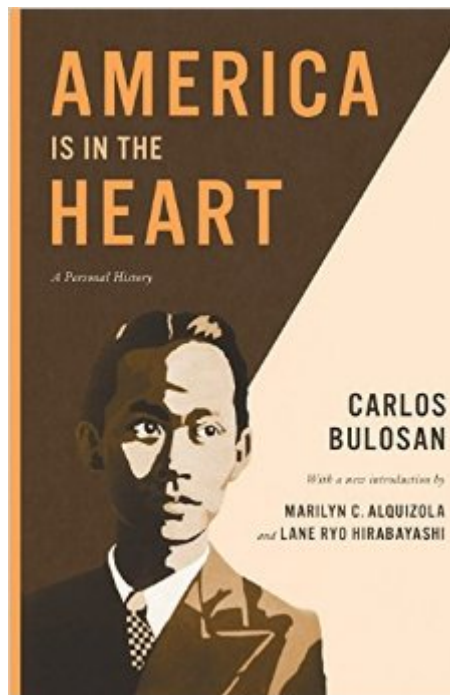


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America Is In The Heart: A Personal History (Classics Of Asian American Literature)



Synopsis

First published in 1943, this classic memoir by well-known Filipino poet Carlos Bulosan describes his boyhood in the Philippines, his voyage to America, and his years of hardship and despair as an itinerant laborer following the harvest trail in the rural West. Replaced by ISBN 9780295993539

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Customer Reviews

This book tells the story of Allos (or Carlos) Bulosan - from his early days as a peasant child in the Philippines to his days as an itinerant laborer and reformer for the Filipinos in America. This autobiography reflects the hard life of a persecuted nationality. With no rights to own agricultural land and the risks of being beaten for even conversing with a white woman, Filipinos were despised along the West Coast and treated as criminals and monkeys. With no legal recourse or organizations, Filipino workers were often exploited by the contractors and the Chinese and Japanese who owned the gambling houses and whorehouses. This exploitation led many to drinking and violence, only to aggravate the hatred of their kind. Bulosan tells of the brutalities endured by Filipinos at the hands of the white community and of the terrors of disease and unemployment. How many times did Bulosan have to hear "You're fired!" after trying to stand up for himself and his people. One thing that struck me about the book was the concept of meeting your siblings when you're old enough to remember it. Having grown up with my older sister always at my side, the first scene in which he first meets his older brother, Leon seemed very foreign to me. It

brought home the point that working families didn't always have the luxury of living together. To survive, each family member had to contribute whether it was working the fields or selling goods in the market, but it meant that the whole family was not united. This family never seemed to be fully together, at least one sibling or parent was always away, trying to do their part. It was hard for me to really relate to that, although I certainly felt for them. Another concept that I noticed was the sense of time in the book.

Essential reading? I dunno. Nonetheless, Bulosan's story is intensely personal and has historical weight in its documentation of the migrant experience. His isn't unique in any regard and you need only look around at the fields that hug the California freeways to catch a glimpse of migrant workers who are, to this day, living experiences similar to what Bulosan described then -- migrating up and down the coast, often without papers and in fear of authority; work conditions that can be intensely hot and bitterly cold, as well as low-paying and piecemeal; often overcrowded living quarters; meager or no health services for those who suffer illness; rampant alcoholism and drug use to deaden one's existence. That the book was written several decades ago indicates that not much has changed, except for the major ethnicity of those in the fields. But enough about that. I acquired a copy of this book from a friend, from an affluent California family who had it assigned to her in a college class, which I believe was her own forced attempt to learn more about a Filipino now-ex-boyfriend's heritage. Her quick assessment: "boring." I, on the other hand, found it fascinating, because of the similar experiences my uncle went through prior to and during his time as a migrant worker in Dole's pineapple fields in the Marshall Islands: both my father and uncle described to me stories of being poverty-stricken working the land, then Japanese occupation driving them further into destitution, which eventually drove them to seek a better life in what Maxine Hong Kingston's relatives describe as "The Golden Mountain" in her book "China Men." My uncle related the harsh working conditions in the fields; the ethnic infighting (dark-skinned vs. "mestizos") and culture clashes among differing ethnic groups.

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