

Contextualizing Filipina/o Experiences through the Life and Lens of Virgil Duyungan

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Abstract

This paper serves a dual purpose: to examine the world of Filipina/o immigrants and Filipina/o Americans during the 1930s in the Puget Sound region, as well as look at the life and death of Filipina/o labor leader Virgil S. Duyungan. Incorporating these two different aspects into one paper reveals how Duyungan's experiences contextualize and highlight key issues of the greater Filipina/o community in the region at the time, such as racial identity and tensions, labor rights, corruption and exploitation, and socio-economic conditions. By utilizing a body of primary and secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, government documents, images and union records, the paper navigates through a broad history of canneries and the workers of the industry, the Great Depression, Filipina/o history, and then the unionization efforts led by men like Duyungan. From there, the paper establishes a timeline of Duyungan's experiences and how they correlate and contrast with Filipina/o experiences, to show how the story of historical individuals, though important on their own, are tied to the communities and greater experiences and events that coincide with them.

Introduction

In 1933, amidst the Great Depression, worker discontent and labor rights activism reached a peak in the United States. During this time, a small group of Filipina/o¹ salmon cannery workers formed the first Filipina/o-led labor union specifically for salmon cannery workers: the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union (CWFLU), Local 18257. It was an organization associated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and led by President Virgil Duyungan. Under Duyungan's leadership, this organization was instrumental in ending the exploitative practices of contracting in salmon canneries and bringing together a sense of unity in terms of Filipina/o labor rights and activism, at least for a time. As a key founder of this union and as an individual who lived a rich yet complicated life, Duyungan and his roles as a labor leader and as a prominent Filipina/o figure have been documented by other scholars. This documentation has characterized him in at least two different ways. Some view him as a figure who led the charge for Filipina/o labor and social rights, both during his life and through his death as a martyr.² Others view him as a corrupt and checkered individual whose death was used as a symbol to serve the purposes of his peers.³

¹ The usage of Filipina/o as a description of people from the Philippines, rather than the more traditional designations of Filipino and Filipina is for the purposes of both convenience and consistency, as well as trying to be gender inclusive. Filipina/o will be used even when specific figures have a specific gender. It is then important to note that Filipina/o men, though not the exclusive demographic, worked more often than women did in the canneries. This label will not apply when referring to the language, which will remain as "Filipino." The use of this terminology comes from similar use throughout Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony's *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (California: University of California Press, 2003).

² For an example of a more positive depiction of Duyungan and the CWFLU, see Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans, a Pictorial Essay/1763-circa-1963* (United States of America: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983), 73.

³ For an example of a more negative depiction of Duyungan and the CWFLU, see Jack K. Masson and Donald L. Guimary, "Pilipinos and Unionization of the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry," *Amerasia Journal* 8, no. 2 (1981): 11. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.8.2.r723g10v61251321> (Note: The spelling of the article's title is not a typo).

It is important to note though, that Duyungan's life, while comparable to the experiences of many Filipina/o people at this time in several respects, is not indicative of every Filipina/o's experiences. Notably, Duyungan's socio-economic status placed him in a more privileged spot: Duyungan's wife, Margaret Mary Duyungan-Mislang, in a 1975 oral history conducted by Carolina Koslosky as a part of the Washington State Oral/Aural History Project, described him as someone who was somewhat arrogant as a result of his status as upper class, or a *Haciendero*.⁴ Yet both the similarities and the differences found between Duyungan and the greater community are noteworthy. It is the purpose of this paper, then, to use Duyungan's personal history as a lens to interpret the broader Filipina/o history, starting from the early 1900s, and ending at the time of Duyungan's death in 1936. This work fills gaps in the historical understandings of Duyungan and the Filipina/o community during this time and examines the overall impact of Duyungan's life on the community. In doing so, it also shows that Duyungan's actions and experiences, both personal and professional, are crucial to providing context to the complex racial, socio-economic, and cultural struggles experienced by the greater Filipina/o community during this era. These actions and experiences include his migration to the United States, interracial marriage, his leadership of cannery workers in the CWFLU, and the impact of his death. Overall, regardless of the existing competing views of his career and his organization, this paper makes it clear that Duyungan's story should be told in as full of an examination as possible.

⁴ Margaret Mary Duyungan-Mislang, "Filipino Pioneer: Point of View of a Non-Filipino Living the Life of a Filipino," interview by Carolina Koslosky, *Washington State Oral/Aural History Program oral history transcripts, 1974-1977*, June 16, 1977: 3-4, (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Box 352900, Seattle WA, FIL-KNG75-12ck.). Referred henceforth in text as either Duyungan-Mislang or Mary Rae (prior to marriage to Duyungan).

Literature Review

Scholars typically have found Duyungan's death in 1936 to be more influential than his overall life. While some scholars argue that his death was essentially martyrdom and was a key factor in bringing Filipina/o unity against the pre-existing and exploitative contracting system of the salmon canning business, a significant and chiefly biographical work has yet to be fully compiled. This is a gaping hole in Asian American, and especially Filipina/o history, because Duyungan's leadership was pivotal in the Pacific Northwest's labor history. In addition, because Duyungan and those around him left an accessible historical record, key aspects of his life allow interpretation of the lives of Filipinas/os during this era, like his interracial marriage, his social status, his controversial work as a leader in Filipina/o unionism, and his dynamic relationships with his peers and his enemies.

Generally, textbooks covering the broader history of the Pacific Northwest region say little about the salmon canneries and Filipina/o Americans and immigrants during the 1920s and 1930s. For example, in the widely cited 1989 textbook *The Pacific Northwest* by Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes,⁵ there is hardly any mention of salmon canneries, and there is barely consideration of the Filipina/o American community that lived in the area and played a part in the development of the region. Even a newer, more up-to-date textbook like *Contested Boundaries: A New Pacific Northwest History*, written by David J. Jepson and David J. Norberg in 2017,⁶ which acknowledges the canneries in the region and addresses the Chinese laborers throughout the mid and late 1800s, as well as noting the trend of women cannery workers, leaves out Filipina/o

⁵ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, "Depression Decade." In *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 381-395.

⁶ David J. Jepson and David J. Norberg, *Contested Boundaries: A New Pacific Northwest History* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

American perspectives and experiences.⁷ To explore the history of Filipina/o Americans and immigrants, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, researchers must look into specialized historical research.

In terms of scholarship with a general focus on salmon canneries and the labor issues involved with them during the early 1900s, the field reaches back decades. A dissertation written in 1938 from the University of California, Berkeley⁸ and a 1949 dissertation from the University of Washington⁹ show that there was at least some scholarly interest in their study, and there are some important mentions of the CWFLU and Duyungan.¹⁰ This was mostly the exception rather than the rule though, as most of the scholarship that covers Filipina/o involvement in the field, specifically with a focus on the early years of the CWFLU under Duyungan, only becomes more prominent in the 1980s onwards. For example, two major published books specifically address the history of Asian Americans in the salmon cannery business of the 1900s, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, the comprehensive 1994 work by Chris Friday, and Ron Chew's 2012 *Remembering Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes*.¹¹ Friday explores not only the history of Filipinas/os in the salmon canneries, but also the history of the Chinese and Japanese workers that preceded them, and discusses how the Filipinas/os achieved unionization and the inter/intra-racial and ethnic tensions that existed within the industry. He also provides a description of the

⁷ For some examples, see Jepson and Norberg, *Contested Boundaries*, 131-132, 170, 202.

⁸ Lauren Casaday, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry in the Pacific Northwest" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1938).

⁹ Gerald Gold, "The Development of Local Number 7 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers of America-C.I. O" (master's thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash., 1949).

¹⁰ For some examples, see Gold, "Development of Local 7," 7, 41.

¹¹ Ron Chew, *Remembering Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes: The Legacy of Filipino American Labor Activism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

death and martyrdom of Duyungan and the impact it had. Chew mostly focuses on the history of Filipina/o union activists Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, their deaths in the 1980s, and their legacy, but does include some history of Filipina/o union activism. For example, he mentions the CWFLU and Duyungan as key points to the development of Filipina/o labor rights in the canneries.

Some scholarly journal articles address the salmon canneries and Asian American participation in the industry. In 1981, political science professor Jack Masson and journalism professor Donald Guimary published “Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry,”¹² which focuses on the aspect of labor contracting, the controversial nature of its operations in the salmon canneries, how Asian Americans like the Chinese, Japanese and Filipinas/os interacted with the practice, and how they abolished the practice over time. Here, the CWFLU and the death of Duyungan are key parts in the end of the contracting system, though the article focuses more on the Chinese and Japanese perspectives and the greater history of the practice. Instead, their work in the 1981 article “Pilipinos and Unionization of the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry” covers a more Filipina/o-centric look at cannery contracting and unionization within the industry. It is here where Masson and Guimary interpret Duyungan’s role as a labor leader as manipulative and controversial in nature, that the CWFLU was ineffective in its initial abilities to combat contracting, and that his death proved to be a positive impact rather than most of his work done with the union.¹³ Asian-American and immigration historian

¹² Jack Masson and Donald Guimary, “Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry,” *Labor History* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 377-397. doi: 10.1080/00236568108584625.

¹³ For example, see Masson and Guimary, “Pilipinos,” 11.

Stephanie Hinnershitz's 2013 work "We Ask not for Mercy, but for Justice"¹⁴ is one of the few examples that provides specific focus on the labor issues of Filipina/o Americans and immigrants in the context of the salmon canneries. She argues that the CWFLU acted as a civil rights organization for Filipinas/os throughout its early years of operation and explores the ambiguity of Filipina/o identity in terms of being American subjects and dealing with racial discrimination, alongside the issues of labor in the salmon canneries. In this work though is only some mention of Duyungan, his presidency and his death.

Finally, other pieces of literature with a focus on other Filipina/o specific historical issues have also addressed the history of the salmon canneries, the CWFLU, and Duyungan, albeit as supplementary material to add context to a much broader focus. For example, there is Asian-American studies professor Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony's 2003 book *American Workers, Colonial Power*, which focuses on Seattle, exploring how the trans-Pacific immigration coming to it from the Philippines impacted the development of the city, as well as looking at the general history of the Filipina/o community that existed there during the early 1900s. The book tackles several issues that the Filipina/o community faced at the time, including education, socio-economic status, racial relations and labor issues. It is here where she chooses to focus some attention on Duyungan's wife Margaret Duyungan-Mislang as a figure of note, alongside exploring the history of the canneries. There is also Fred Cordova's 1983 book *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*, which is a pictorial history of Filipina/o Americans and immigrants, documenting the imagery of their lives and history from as early as the 1800s, as well as utilizing oral histories

¹⁴ Stephanie Hinnershitz, "'We Ask not for Mercy, but for Justice: The Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers' Union and Filipino Civil Rights in the United States, 1927 – 1937,'" *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 1 (2013): 132-152. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/520884>.

and providing historical context to the images throughout the book. While the book touches on a great number of subjects and individuals through imagery and textual information, ranging from Filipina/o farm workers in California, the lives of women, families, and examples of racism and prejudice, Cordova only makes some mention of the CWFLU and Duyungan.

Methodology

This paper relies on a myriad of government documents, oral history, images, union archival records, pamphlets, letters and newspapers. Much of this material is found within the University of Washington Special Collections, specifically the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union Local 7 archive collection. This is the collection of the CWFLU's documents throughout the years, whether it is their attendance books, finances, or even newsletters and articles from specific times that provide context.¹⁵ A portion of the collection is digitized and easy to access and utilize, however, many of the other documents are only available in physical form and need viewing in person. To specifically capture a timeline for Duyungan's life experiences and contextual information, many documents had to be found outside of this repository in databases like NewsBank for newspapers from the era or Ancestry for documents covering specific aspects of his life that have remained relatively untouched. Finally, an oral history from Margaret M. Duyungan-Mislang, conducted by Carolina Koslosky, provides first-hand knowledge of some personal details about Duyungan, providing insight into the personality of the man that would otherwise be uncertain or unknown.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union, Local 7 records, 1915-1985." SCSP 04967, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, Washington, United States. (Hereafter cited as "CWFLU Records").

¹⁶ Duyungan-Mislang, "Pioneer," interview.

Background: The Salmon Canning Industry and Asian Workers

A key industry within the Pacific Northwest, salmon canning within the United States began in 1864 originally on the Sacramento River. From there it spread northwards over several years to the Columbia River, the Puget Sound, British Columbia, and finally in 1878, it reached Alaska.¹⁷ While over time, the industry would employ workers from different backgrounds including the Chinese, Japanese, Filipina/o, Latinx, and Indigenous people,¹⁸ small associations of white business owners mostly utilized their families and friends in the early years of the industry. While several industries like railroad construction would increasingly incorporate Chinese labor early on, as Pacific Northwest historian Chris Friday notes, due to a desire for direct supervision and participation “[the cannery] owners had little reason or desire to hire Chinese.”¹⁹ By 1870, however, Chinese workers entered the salmon canning business²⁰ and began rivalling the largely white demographic. The racist moniker of the so-called “Iron Chink” machine is a degrading yet enduring example of the legacy of Chinese involvement in the salmon canning industry.

Relations between white workers and the Chinese were not explicitly hostile because of race, as for the most part, as Friday notes, “[European American employees] realized that their livelihoods as fishermen, skilled mechanics, and managers depended on canneries staffed by

¹⁷ Fujita-Rony, *American Workers*, 98.

¹⁸ Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 2.

¹⁹ Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor*, 9.

²⁰ Friday, *Organizing*, 8.

Chinese crews.”²¹ As the industry grew over the years, so did the demand for labor, which facilitated the need for contractors and subcontractors, who would seek out and employ individuals for a business for profit. Chinese workers took up this role largely by the late 1880s. As Friday argues,

[After] a brief period of indirect recruitment through cannery employees occurred. . . . The indirect recruitment and management of Chinese laborers remained difficult for the non-Chinese speaking owners . . . [so they] turned to the “China Boss” at the cannery . . . [as they felt] they must rely on Chinese crews and [were] aware that they had few common ties with which to control them.²²

While the practice of contracting was not unique to the salmon canning business, it would become an integral part of the business for decades to come. Eventually though, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 halted Chinese immigration for nearly a half century, reducing the population of Chinese in the region to 6,000 by 1920, two-thirds fewer than the peak year of 1880.²³ The growing intensity of anti-Chinese sentiments at the turn of the century greatly exacerbated this, encapsulated by dramatic events such as the Tacoma Riot of 1885.

Yet the canneries continued to rely on Chinese contractors,²⁴ and with the decline in the Chinese population and workforce, Japanese workers became a more significant percentage of workers in the industry by 1900, though at the time “most cannery owners still believed Chinese to be far superior to other workers.”²⁵ The Japanese would also come to assert themselves as contractors and subcontractors, though tensions between them and the established Chinese

²¹ Friday, *Organizing*, 21.

²² Friday, *Organizing*, 37.

²³ Jepson and Norberg, *Contested Boundaries*, 190.

²⁴ Friday, *Organizing*, 93.

²⁵ Friday, *Organizing*, 95.

laborers and contractors would make it an uphill battle, in part due to racial and cultural differences and antagonisms, as well as the hierarchical relationships that existed both in the United States and in the canning industry.²⁶ By 1907, the “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” a regulation agreement between Japan and the United States on worker migration, severely lowered Japanese as well as Korean movement; after 1912, the Japanese cannery worker population would slowly decline.²⁷ It would be from this point forward that Filipina/o immigrants would set the stage to become a dominant Asian population within the salmon canning business.

Filipinas/os have lived in the United States since 1763, first settling in Louisiana, and were reportedly among the first Asian Americans to cross the Pacific for North America and settle in the continental United States.²⁸ Filipinas/os would enter the Pacific Northwest in the 1850s around Alaska as whaling ship crewmembers,²⁹ and official records show in 1918 Filipinas/os were working in salmon canning, although they were working within the business earlier than that.³⁰ These Filipina/o immigrants in the business of salmon catching and canning would come to be called *Alaskeros*, due to their summertime work in Alaska, but they would also operate for much of the year in the Pacific Northwest.³¹ Filipinas/os would become a more numerous population in the United States, especially on the West Coast by the time of the early 1900s, in great part due to the Spanish-American War of 1898. The conflict had helped establish

²⁶ Masson and Guimary, “Asian Labor Contractors,” 386.

²⁷ Fujita-Rony, *American Workers*, 88.

²⁸ Cordova, *Forgotten*, 1.

²⁹ Cordova, *Forgotten*, 57.

³⁰ Fujita-Rony, *American Workers*, 99.

³¹ Cordova, *Forgotten*, 57.

the United States as a modern colonial power, much like European powers during the time, asserting influence in the territories it took from the Spanish Empire such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines.

The 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts, while dramatically targeting a large number of Asian immigrants, did not affect Filipinas/os, as they were American colonial “nationals,” allowed to carry United States passports, and unlike most other Asians, the United States did not ban their entry.³² This meant that while they were not exactly “citizens,” they were also not “aliens”; instead, they were a colonized people who were free to continue to enter the country and experience part of the American dream. They would, however, be restricted in terms of their rights, privileges, and living experiences, and were subject to racism and bigotry much like other minorities. This dynamic meant that, as Hinnershitz notes,

[Filipinas/os] were “Americans in the heart” (to borrow a phrase from famed Filipino laborer and writer Carlos Bulosan), yet . . . From anti-miscegenation laws, to laws that barred property ownership, to blatant racial intimidation and violence, Filipinos who migrated and settled along the West Coast realized that their racial background over-ruled their rights to protection from harm and discrimination in America.³³

Many Filipinas/os also entered the country during the Great Depression, an era of socio-economic decline on a global scale during the 1920s and 1930s, affecting much of the industrialized world. The United States was one of the countries affected, especially after the Stock Market Crash of 1929, with mass unemployment and financial instability plaguing much of the country’s population. In the Puget Sound region, states like Washington and Oregon did not have as much trouble in 1929, but by the end of 1930, the Depression started taking

³² Friday, *Organizing*, 126.

³³ Hinnershitz, ““We Ask not for Mercy,”” 133.

noticeable effect in the region.³⁴ It forced many citizens in cities like Seattle and Tacoma into joblessness and shantytowns. Many industries would start to struggle during this time, and many would take measures to survive, including the salmon canning business in the region, which found itself in a slump.³⁵ By the time of the Great Depression, Filipina/o cannery workers would feel the impact of the recession. As Friday notes,

[The] wages for unskilled cannery positions occupied primarily by Filipino workers dropped by 40 percent. . . . The depression also shattered the dream of a formal education held by Filipino immigrants. . . . Declining cannery incomes forced Filipinos to find other seasonal jobs, which extended their work season and left little time for school. . . . the earlier adventure and romance of Alaska had been transformed into an unattractive reality.³⁶

The hardships of the Depression would be among the principle influences that shaped the drive for improving conditions in the canning industry, and the idea of forming a union became a key focus amongst the Filipina/o working community.

Both on a national and local scale, unionized organization and worker activism reached new heights during the 1930s. Union organizations such as the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) would gain massive prominence and influence during this era. Labor strikes would sometimes bring entire sectors of industry to a standstill, such as in 1934 when protests shut down the West Coast's waterfront for almost four months.³⁷ Precedent for labor unrest in the canneries, however, had been set earlier. For example, Chinese workers

³⁴ William H. Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast, 1929-1933: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 17.

³⁵ Friday, *Organizing*, 134-135.

³⁶ Friday, *Organizing*, 134.

³⁷ Carlos A Schwantes, "Depression Decade." In *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 390.

refused to work on several occasions, demanded better pay, and attacked foremen, especially in the early years,³⁸ as well as established a short-lived union in 1904 called the Chinese Cannery Employees Union.³⁹ In addition, Mexican laborers in the business, who became a major labor force during the 1920s, rebelled against perceived unfair hours and wages. These labor disputes along with dwindling numbers of other immigrant workers would also contribute to the view that Filipinas/os were the next best option for laborers.⁴⁰ By the 1930s, however, Filipinas/os were also trying to organize due to the hardships of the Depression, drawing inspiration from and joining the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU), a multi-ethnic organization sponsored by the Comintern, or the international association of Communists, as well as the Filipino Laborer's Association. Both organizations focused on supporting and organizing agricultural workers, rather than cannery workers,⁴¹ but Duyungan's leadership would help shift this focus.

Duyungan's Early Life & Filipina/o Immigration:

Vigilio or Virgil S. Duyungan was born in the Philippines on February 24 1899, within the province of Manapla, on the island of Negros.⁴² While not much documentation about his early life in the Philippines exists, travel documents reveal that he came to the United States in

³⁸ Friday, *Organizing*, 38-39.

³⁹ Friday, *Organizing*, 86.

⁴⁰ Masson and Guimary, "Pilipinos," 2.

⁴¹ Friday, *Organizing*, 135-136.

⁴² Virgil Duyungan, *Washington Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965*, National Archives and Records Administration. Washington, D.C. *Ancestry.com*.

July of 1919 at the age of 20. He was well educated, capable of reading, speaking and writing in English as well as Filipino, and he had registered himself as a student in transit as he arrived to the United States.⁴³ Leaving from the Philippines on the S.S. Empress of Asia, he went to Hong Kong, and from there went to Vancouver, Canada⁴⁴ before finally arriving in Seattle, Washington.⁴⁵ At the time, he might have been someone who easily blended in with the other passengers. While some of their destinations within the United States differed, these passengers were all Filipina/o men, all of whom under 30 years of age, were all in transit as students and, with a few exceptions, mostly single. Duyungan, upon arriving in the United States, recorded in the 1920 Census that his parents were both born in the Philippines, that he did not have a job, and that he was the head of a rented space with two other 20-year-old single Filipina/o immigrant men living with him.⁴⁶

Duyungan's early life draws many parallels to what was going on for the average "Americanized" Filipina/o immigrant. The majority of Filipina/o immigrants during this time were single men looking for opportunities like work or schooling, and were finding it in areas like Alaska, Hawaii, and the Puget Sound.⁴⁷ The immigration of Filipina/o people to the United States was also not a simple byproduct of American influence on the Philippines. Instead, as Fujita-Rony argues, "Under American colonization, education was a key vehicle in the

⁴³ Virgil Duyungan, *Canadian Passenger and Crew Lists, 1865-1935*, Library and Archives Canada Ottawa. Ontario, Canada. *Ancestry.com*.

⁴⁴ "Washington Passenger List"

⁴⁵ "Canadian Passenger List"

⁴⁶ 1920 U.S. Census, King County, Washington, population schedule, family 49, Virgil Duyungan. *Ancestry.com*.

⁴⁷ Hinnershitz, "We Ask Not for Mercy," 133.

restructuring of Philippine society . . . and was actually conceptualized within a larger system of American domination.”⁴⁸ Interestingly, Duyungan registered himself as a Protestant Christian,⁴⁹ something indicative of the transitional cultural practices of Filipinas/os at the time, particularly since the American occupation of the Philippines, despite Filipinas/os being predominantly Roman Catholic.⁵⁰ Duyungan reveals that the influx of American missionaries and American policies were starting to create a Protestant population in the Philippines.

Regardless of this “Americanization,” nativists zealously opposed Filipina/o immigration, as sociologist and comparative American historian Rick Baldoz notes,

efforts by lawmakers and nativists to control the Filipino immigration population . . . using conventional methods achieved mixed results. While these legal measures severely restricted the social and economic mobility of Filipinos, immigration from the islands grew steadily during the late 1920s . . . nativists had warned of an impending Filipino “invasion” dating back to the mid-1920s . . . [Nativists] wielded heavy sway over immigration and nationality policy and played a leading role in framing public debate about the “Filipino problem.” When they made claims about the dangers of unrestricted immigration or racial admixture, they were treated as legitimate authorities acting on behalf of the public interest.⁵¹

Eventually, the overall status of Filipinas/os would not last, as on May 1, 1934, the Tydings-McDuffie Act, otherwise known as the Philippine Independence Act, became law. While this act categorized the Philippines as a commonwealth and as such guaranteed the nation its independence within 10 years, it also reversed the status of Filipinas/os as U.S. nationals and restricted their immigration to the United States to a strict quota of 50 persons a year.⁵² So even

⁴⁸ Fujita-Rony, *American Workers*, 54.

⁴⁹ “Canadian Passenger List”

⁵⁰ Cordova, *Forgotten*, 167.

⁵¹ Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 113. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/11102>.

⁵² Cordova, *Forgotten*, 19.

if Filipinas/os had once enjoyed special privileges in the U.S., at this point they were now categorized in a manner similar to other Asians and, as such, were officially subject to the same prejudicial restrictions and “lawful” racist practices as their peers.⁵³ Duyungan, like many other Filipinas/os, would become a major target of discrimination, especially after he decided to get married.

Duyungan’s Marriage & Interracial Relations:

Duyungan got married on June 24, 1925, to Margaret Mary Rae in Snohomish County,⁵⁴ and they would have seven children over the course of their marriage.⁵⁵ Mary Rae’s sister had introduced them to each other at Broadway High School in Seattle.⁵⁶ What makes Duyungan’s marriage stand out in 1925 is that his wife was a white woman. Mary Rae was born in Seattle on September 22, 1901, to John Rae and Maggie Carlisle, two Scottish-born immigrants.⁵⁷ As their relationship was regarded as taboo during this era, experiences shared by the couple were difficult in several ways. For example, according to Duyungan-Mislang’s oral history, she and Duyungan were careful at times to not be seen in public together, never sitting together in restaurants or shows, and sometimes having to walk at about a block’s distance from one another when on the street.⁵⁸ She also explains that finding a place to live and finding a well-paying job

⁵³ Chew, *Remembering Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes*, 133.

⁵⁴ Washington, Marriage Certificate for Virgilo S. Duyungan to Margaret M. Rae, *Ancestry.com*.

⁵⁵ Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 9.

⁵⁶ Something of note is that Mary Rae’s younger sister also married a Filipina/o man at some point, something that Mary Rae initially protested. In Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 3.

⁵⁷ Washington, Birth Records for Margaret Mary Rae (born 22 September, 1901), *Ancestry.com*.

⁵⁸ Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 5.

were extremely difficult, saying that her husband being a cook was in fact lucky for someone of his class and his race.⁵⁹ She also recalled that they once had to move thirteen times in one year.

While Duyungan-Mislang was Duyungan's wife and close confidant, it would do her a disservice to consider these as her only noteworthy characteristics, as she was also someone who was involved with the union as an unofficial yet recognized and influential contributor to the CWFLU. As she explained, "I used to help them in the union. I listened, I was very interested in it, I'd go down and I'd help them write the constitution, helped them do all kinds of [things]."⁶⁰ Even when Duyungan-Mislang went to the Philippines following Duyungan's death, while living there she drew parallels between the harsh racially-fueled experiences felt in the United States due to her marriage and her children, and recalled that

I couldn't send [my children] to American [schools] because they were Filipino. . . . and the Filipino people had just as [much] dislike for me. . . . Rather a prejudice as the . . . Whites had here. . . . the Filipinos had a more harder-harsh [manner], of course, against me . . . Because I was white. And because I had children and they called them half-breed rats.⁶¹

These aspects of Duyungan's and Duyungan-Mislang's personal lives might at first seem disconnected when examining the broader Filipina/o community, but it appears that instances of interracial marriage were not uncommon within Filipina/o communities such as in California, where ethnic and racial historian Paul Spickard notes,

Filipinos and Mexicans [who] worked and lived side by side. They inhabited a similar class and racial position. Filipino immigrant men married Mexican women, immigrant and native, and they formed a mixed community. Intermarriages continued for

⁵⁹ Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 6-7.

⁶⁰ Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 9.

⁶¹ Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 11-12.

generations, mixing families and cultures from the 1930s through the end of the twentieth century.⁶²

Yet intermarriage between whites and Filipinas/os was a new trend in racial relations, as Baldoz notes,

[The] interaction between Filipinos and whites differed from previous customs of social inter-course in important ways. Intimate relationships between Chinese and Japanese men and white women on the West Coast were uncommon, and those that did occur were rarely visible to the larger society. Filipinos, however, were different, eschewing normative conventions that mandated a certain measure of social distance between Asian men and white women... [which] earned them a controversial reputation and attracted considerable attention from western authorities worried about the potential domino effect that might result from breaches in the race line.⁶³

The racial status of Filipinas/os and intermarriage was a constant place of conflict socially and legally, especially highlighted in California as with the 1930s *Roldan v. Los Angeles* case. The case came after a county clerk rejected the application of marriage for a Filipina/o man, Salvador Roldan, and his British fiancée Marjorie Rogers in 1931, as many lawmakers and nativists insisted that Filipinas/os like Roldan were part of the “Mongolian” race and were subject to restrictions to intermarry with whites.⁶⁴ This racial classification of the Filipina/o people was the root of much of the conflict over intermarriage, as Baldoz notes,

The fact that Filipinos did not fit neatly into the nation’s preexisting system of racial classification was a source of great confusion. . . . [as] leading ethnologists of the period had identified “Malays” as the dominant racial group in the Philippines, a separate and distinct category from Chinese and Japanese, who were legally classed as “Mongolians.”⁶⁵

⁶² Paul R. Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 306.

⁶³ Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 90.

⁶⁴ Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 98-99.

⁶⁵ Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 71.

Eventually, this conflicting interpretation of whether Filipinas/os were either “Malayan” or “Mongolian,” and whether this meant that Filipinas/os were restricted from marrying whites, was resolved for a time when the courts ruled in favor of Roldan and Rogers, though this was followed shortly by antimiscegenation laws that explicitly included restrictions on the “Malay race.”⁶⁶ This was the bitter reality for Filipinas/os who entered interracial relationships and marriages, that much of the white population would constantly challenge them in any way possible. Filipina/o poet and labor leader Carlos Bulosan remarked on this situation, stating that

[T]he lives of Filipinos were cheaper than those of dogs. They were forcibly shoved off the streets when they showed resistance. The sentiment against them was accelerated by the marriage of a Filipino and a girl of the Caucasian race... the state legislature [passed] a law forbidding marriage between members of the Malayan and Caucasian races. This action was followed by neighboring states, until ... New Mexico was the nearest place to the Pacific Coast where Filipino[s] could marry Caucasian women.⁶⁷

Evidence reveals that Duyungan was devoted to fighting against legislation in Washington prohibiting interracial marriage, specifically House Bill 301, forwarding letters to the Public Morals Committee about his opposition against the bill.⁶⁸ As Duyungan continued to struggle in his personal life, as most other Filipinas/os would during the Depression, his career path would ultimately lead him to participate in the efforts of cannery workers protesting a corrupt system and have a direct impact on how Filipinas/os would work in that industry.

Duyungan’s Career, Cannery Labor Conditions & the CWFLU

⁶⁶ Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 100-101

⁶⁷ Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), 143. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015000566789&view=1up&seq=153>.

⁶⁸ Letter written on behalf of Virgil Duyungan, February 27th, 1935, related to House Bill 301. CWFLU Records, Accession No. 3927. Box 8/3. <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pioneerlife/id/10247/rec/11>.

Duyungan's early work career was multi-layered: along with being a cook, he also worked as a smelter for a time, and was a contractor for agricultural businesses before helping found the CWFLU.⁶⁹ While no direct correlation between Duyungan's experiences has been established between his work as a contractor in the fields and his anti-contractor work in the CWFLU, it is likely, or at least can be inferred, that this early career was a driving force for his involvement in labor activism. Beyond this, Duyungan's drive for directly involving himself in the labor issues of Filipinas/os is apparent, as he was a known labor agitator for almost a decade prior to the union's founding.⁷⁰ Although most of the other officers who helped establish the union's foundations were university students, Duyungan was not.⁷¹ This is an especially important fact that sets him apart, considering he was made president as soon as the union was founded on June 19, 1933. At first, the CWFLU was not a large organization; it started with just seven founding officers and nineteen other members,⁷² but over time the ranks would grow to 300 in 1935, and around 2,500 by 1936.⁷³ It was Duyungan's initial leadership and organization of the union that was crucial in establishing it. He was the one that initially began discussing the formation of a union with his friends in Seattle, and despite encountering obstacles like contractors firmly controlling workers either through favors or coercion, Duyungan secured some of the first members and applied for the AFL charter.⁷⁴ Historian and economist Gerald

⁶⁹ Duyungan-Mislang, interview, 9.

⁷⁰ Masson and Guimary, "Pilipinos," 10.

⁷¹ Hinnershitz, "We Ask Not for Mercy," 141.

⁷² Friday, *Organizing*, 136.

⁷³ Masson and Guimary, "Asian Labor Contractors," 397.

⁷⁴ Gold, "Local 7," 40, 42.

Gold also notes that, “Beyond doubt, the 1934 wages and working conditions represented considerable improvement over those of the preceding years, and credit must go in large measure to Duyungan for this.”⁷⁵

The necessity for Duyungan’s newly formed union becomes clear when examining the circumstances for Filipina/o cannery workers at the time of its founding. Operating under a contracting system, working conditions were exploitative and rife with corruption and abuse. Gambling, drugs, and prostitution⁷⁶ were encouraged by the contractors, since they would get considerable profits from these practices. Gambling was such a major issue that on July 15, 1935, reportedly \$500,000 out of \$1 million of the annual income of about 4,300 members was being lost to gambling in Chinese gambling houses.⁷⁷ The situation was so critical that the union organized a picketing strike on July 29, 1935 against the gambling operations, with Duyungan at the helm. He stated that “We are only protecting our own people. . . . We will fight to the last, and will all go to jail or win.”⁷⁸ Contractors also forced workers to buy designated products like cheaply made clothes and poor quality food, as well as selling higher quality canned and fresh goods for additional cost, with the promise of a guaranteed job with the purchases made.⁷⁹ Cannery owners and employers were generally accepting of this system because “Under the [contract] system, employers were able to fill short-term labor needs without making long-term

⁷⁵ Gold, “Local 7,” 45.

⁷⁶ Reportedly, prostitutes provided by the contractors included homosexual men, some of which were white and were as young as 14, as well as transvestites. In Cordova, *Forgotten*, 78.

⁷⁷ “Council Given Lengthy List of Gaming Places by Working Men,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), July 15, 1935: 1. *NewsBank*.

⁷⁸ “Filipinos Picket Gambling Joints,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), July 29, 1935: 1. *NewsBank*.

⁷⁹ Gold, “Local 7,” 19-24.

labor commitments... by turning his workers over to a labor contractor, the employer was able to abrogate all responsibilities toward them.”⁸⁰ Reportedly, contractors also exploited not just Filipinas/os, but also white laborers, as both were “being fleeced of small amounts of money by ‘confidence men,’ who promise them jobs in Alaskan canneries in exchange for membership dues in a ‘service club’.”⁸¹

As the CWFLU gained influence and members, it also focused on issues other than labor. For example, the organization was active in supporting independence for the Philippines from the United States.⁸² The passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, however, assisted the CWFLU in combatting the contractors directly. One of the many New Deal programs initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the act was designed to regulate and set prices and incentivize labor activity,⁸³ by creating the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The NRA held several hearings in the 1930s, with the goal to establish rules and regulations within businesses in need of them, included the salmon canning business. Duyungan testified in these hearings, represented the CWFLU, and directly called for the end of the contracting system⁸⁴ as well as outlined the abuses of the contracting system, and ways to improve conditions for workers.⁸⁵ It would be thanks in part to the efforts of the CWFLU and Duyungan, that the NRA would officially outlaw the contracting system. Several issues, however, kept this change from

⁸⁰ Masson and Guimary, “Pilipinos,” 3.

⁸¹ “Racket Charged in Cannery Jobs,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), April 1, 1933: 12. *NewsBank*.

⁸² Baldoz, *Third Asiatic Invasion*, 63.

⁸³ Mullins, *The Depression and the Urban West Coast*, 120.

⁸⁴ Code Hearing, National Industrial Recovery Administration, Cannery Code Hearing, 1934. CWFLU Records, Box 36, Folder 24, 75.

⁸⁵ Code Hearing, 76-83.

being effective. First, as Gold notes, the outlawing of the contracts “merely meant that the contracts the workers signed named the canning company as employer rather than the contractor. The men were recruited by the same methods, the same contractors.”⁸⁶ In addition, the Supreme Court ruled the NRA as unconstitutional in 1935, meaning that the canneries were under no obligation to end the contracting system anytime soon. Finally, what kept the contracting system in place was a deeply established environment of corruption and conflict that persisted within the industry not only with the contractors but also between different unions and among cannery workers; Duyungan would find himself in the crossfire of these competing groups.

Conflict, Corruption & Controversy

Duyungan’s work as President for the CWFLU has been considered by some to be controversial. Attributing and separating his personal motives and ideals as opposed to the organization’s agenda that he represented or the officers with whom he worked is a tricky matter. Arguably, perhaps this could be considered the case with most leaders. However, while some measure of doubt can be cast as a result of a lack of definitive evidence linking Duyungan’s personal motivations and the corruption and conflict surrounding him and his union, it would perhaps be disingenuous not to address some of the more controversial aspects of the union’s operations and Duyungan’s role in them.

Firstly, the CWFLU was notably not the only labor union in operation that was seeking to represent the greater community of cannery workers and farm laborers, and it was not the only minority-led union operating within this industry. These other organizations included the Filipino

⁸⁶ Gold, “Local 7,” 34.

Labor Protective Association (FLPA), the Fishermen and Cannery Workers' Industrial Union, and also the Japanese Cannery Workers Association.⁸⁷ The unions fought with one another over several issues and over several viewpoints about the contracting system, with some being pro-contractor.⁸⁸ Friday notes that neither

the Filipino-led CWFLU in Seattle nor the ethnic Japanese Cannery Workers Association under Arai and the Filipino Cannery Workers Association under De Cano proposed a complete elimination of contractors. Instead, they sought to place their segregated organizations into the existing contract system as specialized recruiters and distributors of labor for their ethnic constituents.⁸⁹

In fact, the idea of combating the contracting system within the CWFLU itself was complicated, as the CWFLU at first avoided directly attacking the contractors, instead focusing their attention on uniting a factionalized Filipina/o community and attempting to foster relationships with contractors about the necessity of cooperation among all Filipina/o workers, unionists and contractors.⁹⁰ They also figured that the Chinese and Japanese were the targets to blame for the woes of the cannery workers, as they were the ones who heavily represented the contractors. For example, the union identified the Chinese and Japanese in the NRA hearing as the perpetrators of labor abuses in the industry,⁹¹ but the union failed to mention Filipina/o contractors.⁹² Also, apparently Duyungan promised Japanese members of the union that he would not try to eliminate Japanese contractors; instead they would still be allowed to operate.⁹³

⁸⁷ Friday, *Organizing*, 140.

⁸⁸ Friday, *Organizing*, 141.

⁸⁹ Friday, *Organizing*, 140.

⁹⁰ Friday, *Organizing*, 139.

⁹¹ Code Hearing, 77.

⁹² Friday, *Organizing*, 139.

⁹³ Masson and Guimary, "Pilipinos," 16.

The association of Duyungan to men like John Ayamo, a Filipina/o attorney, was another matter of controversy. Ayamo, who was present with Duyungan at the NRA hearings, had originally rendered legal services to contractors and had connections throughout the industry. He had apparently offered Duyungan help towards bringing the workers' allegiance from the contractors to the union, along with legal representation for the union.⁹⁴ This working relationship changed, though, with two different narratives developing from the fallout between the two men. Ayamo claimed that Duyungan began ignoring him and other advisors, tried to recruit workers his own way, and that the men distrusted him for being a suspected racketeer. In turn, Duyungan claimed that Ayamo had been working to recruit more men for the contractors through bribery and intimidation.⁹⁵ Ayamo would also come to lead the rival FLPA,⁹⁶ creating division among Filipinas/os about matters of allegiance, and even when the FLPA and CWFLU worked together in a merger, distrust between the two was constantly present.⁹⁷

Looking outside of solely labor-related issues, there also existed at least some divide in identity between state borders and ethnicity when it came to Filipinas/os and the relationship it had with labor, such as with California Filipinas/os as opposed to Washington Filipinas/os. In one instance, the CWFLU requested the restriction of cross-border movement of Filipina/o workers, specifically the movement of Californian Filipina/o cannery workers⁹⁸ who were

⁹⁴ Gold, "Local 7," 43.

⁹⁵ Gold, "Local 7," 44.

⁹⁶ Masson and Guimary, "Pilipinos," 14.

⁹⁷ Masson and Guimary, "Pilipinos," 17.

⁹⁸ It could be argued that this was something exacerbated by the Dust Bowl, the period of extreme dust storms and drought within the central United States that occurred in the 1930s. Displacement of people from states such as Oklahoma into areas like California or Oregon could have led to the mass movement of Oregon and California Filipinas/os, but this would require more research.

restricting the opportunities of Washingtonian Filipina/o cannery workers.⁹⁹ Another aspect which divided the Filipina/o community was the division of different ethnolinguistic groupings, which also made it difficult to cultivate a unified identity in terms of both race and labor. This could be seen with the Ilocanos, who made up the majority of the Seattle Filipina/o immigrant population and competed with the Tagalogs, Pangasinans, and Visayans, some of whom created exclusive associations within their respective ethnic identities.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of this divided association, it appears that the union was sending mixed signals to the workers. On one hand, the union officially opposed discrimination and pushed to gain the support of non-Filipina/o cannery workers, as well as trying to strengthen its Filipina/o base.¹⁰¹ Also, as Fujita-Rony notes, “the local realized the need to organized among Chinese American and Japanese American workers to bolster its political support. In addition, the local gained some African American workers in 1935 and white members in 1935 and 1936.”¹⁰² However, Masson and Guimary contend that, “The union [had] filled its treasure by collecting dues from Chinese, Japanese, and Mexicans while excluding these groups from union membership.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Virgil S. Duyungan et al., Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union Local 18257 Letter to the Washington State Labor Commissioner Regarding the Private Transportation of Out of State Filipino Workers to the State of Washington, March 20, 1934. CWFLU Records, Accession No. 3927. Box 8/3. <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pioneerlife/id/10246/rec/5>.

¹⁰⁰ Friday, *Organizing*, 137.

¹⁰¹ Virgil S. Duyungan, “Annual Report,” *Annual Bulletin of the Cannery Workers’ and Farm Laborers Union, Vol 1(1), June 1936* (Seattle, WA: CWFLU Local 18257, 1936), 2. CWFLU Records, Accession No. 3927-001, Box 9/2. <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pioneerlife/id/10227/rec/2>.

¹⁰² Fujita-Rony, *American Workers*, 186.

¹⁰³ Masson and Guimary, “Pilipinos,” 13.

Perhaps most significantly, further problems would arise for the CWFLU when authorities charged Duyungan with dole fraud and grand larceny. The authorities accused him of receiving around \$50.70 in aid between June and August of 1934¹⁰⁴ from the Washington Emergency Relief Administration while having a \$35 weekly salary.¹⁰⁵ Prosecuting Attorney Warren G. Magnuson¹⁰⁶ filed this charge during his campaign against “chiselers” of the WERA funds. While later acquitted of his grand larceny charge due to lack of evidence, Duyungan would still serve six months in jail after pleading guilty for petty larceny.¹⁰⁷ When Duyungan was released, he was reelected as president in 1936 after being suspended from the union, with members even moving their election of officers to accommodate him.¹⁰⁸ While Duyungan had re-secured his presidency, it would be a short-lived term, and it would be his death that came shortly after this which would have ripple effects on the union and the industry as a whole.

Martyrdom or Not?

On the night of December 1, 1936, Duyungan went with union secretary Aurelio Simon to the Gyokko Ken Café, a Japanese owned restaurant in Seattle’s Chinatown, and there they met with a man by the name of Placido Patron, who was the nephew of a Japanese contractor.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ “Relief Chiseling Laid to Filipino,” *Seattle Post Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), June 13, 1935: 6. *NewsBank*.

¹⁰⁵ “Sixth Dole Fraud Charged,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), June 13, 1935: 3. *NewsBank*.

¹⁰⁶ Warren Magnuson would later become an influential representative and senator for Washington State later in life.

¹⁰⁷ “Woman Admits Dole ‘Chiseling,’” *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, (Seattle, WA), September 18, 1935: 13. *NewsBank*.

¹⁰⁸ Masson and Guimary, “Pilipinos,” 15-16.

¹⁰⁹ Friday, *Organizing*, 146.

While the circumstances of what happened there that night are hazy at best, the only thing that is absolutely certain is that the three men would die shortly upon this meeting, after shooting started between the men. Officially, Duyungan, Patron, and Simon entered the restaurant at around 8:30 p.m., talked for about an hour, and then shooting broke out.¹¹⁰ Duyungan and Patron were armed while Simon was not armed. While Duyungan and Simon died on the spot, Patron was mortally wounded and was hospitalized at Harborview County Hospital. There, before dying on December 3, Patron told police that he killed Duyungan and Simon because they were “cutting in on his hiring hall business” and that “I did all of the shooting, and then Virgil shot me.”¹¹¹

While the newspapers and police officials accepted this narrative, doubt persists over certain details such as whether Duyungan actually killed Patron or not. Many unionists for example believed that Patron was shot by another unknown assailant, in an attempt to cover up the motives of the killings, while some like Duyungan-Mislang offered yet another narrative where a conspiracy including members of the union and contractors had plotted to kill Duyungan due to the charges of corruption.¹¹² Even among scholars, details conflict, such as the name of the assailant who was with Duyungan and Simon; in some sources, he is referred to as Baseda Patron,¹¹³ as opposed to Placido Patron, or that Patron was apparently a Filipina/o.¹¹⁴ Scholars

¹¹⁰ “Two Men Slain in Cafe Battle,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), December 2, 1936: 3. *NewsBank*.

¹¹¹ “Third Man Dies of Wounds after Battle in Cafe,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), December 3, 1936: 3. *NewsBank*.

¹¹² Friday, *Organizing*, 146.

¹¹³ For examples, see Gold, “Local 7,” 52, or Masson and Guimary, “Pilipinos,” 18.

¹¹⁴ Cordova, *Forgotten*, 78.

though, have largely agreed that Duyungan was made a martyr, his death becoming a symbol for the need to end the contracting system, and whatever reputation he acquired was quickly forgotten. As Fujita-Rony notes, “The murders galvanized the membership. Whatever bad press appeared surrounding Duyungan died down as he and Simon became union martyrs.”¹¹⁵ Friday also notes that

Who killed Donyungan, Simon and Patron is still a mystery, but what emerged in the aftermath is not. The local took advantage of the situation to make martyrs of Simon and especially Donyungan. . . . [and] took every opportunity to make certain that the supposed call to “continue” was carried to all in Seattle’s Filipino community. They stressed that the shootings were not the result of gang warfare among competing labor organizations or an interracial killing, but were “the latest and most vicious attack made by the employers” against union forces The Donyungan and Simon killings together with the ability of the local leadership to seize the moment closed the ranks of the Filipino community behind the union movement. . . . Those who had opposed Donyungan found the source of their frustration purged and joined the new leaders in pushing the local’s program.¹¹⁶

As a memorial service in Portland, Oregon’s labor temple was held on December 7, 1936¹¹⁷ for Duyungan and Simon, and a funeral procession was held the same day in Seattle,¹¹⁸ the union was left effectively leaderless and stunned at the sudden violence. However, Hinnershitz notes that “Although those two fatal shots could have destroyed whatever existed of the beginnings of a Filipino civil rights movement, the CWFLU members picked themselves up”¹¹⁹ Now fully motivated and supported by not just Filipina/o workers but by a broader

¹¹⁵ Fujita-Rony, *American Workers*, 188.

¹¹⁶ Friday, *Organizing*, 146-147. Also, his spelling of “Donyungan” rather than Duyungan is a spelling error seen throughout the book.

¹¹⁷ “Filipino Services Today,” *The Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR), December 7, 1936: 11. *NewsBank*.

¹¹⁸ “Strike Pact is Believed Near,” *Seattle Daily Times* (Seattle, WA), December 8, 1936: 10. *NewsBank*.

¹¹⁹ Hinnershitz, “We Ask Not for Mercy,” 142.

coalition that stood against the contracting system, Masson and Guimary note that the CWFLU was “resolved to end the contract system once and for all. . . . in April 1937 the union signed an agreement with the salmon canners which strictly outlawed labor agents and labor contractors.”¹²⁰ However, while most of the divisions among Filipina/o workers broke down, with most of the Filipina/o workers unifying largely behind the CWFLU, Friday notes that “Over time though, this unity would be tested as a result of several incidents, including drives to recruit more non-Filipinas/os.”¹²¹ While to some Duyungan’s life continues to be a mixed legacy, it is hard to deny that his death had served as a catalyst for cooperation and that both his work as president and his death had helped change the face of an industry and a community.

Conclusion

In 1986, when considering listing Seattle’s Chinatown in the National Register of Historic Places, the Department of the Interior wrote, “Filipino workers in Seattle were a strong element in the city’s labor movement. Labor leaders like Duyungan were instrumental in organizing farm laborers and cannery workers and helped defeat the corrupted contract labor system.”¹²² While Duyungan’s story could be simply chalked up in this manner and not be given any further consideration, it is clear through this work that a different picture can be painted about this individual and his impact on the Filipina/o community. However, the greater history of the Filipina/o American community is still one that is largely untapped, especially considering

¹²⁰ Masson and Guimary, “Asian Labor Contractors,” 397.

¹²¹ Friday, *Organizing*, 148.

¹²² U.S. Department of the Interior, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: Seattle Chinatown Historic District*, by Lawrence Kreisman. Edited by Leonard Garfield (September 29, 1986). *National Archives Catalog*. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/75612414>

the lack of scholarship focusing on specific individuals like Duyungan whose lives and stories are deeply intertwined with our overall regional history, influencing aspects like interracial and interethnic relations, labor rights, and politics. No other biographical works focus solely on Duyungan, and although several forms of scholarship mention his impact, there is a need for more scholarship, specifically a biography on Duyungan, especially since his role in unionization and labor rights for Filipinas/os has been so pivotal. The existing literature also lacks a clear consensus on how to interpret this history. Further research is needed to search for any personal documents from Duyungan, as his personal views are not well understood outside of official records. Finding other avenues to explore his life compared to the broader community, seeking out more primary sources, attempting to resolve the differing interpretations of this history, or even exploring other individuals whose stories remain mostly hidden will help build a richer, more fully contextualized history of the broader Filipina/o community in the Puget Sound Region.

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