

A DOLORES HUERTA READER

Edited by Mario T. García

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To Dolores Huerta,
whose commitment to the
struggle for social justice
and a more democratic
America inspired this book.

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Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America, 1962–1980

Margaret Rose

One of the most inspiring social movements of the post World War II era was the historic struggle for the unionization of California farm workers that began in the early 1960s. Studies of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO (UFW), and the farm worker insurgency that developed during this period have focused on its male leadership and provided a patriarchal interpretation of its origins.¹ Perpetuating this view, a recent history textbook noted, "[A] thirty-five-year old community organizer named César Estrada Chávez set out single-handedly to organize impoverished migrant farm laborers in the California grape fields."² Such male-centered interpretations have distorted the history of the UFW and the role of women in its development. The following pages document the heretofore "invisible" participation of Mexicanas and Chicanas in the founding and management of the UFW and analyze the impact of gender on this union. Women's commitment to the union, however, was not uniform. To illustrate the wide range of women's contributions to the UFW this investigation contrasts the experiences of the rare women, such as Dolores Huerta, whose style of leadership fit a "male" model of labor organizing with the more common but no less vital endeavors of women, such as Helen Chávez, whose activism fit a more "female"

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model of collective action—that is, work performed, often behind the scenes, in an auxiliary or supportive fashion.

During the past two decades scholarship in women's labor history has uncovered the diversity and distinctiveness of women's working-class heritage.³ Most of this work has concentrated on Anglo or ethnically European women, and more recently on black women in the South.⁴ The protests of Chicanas and Mexicanas in UFW campaigns demonstrate a continuity with women in other labor struggles in the United States. Thanks to a growing body of research that emerged during the 1980s, the experiences of women of Mexican heritage can also be considered in relationship to the past and contemporary struggles of their ethnic sisters—striking Mexicana laundresses in El Paso at the turn of the century, Mexican cannery operatives in California in the 1930s and 1940s, the wives of Mexican miners who formed women's auxiliaries in copper strikes during the 1950s, militant garment workers at Farah in the 1970s, and female employees in maquiladoras (export-oriented, in-process assembly plants operating along the U.S.-Mexican border).⁵ Indeed, Chicanas and Mexicanas have a rich and detailed labor history and have frequently resorted to collective action to resist unjust working conditions. The present inquiry examines how ideologically defined gender roles have shaped such activism within the UFW.⁶

UFW women have taken two different paths to trade unionism.⁷ Observers of the UFW are most familiar with the career of Dolores Huerta, the union's cofounder and first vice president. Yet Huerta's union activism is atypical. She rebelled against the conventional constraints upon women's full participation in trade union activism, competing directly with male colleagues in the UFW. Her activism resembles that of other well-known Chicana labor leaders of earlier generations, such as Emma Tenayuca and Luisa Moreno; it can only be labeled "nontraditional." A more "traditional" model is that of Helen Chávez, wife of UFW president César Chávez. Chicanas and Mexicanas adopting this approach juggle the competing demands of family life, sexual division of labor, and protest in a unique blend of union activism. But their contribution to union building is obscured because it occurs in the context of domestic responsibilities.⁸ Despite her marriage to a prominent labor reformer, Chávez can be readily likened

to hundreds of other Mexicanas and Chicanas who participated in strikes and picket lines but remained anonymous and forgotten.

Huerta's and Chávez's differing experiences of and attitudes toward politicization, union work, visibility, and domesticity illustrate two distinct ways in which Chicanas and Mexicanas attain and exercise power in this trade union. And their personal backgrounds indicate how class and generational distance from Mexico, in addition to gender, influence women's opportunities and social expectations for themselves.

Superficially, it would seem that these two Mexican American women share much in common. Both grew up during the Depression era; Helen Chávez, née Fabela, was born in Brawley, California, in 1928 and Dolores Huerta, née Fernández, in Dawson, New Mexico, in 1930.⁹ Both women wed in the surge of marriages in the post-World War II years. Chávez married in 1948 at age twenty; Huerta married one day shy of her twentieth birthday, in Stockton, California, in 1950.¹⁰ As practicing and devout Hispanic Catholics, both women valued large families: Helen Chávez bore eight children, Dolores Huerta eleven.¹¹

Yet despite these similarities, notable differences in the two women's lifestyles and personal histories reflect the complexity and diversity of the experience of the Mexican American woman in the twentieth century. Huerta, on her mother's side of the family, was a third generation New Mexican; her maternal grandmother was born in Las Cruces, her grandfather in Carrizozo. Both her mother and her father were born in Dawson, a small mining town in the northern part of the state. Helen Chávez was a first generation Mexican American. Her mother was from Sombrerete, Mexico, her father from San Jacinto, Mexico; the two immigrated separately to the United States in the years after the Mexican Revolution and married in Los Angeles, California, in 1923. In terms of bilingualism, economic opportunity, education, and social class, Huerta's family was more assimilated than Chávez's into North American society.¹²

Chávez's parents were farm workers who lived first in the Imperial Valley in California, not far from the Mexican border, and later moved to the San Joaquin Valley in central California, eventually settling in a small rural agricultural community south of Delano. Forced to quit high school after the death of her father, Chávez worked in the fields

and vineyards full time in order to help her widowed mother provide for the family of five children. Chávez's poverty and lack of education typify the experience of immigrant Mexican farm worker women, who often had even less education, spoke no English, and had to make the difficult adjustment of living and working in a foreign country and culture. Huerta, on the other hand, had a more middle-class upbringing, particularly after her mother moved to Stockton, California, where she operated a hotel with her second husband. Huerta's comfortable lifestyle and family resources enabled her to graduate from high school and community college, a rare accomplishment for Mexican-heritage women in the years just after World War II.¹³

Both class and ethnicity affected the opportunities and social outlets open to these women during the 1950s. The years after the war were a time of civic pride and growing political awareness in the Mexican American community.¹⁴ For Helen Chávez, politicization began with her membership in the Community Service Organization (CSO), a grassroots Mexican American self-help group that established a chapter in San Jose, California, in 1952.¹⁵ A young mother, Chávez became involved through her husband's interest in the CSO. As was customary for this generation of women, her activities were essentially auxiliary; she helped in the office, mimeographing fliers or sorting the mail, but usually she worked at home in the evenings, after her domestic chores were done and the children were asleep. "If we were going to have a meeting," she recalled, "I would address all the envelopes or address post cards, whatever had to be done."¹⁶ The voluntarism of Helen Chávez and other women behind the scenes made the CSO one of the most successful associations for Mexican Americans in California during this time.

Huerta also began with traditional, female-defined activities in community-based philanthropy and volunteer work for Mexican American groups, but by the late 1950s she evolved into a more non-traditional activist leader. Huerta's middle-class resources, particularly her education, gave her valuable skills and confidence, aiding this transformation. Her association with the CSO began in 1955, when a chapter was established in Stockton, California. At first she performed a variety of traditionally "female" tasks—making arrangements for CSO meetings, participating in voter registration drives, and teaching

citizenship classes for individuals in the community—as opposed to the "male" tasks of organizing new chapters and serving as an elected officer.¹⁷ Soon, however, she moved into a more demanding position of responsibility and authority: that of paid legislative advocate for the CSO in Sacramento, an unusual pursuit for most women in the 1950s, and particularly so for ethnic women.¹⁸ Through the CSO Huerta also became interested in the poverty and exploitation of farm workers, in 1958 becoming a charter member of a local group, the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA), and serving as an elected official of the AFL-CIO-sponsored Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), founded in Stockton in 1959.¹⁹ Huerta's active participation in the AWA caused opposition from male colleagues:

But Father McCullough [an AWA founder] didn't want me to be involved. He said farm labor organizing was no place for a woman. So I kind of worked under cover, doing the work through my husband [Ventura] and my brother [Marshall].²⁰

This gender-based reaction indicated that Huerta was challenging the customary division that separated acceptable volunteer activity for women from the traditionally male-dominated world of highly politicized union organizing.

A similar contrast appears in the types of work the two women performed in the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), the precursor to the UFW founded in 1962. Helen Chávez's work, like that of most Chicanas and Mexicanas in the UFW, was administrative and supportive. Yet her participation, and that of other female family members and friends, was vital in building the union and carried risks. "The registration crew will most likely be made up of women," noted César Chávez in a letter to a colleague. "I have most of mine and Helen's relatives on the hook, but they are a little afraid of getting evolved [*sic*] and being black-balled. Will most likely keep their names out in the beginning so as to protect them."²⁰ During subsequent demonstrations and strikes, Helen, along with other Chicanas and Mexicanas and their children, joined picket lines to demand union recognition in the face of taunts, intimidation, and threats of physical harm.

After the NFWA was on more solid ground, Helen was persuaded to quit her work in the fields to assume office duties. Hesitating because of her lack of training, she accepted the responsibility reluctantly. "We wanted her [Helen] to learn the credit union bookkeeping," recalled Dolores Huerta years later. "[During one of our board meetings], he [César] yelled at her [Helen] one night into the kitchen, 'You're going to be the assistant bookkeeper.' She yelled back, 'No, I won't either,' but we voted her the job. Boy was she mad! But you should see her books. We've been investigated a hundred times and they never find a mistake." For over twenty years she has managed the UFW's credit union. Since she is the only full-time staff member, without Helen Chávez this union service probably would not have survived. While this work is essential to the institutional apparatus of the UFW it has been underrated because it is an area traditionally reserved for women and one that does not attract the public attention given to strikes and organizing campaigns.²³ In her association with the union Helen Chávez did not seek a policy-making role. Although she wielded considerable informal influence over her husband, and by extension the UFW, this influence was exercised in the privacy of her home.

Huerta's service to the union, on the other hand, has clearly been nontraditional. As a cofounder of the union with César Chávez, and as first vice president, Huerta has held a decision-making post in the UFW from the outset.²⁴ She was also the union's first contract negotiator, founding the negotiations department and directing it in the early years. "[César] Chávez left the negotiations up to Dolores Huerta," observed one commentator.²⁵ Collective bargaining talks such as the mid-1960s Christian Brothers negotiations were demanding, drawn out, and tedious. "They were difficult," Huerta recalled, "and this is where persistence pays off, you just have to keep hammering away. You may have to have five meetings to change two words . . . this is where César gets uptight. He never really quite trusted what I did until he started to negotiate himself; then he found it was pretty hard to get the kind of language that I had gotten, and he started respecting what I had done."²⁶ As she assumed responsibilities and stances that were traditionally held by white males, Huerta encountered criticism based on both gender and ethnic stereotypes. One grower representative reacted to Huerta's forceful negotiating style and uncompromising

positions, "Dolores Huerta is crazy. She is a violent woman, where women, especially Mexican women, are usually peaceful and calm."²⁷ Such comments indicate the depth of her challenge to the political, social, and economic power of California agribusiness, as well as to the ideology of male dominance.

Another major responsibility for Huerta was the directorship of the boycott in New York City, the largest grape distribution center in the U.S., and her service as East Coast boycott coordinator in 1968 and 1969. Her leadership there contributed to the success of the boycott in mobilizing labor unions, political activists, community organizations, religious supporters, women's clubs, peace groups, student protesters, and concerned consumers behind the union. "The whole thrust of our boycott is to get as many supporters as you can," she declared. "You have to get organizers who can go out to the unions, to the churches, to the students and get that support. You divide an area up—in New York we split it up into eight sections—and each organizer is responsible for an area. We get supporters to help us picket and leaflet; we go after one chain at a time, telling the shoppers where they can find other stores."²⁸ The power of this grassroots coalition forced the Coachella and Delano grape producers to negotiate the historic table grape contracts in 1970. Huerta's executive abilities and influence were also apparent when she returned to New York to administer the lettuce, grape, and Gallo wine campaigns from 1973 to 1975.²⁹ The pressure of revived cross-class and cross-cultural cooperation in New York and across the nation led to the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, the first law to recognize the collective bargaining rights of farm workers in California.³⁰ During the late 1970s Huerta's leadership was spotlighted again; she assumed the directorship of the Citizenship Participation Day Department (CPD), the political arm of the UFW, which she administered until 1982.³¹ In all these capacities, Huerta has served on the executive board of the UFW and participated in the highest levels of policy making in the union. She has proved a formidable strategist in the political contests for power within the union and has had a direct influence on guiding the UFW.

Chávez's and Huerta's differing approaches to trade union activism are also revealed in their relationship to the public world.

Helen Chávez has always preferred to remain out of the public eye—a personal choice, but also the result of a more traditional Mexican upbringing, lack of confidence due to limited education, and the fact that English is her second language, characteristics she shares with immigrant Mexicanas, many of whom speak only Spanish and have even less schooling. The most visible aspect of her life has been her four arrests, two of which were widely reported. The first occurred in the Delano area in 1966, when she was arrested with the celebrated group of “forty-four,” many of whom were members of the clergy, for shouting “huelga” (the Spanish word for “strike”). “Being in jail didn’t scare me,” she explained, “because I know that what I’m doing is right and that I’m doing it for people who have worked and sacrificed so hard.”³² The second highly publicized incident took place in Arizona in 1978, when she was arrested with her husband for violating an all encompassing ban on picketing issued by a local magistrate. The two Chávezes underwent arrest to test the constitutionality of the ruling. “It was a disgusting, filthy jail,” she recalled. “I went there and I started cleaning up the place where I had to stay. Mopping. And it was the worst jail I had been in.”³³ Although her acts of civil disobedience have been few, her example has encouraged other Mexicanas and Chicanas to undergo arrest, thus expanding the social sphere for wives, grandmothers, aunts, and daughters in addition to women field workers in the UFW. Significantly, however, Helen Chávez shuns public appearances on her own and feels very uncomfortable in this role. One of her rare solo ventures occurred in Los Angeles at a fundraiser in 1976. “I will not speak [formally to the audience] because I have not spoken in front of a crowd,” she told a reporter who was covering the event.³⁴ Instead, opting for the more traditional practice of female hospitality, Chávez chose to greet people personally in a reception line.

In contrast, Dolores Huerta’s educational background and middle-class resources gave her self-confidence and made her, from her earliest association with the union, a sought-after public speaker. She has addressed countless labor, student, religious, women’s, political, antiwar, environmental, and consumer groups. Through print, radio, and television, she has raised much-needed funds as well as public awareness of the UFW struggles.³⁵ Huerta has also been a very able lobbyist and advocate on behalf of farm workers

before national, state, and local governmental committees. In frequent appearances before congressional bodies, she has forcefully argued the union’s position on a wide range of issues from amending migration labor laws to the health problems of field workers to immigration policy. In 1984 she testified before a House committee:

The Simpson-Mazzoli bill is a thinly disguised effort to stop labor organizing among farm workers. The other provisions of this bill, legalization, that would apply to so few it would be meaningless, sanctions that would be another political tool in the hands of the Immigration Service, would be used as they have always used their power: against unionization.³⁶

Although an altered version of the bill eventually passed, the UFW’s opposition to a guest worker provision prevailed. Probably Huerta’s greatest asset has been her constant presence in the public eye as a representative of the UFW and the ease with which she has related to diverse constituencies, such as student, religious, labor, women’s, and ethnic groups. A four-day trip to Michigan in 1974 typifies her total immersion in and dedication to *la causa*.

In addition to boycott day, Dolores participated in a rally on the University of Michigan [Ann Arbor] campus, an Ecumenical Service in Detroit, a reception of trade union women, sponsored by the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and a Mexican Independence Day Celebration in Pontiac, Michigan. Dolores appeared on two television programs, radio programs and did taped interviews. On the boycott day rally we got news coverage on 2 Detroit T.V. stations, a newspaper story, several radio stations and three feature articles were written on Dolores.³⁷

Huerta, in contrast to Chávez, clearly relishes the demands of a public life.

Finally, the contrast between Chávez’s traditionalism and Huerta’s nontraditionalism appears in their divergent attitudes toward domesticity and home life. Chávez described her role as follows:

I felt that my job was at home taking care of my children. That was the most important thing to me and I felt, as a woman, [that] that's very important to a child. You have children and I think that your children should be raised by you, not by a babysitter.³⁸

Despite the fact that Chávez went to work in the onion fields and grape vineyards to support her family during difficult economic times while her husband organized field workers, and despite her management of the UFW credit union, she still maintains that a woman's proper place is in the home. This value reflects the aspiration of many working-class Chicanas and recently immigrated Mexicanas who desired to care for their families like middle-class Anglo wives and mothers but were denied this opportunity because of economic need. Like black women, who were also forced to work, they were pushed into the labor force by the inferior wages their husbands earned in a racially segmented labor market.³⁹

Huerta's perception of domesticity contrasts greatly with that of Chávez. To accommodate her hectic work and travel schedule and frequent residential changes, she made unorthodox child care arrangements, often leaving her children with nonfamily members and union supporters for extended periods of time. "You have to make a decision," she once told a reporter, "that if working with people, the people have the priority and the family must understand."⁴⁰ In another interview during a fundraising trip to Chicago, Huerta indicated her total commitment to the union. "There is so much to be done. My life is the union, every minute of it."⁴¹ Like other prominent female labor leaders—Mother Jones, Lucy Parsons, Emma Tenayuca, and Luisa Moreno—Huerta reversed the traditional female priorities, placing personal autonomy and trade union activism before family life.⁴²

Women who did not conform to the conventional model of femininity and domesticity were often subject to criticism and, at the very least, ambivalence.⁴³ While Chávez was praised by women in the union for keeping her family together under trying circumstances, Huerta, like her well-known predecessors, endured criticism from family, union colleagues, and the public at large for her nontraditional attitudes toward her personal and family life. "You could expect that

I would [get criticism from] farm workers themselves, but it mostly comes from middle class people," she explained in an interview. "They're more hung-up about these things than the poor people are, because the poor people have to haul their kids around from school to school, and women have to go out and work and they've got to either leave their kids or take them out to the fields with them. So they sympathize a lot more with my problems in terms of my children."⁴⁴ Huerta's distinct perceptions of wifehood and motherhood have also contributed to her two divorces. "I knew that I wasn't comfortable in a wife's role but I wasn't clearly facing the issue," she acknowledged. "I hedged, I made excuses, I didn't come out and tell my husband that I cared more about helping other people than cleaning our house and doing my hair."⁴⁵ Where many women might have resented household tasks, Huerta simply disregarded them.

One might argue that these differences with regard to politicization, work, public visibility, and domesticity merely reflect Huerta's and Chávez's differing personalities; and, indeed, personality does play a role in their choices. However, because the great majority of Chicanas and Mexicanas in the UFW follow Helen Chávez's path to union activism, a deeper process than temperament seems to be indicated here. That path is influenced by complex factors—class, cultural values, social expectations, views of motherhood, childrearing, and the sexual division of labor.⁴⁶

Female UFW volunteers—such as María Luisa Rangel, who moved her family of nine to Detroit, Michigan, in 1968 for the grape boycott, or Juanita Valdez, who transplanted her eight children to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1970 for the lettuce campaign, or Herminia Rodríguez, who relocated her family of six to Washington, D.C., in 1973 for the renewed grape, lettuce, and Gallo wine boycotts—have all participated as part of a family unit and juggled the competing interests of family, work, and union activism on behalf of the UFW. Chicanas and Mexicanas who manage the campesino (service) centers located primarily in rural communities throughout California continue in the Helen Chávez tradition. Female administrators of other union programs, such as Antonia González at the Agbayani Village (retirement home for farm workers), also emulate this pattern. Because their contribution to union building has blended with domestic responsibilities, it

remains largely hidden from public view and goes unrecognized.

In contrast, Dolores Huerta's style of union activism attracts widespread attention and conveys the inaccurate impression that women in the UFW see in her a model for their own trade unionism. In actuality, Huerta's approach is a rare phenomenon. Women, usually U.S.-born, who rose to positions of prominence in the boycott, such as Jessica Govea, director of the Montreal operation, and Hope López, head of the Philadelphia effort, were exceptions like Dolores Huerta. In June 1969, out of forty-three boycott coordinators in major cities, thirty-nine were men and five were women. The elevation of those five to power was accomplished in spite of ambivalent and in some cases even hostile male attitudes toward women with authority. Recognizing their uncommon and tentative status, Hope López, whose ascent to the upper echelons of the union hierarchy was facilitated by the chronic shortage of male candidates and the crisis atmosphere of the union's early years, noted, "Of course, the real test for the female farmworkers will come after we win this strike. The female farmworker will either continue to help the administration of labor or she will be sent back to the labor room."⁵⁰ Chicanas and Mexicanas who aspire to nontraditional positions of power and decision making, such as women in the ranch committees (local union governance bodies), are also few in number and encounter obstacles to and gender-based criticism of their participation in this traditionally male-dominated activity. Ranch committee-women Mary Magaña, Carolina Guerrero, and Cleo Gómez demonstrated stamina and determination in resisting opposition from male family members and coworkers who did not accept women's participation at this level. Organizer Jessie de la Cruz remembered,

It was very hard being a woman organizer. Many of our people my age and older were raised with the old customs in Mexico: where the husband rules, he is king of his house. The wife obeys, and the children, too. So when we first started it was very, very hard. Men gave us the most trouble—neighbors there in Parlier! They were for the union, but they were not taking orders from women, they said. When they formed the ranch committee at Christian Brothers—that's a big wine

company, part of it is in Parlier—the ranch committee was all men.⁵¹

Dolores Huerta's example encourages women struggling in such male-dominated areas of the union. But the admiration for her model also overshadows more traditional types of women's union activism, so that the essential contribution of the rank-and-file female union activists remains taken for granted.

The irony of this situation is that Huerta is an atypical, and perhaps impractical, model of female trade unionism in the UFW today. Huerta's activism most closely resembles the example of César Chávez, who

Approached the work of helping the poor to help themselves in the only way his nature allowed with a single-mindedness that made everything else in his life—home, family, personal gain—secondary. For Chávez, nothing short of total immersion in the work of forcing change was enough. If his wife inherited virtually the entire responsibility for raising their children, Chávez remained unshaken in his belief that the promotion of the greater good made every sacrifice necessary and worthwhile.⁵²

Given the existing sexual division of labor in the union and in society, few women are able or willing to relegate their personal lives or families to a secondary position in order to pursue union organizing. Thus, the more common form of female participation, a la Helen Chávez, remains "invisible"—unrecognized and unappreciated by union members as well as historians. Far from being a "single-handed" effort, the UFW was built and sustained by rank-and-file union members and supporters, including a great many Chicanas and Mexicanas. To appreciate fully the contribution of thousands of ordinary women to the process, researchers need to develop an expanded definition of union activism that takes into account the commitment of women who combine family responsibilities with labor activism.

Notes

I would like to thank Nancy Gabin, Carol Gioneman, and the anonymous readers at *Frontiers* for their thoughtful criticisms and suggestions.

1. For early popular treatments of the UFW see John Gregory Dunne, *Delano: The Story of the California Grape Strike* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966); Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: The First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, Calif.: Farm Worker Press, 1966); Peter Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes: César Chávez and the New American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1970); Mark Day, *Forty Acres: César Chávez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger Press, 1971); Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap* (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1970). A second wave of literature about the UFW appeared during the mid 1970s and was written primarily by reporters who had covered the story firsthand; see, for example, Ronald B. Taylor, *Chávez and the Farm Workers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); Jacques E. Levy, *César Chávez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975); Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: MacMillan, 1977); Sam Kushner, *Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975). A quick review of the titles reveals the emphasis on César Chávez, president of the UFW. For the most scholarly work to appear on the UFW (which also includes analyses of previous farm labor insurgencies), see Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982). While this monograph is the most analytical and interpretive work, it very rarely mentions the participation of Dolores Huerta, cofounder and first vice president of the union, in contrast to the earlier, firsthand, journalistic accounts. See also J. Craig Jenkins, *The Politics of Insurgency: The Farm Workers Movement in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
2. Quoted in James Kirby Martin, et al., *America and Its People, From 1865*. Vol. 2 (Glenview, IL.: Scott Foreman and Company, 1989), 930.
3. Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1982); Susan Levine, "Labor's True Woman: Domesticity and Equal Rights in the Knights of Labor" *Journal of American History* 70, no. 2 (September 1983): 323-39; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 2 (September 1986): 354-82; Nancy Gabin, "'They Have Placed a Penalty on Womanhood': The Protest Actions of Women Auto Workers in Detroit-Area UAW Locals, 1945, 1947," *Feminist Studies* no. 2 (Summer 1982): 373-98; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
4. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Dolores E. Jarnewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in a New South Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *Journal of American History* 69 (June 1982): 82-97; Lois Rita Helmbold, "Downward Occupational Mobility during the Great Depression: Urban Black and White Working Class Women," *Labor History* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 135-72. Asian and Native American women have received the least historical treatment of all ethnic women. See for example Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). For a recent historiographical article on women of color in an understudied region see Elizabeth Jameson, "Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1988): 761-91.
5. Mario T. García, "The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1920—A Case Study," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980): 315-37; Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Rosalinda M. Gonzáles, "Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Families 1920-1940, Women's Subordination and Family Exploitation," in *Decades of Discontent, 1920-1940*, edited by Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 59-84; Michael Wilson, with commentary by Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1978); Laurie Coyle, Gail Hershatter, and Emily Honig, "Women at Farah: An Unfinished Story," in *Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past and Present*, edited by Magdalene Mora and Adelaida R. Del Castillo (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, 1980), 117-43; Patricia Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987); Vicki L. Ruiz and Susan Tiano, eds., *Women on the US-Mexico Border: Responses to Change* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987).
6. For a fuller explanation of this idea, see Margaret Eleanor Rose, "Women in the United Farm Workers: A Study of Chicana and Mexicans Participation in a Labor Union, 1950-1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1988).
7. Although dealing with different places, times, and industries, the following articles have influenced my interpretation: Louise A. Tilly, "Paths of Proletarianization: Organization of Production, Sexual Division of Labor, and Women's Collective Action," *Signs* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 400-17; Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918," *Signs* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 545-66.
8. Maxine Baca Zinn, in "Political Familism: Toward Sex Role Equality in Chicano Families," *Aztlan* 6, no. 1 (1975): 13-27, notes the phenomenon of family

participation in the struggle for Chicano civil rights. See also Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, passim.

9. Interview with Helen Chávez, Keene (La Paz), California, 12 July 1983, 1 (hereafter Chávez Interview). Helen Chávez was born 21 January 1928. Interview with Dolores Huerta, 2, Keene (La Paz), California, 4 February 1985, 69 (hereafter Huerta Interview 2). Huerta was born 10 April 1930.

10. For statistical data on the increased marriage rate in the postwar years, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *A Statistical Portrait of Women in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), 15–20. For Chávez's courtship and marriage, see Levy, *Cesar Chávez*, 86–87, and Chávez Interview, 9. Huerta's first marriage was noted in the local newspaper, see *Stockton Record*, 20 April 1950.

11. Chávez Interview, 11. The following is a list of Helen Chávez's children's birth order and birth dates.

Fernando	20 February 1949
Sylvia	15 February 1950
Linda	22 January 1951
Eloise	13 May 1952
Anna	11 September 1953
Paul	23 March 1957
Elizabeth	15 February 1958
Anthony	12 August 1959

The list of Huerta's children was compiled from the following sources: Huerta Interview, 2, 80–81, 88–92; Interview with Dolores Huerta, 5, Keene (La Paz), California, 19 February 1985, 172–73 (hereafter Huerta Interview 5); Lori Head Survey (La Paz) 12 June 1984, 4; Alicia Huerta Hernández Survey (La Paz), 12 June 1984, 4. Head and Hernández are Huerta's daughters.

Celeste	1951	First Marriage
Lori	1952	
Fidel	1956	Second Marriage
Emilio	1957	
Vincent	1958	
Alicia	1959	
Angela	1963	
Juanita	1970	Third Relationship
María Elena	1972	
Ricky	1973	
Camilla	1976	

12. Richard Griswold del Castillo, *La Familia: Chicano Families in the Urban Southwest, 1848 to the Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 96–106. The author discusses the variations between native-born Mexican American and immigrant Mexican families in terms of bilingualism, assimilation, employment patterns, economic conditions, and cultural values. New Mexican Hispanics have considered their history and experience distinct from that of immigrant Mexican families; for an exploration of their past, see Nancie L. Gonzales,

The Spanish-Americans of New Mexico: A Heritage of Pride (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 1–85. For biographical data see Interview with Dolores Huerta, 1, Keene (La Paz), California, 16 March 1984, 1–8, 14, and 39 (hereafter Huerta Interview 1), and Chávez Interview, 1–3, 5–6.

13. Huerta graduated from Stockton High School in 1947 and later went onto Stockton Junior College, where she was awarded an Associate Arts degree (a two-year program); see *Who's Who in Labor* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 283, and *Stockton Record*, 20 April 1950. See also Jean Murphy, "Unsung Heroine of La Causa," *Regeneración* 1, no. 10 (1971): 20. For statistics on college attendance for Spanish-surnamed women, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population Characteristics of Selected Ethnic Groups in Five Southwestern States* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), 2. Graduation from high school and college attendance were rare accomplishments for Latinas, as revealed by this census report conducted in 1960. Even in these later years, only 14.2 percent of Spanish-surnamed women in the Southwest completed four years of high school. This number contrasted with a figure of 31.2 percent for Anglo women. Latinas who achieved between one and three years of college fell dramatically, to 3.2 percent. The corresponding figure for Anglo women was 13 percent. Huerta's family provided her with advantages and exposure not generally available to Mexican American women of her generation.

14. Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America. A History of Chicanos*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 329–30.

15. Dunne, *Delano*, 66–67. On these pages, Fred Ross, an organizer for the CSO, explained that he got the Chávezes' name as prospective recruits from a Mexican American public health nurse employed at a well-baby clinic visited by Helen Chávez. See also Matthiesen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 43–50 and Levy, *César Chávez*, 97–99.

16. Quoted in Chávez Interview, 23. For an analysis of the CSO see Ralph Guzmán, *The Political Socialization of the Mexican American People* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 137–43.

17. Huerta is mentioned by name as a contact person in a newspaper article describing a regional CSO meeting in Stockton; see *Stockton Record*, 25 July 1958.

18. Huerta's activity as the CSO legislative representative is noted in *CSO Reporter*, n.d. (circa 1959), Ernesto Galarza Collection, Box 13, Folder 8, p. 2, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University (hereafter Galarza Collection, Stanford).

19. London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 39–78 and 79–98. The authors have devoted a chapter to the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA) in which they mention the activities of Dolores Huerta. London and Anderson also discuss the AFL-CIO-sponsored Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), founded in 1959, in which Huerta participated. The director of AWOC notes the hiring of Dolores Huerta and her election to the office of secretary of AWOC; see correspondence from Norman Smith to Don Vial, 13 July 1959, AWOC Collection, Box 2, Folder 7, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan (hereafter ALUA).

20. Quoted in Levy, *César Chávez*, 145.
21. Quoted in letter from César Chávez to Fred Ross, 2 May 1962, Fred Ross Collection, Box 3, Folder 6, ALUA.
22. Quoted in Barbara L. Baer and Glenna Matthews, "You Find a Way": The Women of the Boycott," *The Nation*, 23 February 1974, 237.
23. Helen Chávez, along with her husband, was an original member of the credit union; see Articles of Incorporation of Farm Workers Credit Union, 21 July 1963, UFW Small Collection, Box 4, no folder, ALUA. (The original document is now stored in the archive's vault. Note: Most of the UFW collection is unprocessed.) Statistics collected by the National Credit Union Administration for 1985 reported a membership figure of 2,389 and listed the total number of loans issued for the year as 273; see National Credit Union Administration, Financial Statement for UFW, 1985, 3-4.
24. Huerta was the only woman elected to the National Farm Workers Association, the precursor to the UFW. She was a vice president. The other original officers were César Chávez, general director; Manuel Chávez, secretary-treasurer; Gilbert Padilla and Roger Terrones, vice presidents. See César Chávez to Fred Ross, 24 January 1963, Fred Ross Collection, Box 3, Series I, Folder 11, Correspondence, 1963, ALUA.
25. Quoted in Taylor, *Chávez*, 217. Huerta explained that she used the ILWU (Longshoreman) pineapple-worker contracts for Hawaiian workers as her model. For an example of early UFWOC contracts, see Collective Bargaining Agreement between DiGiorgio and United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, 13 January 1966, Anne Draper Collection, Box 20, Folder 173, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University (hereafter Draper Collection, Stanford). For a winery contract, see United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (hereafter UFWOC), Box 2, Folder: Almaden Vineyards Contract, 1967, ALUA. The Almaden contract was negotiated by Huerta after a card check election held 28 June 1967. A minimum wage of \$1.80 plus standard UFWOC benefits were guaranteed; see *El Malcriado*, 16 August 1967.
26. Taylor, *Chávez*, 217.
27. Quoted in Barbara L. Baer, "Stopping Traffic: One Woman's Cause," *The Progressive* 39, no. 9 (September 1975): 39-40. For an opposite opinion, see Kushner, *Long Road*, 185.
28. Taylor, *Chávez*, 229-30.
29. For Huerta's involvement in the 1968 boycott, see a sample of her correspondence with New York union leaders: letter from Dolores Huerta to Patrick Gleason (Retail Food Clerks), 18 January 1968, in UFWOC, New York Boycott, sec #376, Box 6, Folder 6, Huerta Correspondence, 1968, ALUA. Huerta generated a tremendous amount of publicity on the strike and boycott; see, for instance, [New York] *International* (official publication of the Seafarers' International Union of North America) 1, no. 2 (February 1968). Vivid accounts of Huerta's participation in the negotiations with Delano grape growers in 1970 appear in Levy, *César Chávez*,

- 313-25, and Day, *Forty Acres*, 161-68. Huerta again headed the New York boycott effort and coordinated the East Coast boycott operations in 1973. For a typical staff meeting and local coordinators' reports, see Minutes, Staff Meeting, 22 May 1973, UFW New York Boycott Office (acc 6125/78), Box 1, Folder: Weekly Meetings-Minutes, ALUA. For a report on success in the chain store campaign, see East Coast Boycott News, 27 July 1973, UFW Chicago Boycott Office (sec 2/3176), Box 2, Folder: Dolores Huerta File, ALUA.
30. Majka and Majka, *Farm Workers*, 233-47. See also Meister and Loftis, *A Long Time Coming*, 215-28.
31. Huerta's assumption of the directorship of the CPD is noted in an open letter to UFW supporters; see "Dear Brothers and Sisters from the Northern California Boycott Staff," n.d. (circa April 1978), Anne Loftis Collection, Box 8, Folder 2, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University (hereafter Loftis Collection). For César Chávez's congratulatory comments on Huerta's legislative achievements as director of the CPD, see *Acta de cuarta convención constitucional de la unión de campesinos de America*, AFL-CIO, 12 Agosto 1979, Salinas, California, 24-25 (Proceedings of the Fourth Constitutional Convention of the UFW).
32. Quoted in Chávez Interview, 33. For the first arrest of Helen Chávez in 1965, see *Bakersfield Californian*, 20 October 1965. See also Levy, *César Chávez*, 192-93.
33. Quoted in Chávez Interview, 33-34. Accounts of her Arizona arrest with her husband, César Chávez, were reported in several newspapers; see *Yuma Daily Sun*, 14 June 1978, and *Los Angeles Times*, 25 June 1978. See also Majka and Majka, *Farm Workers*, 253.
34. *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1976.
35. For example, after her address to the delegates, Huerta was presented with a \$10,000 check by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America at their convention held in Miami in 1968; see (Washington, D.C.) *AFL-CIO News*, 8 June 1968, UFWOC Box 9, Folder: *AFL-CIO News*, 1968, ALUA. In addition, Huerta has made countless speeches and commentaries on radio and television. See, for example, Transcript, PBS, "The Advocates": 8 March 1973, "Should You Support the National Lettuce Boycott?" Dolores Huerta, discussant, Vertical Files, Chicano Studies Center Research Library, UCLA.
36. Quoted from U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Labor Standards of the Committee on Education and Labor, Hearings on Immigration Reform and Agricultural Guestworkers, 98th Cong., 2nd sess., 11 April and 3 May 1984, 21-27, especially 21. For earlier examples of her testimony, see U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Amending Migratory Labor Laws: Hearings on S.1864, S.1865, S.1866, S.1866 and S.1868, 89th Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., 16 March 1966, 690-95. See also U.S. Congress, House, Special Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor, Extension of National Labor Relations Act to Agricultural Employees: Hearing on HR. 4769, 90th Congress, 1st sess., 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12 May 1967, 81-91.

37. Report on Activities for International Boycott Day, 14 September 1974, UFW Boycott Central (sec May 1977), Box 2, Folder: Michigan, Detroit 1974, ALUA. [Detroit] *Sunday News*, 15 September 1974. [Detroit] *Solidaridad Motor-City Boycott*, November 1974, UFW Cleveland, Ohio Boycott (acc 1/17175), Box 1, Folder: Boycott Newsletters, 1973-74, ALUA.
38. Chávez Interview, 23-24.
39. Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 154-59. The author also notes women's ambivalence over work and family roles. For black women see Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love*, passim.
40. Quoted in typed transcript of interview with Dolores Huerta by Ron Taylor at the AFL-CIO convention in Miami, 1974, Ron Taylor Collection, Series 11, Box 9, Folder 21, ALUA.
41. Quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, 19 April 1975.
42. James J. Kenneally, *Women and American Trade Unions* (St. Albans, VT: Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1978), 92-118; Carolyn Ashburgh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles Kerr Publishing Co., 1976), passim; "Living History: Emma Tenayuca Tells Her Story," *The Texas Observer*, 28 October 1983: 7-15; Ruiz, *Cannery Women*, 104-5, 107-8, 113, 116, 119.
43. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 235. Hall, "Disorderly Women," 354-82.
44. Quoted in [San Bernardino, Calif.] 82 *Chicano* 7, no. 34 (25 January 1973): 3. In addition, Huerta cites her father's opposition to her unconventional family and personal life. Huerta's second husband, Ventura Huerta, vigorously opposed her nontraditional attitudes and child-care practices. Huerta alludes to her disagreements with her husband over the care of their children in Barbara L. Baer and Glenna Matthews, "You Find a Way," 234. See also Huerta Interview, 1, 43-49.
45. Quoted in Baer, "Stopping Traffic," 39.
46. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, passim. Milkman, *Gender at Work*, passim.
47. Margaret Rose, "From the Fields to the Picket Line: Huelga Women and the Boycott: 1965-1975": *Labor History* (forthcoming).
48. Rose, "Women in the United Farm Workers," chapter 6.
49. Interview with Antonia Guajarda Gonzáles, Delano, California, 7 October 1983.
50. Quoted from rough draft of typed text, no title, "The female farmworker is as unique . . ." [by Hope López], 20 March 1970, UFW, Philadelphia Boycott Office, Box 5, Folder 13, ALUA.
51. For quotation from de la Cruz, see Ellen Cantarow, "Jessie López De La Cruz: The Battle for Farmworkers' Rights" in *Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change*, edited by Ellen Cantarow, Susan Gushee O'Malley, and Sharon Hartman Strom (Old Westbury NY: The Feminist Press, 1980), 136-37. For ranch committee women, see Rose, "Women in the United Farm Workers," chapter 7. For the difficulties of other working women in the male-dominated world of trade

- unionism, see Ruth Milkman, "Women Workers, Feminism and the Labor Movement since the 1960s" in *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of US Women's Labor History*, edited by Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 306.
52. Quoted in Cletus E. Daniel, "César Chávez and the Unionization of California Farm Workers" in *Labor Leaders in America*, edited by Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 360.

Unsung Heroine of La Causa

Jean Murphy



Dolores Huerta on Picket Line, Delano, 1966. Courtesy of John A. Kouns.

If César Chávez is the hero of the farm workers' movement, Dolores Huerta is its unheralded heroine.

As vice president and director of negotiations for the AFL-CIO United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, Mrs. Huerta plays a key role as she has since its beginning—in the union's struggle for contracts with California's growers. However, her name is almost unknown outside the movimiento. The role is not easy. Eighteen hour days of planning the lettuce boycott, of speaking at rallies, of negotiating, or traveling and of seeking public support for La Causa are more common than not.

\$5 a Week

Nor is the work well paid. Like all other union officials and employees, she makes a salary of \$5 a week and a subsistence largely depending upon contributions of food and clothing.

"All of us have very exotic wardrobes. We get our clothes out of donations," Mrs. Huerta said during a recent trip to Los Angeles, where the only adornment on her hand-me-downs was a new boycott button.

Clothes and comfort mean little to her. Home these days is a sofa in an organizer's house in Fresno but she sleeps wherever her work takes her. She eats, when she remembers to eat, "the groceries our supporters give us."

Down from Delano

She is divorced and her seven children are scattered from the University of Oregon to the homes of relatives and friends. She is known

among co-workers as a dedicated, tireless leader, second only to Chávez, who is devoting her life to the movement.

The union, she said, is seeking to replace the "inhuman" piece rate system with contracts providing for minimum hourly wages, medical and death benefits and pesticide controls.

"The average life span of a farm worker is 49 years," she said. "It makes you want to cry. None of us want our food at that price."

Mrs. Huerta, 40, began as a farm worker when she was a 14-year-old Stockton girl, picking cherries and tomatoes. . . . Her mother worked in canneries but refused to work in the fields.

Real Problems

"With no toilets in the fields, even going to the bathroom was a real problem," explained Mrs. Huerta, who, even after her marriage, worked in the vineyards of Delano.

In the meantime, she had earned a provisional teaching credential by attending Stockton Junior College and taking night classes at the University of the Pacific. She taught for a year in Stockton.

"I realized one day that as a teacher I couldn't do anything for the kids who came to school barefoot and hungry," she said.

She joined Chávez in the Community Service Organization and, in 1962, they began organizing the farm workers. Today, about 30,000 farm workers are covered by union contract.

"We couldn't have a union without the women," says Mrs. Huerta, who insists that other women are the real heroines of the movement. "Their sacrifices have been unbelievable. And the participation of women has helped keep the movement nonviolent.

"They're so damn poor. It's necessary for most of the women to work in the fields. Imagine trying to keep a family together when you're migrant workers living in extreme poverty and your kids still have to work in the fields, too."

Bad Treatment

"Women in the fields get treated very badly . . . with additional humiliation and indignities. When you get propositioned by a foreman, all you can do is quit.

"I can remember picking tomatoes for 11 cents a lug—one day my

husband and I together made \$4—and there was just one old beer can for all of the workers to drink water out of.

"Those are some of the reasons women are so strong for the union. They want to get rid of this system."

Among women field workers who now hold positions of responsibility in the union are Mrs. Chávez, its credit union manager; Gloria Soto, in charge of services; and Ester Uranday, in charge of membership.

"Working in the fields is the only other work they've done," Mrs. Huerta said.

The only woman among five vice presidents of the union, Mrs. Huerta is also often the only woman at the negotiating table.

"César doesn't like to negotiate," she said. "And maybe the growers take scoldings from me that they wouldn't take from a man."

6

The Women of the Boycott

Barbara L. Baer and Glenna Matthews

Dolores Huerta, vice president of the United Farm Workers, was standing on a flat-bed truck beside César Chávez. She didn't show her eight-and-a-half months' pregnancy, but she looked very tired from the days and nights of organizing cross-country travel plans for the hundreds of people who were now waiting in the parking lot alongside the union headquarters at Delano, Calif. She leaned down and talked with children, her own and others. Small children held smaller ones, fathers carried babies on their shoulders.

The parking lot was filled with cars, trucks and buses, decorated with banners and signs. People sang strike songs and Chávez spoke to them about the boycott. Dolores listened intently, nodding, brushing her straight black hair away from her face from time to time and smiling softly at the children. A priest blessed the cars and buses whose destinations read like a history of the great American migrations in reverse: "*Hasta la Victoria-Miami!*"; "*Viva la Huelga-Cleveland!*"; "*Hasta La Boycott-Pittsburgh!*"

Five years ago there would have been nothing unusual about families assembling to move out with the crops, but this time the decision to pull up roots was different. The people on the dusty blacktop were UFW members and until a week earlier they had had a commitment to stay in the area. The union had made it possible for most to have a house or rent one, send their children to a school all year, get medical care. Most of these people had spent the summer on strike lines or in jails. They, within one week of César Chávez's announcement of a national boycott of grapes, had sold their houses and everything they could not carry with them to buy the cars, winter clothing, whatever

else they might need for years outside the San Joaquin Valley. They were ready to leave by the last day in August.

We had come to Delano specifically to meet Dolores Huerta. As we waited for the caravan to leave, she told us to look well at the other women. These women were "nonmaterialistic." They packed up their families and pledged them to stay out on the boycott until the union got its grape and lettuce contracts back. If the woman of a family refuses, Dolores said, the family either breaks up or is lost to the union. Families are the most important part of the UFW because a family can stick it out in a strange place, on \$5 a week per person, the wage everyone in the union is paid (plus expenses). Often the leaders would be women because women were strong at home and becoming stronger in the union. The women led the fate of the union, Dolores told us.

Chávez and Dolores Huerta knew the people they were talking about—and what they were asking of UFW members they asked of themselves first. All summer the union fought to win second contracts from the grape growers in southern and central California valleys who had signed with them first in 1970. But as each contract expired, the Teamsters signed up the growers immediately—thirty at once around Delano. Chávez called the contracts illegal, "sweetheart agreements," because the workers had not voted on their representatives. Chávez called for pickets on the Teamsters-contracted fields. County courts, sympathetic to the growers, enjoined the UFW strikers from active picketing. Thousands of clergy and students came to support the farm workers and some were jailed. Jailings and trials went on all summer.

Farm workers have never won a major strike in the fields because they are not protected by the National Labor Relations Act, whose provisions guarantee the right to picket, because growers and their allies have used violence and, most important, because there is an unlimited scab labor force across the Mexican border. There is no way to win a strike when men will scab at any price.

Toward the end of the summer the picket lines became violent. In separate incidents in the town of Arvin, two union men were killed. A sheriff struck Nagi Daifullah, a Yemenite, on the head with a flashlight. Juan de la Cruz was shot as he came off the picket line.

The United Farm Workers would not fight violence with violence. When the funerals were over, Chávez called for all strikers to get ready to leave on a second national boycott. The first had lasted five years. This one, though better organized, was more complicated: there were now grapes, wines, lettuce and Teamsters as well as the growers.

By noon the dust had settled in a low haze on this crossroads between vineyards—the stucco buildings the UFW calls "Forty Acres." The union offices were nearly empty, though telephones kept ringing. We went into a bare room with a long table to talk to Dolores Huerta.

Dolores was the first person Chávez called upon to work with him organizing farm workers into a union. That was more than a dozen years ago. She became the UFW's first vice president, its chief negotiator, lobbyist, boycott strategist and public spokeswoman. And in partnership, Dolores and Chávez formulated the UFW's nonviolent and democratic philosophy.

In 1955, Fred Ross brought Dolores Huerta to a meeting of the Community Service Organization in Stockton, and she has been in political action ever since. Ross, working in San Jose with Saul Alinsky, had taken César Chávez to his first CSO meeting there. Both Dolores and César say they owe their present lives to Fred Ross, and they keep drawing the thin, spare man, now 60, away from his book about the union and back into UFW struggles.

When Dolores began organizing, she already had six children and was pregnant with a seventh. Nearly twenty years later, there are ten children, and Dolores is still so slim and graceful that we find it hard to imagine her in her youth, the age of her daughter. She has not saved herself for anything, has let life draw and strain her to a fine intensity. It hasn't made her tense, harsh or dry. She shouts a lot and laughs with people. She tells us she has a sharp tongue but it seems to us she has an elusiveness of keeping her own counsel, mixed with complete directness and willingness to spend hours talking. Her long black hair is drawn back from high cheek bones, her skin is tanned reddish from the sun on the picket line, and in her deep brown eyes is a constant humor that relieves her serious manner.

Contradictions in her life must have taken, and continue to take, a toll: her many children, Catholic faith and a divorce, her high-strung nerves and the delicate health we know she disregards. It must be that

her work, the amount she has accomplished and the spirit she instills in others, have healed the breaks. We talked to Dolores Huerta for several hours in the union offices when the last cars had left Delano.

"I had a lot of doubts to begin with, but I had to act in spite of my conflict between my family and my commitment. My biggest problem was not to feel guilty about it. I don't any more, but then, everybody used to lay these guilt trips on me, about what a bad mother I was, neglecting my children. My own relatives were the hardest, especially when my kids were small; I had six and one on the way when I started and I was driving around Stockton with all these little babies in the car, the different diaper changes for each one. It's always hard, not just because you're a woman but because it's hard to really make that commitment. It's in your own head. I'm sure my own life was better because of my involvement. I was able to go through a lot of very serious personal problems and survive them because I had something else to think about. Otherwise, I might have gotten engulfed in my personal difficulties and, I think, I probably would have gone under.

"If I hadn't met Fred Ross then, I don't know if I ever would have been organizing. People don't realize their own worth and I wouldn't have realized what I could do unless someone had shown faith in me. At that time we were organizing against racial discrimination—the way Chicanos were treated by police, courts, politicians. I had taken the status quo for granted, but Fred said it could change. So I started working.

"The way I first got away from feeling guilty about neglecting my family was a religious cop-out, I guess. I had serious doubts whether I was doing the right thing, giving kids a lousy supper to go to a council meeting. So I would pray and say, if what I was doing wasn't bearing fruit, then it would be a sign I shouldn't be doing it. When good things came out of my work, when it bore fruit, I took that as a sign I should continue and that the sacrifices my family and I were making were justified.

"Of course, I had no way of knowing what the effects on my kids would be. Now, ten years later, I can look back and say it's O.K. because my kids turned out fine, even though at times they had to fend for themselves, other people took care of them, and so on. I have a kind of proof: my ex-husband took one of my kids, Fidel, during the first

strike. We didn't have any food or money, there was no way I could support him. He was eating all right, like all the strikers' kids, but on donations. So my ex-husband took the boy until he was 11. I got him back just last year. He had a lot of nice clothes and short hair, but he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. When my ex-husband tried to take another boy, the judge ruled against him. You could see the difference when you compared the two kids—one was skinny and in raggedy clothes and with long hair, but real well, happy. Fidel is coming back now to the way he used to be, and he's got long hair too.

"We haven't had a stable place to live—I haven't been anywhere for more than two months, except in New York on the boycott—since 1970. But taking my kids all over the states made them lose their fear of people, of new situations. Most of us have to be mobile. But the kids are in school, they go to school and work on the boycott. Even the 10-year-olds are out on the boycott in the cities.

"My kids are totally politicized mentally and the whole idea of working without materialistic gain has made a great difference in the way they think. When one of our supporters came to take my daughter to buy new clothes in New York, she was really embarrassed. We never buy new clothes, you know, we get everything out of the donations. She said, 'Mama, the lady wanted to buy me a lot of new things, but I told her they didn't fit me.' You know, she came home with a couple of little things to please the lady, but she didn't want to be avaricious. Her values are people and not things. It has to be that way—that's why everyone who works full-time for the union gets \$5 a week, plus gas money and whatever food and housing they need to live on, live on at the minimum they can."

How has it happened, we asked, that in the very culture from which the word "machismo" derives, the women have more visible, vocal and real power of decision than women elsewhere? Dolores told us that the union had made a conscious effort to involve women, given them every chance for leadership, but that the men did not always want it.

"I really believe what the feminists stand for. There is an undercurrent of discrimination against women in our own organization, even though César goes out of his way to see that women have leadership positions. César always felt strongly about women in the movement.

This time, no married man went out on the boycott unless he took his wife. We find daycare in the cities so the women can be on the picket line with the men. It's a great chance for participation. Of course we take it for granted now that women will want to be as involved as men. But in the beginning, at the first meetings, there were only men. And a certain discrimination still exists. César—and other men—treat us differently. César's stricter with the women, he demands more of us. But the more I think of it, the more I'm convinced that the women have gotten strong because he expects so much of us. You could even say it's gotten lopsided . . . women are stronger than the men.

"Women in the union are great on the picket line. More staying power, and we're nonviolent. One of reasons our union is nonviolent is that we want our women and children involved, and we stay non-violent because of the women and children.

"One time the Teamsters were trying to provoke a fight to get our picketers arrested. Forty, fifty police were waiting with paddy wagons. We had about 300 people. The Teamsters attacked the line with 2 X 4 boards. I was in charge of the line. We made the men go to the back and placed the women out in front. The Teamsters beat our arms but they couldn't provoke the riot they wanted and we didn't give in. The police stood there, watch us get beaten; the D.A. wouldn't even let us sign a complaint. But we had gained a lot of respect from our men. Excluding women, protecting them, keeping women at home, that's the middle-class way. Poor people's movements have always had whole families on the line, ready to move at a moment's notice, with more courage because that's all we had. It's a class not an ethnic thing."

We knew that the women of the UFW found themselves in a unique situation. Unlike the sex-determined employment of the urban poor, the jobs of farm worker women and men had always been the same. They had to work, but it wasn't housework or even factory work separating them from men. Women had picked, pruned and packed in fields, canneries and sheds side by side with men. But would the women decide to let the men organize the union? Dolores Huerta had spoken for herself alone; the resolution of conflicts between family, political, union action, would come to each UFW women in her own terms.

Lupe Ortiz has been an organizer in a union field office since she left school. She is about 25, a natural leader, with a quality of making people laugh to get work done. Yet for all her big voice and humor, she didn't know how women could assert themselves at home as they did at work. What she told us seemed the reverse of our more familiar, middle-class feminism; here, by contrast, a woman insisted on work equality, and in large part received it, but she wouldn't challenge the traditional order of the family.

As Lupe directed her male co-workers in Spanish, she expounded to us in English the differences between Anglo and Chicano women. "You Anglo women, you do it your way, but I don't ever want to be equal to my husband."

"You get the same salary; don't you want the same voice at home?"

"In work, but not at home. No, at home you have to know when to open your mouth and when not to. You have to learn you can't go places men go, like bars."

"Don't you want it to change? For men to act as though you're equal?"

"It's not exactly equality. It's our culture. I don't want our Chicano culture to change. Let men have the say-so." Lupe laughed, this time openly, as she looked at the men in the office. "I bet you split up with your husbands more often than we do because you make head-on conflicts."

Ester Yurande, a generation older than Lupe, showed a generation difference in her appearance: she was as carefully, femininely dressed, with lovely long hair and glittering earrings, as Lupe had been rugged in jeans, sweatshirt and close-cropped curls. Ester had worked in the fields until she became the bookkeeper for the Medical Clinic at Forty Acres. She had been a UFW member from the start, been jailed in the early 1960s. How, we asked her, had the union changed the lives of the women who came to the clinic?

"A doctor treats us with dignity now. We don't get charity when we're having a baby, we get care. It's to do with pride. Mexican women around here used to do what the men said, but Dolores Huerta was our example of something different. We could see one of our leaders was a woman, and she was always out in front, and she would talk back. She wasn't scared of anything."

Dolores herself had told us that she didn't hesitate to argue. "You know, César has fired me fifteen times, and I must have quit about ten. Then, we'll call each other up and get back to work. There have been times when I should have fought harder. When he tells me now, 'you're getting really impossible, arguing all the time,' I say, 'you haven't seen anything yet. I'm going to get worse.' Because from now on, I'm going to fight really, really hard when I believe something. There have been times I haven't. I can be wrong too, but at least it will be on the record how I felt."

When we asked Ester how she felt about fighting back herself, she didn't want to answer. We had become outsiders once more, women who didn't comprehend her way. Men have accepted strong women in the union, but there remains deeply engrained in these women a respect for their men's *machismo*.

There is a religious fervor about the union, which has made its members call it La Causa. Perhaps the closeness of the Catholic Church to the movement is one more reason women have been able to identify with its goals. The UFW women have brought their personal strength and their faith to the union; the union in turn has reinforced and completed their lives by giving them a direct form of action and an ideal.

Dolores, very religious herself, told us that women were most important to the union because a woman determined the fate of a whole family. If a wife was for the union, Dolores said, then the husband would be, too. If she was not, if she was afraid or too attached to her home and possessions, then the family usually stayed out of the union, or it broke up. There had been a number of broken marriages that had cost the union the strength of a united family.

María-Luisa Rangel did not want to go out on the first boycott. At that time—in 1968—many women were staying in California while the men lived together in boycott houses in Eastern cities. The Rangels, parents of eight children, had saved enough money to own part of a family store, and they owned their home in the small town of Dinuba, near Fresno. They would have to part with both if they went to Detroit for two years. Hijino Rangel was determined to go. So María-Luisa went. Looking at her unsoftened features, her inaccessible but not unfriendly black eyes, we sensed the strength that had enabled her

then to wrench herself away from everything she owned and keep her family together. She had a hard time in Detroit; she didn't know much English, the climate was completely strange; and she had two operations in the city. But when they returned to the valley in 1970, the Rangels knew that they had helped win the boycott that secured the 180 union contracts with grape growers of the Coachella and San Joaquin Valleys. And the experience had worked on María-Luisa. She spoke out as a representative of the union about the present boycott. "It's just like it was then. The struggle is for the people to win, not the growers but the people. I know it, and they—the growers—know it."

Women have paid different prices for making the union part of their lives. The 100 women who spent many weeks in Fresno jails last summer (for violating anti-picket injunctions) ranged from minors to great-grandmothers. There were field workers and nuns, lay religious women and union officials. For some of the Chicano women, it was a reminder of previous jailings when no nuns had been present and the guards had beaten "the Mexicans." For others, it was the first time, and almost a vacation from their daily lives. Work-hardened baked hands became almost soft. All the women shared their experiences—the farm workers told city women like Dorothy Day, editor of the *Catholic Worker*, about their struggle, and learned from her about women's movements in the cities and in the Church.

Maximina de la Cruz and her husband, Juan, were born around 1910 in Mexico. Juan entered America on the bracero program, picked crops in Texas and then in New Mexico, where Maximina worked in a clothing factory. They married, moved with their son to the San Joaquin Valley in 1960, and joined the union during the first strikes in 1965. Juan de la Cruz was killed last summer by a man who fired his .22-caliber rifle into the picket line from a truck. Maximina told us she remembers that many times the growers or the Teamsters put on deputy badges, joined in beating the farm workers, and then arrested them on grounds of self-defense. The man who shot de la Cruz has entered a plea in valley courts that he shot defending himself from the picket line.

Maximina was observing the thirty-day mourning period when we came to her home in Arvin. Hearing us arrive, she and her mother, Porfiria Coronado, met us at their gate, and without a word, in the

dark, she took us, with hands that felt like warm, worked clay, into her living room. Candles beneath pictures of saints and near a wedding photograph were the only light. As the night went on, she told us of her early life of hardship, the many moves, purchase of their small house, and the changes the UFW had made in their lives.

"We *know* the growers. They want to go back to the old days, the way it was before we had a union, when we got a dollar an hour, no toilets or water in the fields, no rest periods, and they could kick you out without any pay for not picking fast enough. A whole family earned less than one union man today. They fought us hard and dirty each time, but we didn't give in. We won't. This time we're out in the cities again to tell the good people what it is like to work here. I'm staying on here, and I'll be back at work in the fields, but not until the union gets its contracts back. I might have to wait a while but I know people will understand and help us win back our union. I'm proud to be a woman here. Juan was proud of the union. You know, on the picket lines, we were so gay, peaceful and *atractivas*, even the grandmothers. Until *they* shot their gun."

Except for the Catholic Church, the powerful and wealthy institutions of California have opposed the UFW at one time or another. Grower-biased central valley law enforcement and the courts have made a mockery of legal institutions; agri-business has never given up trying to break the union through legislation; Gov. Ronald Reagan has been photographed eating scab grapes; even the U.S. Government helped the growers by buying non-union lettuce in great quantity to ship to troops in Vietnam. Yet the greater the odds, the more the union has come to represent poor people against the rich and mighty. Dolores Huerta fights best when the situation looks bleakest. She attributes her refusal to give up to her mother's influence.

"My mother was one of those women who do a lot. She was divorced, so I never really understood what it meant for a woman to take a back seat to a man. My brothers would say, 'Mama spoiled you,' because she pushed me to the front. When I was first involved in organizing, my mom would watch the kids for me, but then she got involved herself and she couldn't baby-sit anymore. She won the first prize in Stockton for registering voters and increasing membership.

"To tell the truth, I was prejudiced against women for a long time

and I didn't realize it. I always liked to be with men because I thought they were more interesting and the women only talked of kids. But I was afraid of women, too. It was in the union that I lost my fear of being around women. Or put it this way, I learned to respect women. César's wife, Helen Chávez, helped me more than anyone else. She was really committed to home. Actually, César's toughest organizing jobs were Helen, his wife, and Richard, his brother. They wanted to lead their own lives. Helen kept saying she wouldn't do anything, and she's so strong and stubborn that he couldn't convince her to change her mind. She took care of the food and the kids, and while César was organizing she was supporting them too, working in the fields. César, keeping his *machismo* intact in those days, would make her come home and cook dinner.

"We wanted her to learn the credit union bookkeeping. We yelled at her one night into the kitchen, 'You're going to be the assistant bookkeeper.' She yelled back, 'No, I won't either,' but we voted her the job. Boy was she mad! But you should see her books. We've been investigated a hundred times and they never find a mistake."

The union had to teach its members—farm workers with almost no education or training—the professional skills it required. Marie Sabadado, who directs the R. F. Kennedy Medical Plan, Helen Chávez, head of the credit union, and Dolores, chief negotiator and writer of labor contracts, taught themselves. Dolores made it sound almost easy to learn very specialized skills in a week's time.

"When César put me in charge of negotiations in our first contract, I had never seen a contract before. I talked to labor people, I got copies of contracts and studied them for a week and a half, so I knew something when I came to the workers. César almost fell over because I had my first contract all written and all the workers had voted on the proposals. He thought we ought to have an attorney, but really it was better to put the contracts in a simple language. I did all the negotiations myself for about five years. Women should remember this: be resourceful, you can do anything, whether you have experience or not. César always says that the first education of people is how to be people, and then the other things fall into place.

"I think women are particularly good negotiators because we have a lot of patience, and no big ego trips to overcome. Women are

more tenacious and that helps a great deal. It unnerves the growers to negotiate with us. César always wanted to have an *all-woman* negotiating team. Growers can't swear back at us or at each other. And then we bring in the ethical questions, like how our kids live. How can the growers really argue against what should be done for human beings just to save money?

"We knew everyone was immensely proud of the union services. We also knew that the legal staff (as well as the doctors and nurses at the clinic) were volunteer lawyers from the outside. In the past, the growers got rid of nascent farm-worker organizations by breaking them in the courts. The UFW has an excellent, tough legal staff. But to stay permanently with the union doctors and lawyers need to come from the farm workers themselves. The union will have to send its men and women out of the community for training. There has never been the luxury of a few years in which to do so, and there is a certain fear of becoming 'corrupted' by the universities."

The United Farm Workers headquarters are located in Delano, between Bakersfield and Fresno, and also at La Paz, a town no larger than a half-block of post office, store and gas station, east of Bakersfield in the Tehachapi range. Union field offices lie in small towns in the central valleys. From anywhere in these valleys it is about three hours, north to San Francisco, or south to Los Angeles on any of the state's three parallel freeways. Meeting only union people, in their austere but clean and bright offices, we hadn't seen what local fieldworker conditions were like. We took a look at some company towns by leaving the freeways and taking side roads at random into the fields.

Company towns are wholly dependent for their income on the prosperity and good will of the growers. Since the big growers are the last employers in America to escape collective bargaining, one can judge their civic responsibility by the looks of the town: boarded-up or gutted buildings, cracked sidewalks, decaying stores—they all show that the growers spend their profits on themselves. Only the bars, preserves of the men, where the wine is sold, do business.

Livingston is a company town of Gallo Wines near Merced on Highway 99. Outside the town, the Gallo brothers haven't hidden their wealth. They have splendid houses, isolated even from one another, surrounded by velvety slopes leading to pools, tennis courts

and greenhouses. Not far away, but well hidden, the Gallo workers live in company camps lost at dusty terminals of country roads in the shadow of enormous vats guarded by armed men. When we were there, a determined nucleus of UFW strikers who had refused to work under Gallo's new Teamster contract had also refused to obey the grower's eviction notices. For that, they had been deprived of garbage collection and water.

Downtown Livingston seemed only slightly less bleak than the camps. Fifty people had gathered in front of the local courthouse for a silent protest against the imprisonment of fellow strikers. Aggie Rose, a former elementary schoolteacher of Portuguese ancestry, was head of the union office. As she spoke to the men and women forming the procession, encouraging and exhorting them in Spanish and Portuguese to keep their spirits up, the intensity of her light eyes, her constantly moving thin figure, momentarily brought life back into the town. The line of marchers circled the courthouse for a while. Police in squad cars hovered along dark streets. There was nothing to do but disperse.

Dolores would soon be back in New York directing the East Coast boycott. She was determined that we understand, before we left, why the union would not be defeated, not even in Livingston.

"One of the reasons the growers are fighting us so hard is that they realize we're changing people, not just getting a paycheck for them. Without our militancy we wouldn't have a union. So we keep pushing our people, getting them out on other issues, like the tuition rise in California colleges, or the Presidential campaign. We had farm workers out door to door for McGovern. And when our people come back from the boycott, they will be stronger than ever."

We asked Dolores whether she had ever been scared or lacked confidence in her ability to organize people.

"Of course. I've been afraid about everything until I did it. I started out every time not knowing what I was to do and scared to death. When César first sent me to New York on the boycott it was the first time we'd done anything like that. There were no ground rules. I thought, 11 million people in New York, and I have to persuade them to stop buying grapes. Well, I didn't do it alone. When you need people, they come to you. You find a way . . . it gets easier all the time."