

Both moderate and radical wings of the black civil rights movement, and the riots that broke out in African American ghettos across the country in 1964–1967, had a monumental impact on American society. One of the most immediate responses was the War on Poverty, which was launched by President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) in a quixotic attempt to create the Great Society. A myriad of federally funded programs—Job Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Neighborhood Youth Corps, Head Start, and Upward Bound, among them—were set up to affect the change. While not completely successful, LBJ's domestic programs did ameliorate the plight of many poor people in the country, and they also took the wind out of the sails of black militancy, which had faded by the seventies.

The black civil rights crusade, though, left a powerful legacy. Almost every aspect of American life was impacted, in one way or another. One of the most meaningful consequences of this Second Reconstruction was the stimulus it provided for other people of color to stand up for their rights. These included Mexicanos, who now initiated their own movement of self-awareness.

CHÁVEZ, HUERTA, AND THE UNITED FARM WORKERS

The Chicano movement consisted of hundreds of organizations focusing on a variety of civil rights issues. Broadly speaking, these groups were found in barrios, schools, and prisons. In terms of their approaches, they could be divided into those associations that sought to work through the system and those that called for a major restructuring of the system, the moderate and radical wings of the movement, respectively. As the Chicano crusade began, in the midsixties, the moderates predominated. The key organization representing their perspective was undoubtedly the United Farm Workers (UFW).

The history of labor organizing among field workers goes back to the early part of the twentieth century, as we have seen. Both the Industrial Workers of the World, before and during the Great War, and the American Communist Party, in the thirties, made abortive attempts to improve the lives of farmworkers in the agricultural valleys of the West. Before the rise of the UFW, the last serious initiative in the fields was taken by the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU), formed in 1945 and led in California by Ernesto Galarza.⁸ In the late forties, the NFLU launched a series of strikes in the Golden State, where it centered its activities. These initiatives failed not only because of the many difficulties inherent in organizing workers in the fields but also because the Bracero Program made it impossible to win concessions from growers, the owners of factory-farms.⁹ The termination of the bracero agreement in 1964, however, set the stage for the most ambitious unionization attempt to date—the UFW strike that would be launched in California's San