

Carlos Bulosan and Filipino Collective Memory

Teaching, Transgression, and Transformation

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Abstract

Who is Carlos Bulosan? Why is he significant? Why teach Bulosan in our classrooms? These questions function as points of departure for this lecture delivered in Summer 2021 for the *UNITAS* International Lecture Series cosponsored by *CLASS* and *Kritika Kultura*. By reviewing the significance of Carlos Bulosan, this talk provides an opportunity to examine the continued relevance of Bulosan and his works for the twenty-first century. A pioneering Filipino writer of the twentieth century, Bulosan developed a unique transgressive aesthetic that travels across national and literary boundaries and, in the process, reimagines the boundaries of Filipino identity and literary categorization. Emphasis is placed on approaches to teaching Bulosan within the Asian American studies classroom at Bryant University. Within Bulosan's literary imagination, transgression is inextricably interconnected with transformation.

Keywords

Carlos Bulosan, pedagogy and interdisciplinarity, Asian American studies, US–Philippines colonial relations, Filipino self-determination and Filipino American labor activism

Introduction

The following is the text of my lecture delivered in the summer of 2021 for the *UNITAS* International Lecture Series cosponsored by CLASS (Cultural, Literary, and Art Studies Society, Inc.) and *Kritika Kultura*. This presentation focuses on pedagogical approaches to teaching Carlos Bulosan’s classic text *America Is in the Heart* (1946) in my Asian American studies course at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island.

I assign Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* during the first part of the course, which emphasizes the historical emergence of the field of Asian American studies as inextricably interconnected with the Asian American movement of the late 1960s which historians trace to the Third World Liberation Front student strike at San Francisco State College (1968–69). The retrieval of Bulosan’s text by Asian American and Filipino/Filipino American activists and scholars in the late 1960s and early 1970s speaks to the early stage of Asian American studies which, according to Asian American historian Yuji Ichioka, is characterized as “uncovering a buried past”—which includes reclaiming the histories of various groups within the Asian American community such as detained Chinese immigrants at Angel Island, Filipino migrant workers on the plantations and in the canneries of the US West Coast, and incarcerated Japanese Americans in concentration camps. For Filipino/Filipino American activists and scholars from the 1960s to the 1980s, Bulosan helped to uncover a “buried past” of working-class resistance in the United States and anticolonial subaltern agency in the Philippines.

When teaching Bulosan’s text, I assign E. San Juan, Jr.’s “In Search of Filipino Writing” which provides a useful theoretical framework for students—one that advances earlier concepts introduced in the course by Ronald Takaki and Gary Okihiro. San Juan’s emphasis on the historical specificity of the Filipino experience enables students to return to Okihiro’s rearticulation of orientalism for the field of Asian American studies. American orientalist discourse cannot be separated from US–Philippine colonial relations and the racial-national subordination of the Filipino people. While San Juan advances Wallerstein’s world system perspective in historicizing the international scope of Bulosan’s writing, he simultaneously emphasizes what

lies at the heart of Bulosan's literary imagination—the concept of Filipinos as subjects-in-revolt. This concept speaks to Ronald Takaki's insistence that Asian American/ethnic studies should examine how peoples of color are not only victims of history but also actors in history—subjects with minds, wills, and voices.¹ Filipinos as subjects-in-revolt speak to Bulosan's narrative strategies of transgression/transformation—specifically, the ways in which a long memory of anticolonial subaltern resistance in the Philippines provides the foundation for the Filipino American labor movement during the 1930s in *America Is in the Heart*.

Teaching Asian American Studies at Bryant University

I'd like to begin by talking a little bit about my upper-division course in Asian American studies which I teach for the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Bryant University in Rhode Island. Bryant University is a small private college that has a predominately white student body (83.2% as of 2019).² The majority of the students are business majors given the institution's long history as a business college founded in 1863 in Providence, Rhode Island as a branch of the Bryant and Stratton National Business College which sought enrollment among Civil War veterans and members of the working class.³ Bryant was a business college until 2004 when its College of Arts and Sciences was established; as a result, Bryant College became Bryant University (located in Smithfield, Rhode Island since 1971).

My Asian American studies course contributes to the expansion of the university's curriculum and to our new ethnic studies program. In spite of the racially homogenous student body at Bryant, my Asian American studies course has become one of our more racially diverse courses with student enrollment drawing from US students of color and international students. The course has been attractive to students of color and white students interested in theoretical perspectives on local and global forms of difference. Over the years, the course has attracted a wide range of students across the university—from international business majors to students working in Residential

Life and Services interested in issues of diversity within education (from PreK to the university level).

In my course, I encourage students to reflect upon three interconnected strands which are in conversation with the broader field of literary/cultural studies:

- *Field Formation*

Demonstrate knowledge of the interconnectedness of the history of Asian American Studies and the history of US social movements during the 1960s–70s. Students will be able to articulate how this historical connection (between field formation and social movements) situates the study of Asian Americans within a global context.

- *Canon Formation*

Demonstrate knowledge of the historical development of an Asian American literary canon. Students will be able to articulate the possibilities and limitations of developing an Asian American literary canon. Students will examine the following questions: What constitutes Asian America according to this canon? Who defines the canon? For whom? How does the idea of a canon shift and change at different historical moments in the development of Asian America?

- *Racial Formations*

Use the theory of “racial formation” to examine the processes by which Asian groups have been historically racialized within the United States as well as the ways in which “Asian America” has been defined and redefined by its various communities. Students will be able to articulate the significance of the theory of racial formation to the field of Asian American Studies. We will examine new frontiers for this theory. For example, we will discuss how Asian American feminisms (including studies of sexuality) can enrich our understanding of Asian American racial formations.

The course provides an opportunity for students to learn about pioneering Filipino writer Carlos Bulosan (1911–56) and his significance to the Asian American movement and Asian American literature. Born of the Filipino peasantry in Binalonan, Pangasinan in 1911, Bulosan arrived in Seattle, Washington in 1930 and joined 150,000 Filipino migrant workers—in the canneries of Alaska and on the plantations of the US West coast and Hawaii. Bulosan’s racialized diasporic class consciousness informed his development as a prolific author of novels, short stories, essays, and poems.

Teaching Carlos Bulosan and *America Is in the Heart*

I assign Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*, which was published in 1946. It was recovered by the Asian American movement and republished in 1973 by the University of Washington Press with a reissue in 2014. It was recently released as a Penguin Classic in 2019. This text is very useful for me in the classroom because it helps my students make connections between the three strands of the course—field formation, canon formation, and racial formation. *America Is in the Heart* introduces students to the Filipino American experience and to a canonical text within Asian American studies. Its canonical status speaks to the field’s liberatory vision informed by the Asian American movement of the late 1960s.

America Is in the Heart chronicles the experiences of Filipino migrant workers on the US west coast during the Great Depression. I assign “In Search of Filipino Writing” by E. San Juan Jr. to accompany our reading of Bulosan’s text. San Juan’s essay is an invaluable resource for my students because it provides a historical context for understanding Bulosan’s literary craft. San Juan distinguishes the ethico-political framework of Bulosan’s writing from the immigrant-assimilationist paradigm that has dominated Asian American literary criticism at its inception (see Elaine Kim) and has informed the work of contemporary Filipino American writers/critics who yearn for recognition from the US literary establishment. San Juan discusses Bulosan’s writing as a literature of revolt (not just a literature of exile) that draws sustenance from a durable tradition of anticolonial subaltern struggle in the Philippines.

I ask students to consider how this is dramatized in Bulosan’s text—specifically through its form and the development of the narrator.

Categorized as a literature of revolt, *America Is in the Heart* dramatizes a diasporic Filipino protest consciousness. Part novel, part autobiography, and part collective memory, *America Is in the Heart* is an ethnobiography that transgresses the literary conventions of various forms of writing such as the bildungsroman, naturalism, and proletarian literature. Our protagonist Allos is a composite of many stories. He embodies the collective experiences of the Filipino peasantry under American colonial occupation and Filipino migrant farmworkers in the United States during the Great Depression.

The structure of the ethnobiography (divided into four parts) traces the development of Allos’s awareness of marginalization within Philippine colonial society and the United States. This awareness of marginalization enables Allos to craft modes of resistance as a writer-activist of the Filipino American labor movement which includes the formation of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA union). Bulosan’s text allows us to focus on working-class experiences in the Philippines and the United States. I begin our discussion by asking students to identify how Allos develops a racialized class consciousness in the Philippines (part one). I emphasize how this particular development within part one is significant because it anticipates the emergence of new forms of consciousness in parts two, three, and four.

On Racial/National Subordination:

Carlos Bulosan and the Filipino American Experience

When I teach Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*, I ask students to situate the Filipino experience within US-Philippine colonial relations (beginning with the Philippine–American War 1899–1902). I emphasize that American colonization is key to understanding the historical context of the narrative, its conflicts, and the development of its characters. I ask students to reflect upon how Bulosan’s text begins in the Philippines under American colonial occupation. Our central character and narrator Allos develops his understanding

of self and the world he inhabits within this colonial context. Part one of *America Is in the Heart* dramatizes how the dissolution of Allos's family and their dispossession of land in the Philippines is due to absentee landlordism under American colonial occupation:

One summer day, when the rice lay golden in the sun, startling rumors came to Manguamana: the peasants in a province to the south of us had revolted against their landlords. There the peasants had been the victims of ruthless exploitation for years, dating back to the eighteenth century when Spanish colonizers instituted severe restrictive measures in order to impoverish the natives. So from then on the peasants became poorer each year and the landlords became richer at every harvest time. And the better part of it was that the landlord was always away, sometimes merely a name on a piece of paper. (Bulosan 25)

Asian American historian Erika Lee reminds us that “U.S. rule transformed the Philippine economy in ways that benefited American investors but not Filipinos [by] expand[ing] the Philippines’s export-oriented economy first established by the Spanish” (176).

To help students understand the impact of US colonization on the Filipino experience, I introduce the concept of racial/national subordination. Within Bulosan’s text, the racism encountered by Filipinos in the Philippines and by Filipinos in the United States cannot be separated from the colonial status of the Philippines. According to Filipino scholar-activist Bruce Occena, “Filipinos have been integrated into US society on the basis of inequality and subjected to discrimination due both to their race and nationality” (qtd. in San Juan 450–51). This condition of racial/national subordination informs how Filipinos are positioned within US society and constructed within the US colonial imaginary. According to Erika Lee, Filipinos were classified as “U.S. nationals” ineligible for citizenship and “described in racial terms as uncivilized savages, brutal rapists, and even dogs and monkeys . . . [or] children in need of US guidance” (175).

I ask students to identify passages from the text that illustrate the racial/national subordination that Filipinos encountered. One moment that is useful for this exercise appears at the start of part two with Allos’s passage

to America as a steerage passenger. A traumatic encounter with a young white girl on the boat's deck foreshadows Allos's life of displacement and exploitation as a migrant worker in the United States where he eventually reconnects with his brothers Macario and Amado and learns to reconstitute family, community, and belonging through labor activism and interracial working-class solidarity:

“Look at those half-naked savages from the Philippines. . . Haven't they any decency?”

I was to hear that girl's voice in many ways afterward in the United States. It became no longer her voice, but an angry chorus shouting: “Why don't they ship those monkeys back where they came from?” (Bulosan 100–01)

I also ask students to consider how racial/national subordination exacerbates the hostile working conditions of Filipino migrant workers who are positioned in the United States as racialized colonial subjects ineligible for citizenship. Bulosan dramatizes life as a Filipino migrant worker during the Great Depression through our protagonist Allos. In part two, Allos experiences a “life of fear and flight” from racialized violence (from the pitting of Filipino workers against other workers of color to indiscriminate acts of police brutality) and inhumane working conditions in the environment—on plantations of the West Coast and the canneries of Alaska. Here's one vivid example of the hostile working conditions of Filipino migrant workers:

In those days labor unions were still unheard of in the canneries, so the contractors rapaciously exploited their workers. They had henchmen in every cannery who saw to it that every attempt at unionization was frustrated and the instigators of the idea punished. The companies also had their share in the exploitation; our bunkhouses were unfit for human habitation. The lighting system was bad and dangerous to our eyes, and those working in the semi-darkness were severely affected by the strong ammonia from the machinery.

I was working in a section called “wash lye.” One afternoon a cutter above me, working in the poor light, slashed off his right arm with the cutting machine. It happened so swiftly he did not cry out. I saw his arm floating down the water among the fish heads. (Bulosan 103–04)

Filipino Diasporic Protest Consciousness: Carlos Bulosan and the Asian American Movement

America Is in the Heart was recuperated by the Asian American movement of the late 1960s and the revitalized Philippine national sovereignty movement of the 1970s. An essay assigned to students prior to their reading *America Is in the Heart* is Glenn Omatsu’s “The ‘Four Prisons’ and the Movements of Liberation.” This essay introduces students to the history of the Asian American movement which emerged from the 1968 San Francisco State Strike for ethnic studies. Students learn that the Asian American movement critiqued the racist violence of US imperialist adventures in Asia—specifically Vietnam and the Philippines. Bulosan’s text resonated with the liberatory visions of the Asian American movement and the Philippine national sovereignty movement by achieving two goals simultaneously. *America Is in the Heart* documents the exploitation and oppression of Filipinos within racial capitalism. At the same time, *America Is in the Heart* documents Filipino collective agency in the Philippines and the United States.

Bulosan’s text eloquently captures the emergence of a diasporic Filipino protest consciousness. I ask students to take notice of how the openings of parts three and four are vastly different from the opening of part two which frames Allos as victimized by the hostile racist and exploitative forces of his environment. The openings of parts three and four push against victimization by emphasizing the development of the Filipino organic intellectual—the development Allos’s agency as a writer-activist.

Part three opens with the publication of *The New Tide*, a Filipino workers’ magazine that is an actual journal that Bulosan edited in 1934 while working closely with Filipino labor organizers.⁴ Part four opens with Allos’s reflecting upon American models of the writer-activist such as Carey McWilliams, Louis Adamic, and others. The narrative as a whole, however, reveals that Allos’s ideal model of the writer-activist is deeply informed by a diasporic form of Filipino insurgency—a concept embodied by the character of Felix Razon (a young peasant organizer) whom Allos first encounters during his childhood in the Philippines. Felix Razon later reemerges within the narrative as an active participant in the Filipino labor movement in the

United States. In fact, Felix Razon is involved in the publication of *The New Tide* (Bulosan 189). As a child, Allos encounters Felix Razon in part one in the Philippines:

My mother and I went to the town of Tayug, a rich rice land, and helped in the harvest. Tayug and two other neighboring towns belonged to one family.

In the middle of the season strange men began coming to the rice fields. A rugged peasant boy made impassioned speeches to the harvesters . . . I remember this fanatical peasant boy because years afterward I met him again in America. His name was Felix Razon. (Bulosan 60–61; pt. 1)

Years later, Allos reunites with Felix Razon in the United States.

. . . I took a bus for Los Angeles. I found that my brother Macario and Nick, Jose's brother, were living together. They had started a literary magazine with a man named Felix Razon. To my amazement, he was the same peasant boy who had warned me to leave the rice fields in Tayug, before the Colorum revolted against the landlords. (Bulosan 189; pt. 2)

The character of Felix Razon represents the global movement of anticolonial Filipino class consciousness by referencing labor organizer Pedro Calosa.

The development of Felix Razon's character resonates with the life of Pedro Calosa who is the central organizer of the colorum groups of the 1931 Tayug revolt. Filipino historian Renato Constantino reminds us of the significance of Pedro Calosa and the Tayug revolt:

Calosa had spent many years as a laborer in the sugar fields of Hawaii, but plantation authorities dismissed him when they discovered he was attempting to organize his co-workers. Sent back to the Philippines, he finally settled in Pangasinan where he worked in the rice fields. (353)

The Tayug revolt was supposed to be the spark that would ignite the whole of Central Luzon in a peasant revolution that would achieve independence for the country and reward all participants with equal shares in lands confiscated from caciques. (354)

Felix Razon and the Tayug uprising of 1931 speak to a diasporic Filipino insurgency—or anticolonial protest consciousness—which undergirds the narrative of *America Is in the Heart*. Felix Razon’s embodying the history of Pedro Calosa and the Tayug revolt speaks to the ways in which Filipino American labor activism was informed by a tradition of subaltern struggle for national sovereignty in the Philippines. Bulosan maintained this diasporic connection in his work as a writer-activist until his untimely death in 1956 (see Bulosan’s work as editor of the 1952 *ILWU Yearbook*).⁵

Bulosan’s dramatization of the diasporic continuity of anticolonial Filipino protest consciousness helps to explain why *America Is in the Heart* resonated with activists of the Asian American movement and the Philippine sovereignty movement into the 1980s. We can see how this diasporic continuity is represented in an early attempt by Filipino American filmmaker and activist Linda Mabalot (founder of the Asian Pacific Film and Video Festival) to create a film inspired by Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*.

In her footage for the unfinished film *Quiet Thunder* (1981), Mabalot portrays Filipino resistance to American colonization of the Philippines as the political unconscious of *America Is in the Heart*. Her opening and closing scenes of anticolonial Filipino resistance (a reference to the Philippine-American War which lasted between 1899 and 1902) frames images of dislocation, community building, survival, and resistance in the United States. An historical memory of anticolonial insurgency informs Filipino American modes of survival and collective resistance (Filipino labor activism and interracial working-class solidarity) within *America Is in the Heart*. Mabalot’s film footage reminds us that this collective memory resonated deeply with Asian American and Filipino American activists of the 1970s and 1980s.



Fig. 1. Photo of filmmaker and activist Linda Mabalot. Courtesy of Visual Communications (VC) blog, post by Abe Ferrer, VC Staff.⁶



Fig. 2. Opening scene from *Quiet Thunder: Philippine-American War (1899-1902)*.



Fig. 3. Scene from *Quiet Thunder*: Interracial working-class solidarity – fleeing from fascist violence in the United States (1930s). Moments of interracial working-class solidarity in Bulosan’s text (with characters such as John Custer and the Odell sisters) are useful for helping students reflect upon the ways in which working-class agency is central to challenging systemic racism in the United States.



Fig. 4. Closing scene from *Quiet Thunder*: Philippine–American War (1899–1902).

American Orientalist Discourse

As a teacher, I realize that concepts such as US-Philippine colonial history and racial/national subordination might seem, at times, challenging for students to grasp in relation to our reading of Bulosan's text. So I use a theoretical concept central to the field of Asian American studies to help students. Here I'm referring to the rearticulation of orientalist discourse within the field of Asian American studies. The framework of American orientalist discourse helps my students to grasp and visualize concepts specific to the Filipino experience.

In his essay "When and Where I Enter," Asian American studies scholar Gary Okihiro explains the concept of orientalism for my students in the following:

Orientalism . . . composed a system of thought that supported a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over' Asia. Orientalism's purpose was to stir an inert people . . . shape them and give them an identity, and subdue and domesticate them. (7)

To help students visualize the formation of an American orientalist discourse, I use images from *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (Ignacio et al.) which is an invaluable classroom resource. The political cartoons within the text simultaneously challenge our historical amnesia in the United States with regard to US colonialization of the Philippines. When filmmaker John Sayles premiered his 2011 film *Amigo* (on the subject of the Philippine-American War), he shed light on the dearth of information on Filipino resistance to US colonial occupation within our American educational system:

I was doing research for my last novel, *Los Gusanos*, and I came — kept coming across this phrase, "the Philippine insurrection," or "the Philippine-American War." And I said, "OK, I'm 30-something years old. How come I've never heard of this?" which got me suspicious. You know, usually when we [Americans] win a war—and we won that war—we celebrate it. And how come, you know, *Amigo* is probably going to be the third movie ever made

in the United States about the Philippine-American War? How come there are no novels about it? How come it's not in our history books? (Sayles)

We can perhaps read Gina Apostol's recent novel *Insurrecto* (2018) as a text in conversation with John Sayles's reflection on reconstructing our collective memory of Filipino resistance during the Philippine-American War.

Here are a few images that I ask students to examine. I ask them to walk me through how these images, as part of American orientalist discourse, construct Filipino "otherness"—specifically the racial and national subordination of Filipinos.



Fig. 5. This image is titled "The White Man's Burden (Apologies to Kipling)" from *Judge* (Judge Publishing Company, New York, 1899). This political cartoon which illustrates the United States taking on the responsibilities of an imperial power alludes to Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands" (1899).⁷ Students observe how white supremacy and patriarchal domination are integral to the formation of American orientalist discourse. Image from *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons*, edited by Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio.

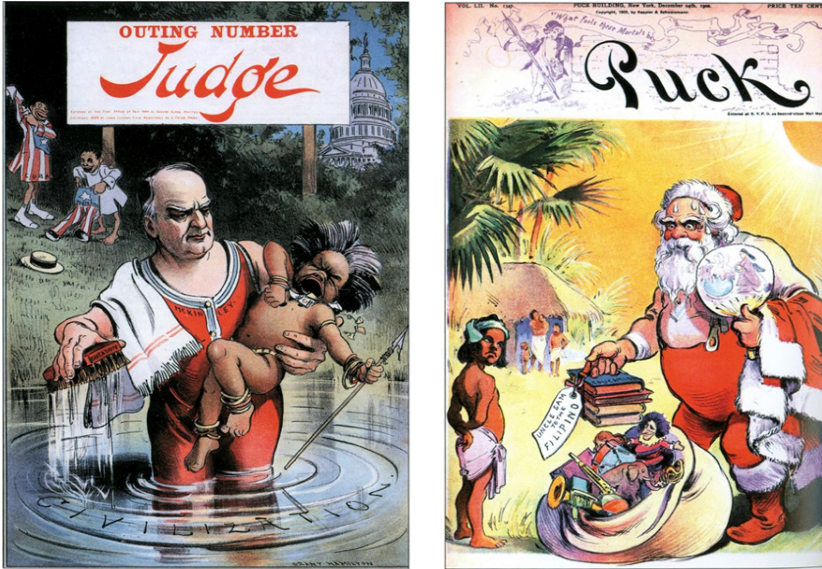


Fig. 6. The left image is titled “The Filipino’s First Bath” and the caption is as follows: “McKinley – ‘Oh, you dirty boy!’” (*Judge*, Judge Company, New York, June 10, 1899). The right image is titled “Christmas In Our New Possessions” and the caption is as follows: “Santa Claus – Phew! I’m glad to oblige Uncle Sam, of course. But next time I come I’ll wear khaki!” (*Puck*, Keppler & Scharzmann, New York, December 24, 1902). My students observe that the Filipino characters in both images are depicted as children to justify the American colonial representation of the Filipino as incapable of self-rule. Often times students will also point out that a perspiring Santa Clause signifies the “white man’s burden” of imperial responsibility to uplift and civilize. A bundle of books is presented as a Christmas gift on behalf of Uncle Sam. An uncomfortable Santa Clause positions the Philippines as the other of Western civilization—an American orientalist construct of the Philippines as unfamiliar, savage, other. Images from *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons*, edited by Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio.

When asking students to reflect upon the formation and function of American orientalist discourse, I also encourage them to consider how Bulosan’s text challenges, interrogates, and destabilizes American orientalism by bringing their attention to a deconstructive moment in part one. Here, in an act of individual survival, Allos reveals Filipino racial otherness as a fiction, as performance. Allos’s performance denaturalizes the American colonial gaze that objectifies, essentializes, and dehumanizes Filipinos:

My clothes began to wear out. I was sick from eating what the traders discarded. One day an American lady tourist asked me to undress before her camera, and gave me ten centavos for doing it. I had found a simple way to make a living. Whenever I saw a white person in the market with a camera, I made myself conspicuously ugly, hoping to earn ten centavos. But what interested the tourists most were the naked Igorot women and their children. They seemed to take a particular delight in photographing young Igorot girls with large breasts and robust mountain men whose genitals were nearly exposed, their G-strings bulging large and alive. (69–70)

On one hand, Allos's performance critiques American orientalist discourse. It denaturalizes white supremacy by revealing the performative nature of racial otherness. On the other hand, Allos's performance reveals the limitations of deconstruction as a mode of individual survival within (rather than a mode of dismantling/transforming) the system of American colonialism. The ineffectiveness of Allos's deconstructive performance of racial otherness (one that pokes fun of while simultaneously reinforces American colonial racism) becomes apparent as the narrative unfolds and explores alternative modes of survival and resistance—specifically the possibility of collective mobilization. In Allos's development as a writer, Bulosan illustrates how new forms of consciousness (writing/cultural production) are interconnected with new forms of collective agency for social transformation.⁸

In the class, when we talk about American orientalist discourse, I remind students that we're talking about a motivated form of knowledge (a system of representation) produced by different types of cultural texts that serves to ideologically justify (naturalize) the US colonial occupation of the Philippines. The different texts include political cartoons as well as a souvenir textile commemorating the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. I came across this textile during a visit to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) museum a few years ago. This textile is part of the RISD collection.

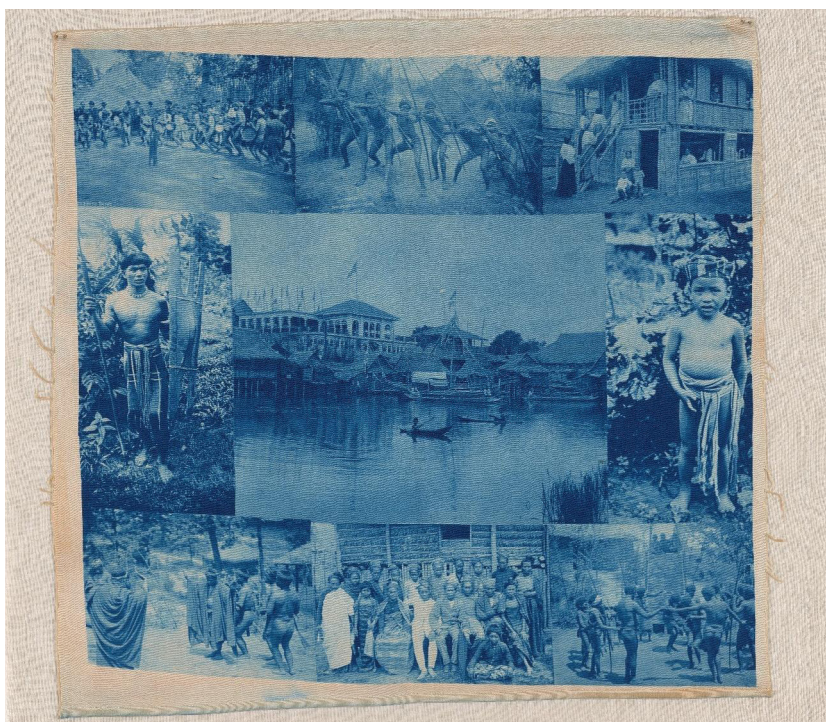


Fig. 7. Louisiana Purchase Exposition Souvenir Textile, after 1904. Printed cotton plain weave. Courtesy of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum, Providence, Rhode Island. This textile was on display in the Former Glory exhibition at the RISD Museum, July 27, 2018–January 20, 2019. The following is a description of the textile from the museum: “This work, possibly a pillow cover, may have been a souvenir from the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Its images depict the Bontoc Igorot people from the Philippines. The US military colonized the Philippines in 1898, and in 1904 a group of Igorot was transported to St. Louis for an exhibition at the fair. Showcased as a constructed village, the group was made to enact their ‘exoticness’ in ceremonial dances and other cultural practices for the consumptive gaze of onlookers. In the centremost panel, US flags fly above the site.”⁹

RISD artist fellow Walker Mettling decodes the images in the textile. Not unlike John Sayles a decade ago, Mettling discovers that our memory of American colonization of the Philippines at the turn of the century continues to be repressed. Mettling’s detailed research diagram uncovers an unsettling fact of American colonial history—Filipinos were displayed in human zoos in

the United States. In his research, Mettling notes that the textile documents the following:

This living museum/human zoo treatment of 1,300 Filipinos from 12 ethnic groups in replicas of their various building styles was deliberate propaganda to justify the annexation of the Philippines after the Spanish American War. The spectacle was designed by Lieutenant Governor of Bontoc Province, Truman Hunt.

PILLOW COVER, LATE 19TH CENTURY
 COTTON: 47.6CM (18 1/16 INCHES)
 GIFT OF MRS. CONSTANCE WHARTON SMITH
 SS 165.15
 DESCRIPTION: PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT, BLUE ON WHITE COTTON.
 SCENES OF VARIOUS NATIVE PEOPLE, PORT WITH AMERICAN FLAG ON BUILDING.

COLONIAL PILLOW COVER

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL US???

CLUES

- 1 AMERICAN FLAG OVER PART W/ THATCHED ROOF BUILDINGS + CANOES.
- 2 DOES THIS SAY "COPYRIGHT [ILLEGIBLE] PHILIPPINE [ILLEGIBLE] COMPANY?"
- 3 DOES THIS SAY "[ILLEGIBLE] BANGY?"
- 4 GOOGLE SEARCH: "BANGY PHILIPPINES" & RESULTS
- 5 GOOGLE SEARCH: "PHILIPPINE POSTCARD SHIELD SPEAR" RESULTS = SIMILAR SHIELDS ATTRIBUTED TO IGOROT OR IGOROTTE PEOPLE.

NOTE: SEARCHED "PHILIPPINE POSTCARD 1899" FOUND MANY DISTURBING WAR POSTCARDS OF DEAD KIDS FROM THE MARA REBELLION (1899-1913) WHEN THE U.S. MILITARY WAS FIGHTING MUSLIM TRIBAL PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES... DURING AND AFTER THE USA'S TAKE OVER OF THE PHILIPPINES FROM SPAIN.

- 6 SCROLLING THROUGH IMAGE SEARCH FIND PHOTO FROM LIBRARY OF CONGRESS OF THE SAME MAN LABELED: ANTONIO, CHIEF OF BONTOC IGOROT.
- 7 FIND EXACT TOP LEFT PHOTO WITH CAPTION "IGOROT DANCE" NOT "[ILLEGIBLE] BANGY LIKE I HAD GUESSED.

FINDINGS

A. THESE PHOTOS WERE TAKEN AT THE 1904 LOUISIANA PURCHASE EXPOSITION IN ST. LOUIS MISSOURI (AKA THE ST. LOUIS WORLD'S FAIR), SPECIFICALLY THE IGOROT VILLAGE AND OTHER PARTS OF THE PHILIPPINE EXPOSITION (NOTE THE ABOVE PAMPHLET FEATURING CHIEF ANTONIO).

B. THIS LIVING MUSEUM/HUMAN ZOO TREATMENT OF 1,300 FILIPINOS FROM 12 ETHNIC GROUPS IN REPLICAS OF THEIR VARIOUS BUILDING STYLES WAS A DELIBERATE PROPAGANDA TO JUSTIFY THE ANNEXATION OF THE PHILIPPINES AFTER THE SPANISH AMERICAN WAR. THE SPECTACLE WAS DESIGNED BY LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF BONTOC PROVINCE, TRUMAN HUNT.

C. LIKE REALITY TV ACTORS, THE IGOROT AND OTHER FOLKS PERFORMED EXAGGERATED VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES IN SHOWS EMPHASIZING THEIR SAVAGE CUSTOMS (HEAD-HUNTING, DOG-EATING) WITH THE FINAL ACT SHOWING THAT WHILE FILIPINOS COULD NOT GOVERN THEMSELVES, THEY COULD BECOME "CIVILIZED" AND LEARN ENGLISH.

D. IGOROT VILLAGE WAS A HIT AND AFTER THE WORLD'S FAIR, TRUMAN HUNT REPEATED THE SHOW, TRAPPING THE PERFORMERS AROUND THE COUNTRY (INCLUDING TO CONY ISLAND), REFUSING TO PAY THEM, AND FORCING THEM TO EAT ONLY DOGS.

E. THIS IS A PIECE OF SOUVENIR/TOURIST ART LIKE THE WORLD'S FAIR HANKERCHIEFS AND OTHER TEXTILE ITEMS GIFTED BY CONSTANCE WHARTON SMITH.

FURTHER READING: TO THE PERSONS OF THE LOST TRIBE OF CONY ISLAND BY CLARE PRENTICE

③ FIND A PHOTO TITLED "BANG AND ARROW SHOOTING," WHICH IS SAME PEOPLE (NOTABLY ONE ON RIGHT WITH WHITE HEAD BAND) ONLY THEY ARE POSING AWAY FROM THE CAMERA.

④ OTHER TEXT ON "BOW AND ARROW..." PHOTO READS: "SOUVENIR PHILIPPINE EXHIBIT, WORLD'S FAIR" **WHAT!?!**

*SAME PERSON W/ WHITE HEAD BAND!!

Fig. 8. Research Diagram: Louisiana Purchase Exposition Souvenir Textile. Courtesy of Walker Mettling, cartoonist, printmaker, and director of the Providence Comics Consortium, Rhode Island. From the RISD museum website: "During his tenure as the RISD Museum's 2017 Artist Fellow, Walker Mettling became interested in a mysterious textile identified in museum records as a pillow cover. Through extensive research, Mettling unearthed the work's likely origin as a souvenir of the 1904 World's Fair and its complex history as a celebration of US colonization of the Philippines and the exoticization of Bontoc Igorot people. In this screen-printed graphic, Mettling describes his research process and findings."¹⁰

Bulosan and Filipinos as Subjects-In-Revolt

Early in the course, I have students read the work of Asian American historian Ronald Takaki. In *A Different Mirror*, Takaki is interested in viewing Asian Americans as “actors in history, not merely victims of discrimination and exploitation, [who] are entitled to be viewed as subjects—as men and women with minds, wills, and voices” (14). The enduring appeal of *America Is in the Heart* for the field lies in its ability to reveal how Filipinos have survived, collectively resisted, and pushed against victimization mode. The following passage from E. San Juan, Jr. helps students explore the concept of Filipinos as actors in history—as subjects-in-revolt:

Called “little brown brothers,” barbaric “yellow bellies,” “scarcely more than savages,” and other derogatory epithets, Filipinos as subjects-in-revolt have refused to conform to the totalizing logic of white supremacy and the knowledge of “the Filipino” constructed by the Orientalizing methods of American scholarship. Interpellated within the boundaries of empire, Filipinos continue to bear the marks of three centuries of anticolonial insurgency (443–44).

America Is in the Heart is a text that “bears the marks of anticolonial Filipino insurgency” which inform the Filipino American labor movement of the 1930s—a movement that paved the way for Filipino American labor activists of the 1960s such as Philip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong. Vera Cruz and Itliong are pioneering figures of the Filipino farmworkers movement in California and the Asian American movement.

One of my writing prompts asks students to discuss how *America Is in the Heart* speaks to Philip Vera Cruz’s moral vision of compassion, solidarity, and commitment which is explained by Asian American scholar-activist Glenn Omatsu:

Through his years of toil as a farmworker, [Philip Vera Cruz] recognized the importance of worker solidarity and militancy and the capacity of common people to create alternative institutions of grassroots power. Through his work with Filipino and Mexican immigrants, he saw the necessity of coalition-building and worker unity that crossed ethnic and racial boundaries. Vera Cruz has also promoted a larger moral vision . . . compassion

for all victims of oppression, solidarity with all fighting for liberation, and commitment to the ideals of democracy and social justice (191).

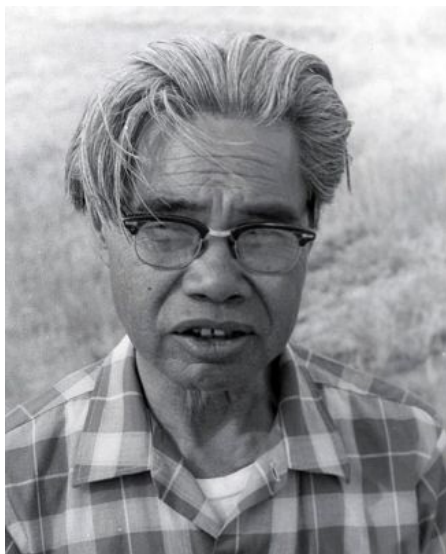


Fig. 9. Philip Vera Cruz. Courtesy of *Farmworker Movement Documentation Project*, UC San Diego¹¹

One example that inspires my students is Allos's developing a workers' school as part of the labor movement toward the end of the text (an example of compassion, solidarity, and commitment):

I worked with a crew of pea pickers [in Nipomo]. I found a new release. The land had always been important to me. I felt my old peasant heritage returning with fresh nourishment. I knew that my future was linked with these tillers of the soil, from whose common source I had sprung.

I started a little workers' school and invited the pea pickers.

When I pointed out that the advance of democracy was related to the working man's struggle for better wages and living conditions, I felt a warm feeling of humanity growing inside of me.

I left Nipomo [for] Betteravia, a town fifteen miles away. In this little town, nestling like dried mushrooms, were Filipino and Mexican sugar beet workers. I worked with them and started another class. (311–12)

Bulosan's generation of Filipino migrant farmworkers and labor organizers (the *Manongs*) of the 1930s (informed by a diasporic anticolonial Filipino protest consciousness) paved the way for the Filipino American labor movement of the 1960s and the creation of the United Farm Workers movement which developed through interethnic working-class solidarity created by Filipino and Mexican farmworkers.



Fig. 10. Larry Itliong. Courtesy of *New York Times* photo gallery.

Larry Itliong, president of the Filipino organization called Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, bridged Bulosan's generation with the interethnic farmworkers movement of the 1960s. A recent PBS documentary on Asian Americans highlights the contributions of Filipino migrant farmworkers in California's central valley by focusing on the historic five-year Delano Grape Strike of 1965 (considered the civil rights movement for people of color on the US West Coast) and the role Larry Itliong played in helping to create the United Farm Workers movement. Delano historian

Alex Edillor states that the Delano Grape Strike of 1965 and the United Farm Workers movement are significant because they're proof that "Filipinos were here, and we made a difference."

Today, Filipinos are everywhere—nearly 12 million around the globe. The memory of Bulosan and the *Manong* generation continues to live in the work of Jose Antonio Vargas (journalist and activist for the rights of undocumented immigrants) and Zenei Triunfo-Cortez (president of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO and labor organizer on the frontline of the COVID pandemic). Can we think of other Filipinos (in the Philippines, the US and throughout the diaspora) who contribute to our unique history of activism and cultural production? Filipinos who build upon Bulosan's diasporic protest consciousness? I invite readers to reflect upon how Bulosan and his writings can help us to continue to make a difference in the twenty-first century.



Fig. 11. *Gintong Kasaysayan, Gintong Pamana (Filipino Americans: A Glorious History, A Golden Legacy)*. Mural in historic Filipinotown, Los Angeles, California. Courtesy of Alvin-Christian's blog.¹²

Final Remarks—Teaching Strategies of Transgression/Transformation.¹³

When I decided to teach Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* within the context of Asian American studies, I was focused on introducing students to the specificity of the Filipino experience as well as the central concerns of Asian American studies which emerged from the Asian American movement. To be sure, Bulosan's text provides an excellent introduction to Filipino/Filipino American history and to foundational concerns of Asian American studies. I did not anticipate, however, the different ways in which Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* would resonate productively within a predominately white classroom. In other words, in addition to serving as an introductory text to the Filipino experience, Bulosan's ethnobiography opens spaces within which students are able to see our interconnected histories. When I ask students to think about Bulosan's strategies of transgression (crossing boundaries and borders) and transformation (challenging racism and economic exploitation), they're able to see how interracial working-class solidarity functions as the bridge between transgression and transformation.

Over the years, I've discovered one moment (out of many) that enables my white students to see how they're able to enter the text in solidarity. In chapter 35, Allos becomes friends with a white male patient in the hospital—"a young boy named John Custer." Allos discovers their common bond of class when John, who did not have the opportunity to learn how to write, asks Allos to write a letter on his behalf to his mother in Arkansas. Allos comments, "I was not writing to an unknown mother any more. I was writing to my own mother plowing in the muddy fields of Mangusmana . . . I realized that this poor American boy had worked all his life. I could have told him then that I had worked all my life, too" (Bulosan 248–49). Through this expression of interracial working-class solidarity (which enables Allos and John to transgress the boundary of race), my white students realize that Bulosan's text is also about the experiences of the multiracial working class. While Allos's class consciousness details the violence of white supremacy/US imperialism, it also highlights how working-class white Americans are able to challenge the ideology of racism to forge solidarity with Filipinos.

My students of color are able to see their own experiences with racism and marginalization reflected in Allos's journey within the text. I've also noticed that Allos's journey gives my students of color hope. When I ask students to observe how Bulosan's text dramatizes how Filipinos are victimized by hostile forces within the environment (US colonization, economic exploitation, racist violence), I also ask them to highlight how Allos learns to challenge and push against victimization mode by developing strategies of transgression/transformation. One of my Latino students, in a passionately written paper, juxtaposes Allos's bearing witness to the brutal lynching of a Filipino organizer by the name of José (fascist violence against labor) with Allos's intellectual awakening and political development as a writer guided by the Odell sisters. Through interracial working-class solidarity (represented by Alice and Eileen Odell), Allos was "determined to face [life] again but now with an unswerving intellectual weapon" (256). One of my Chinese American students, who was coming to terms with the rise of anti-Asian violence in the age of COVID-19, decided to write about Bulosan's text in light of the keywords that characterize Philip Vera Cruz's activism—compassion, solidarity, and commitment. This approach enabled my Chinese American student to see the continued relevance of Bulosan's text—specifically how collective action and interracial solidarity will be crucial tools for the Asian American community as it confronts and challenges the devastating eruptions of deep-rooted anti-Asian racism unleashed by the Covid pandemic.

Strategies of transgression/transformation within *America Is in the Heart* highlight the significance of working-class consciousness and interracial solidarity which, as Angela Davis reminds us, continue to remain necessary as we navigate pedagogical challenges within the academy (pushing beyond dominant neoliberal academic theories that center on the politics of failure/despair) and confront racial/economic injustices associated with the ongoing pandemic.¹⁴ At the same time, Bulosan's strategies of transgression/transformation stem from our long memory of anticolonial resistance in the Philippines—a reminder of how Filipino self-determination is inextricably interconnected with struggles for social justice everywhere.

Notes

1. See Takaki's *A Different Mirror*.
2. *Student Demographics and Outcomes Profile*. Bryant University.
3. See Bryant History and Traditions.
4. See *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt*.
5. See *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt*.
6. From Visual Communications blog – post by Abe Ferrer, VC Staff -- <https://fromthevault.wordpress.com/tag/philip-vera-cruz/>
7. See also Foster, John Bellamy and Robert W. McChesney, "Kipling, the 'White Man's Burden,' and US Imperialism," *Monthly Review*, November 2003.
8. See Teresa Ebert's *Ludic Feminism* for her detailed discussion on deconstruction as a form of idealist theory.
9. "Louisiana Purchase Exposition Souvenir Textile, after 1904." From the Rhode Island School of Design Textile Collection -- <https://risdmuseum.org/art-design/collection/louisiana-purchase-exposition-souvenir-textile-5816515>
10. "Artist Fellow Walker Mettling on the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition Souvenir Textile." <https://risdmuseum.org/art-design/projects-publications/articles/artist-fellow-walker-mettling>
11. See also *Philip Vera Cruz: a personal history of Filipino immigrants and the farm-worker movement*. Los Angeles: UCLA Labor Center & UCLA Asian American Studies Center.
12. Mural in historic Filipinotown, Los Angeles, California. Courtesy of Alvin-Christian Nuval's blog -- <https://livingglobally.wordpress.com/2012/10/25/gintong-kasaysayan-gintong-pamana/>
13. I'm grateful to all of my students from my Asian American studies course at Bryant University – specifically those enrolled in spring 2020 and 2021 who creatively and thoughtfully engaged Bulosan's literary imagination in the age of Covid-19.
14. See "Planetary Utopias: Angela Davis and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in conversation with Nikita Dhawan" and Rahul Rao's "Neoliberal antiracism and the British University."

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