

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month Spotlight

Did You Know?

Larry Itliong (1913 – 1977)

Larry Itliong is a towering figure in American labor history, yet his name remains unfamiliar to many. Born in the Philippines in 1913, Itliong’s journey to becoming a union organizer in the United States is a testament to resilience, courage, and dedication to social justice.

Itliong’s life was marked by hardship from the outset. At the age of 15, he immigrated to the United States, seeking better opportunities. Settling in the agricultural fields of Northern California, he experienced the harsh realities faced by Filipino migrant workers – low wages, abysmal living conditions, and discrimination. These challenges compelled Itliong in the 1930s to join the labor movement, becoming involved in organizing Filipino farmworkers. His activism took root during a time of great tumult in American labor history, with workers across the nation fighting for fair wages, improved working conditions, and the right to unionize.

Itliong’s most notable contribution came in the form of his leadership in the Delano Grape Strike of 1965. Alongside Cesar Chavez and other labor leaders, Itliong played a pivotal role in mobilizing Filipino farmworkers to demand better treatment from grape growers in California’s Central Valley. Together, they formed the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), which later merged with Chavez’s National Farm Workers Association to become the United Farm Workers (UFW) union.

Itliong’s determination and strategizing were instrumental in securing significant victories for farmworkers. He understood the power of solidarity and unity across racial and ethnic lines, building alliances between Filipino, Mexican, and other workers to challenge the systems of exploitation.

Despite his contributions to the labor movement, Itliong’s legacy has often been overlooked in mainstream narratives. This oversight is emblematic of the broader erasure of Filipino American history and the marginalization of Asian American voices in the struggle for social justice.

However, Itliong’s impact continues to resonate today, inspiring new generations of activists and organizers to confront systemic injustices and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities. His legacy highlights the power of grassroots organizing and collective action.

Sources:

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