

By 1969 MAYO had four newspapers operating in Texas: *El Dogüello*, from San Antonio; *Hoy*, published in the Rio Grande Valley; *El Azteca*, printed in Kingsville; and *La Revolución*, from Uvalde. In general, the four newspapers served to promote MAYO's pro-CM orientation. . . . In another editorial, *Hoy* dedicated itself to the unity of the Chicano and to the downfall of all the forces that exploit the Chicano community. . . . Because of their content they increasingly came under political attack. . . . The tone of the articles in the four newspapers paralleled that of the antigringo statements made in public by Gutierrez and other MAYO leaders.

. . . The four newspapers were usually published on a monthly basis. Their audience was primarily the young segment of the Chicano community. Funds for printing the papers came from a variety of sources, from donations to ad sales. Their circulation was limited because of their limited finances; they were always plentiful, however, whenever MAYO was involved with issues.

Without the required resources, the four newspapers proved to be transitory and by 1969 began to go out of circulation. Other sources of financial and labor support . . . began to dry up. . . . Therefore, in the absence of its newspapers, MAYO relied on the periodic distribution of newsletters to its chapters and communities.

In addition, MAYO relied on manipulating the traditional electronic and print media for disseminating its views and advancing its *causa*. Often its tactic was to whet the media's appetite by using strategies and tactics that were controversial, polarizing, and loaded with the potential for conflict. MAYO understood well what was newsworthy.

The Significant Role of Chicanas in the United Farm Workers' Boycott

MARGARET ROSE

This work examines the protest of a selected group of Chicanas and Mexicanas in the UFW—married women with children, particularly in the Washington, DC, boycott—who made the difficult transformation “from the fields to the picket lines” during the struggle for union recognition and collective bargaining rights.

In the early years, Anglo volunteers dominated the boycott operations across the nation. Farm worker participation was minimal. . . . Originally, few Mexican or Mexican-American women and even fewer entire families went to boycott; the family pattern evolved gradually as the UFW experimented, through trial and error, with the most effective response to grower tactics and as union attitudes towards women began to change. Over the years, as the boycott strategy was refined, women were increasingly recognized as important players. . . .

Changes in farm worker organization began during the intensified boycott in 1968 against Giumarra, the largest producer of table grapes (and later extended

Margaret Rose, “From the Fields to the Picket Line: Huelga Women and the Boycott, 1965–1975,” *Labor History* 31, no. 3 (1990). Reprinted by permission of Labor History.

against the entire industry). This long term effort which lasted two years required a greater financial commitment and a much larger staff in major cities all over North America. . . .

In 1968 under pressure from her husband, Hijinio, and with urgent pleas from the union, María Luisa Rangel, a farm worker wife from Dinuba, a small agricultural town outside of Fresno, California, reluctantly agreed to transplant her family of eight children to Detroit to work on the Giumarra campaign. . . . Nevertheless, María Luisa provided essential stability for family life and the boycott as she worked alongside her husband and children until the historic grape contracts were secured in 1970. Soon after the announcement of the agreements the Rangels returned to California. From her Detroit experience, María Luisa emerged a strong advocate of the union's cause. . . .

However, convincing farm worker women to leave their homes and communities during these early years proved difficult for union officials.

With the strike and boycott against lettuce growers in 1970, new personnel were needed. This time recruitment of farm worker families was facilitated by changing attitudes towards and more recognition of Chicanas and Mexicanas in the UFW. . . . And also by the early 1970s, the union leadership and the permanent boycott staff had more experience in preparing for, accommodating, and utilizing farm worker families to maximum effect in the boycott.

During this period, the Juanita and Merced Valdez family and their seven children left the lettuce and strawberry fields in the Salinas Valley in northern California and moved to Cincinnati to help with the lettuce campaign. The parents tended to the day-to-day chores of the boycott. The children . . . devoted their summers, weekends, and after-school hours to picket lines. . . . During the week the parents and older children appeared before community meetings to talk about their work in the fields, their strike experiences, and to appeal for help for their union. Their activities generated publicity for the boycott in the local press and on television news and public affairs programs. . . .

By 1973, when the UFW had intensified its lettuce campaign, renewed its boycott against table grapes, and initiated its drive against Gallo wines, the family pattern of boycott participation was firmly entrenched. Some single Chicano and Mexican men and women participated in boycotts, but married men were discouraged from doing so unless accompanied by their wives and children. “This time,” observed Dolores Huerta in 1973, “no married man went out on the boycott unless he took his wife.” The family pattern exposed farm workers—husbands, wives, and children—to a new world of social activism and political protest. . . . In the family, in the fields, and in the boycott, responsibilities for men and women were divided along gender lines. A patriarchal order characterized the organizational structure and personal relations from the leadership down to the rank-and-file level.

Gilbert Padilla coordinated the union's effort in the nation's capital from 1973 to 1975. . . .

As director of the Washington, DC, boycott, Gilbert was the chief spokesman and strategist for the union in the federal district and the surrounding area. . . .

Gilbert was joined by his . . . wife, Esther, . . . and their baby daughter, Adelita. The 29 year-old Esther Negrete de Padilla, a California-born Chicana,

brought sensitivity, educational training, and administrative experience to the Washington, DC, enterprise. . . .

While Gilbert oversaw the entire boycott operation, he received valuable help from Esther in gender-specific areas. This service . . . did not attract wide notice because of its traditional nature and because it often occurred behind the scenes. A conventional female concern in the home was the care and management of the family. Esther not only met these responsibilities, but also managed the domestic side of the boycott. The two-story frame house in Takoma Park, a suburb of Washington, DC, that served as headquarters for the boycott, . . . was home to the Padillas and to the families and individual organizers who came and went in the course of the two-year campaign.

Esther dealt with the problems that inevitably arose from the interaction of many people. Using her knowledge of the welfare system, she obtained food stamps and medical benefits for the transplanted farm workers. When one farm worker woman required emergency care upon arrival in the city, Esther arranged for her hospitalization. Children required visits to the doctor and glasses. . . .

. . . For the new boycott recruits from the fields, Esther sought medical attention and acted as a counselor and morale booster. As such she served as a liaison between the boycott leadership and the farm worker families scattered around the metropolitan area.

Esther's contribution was not limited to personal and domestic details. Because of her educational and work experience, she was a valuable asset in the formal administration of the boycott. Her public duties ranged from dealing with produce managers and political representatives to office work. Esther's day began with early morning visits to the central produce market. Along with staff members . . . she harangued uncooperative fruit and vegetable dealers who continued to purchase boycotted grapes and lettuce. . . .

After these 5:30–7:30 am daily encounters, she devoted the bulk of her time to political lobbying on Capitol Hill. After Gilbert arranged formal introductions to elected officials, Esther directed this effort. She intervened with influential Senators . . . on labor legislation of interest to the union. She prevailed on long-time supporters . . . to help. . . . Through her lobbying, other members of the California congressional delegation lent their important backing. . . . Public officials who were not sufficiently supportive of the union became the target of UFW campaigns. Esther organized a sit-in at the Washington, DC, office of California Senator John Tunney in response to his failure to support UFW boycotts and his advocacy of labor legislation opposed by the union.

In addition to personal contacts with legislators and their staffs, Esther testified before congressional committees. . . .

When she was not on Capitol Hill, Esther helped in the day-to-day operations of the enterprise. Working out of the boycott house in Takoma Park, she handled correspondence, issued press releases, supervised . . . supporters who volunteered to help in the office, attended staff meetings, and kept minutes for important regional boycott conferences. With her expertise on congressional matters, her knowledge of the Washington, DC, office, and her dealings with farm worker personnel, she also served as a confidante and advisor to her husband. . . . Within this formal patriarchal arrangement, there was a great degree of mutuality, cooperation, and female autonomy.

This family model of union activism also characterized the Washington, DC, boycott venture at the rank-and-file level. . . . With the announcements of the grape and Gallo boycotts and number of personnel increased rapidly. By 1974 there was a staff of 23, supplemented from time to time by temporary non-Hispanic and non-paid volunteers. This figure did not take into account the younger children who often participated in the boycott. The majority of the staff consisted of five farm worker families. . . .

The family of Herminia and Conrado Rodríguez resided in the Arvin-Lamont area, south of Bakersfield, before their move to Washington, DC. Their background and experiences were typical of the families who left their homes to work in the boycott during the 1973–1975 campaign. . . .

Like many other families, the Rodríguezes' politicization became a family affair. During the summer of 1973, the family participated in the widespread protests against local grape growers who balked at renewing the UFW contracts negotiated three years before. . . . As talks between grape producers and the union stalled, demonstrations intensified. When local grape industry representatives hastily concluded contracts with the Teamsters Union, protests heightened. While picketing against local growers, Conrado and his eldest teenage daughter, Lupe, were arrested along with other union supporters and transported to the county jail in Bakersfield. Herminia and the remaining children, together with other detainees' families, went into the city and denounced the incarcerations. . . .

The calamitous confrontations between agribusiness and the union in the summer of 1973 that resulted in the mass arrests of farm workers (men, women, and children) and their supporters politicized many families. When the UFW suspended picketing after the deaths of two union supporters in August, the activism of the Rodríguez family did not diminish. Packing up their personal belongings, they joined the caravans of farm worker families who left in the late summer and early fall 1973 to launch a renewed boycott campaign against corporate agriculture on a distant urban front, far away from the recent turmoil in the fields.

As with the Padillas, the Rodríguezes followed the family model of boycott participation with activities divided along gender lines. Herminia Rodríguez oversaw the domestic needs of her family and participated in traditionally female-defined boycott work. Like Esther Padilla, Herminia received much less attention than her husband and refrained from public speaking [*sic*] with the result that her actions, like those of most other Chicanas and Mexicanas, seemed "invisible." . . .

The traditional responsibility of making her family comfortable was not an easy task for Herminia Rodríguez given the disruptions in family life caused by the boycott. The Rodríguez family, like others, had to adjust to a strange environment, new people, different climate, an unfamiliar culture, and difficult living conditions. An entirely new system of survival and domestic decisions had to be adopted. . . .

As boycott wives and mothers learned quickly, domestic stability became secondary to the demands of the boycott. When organizing needs shifted, the family relocated. Herminia moved her family four times during their two-year stay in Washington, DC. . . . Frequent residential changes necessitated different arrangements for the entire family. Herminia's patient acceptance of this instability contributed to the smooth functioning of the boycott. Furthermore, her sacrifices of domestic tranquility were directed towards political ends. Herminia and other

wives endured these dislocations to advance the goals of better wages, decent living conditions, and the opportunity for a better future in California. . . . In the boycott the thin line between personal family concerns and political action blurred in the lives of Chicanas and Mexicanas. Personal discomforts and domestic duties translated into a strong female political statement.

In addition to managing difficult living conditions and family affairs, Chicanas and Mexicanas also participated in public boycott activities, short of public speaking which was left to the men. . . . The most tedious, but most essential, task was picketing. Chicanas and Mexicanas spent hours on picket duty, particularly during the summers when the objective was to maintain daily picket lines. At grocery stores . . . and at local liquor stores . . . , Esther Padilla carried her two-year-old daughter . . . and Herminia Rodríguez took her five children. . . . At times picket lines were composed of women and children. . . . Becoming active participants in the boycott propelled Mexicanas and Chicanas out of the private sphere and into the public domain in ways they were unaccustomed to in rural California. . . . But while these pursuits expanded the public role of Mexican and Mexican-American women, it did not fundamentally alter gender roles. To the contrary, boycott women relied on a shared domestic culture and female reciprocity to relieve the hardships of their new urban lifestyle.

Farm worker women engaged in supportive jobs in the office, depending on their skill level, but did not participate in the formal decision-making process which was reserved for men. . . . Herminia and other Mexicanas answered phones, stuffed envelopes, or ran office equipment. Marfa Castillo, Herminia's friend, assumed the task of selling union bumper stickers, buttons, key chains, and other items at union-sponsored events. . . . Possessing a fine singing voice, Marfa also provided entertainment performing Mexican folk songs and *corridos* (ballads), such as "De Colores," a union favorite, accompanied by guitar-playing Conrado Rodríguez.

The domestic skills of Herminia, Marfa, and other boycott wives also served the boycott. Herminia shopped, cooked, and cleaned so that other women could perform office duties. While Esther lobbied on Capitol Hill, Herminia babysat her daughter. . . . Farm worker women contributed their domestic talents in other ways at the UFW-sponsored fundraising dinners attended by the Democratic political establishment. . . . At these events, some attended by as many as 2000 guests, and at smaller gatherings, Herminia, Marfa, and other farm worker women collected tickets at the door or assisted in the preparation and serving of food similar to the vital work of the women who ran the strike kitchens in California. In this context, the economically essential work of cooking was converted into a political act.

In contrast to Chicanas and Mexicanas at the rank-and-file level, their husbands exerted a more public and readily recognized presence in the boycott. The family model of social activism gave the male head of household more prominence, authority, and responsibility. . . .

While both men and women walked picket lines, the men were photographed more frequently for union publications and were often jailed—a very public event—for their activities. Whereas in rural California mass arrests of both men and women occurred, . . . in the cities men were more frequently arrested than women. If both husband and wife underwent arrest there was no extended family to care for the children; thus the less public responsibility to stay out of jail usually fell to the wife. . . .

For children, the boycott became a novel and exciting experience, offering a dramatic exposure to a different style of life. . . . But gender divisions prevailed here also. In the Cincinnati boycott, for example, sons Sergio (18) and Rego (15) Valdez often took charge of speaking duties and other responsibilities from their father while their sister Mary (17) performed a more auxiliary and less public, though no less vital, role in the office. Thus while teenage boys often served as spokespersons for their families, their sisters were expected to assume a supportive and behind-the-scenes presence, like their mothers.

The progress of the Washington, DC boycott accelerated after the arrival of farm worker families in the city. The immediate attention of the boycott focused on pressuring supermarkets to remove non-union products and to create strong grass-roots support for UFW collective bargaining demands. Farm worker families . . . were essential in the picketing strategy. Within the first three months of their arrival in the nation's capital, they had succeeded in gaining the cooperation of 137 independent and "Mom and Pop" stores. Local co-ops . . . joined the boycott. After the arrests of three farm workers, another small independent . . . agreed to remove grapes from its shelves. The California boycotters also achieved success in their campaign to pressure 275 liquor stores to stop selling Gallo wine products. . . . But as the local boycott leadership and farm worker families soon realized, the most difficult targets were the large supermarkets. . . . Farm workers and their supporters began picketing Giant Foods, a chain of 100 stores in the Washington area. The largest, and most intransigent chain was Safeway with 234 stores in the vicinity. Despite almost constant picketing at their stores and warehouses, and despite financial losses, both chains resisted demands of farm worker families to honor the boycott.

To create the necessary pressure to make the UFW campaign effective, the boycott leadership turned to the development of long-term community and regional support. Through the sustained cooperation of farm worker families, local organizers, and with the backing of labor, religious, political, consumer, and student groups, the Washington, DC UFW office mounted a viable boycott effort. After organizing the nation's capital, the boycott spread to other areas. Using the experience they had gained in Washington, DC, farm worker families moved to other cities [in the area]. . . .

In this region, the most successful campaign was directed against Gallo wine. . . . Overall, the nationally-coordinated campaign finally convinced agribusiness in California to endorse legislation, the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA), which guaranteed secret-ballot elections—an historic step in the state.

With the passage of the ALRA in summer 1975, a major shift occurred in the boycott structure. As a member of the UFW Executive Board, director Gilbert Padilla and his family returned to California. . . . A challenging and difficult job awaited the two in California—confronting growers who continued to resist attempts at unionization. Farm worker families also returned to California in anticipation of participating in field election campaigns. Herminia and Conrado Rodríguez moved their family back to the Arvin-Lamont area to cast votes for UFW representation at their struck ranches. In Washington, DC boycott operations were transferred to the local Anglo staff. . . .

The ultimate success of the two-year struggle, from 1973 to 1975, against the agricultural industry depended on a remarkable cooperation between Mexican and

Chicano activists and field workers, Anglo organizers, and middle-class supporters in cities across the U.S. and Canada. Farm worker commitment to the boycott was intricately tied to the family approach to organization that preserved gender designated forms of labor activism. . . .

. . . The family model of boycott organization reinforced the general expectation that Chicanas and Mexicanas would exert a crucial, but less visible, role in the boycott. Female cooperation and community prevailed over individual ambition. A familiar domestic culture eased the transition from the fields to the cities. . . .

While the UFW provided an outlet for class solidarity and a means for expressing ethnic pride for an exploited minority, it reinforced traditional gender relations by confining women to traditionally female-defined work and social activism. However, by raising the ethnic and class consciousness of its female membership and by exposing them to novel situations, new ideas, and different cultural expectations, the UFW may have inadvertently laid the foundation for the emergence of a greater awareness of gender issues among Mexicanas and Chicanas.

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CHAPTER

13

The Gaining of Power: Chicano Political Empowerment, 1964–1980



By the late 1960s the political role of Chicanos had changed dramatically, as the U.S. government and the larger American society had begun to pay attention to their problems. The spirit of Chicano ethnic pride and solidarity was kindled by the noble struggles of César Chávez and *La Causa*, which began to have a national dimension through the grape boycott. Meanwhile, in South Texas Chicanos took over school administrations, the judicial system, and the county government of Zavala County. Also in Texas, José Angel Gutiérrez formed a political party based on race, language, and culture—*La Raza Unida Party* (LRUP). In Denver, Corky González, becoming disillusioned and frustrated by the failure of the U.S. government to end oppression of Chicanos, organized the *Crusade for Justice*. For many Chicanos, participation in these activities earned them valuable experience that they would put to use in their membership in the major political parties and in their election or appointment to public office. How did involvement in *La Raza Unida Party* represent change in the Chicano community? Why did Chicanos in Texas request federal intervention to achieve full political equality?

By the late 1970s Chicanos remained optimistic that American society could not continue to ignore them—the fastest-growing minority group in the nation. Working through the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), they went into the communities to increase and strengthen Chicano voting power. Chicanos believed that by such organizing, they could challenge Anglo political supremacy throughout the Southwest. The SVREP would be largely responsible for the growth of political power among Chicanos through voter registration, field research, coalition building, and on-site training of volunteers; involvement in litigation on racial gerrymandering; and improved communication about their concerns. In such activities as conducting opinion polls and surveys, trying to influence public policy, working at the community level, and fighting discriminatory election structures, SVREP would remain an important example of citizen participation. Likewise, the expansion of the Voting Rights Act to the Southwest in the