this was not entirely the case. The parents lacked any formal instruction, because: 1) education was reserved only for elites during Spanish colonization, and 2) the Philippines had no public schools until the Americans took possession of the islands. Sources reveal that the parents taught themselves how to read and write, but they did very little of it. Aurelio described the family home as one that an average income family could afford, with wooden floors and concrete stairs. He stated that, in comparison to other people in Binalonan, the Bulosans were “far from poor.”

In exaggerating the education and income of his parents, Carlos Bulosan was exposing the lives of the collective Filipino peasantry to his readers. Under Spanish rule, Filipinos could neither become educated nor climb the social ladder. Even though the Bulosans lived comfortably, their status pales in comparison to the affluence of Americans. This is a Bulosan writing in 1946, looking back at his childhood, but accustomed to higher living standards of the United States. Bulosan’s parents were only relatively poor and illiterate.

48. In short, “conspicuous consumption” refers to using a product as a means of showing off, or invoking the jealousy of other people. Modern examples include smartphones, large flat-screen televisions, and sports cars. To learn more about conspicuous consumption, consult the works of American author Thorstein Veblen.


50. Ibid., 39.
Bulosan presents his childhood this way: He and his brothers strove to escape a life of wage labor. Carlos worked on the family farm, Macario eventually became a teacher, Leon served in the army, and Luciano worked in local politics. The Bulosan family could barely afford to make ends meet, and most of the remaining money was used to send the brother Macario (Aurelio) to school. The sister Irene died from a mysterious illness, which she contracted at a young age. This, he states, prompted him to go to school and become a doctor. He attended the primary school in Binalonan “off and on” until he was about 13. Here, he was exposed to American literature – stories such as the American Revolution and Abraham Lincoln’s rise from humble beginnings to President of the United States fascinated him. The family was unable to afford to send both Macario and Carlos to school, and so Carlos had to drop out.

Simeon Bulosan’s harvests yielded little over the years, and he slowly sold off pieces of his land to make ends meet. The family was eventually unable to afford the land, and the family farm was seized and given to a man living in Manila (Manila is the capital of the Philippines, roughly 120 miles from Binalonan, where the Bulosans lived). Bulosan does not say whether this man was a banker, or if the farm was mortgaged – he leaves out details of Philippine property ownership.

51. These come from America Is in the Heart.

52. Letter to Aurea from Carlos Bulosan, April 09, 1959, Accession 2329-002, Box 1, Folder 6, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. The letter confirms that Marcella Bulosan, the sister on whom Irene is based, did pass away at a young age. It is uncertain if this was Carlos’s actual motivation to become educated. Aurea is Aurelio’s daughter, who came to the United States to pursue dentistry.

53. Bulosan, America Is in the Heart, 69.
Distraught, Simeon (or an older Bulosan) questioned the ethics of absentee ownership: “Can a stranger take away what we have molded with our hands?” “There is something wrong in our country when a man can take away something that belongs to you and your family.” The family was unable to afford Macario’s tuition, and so he was forced to drop out of school. Impoverished, Bulosan and two of his brothers left for the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>America Is in the Heart</th>
<th>Primary sources</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Aurelio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amado</td>
<td>Dionisio / Joe (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luciano</td>
<td>Silvestre (?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macario</td>
<td>Apolonio (?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allos / Carlos</td>
<td>Allos / Carlos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>Marcella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisca</td>
<td>Escolastica</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1 – The Bulosan siblings. They are arranged from oldest to youngest, comparing characters from *America Is in the Heart* to primary sources. The three middle brothers are marked with “(?)” because no records were found that determined their birth order, so their ages may not correlate with the other autobiography characters. Of Bulosan’s siblings, it is crucial to remember Aurelio. He and Carlos were the closest of the siblings, especially when they lived in the United States. They were roommates, coworkers, and remained in constant contact. Aurelio was also Carlos’s legal heir, which answers earlier questions about whether Bulosan was survived by anyone.

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54. Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, 55. Bulosan credits his father with these statements. They appear on the same page, at different times.

55. Letter to Gentlemen from Mary Gibson, October 23, 1959, Box 4, Folder 10, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. Mary Gibson was Secretary of the Carlos Bulosan Manuscripts Committee. The Committee attempted to collect all of Bulosan’s published and unpublished work, papers, and letters after his death in 1956.
Aurelio was the eldest brother – the archives at the University of Washington contain a collection of papers written by Aurelio Bulosan. Written papers imply literacy, which further implies some measure of formalized education. So it is assumed that the book character Macario, who was the fourth brother, is actually based on Aurelio, the eldest brother. Archival evidence and P. C. Morantte confirm that Carlos was the youngest brother. An essay entitled “Two Letters from America: Carlos Bulosan and the Act of Writing” contains letters that were not found in the University of Washington Archives.56

It is certain that Bulosan attended Binalonan’s primary school at irregular intervals. He then spent three semesters attending the secondary school in Lingayen, the capital of Pangasinan. It is here that Bulosan first developed his talents as a writer, for he apparently contributed to and edited the school’s newspaper.57 After his brief time in Lingayen, he left school and returned home to work on the family farm.58 Details on these schools are uncertain, but based on Bulosan’s writings and the Philippine social context, they were likely Catholic private schools.

56. Oscar V. Campomanes and Todd S. Gernes, “Two Letters from America: Carlos Bulosan and the Act of Writing,” in Writer in Exile / Writer in Revolt: Critical Perspectives on Carlos Bulosan, ed. Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao, (Lanham, University Press of America, 2016), 163 - 195. These two letters were in the possession of Bulosan’s nephews, Wilfredo and Arthur, who both lived in the Philippines. The letters reveal members of Bulosan’s extended family: Bulosan had cousins named Pablo, Amanda, and Bansiong. The brother Silvestre had more than three children, but the only ones mentioned by name are Wilfredo / Fred, Arthur, and Belen. A Mario Bulosan is mentioned, but the relationship is unclear. An earlier footnote mentions Aurelio’s daughter, Aurea. Bulosan has a great-grandniece named Evangeline Urcia. Hopefully these names can spur further research on Bulosan.

57. Morantte, Remembering Carlos Bulosan, 112. Confirmed by Aurelio.

The Bulosan brothers – Aurelio, Dionisio, and Carlos – left the Philippines with the intention of finishing their education and making their fortune.\(^59\) Carlos Bulosan was determined to begin a career as a writer, as he already proved himself a proficient writer in high school. Carlos Bulosan arrived in Seattle on July 22, 1930 – shortly after the Great Depression hit, and he found that America was not at all anything like he expected. His immediate goal was to establish contact with his brother Aurelio, who was living in Lompoc, CA at the time. Bulosan got his first job in America as a dishwasher in Lompoc’s Lane Café (the Opal Café in *America Is in the Heart*).\(^60\)

During his first ten years in America, Bulosan lived in four states: Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona. He worked in fisheries, canneries, and picked produce out in the fields. He found that migrants worked in generally miserable conditions (parallels to John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*).\(^61\) He wrote about witnessing on-the-job injuries comparable to those described in *The Jungle*: in one instance, while working at a fishery, Bulosan’s coworker lost an arm in a cutting machine. Bulosan later found the arm floating around in the water with the fish. Bulosan described working conditions similar to those found in other literary classics, signifying his intellect.

Aside from poor working conditions, the work was not steadily available, due to changing agricultural seasons. In order to remain constantly employed, Bulosan moved

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\(^59\) Morantte, *Remembering Carlos Bulosan*, 46.

\(^60\) Ibid., 60.

\(^61\) A side note about *The Grapes of Wrath*: Steinbeck’s novel is based on the work of Bulosan’s friend, Sanora Babb. She sent reports to her boss, Tom Collins, who shared these reports with John Steinbeck. See “Sanora Babb,” PBS, [http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/bios/sanora-babb/](http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/bios/sanora-babb/)
up and down the Pacific Coast: Washington (mostly Seattle), California (Sacramento, Stockton, and especially Los Angeles), Alaska, and sometimes traveled east (New Mexico). Migration was a large trend among the Pinays, and they usually traveled by train, taxi, or with friends. These occupations paid just enough for short-term survival.

Bulosan was afflicted with numerous health issues throughout his life, the most noticeable being his weak legs, the most critical being tuberculosis. The most prominent episode of poor health was his admittance to the tuberculosis wards at the Los Angeles County Hospital. He stayed there from 1936 to 1938, during which he underwent a series of operations: thoracoplasty and the removal of a kneecap and lung. The leg was apparently gravely injured by a white mob, and a letter reveals his right hand was smashed by white policemen who tried to extort money from him. He was admitted to Seattle’s Firland Sanatorium, another tuberculosis hospital, in 1952. Bulosan attributes his loss of hearing and internal bleeding with the medications he took while at Firland. He underwent a total of 18 operations by 1954. His frail state prevented him from doing physical labor and marching on the front lines during strikes and protests. This in turn


63. Letter to Josephine, April 15, 1955, box 2, Josephine Patrick Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
limited his employment opportunities, which is why he was reliant on writing as an occupation.\textsuperscript{64}

An older Bulosan also led a harmful lifestyle, which he attributes to his writing. He brought himself to starvation (while employed) in order to feel want, as many people around the world felt. Bulosan’s declassified FBI file states that he weighed 99 lbs. by the time he was admitted to Firland Sanatorium and 87 lbs. by June 14, 1954.\textsuperscript{65} Alcohol, especially whiskey, supposedly cleared his mind of distractions, so he could focus on his ideas. It is also possible he drank constantly to numb the pains from his various ailments. Finally, he was an insomniac; he would write in episodes spanning several days, fearing that he would lose his ideas if he slept. This amalgam of poor health and a self-destructive lifestyle caused his death in September 1956.

As mentioned earlier, Carlos Bulosan was not survived by anyone, and Aurelio was his legal heir. But there were women in Bulosan’s life, and primary sources show that they all held some significance beyond being his friends or love interests. He was uncomfortable being seen with a woman in public, not because of the woman herself, or his being with one. He was aware that his relationships were prone to prejudices, since he was a Filipino. And so he never mentioned these women outside of correspondence.

\textsuperscript{64} The American public viewed physical ailments as signs of weakness, and thus an inability to perform a job efficiently. For example: President Franklin Roosevelt had to conceal his polio.

The Babb sisters, Sanora and Dorothy, brought Bulosan lifelong friendship. Sanora Babb and Bulosan originally came into contact when he was editor for *The New Tide*, a labor union newspaper to which she contributed. Bulosan and the Babb sisters wrote many letters, and the sisters recommended many books. They visited him often when he was in the LA County Hospital. Bulosan read one book a day during his time in the hospital, and he credits the Babb sisters with “making” him into a skilled writer.

Figure 4 – Dorothy Babb and Carlos Bulosan

Figure 5 – Sanora Babb c. 1930s.

66. The Babb sisters appear in *America Is in the Heart* as the Odell sisters, Alice and Eileen.

67. Photographs of the Babb sisters were found at “Author, Poet, and Worker,” University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. [http://content.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/bulosan/union.html](http://content.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/bulosan/union.html)
Letters written by Marjorie Patton (dating from 1950-1953) suggest she and Bulosan were married, or at least in a deeply committed long-distance relationship. The Carlos Bulosan Papers at the University of Washington have no copy of the marriage certificate, but letters addressed to a Mrs. Marjorie Bulosan suggest they were married by 1950. Bulosan may have kept the relationship quiet because of racism and prejudice. Marjorie was involved with the labor movement to an uncertain extent. She found a job in connection with the Atomic Energy Commission, which probably gave leads for the FBI. Carlos Bulosan was a blacklisted author by this time, and the FBI already began its surveillance on him the year before. The relationship was ultimately unsuccessful, but records only indicate a separation, not divorce.

In his last years, Bulosan met Josephine Patrick, a white woman who was long involved in the labor movement. They were both members of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), though at different times. They knew of each other, and had mutual friends in various labor unions. Bulosan and Patrick met in Seattle in 1952, at the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 37 chapter. Poetic letters written to Josephine indicate that Bulosan was madly in love with her, but their relationship was also unsuccessful.

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68. Long distance: Marjorie lived in L.A., Bulosan was in Seattle.

69. Letter to Marjorie Paton from Marion Saunders, January 18, 1950, Box 4, Folder 12, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

70. Letter to Carlos from Marjorie, July 19 (year unknown), Box 4, Folder 13, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
Bulosan’s relationships failed because of his dedication to his work. In a letter written to a friend in September 1947, Bulosan says “I don’t want to marry because I am a coward: I am actually afraid of the responsibilities attendant to marriage. It takes a man sometimes to marry. I have married my work, my dream, my hope for the future. No woman can take the place of my work; and all the women I have known realized it, and so in time they all went away.”

Bulosan’s American colonial education promoted freedom and equality, but he later found that these ideas applied only to white Americans. He was acutely aware that Filipinos and other minorities had little chance of economic prosperity and social justice,


especially in the Depression-era United States. Unsurprisingly, he dedicated his life to writing and political activism to push for better conditions and civil rights for minority workers in the United States and (later) around the world. Bulosan’s numerous injuries kept him from performing physical labor and marching out on the front lines, so his written works were his attempts to advance civil and worker rights. He sacrificed love and health for these impersonal ambitions.
Chapter 4
HISTORIOGRAPHY

A wide array of scholars has examined Bulosan’s life and works. The most prominent of these academics is Epifanio “E.” San Juan, Jr., who studies Bulosan within a Marxist framework. A prime example of San Juan, Jr.’s use of the Marxist framework is in his analysis of Bulosan’s story “My Brother Osong’s Career in Politics” (published 1944). San Juan, Jr. identifies the Marxist concepts of objectification of labor, alienation, and the fetishism of surplus-value and commodities within the story.73 Throughout his various edited anthologies, San Juan, Jr. maintains that Bulosan fully recognized the failures of capitalism, and that it directly contributed to absentee ownership, economic decline, and class disparity in the Philippines and in America.

According to San Juan, Jr., Bulosan “emphasized the role of the proletariat because it is conscious of their exploited state and conscious of their mission: to free humanity from alienated labor, irrational habits, and estranging necessity.”74 Bulosan wrote his most radical works before the end of World War II. Throughout the 1930s, America was still suffering from the Great Depression, Filipinos were still oppressed along the West Coast, and the American public was also very critical of the capitalist system. This was a political climate where the Proletarian Revolution really does seem inevitable and feasible. It is also the time when Bulosan was first introduced to Marx and


74. San Juan, Jr., Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle, 15.
other Socialist writers. So, San Juan, Jr.’s Marxist analyses are only partially correct because the earlier works were written by a bitter revolutionary Bulosan (the extent of Bulosan’s revolutionary Marxism will be better assessed in the next chapter).

Another scholar, Susan Evangelista, undercut San Juan, Jr’s classic Marxist interpretations. She believed it better to consider Bulosan as what she called a “Third World writer.”75 Bulosan was an American colonial subject and, like many other Filipinos, was given an American colonial education. They learned that their culture, history, lifestyles, and institutions were vastly inferior to that of America. It is this type of education that brought thousands of Filipinos to seek employment within the United States. But they later found that the “opportunity” in the “land of opportunity” existed only for whites. Bulosan’s firsthand experiences of (mis)education, Philippine colonial dependence, and the stripping of his dignity in America is what makes him a “Third World writer.”

Bulosan lived during an exceptional time period: World War I, the Great Depression, the rise of fascism in Europe, World War II, and the postwar McCarthy Era. Evangelista states that the Marxist analyses by San Juan, Jr. associate Bulosan’s works too closely to the politics of these events, and do not pay enough attention to the people he perceived to be his audience. Marxism, as historical theory, grants no agency to its

75. Evangelista, Carlos Bulosan and his Poetry, 32.
subjects. Again, San Juan, Jr. is concerned with outlining the underlying Marxist themes in Bulosan’s poems and stories. Evangelista says that Bulosan was more inspired to write for colonized peoples everywhere, rather than for the inevitable violent overthrow of capitalism. Bulosan’s later writings attest to this, as they are more gradualist and less militant, though it is possible he simply became less radical with age. Bulosan saw Filipinos “not merely as passive victims of racism and poverty, but as thinking, acting individuals, who create their own history, and indeed part of American history, as they work through their lives.” Through her analyses, Evangelista has reintroduced people and human agency to Bulosan’s works.

The Tagalog word pasyon refers to the Filipino folktale version of Jesus Christ’s life. In reviewing Bulosan’s life, author Augusto Espiritu sees Bulosan as a pasyon, making connections to the suffering, death, and rebirth of Jesus Christ. According to Espiritu, the suffering of Jesus is paralleled by Carlos’s sufferings in America Is in the Heart. Examples include Carlos witnessing the death of his (fictional) sister Irene and the loss of the family farm, the racial violence and oppression in America, and the illegality of Filipino-Caucasian relationships, both real and fiction. In the literary sense,

76. “Agency” refers to a historian describing a subject’s use of free will. Granting agency would read something along the lines of “This person chose this particular circumstance or consequence.” On the other hand, granting no agency would read “This circumstance or consequence happened to this person.” Regarding agency, this project blends the two options: in respect to Bulosan’s destitution, he actively chose to be poor, but also suffered from legalized racism.

77. P. C. Morantte would agree with Evangelista’s stance, that a strict Marxist analysis does not work for Bulosan. See Morantte, Remembering Carlos Bulosan, 123.

78. Cabusao, Writer in Exile / Writer in Revolt, 134.
Bulosan takes on the suffering of the Filipinos for himself. He wrote much about the misery of Filipinos, and clearly had his own pains. According to Alfonso Santos, a Filipino student at USC, Bulosan never complained about his poor health, and never called for any pity.\(^79\)

According to Bulosan’s close friends, he had mystical qualities. Dorothy Babb, P.C. Morantte, and others admitted to a “supernatural aura” surrounding Carlos Bulosan – one of gentleness, kindness, and compassion. Dolores Feria writes about how the Pangasinans (Filipinos from Bulosan’s home province) in L.A. absolutely glorified and revered him.\(^80\) The American and Philippine governments, as well as conservative Filipinos, sought to destroy Bulosan’s mark in history and reject his works. The rebirth of Christ, Espiritu states, is paralleled by Bulosan’s rediscovery in the 1970s – much longer than Christ’s three days.

Filipino author Greg Castilla sees Bulosan as a progenitor to modern multicultural education. The issues Bulosan explored in his work – racial and social oppression, the celebration of foreign cultures and traditions, colonialism and economic exploitation, and calling for the end of racism – are central to multicultural education curriculum. The United States and other colonizing nations used their educational systems as “weapons of colonial conquest.” As stated earlier, those systems taught of the colonizer’s superiority,

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80. Ibid., 71.
and stripped the colonial subjects of their national heritage. Multicultural curriculum, then, emerged as a form of neocolonial resistance, a way to restore national identities.81

Most recent scholarship on Bulosan has been headed by San Juan, Jr., Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi. San Juan, Jr. continues to write articles about Bulosan, and maintains “The E. SAN JUAN, Jr. Archive,” where he and other authors discuss Bulosan’s continuing relevance.82 San Juan, Jr. is now calling for younger scholars, who have fresh new perspectives, to continue his own work.83 It has been over 30 years since San Juan, Jr. edited and published If You Want to Know What We Are, and so inherently views Bulosan within his own Marxist framework. Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi have written a collection of articles on Bulosan over the last 24 years, at least three of which involve Bulosan’s declassified FBI file.


82. http://rizalarchive.blogspot.com/

Chapter 5
LITERARY THEMES

This chapter discusses several literary themes, which are reflected in Bulosan’s life experiences. As established before, Bulosan took on Filipino sufferings for himself when he wrote his autobiography using collective Filipino experiences. Filipino suffering was an extension of the white American hegemony, and Bulosan explored race relations through other writings. This awareness of country-wide racial tensions probably came through his association with African-American writers such as Richard Wright and W. E. B. DuBois. His written works were imbued with Marxist undertones; Bulosan strove for economic equality, rather than worker revolution or a hidden political agenda.

The women in Bulosan’s stories are compassionate and loving, but they are each removed from the story in tragic ways: they reflect the good qualities that were promised through the colonial education system, and their removal symbolizes the harsh realities minorities faced in America. These themes all reveal Bulosan’s aspirations for equality, defense of the oppressed, and peace.

Filipinos were subject to various hate crimes, such as torture, beatings, and shootings. Whites described them with racial slurs such as “sex-starved natives,” “googoos,” “half-naked savages,” and “monkeys.” Bulosan and other Filipinos are repeatedly subject to white hostility in America Is in the Heart. In one incident, a group of Filipinos and Mexicans plan to strike in the San Jose lettuce fields. A white mob

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84. Bulosan and DuBois were members of the Committee to Sponsor Luis Taruc’s Biography. This committee will be discussed further in Chapter 8.
prematurely stopped the strike: some of Bulosan’s colleagues were tied to trees and beaten, one was tarred and feathered. The mob stripped him of his clothing, and beat his legs to a point where he was unable to walk (possibly explaining why he had the actual knee operation). They kicked him when he was down, and smashed his groin. Bulosan described the pain as “so swift and searing that it was as if there was no pain at all.”\textsuperscript{85}

One of Bulosan’s most graphic descriptions of racial violence is the torture and murder of Leroy, a minor character in the story “I Would Remember.” The narrator lived in a bunkhouse with thirty other farm workers, one of whom was Leroy. He spoke of labor unions and worker unity, and how this combination would deliver good work, worker empowerment, and economic security (the narrator only recounts general things Leroy said). One evening, a mob breaks into the bunkhouse, grabs Leroy, and holds the other workers at gunpoint. Leroy is dragged outside where he “began screaming like a pig about to be butchered.”\textsuperscript{86} After the mob left, the workers scramble outside to find Leroy dead: hung from a tree branch, his genitals mutilated, eyes gouged, tongue sliced. The maiming of Leroy served as a warning against unionism. While Leroy’s death is fictitious, Bulosan was projecting his thoughts about white domination in America, and an awareness of race relations around the country.

By Bulosan’s hospitalization in 1936, he already acquired a profound understanding of Marxist ideology. Bulosan was likely drawn to Marxism because it is a

\textsuperscript{85} Bulosan, \textit{America Is in the Heart}, 208.

\textsuperscript{86} Carlos Bulosan, \textit{If You Want to Know What We Are}, 63.
ready-made critique of capitalism and oppression. Within this theoretic framework, problems of the working class transcend simple nationalistic terms. In other words, it was American bourgeoisie that oppressed Filipino proletarians in America and in the Philippines.

Bulosan believed that America provided economic opportunity and racial equality, as per the colonial education he was given. He began his writing career determined to expose the injustices of American capitalist society. Bulosan sought sanctuary in the labor movement, and looked to Marxist ideology. He viewed it as progressive and democratic, since it called for freedom and equality between all ethnicities and classes, which were supposedly American ideals. Initially, Bulosan favored the violent overthrow of the capitalists, and was confident he would see the proletarian revolution unfold. Examination of his later works reveals that he transitioned into gradualism, perhaps social democracy, and was much less militant in his writing.

Carlos’ anti-capitalist feelings are clearly outlined in his short essay, “Labor and Capital: The Coming Catastrophe” (1939). The essay reads as a classic Marxist piece, exclaiming that “as in all industrialized countries, America’s wealth is concentrated in the hands of few.” This wealth is produced by collective labor but privately appropriated. Capitalism is destructive, because the profiteers invest their money on themselves, rather

87. It is uncertain whether the “revolution” he envisioned was socialist or communist in nature.

88. Bulosan, If You Want To Know What We Are, 13.
than for charitable or humanitarian causes. They force longer hours, production quotas, and other intolerable conditions on workers, while investing these increased profits in machines, luxurious items, and private armies. They pool resources together to drive out competition and thereby acquire monopolies or oligopolies. When competition is severely limited, “the more enormous profits they acquire, which means more exploitation.” Depressions are inevitably made when the markets overflow with surplus, and war is the only solution capitalism gives. “All wars,” he wrote, “are fought for profit.”

Another poem “If You Want to Know What We Are” was first published in 1940. It appeared in Literature Under the Commonwealth, a collection edited by Manuel Arguilla. Bulosan indirectly speaks of an emerging worker class consciousness. The millions of workers around the world will erupt into revolution. His tone becomes progressively angry and militant, ending with:

89. Ibid., 13.
90. Ibid., 13. Bulosan may have been alluding to the Nye Committee, which was formed in 1934. The Committee made connections between America's involvement in World War I, and the profits made by big bankers and arms manufacturers, and ultimately concluded that America fought in that war for reasons of profit, not for moral reasons such as making the world “safe for democracy.”

91. Arguilla, an Ilocano writer and one of Bulosan’s literary influences, was beheaded by the Japanese in 1944. The execution of Arguilla and other Filipino authors likely fueled Bulosan’s passionate support for the Hukbalahap. The Hukbalahap was a Communist guerilla group that led the Philippine resistance against the Japanese during World War II. They will be discussed further in Chapter 8.
If you want to know what we are—
WE ARE REVOLUTION!  

Bulosan became much less militant and radical with age, perhaps in response to the chaos and destruction of World War II. The poem “I Want the Wide American Earth” (1950). It still reads as a Marxist work, for the millions everywhere “have history in our hands” and “we have the future with us.” He speaks out against tyrannical groups who imprison those who speak truth, conscript for their wars, and place people in their concentration camps. Bulosan calls upon the people to respond to such hostility with the following:

“Remember, remember,
We shall no longer wear rags, eat stale bread, live in darkness;
We shall no longer kneel on our knees to your false gods;
We shall no longer beg you for a share of life.
Remember, remember,
O remember in the deepest midnight of your fear,
We shall emulate the wonder of our women,
The ringing laughter of our children,
The strength and manhood of our men
With a true and honest and powerful love!’

And we say to them:

‘We are the creators of a flowering race!’

92. Bulosan, *If You Want To Know What We Are*, 79. The Philippine’s Department of Education went to great lengths to track down Bulosan to ask for his permission to be included in *Literature Under the Commonwealth*. A series of letters in the Carlos Bulosan Papers, Box 4, Folder 8, reveal that this path was taken to find Bulosan: Republic of the Philippines Department of Education. Bureau of Public Schools, Manila -> Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippine Consul General in New York -> Acting Director, UNESCO New York Office -> Bulosan’s mailing address in Portland, Oregon. The poem also appears on this webpage, including a Tagalog translation: [http://www.bulatlat.com/news/2-44/2-44-bulosan.html](http://www.bulatlat.com/news/2-44/2-44-bulosan.html)

93. Ibid., 75.

94. Ibid., 76.
Bulosan no longer calls for a violent proletarian revolution, as seen in his previous works. The people should reject, but not destroy, the power structures which disregard equality: countries, corporations, even labor organizations.

Despite his anti-capitalist sentiments and support for the proletariat, Bulosan developed very Bourgeois tastes. Sources show he liked smoking and drinking, especially whiskey. In a letter written to his brother Aurelio, Carlos Bulosan told him “I am living at a very expensive hotel because I like to live well.”95 He had nice suits, and usually had a typewriter nearby. To Bulosan and the Pinoys, affluence and consumerism was their American Dream.96

In many of Bulosan’s stories, women symbolize two things: first, the America that Bulosan sought – a land of kindness, goodness, compassion; and second, how quickly and easily those qualities could be lost. A woman named Marian appears in America Is in the Heart, who cared for Bulosan after he was beaten up by a white mob.97 She was tender and loving, and supported Carlos’s ambitions for labor unionism and a formal education. Shortly into their relationship, Marian was hospitalized. Upon her

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95. Letter to Brother Aurelio from Carlos Bulosan, April 15, 1954, Accession 2329-001, Folder 1-1, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

96. From the documentary “Little Manila: Filipinos in California’s Heartland.” Some Filipinos spent all their hard-earned money on looking flashy - McIntosh suits, slicked and combed hair, neatly trimmed moustaches, and fancy cars. That was the American Dream for them - new cars, gambling, women. This is also among a historical context of the birth of American consumer culture.

97. Marian appears in America Is in the Heart. It is unclear if she was a real person, was based on someone Bulosan knew, or was purely fictional. Bulosan’s second literary agent went by the name of Marion Saunders, but it is uncertain if there is any connection.
deathbed, she asked Carlos to “Promise me not to hate. But love—love everything good and clean. There is something in you that radiates like an inner light, and it affects others. Promise me to let it grow...”

During Bulosan’s first hospitalization in *America Is in the Heart*, he meets the Odell sisters, Alice and Eileen. As was the case with their actual counterparts, they brought him lifelong friendships. Alice took care of Carlos and read to him during his hospitalization, but she soon left for the Soviet Union. Eileen picked up where her sister left off, recommending books and exchanging letters. Carlos’ letters to Eileen were, as he stated, his studies in English. They became distant after his release from the hospital; their estrangement was not personal, but physical—Carlos stated that he began his labor organization after his release.

In Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical story, “As Long as the Grass Shall Grow,” the narrator is a Filipino migrant worker who meets an American teacher named Helen O’Reilly. When he tells Helen that he never attended school past the third grade, she offers to read to him. She reads history, poetry, and the Bible to the narrator.

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99. The Odell sisters appear in *America Is in the Heart*. They are based on Bulosan’s real friends and love interests, the Babb sisters. Alice Odell is based on Sanora Babb, Eileen Odell is based on Dorothy Babb. For sake of clarity, they are not related to the character Marian.
100. In *America Is in the Heart*. Bulosan was released from the hospital in 1938, after which he became involved in union work. Archival evidence shows that he was very much involved in labor organization before his hospitalization.
101. Letter to unknown recipient from Julie, date unknown, Box 4, Folder 8, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. Miss O’Reilly was or was based on an actual person “Julie” knew. Bulosan used the alias “Julie” when communicating with the Hukbalahap.
narrator’s companions, all Filipino migrant workers, come to join their sessions. Helen begins to hold night classes for them in the town schoolhouse. Word eventually gets out, and a town organization speaks out and condemns Helen for teaching the Filipinos. She is replaced by a far less caring teacher, and the narrator and his friends are beaten by white men as a “warning” against attempts to become educated. On a side note, the United Nations’ Bureau of Intercultural Education sponsored a literary contest, and this story won third place.

![Common Ground](image)

Figure 7 – *Common Ground*, Summer 1949. Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical story “As Long as the Grass Shall Grow” appeared in this magazine, p. 38 – 43. According to the biographical sketch, Bulosan worked with Naval Intelligence and the United States Office of War Information. The story won third place in a contest funded by the United Nations’ Bureau of Intercultural Education.

102. Letter to (unnamed recipient) from Julie, date unknown, Box 4, Folder 8, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. Julie / Bulosan does not indicate the contest’s category or when it was held.
This dual nature of America is further explored in the story “The Romance of Magno Rubio.”

Magno Rubio’s love interest, Clarabelle, is beautiful and alluring, but also deceptive and cruel. “The Romance of Magno Rubio” perhaps best illustrates the old Pinoy expression:

“Isang magandang señora, libot na libot ng espada.”
“There is a beautiful woman surrounded with swords.”

Carlos’ understanding of Filipino-white relationships and their social consequences is summarized in an unpublished and untitled story about a Filipino worker whose skin slowly becomes white. The Filipino is told that his natural pigmentation will last, so long as he does not love a white woman. The change in skin color perhaps reflects the Filipino immigrants’ adaptation to and hopefully eventual acceptance within American society, granted they do not associate with white women. Carlos explained that the story was a parable about the United States: “Some elements in America gave us a gift of speech, education, money – but they also wanted to take away our heart. They give you money but deny your humanity.”

The promises for equality and opportunity were fulfilled only for white American citizens. Bulosan was originally a revolutionary Marxist because he and other minority workers found that they could only have a secondhand status in America. His ideas on Marxism changed in that he wanted to keep people free from starvation and

104. Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore, 316.
105. Evangelista, Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry, 13.
homelessness, and to reject tyranny and oppression. The women in his stories reflected the dualistic nature of America: one that is kind and sweet, and one that is cruel and inhumane. Bulosan’s passion for writing stemmed from these flaws he saw in the American social system.
Chapter 6
MAINSTREAM SUCCESS

This chapter is a detailed discussion of Bulosan’s break into popular culture. His (incomplete) publication history is included, indicating his creative energies. Bulosan became very popular, especially for a Filipino in America. He originally began publishing his poems and essays in small magazines and newspapers. Bulosan gained much recognition during World War II, with the publications of the essay “Freedom From Want” (1943) and the book *The Laughter of My Father* (1944). He broke into the American mainstream, was published abroad, and found moderate success beyond writing. But his fame lasted only for a brief period of time.

Bulosan’s literary circle grew early and rapidly. When working on *The New Tide*, Bulosan came into contact with a wide array of progressive writers. Some of the writers with whom Bulosan made acquaintance were the Babb sisters, Richard Wright, and Louis Adamic. Bulosan had at least three literary agents – Maxim Lieber, Marion Saunders, and Harriet Wolfe. Maxim Lieber had connections with Harcourt, Brace & Company, who eventually published *America Is in the Heart*. Bulosan was good friends with author Carey McWilliams, who wrote about migrant conditions in California. He was also

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107. Lieber eventually went out of business. The Marion Saunders Literary Agency took over all of Lieber’s contracts, including Bulosan’s. It is uncertain whether Bulosan left Marion Saunders’s agency for Harriet Wolfe’s, or if he worked with both agencies at the same time.

108. McWilliams wrote books such as *Factories in the Fields* and *Brothers Under the Skin*, titles which suggest his thoughts on migrant labor. He also wrote the introduction to *America Is in the Heart*. 
close to Grace F. Cunningham (pen name Lysle Carveth), and some of her stories are based on Bulosan’s childhood. Bulosan associated with progressives and radicals, who were involved with the Communist Party USA or targets of McCarthyism, which helped develop his own brand of Marxist thinking.

Bulosan was acquainted with a handful of scholars and academics. Archival materials show he communicated with Rodrigo and Dolores Feria, Leopoldo Yabes, and Florentino Valeros, all college professors in the Philippines. In a letter written to Yabes, dated April 13 1948, Bulosan states that he knew the editors at various American universities – New Mexico, Stanford, and Chicago.109 He also states that he was invited to do special guest lectures at Mills College, but declined because he dislikes public speaking. Valeros asked Bulosan for biographical information, and Bulosan replied with his basic (and fabricated) information and a short publication history.110 Florentino Valeros also planned to include some of Bulosan’s work in a book entitled Significant Filipino Writers in English (Google and WorldCat searches for this title return no results). The extent of Bulosan’s relationship with these Filipino professors is unknown because many of the letters were destroyed, lost, or confiscated by the Philippine government – a result of Bulosan’s alleged red taint. Even when the Philippine and

109. Bulosan, Sound of Falling Light, 63.


Margarita Valeros (Florentino’s wife) wrote her Master’s thesis, entitled “An Appreciative Study to the Life and Works of Carlos Bulosan,” and submitted it in 1955. It is held at The National Teachers College in Manila.
American governments blacklisted Bulosan, he was accessible to a handful of students from those countries.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave his Four Freedoms speech in 1941. The four freedoms outlined by the President were:

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of worship
- Freedom from want
- Freedom from fear

Roosevelt stated that these are things that people “everywhere in the world” ought to enjoy. In 1943, Norman Rockwell depicted FDR’s Four Freedoms through oil paintings, which were published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, accompanied by an essay defining that freedom. At this time, Bulosan was fully experiencing want, working no financial security and no stable home. He was commissioned to write the essay about the “Freedom from Want” which was published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, after which he gained national and international recognition as an American writer.

Part of the essay reads:

“We march on, though sometimes strange moods fill our children. Our march toward security and peace is the march of freedom—the freedom that we should like to become a living part of. It is the dignity of the individual to live in a society of free men, where the spirit of understanding and belief exists; of understanding that all men, whatever their color, race, religion or estate, should be given equal opportunity to serve themselves and each other according to their needs and abilities. But we are not really free unless we use what we produce. So long as the fruit of our labor is denied us, so long will want manifest itself in a world of slaves.

It is only when we have plenty to eat—plenty of everything—that we begin to understand what freedom means. To us, freedom is not an
intangible thing. When we have enough to eat, then we are healthy enough to enjoy what we eat. Then we have the time and ability to read and think and discuss things. Then we are not merely living but also becoming a creative part of life. It is only then that we become a growing part of democracy.”  

Bulosan concealed Marxist ideas throughout the essay. The statement “all men… should be given equal opportunity to serve themselves and each other according to their needs and abilities” is nearly identical to one of Marx’s popular slogans from his “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” which reads, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”  

In another part of the essay, Bulosan writes, “But we are not really free unless we use what we produce. So long as the fruit of our labor is denied us, so long will want manifest itself in a world of slaves.” Here, Bulosan has defined the Marxist concept of alienation. Marx states that through the capitalist mode of production, workers are deprived of their ability to direct their lives. Their activities are dictated by the bourgeoisie, and, as Bulosan has outlined, they do not own the goods they produce with their own labor.

Most importantly, Bulosan did not see “freedom” as a political construct, but the readily available access to their basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter. “Freedom” means nothing to those who were starving and homeless. An individual develops their other capacities only after they fulfill their basic needs.

111. Bulosan, On Becoming Filipino, 131.

Thus, one’s economic well-being was a prerequisite to their participation in
democratic politics.

Bulosan published *The Laughter of My Father*, a collection of short
stories, in 1944. The stories were based on Filipino folklore and people Bulosan
knew in Binalonan. During the height of Bulosan’s success, *The Laughter of My
Father* was a much more popular book than *America Is in the Heart*. Some of the
stories were broadcast over radio stations. It became an international seller; the
archives include letters sent from publishers in various countries (listed below), in
which they ask Bulosan’s permission to translate and/or publish the book. Select
stories from the book were also adapted into puppet plays in the Territory of
Hawaii, and drama theater in South Africa.\textsuperscript{113}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>England</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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Bulosan published *America Is in the Heart* in 1946, and it remains his best-known
work to date. The book is semi-autobiographical, but wholly representative of the
Filipino immigrant experience. As stated earlier, Bulosan wrote about Filipino sufferings
as if he experienced them firsthand. The public did not connect with the numerous and
anonymous *Pinoys*, but could sympathize with one individual. In taking on those
sufferings for himself, Bulosan presented an arena in which his audience could seriously
contend with the experiences of migrant workers. It is used and cited today in high

\textsuperscript{113} Hawaii was annexed as a state in 1959.
school and college classrooms in the United States and the Philippines. Bulosan started a sequel, to be titled *My Letter to the World*, but the manuscript was never found.

Bulosan had a chance to start a career in the film industry. Warner Brothers wanted to film a biography of Jose Rizal (1861 - 1896), a Filipino writer and national hero, and one of Bulosan’s influences. Bulosan claims he was asked to be the technical director of the film, but the project was altogether rejected by Rizal’s then-living sister, Trinidad. He does not mention when the film’s production was to take place. But if the story is true, it reflects the incredible respect Bulosan held for Rizal himself.

Bulosan was compelled to write to expose the poverty and destitution he and other Filipinos experienced on a daily basis. His work in the labor unions fueled his creative drive, and he gained limited success in his first ten years in the United States. His career skyrocketed with the publication of “Freedom from Want” and *The Laughter of My Father*, but his fame plummeted just as quickly. Bulosan never regained his wartime popularity.

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114. Letter to (unnamed recipient) from (unnamed sender), date unknown, Box 2, Josephine Patrick Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
Figure 8 – Letter from Dr. Milos Brakus, June 7, 1953. Brakus asked Bulosan’s permission to translate *The Laughter of My Father* into Yugoslavian/Serbo-Croatian. According to the letter, Bulosan’s book was the first publication about the Philippines to appear in Yugoslavia. Brakus also offered to take Bulosan on a tour in Dubrovnik.

115. Letter to Mr. Bulosan from Dr. Milosa Brakus, June 7, 1953, Accession 2329-001, Folder 1-4, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
Figure 9 – Bulosan Partial Bibliography

Bulosan’s creative drive was fueled by what he experienced firsthand: Filipinos and other minorities abused in America, institutionalized racism, and workers exploited by capitalist owners. He joined the labor movement sometime within his first three years in America. Bulosan was not on the front lines or working in the fields; his later injuries and poor health prevented active participation. Instead, he contributed to and edited various union newspapers and magazines, providing a literary foundation to the labor movement and clear expression of Filipino demands. Bulosan’s work proved ultimately successful, as Filipinos slowly gained better economic opportunities and civil rights.

By 1934, Carlos Bulosan worked the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) as its publicist. He edited UCAPAWA’s magazine, *The New Tide*, and came into contact with progressive writers around the country. UCAPAWA was organized by the food processing workers in Salinas, CA and fish cannery workers in Seattle.\(^{117}\) In his autobiography, Bulosan states that he took over the magazine after its original creator, the socialist lawyer Pascual, passed away.\(^{118}\)

\(^{117}\) Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, xvi.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 187. It is unclear whether Pascual was a fictional character or based on a real person. In *On Becoming Filipino*, San Juan, Jr. treats Pascual as a real person. Of the source materials consulted, Pascual only appears in *America Is in the Heart*. It is likely that Pascual is based on Bulosan’s real friend and colleague Chris Mensalvas, given the real-life and book events take place around the same time. Pascual is a socialist lawyer; Mensalvas was a member of the Communist Party USA and attended UCLA to study law. He dropped out after realizing that Filipinos could not enter any profession in America. Bulosan wrote that Pascual was from Stockton, whereas Mensalvas was from Los Angeles. Mensalvas passed away in 1978, more than 20 years after Bulosan’s death.
Later that year, he met Crispulo “Chris” Mensalvas and Claro Candelario, both Filipino labor organizers, in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{119} They regularly met at the Los Angeles Public Library, where Bulosan undoubtedly continued his voracious reading. The three friends and other leftist Filipinos formed the Committee for the Protection of Filipino Rights (CPFR), a branch of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign-Born. According to Bulosan’s FBI file, he served as CPFR’s Commission Secretary.\textsuperscript{120} CPFR campaigned to get 20,000 signatures in support for Filipino naturalization. Their campaign was supported by New York Congressman Vito Marcantonio, a representative of the American Labor Party. In 1940, CPFR moved to Stockton, where America’s Filipino population was heavily concentrated, and published their radical newspaper, the \textit{Commonwealth Times}.

Rather than join larger parties, Bulosan originally wanted to establish separate Filipino units, which he already did with CPFR. He was criticized among some activists for being a “divisionist” – that is, undermining the strength of the labor movement by creating these separated groups. But Bulosan believed organizations focusing on Filipinos would work best for his countrymen. President Harry Truman signed the Filipino Naturalization Bill in 1946, enabling Filipinos to become citizens. The signing of the bill indicated the success of Bulosan and CPFR. The Philippines also gained its

\textsuperscript{119} Letter to Carey from Chris Mensalvas, December 20, 1972, Box 1, Folder 27, Chris D. Mensalvas Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. Carlos and Aurelio Bulosan lived with Chris Mensalvas and his brother Julio for over a year. They survived on pig heads and mackerel from San Pedro, CA.

\textsuperscript{120} “Bulosan’s FBI File,” University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, 51. \url{http://content.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/bulosan/fbi.html}
independence from the United States on July 4th 1946, as was provided by the Tydings-McDuffie Act. Carlos Bulosan never applied for citizenship.

Figure 10 – “An Appeal to Reason.” The Committee for the Protection of Filipino Rights (CPFR) distributed pamphlets such as this during their campaign for naturalization. This particular copy has Bulosan’s writing on the cover.

121. “An Appeal to Reason,” Box 5, Folder 4, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections
In May 1948, Stockton’s Local 7 labor union led an asparagus strike. Bulosan helped fellow Filipino labor activists Claro Candelario, Chris Mensalvas, Ernesto Mangaoang, Larry Itliong, and Phillip Vera Cruz with the strike’s organization.\footnote{122} With over 1,500 asparagus workers marching through downtown Stockton, it was one of the largest strikes in American history to date. But the strike was ultimately unsuccessful; the Cold War was already underway, and farmers, police, and conservative Filipinos used red-baiting tactics to undermine the strike.\footnote{123} Some of the strikers (but not Bulosan) went on to form the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC).

One of Bulosan’s largest roles in the labor movement was his election to the office of Publicity Director for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 37 chapter, based in Seattle.\footnote{124} Bulosan served as editor of Local 37’s yearbook in 1952, wherein he still wrote with a Marxist bent, but he was no longer a violent revolutionary. Chris Mensalvas, Local 37’s President from 1949 to 1959, also contributed to the yearbook, urging union members to continue to push for better wages and working conditions. In order to bring about peace, the union members could sign a peace pledge. One of the pledge’s tenets read: “I am for the total abolition of all
instruments of mass destruction of people, such as atomic, bacteriological, napalm and similar weapons."

Bulosan was rushed to Firland Sanatorium, a tuberculosis hospital in Seattle, on the day the 1952 yearbook was released. ILWU officers, such as Mensalvas, scrambled to raise funds to pay for Bulosan’s hospital bills – at least eighty workers donated. They asked union members and workers to contribute to the Carlos Bulosan Fund, whose slogan read:

Figure 11 - Carlos Bulosan and Chris Mensalvas with Union workers, ca. 1950s

125. Ibid., 11.
“TO HELP CARLOS BULOSAN, IS TO HELP LABOR!!!
DO CONTRIBUTE GENEROUSLY”\textsuperscript{127}

One of ILWU’s more well-known members was Larry Itliong, who at this time was coordinating with the Naknek Red Salmon Cannery in Alaska. (Itliong began serving as ILWU Local 37’s Vice President by 1953) Regarding the Carlos Bulosan Fund, Itliong noted that the union crowd would not be the same without Bulosan, and he promised “to do my best to help in Carlos’ case.”\textsuperscript{128} Naknek Red Salmon contributed a total of $60, suggesting that Itliong fulfilled his promise and indicating Bulosan’s importance to the labor movement.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{127} The Carlos Bulosan Fund, Box 4, Folder 21, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.


\textsuperscript{129} Bulosan also had many friends in the ILWU’s San Francisco office, and members had many positive things to say about him. See “Letter to Mary Gibson from Anne Rand,” August 1, 1960, Box 4, Folder 10, Carlos Bulosan Papers.
Figure 12 – ILWU Local 37 Officers - December 1953. Letters sent from Local 37 listed the union’s officers, as seen in this snippet. Such letters appear in several collections at the UW Special Collections archives.

Bulosan was released from Firland Sanatorium in 1953, and returned to work for Local 37. In 1954, he began working on a new Constitution for Local 37, and was transcribing committee meetings. Letters reveal that ILWU Local 37 slowly won major victories:

“From $30 a months [sic] poor food, unsanitary living conditions, deductions, etc. to $250 a month guarante [sic] (plus overtime), free plane transportation back and forth, special meals, modern housing, free medical services, sick benefits, etc.”

Local 37 shifted their focus within the Cold War context. ILWU was also fighting for the rights of Alaskan workers. Filipinos there were still subject to deportation under the McCarran-Walter Act, since Alaska was not admitted to the Union until 1959. ILWU won civil rights and liberties and secured better conditions for workers, but now turned their attention to fighting fascism and reactionism (extremely conservative politics).

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130. Letter to Joey from Carlos Bulosan, December 28, 1953, Box 2, Josephine Patrick Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

131. Letter to Florentino from (unnamed sender), January 17, 1955, Box 4, Folder 8, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
This chapter examines Bulosan’s relations with the United States and Philippine governments. His early radical writings suggest Bulosan hated these governments for supporting the capitalist system. During World War Two, Bulosan cooperated with these governments, if only to stop the fascist regimes. With the oncoming Cold War, Bulosan found himself blacklisted in the United States and the Philippines, as he was a target of McCarthyism and the House Un-American Activities Committee. The FBI conducted surveillance on Bulosan, and went to great lengths to get him deported. They ultimately could not find enough evidence of Bulosan’s involvement with the international Communist conspiracy.

Bulosan was invited to work with the Philippine Commonwealth government-in-exile, along with P.C. Morantte and other *illustrados*, or Filipino “Enlightened” intellectuals, as well as some of the former *Pensionados.* The government-in-exile operated in Washington D.C. from 1942 to 1945, when Japan occupied the Philippines. Bulosan was initially critical of some fascist influences in Philippine President Quezon’s government. However, Bulosan greatly admired and respected Quezon, whom he considered close.

President Quezon asked Bulosan to write his biography. Bulosan declined for several reasons: 1) Aurelio Bulosan said he would refuse if he was in Carlos’s position.

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132. The Commonwealth government-in-exile based itself in Washington, D.C. It is likely that Bulosan and Morantte were referred to as *illustrados* by others, rather than using the label to describe themselves.
Carlos Bulosan was a writer, not a politician, and could better serve the Filipino people if he worked independently. 133 2) Bulosan wanted to remain a politically independent writer, and 3) being stuck in an office and dictated by time, Bulosan felt the work would ruin his creativity. President Quezon was shocked, and allegedly sneered at Bulosan: “What, you have the nerve to refuse me?” 134 Bulosan began to indirectly contribute to his (later) infamy.

In 1943, Bulosan published *The Voice of Bataan*, a book of poems dedicated to the soldiers that fought in the Battle of Bataan. General Carlos Romulo, who often found himself at odds with Bulosan, wrote the introduction to the book. Romulo was aide-de-camp to American General Douglas MacArthur, as well as the Philippine Commonwealth Government’s former Secretary of Information. The next year, Carlos Bulosan organized an event for Carlos Romulo in Stockton, to mark the second anniversary of the Bataan Death March.

At the event, Romulo gave firsthand accounts of the Japanese brutality. Three things were accomplished at the event: 1) Romulo’s purpose of the visit was to drum up support for war effort, which he did; 2) in supporting the war, Filipinos bought war bonds; and 3) Romulo encouraged whites to embrace Filipinos as brothers, if not brothers-in-arms. 135


134. Ibid., 4.

Around this time, Bulosan’s fame began to dwindle, a process that began with his disfavor within the Philippine government. As mentioned earlier, Bulosan refused to write the late President Quezon’s biography, and never saw eye-to-eye with General Romulo. Bulosan was also at odds with Philippine President Roxas and Defense Secretary Magsaysay (more on them later). Filipino upperclassmen looked down on him because he did not complete a formal education, which is another instance of conspicuous consumption. Bulosan began to see the limits of his fraternity with the Filipino elites.

Amidst the Cold War background, anticommunism continued to rise in the US and Philippines. Filipino elites and conservatives, in both countries, sought to erase Bulosan from popular memory. Bulosan’s works were largely rejected on the basis of his radical writings and labor activism. He was blacklisted in the United States and the Philippines, as he voiced support for the *Hukbalahap*, a Filipino Communist guerilla organization.

In a letter to Aurelio, dated September 16, 1950, Bulosan stated that within the last few months he made connections with “the people’s liberation movement” in the Philippines, and that he already attempted to connect some of his relatives to that movement. One of the dead guerillas possessed a letter written by “Julie,” one of Bulosan’s aliases. Defense Minister Ramon Magsaysay accused Bulosan of being one of the *Hukbalahap*. Bulosan became a persona non grata in the Philippines for over ten years because of the alleged red taint.

136. Letter to Brother Aurelio from Carlos, September 16, 1950, Accession 2329-001, Folder 1-1, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
The FBI conducted surveillance on Bulosan beginning in 1949. They collected data from everywhere they could – Stockton, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle. Additionally, they checked everything they could – mail, tax records, and credit records. He knew he was being watched, but likely did not know to what extent the FBI invaded his privacy. Regardless, this did not stop his creativity and activist work.

Bulosan’s harassment by the FBI was not entirely without merit, given who he knew, his earlier radical writing, and his labor activities. Chris Mensalvas, Claro Candelario, and Ernesto Mangaoang were all Communists.137 The Babb sisters and Josephine Patrick also had Communist ties or sympathies. Bulosan worked as Publicist for the Cannery and Agricultural Workers’ Industrial Union (CAWIU), a labor union affiliated with the Communist Party USA.

The FBI wanted to get enough information to justify Bulosan’s deportation, based on his political leanings. This was a difficult task already, because of Bulosan’s commission to write “Freedom from Want,” his (apparent) work with Naval Intelligence and the Office of War Information, and his literary fame. Given his contact with the Hukbalahap, the FBI may have identified him as a Communist spy. It is also possible the FBI perceived him as an international terrorist threat.

Within ILWU Local 37’s 1952 yearbook, Bulosan wrote an article “Terrorism Rides the Philippines.”138 In the article, Bulosan criticized Defense Secretary Ramon

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137. Mabalon, Little Manila is in the Heart, 258. Candelario confessed to his membership in the Communist Party after he was interrogated by the FBI in 1949.
Magsaysay and especially Philippine President Manuel Roxas. Bulosan denounced Roxas for signing agreements that directly benefitted American special interests, at the cost of the Filipino People: Roxas signed both the Philippine Trade Act (1946) and Parity Amendment (1947), which gave American businesses equal rights as Filipinos to use the country’s natural resources. These agreements served only large corporations, and promoted U.S. neocolonialism in the Philippines.

Later in the article, Bulosan decries Roxas’s attacks on the *Hukbalahap*, the Communist guerilla group that originally led the Philippine resistance against the Japanese during World War Two. In doing so, Bulosan was accused of being part of an international Communist conspiracy by Philippine Secretary of Defense Ramon Magsaysay. The Communist *Hukbalahap* was also considered dangerous by the American government, because the Philippines were in close proximity to the Soviet Union (thereby reinforcing the Domino Theory). The article further contributed to Bulosan’s disfavor with the Philippine and United States government.

Towards the end of his life, Bulosan was involved in numerous literary projects. In 1953, Bulosan was part of the Committee to Sponsor Luis Taruc’s Autobiography. Luis Taruc was the leader of the *Hukbalahap*, and was thus targeted and blacklisted by the Filipino elites. The committee firmly believed that the autobiography was a must

138. Ibid., 27.

139. *Hukbalahap* is an acronym. The organization’s full name is *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapones* – “The Nation’s Army Against the Japanese.”
read “for all Americans who are people of good will, for all those who want to know about struggles for colonial liberation today.”

Noted American historian and sociologist W.E.B. DuBois was also part of the committee, suggesting he and Bulosan were colleagues.\footnote{140} The committee distributed pamphlets about Luis Taruc and his autobiography entitled \textit{Born of the People}. On the back of the pamphlet, DuBois describes the book: “The story of his life told by Luis Taruc and his account of the Hukbalahap movement furnishes a long-needed addition to the history of American imperialism. Every honest American should read Luis Taruc’s calm, factual and detailed story of his bitter life.”\footnote{141} On a side note, Paul Robeson, American musician and later Civil Rights Activist, wrote the Foreword to Luis Taruc’s autobiography.

Bulosan wrote either a poem or short story entitled, “The Battle Hymn of the \textit{Hukbalahaps},” which does not appear or was not included in the Carlos Bulosan Papers.\footnote{142} He also wrote a novel that used the \textit{Huk} Rebellion as historical base. The book was titled \textit{The Cry and the Dedication}, edited by Epifanio San Juan, Jr., and posthumously published in 1995. Judging from these two works, it is certain that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{140} “Committee to Sponsor Luis Taruc's Autobiography letter,” ca. 1953, Box 4, Folder 8, Carlos Bulosan Papers, Pacific Northwest Historical Documents, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, \url{http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/pioneerlife/id/21768/rec/18}
  \item \footnote{141} “Born of the People,” Box 4, Folder 26, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
  \item \footnote{142} Letter to Mary Gibson from Carlos Bulosan, March 14, 1953, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
\end{itemize}
Bulosan contacted the *Hukbalahap* to write a contemporary history of the Philippines, and not to overthrow any government.

In 1954, Bulosan contacted the FBI’s Seattle office to request an interview with an agent. The interview was granted, and Bulosan hoped to set his record straight. He denied any association with the Communist Party, defended his occupation as an author, and admitted that he was not involved in any dissident organizations or insurrections.¹⁴³ The next year, the FBI ceased its surveillance on Bulosan, admitting it could not find conclusive proof of Bulosan’s membership in the Communist Party. Bulosan’s FBI file was declassified much later, and Professors Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi are still studying the documents.

Bulosan’s association with the American Communist Party is unclear, due to conflicting evidence. In 1949, Claro Candelario was escorted by the FBI from Stockton to San Francisco, for questioning. He admitted he was a member of the Communist Party, along with Bulosan and Mensalvas.¹⁴⁴ Carlos Bulosan wrote that he was urged to join the Communist Party, but did not, even though he was inspired by the Party’s principles. P.C. Morante says Bulosan was a party member, brother Aurelio Bulosan denies Carlos’ membership.¹⁴⁵

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¹⁴⁴. Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart*, 258.

Chapter 9
BULOSAN’S DEATH AND IMMEDIATE IMPACTS

Carlos Bulosan died of bronchopneumonia on September 11, 1956. During his final years, he lived in the homes of friends and colleagues. He could not perform much physical labor due to his numerous health problems. A letter from Sanora Babb revealed that Carlos Bulosan lost his hearing by February that year. Sanora was optimistic in the letter, saying that not being able to hear all the noise of the world may allow Carlos to “enjoy more privacy to think and feel for writing.”¹⁴⁶ But none of his stories sold because of his blacklisting. Few people in the Philippines and in the United States mourned his death, but he had some recognition in several newspapers. This chapter surveys the immediate impacts of his passing, and the culmination of his work through Larry Itliong and the United Farm Workers of America.

Shortly after Bulosan died, some of his close friends formed the Bulosan Manuscripts Committee (CB MSS). The Committee’s members were Chris Mensalvas and his wife Irene, Sanora Babb, Josephine Patrick, and Mary Gibson. They were in negotiations to have Bulosan’s manuscripts sent to the University of the Philippines after they were all collected. Dr. Harry C. Bauer, Director of Libraries at the University of Washington, Seattle estimated that 1,000,000 words were left unpublished at the time of

Bulosan’s death.¹⁴⁷ (This figure shows up in various letters the Committee sent to the last Bulosan’s friends and colleagues, which were then found in the Chris Mensalvas and Aurelio Bulosan collections.) In early 1959, the Bulosan Manuscripts Committee asked the University of Washington Press to publish Bulosan’s manuscripts in a collection entitled *The Best of Carlos Bulosan*. It appears that the book was never published: a letter from Dr. Bauer indicates it would cost “at least $5,000 to prepare and publish his literary remains in an attractive form.”¹⁴⁸ (WorldCat.org was unable to find this title.)

Bulosan’s death was generally unmourned in the Philippines and the United States. He was still blacklisted by the governments of both countries. Dolores Feria was enraged by the indifference, and wrote a eulogy to Bulosan entitled “Carlos Bulosan: Gentle Genius,” which appeared in the January 1957 *Comment*.¹⁴⁹ Bulosan’s death was honored in Pangasinan: two weeks after his passing, Bulosan’s hometown of Binalonan renamed Mangusmana (the barrio where he was born) to Barrio Carlos Bulosan.¹⁵⁰

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¹⁴⁷. Letter to Aurelio from Mary, October 10, 1959, Accession 2329-001, Folder 1-3, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

¹⁴⁸. Letter to Miss Gibson from Harry C. Bauer, April 06, 1959, Box 4, Folder 10, Carlos Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

¹⁴⁹. Letter to Aurelio from Dee Feria, October 03, 1959, Accession 2329-001, Folder 1-3, Aurelio Bulosan Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.

Larry Itliong, Bulosan’s colleague in ILWU Local 37, stated that he and Bulosan were not the closest of friends, but had long conversations about Filipino economic opportunities, or the lack thereof. Itliong expressed it was “too bad we didn’t have many Carlos Bulosans who did any kind of writing concerning the work and aspirations of Filipinos.” Itliong recognized long in advance what has been emphasized here: that

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Bulosan provided a voice for the *Pinoys*’ hopes and dreams of better economic opportunity and to embrace American life.

Bulosan’s poem, “I Want the Wide American Earth,” can be interpreted as a foundation for Itliong’s work in the 1960s. Bulosan describes the Wide American Earth, a land “for all the free” with “beautiful rivers and long valleys and fertile plains.” His imagery is a call for a land of plenty, which millions of workers around the world cannot have. The greedy capitalists and tyrannical governments deny this land to the workers.

He uses repetitive sentence structure to tell of the difficulties the Filipinos and other minorities faced in America:

Their judges lynch us, their police hunt us;
Their armies and navies and airmen terrorize us;

Bulosan calls for the people to unite, to find strength in numbers and resist these abusive powers. The millions of oppressed people have history and the future in their “belligerent hands” when they work together, when they build and they create together. Only then can the people say to their oppressors:

We shall no longer wear rags, eat stale bread, live in darkness;
We shall no longer kneel on our knees to your false gods;
We shall no longer beg you for a share of life.

Itliong, like Bulosan and other *Pinoys*, came to the United States seeking better economic opportunity, only to find these doors closed to them. Itliong continued Bulosan’s work in his various labor organization efforts. The “We” Bulosan refers to is

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152. Bulosan, *If You Want to Know What We Are*, 75.

153. Ibid., 75.

154. Ibid., 76.
not just a unified Filipino people, but all workers around the world. Itliong established that unification in the 1965 Delano Grape Strike. He and the Filipinos in the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) voted to strike against the Delano field owners for better working conditions. Itliong then asked Cesar Chavez and the Latinos in his National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to support the move.

AWOC and NFWA merged to create a new union: the United Farm Workers of America (UFW). Bulosan’s “We” thus came in the form of a multi-ethnic workers organization. Itliong, along with Chavez, showed the workers the strength of their “belligerent hands.” The 1965 Delano Grape Strike proved successful, securing a collective bargaining agreement that affected over 10,000 California workers.

Despite government efforts to erase Bulosan from popular memory, he was immortalized when Mangusmana was renamed to Barrio Carlos Bulosan. The CB MSS collected many of Bulosan’s works so that he could be reread for generations to come. His labor organization efforts were continued through Itliong’s work in Delano. Not only were workers able to secure better working conditions, but they unified under a single multi-ethnic banner: the United Farm Workers. Only through cooperation can the workers have their “Wide American Earth.”
Chapter 10
CONCLUSIONS

Amidst heightened awareness of social injustice – the long Civil Rights movement, Vietnam War protests, and Third World liberation movements (especially in the Philippines) – there was an Asian-American identity crisis. Ethnic minorities realized that they had no place in American history. High school- and college-level “American history” was taught from the popular Eurocentric perspective. The struggles of minorities were overshadowed by the more familiar historical phenomena: the presidents, major wars, and the founding documents.

Students, faculty, and members of the community at San Francisco State College went on strike in 1968. They demanded better access to higher education, more faculty members from minority backgrounds, and a new curriculum that acknowledged the abuses and sacrifices, as well as cultures, of minority workers.\textsuperscript{155} Students and faculty at University of California, Berkeley, went on strike in early 1969, making similar demands. The San Francisco strike laid the foundation for the first Ethnic Studies program in American colleges and universities.

A new generation of Asian-Americans rejected their parents’ middle-class aspirations and the emphasis to become Americanized. From the parents’ perspective, this was understandable; surely, they wanted to forget that pain and suffering, and their difficulties in acclimatizing to American life. But this new generation found more

meaning in the buried past. Lillian Galedo, a (possibly former) Stockton resident, remembers her Asian-American history courses at UC Davis in the 1960s: “All you have to do is go home and talk to your parents and find out what’s going on in your community, write it down, and this is it, the Asian American history.”\textsuperscript{156} The University of Washington had copies of \textit{America Is in the Heart} within its archives, courtesy of the Carlos Bulosan Manuscripts Committee. Bulosan’s autobiography was reprinted in 1973 by the University of Washington Press, which in turn prompted the publication of a series of collections edited by San Juan, Jr., Evangelista, and other scholars.

Figures like Bulosan and Itliong are better known in academic or activist circles along the American West Coast, specifically Seattle, LA, or the San Francisco Bay Area, and few outside those circles (even those in Stockton) know about them. Bulosan is still generally unknown among Filipino youths, but there is a chance he may yet be fully appreciated. Evidently, Bulosan’s antiracist and anticapitalist perspectives are the lyrical inspiration for some Filipino American hip-hop artists.\textsuperscript{157} (Further examples of socially or politically inspired music include artists such as Pink Floyd, N.W.A, or Rage Against the Machine.) While not a professional academic vocation, the influence of popular music among younger generations cannot be ignored. Music is a pleasing and widely accessible medium – ideal for communicating or conveying ideas.

\textsuperscript{156} Mabalon, \textit{Little Manila is in the Heart}, 308.

The immediate pressing issue is to restore Bulosan’s reputation as a wonderful writer and labor organizer, rather than an international Communist threat. Few Filipinos who were unaffiliated with unions did not identify Bulosan as a prolific writer, but an impoverished alcoholic Communist who deceptively identified as a common laborer. Professor Dawn Mabalon has been pushing to restore the memory of Bulosan, with whom she has a somewhat personal history. Mabalon’s grandfather ran the Lafayette Lunch Counter, a diner which Bulosan would use as his permanent mailing address in Stockton. In addition, Mabalon’s father was close friends with Claro Candelario. Mabalon focuses much of her efforts on the restoration and preservation of Stockton’s Little Manila Historic Site, but she does not forget to highlight Bulosan’s importance and contributions throughout her work.

Carlos Bulosan’s immediate contribution lies in making Filipino American history more vivid, and much more complex. Looking at examples such as the Hukbalahap or Larry Itliong, it is evident that the Cold War and America’s anticommunist witch hunts were not a story of good vs. evil. Popular memory takes the easy way out: communism is evil, capitalism is good, the UFW was a purely Chicano movement. America has, for the longest time, yet to live up to its promises of economic and racial equality and freedom, as Bulosan saw it. Bulosan’s life story may never be fully revealed, since he actively worked to ensure his own obscurity. But with what few writings are available, Bulosan lives on as a voice for the oppressed.
Figure 14 – Carlos Bulosan, ca. 1950s

158. “Carlos Bulosan, ca. 1950s,” photograph, Carlos Bulosan Photograph Collection, folder 1, Coll. PH1156, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.
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