

America is in the  
heart by carlos  
bulosan



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## Goal and Tactics

Carlos Bulosan's goals were primarily fixated on citizenship, better labor treatment as well as civil and human rights for Filipino migrant workers. Bulosan differs from other activist because he wanted to resolve these issues by promoting socialistic ideas during a time of economic depression. Bulosan (1973) wrote, " We must look for the mainspring of democracy, but we must also destroy false ideas. We must discover the origin of our freedom and write of it in broad national terms. We must interpret history in terms of our liberty. We must advocate democratic ideas, and fight for all forces that would abort our culture" (pg. 188) Bulosan was an idealist and believed in rewriting our history. He was convinced that redefining our past would be the only way to destroy racism and restore equality. Whereas other activist would lead marches, violent acts or sit-ins Bulosan used his gifted writing skills as a tactic to show the world the exploitation of farm laborers. His controversial writing alarmed anti-Communist Senator Joe McCarthy, the Un-American Activities Committee and even some Filipino writers eventually blacklisted him and his fellow radicals. Bulosan was part of organizing rallies, boycotting and protesting in the fields. Another one of his unique tactics compared to past and present activist was his ability to convert the message of unionization in a language for all ethnic backgrounds to grasp. This role enabled him to gain credibility when he traveled to different cities. For example, when he traveled to the town of Betteravia, the sugar beet workers were religious people and only wanted to hear discussions of biblical parables. Bulosan bought a bible to familiarize himself with the material. He would start his lectures on American History, but always went back to the

bible for historical analogies. Bulosan (1973) stated, “ Their eyes glowed with a new faith. They nodded with deep reverence. This is what I had been looking for in America. To make my own kind understand this vast land from our own experiences” (pg. 312). His tactic was to implant a seed and reveal their persecution. He wanted others to comprehend that they are deserving of this land and by sacrificing our labors this country will flourish into the land of their dreams.

### Lasting Effects of the Movement

Carlos Bulosan was actively involved in fighting for higher pay, better job security, good benefits and safer work environments for migrant workers. In Santa Maria Valley, an independent union called the Filipino’s Workers Association was formed. The organization spread their campaign throughout the agricultural areas of California. It was the birth of a developing leadership known as the Filipino movement. Bulosan (1973) wrote, “ The vigilant Filipino workers – their whole-hearted support of the trade union movement, their hatred of low wages and other labor discriminations – were the direct causes that instigated the persecutions against them, sporadic at first, and then concerted but destructive to the nation’s welfare” (pg. 195). Most of the migrant workers were uneducated and illiterate, but they were very conscious of the horrible treatment from the agricultural capitalist. With barely any means of eating or shelter, they held their ground and continued to boycott until their needs were met. While some protest were successful, others ended violently. Their brave acts would be heard for generations to come. Unions were not active during the time of the Great Depression. They were only being organized. Those who were conspiring to mobilize unions

were punished or arrested. It was not until June of 1933, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt passed the National Industry Recovery Act that gave the right for workers to organize into unions. As a result, the boycotts, marches and protest of early migrant workers were the foundation of unions. This would eventually set the trend for social movements and policies of labor laws to have long lasting effects towards modern day society. Currently, employees having the right to organize and bargain collectively through representative of their own choosing, they are free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers, they have enforced work hours, child labor laws, safety and health laws.

#### Working Alternatives and Challenges Presented

The United States colonization created economic disparity for Bulosan's family and many others that were born into peasantry. The growing concentration of wealth and power from political elite produced great difficulties for his family to survive. Bulosan, like other Filipino peasant children, had no childhood memories. At the age five, he worked in the fields and was responsible for household chores. Early in his life, Bulosan develops his hatred for the upper class. His first experience with the bourgeoisie ends in bitter tears when he witnesses the woman knock over a bowl of rice off his mother's hands, that she spent weeks on the field picking. He notices the differential treatment and the division between social classes. Bulosan's family was forced to be at the mercy of moneylenders at extremely high interest. Soon after they were unable to pay their debts, their land was taken from them. Bulosan is desperate to help his family retrieve their property, so hears about this land of opportunity called America. At the age of seventeen,

<https://assignbuster.com/america-is-in-the-heart-by-carlos-bulosan/>

he travels by ship and enters Seattle on July 22, 1930. Unfortunately, when he arrived it was not the dream he expected. The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression left jobs hard to find. Bulosan had only three years of education and barely spoke English. When he arrives in Seattle, he was captured and sold for five dollars to work in an Alaska fish cannery to earn thirteen dollars for the season. Bulosan (1973) described, “ They exploited young immigrants until one of them, the hotel proprietor, was shot dead by an unknown assailant. We were forced to sign papers which stated that each of us owed the contractor twenty dollars for bedding and another twenty for luxuries. What the luxuries were, I have never found out” (pg. 101). This was the beginning of Bulosan’s life in America. He is constantly on the hunt for employment and most of the time the wages are not enough to cover the expense of food or shelter. At the same time, there is an extreme level of prejudice towards the Filipino. He goes from one situation to another being brutally beaten from white Americans or police officials. White supremacy challenged any type of progress that the Filipino movement try to accomplish. Bulosan gets a strong dose of this in Washington, when white people torched a bunkhouse where he slept. He was frantic to survive, so he worked where ever he can land a job which was usually picking crops, being underpaid and forced to live in filthy conditions. Carlos and other Filipinos were susceptible to work in corrupted environments because they had no legitimacy or organizational means to advance their collective rights. They did not have a place in America. They were mistreated by white people, and simultaneously treated kindly by others. This caused great confusion for Bulosan. He was torn by this country that wanted him dead, yet still believed in its dreams.

## Solidarity

Bulosan's experience in America brings him to the realization that through individuals who are willing to stand up for what they believe in, the United States could evolve into the promised land. He visualizes that America is whatever people chose to make it. Bulosan (1973) stated, " It was an exhilarating feeling – this belonging to something vitally alive in America" (pg. 226). He is driven about the labor movement. It becomes bigger than he expected. It was not just a fight for his people, but for all migrants that were being subjected to the social injustices of this country. He witnessed his people form a collective solidarity. The Filipino community as well as other communities shared grievance towards receiving inhumane treatment. This reciprocal emotion from shared events triggered a bond that strengthened them. Carlos and his friends become influential in the movement for Filipino civil rights. Bulosan and others form a committee for Filipinos to acquire citizenship, but they are unsuccessful. They are banned from enlisting in the armed forces during World War II. However, the Filipinos begin a movement that finally allows them to serve in the army. Bulosan (1973) wrote, " I was waiting for this very moment; it was a signal of triumph. But it took a war and a great calamity in our country to bring us together. President Roosevelt signed a special proclamation giving Filipinos the right to join the armed forces of the United States" (pg. 319). Bulosan viewed this as a pivotal moment for Filipinos. It showed that through endless strife success could be achieved.

Forces against them and Envision changes

With the Great Depression getting worse and the Filipino population growing, the anti-Filipino movement becomes stronger. The forces that worked against them was their inability to receive citizenship and their lack of education. Bulosan (1973) states, “ Why don’t they ship those monkeys back to where they came from” (pg. 99)? They were looked down upon as animals and law breakers. This brought Filipinos towards the pits of despair. They were destined to end up as delinquents. Outcasted by the dominant group, Filipinos were led into the life of pool rooms and dance halls. Throwing away their money and drowning their sorrows in brothels and gamble houses. As a result, many white people stereotyped and stigmatize Filipinos. They were in constant limbo. They were not technically illegal, and at the same time had no legal rights. They were unwanted in a country they yearn to call their home. Bulosan comes to the realization that something must change. Between 1935 and 1941, he organized unions to protect his fellow Filipino workers. Their efforts to assemble workers brings them into straight disagreement with the large agricultural interests. He would call for outside meetings pass the perimeters of the county lines to speak with migrant workers. However, they would get raided by local police officials and some were thrown into jail. Their labor movement becomes involved with radical elements. They manage to form a union that affiliates with the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations). He takes part in the committee for the protection of Filipino Rights (CPFR). Throughout this period, Bulosan envisioned change. The Filipinos were mainly bothered with specific issues. “ I prepared a leaflet and distributed copies to the Filipinos in the county. These were there concerns, “ How come Filipinos in California cannot buy or lease real estate”? “ Why can’t Filipino men marry women of the Caucasian

<https://assignbuster.com/america-is-in-the-heart-by-carlos-bulosan/>

race”? “ Why aren’t Filipinos not allowed to marry in California”? “ Why can’t Filipinos allowed to practice law”? “ Why are Filipinos denied the right of becoming naturalized American citizens”? “ Why are Filipinos discriminated against relief agencies”? “ Why are Filipinos denied better housing conditions”? “ Why are Filipinos brutality handled by the police and often treated like criminals”? “ Why are Filipinos denied recreational facilities in public parks and other such places” (Bulosan, 1973, pg. 269)? These men were agitated with social strangulation. Their plan was to listen to the community, but not to propose an action. This was the time to sought out ideas which then eventually lead to a statewide campaign for the recognition of Filipino rights and privileges.

### Risk and Struggles

Bulosan and other Filipinos struggled with finding their own identity in a country that disenfranchised them. They risked their freedom, lives and dignity fighting in a world of white supremacy ideology. A majority of this novel was shaded with violence. Most of the violence was rooted from racism. Bulosan (1973) wrote, “ My fellow workers could not explain it to me. I understood it be a racial issue, because everywhere I went I saw white men attacking Filipinos. It was but natural for me to hate and fear the white man” (pg. 147). The tragedy to this novel is not that America was a brutal country, but that America breed brutal inhabitants into this country. The Filipinos were going up against tremendous forces that were beyond them. They wanted to stand up for their rights, but they were extremely terrified of the consequences. Bulosan (1973) described, “ News came that a Filipino labor organizer had been found dead in the ditch” (pg. 144). In order to persevere,

<https://assignbuster.com/america-is-in-the-heart-by-carlos-bulosan/>



many Filipinos resorted through acts of violence. “ Open your eyes Carlos.

This is a country of survival of the fittest” (Bulosan, 1973, pg. 170).

Individual rage lay deep within Bulosan. This country was slowly turning him into a wild savage. He struggled to not conform into the lewd images the white people constructed for Filipinos. Another barrier they encountered was housing discrimination. Bulosan (1973) stated, “ We saw a nice little apartment house near Commonwealth Avenue and when we approached the landlady took away the “ For Rent” sign” (pg. 256). Bulosan had endless encounters with bigotry. He nearly finds himself becoming a product of his environment but recognizes the hope that is delivered in his people. He embraces this moment of clarity and utilizes it for the battle of Filipino rights.

#### Framing the narrative

Bulosan’s writing conveys the character of a passionate man who was generous toward the nation’s immigrant workers, long abused by their employers. His determination to maintain a radical consciousness and strong ideological beliefs put him at odds with the literary and political establishment. Bulosan’s stories were often based on a protagonist character, usually under duress and always out-matched, similar to the biblical story of David versus Goliath. While rooting for the underdog, Bulosan created complex and flawed human characters that make it easy for us understand and draw inspiration from this literary master and working class organizer. Most importantly, Bulosan’s gift of providing workers and people of color with hope and direction through his deeds of helping workers to discover their power and leverage in the workplace.

## Changing the Status Quo

In this novel, Bulosan formed a sense of nationalism. He was able to identify with a country that was not his own and developed a love towards it despite its character defects. He upholds the value of family, culture, education and loyalty. *America is in the heart* captures the true experience of an immigrant coming to this land. Carlos Bulosan uses his writing as a tool of expression. He uncovers the buried history of Filipino immigrants coming into this country and uses it as a historical reference for future generations to have a better understanding of the hardships they encountered. His Filipino American experiences compliments the existing issues of racial and economic disparity during a time of anti-immigrant's beliefs. His roles in the labor movement and Filipino movement opened doors of opportunities for agricultural workers and for Filipino immigrants to receive citizenship. His hunger for education, passion for equality and love for writing inspired Filipinos to become rich with knowledge. His legacy motivated others to help empower the oppress. Carlos Bulosan set the standards for Filipinos of his time and future generations to not fall short from your circumstances, but to rise up. He challenged the status quo by encouraging others to search for the source of racism, reconstruct our society and mold it into a new ideology that bares equality for all. He was a symbol of hope and changed the world with his determination. His narrative shifted the perspective of Filipino immigrants and their needs of acceptance and tolerance. *America is in the heart* is novel that reminds others that the immigrant people are the heart of this country.

### Work Cited

<https://assignbuster.com/america-is-in-the-heart-by-carlos-bulosan/>

- Bulosan, C. (1973). *America is in the Heart*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.