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# Siete Lenguas: The Rhetorical History of Dolores Huerta and the Rise of Chicana Rhetoric

Christine Beagle

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*SIETE LENGUAS:*  
THE RHETORICAL HISTORY OF DOLORES HUERTA AND THE RISE OF  
CHICANA RHETORIC

by

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B.A., English Language and Literature, Angelo State University, 2005  
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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To my children Brandon, Aliyah, and Eric. Your brave and resilient love is my savior. I love you all.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is both a history of Chicana Rhetoric in the North American polis and a perspectival analysis of three key texts by Chicana labor right's activist and vice president of the United Farm Workers union, Dolores Huerta. The dissertation covers the years between the Mexican Revolution and the Mexican American Generation (1910s-1950s) and the Chicano Civil Rights Years to the present day (1960s-2010s) to trace the legacy of Chicana Rhetoric exemplified in the rhetorical career of Dolores Huerta. Huerta's role as rhetor lies in the analyses of three key texts, so as to explore Chicana Rhetoric in-depth through the lenses of the media, the scholarly, and the personal. I argue that Chicana Rhetoric is representative social activist rhetoric and of current intersections in social, political, racial, and gender rhetorics, and that Dolores Huerta embodies these intersections.

This dissertation seeks to as a rhetor and activist as the center of her own narrative and public life, uncoupling her from an auxiliary and secondary role in the grand

narrative of Chicano history and Chicano rhetoric. Huerta illustrates the rhetorical life of an engaged, autonomous, and efficacious Chicana rhetor.



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## Preface

I am a West Texas woman; raised, educated, challenged, and nurtured by the people and land of San Angelo. My hometown is small, antiquated, and tough. The tallest trees are cottonwoods, we let our cactus grow wild, and we often measure time by the roll of the tumbleweed. Our West Texas ways seem quite backward outside of our small sphere, but that is how we like it. In fact, our town's unofficial motto is, "Keep San Angelo Backward."

We West Texans are an eclectic group; a sundry mix of our long and complicated history. We were Indigenous Native land for millennia and slowly we became indigenous Northern Mexico. Around 200 years ago we entered our Wild West period as a Republic and eventual state consisting of Anglo settlers, buffalo soldiers, *Tejanos*, and *Mexicanos* all vying for land and rights. We were the county seat of brothels, saloons, and gambling and though we would like to think ourselves good Christians, these vices still haunt our day-to-day existence. A part of me believes that San Angeloans are bred with this Wild West sensibility ingrained into them. Another part of me believes we West Texans are deeply proud of our atavistic ways.

San Angelo, this microcosm of nostalgia, was my home and the people surrounding me, neighbors, teachers, family, and friends alike, constituted my entire world until I moved for graduate school. I grew up outside the city limits on a few acres of land. We had rows of pecan trees, which my father and grandfather tended, with a few wild pockets of sage and cactus dotting our fences. We also had endless blue skies, storms in the distance, and, at night, a heaven full of stars. The weather was no less magnificent. Throughout the year, San Angelo typically has over 100 days of over 100-

degree heat and then another 30 plus days of below freezing cold. Our land is beautiful, but extreme. You have to have physical mettle and mental fortitude to survive this place.

I was raised in this land as the daughter of a blue-eyed Anglo and a red-headed *Cubana*, and this strange mix had no counterpart in San Angelo, where binaries were drawn quite clearly and unquestionably. The Anglos knew I wasn't completely white and the Chicana/os knew I wasn't completely Latina. Luckily, being *Cubana* in a desert town was exotic enough that both factions of my youth could not quite figure out where to place me, and thus I was able to make friends across the battle lines. Growing up in the rural part of town meant that my closest companions were the kids from the other farms and ranches nearby. We were a true *mezcla* of first, second, and legacy generation kids of varying ethnicities who came together through proximity and our mutual love of four wheeling, hunting, and late night bonfires. San Angelo was, truly, a great place to grow up.

This tough environment and these strong people shaped my language practices in a unique way. San Angelo is deep, almost central Texas, while also being situated about four hours from *la frontera*, Acuña, Mexico. My lexicon was a definite reflection of these intersections. I spoke a combination of Standard English and Tex-Mex daily as I navigated my different discourse communities, moving seamlessly between and around different formalities, tones, and codes as the audience and situation demanded. From the earliest age, I knew when to use “elote” over “corn,” the difference between “*tocar*” and “*jugar*,” and to always use the honorific terms “Sir” and “Ma’am.” My primary education teachers included Ms. Alschwede, who instilled in me a respect for clarity, and Señora Perez who taught me the power of word, sentence, and paragraph organization. Our

schools were not bilingual mandated, but my teachers always allowed, encouraged, and even expected competency in English and Spanish because it was a reflection of our communities' language practices. West Texans are a pragmatic bunch, and we were instructed on how to be functional language users in the rural, border Southwest.

Looking back, I took for granted that this was a typical education in speaking, reading, and writing. Were not all kids instructed by diverse teachers in diverse language practices? Chicanas were my lexical mentors, my guides in standards and norms. My syncopation, my in-sentence and in-paragraph organization, my love of the tricolon were all cultivated under the tutelage of Mexican American women whose multilingual wordplay was just devastating. They were my inspiration. They were my teachers, my community leaders, my mother, my friends. They were me. My love of language came from these eloquent rhetor's insistence on precision and perfection. Chicanas were my rhetorical paradigm.

The moment I realized that this paradigm was, to some, nothing but an anomaly, an unimportant disruption in an otherwise white-washed and tightly closed canon, was a moment of brutal realization. It was like a punch to the gut. The type of punch that expels every molecule of air in your body and leaves you gasping, desperate. Until this moment I thought it acceptable that my rhetorical education was provided and guided by Chicanas. Not just acceptable, honorable. Mine was a privileged education, of diverse and pragmatic means. As a neophyte graduate student, eager to respectfully absorb what my professor's were teaching, I listened, hollowed, as I was told, blatantly, that women of color do not belong in our Rhetorical canon. Women of color were not important

language users. They were not rhetors and they were not rhetoricians. They were not important. Not important, at all. My language was, in one fell swoop, negated.

As I sit here in Albuquerque, a few years removed from that crisis of linguistic identity, I am able to better grasp how that moment and the unique place and people that raised me has led to the focus of Chicana rhetorics for my dissertation. Sure, West Texas is atavistic. Yes, we often seem to be years, decades, centuries behind the progress of the rest of the world. It is true, we are the stereotypical cowboys and the pastoral paintings of the range, the yellow roses and the cacti. It is all very good-ol'-boy, very romantic. But, it is also so much more than that. The progress that we do make is made out of clear conviction. Our approach to social issues is nothing if it isn't functional and honest. Our approach to language instruction and use is a microcosm for all that is right about this small swathe of the Southwest. While city-dwelling scholars far removed from my humble hometown argue whether the rhetorical canon has any place for women of color speakers, for multilingual speakers, for dynamacy and fluidity, we West Texans are, and have been, unquestionably embracing these rhetors as paradigms for forever.

I am blessed to be a West Texas woman, to embody the landscape and the language of this place. Mine is a legacy of ecology, feminism, and language that must be recorded and told, for the sake of the progress of our Rhetorical canon.

## Introduction

*“Basta de gritar contra el viento—  
toda palabra es ruido si no esta acompañada de accion<sup>i</sup>.”*  
Gloria Anzaldúa

*Current State of Rhetoric and Composition Studies*

Fifteen years ago, Chicano Rhetoric and Composition scholar Jaime Mejía lamented the lack of Chicana/o voices in rhetoric and composition texts (40). He explained that though Chicana/o presence in the academy had been steadily growing since the Chicano Rights Movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s, literary and rhetorical canons had not yet aligned with this growth. Mejía noted a few prominent names regularly anthologized in composition readers, such as Tomás Rivera’s two-page excerpt from his opus *Y no se lo tragó la tierra* in the *Macmillan Anthology of American Literature* (1998). Also present in circulation was Richard Rodriguez, whose assimilationist manifesto *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* tended to be privileged over more radical texts (47). Yet, no consistent presence of Chicano scholars, speakers, and writers was apparent, and the Chicana voice fared even worse, being systematically silenced and excluded from anthologies and readers.

The only Chicana present in contemporary anthologies of rhetoric was Gloria Anzaldúa, whose presence in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg’s *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* was momentous<sup>ii</sup>.

Musing on the inclusion of Anzaldúa, Bizzell writes:

[I]t is no coincidence that as white women and men and women of color increase their numbers in the ranks of scholars of rhetoric, a second category of “new tradition,” [...] has emerged: thinkers practically unknown to the traditional

historians of rhetoric, sometimes because we did not have the methodological and pedagogical approaches necessary to construe their texts as rhetoric and sometimes because their work itself was hidden from scholarly view, fragmented, or lost. These figures alter the traditional tradition even more radically than the former minor figures do, because they require not merely the readjustment of existing scholarly priorities, but a whole new set of priorities. (113)

With the acknowledgement of a Chicana speaking, writing, and theorizing as worthy rhetoric, and the subsequent inclusion of this rhetoric in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, the cornerstone anthology of rhetorical studies, a move towards the unsilencing of Chicana rhetoric began.

What little presence there was of Chicana/o voices in our texts and readers, Mejía argued, was often relegated to inclusion based on “ethnic” or “multicultural” grounds and lacked any critical pedagogy (50). The significant lack of the Mexican American voice in Rhetoric and Composition studies has not been Mejía’s concern alone. Chicano scholar Juan Guerra has written extensively on the concept of transcultural repositioning, using *El Movimiento* and his childhood in South Texas as the basis for this concept.<sup>iii</sup> Guerra argues that Chicana/o rhetors are transcultural and/or multilingual and they enact the practice of shifting their linguistic styles and rhetorical decisions based on shifting rhetorical situations (8). By examining the ways that Chicana/o rhetors enact transcultural repositioning, Guerra argues, “a better understanding of how our multifaceted self-representations and our multiple ways with words can be used to enhance rather than restrict our ability to move fluidly in and out of porous communities that currently comprise our nation” (ibid). Michelle Kells adds to the discussion of Mexican American



speakers and speech as a tool of inductive analysis applicable to Rhetorical Studies and Composition Studies. In “Understanding the Rhetorical Value of *Tejano* Codeswitching” Kells explores the complexities of *Tejano* Spanish, contextualizing it in terms of space, speaker, and situation. She writes, “[h]istorical, political, cultural, and economic factors influence choices about self-representation through language in implicit and unconscious ways” (25). Following a “metalinguistic reflection” (28) and analysis of four bilingual speakers codeswitching during personal, daily speech acts, Kells concludes that “codeswitching is a poignant metaphor, a fluid emblem representing the languages, literacies, and localities our students bring to the classroom,” (36). Later she argues that “[w]ritten or spoken, our languages reflect and inflect our spheres of being in the world, our disparate and overlapping circles of identification” (37).

This dissertation responds to the scholarship of Mejía, Guerra, and Kells and others in Rhet/Comp studies who have called over the last fifteen years for the new priorities that Bizzell anticipated. Rhetoric and Composition Studies has failed to integrate diverse rhetorics such as Chicana/o rhetoric and significant number of speakers in the United States and at the university level. Patricia Bizzell speaks to this issue of the canon when ruminating on the “tradition” of rhetorical studies that honor “socially privileged men” in both who was included in our canon as well as who was able to make the choices on textual inclusion (“Editing the Rhetorical Tradition 109”). She proclaims,

Although the tradition appears to be text-based, how we wish to teach the art of producing them govern our choices of rhetorical texts to preserve, elevate, or delete. And, modern histories of rhetoric have shown that the preferences

governing these choices arise out of complex cultural factors relating to gender, race, social class, national identity, and more. (109)

Chicana rhetoric provides Rhet/Comp scholars with the linguistically and socially diverse speech acts and texts that represent these complex cultural factors of language and identity.

Chicana Rhetoric becomes a paradigm for contemporary rhetorics because it embodies race, social class, and gender tropes while also representing language manifesting as a means of social action. Chicana rhetoric constellated into discourse as a form of resistance against the Chicano hetero-normative/masculinist discourses of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and the rhetoric of 1970's and 1980's Chicano intelligentsia. These heteronormative movements were crucial in coalescing Chicanos into a nationalist discourse necessary for a unified civil rights movement, at the expense of the Chicana voice and political power. As a counter-discourse to the legitimization of Chicano Rhetoric through the institutionalization of Chicano Studies programs after the 1969 *Plan de Santa Barbara*, Chicana rhetors/activists like Dolores Huerta advanced a resistance discourse that ultimately countered the hegemonic rhetorics of male-centered/heteronormative *cultura* and identity formation. Thus, Chicana rhetoric arose as both a form of resistance as well as cohesion, functioning to give language and solidarity to Chicanas in *La Causa* and *El Movimiento*<sup>iv</sup>. Chicana scholar Yvonne Yarbro-Bejerano extends this definition of Chicana Rhetoric when she states, “many of the positions from which the Chicana subject speaks are occupied in relation to racial, class and cultural conflicts and divisions, as well as gender ones<sup>v</sup>” (595).

Chicana rhetoric has evolved over the decades to become a discourse that embodies race, class, and sociocultural tropes in expansive and widely applicable ways. Though originally imagined as the politically aware, yet still diminutive of “Chicano,” the term “Chicana” and the rhetoric it represents is now a political act of identification that is no longer dependent on its *machismo* counterpart (Leon 1). In other words, Chicana rhetoric treats identity as a rhetorical act, insisting that “identity is a position from which people in the world do things: such as connect, incite transformation, or mediate lived experiences” (Leon 4). The Chicano Civil Rights Movement served as the “third space” for Chicana rhetoric to come into cohesion, and over the last four decades of cultivation, Chicana Rhetoric has become a rhetoric capable of representing women of color, transcultural rhetorics, border rhetorics, and counter rhetorics. By excluding the Chicana voice from our Rhet/Comp studies and anthologies, we effectively negate the Chicana presence at important junctures in our cultural imaginary<sup>vi</sup>. Commenting on how Chicana rhetoric, and in particular Dolores Huerta, functions as rhetorical heuristic, Stacy Soward writes:

In addition to being underrepresented in rhetorical scholarship, Dolores Huerta’s rhetorical styles are especially useful exemplars of how women from places of marginality negotiate rhetorical agency through intersectional identities of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. (“Rhetorical Agency As *Haciendo Caras*” 225)

And later, “Dolores Huerta’s rhetoric provides a compelling example of how marginalized women might negotiate rhetorical agency in different ways” (ibid). What Sowards touches on is the intersectionality of the rhetoric of Dolores Huerta and, by extension, of Chicana Rhetoric.

It is this intersectionality of race, class, gender, socioeconomics, politics, and language that, I argue, is the next wave of important and impactful scholarship in both Rhetorical Studies and Composition Studies. By exploring Chicana Rhetoric through the enactment of it in the public sphere via Dolores Huerta, insight into how Chicanas, border residents, multilingual speakers, and U.S. women of color respond to, transform, and ultimately enact rhetoric(s) becomes elucidated and a methodology arises.

*Dolores Huerta as Rhetorical Heuristic*

Dolores Huerta was born in Dawson, New Mexico, a Northern New Mexican town situated at the linguistic crossroads of Spanish, New Mexican Spanish, Diné, and English. Huerta's father, Juan Fernández, was a first generation Mexican American and spoke Spanish fluently. Huerta's mother, Alicia Chavez, was a native New Mexican whose linguistic roots were steeped in New Mexican diversity (Rose 8). Her childhood household was bilingual, with nuances of registers and formalities and this household, which included her paternal and maternal grandparents, encouraged Huerta to become literate and vocal (M. García 28). At the young age of three, Huerta moved with her mother, maternal grandfather, and younger siblings to Stockton, California, another such linguistic crossroads. In California, Huerta would come into contact with Tagalog, Chinese, the Spanish of the *Californios*, and with African American English (M. García 27). This early exposure to diverse languages and language uses would lend to Huerta's prolific speaking abilities and her ability to speak across audiences for different purposes, all to successfully persuasive ends.

As a child submerged in this rich linguistic environment, Huerta would earn the nickname "*Siete Lenguas*" or Seven Tongues, from her grandfather Herculano Chavez,

who not only encouraged Huerta to engage in conversation but also cultivated in her a sense of power via the spoken word. Huerta recalls, “My grandfather used to call me Seven Tongues...because I always talked so much” (M. García 9). In this radical move against the stereotype of the young Chicana who embraces vocality as a *hocicona*, a loud mouth or back-talker, or *malcriada*<sup>vii</sup>, ill-raised or spoiled, Huerta was instead encouraged and nurtured into rhetorical agency by her family. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa explains this cultural tyranny of silencing when she writes,

Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives. (38)

Anzaldúa continues,

The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a *Mujer mala*. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of a male, she is selfish. (38)

This renouncement of selfhood and female voice was still the cultural norm during Huerta's childhood, yet through the encouragement of her mother and grandfather, Huerta was raised to reject silence as a cultural norm.

This nurturing of voice was but one of the many unique elements of Huerta's upbringing that lent to her later ascension to labor and civil rights leader. Huerta's father

was a coal miner and migrant farm worker who would go on to serve in the New Mexico state legislature, and her mother was a Depression-era small business owner. Both of her parents practiced egalitarianism within their close relationships and within their community involvement. Huerta would later reflect that her childhood was one of equality, where she was expected to labor alongside her brothers at the family business, do well in school, and cultivate a civic sensibility (M. García 28). Huerta's ascension to labor right's activist, civil rights figurehead, and woman's right's advocate were all built upon her keen awareness of the power of language to move people towards progressive, self-efficacious means.

But, Huerta's rise to rhetorical leader within these movements was complicated by both her ethnicity and her gender. Perlita Dicochea contends, "Chicana Movement discourse is one example of lived feminist experience from which to further develop discussions about patriarchy, agency, and responsibility for the generations of Chicana/Latina youth" (79). As a Mexican American woman, Huerta's presence in the inner circle of activists, of organizers, and on the senate floor as lobbyist was often an anomaly and thus not met kindly by other leaders, often white and often male, of these movements. Her fight against silence and subjugation was also the fight to establish a rhetoric that was wholly Chicana in approach, delivery, and effect. I agree with Dicochea and I argue that through a deep analysis of Huerta's words and the contexts in which these words were spoken, a mapping of Chicana rhetoric and *La Causa* can continue.

*The Current Conversation: Chicana Rhetoric and Scholarship*

Scholarship informing this dissertation by and about Chicanas speaking in the North American *polis* is a sundry *mezcla* of journal articles spanning decades and fields

of study and anthologies bringing together fiction and prose non-fiction alike. Though covering a spatiotemporal expanse, which would imply a breadth of source material, there remains a definite dearth of deep pedagogy and theory concerning Chicana voice and linguistic power dynamics within Rhetoric and Composition Studies. While other underserved groups have made substantial progress in having their voices established, studied, and disseminated, Chicana's presence in our Rhetoric and Composition canons is still scant. This exclusion is due to a complex interweaving of stifling cultural norms that limit Chicana's exercise of voice in the *polis* coupled with continuous and manifest forms of systemic racism that the Mexican American women endures, the Chicana rhetor is still not a respected voice in our rhetorical canon. Following is a rendering of the scholarship important to Chicana rhetoric and to this dissertation project.

This is not to say, though, that Chicanas are not present, do not speak, do not affect change, and are not constantly pursuing voice. Precedence has been set, and long ago, by Mexican American speaker/activists such as Emma Tenayuca and Maria Varela, though the demand for rhetorical studies on Chicana rhetors is still limited. The few rhetorical studies published in Rhetoric Journals in circulation are few and far between. Notable is Marta E. Sánchez's article, "La Malinche at the Intersection: Race and Gender in *Down These Mean Streets*" published in a special topics issue in *PMLA* in 1998 (113.1). Sánchez explores "the retroping of La Malinche, a rhetorical figure based on a historical one" (118). Using this as her frame, Sánchez critiques the *machismo* stance and rhetoric of *El Movimiento*, elucidating the gender and racial strictures experienced by Chicanas and homosexual Chicanos.

Jessica Enoch has published more recently, with works on Chicana feminist rhetoric and the remapping of the rhetorical trajectory to include Chicana rhetors. Enoch's "Survival Stories: Feminist Historiographic Approaches to Chicana Rhetorics of Sterilization Abuse" (*Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35.3) centers on revised historiographies of Chicana rhetorical activity, placing Chicana voice in important political and judicial contexts and subsequently exploring the feminist rhetoric employed therein. And in "Para la Mujer: Defining a Chicana Feminist Rhetoric at the Turn of the Century" (*College English* 67.1), Enoch calls upon the Aristotelian and Ciceronian concepts of definition as a rhetorical act to rewrite *Mexicanas* and Chicanas in the rhetorical tradition and consequently explore what Chicana feminism looked like at the turn of the twentieth century and currently.

Moving beyond the field of Rhetorical Studies, Chicana rhetoric is strongly evidenced in Women's and Ethnic Studies scholarship. These fields of study, much unlike Rhet/Comp, are predicated on inclusion of diverse voices, not for tokens or to meet quota, but rather as valid and integral scholarly topics. An early example of these inclusionary practices from these fields outside of Rhet/Comp is from scholar Alma M. Garcia, who published the seminal article, "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980" in *Gender and Society* (3.2) in 1989. This article articulated many of the discourse topics and concerns that scholars working in Chicana Rhetoric would later interrogate and build upon. Perlita Dicochea writes in the re-historicizing frame with a more theoretical bent in "Chicana Critical Rhetoric: Recrafting La Causa in Chicana Movement Discourse, 1970-1979" (*Frontiers* 25.1). Here, Dicochea explores two Chicana publications, *Regeneración* and *Encuentro Femenil*, in pursuit of Chicana



feminist tropes dealing with lived experiences such as “welfare, employment, education health, family roles, the movement, and sexuality,” all important topics in the context of *El Movimiento* (79). Dicochea proclaims that recovering and studying “Chicana Movement discourse and activism reminds us that the complexity of our human conditions call for leadership to embrace, manage, and manipulate dimensions of power so that they reveal their dynamism within Chicana/o specific experiences” (88).

These acts of discourse, activism, and leadership are explored through Lori A. Flores’ article “A Community of Limits and the Limited of Community: MALDEF’s Chicana Rights Project, Empowering the ‘Typical Chicana,’ and the ‘Question of Civil Rights, 1974-1983’” (*Journal of American Ethnic History* 27.3). Flores recounts the inception of Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund’s (MALDEF) Chicana Rights Project (CRP). Founded in 1973 by then-MALDEF president Vilma Martinez, the CRP “defended Mexican American women’s rights in employment, education, immigration, housing, reproductive rights and child care through a level of litigation and community outreach never before seen” (Flores 82). Flores focuses on the Chicana feminist rhetoric of the CRP by exploring correspondence and media materials during the early years of the Project’s inception. Through these a problematic picture of the CRP as a middle-class organization that often positioned Chicanas as triple oppressed and ignorant arises (Flores 89-90). Flores’ scholarship sets a precedent in working with Chicana rhetoric in terms of methods of analysis and taking a critical approach.

The fields of Communication and Speech have also been crucial in recovering Chicana Rhetoric, with topics ranging from discourse analysis of Chicana organizational rhetoric to the importance of Chicana voice in epistolary form. Though these fields most

closely parallel Rhet/Comp in content and approaches, it is Communication and Speech, and not Rhetoric, that has heeded the call for inclusion of the Chicana voice as important to our understanding of U.S. linguistic practices. In “Creating Discursive Space Through a Rhetoric of Difference: Chicana Feminists Craft a Homeland” (Quarterly Journal of Speech 82), Lisa A. Flores takes the concept of a rhetoric of difference and discursive space to uncover how and where Chicana rhetoric happens. She argues that:

Chicana feminists are not alone in their discussion of space; indeed, the concept of space in relation to public and private spheres is common in feminist works. Space as it relates to home, however, is a notable theme in the writings of Chicana feminists. Living with the unique experience of being a border culture between Mexico and the Southwest part of the United States, Chicana/os find themselves with a foot in both worlds. (142)

Here the rhetorical concepts of the *polis* (public sphere) and *oikos* (private sphere) are filtered through a Chicana feminist lens. Stacey Sowards has also published on Chicana rhetoric, specifically on Dolores Huerta’s rhetoric, in “Rhetorical Agency As *Hacienda Caras* and Differential Consciousness Through Lens of Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class: an Examination of Dolores Huerta's Rhetoric” (*Communication Theory* 20. 2) where she applies the Anzaldúan concept of *hacienda cara*, or making face, along with Chela Sandoval’s idea of differential consciousness<sup>viii</sup> to Huerta’s speech acts.

Sowards has also done work exploring the epistolary relationship between Huerta and César Chávez in “Rhetorical Functions of Letter Writing: Dialogic Collaboration, Affirmation, and Catharsis in Dolores Huerta's Letters” (*Communication Quarterly* 60. 2). The rhetorical analysis conducted in this article explores how Huerta creates an

identity for herself through the acts of delineating her accomplishments and sacrifices as a leader of the UFW. These acts of *haciendo cara*, Sowards argues, enabled Huerta to build a reputation as a nationally recognized social justice advocate for issues relating to race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and gender (Sowards 295).

Book length studies and collections of Chicana Rhetoric are few. Possibly the most important of these to Chicana Rhetoric is *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature* (2002), which contains numerous writings by Mexican American women. Chapter 12 in the anthology is titled “Early Perspectives on Class and Gender” and includes essays by Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Luisa Capetillo<sup>ix</sup>. Later, in the Chapter “Editorial Discontent,” Sara Estela Ramirez’s “Speech Read by the Author on the Evening that the ‘Society of Workers’ Celebrated the Twenty-Fourth Anniversary of its Founding” is included and Andrea and Teresa Villarreal’s “Why Are You Still Here, Mexican Men? Fly to the Battlefield” is found in the chapter “Against Tyranny.” These important tracts from the early twentieth century are all precursors to the rhetoric of the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement, speaking on much of the same issues (agrarian reform, education, gender equality) that later Chicana rhetors would take up. Maylei Blackwell’s *¡Chicana Power!* (2011) is also an important text in terms of contextualizing Chicana rhetoric. Blackwell uses archival research as well as oral histories to recount the *machismo* culture of *El Movimiento* and to explore the ways that Chicanas resisted this subjugation to fight for gender equality within the movement.

These texts prove that the interest for recovering, analyzing, publishing, and disseminating Chicana speech acts is present, though the lack of a strong, central demand in Rhetorical Studies remains. This absence of demand for Chicana Rhetoric is important

for a few reasons: it perpetuates the idea within the canon of Rhetoric that the Chicana does not speak publically, it deters Rhetoric scholars from pursuing studies and analyses of Chicanas as efficacious speakers, and it prolongs the re-cycling of the few important yet dated studies already in circulation.

Literary theory has also proven important to Chicana Rhetoric. For instance, Tey Diana Rebolledo provides an informative methodology for analyzing Chicana texts in “The Politics of Poetics: Or, What Am I, A Critic, Doing in This Text Anyhow.” Though Rebolledo intends for these to be applied to literary analyses and not public rhetorical acts, per se, the guidelines hold for analysis of either. Rebolledo examines subversive discourses and tactics such as avoiding hero worship and being critical even if the author/rhetor is still alive, that motivate the analyst to take Chicana texts seriously. By following Rebolledo’s guidelines, scholars engaged in recovering and analyzing the complex rhetorical moments of Chicana activists can help to contribute a deep and broad body of texts to the canon of rhetorical studies.

There is much theorizing on queerness and *Chicanisma*, including seminal works such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Paso por Sus Labios*, which each detail the rebellion against the sexual dichotomy of virgin/whore that is so ingrained into young Chicanas. These works are supported by anthologies such as the collaborative Anzaldúa/Moraga *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo, that created a space for queer Chicanas to write publically about their sexual identities. These Chicana writer/theorists are but a few of the cadre of women “lifting the veil of the Virgin’s face

to show a real woman who is not exempt from the trials of life” (NietoGomez, MEChA Resolution, 1973).

*The Kairotic Moment*

The need to address this current silencing and stasis of the Chicana voice in Rhet/Comp Studies is pressing. We live in the age of California’s Proposition 277, which limits bilingual education in a state largely consisting of Spanish language speakers and of the Arizona anti-immigration bill SB 1070 that effectively allows police to target anyone appearing to be of Mexican descent. This idea that people of Mexican descent in the United States are unworthy or undesirable is even more blatant in Texas, where the Texas Board of Education successfully adopted a series of social studies textbooks that essentially eliminated minority voices, such as Dolores Huerta, from the curriculum<sup>x</sup>. In this atmosphere of xenophobia, where Mexican Americans are written as “other” or completely written out of our histories altogether, and where our school children are taught a dangerously myopic version of the history of Mexican Americans, the need to re-historicize and re-vise Chicanas as established, complex, political, and rhetorically efficacious is now.

As arbiters of the theory and the power of language, rhetorical scholars have a great stake in exploring the *lacunae* of Chicana voice in our canon. If we are going to progress as a discipline and as a thoughtful community, we must recognize our faults and oversights and strive to mend and bridge these. And, our history as a discipline marked by white, male, heteronormative, English-Only ways is by far our biggest fault. When an entire discipline’s corpus consists of white males, scholarship remains myopic, theories work within a vacuum, and the applicability and longevity of our work is limited.

Rhetorical studies must heed the serious call to remap and regender the trajectory of the canon, and allow that remapping and regendering to be broad and inclusive. This struggle of remapping and regendering is already in progress (Glenn 1997; Pérez 1999; Enoch 2008) and I believe that now is the *kairotic* moment to continue the revision of our rhetorical trajectory to substantiate the Chicana as rhetor.

In pursuit of the recovery and deep contextualization of historic women rhetors, scholars such as Cheryl Glenn, Patricia Bizzell, Susan Jarratt, and Linda Ferreira-Buckley have come into conversation on the regendering of the rhetorical trajectory. Cheryl Glenn comments:

Writing women (or any other traditionally disenfranchised group) into the history of rhetoric...interrogates the availability, practice, and preservation (or destruction) of historical evidence, [and] simultaneously exposes relations of exploitation, domination, censorship, and erasure. (“Truth, Lies, and Method” 389)

I believe that a full-length rhetorical study of Chicana rhetoric through case studies of exemplar texts, herein three speeches of Dolores Huerta, is needed in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Complementing a thorough trajectory of Chicanas active in the American *polis* through the turn of the twentieth century to today, an in-depth analysis of a representative Chicana rhetor will begin to fill this gap. Dolores Huerta is a heuristic for this project in many aspects; as a Chicana speaker, as a civil rights, gender rights, and labor rights activist, and as a community organizer. Analyses of her speeches and testimonies have the potential to be far-reaching and easily adapted and cited in many fields for many different reasons. The choice of Huerta as a definitive Chicana rhetor

carries with it a potentially extensive impact. From the 1950s through present day, Huerta has been actively working for Mexican American rights, sometimes alongside other Chicana activists and sometimes as a woman apart. Her rhetorical fluidity and dynamism combined with her revisioning of culture and gender norms make her a Chicana rhetor that is not easily lumped into a category or essentialized into a type.

*Key Texts of Dolores Huerta for Analysis*

In order to effectively demonstrate how third space feminism, in particular the idea of liminal spaces as forum for Chicanas to speak, how particular and universal audience is used by Chicana rhetors to engage and position their audience, and how social semiotics provides a framework of rhetoric-in-action for Chicanas, I chose three primary texts to work with and through. These texts represent public acts of Dolores Huerta's rhetoric, each represent a different rhetorical situation, and each represent one of the three branches of rhetoric. Following are brief explications of each text.

First among these texts is Huerta's 1969 "Statement to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor," representing forensic rhetoric. This brief, yet powerful testimony from early in Huerta's rhetorical career argues for the abolishment of 'federal obstacles to farm worker organizing' (M. García 213). Next, I will examine her 1973 debate with Chuck O'Brien of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which falls into the category of deliberative rhetoric. This debate is an example of Huerta as a more established and authoritative voice as Vice President of the United Farm Workers and as a figure in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Finally, I will look at Huerta's controversial 2009 UCLA Medal Recipient Remarks, a turn at epideictic rhetoric, where Huerta speaks on education, politics, and women's' and migrant's rights. These remarks

are interesting because the formal, congratulatory tone of the occasion and the genre was interwoven with strong politics and thus demonstrate a movement away from traditional rhetorical practices practiced by Huerta's rhetorical foremothers and the coming to fruition of Huerta's rhetorical practices and, by extension, Chicana rhetoric.

### *Theoretical Frames*

I chose the following three representative texts not only because of their time periods and functions, but also because of they represent a range of formalities, tones, audiences, and approaches. I wanted a diverse set of texts to analyze so that the complexities of Chicana rhetoric could be elucidated. In pursuit of these complexities, I have chosen three particular theoretical frames, Emma Pérez's third space feminism, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's universal and particular audience, and Hodge and Kress' social semiotics, to use throughout the analysis chapters. Third space feminism accounts for the spaces that Huerta's rhetoric arises and allows me to explore the context more deeply. Universal and particular audience allows for the analysis of how Huerta is positioned and subsequently positions her audience via trope and word choice. And, finally, social semiotics provides the terminology that coalesces the previous two theoretical frames and illuminates the linguistic moves Huerta makes throughout.

### Connecting the Theoretical and Analytical Frames

The three interdisciplinary theoretical and analytical frames of third space feminism, social semiotics, and universal and particular audiences work together in this project to assist in the rhetorical analysis of three of Dolores Huerta's rhetorical acts, rhetoric that stands as *par exemple* for Chicana rhetoric. These theories arise from Historical Theory (Pérez), Rhetorical Theory (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca) and



Social Linguistics (Hodge and Kress) and thus provide the tools for contextualization and exploration of Huerta's rhetoric in a meaningful way. Placing the speech acts analyzed here in their original moments is crucial for the understanding how Huerta was so effective in moving people to action. But the context is not the only important element. Knowing who her audience was and how she positioned them and was conversely positioned by them also lends to this understanding. And, her work being labor activism, knowingly how she was able to move these audiences into moments of empathy and/or understanding and thus be a persuasive rhetor is also important. The following theoretical frames work symbiotically to reveal not only *what* Chicana rhetoric is, but also *how* it functions.

Emma Pérez's Third Space feminism, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's Universal and Particular Audience, Hodge and Kress's tenets of Social Semiotics all allow for analysis of language, power dynamics, gender, and ethnicity. These interdisciplinary theories come together to allow for analysis of the tenets of Chicana rhetoric: that of dynamic language practices, language as always manifesting socially and in regards to both an immediate as well as a general audience, and a rhetoric always aware of race and gender. Following is a brief explication of my interpretation of each theory and how it will function in my analysis of Dolores Huerta's rhetoric.

#### Emma Pérez's Third space feminism

Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary* details a theory for approaching women of color texts that accounts for space and time as well as ethnicity and gender, all crucial elements in the analysis of Dolores Huerta's rhetoric. Pérez, citing Foucault, argues that Chicana/o history,

[L]ike any other subaltern history, will tend to follow traditional history's impulse to cover, "with a thick layer of events," as Foucault writes, "the great silent motionless bases that constitute the interstitial gaps, the unheard, the unthought, the unspoken. These interstitial gaps interrupt the linear model of time, and it is in such locations that oppositional, subaltern histories can be found. (5)

These interstitial gaps give way to opportunity for women of color rhetors to speak. For Chicana rhetoric the interstitial gap moments occur during Mexican Revolution (1910s), the following years of labor struggle in the United States (1920's through the 1950's), the Chicano Civil Rights Movement (1960's-70's), and the subsequent feminist movements (1980's-90's). These are the moments where socioeconomic and gender norms are countered, where mores and tradition were challenged, and where the unheard was heard.

In regards to analysis of Huerta and, by extension, Chicana rhetoric, third space feminism provides a theoretical access point in exploration of the contexts, of the moments that Huerta came to forum. Yet, these moments were not perfect sites for the rise of Chicana rhetoric. Pérez explains, the "official" Chicano Movement of the 1960's and 1970's, like the Mexican Revolution, spoke to women—but only on certain terms, as exemplified by the male rhetoric and in men's expectations" (71). Third space feminism allows for the problematizing of these contexts.

It is important to note that third *space* feminism is not the same theory as the more mainstream third *wave* feminism. Beginning in the late 1970s, third wave feminism became a new apparatus through which American feminists reengaged feminism. Third wave feminism, according to R. Claire Snyder:

[I]llustrate[s] an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism, [...] embrace[s] multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification, [...] and emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political. (175)

Though third wave feminism claims to embrace women of color, with inclusivity being one of its central tenets, women of color feminists tended to disagree. For Chicanas, the lack of attention given to the interconnections of race and class with sexism, combined with the manifest microaggressions thrown at them anytime this issue was voiced, served as impetus to separate from mainstream third wave feminism and seek an alternate framework.

Chela Sandoval explains that third wave feminism was hegemonic in both theory and practice (46.7) and that third wave feminism was, in fact, white feminism. Women of color were made to feel cursory to the “main” struggle for gender equality and relegated to silence over voicing concerns about the impact of race along with gender. So, even though third wave feminism spouted inclusivity, it was inclusivity at an expense and women of color saw their voices, their theories, and their practices being “unrecognized and unregarded” (46.7). This reaction against third wave feminism may also be rooted in the movement’s tendency to markers and labels, claiming that these hinder rather than help. While agreeing with the need for fluid labels, third wave feminism is rooted in the belief that ethnic and cultural markers are too apparent to simply be negated.

By using third space feminism as the major theoretical and analytical frame for this project, the diverse forums and audiences explored throughout are recognized as valid and this validation serves as the foundation for legitimization of Huerta and, by

extension, all Chicana's speech acts. For Chicana rhetors that practiced their craft in non-traditional forums to audiences that were not typically viewed as validly voiced members of the *demos*<sup>xi</sup>, third space feminism works to support their rhetorical acts and allowed for a frame of understanding of these speech acts. Dolores Huerta's forums varied from the intimacy of migrant worker's homes, to picket lines, to the floor of the California State legislature, and her audiences were as diverse as these locales. No longer is rhetoric a site of linguistic power for white rhetors only; via third space feminism the interstitial gaps, the opportunities for voice that Chicanas embraced, are recognizable and proven efficacious.

#### Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's Universal and Particular Audience

With third space feminism providing the analytical frame of context, i.e. time and place, the theoretical concept of universal and particular audience allows exploration of how her rhetoric listeners to action. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca argue in *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* that:

The goal of any argument is to bring the audience into consensus with the stance of the rhetor. In doing this, the rhetor makes decisions on the content, *topoi*, and delivery of their speech based on the universal audience, an unfixed audience used by the rhetor to position their argument, and the particular audience, the actual participants in the rhetorical exchange. (n. pag)

Supporting this theory of the universal audience is the idea that "a rhetor linguistically creates a presence which the audience adheres to" (Long 107). This approach to *ethos*, an approach that Richard Long describes as "rhetorical processes as a configuration of psychological phenomenon held together by a linguistic system" (ibid),

is interactive: as the audience responds to the rhetor's words, the rhetor in turn decides on their next move in order to continue to guide the audience towards agreement on the issue.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca approach to audience is centered in the speaker, whose "mental conception of the audience" is more important than "the physical presence of a group of people assembled to hear the speech" (Foss, Foss, Trap 89). This mental conception accounts for the speaker's preconceived ideas of whom they are speaking to and who they are attempting to persuade, and thus puts the power of positioning in the speaker's hands. Aristotelian in its reliance on *ethos*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's universal and particular audience is a functional rhetorical theory for exploring Dolores Huerta's rhetorical efficacy. Her rhetoric analyzed herein moves through each of the three branches of rhetoric, deliberative, epideictic, and forensic, so an inclusive theory of audience is needed. As Dolores Huerta moves through the various sites (a congressional hearing, a debate, and a ceremonial speech) her choices in content and diction reflect her awareness of the audience in regards to the topic and context (the particular audience) and the potential important others who may reasonably be interested in and understand the topic (the universal audience).

As a Chicana rhetor, Huerta's cultural imaginary of universal audiences would be different than the typical white, male rhetor in terms of linguistic practices, common tropes, and effective uses of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. By using the Perelman and Olbrechts-Tytechian approach to audience, these cultural elements can be accounted for. Dolores Huerta is an expert at positioning her audience, both particular and universal, and this is one of the major tenets not just of her rhetoric, but of Chicana rhetoric.

### Hodge and Kress' Social Semiotics

While third space feminism and universal and particular audience helped situate and position Huerta's rhetoric, in particular her tropes and audience-positioning moves, social semiotics provides this dissertation project the terminology to link these rhetorical moves to linguistic patterns, thus taking these analyses from micro/local to macro/global. Huerta's rhetoric is a social rhetoric, manifesting in the public sphere and for public means. Social semiotics, the study of semiotics that accounts for social context, allows for the text to be positioned historically and then analyzed through the three perspectives of scholarly, media, and personal, each in fruitful ways. In pursuit of a focused frame for these three perspectives, I have taken a truncated version of "propositions to guide a diagnostic social semiotics" (111-12) that applies directly to analyzing dynamic and contextual linguistic acts. The tenets listed in the truncated version (included in Chapter Four of this dissertation) discuss the linguistic manifestations of solidarity (discohesion/cohesion, alliances/antagonisms, bonds/barriers) and power (order, control, and hierarchy) based on Durkheim's renderings (40). Hodge and Kress explain that by looking for particular manifestations of solidarity and power, for instance through a speaker's use of pronouns, "the relations between and within social classes in a class based society" and the "constitution of smaller groupings such as family, kinship, and so on" can be understood (40-1).

Supporting this methodology of the microcosmic reading of an individual's speech acts in order to elucidate macrocosmic concerns is Barbara Johnstone's work as presented in *The Linguistic Individual*. In the monograph length study of the importance of the individual and the idiosyncrasies of their speech acts, Johnstone argues for a view

of language as a tool of uncovering the “[i]nteractive, phatic, socially cohesive functions of language” (x). Johnstone argues that “looking carefully at instances of idiosyncrasy and newness in discourse and imagining a view of the linguistic process” allows us to uncover “how speakers know each other by how they understand each other” (x). This important aspect of language, the awareness of interchange and rhetorical acts as acts of interlocution, support the use of social semiotics as a methodological frame. Johnstone continues:

[S]tyle is notoriously difficult to describe. It is indisputable that speech is always multi-voiced, always drawing on other speech, and that the ways we talk are constrained, shaped, and dictated to us in more ways than we realize (see, e.g., Scollon 1995). But it is also indisputable that no two individuals always speak with the same voice. Creativity is possible, even if it is sometimes difficult; linguistic innovation is crucial for linguistic change and for human and social life. Only by complementing the linguistics of language with the linguistics of speakers, can we see how the grammatical possibilities examined by syntacticians, the statistical regularities uncovered in sociolinguistic research, and the interpretive conventions described in pragmatics interact with our fundamental need to express ourselves (xi).

This project aims to uncover style, linguistic innovation, and the need to express oneself, all via the rhetorical analyses of Huerta’s speech acts and within the realm of rhetoric, not linguistics. Johnstone warns of the profound difficulties of this type of work, yet provides working methodology in *The Linguistic Individual*. Throughout the text Johnstone provides synoptic speech acts and then explores the intricacies of them,

making connections between who the speaker is, their potential exigencies, and their potential ramifications. I replicate this methodology for each of Huerta's speech acts in my initial rhetorical analysis of each text, substituting rhetorical concepts in place of linguistic ones.

### *Research Methods*

Since much of the information in this dissertation is new to Rhetoric and Composition studies, I wanted to be as thorough in my contextualization and analysis as possible. For research methodology, I began in local archives, becoming familiar with each historical context by looking through local newspapers, notably the archives of the *Albuquerque Journal* and the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. I also turned to familiar texts and their bibliographies, both of which were excellent starting places to begin research into what was, for me, uncharted territory of the rhetoric of Chicanas in the North American *polis*. These research methods are further explained in the following sections.

### Cultivating a Rhetorical History

Though originally conceived as one trajectory of Chicana rhetoric spanning the years from the Mexican Revolution to present day, during my research I realized that this was a reductive rendering of a long and rich rhetorical history. Scholars before me have traditionally envisioned the years from the Mexican Revolution through the dawning of the civil rights years as the Mexican American Generation. This generation is marked by different political, economic, and cultural tropes, and thus different rhetoric than the civil rights years and beyond. By dividing the trajectory into two chapters, I was better able to delineate these tropes and rhetorical moves and write a much richer rhetorical trajectory. I more deeply researched important politicians, local and national leaders who were either



Mexican American or who greatly influenced Mexican American communities and cultural life. What I uncovered was an evolution of sociopolitical leanings and rhetoric with Chicanas always at the helm, even in the earliest years. Organizations crucial to creating forum for Chicana rhetoric, most such as LULAC and MEChA, also became important aspects of each trajectory through this more in-depth research.

Because of this rich history, I was able to pull the trajectory apart into two timelines, which I chose to split at the dawning of Chicano Civil Rights era. It was at this point that the shift from the conservative politics of the Mexican American Generation to the progressive politics of *El Movimiento* occurred, with Dolores Huerta spanning each of these and consistent in her politics throughout these eras.

These trajectories were heavily reliant on a few major texts: Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* and Jessica Enoch's "Para La Mujer": Defining a Chicana Feminist Rhetoric at the Turn of the Century" for the earlier trajectories and F. Arturo Rosales' *Chicano! The History of The Mexican American Civil Right Movement* for the latter trajectory. Also crucial was the Center for Southwest Research holdings and the librarians who assisted me in using these stacks, I would go to the CSR in pursuit of triangulation and for verification of dates, people, and attitudes surrounding the various movements.

Extending beyond the trajectory chapters, primary and secondary source material collection for this dissertation project spanned a broad range of fields of study and mediums. I began my research in the texts I knew most intimately, namely Bizzell and Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Kells, Balester, and Villanueva's *Latino/a Discoveries: On Language, Identity, and Literacy Education*, Anthony Quiroz's

anthology *Leaders of the Mexican American Generation: Biographical Essays*, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary*. I allowed these texts to inspire me in topic and angle, but I also used them as references, combing their bibliographies for other texts that would inform my search for a definition of Chicana rhetoric, a trajectory of Chicanas in the North American polis, and Huerta's presence and effect on both of these.

From these texts I moved into the articles reviewed in the Current Conversation section, notable amongst these was Lori A. Flores' "A Community of Limits and the Limits of Community: MALDEF's Chicana Rights Project, Empowering the "Typical Chicana," and the Question of Civil Rights, 1974-1983" and Alma M. Garcia's "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980," each of which provided methodological and analytical precedence as well as rich bibliographies. I continued to replicate this method of delving into the bibliographies of familiar texts and allowing these references to guide me in source cultivation. Because the work included herein is new to Rhetorica and Composition, but not to other fields such as Chicana/o Studies, Gender Studies, History, or Linguistics, my research method had to be open and flexible, allowing these other, interdisciplinary research methods and writing approaches to inform my own. This allowance led to a rich rhetorical history that is clearly informed by a wide range of scholars across many fields of disciplines.

Also apparent throughout the research completed for this dissertation is a reliance on source material gleaned from simple internet searches. Often I would go to city or government websites where rich historical information not found in other annals is housed. Texas often hosts these websites for their border cities, most notable in this

project is Laredo's, which provided me information cited in my early trajectory. Often scholars discount the internet as an unreliable or unmediated source, but as a contemporary writer and a person that has grown up with the internet, I integrated it successfully into my research. Also, as an instructor of Rhetoric and Composition in the digital age, being versed in the research methods needed to cultivate reliable and credible source in an efficient manner is crucial to being an enduringly successful teacher.

### Perspectival Analysis

The approach of the perspectival analysis works in tandem with third space feminism, social semiotics, and particular and universal audience in pursuit of contextualization and elucidation of Dolores Huerta's emerging and evolving rhetoric. While third space feminism theorizes on the spaces that Chicana rhetoric comes into being, social semiotics helps us to understand how this rhetoric interacts with external signs and symbols, making it understood and effective. Once Chicana rhetoric emerges and is positioned in relation to its environment, the rhetor's choices can be further examined based on who the particular and universal audience is and the rhetor's *ethikos* with this audience. From here rhetorical choices such as tone and word choice, tropes, and the angle of the delivery of the content can be understood. The perspectival analysis then renders the analysis of the text as a part of a broader social conversation, providing a macrocosmic understanding of a microcosmic speech act. From this, the tenets of what Chicana rhetoric is based on can be understood.

In pursuit of a deep contextualization and analysis of each of the three representative speech acts analyzed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this dissertation, I use the methodology of the perspectival analysis, or the analysis of the text through perspectives

that each rendered the text and context in different, yet important ways. For each of Dolores Huerta's speech acts analyzed in this project, I use the three perspectives of media, scholar, and personal.

For the media perspective I will explore how the media reacted to the specific speech act being analyzed as well as the general reporting of social, political, and economic happenings relevant to Huerta's work. Hodge and Kress argue that,

In contemporary Western societies power and solidarity cannot be exercised solely through countless individual exchanges. The mass media act like communication technologies of the past, including writing, art, and architecture, in having to construct communication exchanges that bind distant participants into an effective community. (46)

Because Huerta's rhetoric was situated most often in the political arena, a national stage for speech acts, exploring media renderings of her rhetoric as well as how the media reported on the issues Huerta spoke on is important. The exploration of media accounts of both Huerta's rhetoric and on topics such as the Delano Grape Strike, the United Farm Workers Union (UFW), the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, and other such directly relevant topics will help to elucidate the voices that Huerta was working both with and against in her struggle to get the tenets of the UFWs work into mass dissemination.

Media accounts are also important because they provide access to the cacophony of voices that Huerta was speaking to and responding to during each of the texts analyzed herein. For example, around the time of the 1974 debate with Teamster Chuck O'Brien, Huerta was often in the news because of the Grape Boycott. At the same time, the Teamsters were in the news for their strikebreaking and sweetheart deals, which worked

quite well in establishing their presence in the Imperial Valley. Depending on whether the publication medium was pro-grower or pro-worker, both Huerta and the Teamsters were either lionized or vilified, which in turn affected reader's judgments on who to support. These historical renditions are quite important for contextualizing as well as understanding the rhetorical choices, such as tropes and tone, that Huerta makes.

The scholarly point of view will filter both the text and the context through the perspective of thinkers in academic disciplines with varying concerns and connections. The scholarly perspective functions as the insight into how the academy contextualized the events surrounding each of Dolores Huerta's speech acts both during and since they occurred. For example, the 1960's, the decade during which Huerta gave her testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, was a socially and politically turbulent time that has been extensively documented by scholars in the fields of Labor and Law, Public Health, and History. The scholarly point of view is also intimately connected to third space feminism, as many of the ideas that would eventually motivate Chicanas to break from third wave feminism came from Chicanas in the academy such as Anna NietoGomez, Martha Cotera, and Norma Alarcón.

The personal view is an important element to each rhetorical analysis included in this dissertation project because it lends insight into Huerta's own opinions on her speech acts. Though she rarely speaks directly about her rhetorical moves, Huerta is passionate about speaking on the causes she supports. Thus, she provides primary source material that allows for the elucidation of rhetorical choices such as content, tone, and exigence. Here, Huerta is given space to voice her own opinions on her rhetorical history.

*Chapter Summaries*

Preceding two historical trajectory chapters will be a rhetorical biography of Dolores Huerta. This rhetorical biography explores the influences of Huerta's family, upbringing, faith, and personal convictions which all impacted her as a public rhetor. Following are the two trajectory chapters. Chapter Two covers the Mexican American Generation (1910s-1950s) and Chapter Three covers the Civil Rights Movement to contemporary era (1960s-present day). The following three analysis chapters will each cover three examples of Dolores Huerta's rhetoric that represent each of the three branches of rhetoric. These chapters will employ the method of perspectival analysis and strive for a deep contextualization of Huerta's speech acts. Concluding this dissertation will be a chapter exploring the impact of Chicana rhetors and Dolores Huerta's rhetoric on the fields of Rhetoric and Composition.

*Chapter One: Siete Lenguas: A Nueva Mexicana Chicana*

Chapter One is a rhetorical biography of Dolores Huerta, a biography that traces her familial, environmental, religious, and political rhetorical influences. I explore Dolores Huerta's early life, which, I argue, was integral to her later ascension as spokeswoman and Vice President of the United Farm Workers (UFW). Chapter One shows Huerta as daughter, activist, mother, organizer, testifier, labor leader, lover, feminist, and rhetor. An explication of these as representative of her work will set the foundation for the coming chapters and the introduction of the three texts for analysis.

## Chapter Two: Mexican and Mexican American Women and Labor Rights

### Activism

In order to situate Dolores Huerta in a rhetorical context, I trace the trajectory of Chicana Rhetoric from the time of the Mexican Revolution to present day. Chapter Two documents Mexican and Mexican American women active in labor rights activism in the North American *polis* since the turn of the twentieth century. This chapter serves to explore the rich legacy of *Mexicanas* and Mexican American women advocating for economic and social justice through labor rights, a legacy that Huerta would come to participate in in the latter half of the 1950s. *Mexicanas* such as Dolores Jiménez y Muro and Mexican Americans such as Emma Tenayuca and Josefina Fierro de Bright are woven into the already in extant rhetorical trajectory and given a deep contextualization in terms of the time, place, and the cause they were integral to.

I argue that the precedence set by rhetorically active *Mexicanas* in the fight against Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz set a textual legacy that included propaganda and letter writing, agrarian reform activism, and being *soldaderas*. These politically charged rhetorical activities influenced socially progressive Mexican American women rhetors who would build on this legacy in the coming decades.<sup>xii</sup>

## Chapter Three: The Chicano Civil Rights Movement and the Rise of Chicanismo

Extending Chapter Two's trajectory of *Mexicanas* and Mexican American women in the realm of labor rights activism, Chapter Three documents Huerta's emergence in the American *polis* and subsequent other Chicana rhetors of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement era. This retracing of rhetorical history of an important civil rights movement explores the political and rhetorical work of Chicanas in their communities, in

organizations, and in unions. Civil Rights era Chicanas moved into the American *polis* vocally as testifiers, organizers, lobbyists, academics, and social movement leaders. This further movement from the *oikos*<sup>xiii</sup> to the *polis* entailed confronting and overcoming cultural norms and social strictures that continued to hinder Chicanas from assuming their rightful role of ratified speaker.

Chapter Four: The Organizer and Lobbyist Paradigm: Dolores Huerta's 1969 "Testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor"

Chapter Four is the first of the three perspectival analysis chapters that contextualize and explore Huerta's rhetoric via her 1969 "Statement to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor." I begin this chapter by conducting a rhetorical analysis of the Statement based on its historical context as well as its most salient rhetorical tropes. I then look at the text from the perspective of how the media reported and reacted to this statement. Next, I will move on to how scholars have since acknowledged and rendered this important moment in the early years of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Finally, I explore how Huerta has since rendered this era of her work through personal reflection and recounting of events.

Chapter Five: Huerta Enters the *Polis*: Dolores Huerta's 1973 Debate with Teamster Chuck O'Brien

The 1973 debate between Dolores Huerta and Chuck O'Brien of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters demonstrates the Hileyian<sup>xiv</sup> shift in access and voice in the polis. We have two speakers of differing genders, ethnicities, political views, and representing opposite ends of the union-representation spectrum coming together in public debate. The context of the debate is also important, with the debate happening at a



peak time for Huerta and the United Farm Workers. The UFW had been given full acceptance by the AFL-CIO in 1970 and, a year before in 1969, Huerta and the UFW signed the momentous contracts with grape growers, successfully ending the four-year Delano Grape Strike in favor of the field workers.

When the Huerta/O'Brien debate took place, the worker's contracts had since expired, grape growers had aligned themselves with the Teamsters Union, who employed thug tactics against the workers in a desperate attempt to avoid another strike, and Huerta was once again called on to become the public voice of the UFW. The debate, one of the public forums leading up to the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, saw Huerta as an experienced voice in social movements in California, as a veteran labor rights leader, and as an established Chicana rhetor. This established presence is displayed full force in her debate tone and style.

Chapter Six: The Chicana Rhetor at UCLA: Dolores Huerta's 2009 "Recipient Remarks for the UCLA Medal"

Even the most prolific rhetors are typically limited in the scope of their productivity to a few years or during a certain school or movement, but Huerta defies this norm. Active in the public sphere for the last 60 years, Huerta has continued to be a voice and presence for Chicana/o issues. Though the struggles have changed since her initial involvement with Chávez and the CSO in the 1950s, Huerta has not stopped working tirelessly for equality and rights for Mexican Americans, migrant laborers, women, and the poor. Chosen because it represents a recent example of her rhetoric, but also because of the manifest renditions of it in the media, in scholarly debate, and by Huerta herself, Huerta's UCLA Medal Recipient Remarks commencement ceremonies in 2009 led to

debates regarding propriety, politics, and the Chicana's place in speaking on these things in a public forum.

Conclusion: Looking Forward; the Implications of Chicana Rhetoric to Rhetorical and Composition Studies

This conclusion looks forward to the inclusion of Chicana rhetoric in Rhetoric and Composition studies. I first explore the current absence of Chicana voice in the texts we honor as foundational to our canon and the texts we use in the classroom, the impact this absence has on us, as scholars, and on our students. Next, I discuss how Composition studies will evolve based on the diversification of the voices we honor as representative examples of writing for our students to engage, analyze, and model. I end by meditating on the profound positive impact that the inclusion of Chicana history, politics, and rhetoric can have on our Rhetorical Canon. I argue that Chicana rhetoric is representative of the voice of labor, of gender, of economic social justice and that the rhetoric of Dolores Huerta is a paradigmatic heuristic of these ideals.

### *Conclusion*

The remapping and regendering of our Rhetorical Canon is a movement with kinetic traction, and I see the inclusion of Chicana and Chicano rhetors as a logical piece of these re-imaginings of important language users. My intent, then, is to recommend Huerta as a Chicana worthy of inclusion in the canon and then to defend this argument. I know from reading José Aranda Jr.'s *When We Arrive: A New Literary History of Mexican America* (2003) and Juan Bruce Novoa's *Canonical and Noncanonical Texts* (1986) that there are profound issues with the Western Canon to begin with, most notably, but not limited to, the racist, classist, exclusionary standards that it is built on. I

believe that the fundamental way to rectify these issues is to affect change. Opening the canon to speakers who are transcultural, who code switch, who are multi-lingual, who have not pursued traditional lines of education or traditional models of theorizing and teaching, and focusing on rhetors who use “everyday rhetoric,” (Cintron 1997; Nystrand and Duffy 2003) allows us to transcend the canonical norm, not because these speakers are anomalous, but because they represent a way of speaking and thinking that broad swaths of our society relate to and honor.

Huerta is a successful rhetor because she is a brilliant speaker, because of her strong political awareness and her socially progressive attitude, and because she is so effective at organizing and lobbying. She is the paradigm upon which other Chicanas can look to for rhetorical precedence.

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<sup>i</sup> “Enough of shouting against the wind—all words are noise if not accompanied by action.” Quote taken from the foreword to the second edition (1983) of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s *This Bridge Called My Back*.

<sup>ii</sup> See Hector A. Torres’ interview with Gloria Anzaldúa for more information on her as a writer and teacher of writing in *Conversations with Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Writers*.

<sup>iii</sup> Transcultural Repositioning is the rhetorical practice of moving “back and forth with ease and comfort between and among different languages and dialects, different social classes, different cultural and artistic forms” (Guerra, 8).

<sup>iv</sup> Here, and throughout this dissertation, *La Causa* refers to the original and enduring “cause” of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, which I locate in labor rights activism, and, more specifically, in the work of the United Farm Workers. *El Movimiento* refers to the Chicano Civil Rights Movement *en total*.

<sup>v</sup> Yarbrow-Bejerano cites Norma Alarcón as her inspiration for this concept. While the quote herein is taken from Yarbrow-Bejerano, see Alarcón’s “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American feminism” for more on the original context of the definition.

<sup>vi</sup> For more on revisionist histories seeking a more inclusive rhetorical tradition see Jones Royster’s *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women Work, and the Family from Slavery to Present*, Baca and Villanueva’s *Rhetorics of the Americas: 3114 BC to 2012 CE*, Glenn’s *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through Renaissance*, and Lunsford’s *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*.

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<sup>vii</sup> This is a contentious label in terms of it being used mostly in the pejorative, against girls who speak to freely, and as a way to mediate and silence this free speaking. When Huerta speaks on this as her nickname, she does so positively and as an endearing recollection of her grandfather. The gender implications, though, are still present.

<sup>viii</sup> Chela Sandoval's "differential consciousness" is the active self-awareness of the multiple identities of U.S. women of color feminists and the subsequent suppression/highlighting of these identities in changeable and varied contexts in order to gain political power. For more information see Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000).

<sup>ix</sup> Villegas de Magnón's "The Rebel is a Girl" and Capetillo's "How Poor Women Prostitute Themselves" can both be found grouped under socioeconomics and turn of the century Mexicanas in Kanellos' *Herencia*. Both Villegas de Magnón and Capetillo were rhetorical strategists during the Mexican Revolution, writing and publishing against the Porfirio Diaz regime. For more information on these women and their textual activities, see Chapter Two of the dissertation project.

<sup>x</sup> See Abbie Strunc and Kelly King's "Citizenship Education in Texas: Gaps Between Theory and Practice in the State Curriculum Standards" in the *American Educational History Journal* Vol 40.1/2 (2012) for the current debate surrounding textbook choice and Chicana/o cultural erasure occurring in the Texas school system.

<sup>xi</sup> *Demos* (δῆμος) were the common citizens, typically male, of Greek city-states who were active in the *polis*.

<sup>xii</sup> Emma Pérez marks the Mexican Revolution, and the subsequent diaspora of Mexican nationals moving across the border of Mexico into the Southwest United States, as the beginnings of Chicana identity formation as evidenced through the textual activity of these diasporic women. See *The Decolonial Imaginary*, xviii for further details on her argument.

<sup>xiii</sup> The *oikos* was the home and the traditional place of congregation and conversation for women in Ancient Greece.

<sup>xiv</sup> See David Hiley *Doubts and the Demands of Citizenship* for a further discussion on a revitalized public sphere (*polis*) based on a diversified group of speakers (*doxa*).

*Chapter One: Siete Lenguas: A Nueva Mexicana Chicana*

“My grandfather would always call me seven tongues...  
because I talked so much.”  
Dolores Huerta<sup>i</sup>

This chapter traces Dolores Huerta’s development as a rhetor whose cultural and linguistic origins informs and defines her success as an efficacious Chicana rhetor/activist. Through a rhetorical biography focusing on how family, environment, and civic involvement influence Huerta’s rhetoric, a delineation of her embodiment of a Chicana rhetor is gained.

*Introduction*

In “*La Pasionaria Chicana*,” Mario T. García provides an endearing account of Huerta as the “civil rights worker, the farm labor leader, the feminist, the environmentalist, and the peace advocate leader” as well as mother to eleven children and friend of César Chávez (xxviii). These roles are all collapsed into Huerta as *La Pasionaria*, the Passionate One. García explains this moniker, stating that Huerta’s life’s work is framed always by her deep spirituality, a spirituality that does not conform to common Catholic, Mexican American norms and mores. García explains that while Huerta is a devoutly religious Catholic, her faith must always be viewed through a social lens (ibid). This is what makes Huerta a rhetor apart; she is a social activist whose rhetorical work is not hindered, but rather guided by, her personal life and views. Her life’s work is to help others, not to stay in the home as the good wife and good mother. She is an “instinctual liberationist,” not an intellectual liberationist; she is a person who does not over moralize or essentialize any one’s struggle for equality (García xxvii). Huerta’s rhetorical activism is not based on reaping any benefits for herself, but rather it

is done in pursuit of social and civil justice for those who cannot advocate for themselves. She is rhetorically able: a natural public speaker able to articulate the plight of the migrant and farm worker and, in doing so, effect change.

Other biographies of Huerta are not as polite as Mario T. García's rendition. Griswold del Castillo and García explore Huerta less "*La Pasionaria*" and more as the transgressor against the norms of *Mexicanidad*, or the tenets of being Mexican. Griswold del Castillo and García mention that Mexican Americans' reactions to Huerta have not always been positive, in great part because of her subversion of *Mexicanidad*, in particular her dismissal of being a model *madre mexicana*. Some find Huerta to be "neglectful" of her children, contrary in nature, too aggressive, and prone to conflict. Though touching on these negative views of Huerta, Griswold de Castillo and García do not limit their account of Huerta, instead contextualizing them as cultural manifestations of *Chicanisma* and motherhood during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. The authors explain that in contrast to Helen Chávez, Cesar Chávez's wife and the model *madre mexicana* of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, Huerta is the independent Chicana who "move[s] pragmatically through the limits of "lo Mexicano" and "lo Americano" without losing her sense of both" (25).

Building on this common portrayal of Huerta as the transgressor of Chicano norms, Margaret Rose comments, "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" (54). Rose's take on Huerta is that she was the female capable of moving into and within a male-dominated organization due in large part to her assimilated, American middle class background,

which provided her the audience, education, and confidence to speak. This nuanced cultural identity that incorporates elements of being Mexican, American, working and middle class, a mother, and a wife lend to her pragmatism and to her efficaciousness as a rhetor.

Much of this pragmatism can be traced back to Huerta's mother, Alicia Chavez. scholars such as Griswold del Castillo and García make a point that Huerta's unique sense of self and identity arises from her mother, a *Nueva Mexicana* business owner who raised her family via an egalitarian model of shared responsibilities, equal treatment, and fluid gender roles, and her father, a first generation Mexican American who pursued union work and organizing for poor workers in New Mexico. The strong, egalitarian relationship with her mother laid the foundation of her attitudes towards men and gender roles while her relationship with her father set the precedence for rhetorical work to be a viable option for a life's goal. Both her mother and father's contributions to Huerta's rhetorical confidence lend themselves to her famous partnership with Cesar Chávez, arguably the most recognizable figure of the UFW. And, it is this relationship with Chávez that tends to be the backbone of Huerta biographies. Though the two are inextricably linked via their cofounding of the UFW and their many years organizing and working together, Huerta is consistently written as the helper, the subordinate, and the woman behind the man. Jean Murphy begins her bio sketch of Huerta as such: "If César Chávez is the hero of the farm worker's movement, Dolores Huerta is its unheralded heroine" (75). Though positioning Huerta as prominent in *La Causa*, Murphy calls attention to the perpetual "unheralding" of Huerta to Chávez that results in her being

historicized as less noteworthy to *La Causa*. This subordinate positioning is indicative of many biographies of Huerta.

In regards to these biographies, which are all artifacts of the political and social context in which they were penned and published, I believe that a revised history of Huerta is needed. This history must refocus Huerta as the New *Mestiza* that Griswold del Castillo and García mention her to be; a woman whose shifting and multiple identities allow for navigation in liminal spaces and growth as a human being and as a rhetor. This “new *mestiza*” is an Anzaldúan take on the Chicana living between tradition and non-tradition, allows for an exploration of womanhood for women who do not ascribe to cultural, political, or social norms and who do not rely on men or on male heteronormative standards for self-critique and self-awareness. Most important for a revised historicity is the re-casting of Huerta as a Chicana rhetorician who is paradigmatic to the tradition of rhetoric that this dissertation uncovers.

Huerta’s politics arise from an ethical obligation to speak for and on behalf of the poor, of minorities, of migrant workers, and of immigrants. So, even as a society-positioned liminal speaker, Huerta speaks, struggling against those silences and those reductive positionings pressed upon her by outside influences. She embodies the idea of third space speaker, the Chicana, who is involved in political struggle, the struggle of power and to be heard, which must resist reinforcement of standard and reductive representations. Her mother, a third generation *Nueva Mexicana*, and her father, a first generation Mexican American, are each significant influences in Huerta’s life and for very different reasons. I believe that Huerta’s positioning as a speaker arises largely from the rhetorical legacies of her parents and her maternal grandfather. Her mother was a



small business owner during the Depression and helped down-and-out community members with food and housing. Her father was a coal miner turned New Mexico legislator whose awareness of struggle and of voicing concerns over subjugation and inequality truly set a precedent for his daughter. Huerta and her rhetorical prowess are products of these legacies.

Huerta's untraditional approach to family is an exciting aspect of her persona that lends to her aggressive form of social activist rhetoric. Huerta is a new prototype: a *madre Chicana* who adheres to no one cultural or religious norm, but rather raises her family and conducts herself on her own terms. This new prototype makes her the vibrant, effective speaker she is. Pierre Bourdieu explains in *Practical Reason* that "[t]hose who have the privilege of having a 'normal' family are able to demand the same of everyone without having to raise the question of conditions (a certain income, living space, etc.) of universal access to what they demand universally" (69) and this idea, in regards to Huerta, allows for an understanding of how she can embody non-normativity while concurrently redefining the normative.

Huerta comes from multiple and varied cultural and religious tradition marked by staid gender roles, yet she defies the norms of passivity and subjugation of Mexican American women to their spouses and devotion to their progeny. As the head of her household, she refuses to abide by any familial strictures that demand silence or subservience. These are salient characteristics of her as a human being as well as her as lobbyist, activist, and organizer. This chapter will explore the origin and application of these roles and argue that it is through this transgressive, subversive positioning that

Huerta is able to assume the role of figurehead and speaker and embody the ideal of the new *mestiza* in rhetor form.

### *Familial Influences*

Dolores Clara Fernández was born April 10, 1930 in the small Northern New Mexico coal-mining town of Dawson to Juan and Alicia (Chavez) Fernández. Born on the brink of the Great Depression into an unsteady household, Huerta's early years in New Mexico were marked by the presence of strong speakers/intellectuals that made up her immediate and extended family. Her father was a first generation Mexican American and her mother a third generation *Nueva Mexicana* (Rose 27). The rhetorical legacies of these cultures, as well as a middle class milieu inherited from her mother and a firebrand activism rhetoric inherited from her father, would be foundational to Huerta. As she puts it, "I believe the part of who I am began where I was born which was in the state of New Mexico, which is a bilingual state. That as important because as a young child I grew up speaking both English and Spanish as did my grandparents who were both, on my mother's side of the family, born in the state of New Mexico" (Harding 177). Hailing from the only state that honors Spanish as well as English as sanctioned state languages, Huerta's birthright would be one that legitimated multilingualism on a spectrum of formalities and histories.

Another important factor in the early molding of Huerta as a rhetor was her divergent parental relationships. Separated from her father at the age of three, she would establish a distant yet honorific relationship him that lasted throughout her life. With her mother, with whom she would grow up with and remain close to her entire life, Huerta would learn rhetorical confidence, the art of negotiation, and how to linguistically

navigate shifting discourse communities. Also important in her formative years was her matrilineal grandfather, Herculano Chavez, with whom she would spend much of her adolescence and who would be an early supporter of her rhetorical tendencies, naming her *Siete Lenguas*, or Seven Tongues. Huerta would recall that her grandfather encouraged her to read periodicals and would engage her in discussions of current events, instilling in her the passion for politics and the verbiage with which to express it. Though she never directly comments on the roots of her nickname and whether it refers to the pejorative, with *Siete Lenguas* referring to a chatty child rather than a linguistically precocious one, Huerta's recollections of her grandfather lend to the idea that this nickname was more honorific than not.

With these three strong, dynamic, and supportive presences in her formative years, Huerta was allowed the opportunity and training to prepare to enter the North American *polis* as a young woman, and is still present today, more than 50 years later.

#### *Patrilineal Influence(s)*

Born in Dawson, New Mexico, Huerta's father, Juan Fernández, was the son of newly immigrated Mexican parents (M. García xvi). As citizens of Mexico during the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution, Fernández's parents were products of the turmoil of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and the initial stirrings of unrest of the lower classes most effected by the top-heavy politics of the era. Though his parent's involvement in these initial revolutionary activities is uncertain, the influence of the revolutionary spirit that surrounded Mexico around the time of Fernández's conception is obvious. As Fernández grew older, he would engage in the same fight against unequal pay, disparaging treatment of the poor, and lack of access to efficient socioeconomic

superstructures and education that his foremothers and forefathers in Mexico had fought against.

An American citizen by birthright, as a child of recently arrived Mexican immigrant parents Fernández was burdened by the social positioning of being a second-class citizen in his own country. This immediate prescription of economic and political opportunities, or lack thereof, did not sit well with him. Fernández would have been born in the early twentieth century, around the time that New Mexico petitioned for and gained statehood (1912). Though New Mexico as a territory had officially been a part of the United States since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, its acceptance into the unified United States was hard won. A factor in this delayed statehood was the diverse ethnic and linguistic make-up of New Mexico. In a 1906 report on the proposed joint statehood of New Mexico and Arizona these fears were summed up by the white majority of Arizona with the statement that:

[T]he decided racial difference between the people of New Mexico, who are not only different in race and largely in language, but have entirely different customs, laws and ideals and would have but little prospect of successful amalgamation.

The objection of the people of Arizona, 95 percent of whom are Americans, to the probability of the control of public affairs by people of a different race, many of whom do not speak the English language, and who outnumber the people of Arizona two to one. (*Language Rights and New Mexico Statehood*)

Growing up in this era of New Mexican history, Fernández would have been enveloped into these essentialized notions of “the other” whose customs and ideals and language practices were foreign to the Anglos moving into and gaining control of the

Southwest. Huerta would later recall that her father embodied resistance to these essentializations of American citizenship as white, male, monolingual English speakers. In recollecting her father, Huerta explains he was “very intelligent, very intelligent, he had a very strong personality, a very handsome man. He looked very Indian, in fact I look like my father, but he had green eyes (Harding 177). Huerta continues that her father “had a very good way with words and I can see my father as an organizer” (ibid). As Huerta notes, her father was a speaker and organizer, serving as a “key labor organizer in the CIO during the 1930s” (M. García xvi), and her memories of him are in the form of stories about his union activity.

#### Coal Miner’s Daughter

From his humble beginnings as a coal miner and migrant laborer to legislator and war veteran, Fernández would come to inspire his daughter in terms of perseverance and the necessity to advocate for social equality and change. After working in the coalmines and later, once the mines were shut down, as a migrant laborer throughout New Mexico, Fernández became acutely aware of the travails of the underpaid workers plight in New Mexico. Compelled by his own struggles as a migrant laborer and by the witnessing of so many other New Mexicans’ struggles with low pay and poor living conditions, Fernández became convinced that via organized effort and through a union for laborers, efficacious change could be made. Fernández became involved in union work, rising to the rank of secretary-treasurer of the local CIO at the Terrero Camp of the American Metals Company in Las Vegas, New Mexico (Telgen and Kemp 1993). While working administratively for this local union chapter, Fernández took advantage of the mostly Mexican American and Hispanic demographics of Northern New Mexico in his pursuit of

political voice. He was in opposition to the Anglo landowners and mine owners in both presence and linguistic practices by representing the different race, customs, language, laws and ideals previously denigrated by those seeking the defeat of joint statehood.

Capitalizing on this positioning, Fernández ran for and won election to the 1938 New Mexico State Legislature as representative of San Miguel County, New Mexico. Fernández used this time in office to speak for worker's rights, focusing on improvement of wage and living conditions while calling attention to the state of poor and migrant workers in New Mexico. In a news article published in the *Los Angeles Times* (1999) James Rainey would recount a rumor that Fernández, a "fiery union leader who had served in the New Mexico Legislature [...] identified one fellow legislator as a 'dirty scab' and punched him out on the floor of the House" (M. García 150). Instead of following in the brute force tactics of her father, Huerta chose the strong fist tactics of calculated rhetoric as her weapon. Fernández enlisted in the Navy and served in the Korean War. After serving his country, Fernández returned to New Mexico and continued in his studies, which had been truncated early in life due to the Depression and his call to activism (Rose 3).

Though not close with him through much of her childhood, it is clear from Huerta's recollections and rendering of her father that he was a large influence on her. Not only does she embody him in her indigenous looks, something that she speaks of lovingly, referring to her father as handsome, she also embodies him in her "way with words." Huerta would also continue Juan Fernandez's legacy of unionizing and lobbying, two very unique roles for Mexican Americans, both men and women. Though her mother, Alicia Chavez, takes much of the credit for raising Huerta and encouraging her to

pursue education, live an egalitarian lifestyle, and be civically active, it is Huerta's father who truly sets the precedent for her to become a Chicana activist/rhetor.

### *Matrilineal Influence*

Huerta's mother, Alicia Chavez, would also deeply influence Huerta's path into social and labor work and advocacy. Huerta recalls that her mother 'was, of course, very supportive of me as a young woman and always pushed me to be out in front, to speak my mind, to get involved, to be active' (Harding 179). In opposition to her desire for her daughter to be vocal and present, Chavez was a "very quiet, a calm kind of personality, but she had a lot of quiet energy and did a lot of things" (ibid). Chavez divorced Juan Fernández and, with three small children and her father Herculano, moved from New Mexico to California. Upon first arriving in Stockton, California in 1933, Chavez took a job waitressing and working in the local canneries. With the support of her father Herculano, who watched her children while she worked, and her second husband, Chavez was able to support her family through the Depression, meanwhile saving enough money to purchase a 70-room hotel with adjacent restaurant.

With the acquisition of this property in a working-class area of Stockton, the financial stability of Huerta's childhood be solidified and access to a diverse range of interlocutors for the young rhetor would be gained. Huerta would recall that this hotel was the site of a coming together of race, class, and language and this vibrant discourse community would absolutely lend itself to Huerta's rhetorical abilities. Because Chavez would rarely turn away anyone from her hotel and restaurant, choosing instead to allow patrons to pay as they were able, the clientele at the business was often made up of travellers, migrant workers, and other such people in transit who were looking for a place

to stay and an ear to listen to their story. Doubtless that the interactions that Huerta enjoyed with this diverse crowd would lend to her rhetorical flexibility. Capable of moving into working-class discourse communities just as easily as middle-class discourse communities was a rhetorical tactic of Huerta's honed at her mother's place of business.

### Mother and Marriage

Alicia Chavez would not only be a direct influence on Huerta's rhetorical prowess, but also in a more intimate way in regards to establishing, maintaining, and sometimes ending personal relationships. As a young mother in an unstable union, Chavez took the initiative to leave her first husband, Huerta's father, and move herself, her father, and her three children from New Mexico to California. Though struggling through this relocation to Depression-era California, Chavez managed to find work, in canneries and waitressing, to support her family. Huerta recalls this time of her mother's life: "My mother was a very hard worker; she had to work two jobs because she divorced my dad and this was right after the Depression, during the 30's. We came to California in 1936. My mother had to work two jobs to keep us fed" (M. Garcia 333). Upon moving to California, Chavez met and married James Richards, the second of three marriages. Commenting on Chavez's willingness to leave unstable and unhappy marriages, Barbara Baer states, "Having made unconventional choices herself—as a Chicana and a Catholic, she remarried three times against church and social prohibitions—she encouraged her children to do the same" (99). Whether Chavez actually encouraged her children to marry, divorce, and remarry is questionable, but what is obvious is the precedence she set as a young mother making her way in a racist, sexist, and socially unjust United States.



Instead of allowing social and religious strictures to dictate her relationships with men, Chavez would enter into and leave her personal commitments on her own terms.

This was a powerful precedent for Huerta when it came to her own marriages. As a young, Catholic Chicana, Huerta was raised under the same tenets of culture and religion as her mother. Though Huerta recalls her mother being very religious, she also remembers her mother as a non-observant Catholic who would live by the tenets of the religion, but not adhere too strictly to the subservience and deference that the religion demanded of women. Aware of her mother's subversion of these certain aspects of Catholicism, Huerta would later replicate the act of interrogating those strictures on women. She would divorce, have children out of wedlock, support birth control and abortion, and devote herself to promoting women's rights both in and out of the church. Through her clear and long lasting devotion to her children, her faith, and her values and her decidedly transitory relationships with men, Chavez demonstrated to Huerta that her success could come independent from marriage. Though this was in direct opposition to both their culture and the Catholic faith, Huerta saw the success of her mother, and would go on to replicate it in her coupling and motherhood decisions.

Another interesting aspect of Alicia Chavez that lends itself to understanding Huerta's rhetorical capacities is her relationships with middle class white men. After leaving Juan Fernández and moving with her children and father to California, Chavez married James Richards, with whom she would purchase the hotel in Stockton during the Great Depression. Chavez's union with Richards would remain strained for the duration of the relationship, in part because of her daughter's inability to form a bond with him. Though not close in terms of emotional attachment, through Chavez's union with

Richards, Huerta was provided daily contact with white, male middle class speaking patterns.

Though not paramount to her eventual success as rhetor, learning and practicing the rhetorical patterns of white males lent to Huerta's ability to linguistically engage this particular discourse community. George Phillip Krapp noted this phenomenon within modern North American society as early as the turn of the twentieth century as he explored the emphasis of importance on the users of language over the forms (Finnegan 85). Edward Finnegan elaborates, "A description of the language of socially acceptable Americans by definition codifies socially acceptable American English; for socially acceptable persons speak in socially acceptable ways." Adding to her cohort of white, American male interlocutors, Huerta would later marry her high school sweetheart Ralph Head, an Irish American. Also of note is that, though these relationships were contentious, this contention aided Huerta in learning to navigate white male middle class argument strategies and tropes. Her knowledge of this particular type of interlocutor and their rhetorical tropes would be an essential element of her success in lobbying for the UFW and testifying in front of Congress.

Margaret Rose explains that Huerta's mother, Alicia Chavez, provided her not only with the education and stability to enter into the *polis* via being a model of community activism, but also provided Huerta with a "clear model of neighborhood involvement" (3). This model arose from life at the hotel in Stockton, California. The hotel was situated in a part of town where socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and languages intermixed. Huerta recalls:

The neighborhood that we lived in was very diverse. We had on the left hand side there was an Italian family. They were recent Italian immigrants. Across the street there were Italians. Our neighbors on the right hand side were an African American family, the Smiths. We had around the corner Filipinos. These were all new immigrants, right? A Filipino family. There were Chinese and Japanese, Native Americans, Greeks. People that had come from Oklahoma, the Okies as they were called. (179)

Huerta would later recall her childhood spent among this diverse group as “a universal preparation for the world” (Harding 178). Rose also contends that it was Chavez that instilled in Huerta the tenets of “religious philanthropy and civic responsibility.” Huerta was encouraged by her mother to be socially active, which took the form of membership in clubs both in and out of school and a ten-year long membership in the Girl Scouts. Huerta remarks, “Now that I look back at everything I’ve done in my life, I can say it started when I was a shy 8-year in Stockton and I became a Girl Scout”<sup>ii</sup> (girlscoutshcc.org). This early childhood involvement with a gender-based civic organization was quite foretelling of the path Huerta would follow in life. Huerta’s recalling of her membership with Girl Scouts is important, as it provides insight into a moment when her calling as a vocal, empathetic, and community based rhetor would come into fruition. These tenets of the Girl Scouts, Huerta would later attest, compelled her to continue in her activism even when it seemed all was lost.

#### *Young Motherhood and Early Activism*

Dolores Huerta graduated from Stockton High School in 1947 and enrolled as a first generation college student at University of the Pacific’s Delta College. She would

attend classes until 1950, when she left to marry her high school sweetheart, Ralph Head. The union was shaky from the start and would subsequently end three years later after the births of her two daughters, Celeste and Lori. Huerta returned to school at the University of the Pacific in Stockton where she earned a provisional teaching credential and subsequently began teaching to support herself and her two young daughters. This choice to leave school and begin teaching would be a decisive one, one that would absolutely shape the trajectory for the rest of Huerta's life.

In 1954, Huerta took a teaching position at an elementary school in rural California, where she was one of only three bilingual teachers in the entire county. Her bilingual skills made her quite marketable, but also positioned her to teach at schools where a majority of her students were the children of Spanish speaking, and often poor, migrant farm workers. From the start, Huerta was deeply troubled by the plight of the children she was tasked with teaching. Finding it hard to execute curriculum because her students were often under-clothed and hungry, Huerta began considering how to best handle this dilemma. She states, "I couldn't stand seeing farm worker children come to class hungry and in need of shoes. I thought I could do more by organizing parents than by trying to teach their hungry children" (Doak 22-23).

During the years of 1954-55, Huerta was on the cusp of her entrance into social activism and organizing, and this proved to be a critical moment for Chicanas in social activism work beyond Stockton, Delano, and rural California. In 1954 the film *Salt of the Earth* premiered. *Salt of the Earth* told the story of a mining town in New Mexico, named "Zinctown" in the movie but based on the very real Grant County, New Mexico. The movie recounts the controversial and dangerous mining practices of a big business

mining company, at the expense of the local miners and their families. Central to the movie is the protest, picketing, and organizing of the women of the town, the mothers and wives of the mine workers. In fact, the narrator of the film is a Mexican American woman, Esperanza Quintero. The film begins, “How shall I begin my story? My name is Esperanza Quintero. I am a miner’s wife” (*Salt of the Earth*). Though given agency in the narration of the film, Esperanza’s role as wife/mother and activist/organizer is complicated by the ill treatment she receives from her husband.

These themes of second class citizenship, of economic disenfranchisement, and the urge towards activism for Mexican American women of this era are telling of Huerta’s rise to rhetor. As a native New Mexican with familial ties to the mines, Huerta’s life is quite parallel to the rhetor Esperanza of the movie. And, like Esperanza and the other women involved in the strikes the movie is based on, Huerta would come to embrace nontraditional gender roles and approaches to motherhood in her movement towards activism. As the movie marked a certain moment of shift for Mexican American women activist rhetors, Huerta was shifting into her life’s work of activist/rhetor.

This movement into her rhetorical life happened in 1955, when Huerta was introduced to Fred Ross and was invited by him to become a member of the Community Service Organization (CSO). Founded by Ross in 1947, the CSO championed for improved treatment of Mexican Americans in California. Initially suspicious of Ross and his motives, she was reticent to align her desire to effect change with Ross and the CSO. Huerta recalls,

“I thought Fred Ross from the Community Service Organization...a Saul Alinsky organizer, was a Communist, so I went to the FBI and had him checked out. I

really did that. I used to work for the Sheriff's Department. See how middle class I was. I was registered Republican at the time [in the late fifties]." (M. García 28)

Margaret Rose also explains that Huerta's initial involvement with the CSO started in a quite normative, non-subversive way. "Huerta [...] began in traditional, female defined activities in community based philanthropy and volunteer work for Mexican American groups" (Rose 57). Huerta recalls that these early CSO activities included serving in women's clubs "that didn't do anything but give dances and celebrate *Fiestas Patrias*" (M. García 165). It was Fred Ross, Huerta iterates, that encouraged her to take leadership roles in the CSO and take her prominent position as speaker in the organization. Huerta recalls, 'Fred opened a door for me. He changed my whole life. If it weren't for Fred, I'd probably just be in some stupid suburb somewhere' (M. García 165).

And it was in the CSO that Huerta truly began to counter the norm of Chicana labor rights activists. Margaret Rose explains that the roles Huerta assumed post 1950s for the CSO were traditionally male: that of organizing new chapters and serving as an elected official (27). The feat of organizing new chapters included not only the administrative aspect of documentation and financials, it also included the cultivation of members dedicated to the organization. This was grassroots rhetoric at its finest. Huerta would move throughout her network of contacts, discussing the ills befalling the community and then outlining ways to rectify these ills via participation in the CSO. Huerta's success at spreading the message of the CSO in such a diverse and dynamic way led to her ascension within the organization from organizer to lobbyist. Rose explains that Huerta "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” (27). This countering of the activist norm worked to Huerta’s advantage. As a Mexican American woman, her presence in politics and in forum would be noticeable, and once notice was paid Huerta would embrace the rhetorical situation and pursue the agenda of the CSO.

During the early years of working for the CSO Huerta met and married her second husband, Ventura Huerta, and became mother to Fidel, Emiliano, Vincent, Alicia, and Angela, along with Celeste and Lori from her earlier marriage. As her family grew, so did her rhetorical leadership in the CSO and her involvement with César Chávez, with whom she would go on to found the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) and, subsequently, the United Farmworkers Union (UFW) with. Reflecting on this momentous time in their early years of organizing, Chávez recalled that, ‘Everyone knows her [Huerta], and the usual remark is that she is a fighter’ (M. García 12). Her firebrand rhetoric helped to establish her in the CSO, but it was not very financially fruitful. As she transitioned from CSO activist to union founder, Huerta took jobs translating, substitute teaching, and even working in the fields harvesting onions (M. García 13).

Lacking a car, telephone, and other essential organizing tools, Huerta persisted, relying on handouts to feed and clothe her children and volunteer childcare so that she could travel and hold meetings. By the mid-1960s, Huerta was fully committed to her role as activist organizer with the NFWA and eventually as Vice President of the UFW. Her prominence in the massive social movements happening with worker’s rights came with tough familial decisions. Huerta was confronted with the choice to move away from Stockton, and her family, to Sacramento to successfully lobby Congress for multiple bills

concerning worker and voter rights. As her commitment to the UFW and *La Causa* grew, her marriage with her second husband, Ventura, began to deteriorate. Huerta recalls that Ventura wanted her to be a more traditional wife and mother and urged her to abandon her organizing and lobbying to stay home. But, Huerta was already completely immersed in activism work. The end to this second marriage came in 1963. Huerta found herself a single mother of seven living on a small income from her community work and help and handouts from her friends and families and the families of farmworkers. Though these were difficult times, Huerta would not be deterred from continuing in her activism.

### *The Organizing Years*

It is often Huerta's enduring partnership with César Chávez that is the focus of her legacy and for good reason. While Chávez served as the calm, quiet figurehead at the front of marches and in photo-ops with the Kennedy's, Huerta was the firebrand speaker moving within the masses, organizing and rallying them. Their opposing rhetorical styles complimented each other, though they often argued privately and publically concerning the direction and vision of their work.

As Huerta and Chávez's partnership grew, they began to make strategic decisions as a team. Chávez continued serving as the figurehead for the public farmworkers fights while Huerta explored the minutiae of exactly what that fight entailed, from the fields to the home to the communities that these workers lived in. Huerta and Chávez began to move away from lobbying for general rights of Spanish speakers for the CSO and fight more consistently and focused for the farmworkers, the pair decided that a break from CSO was inevitable. Though Fred Ross and the CSO was their entree into activism, the two knew that a union was the next step in their successful partnership. In 1958, Chávez



and Huerta helped to found the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA), a union for farmworkers, and by 1959 the AWA merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), a larger and longer established union that was a part of the American Federation for Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO). In 1961 Chávez left the AWOC after they voted against founding a farmworker's union, which was Chávez and Huerta's ultimate goal. Though Chávez was then free to start working towards the goal of unionizing, Huerta continued working with the CSO in order to support her family. Working together, the two began doing the rhetorically intensive footwork of spreading the word of the union and planning for their first convention. In September of 1962 the first convention of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) was held with 300 in attendance (Doak 37). Huerta was elected Vice President with Chávez taking the helm.

The next two years were spent with Chávez in Delano and Huerta in Stockton, allowing them to build bases in two significant parts of California growing country. Huerta spent this time corresponding with Chávez over union business and travelling extensively throughout the Central Valley. Huerta's main rhetorical work, though, was centered in Sacramento, the capital of California, pursuing lobbying efforts. As Juan Gomez-Quiñones explains, "Mexicans provided a basic labor resource in mining, agriculture, and construction" and as the Mexican American presence in these industries grew so did concern over poor wages and poor working conditions, thus necessitating "labor organizing, which became fairly widespread" (295). Huerta's speeches and testimonies were preeminent in shaping the conversation on wages, working conditions, and the general plight of the field worker during this time. The laws that she supported

included a 1960 bill to permit people to take the California driver's examination in Spanish, the 1962 legislation repealing the Bracero Program, and the 1963 legislation to extend Aid to Families with Dependent Children to California farmworkers. These are indicative of the overture of her work: pro-Mexican American, pro-immigrant, and pro-poor women, children, and families. Her lobbying and organizing efforts were manifesting concurrently with other waves in the Chicana/o Movement. As she testified and organized, other prominent speakers such as Corky Gonzales and Reies Lopez Tijerina were inspiring Chicana/os young and old to begin critically confronting their decades long treatment as second class citizens in their homeland.

These pro-migrant, pro-worker successes were won during a deeply divided era of American politics. The early 1960's were marked by the tense politics of the Cold War, in particular the Bay of Pigs and the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis. Huerta's involvement with these issues was both nuanced and complex and, at times, contradictory. Huerta was first a labor rights activist, but guiding these activist activities was also Huerta's devotion to politics and, more specifically, anti-capitalist politics. Kenneth Burt writes, "In yet another remarkable connection, Dolores Huerta went on to become the honorary co-chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, the descendent of the old Socialist Party whose members had helped shaped post-war labor and civil rights politics in California" (103). The Democratic Socialists of America state their vision as follows:

At the root of our socialism is a profound commitment to democracy, as means and end. As we are unlikely to see an immediate end to capitalism tomorrow,

DSA fights for reforms today that will weaken the power of corporations and increase the power of working people. For example, we support reforms that:

- decrease the influence of money in politics
- empower ordinary people in workplaces and the economy
- restructure gender and cultural relationships to be more equitable.

We are activists committed to democracy as not simply one of our political values but our means of restructuring society. Our vision is of a society in which people have a real voice in the choices and relationships that affect the entirety of our lives. We call this vision democratic socialism — a vision of a more free, democratic and humane society ([dsausa.org](http://dsausa.org)).

This vision aligned with the UFW's work, and with Huerta's rhetorical work on the repealment of the Bracero Act and the extension of food and financial aid to needy families.

This political leaning was also of great importance to Huerta's rhetorical efficacy. She was a Chicana Socialist during a time where Latino/as and Communists/Socialists were the dire enemy of the security of the American way of life. Zaragosa Vargas explains, "In the Red Scare that followed World War II, Mexican American activists working for civil rights were harassed, intimidated, vilified and indicted as subversives" ([oregonstate.edu](http://oregonstate.edu)). As Russia positioned themselves to begin nuclear destruction of the United States via Cuba, Mexican Americans were swept into suspicion based on nothing less than skin color and linguistic practices.

*The Chicano Civil Rights Years*

In 1964 Huerta relocated to Delano to focus organizing efforts in the Imperial Valley with Chávez. During this time Huerta and her six children lived with Chávez, his wife Helen, and their eight children. Using the Chávez household as headquarters for the union, Huerta, Chávez, his wife, and cousin Manuel Chávez slowly grew the ranks of the union. Chávez served as spokesman, Helen as bookkeeper, and Huerta and Manuel as recruiters. Huerta and Manuel would often work in the fields alongside the migrant workers in order to both spread the word of the union and to earn money. Alongside their reinvigorated organizing efforts another movement was happening within the Chicana/o communities throughout the Southwest, the Chicano Civil Right Movement.

Concurrent with the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement Huerta and Chávez were making great gains in their union work. The Delano grape strike, the movement that would become the foundation upon which the UFW would be built, began in 1965. Upon the advice of a lawyer friend, Huerta and Chávez were advised to shift from ineffective strike and picketing to the more effective boycott, in particular of liquor. Starting with the grape grower Shenley, a supplier of wine grapes located in California's Imperial Valley, as target for the first boycott, Huerta and her cohorts began spreading the word of farm worker abuses nationally. Volunteers hitchhiked to various American cities, speaking on the abuses of Shenley grape pickers and calling for communities, grocers, and buyers to discontinue purchasing Shenley products. As the volunteers continued to successfully spread the word throughout America, Huerta and Chávez were organizing a march on the California capital to compliment the rhetoric of the boycott. In 1966, this march manifested with farmworkers, protestors, and organizers walking 300 miles from Delano

to Sacramento in a pilgrimage that ended on Easter Sunday. Before the march could culminate, Shenley agreed to recognize the union and sign a contract for their 400 workers.

This was a huge win for the UFW, and it was also a very prominent rhetorical moment for Huerta. At the culmination of the march to San Francisco, Huerta was asked to read the Farmworkers statement from the steps of the capital in front of the *peregrinación* devotees, the community, and media outlets from around the country. It was Easter Sunday of 1966, and the march from Delano to Sacramento had lasted over 300 miles. The attendees were tired, yet invigorated by their efforts and accomplishments. Huerta ascended the steps of the capital and, addressing the large crowd, read:

The governor and the legislature of California, we say you cannot close your ears and eyes to us any longer. You cannot pretend that we do not exist. You cannot plead ignorance to our problems because we are here, and we are not alone.”

(*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

As the noted firebrand speaker of the UFW, Huerta’s rallying read of this bold statement was followed by sonorous cheers from the crowd. These cheers would resonate through media renderings of the march and the finale, and was soon complemented by the momentous deal with Shenley that favored the UFW’s demands for the farm workers.

Complementing the UFW’s win against Shenley and Huerta’s rousing speech on the steps of the capital was the implicit win for women and students that came from Huerta’s and the UFW’s successes. While the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement struggled with macho politics and the subjugation of Chicanas participating in the ranks,

the NFWA was setting a precedence for a nuanced involvement where the presence of women on picket lines and in marches was called for, expected, and honored. Huerta recalls,

“They would always say if they didn’t have a woman, “We need some women on our picket line. We need some women here.” It makes it a lot easier for them.

Then they can justify not being macho tough or macho revenge, you know. Just having the women there made it possible, I think, for the organization to practice it’s nonviolence” (Harding 183).

The culmination of the Shenley strike in late 1966 would give way to one of the most productive times in Huerta’s rhetorical career. With the merger of the National Farm Workers Association with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, the United Farmworkers Organizing Committee, later the United Farm Workers (UFW), was born. This merger meant that opportunities to speak, both in the fields and in the legislature, expanded and that Huerta’s rhetorical skills were now more necessary than ever. In 1967 striking farm workers, supported by the UFW, expanded their boycott on grapes used in wine production and began a national boycott of California table grapes. Huerta’s various rhetorical roles during thee crucial *Movimiento* years were simple: advocate, organize, and lead via her speeches. Lisa Genasci explains, she “did much of the negotiating, the legislative work” (131) for the UFW. While Chávez fulfilled his obligations as the personality and face of the UFW, Huerta called people together and explained and implemented the nuts and bolts of the boycotts and protests. From her beginnings running small, home-based and community-wide meetings of a few dozen people ten years prior in the Community Service Organization, Huerta came into

rhetorical profundity organizing thousands, lobbying, debating, and otherwise dominating the Chicana/o *agora*<sup>iii</sup> of this time.

With multiple successes within the following years, including pro-worker contracts with grape and lettuce growers and the partnership of the UFW with the AFL-CIO, Huerta continued to work diligently within both the UFW and *El Movimiento*. But, times were changing, and the social milieu of the 1960s and 1970s was giving way to another cadre of movements. True to her dynamacy, Huerta would be prepared to shift causes and rhetorical devices as her partnerships and activist causes shifted.

#### *Huerta's Post-Labor Rights Rhetorical Activity*

Huerta's calling to lead the farm worker's labor rights movement slowly ebbed as worker rights were established in California and throughout the United States. As fair wages, safer working conditions, healthcare, and other such safeguards were voted into law, Huerta's focus shifted to other social and political causes. Beginning in 1980s, Huerta would become more directly involved with political demonstrations. Though politically active from the beginning of her rhetorical career, most notably during the 1960s, she remained most closely connected to labor activism and migrant labor rights.

But as the 1980's dawned, the image of Latinos in America would shift from tropes of the penitent activist, the militant brown beret, and the migrant laborer to a more popularized, mainstream rendition of the up and coming young entrepreneur. President Reagan would christen the 1980's the "Decade of the Hispanic," and young Chicanas and Chicanos were given the cultural and political push to envision themselves as a part of the yuppie echelon and with access to everything that lifestyle entailed. As this Reagan era agenda of sociocultural and political enculturation of Chicana/os progressed, though,

Huerta would frequently be seen at anti-Republican party demonstrations, speaking against the underhanded savior rhetoric being suavely directed to Latina/os in the United States.

In response to the assimilationist and silencing tactics of the government, the United Farm Workers founded *Radio Campesina* as a forum for discussion of the ills of Reagan-era Republicans and to discuss the massive union busting occurring throughout California and the United States. *Radio Campesina* entered the airwaves in 1983 heralded by an Associated Press article with the headline “Growers fear farmworkers radio station’s newscast may become ‘propaganda tool’” (*The History of Mexican American Radio*). In response to the sensationalism surrounding the bilingual radio station, General Manager Victor Aleman remarked, “Our purpose is to inform, not to agitate or manipulate. Farmworkers are the most exploited and abused people and, at times the most uninformed” (ibid). The growers had made good use of the radio airwaves for many years prior to the founding of *Radio Campesina*, and were reluctant to give up their stranglehold monopoly on this very effective form of media. *Radio Campesina*’s efforts to counter this monopoly came in the form of language use, with Spanish being the primary language of the station, and the playing of non-European music (ibid). The precedence of Spanish language use for political means on the airwaves came during the 1920’s and 1930s when radio broker Pedro Gonzalez began using his influence and access to radio to criticize the police department’s treatment of Mexicans in Los Angeles. In 1934, District Attorney Buron Fritts caught wind of this and had Gonzales arrested and jailed on trumped up rape charges. Gonzales would spend the next six years in prison and would subsequently be released and deported to Mexico (ibid). Ben Gutierrez, remarked



on this controversial history when he explained *Radio Campesina's* stayed focus on informing farm workers of their rights and of important occurrences with the union. He explains,

We didn't get into political things at all. We would carry it as a news item. [The farmworkers organizing] was very controversial. Why should we [get involved]? Just because we were a Spanish language station? To us, that wasn't enough. We were using the public airwaves of this country. We had to watch our step. (ibid)

For Huerta, co-founding *Radio Campesina* along with Chávez meant that the UFW's message could be disseminated widely beyond the Imperial Valley. The radio station became a means for the public at large to begin gaining a broader understanding of the plight of Mexican and Mexican Americans while also functioning as a means for Americans to begin understanding the categorical socioeconomic differences that Latinos in the United States were confronted with. The lumping of all Spanish surname peoples into the misnomer "Hispanic," which came to encompass those of Mexican descent along with Islanders such as Cubans and Dominicans, Central Americans, and South Americans had become a political tactic of the Reagan administration with the declaration of the 1980s being the "Decade of Hispanics." For example, Cuban Americans had long been considered a privileged group amongst Spanish surnamed peoples in the United States. This stems from the prevalence of well-to-do Cubans relocating to the United States willingly, and Cuban American success once settled in the United States. The diaspora of Cubans that happened during the 1980s was followed by the seeming success of these immigrants. In discussion of what the "Decade of the Hispanic entailed, the Cuban American National Council proclaimed, "that the rapid growth of the Hispanic American

population could be used [...] to demand equitable political empowerment and full participation in American social, economic, and educational life” (Cuban American National Council). Though Latina/os in the United States deeply understood the differences, socially, culturally, and economically, within their population, politicians attempted to diminish these differences in pursuit of placation. This rhetorical appeasement was not supported by social programs or reforms that actually benefitted Latina/os in the United States. As Latina/os were persuaded to envision themselves as a part of the wall-street decade of the 1980s, they continued to be systematically and systemically held down both socially and economically. *Radio Campesina* and the UFW pushed against this message through their informative programming.

Huerta worked closely with *Radio Campesina* throughout the 1980s, assisting in the organizing, fundraising, and programming mechanics of the station. Her politics during this era remained aligned with the Democratic Party, and she continued work of 20 years prior with the Robert Kennedy campaign, by speaking for Democratic nominees and against the Republican platforms. In 1988, as Huerta was peacefully demonstrating at an anti-Bush politics rally she was beaten by police. Rushed into emergency surgery, Huerta suffered a ruptured spleen, six broken ribs, and a subsequent tough recovery (García 19). During her recuperation, Huerta officially stepped down from active work in *Radio Campesino* and in the UFW and begun a more focused agenda with the Feminization of Power campaign. This national campaign, spearheaded by the National Organization of Women (NOW), acknowledged the lack of women in the male-dominated political arena and attempted to “double the number of women occupying

seats in state legislatures and Congress through a multi-state tour to recruit potential female candidates” (apnewsarchive.com).

This shift in Huerta’s activism focus, from labor rights to women’s rights, came at a time of great shifts for Chicanas across the United States. Chicanas were moving out of *El Movimiento* with clear knowledge of the apparatuses of subjugation that they were being challenged with, both by white America and by Chicanos. As a founding leader in the labor and civil rights movements, Huerta stood iconic as a voice, a voice that Chicanas could model themselves after. Responding to her role in the feminist movement of the late 1970s through the 1990s, Huerta states, ‘Unless women can control their own bodies then women will always be suppressed’ (M. García 340).

#### *Current Rhetorical Activity*

Though Huerta has slowly moved from the front lines of activism and organizing to a more behind the scenes, directorial position, her rhetorical contributions to important social and political issues has not diminished. Rather, her experience as a front lines activist rhetor has only added to her rhetorical diversity as a more tenured social and political speaker.

With the establishment of the Dolores Huerta Foundation (DHF) in 2002, Huerta assumed an honored place as rhetor in the *polis*. Her travelling and speaking engagements have remained steady, with consistent invitations to speak on social and civil rights issues throughout the country. Her foundation is based on the premise of “creating networks of healthy, organized communities pursuing social justice through systemic and structural transformation” (<http://doloreshuerta.org/>). And, the various programs that the foundation supports demonstrates direct action to these causes. California politics has been shaped

over the last decade by the educatory nature of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, a rhetorical move from *oikos*<sup>iv</sup> to *polis* that directly aligns with Huerta's own transition. The DHF serves communities in providing instruction in how to organize, how to advocate, and how to navigate the sometimes tricky politics of community leadership.

Huerta remarks:

“I learned my organizing method from a gentleman named Fred Ross Sr. He is a person — also the one that taught César how to organize. And we organized through a grassroots model where we would meet in people's homes. And, by the way, I'm still doing that same thing today with my foundation, the Dolores Huerta Foundation for community organizing.” (*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

As head of an efficacious community-based foundation, Huerta has seen her decades-long contributions to social and civil rights become acknowledged in very public ways. In May 2006, Huerta was awarded an honorary degree for work in civil rights from Princeton University, Mills College, and the University of the Pacific. The naming of various schools after her in California, Texas, and Colorado complemented these honors. Her impact on education is served through these honors. As a Chicana speaker, Huerta has gained the respect that comes with students attending a place of learning named after her. This is important, as young learners will go forth spreading Huerta's name as concurrent with a place of education.

Within this last decade, Huerta's honors have been both national and numerous. In 2009 she was awarded the UCLA Medal and in May of 2012 she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barak Obama. When receiving the medal, Huerta remarked:

“The freedom of association means that people can come together in organization to fight for solutions to the problems they confront in their communities. The great social justice changes in our country have happened when people came together, organized, and took direct action. It is this right that sustains and nurtures our democracy today. The civil rights movement, the labor movement, the women’s movement, and the equality movement for our LGBT brothers and sisters are all manifestations of these rights. I thank President Obama for raising the importance of organizing to the highest level of merit and honor.”

(doloreshuerta.org)

In tribute to Huerta, President Obama remarked:

Without any negotiating experience, Dolores helped lead a worldwide grape boycott that forced growers to agree to some of the country’s first farm worker contracts. And ever since, she has fought to give more people a seat at the table. “Don’t wait to be invited,” she says, “Step in there.” He continues, “And on a personal note, Dolores was very gracious when I told her I had stolen her slogan, “Si, se puede,” “Yes, we can.” Knowing her, I’m pleased that she let me off easy, because Dolores does not play. (*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

Later, Huerta would reflect on this momentous honor in an interview where she summed up her past and present dedication to community activism. She states:

When we started organizing the farm workers, people would say, how are you going to organize the workers? They don’t speak English. They’re not citizens. They don’t have any money. But we would say to the workers, you have power. And they would say, what kind of power do we have? It’s in your person. And it

is in your person. And you, together with other people, other workers, you can make the difference. But you have to remember that nobody is going to do it for you. If you don't get out there and try to solve your own problems, it's never going to change. And that same message applies to everyone. Every one of our segments of society that are trying to make positive change or fighting for social justice, this is what we have to do, come together, organize, push back, take that direct action, and then we can make the world a better place. (*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

Recently, Huerta has been embracing her role as a “born again feminist” by speaking and canvassing on women’s rights issues such as the Late Term Abortion Ban coming up on local ballots such as in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This ban would outlaw the practice of medical abortions after 23 weeks of pregnancy without prejudice. With women’s reproductive and medical rights being threatened, Huerta has made it primary to get into communities and speak to potential voters, especially college students, about what the ban is and the potential effects it would have on women, families, and the community.

Huerta’s rhetorical efficacy lies in her ability to speak in a comprehensive way about myriad issues to a myriad of people. Her reputation and rhetorical prowess precedes her; in action she is the consummate interlocutor. She engages her audience, listens to their concerns, and responds with educatory concern. Her life’s work has been social and civil rights, and her rhetoric has been the vehicle through which these concerns have manifested.

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<sup>i</sup> From an interview with Margaret E. Rose. See citation in the bibliography. Huerta's grandfather's diminutive use of the phrase "*siete lenguas*," seven tongues, suggests a reversal of the Anzaldúan critique of women being labeled *malcriada*, ill raised, for being talkative.

<sup>ii</sup> The Girl Scouts have a patch program based on "the core of Dolores Huerta's legacy: the human and civil rights of farmworkers, women, and immigrants" with girls being encouraged to research the "challenges facing farmworkers, women, and immigrants," to "connect with others to increase community action" and to "take action!" (sdgirlscouts.org).

<sup>iii</sup> *Agora*, or the Greek *Ἀγορά*, meaning assembly or meeting place and used to symbolize the central locale of political life in Greek city-states.

<sup>iv</sup> *Oikos*, or the Greek οἶκος, meaning household.

## Chapter Two: Mexican and Mexican American Women and Labor Rights Activism

“While Huerta is an atypical labor leader, she is also part of a tradition of strong Chicana/Latina labor and community leaders of the twentieth century.”  
(Mario T. García xxi)

This chapter traces the trajectory of Mexican and Mexican American women soldiers, writers, educators, and activists who were vociferously present in both the Mexican and United States *polis* from the turn of the twentieth century through the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement. I begin this trajectory at the turn of the twentieth century on both sides of the Rio Grande in order to establish that the rhetoric of Dolores Huerta arises from the political rhetoric of *Mexicanas* during the Mexican Revolution, their Mexican American women predecessors fighting for labor rights for Mexican Americans, and migrant workers in the United States in the ensuing decades. As I explore each successive decade of the early twentieth century, I focus on prominent Mexican and Mexican American women rhetors that directly influenced Huerta, either through their groundbreaking work in labor rights activism or through the glass ceilings they shattered. This chapter demonstrates that Chicana Rhetoric has its roots in early rhetorics of Mexican *antiporfiristas* and early Mexican American women rhetor/activists.

### *Introduction*

Dolores Huerta came into rhetorical prominence in the pre-civil rights, pro-labor rights decade of the 1950s, but the precedent of Mexican American women seeking to effect change in the political arena was set long before. Though various political movements would come to shape the rhetoric of Dolores Huerta and other Chicana rhetors, the most contemporary would be the Mexican Revolution of the 1910's. By the early 1900's the United States and Mexico had been divided for some fifty years, with



the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 marking the contemporary schism. This moment marked the definitive dividing of the two countries, yet the people of the Southwest still maintained intimate connections through a shared history and through familial ties. Chicana historian Emma Pérez notes, “The discourse of the revolution knew no boundaries. Language, words, corridos, and concepts moved back and forth along the Mexico-U.S. border as easily as the renowned revolutionary Francisco “Pancho” Villa” (56). Though women on either side of the border experienced different social and economic movements, they continued to share a political consciousness through these rhetorical interchanges. Maylei Blackwell explains that the “roots of Chicana feminism [begin] in Mexico, primarily in women’s involvement in the radical tradition of anarchism and socialism” (3). She contends that these ideologies have “informed labor and civil rights movements by Latina/os north of the border” (ibid). *Mexicanas* active in Mexico and in United States during the time of the Mexican Revolution were producing *antiporfirista* print and public texts that were profound in creating a public, political voice. *Mexicanas* made great strides in shaping the outcome of the Mexican Revolution and it is these women rhetors that would serve as the precedence upon which Mexican American women such as Dolores Huerta would build<sup>1</sup>. Tactics for entering the *polis*, positioning themselves as rhetors for sociopolitical change, and conducting activism work relevant to the temporal and social zeitgeist were all direct manifestations of the antiporfirista *Mexicanas*. Dolores Huerta’s rhetoric is agonistic and counters the norm, both of which are rhetorical legacies of *Mexicanas* and Mexican American women of the Mexican Revolution era, which was followed by the Mexican American Generation of the 1930s-1960s.

Separated by the Rio Grande, but still intimately connected to *Mexicana* rhetors and rhetoric through familial and political connections, Mexican American women across the Southwest contributed to *antiporfiriano*<sup>ii</sup> and the Mexican Revolution and would come to see themselves as an integral part of the Mexican Revolution. Mexican American women saw themselves connected to a revolution that resulted in agrarian reform, education reform, equal rights for women, and rights for workers (Pérez 56). And, they would embrace this connection, recognizing how important their voices were in the reform that was so desperately needed in their own communities. Mexican American women would rise to become founders of labor revolutions occurring throughout the Southwest and on the East Coast in the early part of the twentieth century.

Though not yet embracing the politicized term “Chicana,” twentieth century Mexican American women were embracing the ideologies of labor and civil rights, but not yet associating with the politics of anarchism and socialism that would later come to mark the turn towards the political identification of “Chicana” (Blackwell 3). These Mexican American women predecessors of Dolores Huerta were also concurrently publishing, teaching, organizing, and speaking in spaces ranging from small *mutualista* meetings to large conferences. Demonstrating a structure that labor leaders such as Emma Tenayuca and Huerta would embrace in later decades, turn of the century Mexican American women began their movement from the *oikos* (home) to *polis* (city) by starting in the home and then progressively moving to larger meetings, meeting houses, and by the mid-1910s, to conferences such as *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*. Complementing their public speaking activities was prolific textual activities, including editorials, articles,

poems, and other literary endeavors. These varying approaches to entering the *polis* and coming to forum are important to document because they serve as precedential proof that Chicana rhetoric has been dynamic, situational, and political from its inception.

*Textual Activities of Mexicanas during the Mexican Revolution*

Though there is no one particular moment when Mexican American women began organizing and advocating for change, the turn of the twentieth century, a time of great change in both the United States and in Mexico, can be viewed as a critical turning point. On the Mexican side of the border, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) went from a decades old toss up between successive presidents to a full-blown revolution by the turn of the century. Though the Mexican Revolution was rooted in *el otro lado*, its propaganda took root on both sides of the border. In fact, most of the successful pamphlets and magazines were written by revolutionary *Mexicanas* and *soldaderas* in San Antonio, Texas, and Los Angeles, California. Emma Pérez writes:

Women [...] contributed to the revolution's agenda as revolutionists, activists, and journalists. The revolution, then, created a kind of renaissance during which women wrote essays and edited their own magazines, newspapers, and journals. Many of these women, who sought political exile in the United States, wrote prolifically, criticizing the dictator Porfirio Díaz and championing the revolution as a revolution for women (56).

Through their correspondence and personal interactions with revolutionary *Mexicanas*, Mexican American women were coming into contact with progressive worker rights and agrarian reform ideas from Mexico that spoke directly to their own plight in the U.S.

One example of the textual activity of revolutionary *Mexicanas* was *La Mujer Mexicana*, a widely read newspaper edited by Dolores Jiménez y Muro that espoused progressive liberal views and advocated for the improvement of conditions for the Mexican poor. Jiménez y Muro, born in Aguascalientes, Mexico in 1848, was a schoolteacher turned socialist activist turned colonel in the Mexican Army. It was her superb writing skills that tied all of these vocations together and allowed her to become the editor and writer for *La Mujer Mexicana*. She composed other important revolutionary-era documents as well including the 15-point plan of the *Complot de Tacubaya* (1911), a crucial piece of propaganda that incited rebellion in favor of Francisco Madero. Also, “The Political and Social Plan” (1911) which subsequently influenced Emiliano Zapata’s political and social policy. Jiménez y Muro’s major causes were “agrarian reform, maximum working hours, better wages and working conditions for peasants in the countryside as well as workers in urban areas, educational reform, and the protection of Mexico’s indigenous people” (Rappaport 341). These causes were indicative of the very fabric of feminist concerns in Mexico and spoke to Chicana’s concerns as well. That the fruits of working the land would benefit the laborers of the land, and that the laborers would not be exploited in the process would serve to motivate *Mexicanas* to rhetorically engage the Mexican *polis*, and, later, Chicanas in the American *polis*.

As a prominent *soldadera* fighting for socialist leaders, Jiménez y Muro was present on the battlefield, as well as in print. In a letter written after her arrest for participating in the Zapatista uprising in Morelos in support of General Victoriano Huerta in 1913, Jiménez y Muro demonstrated her rhetorical ability in a letter to General Aurelio

Blanquet, a co-conspirator of Huerta in the Morelos uprising (The American Mosaic 1).

In the letter, Jiménez y Muro explains:

As for general hopes, there are two. One is that you read carefully what I am about to write about the current revolution, whose root causes I have known before it started, and whose progress I have followed intimately. The other is that the Government adopts peaceful means to end it (ibid).

In this plea, Jiménez y Muro positions herself in two fundamental ways: as a writer and a revolutionary. This nuanced self-presentation creates a profound sense of *ethos* that is precedential to later Chicanas whose rhetorical work included advocating for labor rights, working rallies and protest lines, and drafting pamphlets and editorials.

Also writing in pursuit of progressive social politics around the same time as Jiménez y Muro was Juana Gutiérrez de Mendoza. Gutiérrez de Mendoza was well-known in Mexico for penning stories on labor conditions for both *El Diario del Hogar* and her own newspaper, *Vesper: Justicia y Libertad* which she co-authored with Elisa Acuña y Rosetti (Acuña 170). Though *Vesper* was short lived, confiscated before wide spread dissemination and published only one time after 1910, both Gutiérrez de Mendoza and Elisa Acuña y Rosetti continued to create and write for *antiporfirista* publications (Mirandé and Enríquez 205). Gutiérrez de Mendoza continued to write and publish *Alma Mexicana* and Acuña y Rosetti was responsible for *Fiat Lux* (ibid).

While these *Mexicana* rhetor/writers were effecting change through their publications, mainly in the arena of educating the public to common *antiporfirista* tenets, activity was not limited to pen and paper. Many *Mexicanas* such as Juana Gutiérrez de Mendoza and Elisa Acuña y Rosetti were active in political organizations that saw them

campaigning for progressive candidates and organizing within communities in pursuit of social and economic improvements. *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, “a women’s political resistance organization,” (Paloma, Acosta, and Vinegarten 74-75) saw Jiménez y Muro and Acuña y Rosetti “guiding the struggle of the [Mexican] Revolution” through the “radical transformation of women” (Mendoza 107). *Hijas* was important because it brought feminist-minded, socialist-oriented *Mexicanas* together in collusion against the threat of having their issues undermined by the larger political revolution. Decades later, a regeneration of *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* would emerge in the form of an American Latina Feminist organization, taking *Hijas* as its namesake, during the struggle against atavistic racial and gender roles threatening Chicanas during the Chicano Rights Movement (1960s-1970s).

*Rhetorical Activities of Mexican American Women (1900s-1920s)*

The Mexican Revolution served as the *kairotic* moment for *Mexicanas* to assume positions in battle and in the public forum in the debate over social and political changes occurring in Mexico. During this same time on the American side of the border, the burden of silence and cultural and economic stasis on Mexican American women was strong. The social norms that *Mexicanas* were struggling against via their involvement in the Mexican Revolution were not being challenged in America, or, if they were, it was not through the aggressive acts of brave *soldaderas* or the political writings such as those of Jiménez y Muro, Gutiérrez de Mendoza, and Acuña y Rosetti. Juan L. Gonzales, Jr. explains that the persistent norms oppressing Chicanas included the continued “emphasis on masculinity, patriarchy, [...] the subordination of women, the sexual double standard, and the assumption that women and children were the property of the husband” (186).

Separated from the progress being made in Mexico by a border and a treaty, Mexican American women watched as their counterparts in *el otro lado* took part in effecting change via public forum. In America, it was through the economic hardship of being a woman of color in a country that honored neither femininity nor non-whiteness that Mexican American women went beyond the tradition of being bound to the *oikos*, the home. Needing to either supplement the poor wages their husbands were receiving or support themselves with their own work, Mexican American women became a significant part of the American workforce in the early 1900s (Acuña 183). The jobs that Mexican American women held around this time were often localized in laundries and canneries (Ruiz 6). Emma Tenayuca, the most important Mexican American woman activist of the 1920s-1930s demonstrates this via her work as and advocating for pecan shellers in San Antonio. These low-level manufacturing and industry jobs typically paid Mexican American women a fraction of what Mexican American men were receiving in similar wage-level jobs and upwards of half of what European migrant women were receiving in the same positions (Acuña 183). And, poor wages were only compounded by deplorable living situation. Zaragosa Vargas explains:

Mexican Americans were kept in their place as excluded and exploited second-class citizens—they were the last hired [...], were discriminated against [...], and had to cope with the larger issue of racism. Segregation barriers in most cities of the Southwest were strong. Anglos maintained the racial status quo and therefore resisted fair housing and federal housing apartheid policies led to related social problems, such as the segregation of school” (Labor Rights are Civil Rights 13).

Mexican women, during the time of the Mexican Revolution, were able to use a middle-class means of voice, the press, to tap into the movement, but Mexican American women did not have access to this middle-class means of speaking. Mexican American women with roots in the North American Southwest and *Mexicanas* who were a part of the diasporic influx across the border during the Mexican Revolution did not yet have access to the media or to the *polis*, but were still intent on voicing collective concerns

Concurrently, Mexican American men were facing similar hardships in terms of poor wages, poor working conditions, and quicksand debt systems with their companies. These debt systems were arranged where goods and necessities could be purchased from company stores on credit and the debt would be taken from the next pay cycle. This looping of credit and debt meant that low wages were never proctored in full and the company would continue to profit from their workers in more ways than just paying peon wages. The workers reliance on these debt systems, and the true underhanded nature of them, was not lost on the workers. And, these quicksand debt systems were yet another motivation for workers to organize against large growers, companies, and corporations.

The right for Mexican American and Mexican men living and working in the United States to protest, organize, and unionize was ever present. But these early organization and unionizing efforts were made as complicated and economically destructive to the workers as possible by their employers. As Rodolfo Acuña explains, the early 1900s was a time of great discrimination against working Mexican Americans in the Southwest, where a culture of oppressive work conditions followed Mexican Americans, who were considered enemies and foreigners (167). As early as 1906, Mexican Americans were organizing and unionizing for better wages and better working



conditions. For example, in 1907 1,600 Texas and Pacific workers, the majority of which were Chicano and Mexican Nationals, went on strike and, supported by the United Mine Workers, called for better wages and the right to have the fence around their town taken down and the armed guards surrounding them as they worked disbanded (Acuña 169). These early efforts by Chicanos to organize were a definitive foreshadowing to the labor rights movement that would rise during the following decades. While these early struggles were led by males, it would be their female counterparts, those Mexican American women working in the canneries and packing houses, that would be the voice of change.

Mexican American women were pursuing labor rights through varied rhetorical activities, most notably through textual endeavors intimately tied to the Mexican Revolution. Critical awareness of the need to support working men and women through agrarian reform and workers rights was the basis of the revolution happening in Mexico, and Mexican American women were paying attention. Assisting them in finding outlets for voice and discussion with how Mexican revolutionary ideas could be applied to their struggle was Ricardo Flores Magón. Flores Magón expatriated to the United States in 1904 in order to continue his political work against the Porfirio Díaz regime while concurrently drawing attention to “discrimination, police brutality, and lynchings of Mexicans in the United States” (Acuña 169). While in the United States, Flores Magón edited the *antiporfirista* newspaper *Regeneración*, which was read widely in Chicana/o enclaves throughout the Southwest (ibid) and would serve to invigorate Mexican American women in their organization and activism endeavors.

Sara Estela Ramírez, a young Mexican American woman from Laredo, Texas was an early supporter of Flores Magón, of agrarian reform in the Southwest, and of mutualism. Her progressive, liberal publication *La Corregidora*, which espoused these ideals, was disseminated from San Antonio to Mexico City. An educator by trade, Ramírez engaged in oppositional politics by supporting Flores Magón from Texas via her prowess as a writer, a poet, and a teacher. Mirandé and Enríquez note that at her funeral Ramírez was remembered as “the most illustrious Mexican woman of Texas” and “*La Musa Texana*” (207). Ramírez’s main contribution to the rhetorical history of Chicanas was her tireless advocacy of human rights via mutualism, a belief that all should be treated equally and have a hand in helping each other survive and progress, and feminism. In terms of activism via print during the Mexican Revolution, Ramírez’s contributions north of the border many. Writing poetry on mutualism and feminism, penning articles in support of worker rights for *La Crónica* and *El Democrática Fronterizo*, and opening her home to the fleeing Flores Magón and his brother in 1904 as well as to other *magonistas* such as Juana Gutiérrez de Mendoza and Dolores Jiménez y Muro (Blackwell 107-8) all lent to her becoming a prominent Mexican American voice during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Complimenting the progressive political rhetoric of Ramírez was the rhetoric of educational policy in which Mexican American female teachers in the Southwest were engaged. Notable progressive educators of the 1910 and 1920s, the heyday of the Mexican Revolution, were Jiménez y Muro and Ramírez as well as Jovita Idar, Marta Peña, and Leonor Villegas de Magnón. Idar, Peña, and Villegas de Magnón were all educators in South Texas and contributing authors to *La Crónica*, an important

revolutionary era liberal publication. Idar, daughter of *La Crónica*'s publisher Nicasio Idar, was the momentum behind the publication becoming "a diverse pedagogical space" where teachers such as Peña and Villegas de Magnón could come to forum (Enoch 121). Aware of the need for children along the U.S. Mexico border to receive their education in both Spanish and English, Idar wrote tirelessly in support of Mexican American children having access to the Spanish language and to Mexican culture during their education.

Supporting Idar in this cause, Villegas de Magón penned three socio-politically themed articles for *La Crónica*; "Mexican Evolution" on Mexican politics, "The Mona Lisa" on the Western cultural tradition, and her Spanish language preservation manifesto "The Advancement of Mexicans in Texas" (Enoch 122). Peña, in a more educationally focused turn, "took up a distinctly uniform pedagogical agenda" in *La Crónica* with the article "Sections for Mexican Children" which focused on Mexican civic duty (Enoch 122). Though writing in Texas for Americans, these Mexican American women's clear ties with Mexico were deep and complicated. Their students in Laredo would have been majority Mexican and Mexican American due to the divisive geography of Laredo, whose Anglo population was small, extremely affluent, and centralized white enclaves in Laredo (Sanchez 70). Jessica Enoch explains that these women's articles in *La Crónica* reflect the tension of the border, where these writer/teachers were calling "on their readers to identify with one another and Mexico while still paying heed to the very real demands of life in Texas" (122). This educator/activism role that Idar, Peña, and Villegas embodied allowed them to not only educate their young Tejana/o students, but also to write on cultural citizenship, on politics, and on their history as Mexican Americans.

In extension to these writings, Idar also devoted her time to organizing Mexican Americans into forum on issues such as “criminal justice, the organization of workers, education, and the status of women” (Mirandé and Enríquez 223). This forum, *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, led by Nicasio Idar and supported by his daughter Jovita, met in September of 1911 in Laredo. This conference “brought together Tejano educational, labor, and civil rights activists with writers, journalists, and mutual aid societies” (Blackwell 109), as well as politicians from both sides of the border. Women were present and vocal at the conference, notably Hortensia Moncaya who “spoke about abuses of the criminal justice system and specifically about the lynchings of Chicanos (Mirandé and Enríquez 223).

Arising from this forum came a new organization, the *Liga Feminil Mexicanista*, consisting of the female members of *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* committed to the goal of leadership and representation “*por la raza y para la raza*” (for the race and by the race). In support of the conference and the *Liga Feminil Mexicanista*, two activist/organizer sisters, Andrea and Teresa Villarreal, started the publication *La Mujer Moderna*, a newspaper based out of San Antonio, Texas that “championed the emancipation of women” (Acosta and Vinegarten 78). These sisters’ goals were two-fold: support the revolution against Díaz and the ills of society he represented while concurrently fighting for the liberation of women. This fight was not futile; because many men involved in the revolution were under constant fire, literally and metaphorically, women were often called on to carry out the literary and propaganda end of the fight. Via *La Mujer Moderna*, and other similar newspapers of the time helmed by Mexican American women, and through the organization of themselves into activist cohorts such

as *La Liga Feminil* and *Regeneración*, women like the Villarreal sisters were essential to the Mexican Revolution and the eventual overthrow of Díaz. Though organizing and writing from the United States they were efficacious in their goals of progress for Mexican and Mexican Americans.

#### *Post-Revolutionary Activity of Mexican American Women*

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, Mexican American women were active in fighting for freedom and advocating for human rights, but with the revolution came a greater impetus to not only fight for all Mexicans and Mexican Americans, but also to pay distinct attention to the plight of women. This plight was not easily won, even within the ranks of the progressive freedom fighters. Flores Magón, leader of the anarchist Partido Liberal Mexicano, famously addressed his female supporters in his essay “A La Mujer,” printed in *Regeneración*, when he wrote:

“You constitute one-half of the human species and what affects humanity affects you as an integral part of it. If men are slaves, you are too. Bondage does not recognize sex; the infamy that degrades men equally degrades you. You cannot escape the shame of oppression. The same forces which conquer men strangle you.” (Pérez 61)

Flores Magón continued, ‘Your duty is to help the man; to be there when he suffers; to lighten his sorrow; to laugh and to sing with him when victory smiles’ (Pérez 62). This reductive positioning of women as helpful to the cause, as long as they stayed in their place, was indicative of the still persistent culture of misogyny facing female activists of the era. Because of this persistent culture, Mexican American women rhetor/activists dedicated at least part of their fight to women’s equality in the form of pressing for fair

pay, education, and political opportunities. As the Revolution ended, these same fights would continue, but with a more focused fervor than before.

In Mexico, a new constitution was established in 1917 providing equal rights to all regardless of gender and ensuring free access to education, freedom of press, and freedom of association. At the same time, American women were still three years away from the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, though women's suffrage was already an established movement. For those *Mexicanas* and Mexican American women along the border, though, it seemed that mainstream white-American suffrage was not quite concerned with their plight. This *lacuna* of women's suffragist's interest in non-white border women created the space for Chicanas to rise into vocal leadership positions in pursuit of their own, tailored suffrage.

In post Mexican Revolution America, this meant fighting for better pay and improved living conditions as well as access to health services and a quality education. *Mutualistas*, often founded and led by women, were crucial in these fights. Dating back to pre-revolutionary Mexico, these organizations were diverse in function, yet all were predicated on the tenets of cooperation and protection of vulnerable citizens. Often, these organizations, which included men and women from local neighborhoods, communities, and sometimes even across communities, would come together to ensure education, healthcare, and basic needs were met for their neighbors. Some *mutualistas* also functioned in political ways such as the Texas *mutualistas* that fought against the rampant lynchings of Mexican Americans along the Texas/Mexico border. Adding labor to civil rights, *mutualistas* were often active in organizing for better wages and working conditions. Julie Leininger Lycior recalls:

In 1917 one of the six labor mutualistas of San Antonio, Sociedad Morelos Mutua de Panaderos, staged a strike. It had lasted for a year when the United States Department of Labor mediated a settlement resulting in slightly higher wages and shorter hours” (Sociedades Mutualistas)

This union-style side to these organizations set the precedent for Chicana rhetorical roles in unions and union strikes that would mark the decades following the end of the Mexican Revolution.

Vicki L. Ruiz notes that Mexican American men and women, some acting “out of socialist convictions nurtured during the Mexican Revolution” and some solely in pursuit of decent wages and conditions, made for enthusiastic union members (77). Supported by the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packaging, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), who were working tirelessly to strengthen working conditions for cannery and packing workers nationally, the San Antonio, Texas based strike of the Southern Pecan Shelling Company would become a crucial moment for Chicanas engaging in rhetorical activity linked to unions and organizing. Though not a pecan-sheller, Emma Tenayuca, 23 at the time of the strike, was active in local San Antonio politics, serving as secretary of the San Antonio, Texas branch of the Texas Communist Party and versing herself on the growing Communist movement in the Southwest via newspapers and pamphlets. Educated and fierce in her conviction that the poverty and health care woes of fellow San Antonians could be rectified through better working conditions, Tenayuca was elected to serve as leader of the El Nogal union strike of Southern Pecan. Leading, organizing, and demonstrating alongside between 6,000-10,000 pecan shellers over the course of six weeks, Tenayuca worked to keep the pressure on the company to raise

wages to the federal minimum. Throughout their struggle, strikers were tear-gassed, billy-clubbed, and imprisoned (Ruiz 79) and Tenayuca came under intense scrutiny as the leader of the strike as well as for her leadership role in the Texas Communist Party. Embattled and eventually blacklisted, Tenayuca stayed committed to her work as organizer and activist and her persistent voice in the struggle ultimately led to a bittersweet success. The strikers' demands were met, but rather than following through with higher wages for its workers, Southern Pecan closed its San Antonio doors. After the strike, Tenayuca was forced into hiding due to her high profile rhetorical activities as well as her Communist Party connections. In 1987, 49 years after the end of the strike, Tenayuca would recall, "What started out as an organization for equal wages turned into a mass movement against starvation, for civil rights, for a minimum-wage law" (APWU). Tenayuca's ascension into the vocal leadership role of the El Nogal strike was a first; never before had a Mexican American woman led such a large and important movement against the agribusiness conglomerates that were the main cause of repression for Chicana/os. Her presence as speaker in the *polis* was monumental to the acceptance of the Chicana rhetors that would soon follow.

Around the time of Tenayuca's rise to figurehead speaker in San Antonio, a distinct shift was taking place for other Mexican American women doing similar work in civil and labor rights organizing. In previous decades, Mexican American women doing public rhetorical work were still consistently tied to the home or community, as in the case of Jovita Idar, who worked under the close tutelage of her father, and with *mutualista* members, whose work was intimately tied to the neighborhoods and communities they lived in. With Tenayuca as foremother, Mexican American women



began leaving behind their strong ties to the *oikos* and travelling to different cities and states in order to advocate. This meant that these women were not reliant on familial ties for access to the *polis* nor were they committed only to their immediate communities as forum for their rhetorical activities. As early as 1938, Chicanas began to travel and work as union representatives and activist/organizers in states across the Southwest, the South, and even on the East Coast.

The ascendancy of Mexican American women into these public rhetor positions was situated in the make-up of the unions and the protests that they were figureheading. Upwards of 95% of the canners, garment workers, pickers, and industrial workers that were striking and organizing during the 1930s in the Southwest were Mexican American, Californio, and Tejana/o (Ruiz 74). And, as Pat Chambers, lead organizer with the Communist-led Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union, would later state, "Although the directives in some superficial way could come from the outside, the actual organization had to come from the workers themselves" (Ruiz 74). Whites such as Chambers and Dorothy Ray Healey headed major unions such as the UCAPAWA-CIO, but never equivocated over encouraging Mexican Americans to assume vocal leadership positions. It would be women such as Emma Tenayuca, Luisa Moreno, and Josefina Fierro de Bright that would come to fill these vocal leadership roles in the organizing and advocating for labor and civil rights for Mexican American workers throughout the 1930s. As F. Arturo Rosales succinctly explains, "[t]he union attracted minorities because it promised to address dual wage systems and the labor segmentation" both of which were essential topics to much of the Chicana/o rhetorical activity taking place at this time (123).

*Women Rhetors of the Mexican American Generation 1930s-1950s*

Between the end of the Mexican Revolution (1920) and the beginning of the Great Depression (1930) a 75% increase of Mexicans living in the United States occurred, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of this increase concentrated in the Southwest (Vargas 16). Mostly young and mostly with families to support, Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals labored primarily in agriculture, with men picking fruits and vegetables and women working in canneries and packing houses. The substantial amount of able working people attempting to work in a downward spiral economy created many labor rights issues throughout the ensuing decades.

The decade of the Great Depression and the subsequent war years would prove to be a dark time for Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals looking to secure work and a living wage in the United States. Mexican Americans struggled against the “last to hire, first to hire” culture of the Depression, where Americans of color were hired last and fired first in favor of whites. This disparate hiring culture was then compounded by the spread of Mexican Repatriation (Vargas 18). Beginning in 1929, Mexicans and Mexican Americans were either arrested and bussed across the border into Mexico or travelled there willingly under the auspices of financial assistance from the U.S. government to aid in their relocation. Though enacted based on the profound lack of jobs during the Depression, this repatriation was fueled by blatant harassment and intimidation by whites and was government sanctioned, with President Hoover approving measures to move people of Mexican decent across the border whether U.S. citizen or not. Speaking on this mass exodus, Robert McKay explains that upwards of “400,000 to 500,000 Mexicans and their American-born children returned to Mexico” with “[m]ore than half

of these depart[ing] from Texas” (“Mexican Americans and Repatriation”). Many Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans were moving from rural areas in the vast state and services, including assistance in selling or moving belongings and filing paperwork to assist in crossing the border, were either absent or grossly neglected.

With this repatriation came more jobs and more social welfare benefits for white Americans, which was, ultimately, the motivation behind the repatriation. But, in the aftermath of the movement of Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals across the U.S./Mexico border, local businesses and employers came to the realization that their profoundly racist act of repatriation came with dire consequences. Chicana/os, who had been consistently loyal patrons to businesses, vanished, as did these businesses’ subsequent profits. Also, employers came to find that white Americans would simply not do the backbreaking labor previously done by Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals. Local economies began to strain and collapse over the absence of Chicana/os.

For those Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals that did not repatriate, electing to stay or managing to avoid the forced movement back to Mexico, job opportunities and wages were scarce and insufficient. The unavailability of sustained employment was only complicated by factors such as illiteracy in the English language, lack of quality education and job training, and barred access from the various Works Program Administration projects of the New Deal. This strained social and economic context would be the setting for a new form of Chicana rhetoric that was as political as before, but with a more focused purpose. Mexican American women’s rhetoric of the 1930s through the 1950s would embody labor and worker rights. Zaragosa Vargas speaks on this era as struggle that erupted into labor rights activism. He writes:

Mexican women likewise gained a voice and added a noteworthy dimension to the incipient union movement. Spanish-speaking women provided crucial support during strikes through explicit action. They held the picket lines sometimes for months on behalf of their male kin. When the strikes were over, the women continued to lead the struggle for unemployment relief as the members of Unemployed Councils, neighborhood relief committees, and auxiliaries. [...] As workers in the fields, in canneries and packinghouses, and in garment shops and cigar factories, Mexican women developed a consciousness of common interests that fueled the movement toward unionization and then political action. (*Labor Rights are Civil Rights* 4)

Acknowledging the basic ills of their subjugation as the lack of ability to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities, Mexican American women would rise vociferous in demanding economic equality and fairness. This New Deal era was marked by the rhetorical work of labor activists such as Emma Tenayuca, Luisa Moreno, and Josefina Fierro de Bright.

Through her work with Emma Tenayuca and the UCAWAPA-CIO, Luisa Moreno saw the need for an organization that represented all Latina/os in the United States not just locally, but nationally. With the help of Josefina Fierro de Bright, Moreno founded *El Congreso de Pueblos que Hablan Español*, a Los Angeles based conglomerate of Revolutionary and Depression era activists. Taking the basic tenets of the Communist Party, including the common Popular Front idea that the next wave of change in American Democracy would be ushered in largely on the backs of Latina/os, *El Congreso's* overarching purpose was to fight discrimination against Spanish speaking

peoples in the United States as well as to represent Spanish speaking Americans in their struggle for their equality. Moreno's ascension to rhetorical prominence in the organizing arena was a dynamic one. Born to a wealthy family in Guatemala, Moreno traveled to America in 1928 to pursue a career as a journalist, yet ended up working in New York garment factories in order to support her young daughter, Mytyl, and her abusive husband (whom she would soon divorce). While in New York, Moreno helped fellow Latina garment workers in New York organize into a union. This, coupled with her primary role leading "a protest against the ruthless and cold-blooded police murder" (Mirandé and Enríquez 230) of picketer Gonzalo González led Moreno into a life of organizing and activism rather than journalism. Her rhetorical prominence in New York caught the attention of the American Federation of Labor, and in 1935 Moreno was hired by the AFL and subsequently moved to Florida to continue organizing, mostly women of color laborers, and advocating. Her work with the AFL led her to join the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) where she became prominent in areas with large population of Spanish-speaking workers such as San Antonio and Los Angeles. In 1940, Moreno put her journalism skills to work as editor of the UCAPAWA's Spanish language newspaper *Noticias de UCAPAWA*.

These early times of organizing both in New York and the Southwest were trying for Moreno. She had long since divorced and placed her daughter Mytyl with a family in Florida and was under constant scrutiny for communist activities. Like Tenayuca in San Antonio, Moreno's affiliations with unions and her prominent role as rhetor in the San Antonio pecan-shellers strike made it difficult for her to separate politics from her organizing and activism efforts. Because of this ever-present tension, her ability to

effectively lead, organize, and head *El Congreso* was always in jeopardy. Though continuing to successfully organize Spanish-speaking workers and maintaining, along with Josefina de Bright, *El Congreso*, whose numbers swelled throughout the Great Depression and the 1940s to upwards of 70,000, (Vachon 286) Moreno's popularity and efficacy would become her downfall. After serving as international vice president for UCAPOWA and state vice president for the CIO, Moreno was forced to leave the United States in the 1950s (Vachon 286). Following an eerily similar fate as Tenayuca, Moreno would pass away years later destitute and far removed from her former rhetorical life in the North American *polis*.

Luisa Moreno's rhetorical work throughout the 1930s through the 1950s was notable in both volume and efficacy. From her work side-by-side with garment workers in New York, cigar rollers in Florida, strikers in Texas, and her role as speaker in front of the Fair Employment Practices Commission in California, she was precedential for later Chicana/Latina rhetors moving outside of their *oikos* and their communities and becoming prominent rhetors throughout America. Huerta would follow a similar path two decades later, often, like Moreno, leaving her children with friends and family to travel to organizing rally's and speaking engagements. Yet, unlike Moreno, Huerta would prove to be continually successful in her rhetorical work and able to deflect the societal and cultural pressures of motherhood in pursuit of her labor rights work.

Throughout her time as activist/rhetor, Moreno was often accompanied and always supported by her close working partner and co-founder of *El Congreso de Pueblos que Hablan Español* Josefina Fierro de Bright. Fierro was born in Mexicali, Mexico to a lineage of strong, female political means; both her mother and grandmother

were *magonistas* and supporters of the PLM (Blackwell 49). As a young girl living in Los Angeles, Fierro was distinctly aware of the inequities of American capitalism concerning Mexicans and Mexican Americans and, as a teen, she began to speak out against merchants that would “sell to Mexicanos but refused to hire them” (Blackwell 49). At age 18, Fierro rose to lead organizer of *El Congreso*, working alongside Moreno in Los Angeles advocating for Spanish-speaking workers. The first *El Congreso* was set to take place in Albuquerque in 1938, but the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee “swept into the city, arousing a campaign of hysteria against it” (Mirandé and Enríquez 232). Eventually manifesting in Los Angeles in 1938, *El Congreso* served as forum for Mexican American issues during the darkest days of the Great Depression.

Debating common topics such as poverty and hunger as well as less mainstream issues such as the rights of foreign-born workers, Moreno and Fierro moderated conversations with a sense of determination. Fierro would later explain the transactional nature of *El Congreso* when she stated that the purpose was to:

“Shape the law to benefit all levels of society and influence labor bosses and growers. [...] We are here to channel into positive ways of believing and thinking that will help all of us to end the repression that is the source of our misery. The challenge is still there to pave the way for other exploited workers.” (Larralde 18)

Fierro was a force in Mexican American activism during the 1930s. Beautiful, articulate, and married to a Hollywood screenwriter, she held the social and political connections that allowed her entrée into rhetorical engagements not previously afforded to Mexican American rhetors. Her connection via her husband, John Bright, with Hollywood stars such as Judy Garland afforded her the opportunity to garner attention for

the causes of *El Congreso* on a national level. This presentation of Mexican American and Mexican national workers' plights to Americans beyond the Southwest came at a critical economic juncture in the United States. Coming out of the Great Depression, Americans were awakening to the new politics of employment arising from New Deal programs and the United States was experiencing massive cultural ebbs and flows that resonated politically and economically.

Coming out of the Great Depression, activists such as Moreno and Fierro continued in their impressive organizing and activism efforts. Times were changing, though, as the American economy would make an impressive upwards shift as the country gradually entered World War II. The need for a labor force to replace the absence of men being sent overseas to fight in the war was immense and immediate. In direct opposition to the Mexican Repatriation activities of the 1930s, the institution of the Bracero program, an "emergency" migration policy instituted in 1942, (Snodgrass 79) would see a new influx of Mexicans and the return of Mexican Americans to North American soil. With some 4.6 million bracero contracts issued over the next twenty years (ibid) the entire milieu of Mexican American labor activism would change and a new cohort of Mexican American women rhetors would emerge, vocally carrying on their foremothers fight and setting a new, more sociopolitical tone than their predecessors. Though Mexican American rhetorical activity would still be firmly rooted in labor activism, there was a new sense of urgency to become a more critical part of the U.S. *demos*<sup>iii</sup>.

By the mid-1940s it was apparent that there was not one struggle for labor rights within the Mexican American community, but rather two distinct struggles divided along



gender lines. The sexual division of labor translated to a sexual division of labor activism, as Mexican American women fought for labor rights concurrently with gender rights. While some Mexican American men activists, namely Bert Corona and César Chávez, honored Mexican American women voices in their work, even promoting women to the highest levels of organizing and activism within their respective organizations, these women still bared most of the brunt of voicing gender along with labor concerns. Baca Zinn explains this division in terms of different social locations, different ideologies of family and labor, and different histories that led to different languages and methodologies (181). For pre-Chicana/o Movement Mexican American women rhetors of the 1940s and 1950s, articulating the importance of family along with labor was foundational to their activism. The inferiority of jobs available to Mexican American women was compounded by the subjugated positions these women retained in in their cultural and familial relationships as well as in U.S. society at large. Embodied in this subjugation was the urge to remain in a silent, supportive role to their male counterparts and to struggle for the benefit of these counterparts instead of themselves or as part of a collective. And while this struggle remained a constant for Chicana rhetor/activists it also began manifesting in different forms in wartime America. The younger generations of politically aware Mexican American women, born and raised, for the most part, in North America, were beginning to confront the racist oppression of their existence by whites in their own country. As Mexican American men were being sent off to war, Mexican American women remained on American soil left to voice their dissatisfaction over their “triple oppression” treatment (Segura 47). Soon, these young Mexican American soldiers would return to the United States with a new world view and a new sense of anger over

the persistent subjugation they were experiencing in the country they had just laid their lives on the line for.

The following years, a period of rhetorical urgency that would come to be called *El Movimiento*, or the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, would mark the sociopolitical apex of Chicanas in the twentieth century. Dolores Huerta would be present during this time advocating for the rights of Chicanas and Chicanos via the labor rights movement. These two concurrent struggles were intimately connected by the reality of economics. Zaragosa Vargas explains:

World War II represented a turning point for Mexican American workers, whose demand for equality in the workplace and in the nation as a whole made them the chief actors in the struggle for civil rights. This heightened consciousness was brought about by the opportunities for political and economic advancement afforded by New Deal legislation, the government's patriot wartime propaganda, the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices hearings on Discrimination, and the bloody interracial violence that swept America's cities in 1943. The entry of Mexican Americans into the CIO Unions and their fight against shop floor discrimination served as the important catalyst in the unfolding struggle for social and political advancement by this fast-growing, urban working-class population. (*Labor Rights are Civil Rights* 12)

Vargas continues, "As always, Mexican American women played as important a role as the men in mobilizing and leading support for the cause of civil rights" (*Labor Rights are Civil Rights* 12).

### *Conclusion*

As the Mexican American women rhetor's documented in this chapter demonstrate, Dolores Huerta's ascension to rhetorical powerhouse was not an anomaly; rather, women such as Tenayuca, Moreno, and Fierro set the rhetorical precedent. By first replicating the rhetoric of Mexicanas involved in agrarian, education, and economic reform during the Mexican Revolution, and later building off of the social activist ideologies of *mutualistas*, Mexican American women rhetors of the early twentieth century truly set a standard for rhetorical and textual activity in pursuit of social and civil justice. Mario García explains:

While Huerta is an atypical labor leader, she is also part of a tradition of strong Chicana/Latina labor and community leaders of the twentieth century. This includes Luisa Moreno, a key organizer for UCAPAWA (United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America), who in the 1930s and 1940s led a successful drive to unionize Mexican American cannery workers of Los Angeles and elsewhere. Josefina Fierro, a protégé of Moreno, proved to be a charismatic and significant civil rights leader in Los Angeles and southern California as the executive secretary of the National Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples (El Congreso). Finally. In Texas as a young teenager, Emma Tenayuca, equally charismatic as Fierro, successfully organized Mexican American pecan shellers in San Antonio. These women possessed many if not all of the same strong qualities as Dolores Huerta. (xxi)

Huerta entered her rhetorical work in the mid-1950s, just as movies such as *Salt of the Earth* that documented her predecessors were being made and just as the next

phase of mutualista-like community organization such as the Community Service Organization were coming into cohesion and efficacy. Huerta was poised to be the bridge between these early precedents, an era marked by social and civil justice but not yet steeped in socialist politics, and the next wave of activism, *El Movimiento*, the Chicano Civil Rights Movement.

As *El Movimiento* progressed into a national movement, it provided the platform for the socially and politically aware rhetoric of Mexican American women to evolve and become an important aspect of the U.S. *polis*. And, importantly, it provided a precedent of gendered Mexican American rhetoric for politicized Chicanas to look back at and build from. The resistance and counter discourses of the Mexican American generation would become the foundation for Chicanas seeking models of agency, which could be located in Emma Tenayuca, Josefina Fierro de Bright, and Dolores Huerta.

Throughout the coming decades, Mexican American women would adopt and embody the politicized term of ‘Chicana’ to represent their awareness of and commitment to progress in labor, gender and social justice causes. Dolores Huerta would be at the helm of these movements, speaking, organizing, and leading.

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<sup>i</sup> Yolanda Flores Neimann also places the origin of Chicanisma in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. She states, “Known examples of Chicana activism begin with the women who fought alongside men in the Mexican Revolution” (Chicana Power, vii).

<sup>ii</sup> The *porfiriato* (1876-1910) marks the Mexican presidency of Porfirio Diaz. This contentious time is remembered as an era of economic growth involving foreign investment and a growing upper class in Mexico, at the expense of freedoms and economies of the middle and poor classes. The *antiporfiriato* rose as the counter to the Diaz presidency, resulting in his ousting and the subsequent Mexican Revolution.

<sup>iii</sup> From the Greek δῆμος meaning “the people.”

### Chapter Three: The UFW, The Chicano Civil Rights Movement, and the Rise of Chicanismo

“Perhaps the Chicano Movement was not as central to American consciousness because the plight of Mexican Americans was not as recognized as the sin of slavery. Perhaps it was too fragmented and did not coalesce around the figure of a dynamic religious leader.

Perhaps it was not as well covered by the media because so much of its ideas and grassroots organization was expressed in the Spanish language. Or perhaps it was because Mexican Americans were still viewed as foreigners.”

F. Arturo Rosales

#### *Introduction*

Moving into the American Civil Rights decades of the 1960's and 1970s, Dolores Huerta held an established place in the political arena as a tireless advocate of labor rights. Building off of the successes and the losses of Mexican American women rhetors and activists of earlier decades, women such as Emma Tenayuca in Texas and Josefina Fierro de Bright in California, Huerta's rhetorical career aligned with and progressed her predecessor's work in civil and social rights causes. Her work in the 1950's with the Community Service Organization (CSO) had morphed into a vice president position in the United Farm Workers Union (UFW). This position of rhetorical prominence meant Huerta was advocating in front of Congress as well as in the fields for progressive legislation that would benefit the workers, mostly migrant and mostly Mexican and Mexican American, responsible for harvesting America's foodstuffs. Her close friendship and working relationship with César Chávez, president of the UFW and a rising voice in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, complemented her rhetorical dynamism during this era.

As a team, the two led the UFW through some of the most successful and influential labor strikes, negotiations, and pro-worker contracts in the forthcoming decades. Though their ties with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement were often peripheral, the UFW being more focused on labor rights as opposed to civil and social

justice in general, Huerta and the UFW would come to be intimately linked to the social movements underway in the late 1960's and 1970's. The UFW's strikes and marches were sites for *Teatro Campesino*<sup>i</sup> productions and for young civil rights fighters to test their mettle. So, while not always fighting the same battles, Huerta, Chávez, and the UFW were intimately linked to *El Movimiento*.

Though working from the precedence of Mexican American labor rights activists such as Emma Tenayuca and Josefina Fierro de Bright, Huerta would come stand as a more powerful, more effective voice in the U.S. *polis* than her predecessors. As the vice president of a labor union representing mostly minority laborers and as a lobbyist for labor rights law, Huerta's rhetoric was profoundly powerful because of these positions of power. Her forums were the sites of important social and political decisions and her voice would help shape these change. Her visible presence as a woman and a Chicana in these male-dominated realms of rhetoric was important to *El Movimiento* because it demonstrated that Mexican American women could be effective speakers and leader.

Huerta as the symbol of Mexican American labor rights activism would become a crucial visual for Chicanas fighting against sexism in the movement. Following the Chicano Civil Rights Movement era, Huerta would undertake a new endeavor, that of advocating for women's rights, in the 1980s and 1990s. Her shift in focus came with the rise of Chicanisma and third wave feminism. These decades would mark Huerta's growth as rhetor in forums beyond labor rights and solidify her voice as powerful and efficacious in American civil and gender rights arenas.

*Dolores Huerta and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement*

The Chicano Movement came to fruition with various epicentric events beginning in the 1940's and culminating in the late 1960's. The 1940's saw returning Mexican American soldiers coming home from World War II to subpar wages and working conditions and continued strained race relations. The societal tensions stemming from these ills came to national attention in 1948 when the remains of Private Felix P. Longoria were returned to his hometown of Three Rivers, Texas from Luzon, Philippines, where he had died by enemy gunfire. Upon return of his body, his widow attempted to make arrangements for his burial at the local funeral home in Three Rivers and was subsequently rebuffed by the funeral director on grounds that previous Mexican American services at the chapel had been disruptive (Allsup). Longoria's widow then contacted Dr. Héctor P. García, a Mexican American civil rights leader in South Texas and founder of the American G. I. forum (Kells 27).<sup>ii</sup> García petitioned then senator Lyndon B. Johnson to advocate for a proper burial for Longoria. Johnson was able to secure a burial plot for Longoria in Arlington National Cemetery, and the "Felix Longoria affair" subsequently went national, garnering positive attention for the fledgling Mexican American Civil Rights Movement.<sup>iii</sup> This event was a "galvanizing event for Mexican American civil rights" (Kells 62) and an early rallying point for Mexican American civil rights activists as it stood as an example of the systemic and systematic racism that *El Movimiento* would come to fight against.

Possibly the most sensational example of structural racism of the post-Chicano Civil Rights Movement was the Sleepy Lagoon Case. Predating the Felix Longoria affair by just a few years, the Sleepy Lagoon Case centered on the arrest of seventeen young

Mexican American men in Los Angeles, California. These men were arrested and accused in the murder of another Mexican American teen at a local party, with charges ranging from assault to first degree murder (Rosales 102). This *en masse* arrest incited Californians, with journalists, movie actors, and activists such as Josefina Fierro de Bright and Bert Corona coming together to draw attention to the plight of these young men. The subsequent national attention to the case can be surmised in the following statement made by the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee:

“It wasn’t only seventeen boys who were on trial. It was the whole of the Mexican people, and their children and grandchildren. It was the whole of Latin America with its 130,000,000 people. It was the Good Neighbor Policy. It was the United Nations and all for which they fight.”<sup>iv</sup> (Rosales 102)

Through the frame of the trial of the seventeen young men, 12 of whom would eventually be exonerated, the xenophobic atmosphere of Los Angeles, of California, and of the United States was coming into tangible being. Where White Americans in general and peoples living outside the American Southwest were possibly unaware of the atrocious racist acts committed against Mexican Americans and Mexican migrants prior, these national headlining events allowed the Chicano Civil Rights Movement to gain momentum and much needed media coverage. These acts of blatant racism against citizen and non-citizen alike served as springboards for rhetors such as Huerta to come into national forum and begin articulating the microaggressions and structural racisms that Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans endured on a daily basis.

Building off of these nationally broadcast media sensations in the 1940s, Mexican American Civil Rights would enter into an intense period of organizing and activism



leading up to the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For Dolores Huerta, the 1950s would mark her entrée into civil and social justice organizing, labor rights work, and union leadership. By the mid 1950s, Huerta had married and divorced, had two children, and had received her teaching credentials from the College of the Pacific in Stockton (Baer 99). As a teacher, Huerta was frustrated by the lack of essential provisions her students, children of migrant farm workers, had. This frustration was rooted in her inability to effect real change while in the classroom executing curriculum to students who were cold and hungry. Seeking ways to assist these children in finding adequate clothing and shelter, Huerta became aware of various organizing opportunities in Stockton. This proved to be a critical turning point for Huerta and her rise to labor union leader and activist. She recalls, ‘I was having a hard time really swallowing that I would be a teacher living in a suburb....My longings for my own life were answered by being able to participate in the building of a union’ (M. García 7). This dream had distinct roots in the zeitgeist of 1950’s California. Mexican American Civil Rights was a growing movement, with the Sleepy Lagoon Case (1943) and the Zoot Suit Riots (1943) serving as precursors, drawing activists together for the cause of fighting against racial discrimination.

*Dolores Huerta, César Chávez, and the Rise of the NFWA*

By the late 1950’s, Huerta was remarried to Ventura Huerta, yet the pairing was not a good match, as Huerta was more committed to her work in the CSO than to maintaining the house and presenting herself as a good housewife. She remarks, ‘I knew I wasn’t comfortable in a wife’s role, but I wasn’t clearly facing the issue. 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' (Rose 11). These early years were not without personal strife over not fulfilling cultural and familial expectations for her as a wife and mother and her want to pursue activism work. She continues"

"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 are a woman but because it's hard to really make that commitment."

(Baer and Matthews 82)

Though Huerta felt strongly about her calling towards labor rights activism, she hesitant to align herself with any of the local California movements because of their ties, real or otherwise media constructed, to communism. Huerta speaks on her suspicions of activist organizers of the era when she recalls her initial meeting with CSO founder Fred Ross. She says, 'I thought Fred Ross from the Community Service Organization...A Saul Alinsky organizer, was a communist, so I went to the FBI and had him checked out. I really did that' (Griswold del Castillo and García 28). After confirming that Ross was not Communist associated, Huerta began work with the CSO, whose expressed goal was to 'promote increased civic participation by the Spanish speaking community' with focus on 'the political concerns and social problems of working-class Mexican American families in urban areas' (Rose 10). Emerging as a vocal leader, Huerta was tapped by Ross to

lobby Congress on agricultural issues, a position previously only held by males within the organization (Rose 11). Ross' faith in Huerta was profound not just in serving as her gateway into activism work. Huerta explains:

“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.” (Baer and Matthews 82)

Though her commitment would result in separation and eventual divorce from her second husband, Huerta would not be deterred. She recalls:

“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 would have gotten engulfed in my personal difficulties and, I think, I probably would have gone under.” (Baer and Matthews 82)

By the early 1960s, Huerta was a force in the CSO, prominently lobbying on behalf of the organization. But, her work there was limited, as she could only perform lobbying and organizing that was mandated by the organization. Her desire to focus on labor rights, and specifically migrant labor rights, was stifled. By 1962, César Chávez decided to break from the strictures of the CSO and start work on building a union focused on representing farm workers. Chávez moved to Delano, California to found the National Farm Worker Association (NFWA).

Though established in his own right in California as a “masterful organizer,” and a capable leader of the CSO, Chávez knew that Huerta was essential to the success of the NFWA. On Huerta, Chávez remarked, ‘Everyone knows her, and the usual remark is that she is a fighter’ (Rose 12). Huerta attempted to balance her work with the CSO and help Chávez with the building of the NFWA, mostly because her income depended on continuing to work for the CSO. She wrote to Chávez during this time, explaining, ‘If I did not have to work for the CSO, but could have an independent income, then no one could say anything about what I do’ (M. García 13). This strained balance between the CSO and NFWA was too much, and Huerta was terminated from the CSO for her “overriding in farmworker organizing over CSO business” (ibid). Huerta recalls this time of transition for herself and for the union when she remarks, “And that was a big step for me because I had family that I had to support, and I remember just thinking about this is such a foolish thing to do but I just remember, I have got to do this and I did it.”

(*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

During this time in California, in particular, the challenging of inequality was focused in economics, with the wages and working conditions of Mexican Americans becoming a microcosm for other racist practices. Gil Padilla, a WWII veteran, field laborer, and eventual leader in the UFW alongside Chávez and Huerta, recalled how the importation of *braceros*, Mexican contract laborers, kept the wages for field workers below livable. He explains, ‘Things were worse then when I left [the fields] in 1948. The *braceros* were there and they used to pay 1.00 an hour, there was no water, there were no rest periods, there was nothing’ (Rosales 132). Padilla continues, ‘there was no employment [insurance]; there was no minimum wage at the time,’ and, compounding

the problem, there was a “lack of agencies that would get excited for doing something for farm labor’ (Rosales 132). This *lacuna* of real, focused assistance for farm laborers was the real calling of Huerta and of César Chávez.<sup>v</sup> Chávez was born in Yuma, Arizona, to poor, farmworker parents and followed his family to California to work the fields there. His early years were spent working the fields, where unionization efforts were present but never fully realized (Rosales 130). These efforts, combined with the devotion of his mother to helping others, instilled in him a commitment to helping others help themselves.

Though quiet with a seemingly passive demeanor, Chávez was an excellent and experienced organizer, with training mentors ranging from Fred Ross of the CSO to Father Donald McDonnell, a Ross associate who preached the *Rerum Novarum*, “an encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII advocating labor unions to eradicate poverty” (Rosales 131). His quiet and charitable demeanor worked well with Dolores Huerta’s firebrand personality because of the opposing rhetorical styles. Mario T. Garcia explains, “They hated her. They called her the dragon lady. They wished they were negotiating with César and not with Dolores” (*Chicano!* PBS documentary). Along with Huerta and Gil Padilla, Chávez engaged in house to house visits throughout the towns and labor camps that constituted the Imperial Valley, employing his soft-spoken, yet impactful rhetoric in these intimate settings. This was dangerous work for a fledgling union—if any of the growers had caught wind of the NFWA’s early efforts to gain the membership of their workers the union may never have survived. But, slowly, membership grew and soon the NFWA ranks were 1,000 strong (Rosales 134). Through the dues of members, dances, and other such fundraisers, the NFWA was able to set up death benefit insurance

for members, a credit union, and even secure an office and a \$40 a week salary for Chávez (ibid) By 1965 the NFWA was ready to engage in it's first fight against unscrupulous growers when they went to task for wage-shearing against rose growers. After successfully securing a 120% wage increase (Rosales 134) for workers, the NFWA had proven it's ability to be real dealers for labor rights and the stage was set to take on a much bigger fight.

These momentous changes happening with labor rights in California were concurrent with civil rights activities in the American South. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was making waves with their Freedom Rides and aggressive registering of voters<sup>vi</sup>, and the March on Washington, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. drew Civil Rights to the forefront of American politics. The atmosphere was ripe for Huerta and Chávez to make a major move towards unionization. Once Chávez had persuaded Huerta to commit full time to the fledgling NFWA, she was reticent at first, proclaiming, 'I feel there will be a lot of criticism' (M. García 13) the momentum was set in motion, and, by 1965, the Delano Grape Strike, led by the NFWA, was in full effect. The Delano Grape Strike was a momentous event, leading to the formation of the United Farm Workers Union and serving as a point of cohesion for early Chicano/a activists.<sup>vii</sup> Though the UFW (and farm worker activism) and the Chicano/a Civil Rights Movement were two separate movements, they were inextricably linked throughout the coming decade.

#### *The Delano Grape Strike and El Movimiento*

The Delano Grape Strike began on September 5, 1965 when Filipino members of the Agricultural Works Organizing Committee (AWOC) refused to leave their lodgings

at the Marcus Zaninovich farm to pick grapes (Rosales 136). The workers staged a sit-in protesting low wages at the farm and encouraged workers from other local farms such as Di Giorgio and Schenley to participate in the sit-in strikes as well. Dolores Huerta's prominent vocal role in the Delano Grape Strike, marked by her vigor and vociferousness, added a certain balance to the cause. While Chávez was the public face of the strike and maintained a passive and nonviolent persona, allowing Huerta to embody the firebrand role that suited her rhetorical style well. Mario T. García explains,

Still another impressive attribute of Huerta concerns her public rhetoric—her rhetorical ability to address the plight of the farm workers and the goals of the movement. She possesses a natural speaking ability more so than did César Chávez. Even as a young child she was very verbal and outspoken. In fact, her grandfather called her “Seven Tongues” because she liked to talk so much. Bilingual and equally as powerful in English as in Spanish, Huerta could reach out to different audiences and connect with them. But what made her rhetoric particularly potent was her conviction that the struggle was a just one. Sincerely believing in the struggle, she effectively transmitted her message to her audiences. She converted them into believers in *La Causa*. The farmworkers' struggle was not just a physical but a discursive one as well. In this effort, the voice of Dolores Huerta was crucial. (xxvi-ii)

Because of the close proximity of the AWOOC strikes to the NFWA efforts in Delano, Chávez felt compelled, and possibly a bit pressured, to align the NFWA with the AWOOC strikers in a show of solidarity and support for higher wages on the grape farms. Chávez commented on his initial reluctance to join in the strike when he commented,

‘Well, you see, we’re led into it, we didn’t have any money’ (Rosales 137). With only 87 dollars in the strike fund and over 3,000 members potentially supporting the strike, Chávez and Huerta were in quite a bind. Taking the vote to strike to his associates on September 16<sup>th</sup>, amidst the festivities of Mexican Independence Day, the NFWA voted to support the Filipino members of the AWOOC (Rosales 137). Reflecting on the beginnings of the Grape Strike, and the UFW, Huerta states:

“We voted to support the Filipino workers, but we were very naïve. We made these big old signs that said “*Huelga*” which means strike in Spanish. The first day we had a few strikers that were beaten up. It was not a good experience.”

(*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

Once committed to the strike against grape growers, a strike that would come to last fifty-nine months, the reality of the nuanced political dynamics of a unionized strike set in. Aside from the bleak financials of the fledgling union, there was the issues of strike breakers, fluctuation of committed union members, and the ever present need to keep a positive image of the union, it’s members, and it’s leadership. Financially, Chávez was tasked with growing their strike fund. If strikers were expected to stay for the long haul, they would need assistance in obtaining basic necessities for themselves and their families. There was also a need to fund medical and death issues as they arose. For Chávez, finding funding that was no-strings-attached was of the utmost importance. At one point, he turned down a fifty thousand dollar grant because of the potential biases and obligations attached to it (Rosales 137). Eventually, financial assistance from groups such as the California Migrant Ministry, groups already closely associated with the NFWA’s cause and it’s tenets, would help support the union through the strike.



Another issue, that of strikebreakers, was an ever-present and ever tense situation for the strike. The growers were a closely-knit and powerful bunch capable of moving scabs quickly and en masse into their fields while the strikers sat out. Rosales notes, “thousands of strikebreakers were hired—many were undocumented workers from Mexico. The farmers also recruited Arabs from Yemen, Japanese-American students and local Mexican Americans” (137). But, with the assistance of on-the-line leaders such as Huerta, who was present and vocal during much of the strike, the NFWA and AWOOC were quite successful in keeping scabs out of the fields. Rosales continues, “the union enticed some of the strikebreakers to walk out of the fields. ‘Some of those Arabs became leaders in the strike,’ recalled Gil Padilla” (137).

Another vital element in keeping strikebreakers out and strikers on the picket line was the presence of *El Teatro Campesino*, an agitprop theater group lead by the young Luis Valdez. The presence of Valdez and his theater group was manifest in it’s positive impact to the Delano Grape strike. Their on-the-strike-line plays served to keep the strikers entertained, inspired, and informed. Chávez explained:

“Well, it helped with the workers...it was street theater...it was able to deal with three important things. One was just deal with...like we’re here to stay. You know, he came out and sang, “Viva La Huelga” [Long Live the Strike] and “No nos moverán” [We will not be moved] and all that stuff—great! The other thing he was able to ridicule...growers...which was great. Not attack them. But ridicule...Then deal with the internal problems we had about the strikebreakers or being afraid...Oh, the Friday night meetings would be jammed with

people...because even though we were losing the strike...they're still coming because the teatro was there.” (Rosales 136)

With spirits continuously revived by *El Teatro Campesino*, strikers were more receptive to the continuous and intense strike-rhetoric of Huerta and other NFWA leaders.

With the end of the Bracero Act in 1965<sup>viii</sup> and national opinion of social reform initiatives shifting to the positive, Huerta and Chávez pushed the Delano Grape Strike into its next phase, that of the protest march, or *peregrinación*<sup>ix</sup>, a tactic employed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and African American Civil Rights activists in 1963 during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In early spring of 1966 Huerta, Chávez, and a couple hundred supporters set off from Delano on the 300 mile trek to the capital of Sacramento. At each stop along the way Luis Valdez would read El Plan de Delano, the manifesto of the march signed by members of the NFWA. Along the way the march drew national media attention, and pressure on the growers grew as ranks of pilgrims swelled to over 1,500 (ABC-CLIO). Carrying banners of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a large wooden cross cloaked in black, and stopping for prayer meetings in each town, the marchers reflected a penitent group of peaceful protestors, a look that only added to the positive depiction of them in the media. Huerta remarks:

“César said it was going to be a march of penitence. And the workers said, well we don't have anything to be penitent about! The growers are the ones doing everything wrong!” And Cesar said, “No, no, I want everyone to think of something you've done, some gossip maybe, some fight that you had. Think of your own things in your own life. (*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

The marchers were set to reach the capital on Easter Sunday 1966 and Schenley, one of the main growers involved in the strike, foresaw public opinion leaning towards the NFWA and their cause. Seeking to avoid negative fall out, Schenley contacted Huerta and Chávez a week prior to their arrival in the capital and notified them of their willingness to negotiate contracts for their workers. Huerta was tapped as negotiator for the NFWA and succeeded in getting Schenley to sign contracts on the workers terms and other grape growers, Gallo and Franzia amongst them, soon followed. Reflecting on her role as key negotiator in the Delano Grape Strike, Huerta recalls:

“I guess the growers complained...they weren’t used to dealing with women...People like Jerry Cohen [also a negotiator] would say, ‘You have to be polite.’ And my thinking is, Why do we need to be polite to people who are making racist...[and] sexist comments? You have to call them on it.” (Rosales 143)

Luis Valdez reflects on Huerta’s powerful presence and leadership during the Grape Strike when he states:

“Here is this young woman, not that big, leading a struggle, and she was challenging the role of women among farm workers. They had never seen an aggressive independent woman like Dolores. And I found myself in a position where I was willing to be a lieutenant a follower.” (*Chicano! PBS documentary*)

The Delano Grape Strike provided Huerta with the national stage and forum for the delivery of her firebrand rhetoric, and people took notice. Throughout the strike, Huerta continuously redefined what Chicana activism looked like and how it sounded. In the

coming years, other Chicana activists would begin building off of Huerta's precedence, even as Huerta continued her rhetorical work.

### *The Rise of Chicanisma*

While Huerta was experiencing great rhetorical successes fighting for labor rights as Vice President of the United Farm Workers, other politically and socially active Chicanas continued to struggle not only for the tenets laid out in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*<sup>x</sup>, the guiding manifesto of The Chicano Civil Rights Movement, but also for equality within the movement itself. As the movement progressed, many Chicanas were becoming increasingly disillusioned with their treatment by the men in the movement, many of whom believed that women participants should be in supportive roles rather than on the front lines of progress. Huerta, along with fellow Chicanas, continued to push against the triple burden of racial, gender, and economic discrimination through relentless questioning of the superstructures that attempted to continue to alienate them and silence them both within the movement and with out.

This struggle for agency in the personal and public realms came into fruition earlier for Huerta than for most activist Chicanas. Eileen Foley explains, "In the early '60s she worked in the fields of California with César Chávez as they organized farm workers. In 1967 she helped negotiate and service the first contracts between the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) and the growers" (93). Foley continues,

[A] union whose members are often steeped in the machismo tradition, elected her overwhelmingly and unanimously its first vice president. 'People respond to those who are willing to help and work with them,' [Huerta] said. 'It over-rides any machismo. The union has brought a lot or women into leadership positions,'

she added. ‘People are poor so the whole family works together and whole family strikes together and picket together...We are non-violent and the women bring a lot of dignity to our movement’ (93-4).

Active, by 1967, for more than a decade in her union work, Huerta served as a rhetorical precursor, demonstrating to younger Chicanas that vocality and persistence were necessary additions to rhetorical competence.

Concurrent with Huerta’s early union activism was Maria Varela, whose work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee marked the Chicana’s presence in the Deep South. Varela’s work focused on assisting in the voter registration drive and freedom rides that marked the fervent Civil Rights years of 1962-1964. Marking the continuous of Chicanas moving beyond the *oikos* and beyond their communities, Varela’s work was also marked by a liminality of sorts; her civil rights work extended beyond Chicana/o concerns into the plight of Americans of color. Speaking on the importance of her movement into the South and within the African American Civil Rights Movement, Varela states:

“These are young radicals; the word “revolution” occurs again and again in their speech. Yet, they have no party, no ideology, no creed. They have no clear idea of a blueprint for a future society. But they do know clearly that the values of present American society—and this goes beyond racism to class distinction, to commercialism, to profit-seeking, to the setting of religious or national barriers against human contact—are not for them.” (Zinn 13).

Her work in the South was focused on African American civil rights issues, yet still spoke to the same subjugation and resistance that was happening in *El Movimiento*.

Jessie De La Cruz, a Chicana who would come to serve an important role in *El Movimiento*, experienced this tension firsthand as she attempted to enter into the organizing efforts of the early UFW. After attending an initial UFW meeting led by César Chávez in Fresno in 1964 she elected to stay home while her husband, Arnulfo, went alone. Noticing De La Cruz's absence from the meeting, Chávez questioned Arnulfo as to Jessie's whereabouts. Arnulfo advised Chávez that De La Cruz was, "in the kitchen" Chávez responded, "she needs to be here, she needs to know what happened" (De La Cruz). This instance, De La Cruz recalls, led to her being a part of *La Causa*, a moment, De La Cruz states, "that would not only provide labor workers higher wages and better working conditions but also the respect which we deserved." Her major work was with the UFW advocating for farm worker rights. In 1986, De La Cruz was called to testify against the use of *el cortito*, the short handled hoe used by farm workers that forced workers to bend at the waist while working for hours at a time. Her testimony concerning the literal backbreaking effects of *el cortito* assisted in the outlawing of the use of this tool in California. De La Cruz's intimate connection with the land and her rhetorical efficacy in defending worker rights is significant; she represents the legacy of Chicanas whose agrarian livelihood serves as the base for her rhetorical work. Though many Chicanas were speaking and organizing from within the confines of the city, there was still significant Chicana rhetorical activity happening in rural areas across the Southwest.

The diversity of Chicanas, from Huerta to De La Cruz to Varela, active during *El Movimiento* and the African American Civil Rights Movement demonstrates the further shift from local to national and from focused fights to diverse struggles. Though Chicanas

would not abandon these diverse continental struggles in the coming decades, a new fight, that of feminism, would become the unifying goal.

But, even with rhetorical models such as Huerta, Varela, and De La Cruz, women in the movement struggled with finding forum. Dolores Huerta speaks on the initial presence and then eventual absence of Chicanas in both the UFW and various high profile Chicano Civil Rights Movement activities by explaining why she calls her self a “sort of born-again feminist” (M. García 276). She explains that women “were in the movement since they were seventeen or eighteen years old [...] and then all of the sudden they should be in leadership positions, but they’re not, you know. They got organized into being in jail at home surrounded by four walls” (M. García 276). She continues, “The women have got to stay involved. And I am putting the responsibility on the women. They’ve got to see themselves in leadership positions, and they’ve got to, because I think that the energy of women is very important” (M. García 276). That women were integral to the movement is a topic much debated. While some factions of the movement decry Chicanas wanting to establish themselves as present and vocal as an act of treachery, meant only to undermine the movement, others see the movement as the space where Chicanas were able to confer and begin to organize, actions leading to their strong presence in third space feminism, in academia, and in the literature of the coming decades.

The reality of the movement years was that Chicanas often found themselves silenced, relegated to assisting roles, discouraged from leadership positions, and otherwise made to feel as if their place was solely in support of Chicanos. This atavistic turn was grounded in the *machismo* of *El Movimiento*. Those Chicanas assuming vocal,

prominent roles in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement were often tying civil rights into woman's rights, a move that many Chicanos felt undermined the movement as a whole. Chicanas would not stand for the perpetuation of the role of the Chicana as housewife and passive supporter. These concerns were addressed at the 1969 Denver Youth Conference, where a workshop on women in *El Movimiento* was held. Following the meeting it was declared that, "It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated" (A. García 88). It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated." This statement served to incite Chicanas in the movement, and in 1971 the *Mujeres Por La Raza* conference was held in Houston, Texas. With over 600 politically active Chicanas in attendance, topics such as marriage, sexuality, and education were discussed. These meetings would result in a wave of critical thought and writings, and soon thereafter *Encuentro Femenil*, the first Chicana journal, and *Hijas de Cuauhtemoc*, a newspaper focused on Chicana issues, came into publication.

Establishing a feminist movement separate from the Chicano Civil Rights movement and separate from the Anglo feminist movement, both happening concurrently with the rise of Chicanisma, was crucial. The complex issues of economics and family values, of machismo and sexuality, that Chicanas were exploring and organizing to overcome were starkly different than the issues that white feminists were fighting against. Huerta acknowledges that the "1960s Second Wave of feminism, and in particular leaders such as Gloria Steinem, influenced her to openly embrace feminism" (Garcia, xxii). "For Huerta, feminism meant struggling to achieve total and equal rights for all women, but in her own personal life being selective of certain feminist issues. In this way, she defied the



stereotypical and monolithic view of American feminists” (M. García xxiii). Though a long and treacherous road to critical consciousness, these struggles against not only the racism of white America, but also the sexism found within their own culture, created the atmosphere of vocality for Chicana rhetors to thrive in.

*Chicana Feminism throughout the 1980s-1990s*

Coming out of the Civil Rights years, Chicanas found themselves fighting for voice on various fronts. While still pursuing union and workers rights, the issue of establishing themselves as efficacious forces in socioeconomic and political realms became a renewed battle. It seemed as though the 100 years work of Chicanas in the American *polis* was all but undone during the macho years of *El Movimiento*. Alma García explains:

Indebted to the contributions and struggles of Chicana feminists during the intense period of the Chicano Movement, a new group of Chicana feminists evolved during the 1980s and into the 1990s. These later feminists can be considered post-Movement feminists in that their ideological constructions appear in a period when the Chicano Movement as a specific historical manifestation no longer exists. (261)

Post-Movement Chicanas were reactive: the previous decades were marked by dis cohesion, discontinuity, threats, and stasis. Chicanos were asserting *machismo* culture on them while white feminists were subjugating race and class issues to their own concerns. All of this was compounded by anti-feminist Chicanas undermining the progress of autonomy and self-sufficiency in the name of Chicano nationalism and cultural legacy.

Rather than allowing these threats of atavism to deter them, Chicanas of the late millennium found themselves shifting focus into renewed mediums of rhetorical work, including academia and literature. Infiltration of these superstructures meant novel rhetorical moves were needed. A new cadre of Chicanas would helm this movement, women with a variety of talents, styles, and goals. And, assisting them in this infiltration would be a dynamic reengagement of feminism, a feminism that was functional for North American women of color.

An example of this movement towards multiple rhetorics used for varied means is the work of writer/scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. Their groundbreaking text, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), was theory in action: an anthology of a collection of genres speaking in nuanced ways about being a third world woman of color in the United States. Anzaldúa touches on the act of writing as a means of resistance in *This Bridge* when she states,

“To write is to confront one’s demons, look them in the face and live to write about them. Fear acts like a magnet; it draws the demons out of the closet and into the ink in our pens... Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared” (171).

As Chicanas moved into the literary realm, first via small press and slowly but forcefully into university presses and other such big publishing houses, Chicana feminist theory, fiction, and non-fiction began to be disseminated en masse. Where once pamphlets and newspapers served as the medium for the delivery of Chicana voices, the novel and the

essay became the norm, with presence in classrooms nationwide. Writer/novelists such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, and theorists such as Norma Alarcón appeared on course syllabi and the Chicana voice was given privilege.

This mass dissemination of Chicanisma stood in direct opposition to the previous decades of attempted silencing by leaders in *El Movimiento* and not only served as push back, but also served as a means to explore multiplicity as a power move instead of a hindrance, as so many Chicanos during the movement attempted to envision it.

Rebolledo, quoting Alarcón's "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism," explains, "from the outset, the writers were aware of the displacement of their subjectivities across 'a multiplicity of discourses.' This displacement in turn implied a multiplicity of positions from which the writers tried to grasp or understand themselves and their relations with the real or historical context around them" (356). Norma Alarcón would come to refer to this aspect of Chicanisma as "multiple voiced subjectivity" which embodied Chicana feminists need to be able to self-identity and to reject others attempts at identification, essentialization, or subjugation.

The post-civil rights era was a complex and trying time for Chicanas coming into their rhetorical agency. On one hand, the time was right for Chicanas to raise their voices in support of civil, social, and economic rights for Mexican Americans, yet their position as women advocating within a still *machismo* based culture became crushingly realistic as their voices were silenced and subjugated. Successes were happening in the literary realm, and as many Chicanas were entering the upper echelons of academia, there was much passionate debate over issues of identification, naming, inclusion/exclusion, and representation. Rebolledo explains, "while Chicana writers were trying to seize their own

voices and become speaking subjects, they were at the same time “decentered,” and tended to dissolve into the collective and political” (102).

*The Rise of Third wave feminism*

Third wave feminism stood as the apparatus through which Chicanas could make sense of this threatening dissolution and continue being productive through dialogue and through scholarship. Emma Pérez envisioned the interstices, the gaps, where Chicanas were being marginalized as the sites for forum, for revisioned representation. It was from these margins that post-*Movimiento* Chicanas would continue in their rhetorical endeavors. Gloria Anzaldúa, whose writings have to come shape the struggle of the years following El Movimiento, truly embodies the interstices of voice during this era. Raised in the Rio Grande Valley as the precocious and culturally resistant daughter of farm workers, Anzaldúa spent summers in stoop labor in the fields of South Texas. This intimate connection with the farm worker plight would not take the path of advocating as Huerta took, rather Anzaldúa would allow these childhood experiences to guide her thought on race relations and gender norms, eventually taking shape into the formative concept of *mestiza* consciousness. Reflecting on how working in the fields affected Mexican American identity formation, Anzaldúa writes:

We were dumb, we were lazy; all we were good for was stoop labor, and we did it from the time we got up in the morning at four or five o'clock until the sun went down at eight—as much as fifteen hours a day. After a few months, a few years, a few decades, a few centuries...you started feeling like an animal. You were nothing and possessed no dignity (105).

The physical and mental hardships created from attempting to economically survive in a racist and classist society led Anzaldúa to the belief that these shared experiences are what constitute identity consciousness and subsequently identity formation. Edwina Barvoza comments on this when she states, “Anzaldúa’s concept of inner *mestizaje* is physically and culturally rooted in living diverse social positions, yet simultaneously being or feeling displaced from each of those positions” (125). And further,

[T]he ideal role of a person with mestiza consciousness is as a social bridge who works to unite divided peoples. The mestiza-as-social-bridge uses the various knowledges and perspectives that she has gained through living her multiple identities at the margins of many different social locations to help link people who are otherwise divided. In doing so she helps others gain perspectives that they have not yet gleaned from whatever configurations of identities they have so far obtained. (Barvosa 126)

The progressive thinking here is that Chicanas are not dis cohesive or fractured by their multiple belongings in varied discourse communities. Even at the margins of these communities they are still members with the knowledge that allows them to bridge, not move into and out of and across, these communities. The *mestiza* consciousness is a concept of wholeness, of an identity culled together from being a *mestizaje*, a mix.

### *Conclusion*

The Chicano Civil Rights years was a contentious time for Chicana rhetoric. Chicanas passion for and dedication to social, political, and economic progress was hindered by the machismo cultural of *El Movimiento*. These macho politics, which demanded that women take non-vocal, subservient, and behind-the-scenes roles led to

internal strife in the movement and amongst Chicanas. What came from these tensions was Chicanisma, or Chicana feminism, and the language with which to articulate this new movement.

For Dolores Huerta, the Chicano Civil Rights years were prolific, as *La Causa*, the labor movement as represented by the United Farm Workers union, was at its apex. Huerta was the vocal figurehead for the union and for labor rights in North America, marking her as not only a heuristic for Chicanas pursuing vocality, but also as an icon of *El Movimiento*. Huerta rhetorical prowess, through lobbying, organizing, and leading, was unmatched during these socially progressive years and her reputation was thus solidified. This was the era where her rhetorical corpus began, and the social and cultural shifts would become the content for her rhetorical work.

Moving into the next few decades, Huerta embodied not only rhetorical precedence for Chicana Rhetoric, but also set the standard for the new mestiza, a woman embracing socially and culturally diverse spaces and not held to cultural norms and expectations. Slowly, *La Causa* would stop being her primary rhetorical movement and women's and gender rights would take the forefront. The era of the Civil Rights Movement would be a turning point for Huerta in deciding to move from the larger national cause of labor rights to the more focused fight for feminism, as it was for many Chicanas. Confronting the macho politics, the heavies, and the silence, Huerta and her contemporaries would begin to fight new rhetorical battles to gain agency and forum for issues specific to the socioeconomics and political power of Chicanas.

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<sup>i</sup> *Teatro Campesino* was founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 on the picket lines of the Delano Grape Strike. Valdez and his troupe of young activists would perform *actos*, skits, to invigorate and educate the strikers.

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For more information see scholar Yolanda Broyles Gonzales book *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*.

<sup>ii</sup> The American G. I. Forum was founded in 1948 by Dr. Héctor P. García, a Mexican American civil rights leader, physician, and veteran. The G. I Forum served Mexican American servicemen returning to South Texas after the war in receiving fair and equal treatment from the U.S. Military. This was necessary; though these men had served dutifully in WWII, they were returning home as second-class citizens. For more

<sup>iii</sup> During these early years of the fight for civil rights for Mexican Americans, the term “Chicano” was not yet in popular usage. In fact, the term was often used as a pejorative by higher echelon Mexican Americans to describe lower echelon Mexican Americans. It was not until the 1960s that the term would be embraced by politically active Mexican Americans and take on the power and politics we associate with it today.

<sup>iv</sup> The Good Neighbor Policy (1933) was a Roosevelt era attempt to rectify previous interventionist policies in Latin America that had served to create strained relations with countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

<sup>v</sup> Though the CSO was ran, at the time, by a Chicano (Tony Ríos) it refrained from direct involvement in farm labor organizing because the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) associated with the AFL (American Federation of Labor) and financed by the UAW (United Auto Workers) and spearheaded by activist Ernesto Galarza and Ríos was remiss to step on Galarza’s toes. This was the tipping point for Chávez, who was, at the time, national director for CSO. He soon left the CSO and founded the NFWA.

<sup>vi</sup> The CSO was also engaged in a voter registration campaign. As noted in Rosales’ *Chicano!* The CSO “acquired clout by registering and organizing Mexican American voters to vote in a bloc, a feat leading to the election of Edward Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council” (133).

<sup>vii</sup> The fledgling NFWA combined forces with their rival AFL-CIO sponsored Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), whose membership was primarily Filipino, in the early days of the Delano Grape Strike. This combining of the two (NFWA and AWOC) would lead to the founding of the United Farm Workers Union. For more information on the dynamics of this see <http://www.ufw.org>.

<sup>viii</sup> The Bracero Program (1942-62) had become quite a powerful weapon of growers against strikers in the early civil and labor rights years of the 1950’s and 1960’s. The program allowed Mexican Nationals to come to the United States as guest workers in mostly agricultural jobs. While necessary during the war years while much of the agricultural labor force was fighting overseas, it later became a tool of growers to keep wages low and farm workers from striking or unionizing via the importation of abundant and cheap labor. For more information see <http://braceroarchive.org/>.

<sup>ix</sup> *Peregrinación* translates to “pilgrimage” and aligns with the NFWA’s commitment to integrating Catholicism into their tenets and public demonstrations via the display of icons such *La Virgen de Guadalupe* banners and public partnerships with local dioceses and religious organizations.

<sup>x</sup> Full text of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* can be found at [http://www.cwu.edu/~mecha/documents/plan\\_de\\_aztlan.pdf](http://www.cwu.edu/~mecha/documents/plan_de_aztlan.pdf).

Chapter Four: The Organizer and Lobbyist Paradigm: Dolores Huerta's  
1969 "Testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor"

This chapter is a perspectival analysis of Dolores Huerta's 1969 "Statement to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor." I first contextualize the statement by providing information on what the hearings were concerning and how Huerta came to speak to the subcommittee. Next, I analyze the text based on Huerta's rhetorical moves, paying close attention to her position as a Chicana rhetor speaking in front of white male audience. Following this, I analyze how the media reported and reacted to this statement, how scholars have since acknowledged and rendered this important moment in the Chicano Civil Rights/Labor Movement, and finally, how Huerta has since spoken about the context of this statement. Tey Diana Rebolledo's methodology for analyzing Chicana texts outlined in "The Politics of Poetics: Or, What Am I, A Critic, Doing in This Text Anyway" will serve as a guide for analysis while an abbreviated version of Hodge and Kress's approach to Social Semiotics will function as my analytical frame. Other scholars such as Emma Pérez and Chela Sandoval will lend to the analysis throughout.

*Methodology of Analysis*

Any analysis of Chicana rhetoric must take into account the social and linguistic dynamacy of the rhetor and the situation in which their speech act takes place. Until a rhetorical methodology for analysis of Chicana rhetors arises, I am pressed to seek out already in extant methods that allow for this dynamacy, yet are substantial enough to situate the rhetor and their rhetoric within the trajectory of Rhetoric and Composition Studies.



Guiding the use of social semiotics as the primary tool of analysis for Dolores Huerta's rhetorical acts and, by extension, Chicana rhetoric, is a set of guidelines found in Tey Diana Rebolledo<sup>1</sup>'s article "The Politics of Poetics: Or, What Am I, A Critic, Doing in This Text Anyhow." Rebolledo explains the need for a Chicana methodology for Chicana textual analysis as rooted in legitimizing the text. Whereas mainstream (re: white, male hetero-normative) theoretical methodologies threaten to "undermine," "overshadow," or even force the Chicana text into a "state of oblivion," the Chicana theoretical perspective serves to "legitimate" and make the text "intellectually viable" (205). This methodology follows, in abbreviated form:

1. Approach the text as a reader whose main concern is making the Chicana text known;
2. major goals of analysis are in-depth analysis, cultural context, and history;
3. Chicana voices are not arising "from a complete void" (207);
4. Chicana discourse is "fraught with tensions and contradictions" (208) and these must be addressed;
5. when working with Chicana texts, scholarship must be sound and rigorous; when working with living authors, scholarship must not be timid;
6. embrace caustic criticism and be aware of personal biases;
7. personal preference, aesthetic or otherwise, should not be a factor in determining texts to include in the general Chicana cultural framework
8. the Chicana's complexities are infinite.

These guidelines, simple yet comprehensive, allow entrance into Dolores Huerta's texts in consideration of both Chicanisma and rhetoric.

These tenets of Rebolledo's methodology of analyzing Chicana texts directly inform my choice in theoretical and analytical tools. Social semiotics, the study of semiotics that accounts for context, allows for the text to be positioned historically and then analyzed through the three perspectives of scholarly, media, and personal. The scholarly viewpoint allows for insight into how academics and the academy are rendering Chicana speech acts, how these speech acts are being disseminated within important academic conversations, and how they are being used to give voice to, or silence, Chicanas. The media viewpoint allows analysis in popular renderings of how Dolores Huerta was portrayed during the time of each of the speech acts analyzed herein. And the personal viewpoint honors Huerta's own words in regards to the speech acts, the politics, and the social movements occurring during the speech acts.

In response to these three perspectives, a truncated version of Hodge and Kress' "propositions to guide a diagnostic social semiotics" from *Social Semiotics* (111-12) applies directly to analyzing dynamic and contextual linguistic acts. The truncated and tailored list follows:

- The terms of a code itself can carry signifiers of power (order/disorder) and solidarity (cohesion/discohesion). The presence of these meanings in the privileged site of the code demonstrates their importance, though it does not guarantee their truth.
- Absence or disruption of cohesive devices are transparent signifiers of repudiation of social relations.
- Absence or disruption of [...] paratactic structures [are] a transparent signifier of the repudiation of kinds of social order and belonging.

As with any act of analysis, not all of these methodological tenets will be necessary or applicable all of the time. But, based on the kairotic moment, aspects of Rebolledo and Hodge and Kress' methodological approaches will allow for a thorough and functional analysis of Huerta's speech acts.

*The Kairotic Moment*

Dolores Huerta's "Statement to the Senate Subcommittee of Migratory Labor" functioned as a national coming out for Huerta as a lobbyist and figurehead for the United Farm Workers (UFW). As a growing voice in the unionizing of migrant labors and co-founder of the UFW, Huerta was chosen to speak on behalf of these efforts to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor in Washington D.C. on July 15, 1969. This invitation stemmed not just from her reputation as a rhetor representing the UFW, but also from her close relationship with Robert Kennedy. Kennedy had been present in California the previous year alongside Huerta and Cesar Chávez during the Delano Grape Strike as they boycotted and bargained for better wages and working/living conditions for migrant workers in the grape fields. Amidst the boycotts and the fervor surrounding them, Kennedy held hearings for the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor in Delano, California cultivating testimony from migrant laborers and pointedly questioning the Delano Police Department over their aggressive treatment of union members and picketers.

After Robert Kennedy's assassination in June of 1968, Senator Walter Mondale was appointed to fill RFK's position on the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare and later would be Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor ([mondale.law.umn.edu](http://mondale.law.umn.edu)). Following in the political footsteps of RFK, and motivated by

the perpetual yet urgent powerlessness of the farmworker that RFK rallied against, Mondale invited Huerta to testify on the destructive debt system of migrant labor and the poverty that the growers lorded over their workers. The intent of these testimonies was to continue to give forum to the narratives of the plight of the migrant laborers and the ills of the migrant labor system in the United States. Huerta's testimony was one amongst a slew of experts, including economists and representatives from California growers, and migrant workers themselves. These testimonies proved acrimonious at times, as the two factions of enduring echelonic capitalism, represented by both the growers and some of the more atavistic members of the Senate subcommittee and those attempting to effect change for the poor, Huerta and Mondale alike, spoke passionately about the situation of the migrant laborer in the United States (ibid).

Senator Mondale framed these subcommittee hearings under the theme of "powerlessness," even naming the hearings "Migrant and seasonal farmworker powerlessness" ("Migrant and seasonal farmworker powerlessness Hearings" 1969).

Introducing the hearings, Senator Mondale remarked:

This morning the Migratory Labor Subcommittee begins its third set of hearings on migrant and seasonal farm labor problems in the United States. The theme for the entire series of hearings is powerlessness. The subcommittee is examining the depth of powerlessness among migrants, and the reasons for it. (ibid)

He continued:

These hearings are designed to explore the extent to which migrant workers are powerless to influence decisions in both their home base communities and in so-called user States. The subcommittee is examining the degree to which, and the

ways in which, migrant and seasonal farmworkers are deprived of political power, deprived of economic power, deprived of cultural identity or pride, deprived of rights and privileges that most Americans take for granted. (ibid)

Remarking on this idea that the North American farm worker existed in a state of deprivation of power, sociologist William A. Rushing cites Marx in his 1970 article, “Class, Power, and Alienation: Rural Differences” when he explains:

Because worker and capitalist occupied fundamentally different positions in the system of production—namely, one owned the means of production and the other didn’t, the worker’s position of power was eroded and he became increasingly alienated (i.e. powerless) as a result. Hence the differences in position of power are viewed as leading to difference in perceived, felt, or subjective power.

On the farmworker, Rushing continues,

There are wide differences in power. Like factory workers, agricultural workers are separated from the means of production, but unlike most factory workers they are not supported by strong union organization, and only spasmodic attempts at unionization have been made [...]. Consequently, agricultural workers have almost no voice in economic decisions which affect them. (166)

Huerta’s presence and her authoritative rhetoric stood in opposition to this theme of powerlessness. If, as Mondale and Rushing postulated, the farm worker’s deprivation of power was rooted in their inability to advocate for themselves, Huerta was the rectification to this silencing. By the time of this testimony, Huerta had been organizing, advocating, boycotting, and effecting change for almost two decades and to great success. From Stockton to Delano to Sacramento, and now in D.C., Huerta’s voice had become a

recognizable symbol of the unionization of migrant laborers and of equitable working and living conditions for all.

The statement to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor came during Huerta's rise as rhetor in *La Causa* and as she was establishing herself as Vice President of the United Farm Workers. Scholar Juan Gomez- Quiñones reflects on the import of this era when he explains:

Mexicans provided a basic labor resource in mining, agriculture, and construction" and as the Mexican American presence in these industries grew so did concern over poor wages and poor working conditions, thus necessitating "labor organizing, which became fairly widespread. (295)

Huerta's legacy in this very important part of American history demands to be written as more than just a figure present; instead, it needs to be revealed how her speeches and testimonies shaped the national conversation on wages, working conditions, and the general plight of the field worker. In addition to organizing, she was highly politically active, lobbying in favor of (and against) numerous California and federal laws concerning migrant labors and labor rights. The laws that she supported included a bill to permit people to take the California driver's examination in Spanish, the legislation repealing the Bracero Program, and the 1963 legislation to extend Aid to Families with Dependent Children to California farmworkers. These are indicative of the overture of her rhetorical work and her authority on these topics is evident in the testimony. Her words, powerful and assured, are paradigmatic of the Chicana rhetor: linguistically dynamic and capable of moving between formalities, tones, structures, and syncopations with efficacious intent.

*Analysis of the “Statement of Dolores Huerta, Vice President, United Farmworkers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, to U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1969”*

Senator Mondale opens the hearings with a brief monologue, during which he proclaims:

It is imperative that we examine this history of migrant and seasonal farmworker attempts to organize, the extent to which their attempts have been successful, and the reason for the successes and failures. The purpose of our hearings this morning is to learn about the farmworker’s efforts to organize to gain their fair share of power, and to investigate the extent to which public and private institutions and practices may be suppressing farmworker attempts to organize.

(U.S. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare).

Mondale then calls to speak Senator Alan Cranston, a Democrat for California serving his first term as senator from the state. Cranston would be the first in the hearings to introduce Huerta, stating:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to express my admiration of your leadership in holding these hearings and exploring the titanic problems facing the farmworkers of the United States. The bill you introduced (S. 2568) is typical of your leadership, a bill making it unlawful to employ green carders to replace strikers during a labor dispute.

I would also like to welcome Dolores Huerta, who is a remarkably effective leader in this struggle, and whose presence here will enable us to get into the record a fascinating, illuminating, and highly disturbing story of the valiant

struggle of the farmworkers who face so many serious problems in our society.

(U.S. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare)

Cranston introduces Huerta's testimony in three ways: as being "fascinating," "illuminating," and as a perspective on the "highly disturbing story of the valiant struggle" of farm workers. These framing terms are important for the connotations they bring to Huerta's rhetoric prior to her speaking. Fascinating, from the verb fascinate, in its earliest manifestation was a transitive verb that indicated affect by witchcraft or bewitchment and later, after losing the connection to witchcraft, it came to mean depriving of the power of escape or resistance (OED). Potentially unintentional, Cranston has both positioned Huerta in a long and complicated history of women who speak as being bewitched and, therefore, dangerous, and has replicated the theme of powerlessness, but inverted it to give power to Huerta, representative of the farmworker, and shifting the inability of resistance to the senatorial audience.

Cranston's next descriptive, "illuminating," positions Huerta as an "illuminate," elucidating another potentially unintentional connotation of Huerta as rhetor: that of the "spiritually or intellectually enlightened person" who is initiated in the "mysteries" (OED). This connection with the enlightened and the mysterious parallels third space feminism's idea of desire as an act of Chicana agency. Emma Pérez explores the potential of desire to "transform us, to revolutionize us, and to challenge that which is repressive in our society" (103). Pérez uses four Chicana cultural icons of analysis in her exploration of Chicana desire as rhetorical agency, with each icon coming together to represent "Chicana feminist agency—something of India/Mestiza/Chicana," all cultural labels that Huerta identifies with. Here in the Senate Subcommittee hearings, the desire manifests



with the particular audience's desire to be illuminated, to be informed, on a topic that they cannot know without an intermediary's insight. Huerta is the illuminate of the farm worker struggle with the power to fascinate, to hold her particular audience captive with her knowledge. Cranston's final positioning of Huerta is as a storyteller of the valiant struggle of a highly disturbing tale. Historically, the story teller was a revered position that came with great knowledge and was imbued with *ethos*. It was through story telling that human history, mythical and otherwise, was passed down and with it the morals and lessons that society needed to continue to be civilized and cohesive. Cranston assures the connotations of mythos and morality are insinuated via the use of "valiant" and "disturbing," each of which connotes Quixote more than Senate Subcommittee.

Once introduced to the Senate Subcommittee via these framing terms, Huerta begins her testimony. Acknowledging the theme of powerlessness, and in direct defiance of it, Huerta begins her testimony to the Senate Subcommittee with the declaration: "My name is Dolores Huerta. I am the Vice President of the United Farmworkers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), AFL-CIO" (M. García 213). Immediately placing a name and title upon herself and her presence at the hearings, Huerta establishes herself as a human being with the right to speak. This is a radical act of self-legitimation and in direct acknowledgement of her audience. She is not the "powerless" member of the migrant labor force that the subcommittee has convened to discuss, to know. Rather, she challenges the listeners, senators from states such as Texas and West Virginia, some congenial and some hostile, to recognize her, to validate her, and to listen to her. She is Dolores Huerta, Vice President of one of the most active, efficient unions in the United States.

This opening rhetorical move is in line with Chicana scholar Emma Pérez's theory of third space feminism, and in particular the repetition of rhetoric necessary for Chicanas to align their words with their activities. While it is customary for any speaker before a senate committee to introduce themselves, it is crucial that Huerta do so. Though she was introduced before her testimony, and though the speakers on the subcommittee have documentation notifying them of Huerta's name and title, she still makes it a point to name and title herself prior to her testimony. If this repetitive rhetorical move were left out of her statement or if it were diminutive in diction, sentence structure, or execution then her presence would be subjugated. Simply, there is more at stake for the Chicana speaking. Huerta demonstrates this urgency via the pushing aside of the veil<sup>ii</sup> and establishing herself as an authority, as present, and as vocal.

After this introduction Huerta begins to delineate her argument. She prefaces this delineation with a disclaimer, proclaiming:

We have had tremendous difficulties in trying to organize farm workers. I don't think, first of all, that we have to belabor the reason why farmworkers need a union. The horrible state in which farmworkers find themselves, faced with such extreme poverty and discrimination, has taught us that the only way we can change our situation is by organization of a union. (U.S. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare)

Here Huerta touches on what social semiotics terms "bodies in space," or the idea that our language, for example here the terms "organize," "union," and "faced," can be used to position people, either in pursuit of cohesion or dis cohesion. Hodge and Kress write, "These turns of speech are sometimes called metaphors, but what they express is a basic

equation between the ordering of social bodies in physical space and the relationship between persons in social space” (52). Huerta uses these terms to position the migrant farm workers with the senatorial audience via cohesive semiotics. Before she calls the audience to task for their part in the “extreme poverty and discrimination” of the migrant laborer, she first brings these men into empathetic collusion with her, with the UFW, and with the laborers. This rhetorical move is a semiotic message of power and solidarity; first, the senators are brought into solidarity with Huerta and the UFW and then they are imbued with the power to effect change.

Huerta’s next rhetorical move is the recounting of the timeline of the Grape Boycott. In doing so, Huerta establishes the effectiveness of the boycott, not just through the UFW’s involvement, but also through the support of ‘millions of Americans’ who are ‘supporting the grape workers strike by not buying table grapes’ (M. García 214). Huerta also provides the particular and universal audiences with an opportunity to acknowledge the rhetorical work that has shaped the boycott and subsequently led to the Senate Subcommittee hearings. Hodge and Kress, citing Saussure, explain the importance of iterating timelines when speaking on the synchrony, or interdependence and parallel occurrence and evolution, of events as shaped by language when they explain that “transformations arise in a synchronic state, in social conditions of language use” and later that “at least two forms must coexist, however subtly distinguished, as the starting point for change” (32). Taking this microcosmic concept and applying it to the macrocosmic Grape Boycott, we see that the tension between pro-laborer and pro-grower has manifested into the rhetoric of the Grape Boycott. This story of social transformation is the topic of discussion at the hearings, and Huerta is the narrator.

Calling on this juxtaposition of the average North American citizen's support for migrant farm laborers movement toward labor rights against those few yet elite that support large growers, Huerta goes on to testify that the Department of Defense (DoD), seemingly in response to the UFW helmed Grape Boycott and in support of large growers, has doubled their purchase of table grapes. After providing the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor with hard facts, including the exorbitant amount of grapes being shipped by the U.S. government to the soldiers in Vietnam, Huerta states, 'These are the facts as to how the Grapes of Wrath are being converted into the Grapes of War by the world's richest government in order to stop farm workers from waging a successful boycott and organizing campaign against grape growers' (M. García 215). This *anaphora*, coupled with the *enargiac* images of the Great Depression and the Vietnam War was quite pathos laden.<sup>iii</sup> The *anaphora* occurs when Huerta aligns the classic North American novel "Grapes of Wrath," a tale of poor migrant farmers struggling to survive in the Great Depression, with her phrase the "Grapes of War." In true storyteller fashion, Huerta has invoked a North American mythic tale to coincide and elevate a current North American struggle. Huerta also expertly plays on the term of "organizing campaign" which connotes the campaigns being waged by North American soldiers in pursuit of life and victory in Vietnam. Through this turn at semiotic cohesion, the particular audience could envision the atrocities of the Depression and the Vietnam War as microcosms for the subversion of the Grape Boycott by the U. S. Government.

These rhetorical moves allow Huerta to position her audience as complacent in the laborer's struggle for equality. The senators sitting before her listening to the testimony have suddenly become a synecdoche<sup>iv</sup> for the U.S. government and the DoD.

They may not be the politicians organizing the movement of table grapes to Vietnam, but they, at least for the moment, represent those large growers and *laissez faire* DoD employees in power. Acknowledging this positioning of her audience and anticipating their rebuttal to her synecdochic use of them as representatives of the DoD, Huerta engages the opposition by stating more facts. She explains that the:

“DoD explains in its Fact Sheet that “the basic policy of the DoD with regard to awarding defense contracts to contractors involved in labor disputes is to refrain from taking a position on the merits of any labor dispute. This policy is based on the premise that it is essential to DoD procurement needs to maintain a sound working relationship with both labor and management.” (M. García 215)

With the government’s own rhetoric stated in testimony, Huerta argues that the DoD is violating its own policy via the “fantastic increase” (*ibid*) in grape procurements occurring concurrently with the UFW led Grape Boycott. So, not only is the DoD violating its policy by shipping boycotted table grapes to soldiers fighting in Vietnam, through this “fantastic” procurement and shipment of the boycotted grapes, they are blatantly aligning with large growers. There is no implication of forced interpretation here. Huerta has cited a governmental fact sheet that states its policy and its reason: that the government must maintain a “sound working relationship with both labor and management.” The violation as well as the culprit is clear.

Huerta concludes this line of argument by calling the DoD to task for violating its own stance on engaging in labor disputes and then places the onus of rectification on those senators sitting before her in the Senate Subcommittee hearings. She testifies, “It seems that the DoD is violating its own policy and endangering its working relationship

with labor, and we hope that the committee will explore this fully” (M. García 216). Her purpose in this statement of hope is *eristic*, or in pursuit of productive argument, and her rhetoric reflects this. Huerta is not the antagonist of this story, but rather simply the teller. Her ethos is invoked mightily here as she is able to deftly move from logos to pathos, continuing to position her particular audience as empathetic listeners.

Moving from this anecdote on the government’s complacency in the farm worker’s struggle for labor rights and her suggestion towards the committee’s further action, Huerta continues her testimony by explaining the struggles of the laborer. “The history of our struggle against agribusiness,” she states, “is punctuated but the continued violations of health and safety codes by growers, including many table grape growers” (M. García 216). Her use of the possessive pronoun “our” is important here, as it functions on two significant levels. First, Huerta is aligning herself with the farm laborers and their historic struggle against human violations waged against them by large growers. She may be the eloquent speaker before the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, but that does not negate that she is also intimately affected by these systemic ills because of her gender and ethnicity. Compounding this is Huerta’s aligning of the senators against these human rights violations. As the audience members to this testimony, the manifestation of the Perelman/Olbrechts-Tytechian particular audience, the senators are implicitly included in the collective, possessive pronoun “our.” They are not field laborers, yet they share the history of labor rights activism through their witnessing of Huerta, and the other testifiers, speech. The history of labor rights, from child labor, to minimum wage, to the current discussion on migrant labor is a history embedded in their

profession. By embracing them as historical activists whose legacy is that of pro-laborer, Huerta's call for them to move towards rectification is amplified.

In concluding her testimony, Huerta builds on the earlier use of *anaphora* and *enargia* by extending the metaphors of economic depression and war as acts similar to the undermining of the Grape Boycott. She states:

“Many farm workers are members of minority groups. They are Filipino and Mexican-Americans and black Americans. These same farm workers are on the front lines of battle in Vietnam. It is a cruel and ironic slap in the face to these men who have left the fields to fulfill their military obligation to find increasing amounts of non-union grapes in their mess kit.” (M. García 217)

The *enargiac* image moves the particular audience from envisioning the brave men of color fighting on the front lines of the Vietnam War to fighting in the fields of California, each battling a foe that wishes to suppress their quality of life. Huerta invokes a sense of deep hurt and deep wrong doing to these men, some of whom were farmworkers before picking up arms to serve their military. In this turn, she forces her audience to visualize the farmworker not as a foreign worker or as a faceless worker, hunched over and successively swinging a short hoe, but rather as a brave young man, an American man of color, fighting for a better way of life.

Huerta is also using the classic rhetorical trope of *metalepsis* with a counter turn. She first invokes synecdoche once again by correlating the farm workers she is representing with those soldiers of color fighting in the Vietnam War. With this connection made, Huerta then compares the actions of the DoD's support for boycotted table grapes to a “cruel and ironic slap in the face” towards these worker/soldiers. This

statement on the young men being denigrated over the presence of table grapes in their mess kits is immediately followed with the concluding line, ‘UFWOC calls on all concerned Americans and on the members of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor to protest this anti-union policy of the military and the Nixon administration’ (M. García 217). The *metalepsis* occurs here, as Huerta moves from these *enargiac* images to her call to the committee (a *synedochic* substitute for the DoD) to “protest this anti-union policy” (ibid). The present effect of the subversion of the boycott is connected to the larger, more controversial and national issue of the Vietnam War. And, it is with this *metaleptic* turn that Huerta is able to connect the nuances, implicit and explicit, that have been outlined throughout her testimony.

Though the topic of Huerta’s statement to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor was about the “powerlessness” of farmworkers, Huerta’s angle became the Vietnam War. Her decision, to align these two “wars,” was not without its potential pitfalls. First, the Vietnam War was a war of ideology, with North America entering the fray for reasons that remained ambiguous to many at the time of the statement (1969). Also, public opinion of the war was low, with many North Americans declaring each victory won by North American soldiers pyrrhic victories. Knowingly, Huerta avoided any rhetoric that would connect the faulty ideology of the war to the boycott. Instead, Huerta focused on connecting the prominent faces seen in the media of battle worn soldiers, mostly young men and many men of color, to the young men of color working the fields of large growers that the Grape Boycott was fighting for. In doing so, Huerta enabled her audiences, both particular and universal, to envision who the farmworkers were, what they were fighting for, and how difficult a battle it was.



*Scholarly Renderings*

Academia had taken an interest in the farmworker's plight at least a decade prior to the Senate Subcommittee hearings in the form of studies and articles. As early as 1960, articles in sociology, public health, law, and economics journals were delineating the various aspects the farm worker struggle. In *Sociometry*, published by the American Sociology Association, William A. Rushing's "Class, Power, and Alienation: Rural Differences" took a Marxian approach to the "inverse relationship between social class and powerlessness" (166) via a quantitative/qualitative study looking at the powerlessness reported by both large growers and migrant laborers. Rushing found that while growers often felt a sense of powerlessness over government regulations and the whims of the economy, these paled in comparison to the powerlessness over basic human necessities experienced by the laborers working on the grower's farms. These lack of essentials was explored deeper in the 1961 article "Health Needs of Seasonal Farmworkers and their Families" written by Shafer, Harting, and Johnston and published by the Association of Schools of Public Health. Shafer et al reported:

In many areas, the usual living and working conditions of the seasonal farmworker families contribute to disease and disability. Some families live in large, well-built, well-maintained, and well-managed farm labor camps with good toilets, adequate water supply, and regular garbage and trash collection. Others live in rows of makeshift units where there is little regard for human health, safety, or decency. (469)

The authors later urge growers to take responsibility for the health of their workers and the sanitation of their housing and fields (470) as well as for communities and states to

hold growers accountable and to vote into legislation standards and monitoring systems. They also call for national action to ensure the protection of migrant laborers. The authors write:

Although emphasizing local and State responsibility is appropriate, the periodic shifting of workers and families from one community to another implies the added need for national leadership and assumption of responsibility. The separate action of single communities and States is likely to result in the duplication of some services to migrant families and gaps in others. Interstate planning and exchange, across the continent if necessary, can be facilitated by active national leadership and participation. (473)

Huerta comments on the poor state of health and healthcare for the migrant laborer in her statement when she remarks:

Let me add another thing, as long as we are talking about health. The healthcare of farmworkers is almost nonexistent, and the rate of tuberculosis is 200 percent above the national average. While you consider that many of the people now picking grapes are being brought in from Mexico, that they are people without any type of legal residence papers, and therefore, have not been processed through the health regulations that usually apply to immigrants coming into this country, you can imagine what the contamination possibilities are, when the people are coming from a country with lower health standards than the United States.

It would be another 8 years before the Senate Subcommittee would convene and Huerta would be called to make this testimony of the ills being experienced by

migrant labors throughout California and the United States. (U.S. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare)

In “Current Developments in Farm Labor Legislation” (1966) Stanley Knebel passionately renders the movement towards progressive legislation in support of migrant laborers. After prefacing his article with the Victor Hugo quote, “Nothing in this world is so powerful as an idea whose time has come,” (1131) Knebel proclaims:

The plight of the farm worker has been a matter of some concern for many years. But it is only recently, during the past few years, that there has been real public awareness of the problem and indication that ameliorative action is, and will be, forthcoming. (1131)

And later,

Farm workers have been referred to as “the forgotten people,” but a reading of the social welfare legislation enacted during the 1930s, and up until the early 1960s, would suggest that they were remembered in no uncertain terms. Nearly every act contains specific prohibition excluding agricultural workers from coverage. One might regard these exclusionary clauses as reflections of legislative dynamics, for little consideration is given to the unrepresented where there is a rill call. But the influence of the so-called farm bloc is on the wane, weakened by the continuing urbanization of our society and the Supreme Court’s reapportionment decisions. Farm workers still are without a political voice of their own. However, a coalition of church, labor, and civic groups is not working effectively in their behalf.

(1132)

These scholarly publications reflect not only a historical account of the years leading up to the Senate Subcommittee hearings, but stand as historical proof that the concern for migrant farm labor rights and well-being was not the concern of Huerta, Chavez, and the UFW alone. Rather, the migrant farm worker's plight had become a part of the North American social conversation. The health, economic solvency, and agency of the farm worker was a microcosm of the same concerns being fought for within the Civil Rights Movements happening concurrently to these publication of these articles. Dolores Huerta would continue this conversation, not in the academic circles of the time, but rather in the North American *polis*, echoing these same concerns to a much broader, national and political audience.

#### *Media Renderings*

Because the strikes and boycotts associated with the labor rights struggle were helmed by the United Farm Workers union, which was led by a Chicano and Chicana, Cesar Chávez and Dolores Huerta respectively, the media often collapsed the focused labor rights work of *La Causa* with the more diverse civil rights work of *El Movimiento*. National news reports carefully followed the UFW and the Grape Boycott, partly because it was a major move against economically powerful, white California growers, and thus served as a microcosm for the larger civil rights struggles occurring throughout the nation, and partly because of its ties to the Vietnam War. These complicated interconnections often worked to the benefit of the UFW, a union whose major tactic was media coverage of its non-violent protests against unfair corporate practices.

Mass media renderings of Dolores Huerta during her early years participating the in North American polis were often focused on her as the firebrand rhetor juxtaposed

against the quiet calm of Cesar Chávez. Huerta was positioned as leader of the union from the onset, with one reporter recalling that “virtually all observers in the scene at that time were convinced that next to Chávez, Dolores Huerta...was the top leader of the union” (Rose 6). Another report in *The Nation* (1974) cites Ester Yurande, a former field worker and member of the UFW, on Huerta. She states:

“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 afraid of anything.” (M. García 85)

In the same 1974 *The Nation* article, Huerta is quoted as follows:

“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 voted on the proposals. He thought we out to have an attorney, but really it was better to put the contracts in 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.” (M. García 89)

Huerta’s voice was given credence and her authority validated in articles such as this one, yet the media tended to counter-position Huerta as the struggling or incompetent mother, even if the overall rendering was positive. In the same *The Nation* article, authors Barbara L. Baer and Glenna Mathews describe Huerta, at the time of the article a mother of ten, as

strained and tense. They report, “Contradictions in her life must have taken, and continue to take, a toll: her children, Catholic faith and a divorce, her high strung nerves and the delicate health we know she disregards (M. García 81). And a year later, Baer writes in the article “Stopping Traffic” in *The Progressive* that while César Chávez was travelling to Mexico on UFW work, Huerta was having more babies (M. García 81). These contradictory renditions of Huerta are fraught by society’s, as filtered through the media, discomfort with acknowledging that a Chicana could be mother and leader, competent at each job concurrently.

News reports on the NFWA/UFW activities extended beyond Huerta and were much more blatantly negative. The California Migrant Ministry reported on the grower-leaning news reports stating that:

On December 1, 1968, *Presbyterian Life* printed a long article by Mr. Allan Grant entitled “California Grapes and the Boycott—The Grower’s Side of the Story.” Among other things, Mr. Grant implied that farm workers in California are doing reasonably well economically. He also hinted that the leaders of the Union have no real interest in the workers or social justice. (1)

The article comments on Mr. Grant’s potentially grower-biased *Presbyterian Life* article, stating that the author “pieced together a large number of facts and conclusions (some accurate and some not): but he did not deal seriously with the underlying issues of the Delano Grape Strike” (1). Another such example of the media progressing pro-grower sentiments was rooted in well-paid government officials and lobbyists who were oft quoted as authorities on farm workers and the union boycotts and strikes. For instance,

Allen Grant, the spokesman and executive officer of the California Farm Bureau Federation was a vocal detractor of César Chávez, positioning Chávez as a “money- and power hungry labor professional” (Hartmire 5). These negative portrayals of the NFWA/UFW and their leaders were quite detrimental because much of the country outside of California and the Southwest relied on mass media news reports for their knowledge on the labor rights movement happenings.

For the UFW, contributing to the oft-pro-grower mass media renderings of the formation of their union, the Delano Grape Strike and subsequent Grape Boycott, which led to the Senate Subcommittee Hearings in Delano, was a priority. The attention that Senator Kennedy can the hearing brought to the UFW and their boycott efforts was paramount in countering the pro-grower rhetoric. Reverend Chris Hartmire, the former Director of the National Farmworker Ministry, explains:

Two significant things came out of those hearings. One was just the fact that Bobby Kennedy came to Delano, and he got to meet Cesar, he got to meet the other leaders of the National Farm Workers Association. And, secondly, the hearings just gave visibility to the Delano Strike. It did the opposite of what the growers wanted. The growers wanted invisibility and localization and wanted to crush it locally. That’s the strategy. For the strikers, the more national publicity the better. (*Chicano!* PBS documentary)

*El Malcriado* was established in the winter of 1964-65 by Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chávez, with Bill Esher as assistant (and later coordinator) of the paper, yet was kept independent of the NFWA (Adair 1). The name *El Malcriado*, translated to “ill mannered” or “ill raised” and it’s this idea of going against the norm, aka the North

American mass media, that the newspaper's name played on. The name held resonance "with many farmworkers because during the Mexican Revolution, there had been a newspaper with the same name" (*El Malcriado: The Voice of the Farm Workers*). This idea of rabbleroising in support of a revolution was complemented by the newspaper's gentle rendering of "*sacrificios para la causa* stories and exhortations" (Adair 3) stories about union members, workers, and strikers and the sacrifices they were making for pro-labor causes. Offered as a benefit to members of the NFWA (and, eventually, the UFW), *El Malcriado* functioned as a sanctioned space for union news, for *testimonios* from the picket and strike lines, and as a way for the union leaders to progress their message via a vernacular that the readers, a diverse crowd consisting of strikers, picketers, workers, and common citizens, could read and repeat. Reflecting on the publication, Doug Adair recalls, "we did serve the membership with articles on new contracts, details of the new health insurance plan, and other issues directly relevant to their [the farm workers] lives. The paper had a circulation of over 10,000 at its peak, the majority being in English" (Fishlow, Adair, and Day 4).

*El Malcriado* did much to serve the UFW and the Farm Worker's Movement, though its reporting of Chicana involvement and concerns was tempestuous, at best. In 1970, the publication reported, "Approximately 200 persons are on the grape boycott, of this total about half are women" (Rose, "Women Power Will Stop Those Grapes," 6), thus indicating that the publication had no qualms about reporting the presence and effectiveness of women on the lines. But contrary to this positive representation, *El Malcriado* also had no qualms on pushing Chavez's anti-birth control and anti-abortion views. Though these views aligned with Chávez's very public image as a devout



Catholic, they often conflicted with the views of Chicanas involved with *La Causa* and *El Movimiento* views. Ana Raquel Minian writes that Chávez “did not focus only on union contracts. Wages, working conditions, strikes, or boycotts. He also spent a considerable amount of time criticizing birth control distribution programs (63). And later:

Union officials’ use of a discourse of bodily comportment and sexual self-control as a way to make out radical labor claims is all the more striking because it occurred during a period when many on the left—and even in the center—were rejecting sexual respectability. (64)

Minian argues that Chávez and the UFW used *El Malcriado* to “present the union through a language of sexual-self restraint” because it was crucial that the image of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as “outsiders who lacked bodily self-restraint” reversed into one of “corporal discipline” (64). This as compounded by Chávez’s view on birth control as a tool racism, stating that Planned Parenthood pushed birth control on Mexicans and Mexican Americans as a “eugenic solution” to these ethnicities “uninhibited fertility” (66).

The conflict between the UFW fighting for farm worker rights while concurrently suppressing women’s rights did not go unnoticed by media publications beyond *El Malcriado*. Lester Kingsolving reporting in the *St. Petersburg Times* attempted to elicit information on this seemingly contradictory stance on social justice. Prefaced by a quote from Chris Hartmire, who proclaims, “Cesar Chavez has devoted his life to building a democratic union that can free farmworkers from dependence and poverty,” Kingsolving asks, “Just how free are the farmworkers from dependence upon the leaders of the UFW? (2D). Following this rhetorical question up, Kingsolving quotes Gilbert Padilla, Secretary

Treasurer of the UFW on the issue: ‘True, there are no contraceptives given out in our UFW clinics. [...] We don’t believe in contraception, or in abortion, which isn’t allowed in our clinics, either’ (ibid). This statement on this anti-woman’s rights stance is indicative of what Chicanas in both *La Causa* and *El Movimiento* were struggling against, and what would motivate them to break from the nationalist movement into their own vein of Chicanisma in the coming decades.

### *Personal Rendering*

Reflecting on the context of her testimony in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, Huerta recalled that sense of powerlessness that Senator Mondale had originally framed the meetings. Huerta recalled:

“We had been on strike for a few months and the growers were bringing in strike breakers from Mexico. They went and got court injunctions limiting us to five people per field. Can you imagine five pickets on a big thousand acre field?” (M. García 182)

These types of local injunctions, compounded by the national moves such as the Department of Defense’s ramping up of the procurement of boycotted table grapes, stood as seemingly insurmountable roadblocks to the progress of worker’s rights.

Strikebreakers and sweetheart deals were prevalent and effective during the Grape Boycott and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. And, worse, these tactics were often compounded by the macho politics of Chicanos within *El Movimiento*. Huerta recalls her unique position in the boycott and in *El Movimiento* as a Chicana leader in an otherwise male-dominated and machismo atmosphere when she states:

“And women being involved on the picket lines made it easier for the men then to accept nonviolence. They would always say if they didn’t have a woman, ‘We need some women on our picket line. We need some women here.’ It makes it a lot easier for them. Then they can justify not being macho tough, or macho revenge, you know. Just having the women there made it possible, I think, for the organization to practice its nonviolence.” (M. García 183)

The theme of powerlessness that propelled the Senate Subcommittee hearings as well as the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 1970’s was counteracted by Huerta and her strong presence as leader and speaker in the UFW and migrant labor rights movement.

In reaction to these attempts at subjugation, the Chicanas of the movement would turn to anti-macho tactics, nonviolent and vocal, to continue in their resistance. Huerta was paradigmatic in these non-violent tactics. Luis Valdez, founder of *Teatro Campesino* and early activist with the UFW, recalls:

Here is this young woman, not that big, leading a struggle, and she was challenging the role of women among farm workers. They had never seen an aggressive independent woman like Dolores. And I found myself in a position where I was willing to be a lieutenant, a follower. (*Chicano! PBS documentary*)

Commenting on the macho politics of the era, Eileen Foley remarks that in 1973, “a union whose members are often steeped in the machismo tradition, elected [Huerta] overwhelmingly and unanimously [as] its first vice president” (94). Huerta adds that ‘people respond to those who are willing to help and to work with them [...] it over-rides any machismo’ (M. García 94).

The macho traditions and macho politics that dominated the era of Huerta's testimony, the late 1960s and early 1970s, were not always so easy to conquer. The idea of the "submissive Chicana" was not limited to the civil rights era nor to a small segment of Chicanos. Leticia Hernández commented on this situation when she recalled:

“[One guy's] mother was vocal and took charge, but men in the movement had their ideas of what women should do—that is, be barefoot, pregnant, tied to the kitchen stove. The men felt that they should be the ones to make the statements and should be the ones to write the papers and that the women should be the ones to type the papers and women should be the ones who serve the coffee on the side and make everything nice and comfy for them when they come home from the ‘war.’” (Blackwell 69)

Maxine Baca Zinn explains the roots of macho politics, the politics that Huerta was fighting against each time she assumed the role of speaker for the UFW, as being held in two traditions. She writes:

The first tradition treats women as constitutionally and socially inferior to men, and therefore less interesting than men. The second tradition treats people of color as inherently or culturally inferior to Anglo-white people. Both of these social and intellectual ideologies have produced cultural stereotypes. Chicanas are variously portrayed as exotic objects, manipulated by both Chicano and Anglo men; as long suffering mothers subject to the brutality of insecure husbands, whose only function is to produce children; and as women who themselves are childlike, simple, and completely dependent on their fathers, brothers, and husbands. (17)

Baca Zinn's point is clear: Chicanas pursuing voice, even in an era of revolutionary ideas and progress, are stifled by multiple layers of subjugation and silencing mechanisms.

Dolores Huerta's testimony in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Migrant Labor was momentous in the act of shirking these systemic silencing mechanisms. Not since the days Josefina Fierro de Bright and Luisa Moreno, some three decades prior, had Latinas been present and vocal in the North American *polis*. What would make Huerta's entrée into the polis truly profound would be its legacy. There would no longer be a gap of silence, no longer an era when Mexican American women were not heard in political and sociocultural issues, locally and nationally.

As a Mexican American woman, Dolores Huerta was truly in a third space, positioned by class, race, and gender, all three of which worked counter to the speaker/activist moment of this statement in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor. Rather than allowing these potentially destructive positionings to limit or undermine her, Huerta embodies them, embraces them, and allows them to guide her rhetorical choices. Huerta knows her audience intimately. As the step child of a white, middle class father, Huerta's access to the norms and expectations of the present senators allows her to choose her wording, her use of ethos and pathos, her organization of the argument in methodical and effective ways. Demonstrated via her testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, Huerta's rhetorical ability to deal with audiences like these white, male, politicians, was not limited to the enclosed room on Capital Hill. Rather, it was Huerta that was often designated as UFW speaker and mediator.

Margaret Rose argues that Huerta "had no formal background in the complicated technical area of contract negotiations" though she became "the union's first contract

negotiator” (7). Rose contends Huerta’s capability was rooted in her experience during the previous years working in New York City with other activists and feminists such as Gloria Steinem. Rose states that:

As a labor activist, Huerta had dismissed the 1960s women’s liberation movement as a middle-class phenomenon. For years she had ignored inappropriate comments and gender discrimination directed at her and other women by male colleagues and other critics as an inevitable part of the job. Travelling across country, she increasingly became sensitized to the sexism in her own organization. Her consciousness raised, she began to directly challenge offensive remarks and stereotypes. (8)

In regards to this movement from *oikos*, the home, to *polis*, public forum, and into a critical awareness of the sexism that accompanied this movement yet would no longer be tolerable in her work as labor union leader and advocate, Huerta remarked to Chávez “I am not the quiet long suffering type” (Rose 7).

Speaking on her role as leader, Huerta has come to honest terms with her ability to engage and persuade. She explains, “[w]hen I think of Hispanic leadership, I think of a person who makes sacrifices, has ability, has perseverance, the desire to do things. Someone the people will follow” (M. García 282). She continues, “I am an elected official. Being a co-founder of the Union made my [election] easier. About 20,000 workers elected me to my present position. So my authority comes from them’ (M. García 282). She is the voice of the people she is representing and she is honorific of this position. As she progresses from testimonial to debate, Huerta’s rhetoric continues to reflect this awareness of position and audience.

### *Conclusion*

When Huerta's testimony took place, in July of 1969, the political and social ideology behind the concept of "Chicana" was still manifesting and coming into cohesion. The Chicano Civil Rights Movement was still in its early years and was still fragmented in scope and goals. Those involved in *El Movimiento* were struggling for civic and social justice while internally struggling with identity and cultural liminality. This era marked the moment when "memories were sewn together by individual and collective interpretations of belonging and not belonging to a Mexico of the past and present" (Gomez-Quiñones and Vasquez 44-5), and, I would argue, of a United States of the past and present. This struggle would give way to an acknowledgement of the mestizaje consciousness, a connection with indigenous roots, while concurrently acknowledging being "*lo Americano*," or American by birth right and by culture. For Chicanas, adopting the moniker of "Chicana" was a political act of self identification (Leon 4) and was a "basic acknowledgment of self-worth and dignity premised on women-centered and women-led social change" (Gomez-Quiñones and Vasquez 45).

The United Farm Workers union, on the other hand, was enjoying its seventh full year as an established union, with Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chávez at the helm and appearing consistently in the North American *polis* and in the media. Their articulation of the state of the migrant laborer in California would become the exigence for much of the scholarly articles and media publications regarding farmworkers and the rhetorically powerful march to Delano, which occurred from March 17-April 11 1966, would continue to be a major symbol of the Chicano Rights Movement as it gained cohesion (Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project).

This spatiotemporal liminal moment in the Chicano Rights movement represents a straddling of traditional Mexican American cultural and social values and the much more politicized and progressive values that would emerge in the coming years. Chicanos were still the primary speakers and leaders in *El Movimiento*, thus continuing to set the standards for rhetorical tropes, topoi, and agency. Huerta emerged during this time as *the* Chicana speaking. Though there were other active Mexican American women in leadership and advocate roles, it was Huerta who was the face and voice of the labor struggle that would become the cohesive force bringing *El Movimiento* together.

Huerta's statement in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor stands as an example of her early rhetoric, a rhetoric that was still more in the tradition her predecessors Tenayuca and Fierro de Bright. These traditional tropes and rhetorical moves were also in line with the genre conventions of the testimony, which include formality, reliability of the speaker, and truthfulness of the utterances, all of which are juxtaposed by the audience's position as critics and skeptics. Embracing these genre conventions and acknowledging her particular audience's position, Huerta was tasked with delivering a firm case against the North American migratory labor system knowing that her audience is tasked with unraveling the loose ends of her argument. This state of suspended belief, of wrong until proven otherwise, creates an antagonistic context that could function as a microcosm of what was happening outside this subcommittee meeting on a much larger scale in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement.

Attempting to acknowledge, address, and then rectify a centuries worth of wrongdoing by white America against the Mexican Americans, many of whom had been generational rightful citizens of the North American Southwest until the Treaty of



Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, the Chicano Civil Rights Movement began as a series of small protests and boycotts throughout California and the Southwest which led to larger conferences and demonstrations throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. Dolores Huerta's testimony in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor on July 15, 1969, is in regards to one aspect of this civil rights movement, that of labor rights of migrant workers. These workers were not all Mexican American or Mexican Nationals, but rather represented a diverse mix of ethnicities and homelands. The migrant laborer plight was thus not a fight for any one ethnicity; rather, it was a fight for fair wages and working conditions for all field and migrant laborer. Huerta's role in this fight, a fight that was still gaining momentum and cohesion when this testimony took place in 1969, was that of political rhetor, of advocate, and of intimate organizer. Though still early in her rhetorical career, her place as rhetorical heuristic for Chicana rhetoric was beginning to solidify via expert oratory such as this testimony.

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<sup>i</sup> Tey Diana Rebolledo is a Chicana Professor Emerita of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of New Mexico specializing in Chicana/o literature. Though her methodology is meant for the critique of Chicana literature, the tenets speak to the analysis of Chicana speech acts such as Dolores Huerta's testimony, debate, and convocation remarks.

<sup>ii</sup> In reference to the 1972 MEChA Resolution that commented on Chicana's need to become self-advocates during *El Movimiento* with the "lifting the veil of the Virgin's face to show a real women who is not exempt from the trials of life" (MEChA Resolution 1972).

<sup>iii</sup> Anaphora: A "carrying back," or a repetition of a word at the beginning of successive clauses or phrase. Enargia: Visually powerful, vivid description used to recreate a person or event. The Vietnam War was just beginning its era of Nixon/Johnson era of escalation.

<sup>iv</sup> Synecdoche: When a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa

<sup>v</sup> Metalepsis: When the present effect is attributed to a remote cause

Chapter Five: Huerta Enters the *Polis*: Dolores Huerta's 1973 Debate with Teamster  
Chuck O'Brien

This chapter is a perspectival analysis of Dolores Huerta's opening remarks in the 1973 debate between her and Chuck O'Brien of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. I will first contextualize the debate, providing information on what the historical happenings of the years leading up to the debate as well as providing pertinent background info on O'Brien and his association with the Teamsters Union. Next, I will analyze the text based on Huerta's rhetorical moves, paying close attention to her position as a Chicana rhetor. Following this I will analyze how the media reported and reacted to the context of this debate, including renditions of Huerta and the Chicano/a Civil Rights Movement, how scholars acknowledged the context of this debate, and finally, how Huerta has since spoken about this era in her rhetorical career. Tey Diana Rebolledo's methodology for analyzing Chicana texts outlined in "The Politics of Poetics: Or, What Am I, A Critic, Doing in This Text Anyhow" will continue to serve as a guide for analysis while third space feminism, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca concept of universal and particular audiences, and Hodge and Kress's approach to social semiotics function as the theories guiding the analysis of this debate.

*The Kairotic Moment*

Established in 1902 in Chicago, Illinois, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters was a powerhouse union representing shipping, freighting, commercial drivers, and sundry other commercial and industrial movers throughout the United States (Riggs 13). During its turbulent early years, the union was marked by the blatant and rampant corruption of its leaders, a legacy that would continue to plague the union,

soiling even the mention of the word “Teamster” leading up to their presence in the fields of California during the late 1960s. In an article published in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1905 entitled “The Chicago Teamster’s Strike--A Study of Industrial Democracy,” author John Cummings unleashes a diatribe against the Teamsters, eerily similar to what would be echoed some 70 years later with their involvement in the Delano Grape Strike and Salad Bowl Strike. Cummings writes:

As a conspiracy against the industrial peace of the community, consummated by evil-minded labor leaders, the Chicago teamsters’ strike would have comparatively little social significance and the painful experiences of the past few months might be allowed to sink out of public consciousness without any comment. (536)

But, Cummings continues, “unfortunately all the evidence is unmistakably to the contrary. One need not assume that any but those union officials high in authority, and certain boon companies, knew the precise terms and details of this wrecking adventure” (536).

Cummings goes on to explain that it was with full awareness that the Teamsters and the authorities running Chicago at the time allowed for dubious union organizing that helped not the workers, but the companies and politicians involved in the deals. From the outset, the Teamsters Union was less a union and more of a sanctioned site of the swindling of the poor North American laborer at the hands of *mafiosos* and politicians.

Though troubled from the outset of the union’s formation, the backhand deals and blatant corruption did not deter the union from growing powerful outside of its hometown of Chicago. The Teamsters were successful because they served an important purpose,

that of centrally organizing workers across a broad spectrum of jobs. David Witwer explains:

The union's importance stemmed from long-term changes in America's cities. Over the course of the nineteenth century urban centers had evolved, growing in geographic size, as well as population, and playing a central part in the industrial and commercial transformation of the country. The new metropolis of the turn of the century was no longer a walking city, but one dependent on a number of intraurban transportation networks (Mohl 1985: 27–66; Jackson 1985: 103–14; Warner 1962: 1–34). Streetcars, the most frequently described element of these transportation networks, moved commuters from distant residential neighborhoods to downtown commercial districts. A variety of horse-drawn vehicles, however, supplied the bulk of the remaining transportation needs of the city. Buggies, cabs, and carriages conducted passenger traffic not conveniently served by streetcars, for instance at weddings and funerals. [...] By organizing the men who labored in this transportation network, the Teamsters Union acquired great strategic power. (185-186)

This stronghold on unionization of the workers of the roads and highways of North America, from the Midwest to the East and West Coast, ensured the Teamsters would have clout in every major city in the early twentieth century. Sensing an opportunity, the mafia, in particular Cosa Nostra, would make inroads into the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) by placing members as heads of local chapters and being instrumental in choosing who would lead the IBT (Jacobs and Peters 237). In 1956, as Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chávez were gaining reputations in the

Community Service Organization in California, Senator Paul Douglass issued “The Douglass Report,” a scathing inside into the workings of the Cosa Nostra led IBT. The report:

Disclosed the results of a congressional investigation that found numerous conflict-of-interest situations in which “insiders” had charged exorbitant fees and profited at the expense of benefit plans and their beneficiaries. Payments from individual union members were routinely skimmed off by plan administrators, and union employees secured position as employees of the benefit plans while doing little work for high fees. (Jacobs and Peters 237)

The Teamsters would eventually suffer a severe blow to their organizational structure and national reputation after Jimmy Hoffa<sup>i</sup> ascended to power in the 1950s with the help of the Cosa Nostra. With the Mafia’s hands deep in union contracts and pension funds and negotiations of the Teamsters being handled by the mob, a congressional investigation, led by U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, was convened to uncover the wrongdoing. The investigation led to the conviction of Hoffa for union pension fraud and jury tampering in 1967. His protégé and mob darling, Frank Fitzsimmons, would ascend to the leadership of the IBT. It was under Fitzsimmon’s leadership that the Teamsters would attempt to consolidate all workers responsible for picking, packing, and moving North American foodstuffs. This foray into the realm of Dolores Huerta’s union, the United Farm Workers (UFW), would cause major rifts between the two unions, leading to the Huerta/O’Brien debate of 1973.

By the time of the 1973 debate between the UFW, represented by Dolores Huerta, and the IBT, represented by Chuck O’Brien, the UFW was at it’s most powerful. Richard

Griswold del Castillo writes that within its first decade of being, the UFW grew from “a handful of friends and relatives along with some of the poorest workers in America” and became “an organization that triumphed over some of the most powerful multinational corporations in America” (200-201). But, it was not the large growers and multinational corporations alone that the UFW was fighting against. Griswold del Castillo explains that the UFW’s battle was also with the Teamsters, whose presence in California was seemingly built on undermining the UFW’s efforts to organize farm workers and to enter into sweetheart deals with the growers. Griswold del Castillo explains:

There had been a large struggle against the Teamsters Union. Four years [prior to the passage of the California Farm Labor Relations Act] in 1970 the UFW had won a tremendous victory when scores of corporate grape growers signed contracts recognizing the union. Almost immediately after this success, the Teamsters began a jurisdictional war with the UFW. The Teamsters signed a sweetheart contract giving the growers what they wanted without even negotiating wages for the workers. (202)

The agreement broke down completely in 1970 as California Teamsters undermined Fitzsimmons and began to blatantly resume the organizing and recruiting of farmworkers. Compounding this, the Teamsters also moved in to disrupt the negotiations between the UFW and the growers involved in the Delano Grape Strike. In what would come to be called the “Salad Bowl Strike,” Teamster-represented drivers carrying farm products out of California went on strike and within days the Teamsters won the legal right to begin organizing and signing contracts with farmworkers (Ferris, Sandoval, and Hembree). This was a great blow to the UFW.

The Teamsters, understanding the hold that the UFW had with workers in the fields, established themselves throughout the Imperial Valley as the major players in contract negotiations with striking drivers associated with a smaller scale boycott known as the Salad Bowl Strike. Of 10,000 drivers within the Imperial Valley at the time of the Salad Bowl Strike, 6,000 Teamster represented drivers went on strike. Farmworkers abandoned the UFW in droves to align themselves with the Teamsters, whom they saw as a large, powerful national union as opposed to the smaller and homegrown UFW. Though still strong politically, the UFW saw their membership fall from 70,000 to 6,000 by 1975 (Shabecoff). The lure of protection and economic stability from the Teamster's union was too strong to resist for the embattled farmworkers, even if the protection and stability was cemented with dirty hands.

This purging of members and massive movement of alliances led to violence, the arrest of Cesar Chávez, and, eventually, a jurisdictional agreement solidifying the UFW's right to organize and represent California farmworkers (Griswold del Castillo 202). Even through these struggles with the Teamsters Union, the UFW was still a powerhouse in California politics. Griswold de Castillo explains:

In 1971 the growers sponsored Proposition 22, an initiative to outlaw boycotting and to limit secret ballot elections to full-time, non-seasonal employees. On November 7, 1972, California voters listening to Chávez and the UFW supporters, soundly defeated Proposition 22 by a margin of 58 to 42 percent. (202)

The 1973 debate between Dolores Huerta, Vice President of the UFW, and Chuck O'Brien, representative of the Teamsters, came at a critical juncture in these two unions struggles over representational rights of farmworkers. On the UFW side, Chicana/os were

fighting in solidarity with the farmworkers based on a profound sense of mutualism and civil rights. On the Teamster side, contract and member grabbing meant more financial gain for an already money saturated union. The stakes were high, and Dolores Huerta was poised to enter into the debate armed with the organizational knowledge and rhetorical fortitude needed to maneuver around the shady Teamster rhetoric. What follows is a rhetorical analysis of Dolores Huerta's opening remarks in the debate.

*Analysis of the 1973 debate between Dolores Huerta and Chuck O'Brien of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters*

Huerta begins the debate on an educatory note. She states in the *exordium/narratio*<sup>ii</sup> of the opening remarks:

“I wish to thank everyone that made this possible. The organizing of farmworkers has a long and bitter history. Every effort that has been made has been broken by the powerful force of the growers with violence against the powerless, most of the time ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, Mexicans, and Mexicans again. The Teamsters Union in 1961 tried to organize farmworkers. They set up an organizing office in Stockton, California, my hometown, put out a lot of effort and a lot of money and their effort failed. They had to close down the office.” (M. García 219)

The immediate positioning of her interlocutor is clear: the Teamsters, represented by O'Brien, are outsiders and they are failures. Their presence in the struggle is opportune, not to the workers they claim to represent, but to themselves. And, they are perpetrators of violence, loaded with money but not with the ability to succeed.



As the first speaker in the debate, Huerta was responsible for establishing the tone, the content, and the overall trajectory of the arguments that her debate interlocutor would have to respond to. Embracing her role as primary speaker, Huerta began with a common rhetorical move for her and a move representative of Chicana rhetoric: positioning of the audience. This is an important move for any speaker, and an especially important move for Chicanas. Huerta had entered this debate as a positioned body, a woman of color whose ethnicity and gender embodied a legacy of silence and subjugation at the hands of white North American men for centuries.

The line “Every effort that has been made has been broken by the powerful force of the growers with violence against the powerless, most of the time ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, Mexicans, and Mexicans again”<sup>iii</sup> an example of *diacope*, or the repetition of a word with few or no words in between. Huerta uses the terms here for amplification of the presence of both migrant farm workers and Mexican nationals used as strikebreakers by the Teamsters. This stands as an example of her *ethos* with the particular and universal audience: as a Mexican American woman, she can make this amplified point and have it stand as fact. If O’Brien were to make this same statement, even if it was fact-based, it would be rendered racially insensitive.

Huerta is moving herself into alliance with the farm workers, who represent ethnic minority groups such as the one she belongs to. Using the Huerta understood this subjective positioning. But, she did not allow it to dictate how the debate would progress. Instead of letting her white, male interlocutor determine her rhetorical agency for her, Huerta made the opening move. This understanding of her particular audience allowed Huerta to be the dominant voice in the debate, from inception to conclusion.

Huerta was an elected official, the vice president the United Farm Workers union, one of the most powerful unions in the United States, and a capable interlocutor ready for the challenge of outlining, arguing, and rebutting O'Brien concerning the underhanded tactics of the Teamsters in Imperial Valley organizing. And Huerta does not equivocate on her position of power. During her first rebuttal of the debate she proclaims, 'I was elected at a convention of farm workers to represent them by many thousands of farm workers' (M. García 222). The explicit statement is that she is the rightful rhetor in this debate, the explicit statement is that Chuck O'Brien has no place, elected or otherwise, speaking for farm workers who have not validated him as speaker for their cause.

Huerta continues to position the Teamsters with her use of pejoratives to name them and their actions. She states:

“One of the other groups that tried to organize farmworkers was the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee. They had a group strike in the lettuce fields in the Imperial Valley in 1961. The Teamsters moved in there during that strike and signed a backburner deal with the Bud Antle Company, allowing them to keep their foreign Mexican workers, the braceros. It was a straight sweetheart deal and the Teamsters gave the Bud Antle Company 1\$ million to keep that company from going bankrupt.” (M. García 219)

These “backburner” and “straight sweetheart” deals were clearly not in favor of farmworkers; rather, they were made to directly benefit the growers and the Teamster Union as an organization. And, the Teamsters have a clear legacy of these sweetheart and backburner deals, not just against the UFW, but against other legitimate farm worker

organizers and unions as well. Huerta does not equivocate on this matter. Her positioning of the Teamsters via the use of pejoratives is effective. They are the bad guys in collusion with large growers. They are not concerned with representing the farm workers and their presence in the debate is clear: to protect the union and large grower interests over the people they claim to represent. O'Brien is now tasked with repositioning with equally well-informed history and positive rhetoric.

Huerta's next move is to distance her rhetoric from the pejorative as she begins to discuss César Chávez and the Delano Grape Strike. She explains:

“We went ahead with the first big boycott and all of you who are sitting out here who didn't eat grapes helped the farm workers achieve, for the first time in this nation, the right to have a union; the right to go to work and know you're going to get paid minimum wage.” (M. García 220)

She continues, “They were allowed to have toilets, drinking water, freedom from pesticides, a farm worker medical plan that covers the farm worker, his wife, and his children (ibid). She finishes this positive rhetorical turn with the powerful; “All of these dreams we've committed our lives to for farm workers in one sharp blow have been smashed” (ibid). Here, Huerta uses second person expertly. Typically, the use of “you” can be read as an indictment of the reader. It is as if the speaker is pointing their literal finger at the audience and directing the message to them personally.

This has a personal, jarring effect, as the audience is forced to either empathize or distance themselves from the allegation. Huerta does this here when she praises the audience (“all of you sitting here”) for their assistance with the Grape Strike and then directly places the successes of this action on their shoulders (“you're going to get paid

minimum wage”). She is inviting the audience of the debate to be in coalition with her, with the UFW, and with the farm workers. Together, they have made “dreams” become realities for these workers, and the Teamsters have been the actors intent on “smashing” these dreams.

This positive rhetorical turn creates a cohesion with the both the particular and universal and Huerta as representative for the UFW and, by extension, for the farm workers. The cohesion thus created through her pronoun use is a typical move for her and for Chicana rhetoric. By allowing the audiences to align with both the rhetor as a person and the exigence of their speech, here the validity of the UFW over the Teamsters, Huerta creates an opportunity for solidarity. This solidarity is an us/those dynamic: us against the Teamsters. Hodge and Kress explain that this move can sometimes be problematic due to the ambiguity of the ambiguity of the signifiers embedded in the pronouns used. They explain:

Such forms [are] fraught with difficulty for the unwary language learner, because of the precise social knowledge they require. It also makes them dangerous when social relationships are insufficiently clear, either for lack of clear supporting signifiers, or where negotiation or dispute would render them unstable. (41)

The potential for discohesion and instability is mediated by Huerta’s expert positioning of her audience, both via her declaration of her ethos and thus her establishing of her ethikos and through her expert use of pronouns that allow alliance and avoidance of antagonism and disconnect.

Huerta's next move in the debate is to further establish a precedence of Teamster trickery and subversion of union morals and mores. Here, Huerta calls on the history as well as family when she states:

“In the Cannery Worker's Union, which Teamsters have represented for forty years, my mother was a striker to get a cannery union, was turned over to the Western Teamsters. Those union officials have been found guilty of 34 counts of racial discrimination against Mexicans.” (M García 221)

Again calling on ethos, but this time her ethos as a member of a family tied to labor organizing, Huerta is making a move which Emma Pérez terms “sexing the colonial imaginary.” Pérez explains:

Women's activities are unseen. Unthought, merely a shadow in the background of the colonial mind. Yet, Chicana, Mexicana, India, and *mestiza* actions, words spoken and unspoken, survive and persist whether acknowledged or not.

Women's voices and actions intervene to do what I call sexing the colonial imaginary, historically tracking women's agency on the colonial landscape. (7)

Huerta accomplishes this in two ways. First, by being present and speaking, Huerta is negating the colonial imaginary of the silent Chicana/Mexicana/India/Mestiza. Second, Huerta calls about her mother to establish a legacy of Chicana agency. By demonstrating that Chicanas are and have been present in the North American *polis*, even though our contemporary colonial imaginary still does not account for their presence, Huerta counters the norm and continues the present a cohesive opening to her debate via the educatory frame.

Huerta continues her debate with a delineation of Teamster atrocities towards the farm workers when she states:

“The cannery workers don’t have clinics, they don’t have credit unions, they don’t have service programs. The Teamsters Union has been known to discriminate all the way down the line against Mexican-Americans, and of course the bulk of the workers in California are Spanish-speaking people. So that’s why we don’t want the Teamsters Union, not even talking about the violence and other terrible things they have done. They are here to protect the growers. The Teamsters Union was brought in by the growers. A Teamsters official pleaded has pleaded no contest to accepting a \$10,000 bribe from a lettuce grower in California.” (M. García 221)

The UFW, from its inception, used union member dues to establish a credit union, a clinic, and insurance plans for migrant workers. On unemployment insurance, a hard won battle for workers whose jobs were, by nature, seasonal and therefore not reliable, Huerta explains:

“Farm workers had no unemployment insurance. It wasn’t until Governor Jerry Brown got in and there was an Assemblyman here from Los Angeles, Jack Benton, who really helped push that bill. [Governor] Reagan vetoed the bill four times. We first got it out of the Assembly in 1961. I remember one of the farm workers said at the hearing, “They are going to get a person to the moon before we get unemployment insurance for farm workers,” and they did. A man landed on the moon before farm workers got unemployment insurance.” (M. García 242)

And on the UFW led and farm worker funded credit union, Huerta states:

“Our credit union that we have, we have this little bank for farm workers. The farm workers put their own money into this bank and they borrow from themselves, and, of course, everyone says, “Oh, farm workers can’t learn a credit union, they are migrant, they don’t know anything, they don’t have an education, they too dumb to run a credit union.” Well, César didn’t believe all of that, so he set up a credit union back in 1963. Our credit union has lent out five million dollars to farm worker, isn’t that incredible?” (M. García 243)

Huerta remarks on these accomplishments not as the UFW’s, or Chávez ‘s, or her own, but rather as farm worker successes that she and the UFW merely assisted with.

Huerta ends her 30 allotted minutes with the *peroration*<sup>iv</sup>, or final part, of her opening remarks of the debate in perfect tripartite. She first begins with the *enumeratio*, the summary, of the debate. She states that the evidence, which she has expertly, ‘is overwhelming and we have it all documented’ (M. Garcia 222). She next moves into the *amplificatio*, or amplification, portion of the *peroration*. Here she uses the rhetorical strategy of *hypophora*, or the use of posing rhetorical questions to the audience and then immediately answering them. O’Brien will soon be moving into his speaking time, so Huerta must guide her audience one final time in positioning her interlocutor. She asks:

“Now if they [the Teamster Union] were so interested in having elections why did they defeat the bill in the state legislature? Why aren’t they using that money that’s destroying farm workers to make life better for their members they have under contract? Why are they using that money against the farm worker?” (M. García 222)

To which she follows with the answer, ‘For just one reason: to help out the big agricultural growers who own 1.5 million acres of land in California; I don’t think they need their help’ (ibid). Her use of *hypophora* is combined with the turn of *epiopsis*, the use of reproachful questions, to create the ending move, the *commiseratio*, of the *peroration*. The *commiseratio* is meant as the final move to excite the passions of the audience/interlocutor, but more notably it is a move of pathos, used to create a sense of pity in the audience. Huerta does this expertly, as the audience is moved to note that it is not the Teamster’s via O’Brien that need financial help, it is the very people they are supposedly, but clearly not, helping: the farm workers.

The *hypophoric/epiopic* questions also act as framing questions that O’Brien is tasked with addressing. The audience demands it. Chicana rhetoric is a social rhetoric, and Huerta demonstrates how nuanced this social rhetoric can be. Though active and educatory, her words are implicitly pathos laden with truths. The audience is invited, not forced, into agreement with the ills of the bad politics of the Teamster Union. Huerta is creating cohesion through dis cohesion; she is creating solidarity with the audience with herself as rhetor and for the union she represents while concurrently positioning the particular and universal against the back handed union politics of the Teamsters. She does this by explicitly stating how the Teamsters “destroy” and are “against” the farmworkers they claim to represent. This trope of cohesion/dis cohesion would serve Huerta well throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s as she extended her debate rhetoric outside of the UFW realm and into the fight against the War in Vietnam and her involvement with the burgeoning women’s movement. This trope would also become a tenet of Chicana rhetoric: the rhetor would create alliance with their audiences at the expense of whatever



sociopolitical, socioeconomic, or sociocultural ill they were speaking for or against. For Chicana's gaining access to the *polis*, this was a crucial move, as they wanted to not only speak, but also be heard.

### *Scholarly Renderings*

The unionization of workers was a major part of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, if not the first real element that moved the *El Movimiento* into cohesion. But, with any push towards agency and civil rights, it was not a smooth and easy ride. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters was a real foe for the United Farm Workers, and if the Teamsters were successful in undermining the UFW then the Chicano Civil Rights Movement would also have experienced a real blow to their growing movement. It was Dolores Huerta who would be the one to embrace her agency and raise her voice against their underhanded moved in the Imperial Valley of California.

Labor Rights scholars had long taken notice of the International; Brotherhood of Teamsters, and publication of the IBT and their tactics was at a boom period around the time of the Huerta/O'Brien debate. Books and articles abounded on Hoffa, Cosa Nostra, and labor racketeering. Jacobs and Peters detail that the:

1964 prosecution of Jimmy Hoffa partly involved his receipt of kickbacks in exchange for making benefit fund loans. Organized crime associate Allen Dorfman (an employee of and later a service provider to the fund) was convicted in 1972 of conspiring to receive a kickback for influencing a fund loan. (238) And later, "Organized crime's plundering of union benefit funds was one of the factors leading Congress to pass ERISA (Employee Retirement Insurance Act) in 1974" (ibid). These issues were important to the Chicano Civil Rights Movement activists, who saw

the mistreatment of farm workers from the growers and government alike as a microcosm for the mistreatment of all Mexican Americans.

It was clear to most scholars publishing during the era of the debate that the Teamsters were a low down bunch. The question, then, was how the IBT could continue being so effective, even with a centuries old reputation of sweetheart deals, mafia ties, and the federal conviction of their leader? Marshall Ganz, an early organizer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a 16-year leader with the UFW, speaks to the Teamster's tactic of securing jurisdiction as the foundation of their success. Ganz explains that the Teamsters:

Were not proposing to organize field workers at all. The Teamsters' strategy was simply to make sure that no one else did—and, thus, that no other group of workers in the industry's interconnected chain of production could impinge upon the Teamsters' own freedom of maneuver or to compete with them for the employer's dollar. This is what the Teamsters meant by "securing their jurisdiction. (ch. 6)

Though this strategy succeeded occasionally, Ganz argues that the UFW was more successful due to what he terms "strategic capacity." He writes

The UFW succeeded, while the rival AFL-CIO and Teamsters failed, because the UFW's leadership devised more effective strategy, in fact a stream of effective strategy. The UFW was able to do this because the motivation of its leaders was greater than that of their rivals; they had better access to salient knowledge; and their deliberations became venues for learning. (Introduction)

The three elements of strategic capacity speak directly to Dolores Huerta's leadership of the UFW, with the debate serving as a demonstration of her motivation, salient knowledge, and her rhetorical acuity on deliberation.

In terms of Chicana/o related scholarly production, by the time this debate took place in 1973, *El Movimiento* was struggling to stay together due to internal strife predicated on *chingón* politics (Blackwell 76). "*Chingón* politics," Blackwell explains, "demonstrates what bell hooks calls, "the effects of equating freedom with manhood, of sexualizing liberation" (ibid). While Huerta was successfully co-leading the UFW and engaging in public rhetorical acts, Chicanas were still fighting to gain voice and opportunities to lead within the movement. Emma Pérez expounds on Chicanas positionality in this era of the *chingón* when she writes:

The Mexican Revolution and its nationalism has served as a history lesson for the Chicano/a movement. [...] The women of the revolution have been so idealized and romanticized that they have come to represent for contemporary Chicano nationalists imagined values and morals to fit a nationalist paradigm. Chicanas are expected to mimic the *Adelitas*, camp followers who serviced the male soldiers, cooking tortillas and mating with the men. (124)

But it was clear by 1973 that the women involved in *El Movimiento* were not satisfied being *Adelitas*, working behind the lines in support of the heavies and in continuation of the subjugation that had hindered their social and cultural progress thus far. The struggle The Chicano Civil Rights movement was a moment of opportunity for Chicanas to shirk the oikos and move into their rightful places as speaker in the polis, publically

representing issues that were important to them, their families, their communities, and their culture.

Anna NietoGomez, the elected president of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) at California State Long Beach in the early 1970s, experienced this struggle firsthand. After being elected and even with the support of the student body at Cal State Long Beach, NietoGomez was undermined by “the heavies,” the Chicanos involved in MEChA, who would not stand to be led by a woman. Adelaida R. Del Castillo remarks, ‘it was considered improper and embarrassing for a national leader to come on campus and see that the organization’s leadership was female’ (Blackwell 76). NietoGomez persevered, though, and through her struggle to have her voice heard founded *Encuentro Feminil*, a Chicana feminist journal first appearing in 1973 that focused on Chicana Civil Rights concerns including family structures, the Anglo feminist movement, and more immediate concerns such as birth control and fair wages.

Positive developments in *El Movimiento* were present, though, and evidenced through the rising number of Chicana/os in academia, through a booming of Chicana/o literature, and through textual artifacts such as the two *Plans* drafted in 1969. The pro-indigenous Chicano manifesto *The Plan del Espiritu Aztlan*, drafted in Denver by leaders such as Corky Gonzalez and workers like Juanita Dominguez, Pricilla Salazar, and Marcella Lucero Trujillo (<http://www.umich.edu/>) and *El Plan de Santa Barbara* the manifesto, theory, and methodology on the incorporation of Chicano Studies in higher education both stood as guiding texts co-drafted by members of the movement. These important rhetorical materials laid the foundation for Chicana/o scholars to begin cultivating Chicana/o based curriculums, served as an apparatus for theory building, and

acted as the base for self-reflection and group critique as *El Movimiento* became more and more located in the academy. *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*, Women Active in Letters and Social Changes, or MALCS, became the largest organization of Chicana academics and carried with them a powerful message. In a 1983 statement, MALCS declared:

“We are the daughters of Chicano working class families involved in higher education. We were raised in labor camps and urban barrios, where sharing our resources was the basis of survival....Our history is the story of working people—their struggles, commitments, strengths, and the problems they faced....We are particularly concerned with the conditions women face at work, in and out of the home. We continue our mothers’ struggle for social and economic justice.”

(Hurtado 842)

Though Huerta was not a part of this scholarly turn in *El Movimiento*, her labor and social rights activism was demonstrative of one of the foundational tenets of the cause. And, her very public and very vocal leadership role with UFW supported the leadership moves that student/scholars such as NietoGomez were attempting to make in the academy. Leadership opportunities and the types of leadership that would be practiced were in constant question to the Chicanas in *El Movimiento*. Building on Huerta’s legacy of a non-hierarchical, educatory, grassroots leadership, Chicana leaders such as Rosie Gomez of the Texas *La Raza Unida* Party and Corinne Sánchez of MEChA Cal State Long Beach began practicing the Chicana style of organizing called *La Hermanidad* (Blackwell 87). The leading Chicana organization *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* embedded *la hermanidad* into their philosophy as follows:

“The goal for the Hijas is to involve women in the struggle of her people by identifying and dealing with the problems of La Chicana” and this would be done by naming gendered racism and identifying “the ways patriarchal power divided women.” (ibid)

Important to these Chicana scholars active during *El Movimiento* was both the fight against subjugation within their own movement as well as the fight against being silenced in the third wave feminist movement that was shaping up to be an Anglo-only feminist movement. By the 1980s and into the 1990s, scholarly publication by Chicanas and on Chicana feminism would boom, thus marking a precedence for Chicana voice, on pedagogy, praxis, and theory, in the academy.

### *Media Renderings*

Countering Huerta’s brave rhetoric during and post-Chicano Movement was much oppositional rhetoric aimed at keeping Huerta and women like her out of the *polis* and in the *oikos*, behind the men, and overall silent. One tactic used by the media to continue the subjugation of the Chicana voice and the issues it raised was the use of *ad hominem*, or “against the man” attacks on Chicanas speaking out against mainstream coverage that did not align with their goals and viewpoints. For example, much media coverage of Huerta during the early 1970s focused less on her role as Vice President and rhetorical leader of the United Farm Workers and more on her counter approach to mothering and male perspectives on her personality.

Many news sources documenting other’s opinions on Huerta read as harsh, with both her character and her rhetorical ability being topics of attack. In an article from 1975 Huerta was described as such:

“Huerta’s direct political tactics angered some growers to the point that she was boycotted. One public relations man representing the Delano grape growers insists she is a demonically driven woman: “Dolores Huerta is crazy,” he says. She’s a violent woman, where women, especially Mexican women, are usually peaceful and pleasant. You can’t live brought up like she does and not be crazy.” (Baer 101)

California Democratic assemblyman John Vasconcellos added, “She’s too quick to attack, too reluctant to listen” (ibid). These reductive renditions of Huerta, as crazy, combative, and possibly even hysterical tended to overshadow the more positive comments towards her work.

And, it was not only men in the media who were attacking Huerta’s character in order to undermine her rhetorical efficacy. Commenting on Huerta’s approach to motherhood, Barbara L. Baer writes in *The Progressive* (1975) “during a two year breathing period, from 1970 to 1972, [...] Cesar Chávez took a brief trip to Mexico. Dolores Huerta had more babies” (97). Baer continues to profile Huerta’s motherhood/mothering choices with a distinctly bitter tone. She continues, “But what was an intelligent, resourceful, emotionally-high-pitched young Chicano woman to do in the mid-1950s? She married again. She and her second husband, Victor Huerta, had four more children—two boys and two girls” (ibid). And then later in the article:

Dolores Huerta, I came to believe, belongs to the older generation of Chicanas in her thinking, if not her actual age. She is open and frank except on the subject of birth control. She knows that outsiders like myself and even the younger generation of Chicanas cannot or will not understand why she keeps having

children. She sees in my continual questions that I am critical of the way she risks her health to give her man as many children as he wants. (102-3)

Baer is applying a myopic, white feminist perspective in pursuit of understanding Huerta's approach to motherhood. Her words intimate that she believes Huerta's choice to have more than one to two children is counter to the norms of reproductivity expected by herself (an outsider) and the "younger generation of Chicanas" whom are positioned here as more progressive in their beliefs in birth (and pregnancy) control. Baer describes herself as the "continual" questioner of Huerta's lack of control over pregnancy, stating that Huerta "risks her health to give *her man* as many children as he wants" (italics are my own). Stripping Huerta of her agency, Baer is concurrently countering the mission of *The Progressive* while enacting color-blind racism. *The Progressive* positions itself as a:

Magazine of investigative reporting, political commentary, cultural coverage, activism, interviews, poetry, and humor. It steadfastly stands against militarism, the concentration of power in corporate hands, and the disenfranchisement of the citizenry. It champions peace, social and economic justice, civil rights, civil liberties, human rights, a preserved environment, and a reinvigorated democracy. Its bedrock values are nonviolence and freedom of speech. (progressive.org)

Though it's profile of Huerta meets this target, the actual execution of the profile falls short of standing against disenfranchisement and championing social/civil/human rights. Rather, Baer writes Huerta as a baby maker, as a passive receiver of men's children, as careless in her own self-care. Baer does not once mention Huerta as "mother." Meanwhile, Baer connects these pejorative characteristics to Huerta's culture, making it seem as though Huerta is a victim to cultural expectations instead of an aware



woman choosing who she partners with and choosing to mother. I imagine that if Baer were reporting on a white feminist making the decision to procreate with multiple men and have as many children as she deemed right, it would be proclaimed a radical act of progressive motherhood.

While Huerta was fighting against reductive views of minorities and of women, it seems the media was intent on pushing her into two essentialized roles: that of the hysterical woman and a complicit supporter of *chingón* politics. This tension is summed up nicely by two friends and contemporaries of Huerta. Luis Valdez explains, “She is an excellent negotiator. She can break things down and can also stand her ground on an intellectual level and argue points, you know, with lawyers,” while Mario T. García states, “They hated her. They called her the dragon lady. They wished they were negotiating with César and not with Dolores” (*Chicanao!* PBS documentary).

Margaret Rose sums up this either/or dynamic that pitted Dolores Huerta against Helen Chávez, wife of Cesar Chávez, during her first few decades in the UFW when she writes:

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 union activists remains taken for granted. (“Traditional and Non-Traditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America” 65)

At the time of this debate, and even through the next two decades, Huerta would be consistently questioned and denigrated in the media for her dedication to her union work.

Rose remarked, “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 (“Traditional and Non-Traditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America” 62). What Rose fails to point out was that this was a great issue with the media because Huerta was a woman of color, a Chicana leader and mother whose autonomy was a decision to be both mother and leader. It would not be until third space feminism, a feminism that focused on women of color politics and sociocultural needs, that her decision to both mother and lead would become an unproblematic paradigm.

#### *Personal Rendering*

Though media outlets were intent on labeling, essentializing, and undermining Huerta, she would not allow this negative coverage to deter her. It was during the 1970s when Huerta began acknowledging her role as rhetorical leader, both natural and elected. While acknowledging her firebrand style, she was often quoted as labeling herself as someone with a “terrible temper,” though this might not have been in the pejorative. Richard A. Garcia makes the case that Huerta’s “temper” was framed so because she was a woman, and a strong vociferous one at that, and that otherwise she might have been labeled as “strong” or “radical.” Garcia writes, “In many ways she lives in the space between the traditional woman’s role and the radical feminist one” (59). Garcia continues, “Huerta represents the New Mestiza that Gloria Anzaldúa has described, the woman who lives on the border between tradition and non-tradition, between acceptable and non-acceptable” (ibid). Huerta comments on this binary in a most un-binary way. She

explains, “I think women are particularly good negotiators and organizers because we have a lot of patience and no ego trips to overcome” (R. Garcia 65) and later:

“I am a logical person. I went to school and you learn that you have to weigh both sides and look at things objectively, [not ideologically]. But farmworkers, I believe, know that wrong is wrong. They know that there’s evil in the work and that you have to fight evil not as a metaphysical question but as a question of justice.” (R. Garcia 70)

For Huerta, her “temper” and tempestuousness was simply a part of her job, a natural reaction to the injustices that she was fighting against. She does not apologize for her firebrand style because it is fueled by righteous indignation. Anzaldúa would later theorize on this tempestuousness Huerta seemed to embody to others during this era in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, a text written some twenty years later. In it, Anzaldúa would argue that the anger women, in particular Mexican American women, feel comes from a history of oppression and that in response to this oppression women:

“No longer need to accept the victim role or act like the “pacifier” in relationships or society. Women can assert their personal traits and can reconstruct the texts of their lives and in their writings a world from within a new language free of male tropes or gender.” (R. Garcia 31).

Around the time of this debate, in 1973, Huerta also often spoke about her non-traditional family choices and approach to motherhood. Speaking frankly, she explained:

“You could expect that I would [get criticism from] farm workers themselves, but it mostly comes from middle-class people. 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 the women have to go out and work and they've got to either leave their kids or take them out into the fields with them.”

(M. García 63)

And further, “You have to make a decision that if working with people, the people have the priority and the family understands” (ibid). Huerta would speak often in interviews during the 1970s about the tension between her union work and her family. As the third wave feminist movement grew concurrently with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, and as Chicanas began to articulate the reasons why neither of those movements spoke to their needs, interest in Huerta's non-traditional approaches to union work and mothering became of great interest. As a leader in the UFW and, by extension, *El Movimiento*, she represented to younger Chicanas precedence as well as the potential to counter the norm and still be efficacious.

Complimenting her belief in the power of motherhood, Huerta acknowledges that there is resistive power in speaking, and her affiliation with the UFW supports her commitment to resistance through rhetorical acuity. She remarks, ‘Non-violence is our strength,’ (M. García 236) and this is demonstrated through the UFW resistance tactics of boycotting, organizing, and debating. This non-violent approach to hegemony is also demonstrated through the UFW's willingness to align with similar organizations that share the goal of supporting farm workers in gaining civil, social, and economic rights. Huerta speaks to this when she explains the UFW merger with the AFL-CIO in 1966. She states, ‘we had the grape strike in 1965, and subsequently we merged with the AFL-CIO in 1966, which was very good at the time, because it was a survival thing. Had we not merged, the Teamsters would have wiped us out because they moved into the fields in

1966' (ibid). She continues speaking on this non-violent approach to the oft-violent Teamsters by touching on the visual rhetoric of her organization. She explains that having Cesar Chávez as the head of the UFW, 'made it very easy in that fight that we had with the Teamsters, because here we had an indigenous leader, you know, a farm worker himself who was the head of the union, as against the Teamsters, right, who were all outsiders who had come there to try to destroy us' (M. García 263). Positioning her audience in coalition with her, with the UFW, and ultimately with farm workers is an important rhetorical move for Huerta, and here she speaks on the nuanced approaches she takes to this move.

Near the end of the debate, after Huerta demonstrates another typical rhetorical move for her, the audience callback. She says:

“These are things we have to remember. This is how they crush the strikes, by putting the leadership in jail, by deporting them before when people were trying to organize and by using all of the force of the courts and the community against the strikers. Of course we have something now that we didn't have before. What is it?”

To which the audience remarks, 'The boycott' (M. García 227). Another move of coalition and positioning, the call back is a standard for Huerta, who is most known for the iconic “Sí Se Puede!” rally cry. This rhetorical move of the call back began as a rallying cry used during her years organizing in the fields and walking picket lines. Its function is two fold: as a way to form coalition with benevolent audience members and as a way to vociferously impact those opposition audience members whom these rallying cries are voiced against. Typically, Huerta finishes her speeches with these callbacks. An

example of this in complete action came at around the same time as the Teamsters debate. Huerta was giving a Keynote address to Annual Convention of the American Public Health Association (1974) and, after urging the audience members to assist in nonviolent action in support of the Delano Grape Strike, Huerta remarks:

“Let’s say a few Vivas now, okay? You know what Viva means? That’s what you’re all about: Long life. Long life. And we always say that in the Spanish community, we say viva, which means long life. So we’re going to say a few vivas and we are going to say a few Abajos. You know what Abajos are? That means down. And then we will say one other thing: *Sí Se Puede*. Can we have this dream that we are talking about? Health for everyone, brotherhood, peace? In can be done: *Sí Se Puede*. [...] Okay, let’s try it now. All together, huh. I’ll say Viva La Causa and everybody yells, Viva, really loud, okay? Viva La Causa! Viva! Ugh, that was very weak. This is very important. This is kind of like praying in unison, you know, so it’s very important.” (M. Garcia 239)

And it is here that Huerta demonstrates why she is called *La Pasionaria*, The Passionate One. There is an awareness of audience and intent that is interwoven with rhetoric and religion. These are remarks upon a reward, not a sermon, yet Huerta understands the power of congregation, the visceral nature of joining voices with others.

### *Conclusion*

By the time of Huerta’s debate with Chuck O’Brien, Chicana rhetoric was beginning to manifest the tenets that would come to solidify and shape it over the coming decades. The elements of political activism, language tied to social relations informed by historic events, and agency intimately tied to gender and ethnicity as positive factors had

become prominent Chicanas active in *EL Movimiento*. These elements of Chicana rhetoric were coming together to counter the norm of the masculinist discourse that had ruled the initial phases of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, during which women were encouraged to abide by macho politics, which positioned the “heavies” of the movement in front, and the women in the foreground. For Chicana rhetors coming to forum in the mid-to-late 1970s, language was always operating politically and was always a manifestation of the environment, including audience and genre, in which it arose. For Chicanas, this meant positioning themselves as a part of an *a priori* conversation where their voice had been previously silenced or ventriloquized, yet would be no more.

The Chicano Movement of the 1970s was the definitive kairotic moment for a cohesive Chicana rhetoric to take shape. *In Doubt and the Demands of Democratic Citizenship*, David Hiley makes the case for a richer, more diverse public sphere explaining, “theorists and critics—from Robert Bellah and his associates to Jurgen Habermas, Michael Sandel, and even Cornel West—have called for a revitalized public sphere” (78). This revitalized sphere would stand in opposition to the Socratic *polis*, where it is only the privileged few male thinker/citizens who speak. This antiquated idea of the *polis*, according to Hiley, would be replaced by all citizens pursuing diverse private interests in the public sphere. This shift in access would then lead to re-visioned forms of opinion making, of *doxa*, of customs and canons, and in democracy *en total*.

Following this line of thought, citizens such as Dolores Huerta, a divorced, unlanded Chicana, would have equal access to, and forum in, the *polis*. Though the UFW and the Teamsters would continue to battle for members and power in the California

labor rights fight, Huerta would continue to hold fast and be the vocal advocate and leader for the UFW. Her tireless rhetorical work would eventually culminate in the groundbreaking California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975. This act ensured “peace in the agricultural fields by guaranteeing justice for all agricultural workers and stability in labor relations” (Handbook on the California Agricultural Labor Relations Law 1). From this diversity of voices would come attention to social justice issues that directly affect the poor, undocumented, disabled, and non-white. These issues, which reflect the challenges of a large demographic of American society, would no longer be relegated or silenced and instead become prominent issues of discussion. And Dolores Huerta was at the forefront of this unsilencing. Richard A. Garcia remarks:

Huerta, unlike other Mexican American women organizers, such as Emma Tenayuca, Luisa Moreno, or Josefina Fierro de Bright, functions in her own space, at a crossroads of liberalism, conservatism, and radicalism. Consequently, she speaks when others are silent.” (17)

By the 1970s, Huerta was rising as speaker exemplar of third space feminism, as the prototype for Chicanas rising to leadership and rhetor roles in *El Movimiento*, and as the heuristic for Chicana rhetoric.

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<sup>i</sup> The corruption that came to be the Teamsters legacy was marked by the infamy of Jimmy Hoffa, President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters from 1958-1971.

<sup>ii</sup> The exordium is the first of the 6 parts of an oration (exordium, narration, division, proof, refutation, peroration) that functions to catch the audience’s attention.

<sup>iii</sup> This instance of *diacope* can also be considered a use of *diaphora*, the repetition of a name to first signify the person or persons it describes and then to signify its meaning. I have chosen to term it diacope because that meaning is left ambiguous and I cannot find textual evidence of Huerta’s intent for this rhetorical turn.



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<sup>iv</sup> The peroration typically has two parts, the *recapitulatio*, which functions as a summary of the main points, and the *affectus*, an act of pathos used to align the audience into solidarity. I argue here that Huerta deviates from this slightly, with the *enumeratio* functioning as the *recapitulatio* and the *commiseratio* functioning as the *affectus* and the addition of *hypophora* and *epiplexis*.

Chapter Six: The Chicana Rhetor at UCLA: Dolores Huerta's 2009 "Recipient Remarks for the UCLA Medal"

"No march is too long, no task too hard for Dolores Huerta if it means taking a step  
forward for the rights of farm workers"  
Cesar Chávez, 1990<sup>i</sup>

This chapter is a perspectival analysis of Dolores Huerta's 2009 UCLA Medal Recipient Remarks, which took place on June 12, 2009. I will first contextualize the remarks, providing a historical context including background on the honor and Huerta's work during the years preceding the honor. Next, I will analyze the remarks based on Huerta's rhetorical moves, paying close attention to her position as an established Chicana rhetor, the rhetorical moment, and audience. Following this I will analyze how the media reported and reacted to this statement, how scholars have since acknowledged and rendered these remarks and Huerta's rhetorical persona of the era, and, finally, how Huerta has since spoken about the context of this statement.

*The Kairotic Moment*

The importance of the United Farm Workers Union, the Delano Grape Strike and subsequent Grape Boycott, and the rhetorical work of Dolores Huerta to North American labor and civil rights during the 1950s through the 1970s cannot be stressed enough. Henry Cisneros explains, "For young Chicanos and Chicanas in the cities, the Farm Worker Movement became a pivotal experience. Many young people went to Delano and came away with a new sense of what it meant to be Chicana/o (*Chicano!* PBS documentary). Ester Hernandez continues:

I think it was the Farm Workers Union that really became the heart and soul of the Chicano Movement because it was the most visible in many instance, because it was the most vulnerable, because, again, we were supposed to be the most

unorganized, and isolated, and I can go on, yet, people were still out there, taking a stand in some of the most dangerous, brutal, vicious conditions that you can imagine. Yet, people were still out there. So, I think they were really an inspiration. (ibid)

The work of the farm workers and the UFW extended beyond Chicana/os to inspire politicians, religious leaders, and common citizens across North America and even across the pond in the United Kingdom (ibid). It was an exciting time of change and progress, and Huerta was at the forefront, providing guidance on how to systematically and linguistically navigate these sociocultural, political, and economic shifts.

But, as the decade of the 1970s came to a close, so did the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, with the United Farm Workers Union experiencing a similar phase out in terms of efficaciousness and influence with their labor rights work. With Richard Nixon's ascension into the presidency in 1969, the Kennedy-Johnson era ended, and with it the White House's shift away from that era's progressive politics. Nixon began a campaign of "courting the Chicano middle class" (Acuña 386-7) which entailed taking the focus off of providing social programs and workforce training for the lower classes which in turn exacerbated the poverty and quality of living issues that Chicano/as had not quite rectified during the previous decade's movements. Nixon also strategically placed Mexican Americans in local and state level government positions, pitting those Chicanos "in power" against those "without," a practice that Ronald Reagan would continue to implement as governor of California and, eventually, as president. This "Republicanization of the Mexican American" (Acuña 389) was not without pushback,

though, as post-Civil Rights era Chicano/as continued to pursue identity and voice through their own political maneuvers.

This pushback against the “Republicanization” came in the form of Chicana/o political organizing. *La Raza Unida* Party (RUP) began in Colorado in 1970 by Corky Gonzales, with a woman’s caucus, *Mujeres Para La Raza*, founded shortly thereafter. The goal of RUP was simple: to organize enough voters to get Chicano candidates on the electoral tickets and subsequently elected to office. This would, in turn, counterbalance the “Republicanized Mexican American” politicians and provide voice for civil and labor rights issues. Unfortunately, though, the same issues that undermined the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, namely internal divisions and underlying sexism, led to the failure of *La Raza Unida*. Acuña writes:

Throughout its existence, according to political scientist Armando Navarro, ‘Sexism was a problem that pervaded most RUP chapters. While women played very important secondary leadership and supportive roles, it was the Mexican male that tended to usurp the partido’s main leadership role. Most of RUP’s candidates and state chairpersons were male.’ (393)

Huerta was still present and influential in the North American *polis* throughout these times of political power recession. And, by the mid-to-late 1970s, Huerta’s rhetorical career had become demonstrative of Chicana rhetoric. Huerta’s rhetoric was a symbol to younger Chicana rhetors and leaders of how to undermine hegemonic language by first reproducing it and then providing alternative or oppositional rhetoric to counter it. Huerta demonstrated through her work in union politics and lobbying that Chicana rhetoric was first produced *in situ* and in-community, and then reproduced through

institutional channels such as the academy, media, or through elite political rhetoric. This re-production served as the legitimizing act that solidified the moves and tropes of Chicana rhetoric. A good example of this was Huerta's trope of "the grapes of wrath/the grapes of war" which came to symbolize the Grape Boycott and Chicana/o resistance to the Vietnam War both visually and linguistically, as well as the now infamous "Si Se Puede!" (Yes We Can!) callback used during union rallies and meetings. These renderings would come to shape what was effective and what was not effective in Huerta's corpus of work and these documentations of her successes and failures would become the blueprint for future rhetors, especially as the movement out of *El Movimiento* and *La Causa* and into the era of Chicana feminism began.

Acuña documents Chicana feminism as arising in the 1960s as an integral part of that era's social justice movements. He writes, "Chicana feminist thought was encouraged by the 1960s; it gained momentum at the turn of that decade, and by the end of the 1970s had an impact on the culture of most Chicano organizations (396). Though originally enacted as counter-hegemonic discourse from within *El Movimiento*, Chicanisma became its own movement, manifesting in organizations such as *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*. In their 1971 manifesto, *Hijas* stated:

"We believe that the struggle is not with the male but the existing system of oppression. But the Chicano must also be educated to the problems and oppression of La Chicana so that he may not be used as a tool to divide by keeping man against women." (Blackwell 83)

Blackwell continues, "The women's group eventually became a vehicle through which to voice complaints about the contradictions between civil rights discourse and the way

women were treated” because what women of the movement “wanted in essence, was some accountability from the men...that they be consistent with their ideology because the women weren’t treated with respect” (83).

The tension was not just between the women and men of the movement though, with much strife happening amongst Chicanas. A prime example of this occurred with early Chicana feminist and MEChA Cal State Long Beach leader Anna NietoGomez. NietoGomez was a critical force in Chicana politics and in the Chicano student movement, responsible for creating cohesion amongst Chicana feminists during the student movement days. She would organize meetings, called raps, to create a forum for Chicanas to speak openly about issues pertaining to them and begin working towards rectification of these issues. In an attempt to articulate the cohesion that these rap sessions created, NietoGomez proposed articulating this growing sisterhood as “*hermanidad*” a play on the word *hermandad*, or brotherhood. Leticia Hernández explains:

“I had a big problem with hermanidad being a word because I was a real Spanish-language purist, and I got into a real wrangle with Anna about this. [...] To me it was a wrong word to use. I mean it was not correct. The correct word was hermanidad, and I was stuck on that, and they wanted hermanidad because supposedly this made it sound feminist. I told them it made them sound stupid. They were trying to tell me that we can create our own language, but I’ve never really bought into that, especially at that time.” (Blackwell 85-6)

This creation of new words leading to a new language to articulate these arising Chicana feminist ideas demonstrates the tension and the difficulty of coming into voice. The

struggle between nationalist ideals and feminist ideals would continue to be debated throughout the 1970s, through a “discourse that produced gendered ideologies that shaped movement ideas about political leadership, the roles of men and women, and the sexual division of political labor” (Blackwell 100).

As the 1980s began, a boom in academic and literary publications on Chicana feminist thought and theory began. Theorists such as Norma Alarcon and writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga were drafting foundational texts that worked to counteract the continued macho politics and machismo discourse of academia and the continued social progress movements. These writers and thinkers were carving out the interstitial gaps of feminism-in-nationalism that allowed for rehistorization of Chicana presence and voice while at the same time creating and legitimizing the language needed to articulate Chicanisma. Concepts such as Third space feminism (Pérez) and *mestiza* consciousness (Anzaldúa) were evolving, and along with them a renewed interest in leader such as Huerta that could be looked upon as paradigms. In an essay on the Anzaldúan “Borderland Woman,” Richard A. Garcia writes:

A good example of a Latina controlling her own life and being a “Borderland Woman” is Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the Farmworkers Union. Known for being a “non-traditional Mexican, a union leader, and a great negotiator,” she embodies what Gloria Anzaldua terms the New Mestiza, a woman sin fronteras – a woman without boundaries or borders. Her independence and strong personality have enabled her to live within the space of a “traditional women’s role and radical feminist one. (32-3)

He continues

Her atypical union activism, noted for its competitive and combative edges, has charted new territory for women involved in any political movement. [...] Her essence is larger than domesticity and stretches beyond feminism and ethnicity to define a new Mestiza, creating a new narrative for women. (33)

Huerta's own involvement with feminism was not quite as clear as her precedence as a Chicana feminist role model. Rather, during this time of growing critical consciousness amongst Chicanas, Huerta put the UFW and labor rights first, acknowledging the need for feminism, yet not truly making it a tenet of her work until the 1980s. Huerta explains her seeming ambivalence in terms of the dis cohesion that the Chicano/a Civil Rights Movement was plagued with. She says:

“I know that the farm worker issue is not the only Chicano issue. But in terms of the visibility of the Chicano issues, I think first of all there wasn't an agreement among the Chicanos themselves on what the issues were. Some people talked about bilingual education, other people talked about something else.” (M. García 171)

With the bandying about of focus, leadership, and goals and the separate movements happening amongst students, Chicanos, and Chicanas, Huerta made a stand during these civil rights decades to commit to union rhetoric and avoid explicitly stating feminist concerns, unless they were specific to labor rights as well.

Complicating Huerta's reluctance to profess Chicanisma, as a tenet of her organizing and leading was her sometimes blatant rhetoric on corporal self-control and abstinence for the farm workers and union members. During once particular speech, Huerta was quoted as admonishing workers for having 'no self control or discipline' and



engaging in ‘indiscriminate and shameless sex in an indiscreet and obviously laissez faire manner and attitude that reflected badly on the Union’ (Minian 76). Yet, as Minian notes while:

Huerta and Richard Chávez chastised members for their sexual behavior, their own conduct reflects the difficulties union leaders faced while trying to ensure that members sexual practices conformed to the union’s image. The two of them lived openly together and had children after Huerta had already divorced and had children with two other men. (ibid)

Nevertheless, Huerta’s Union work and leadership and the work and leadership of other Chicanas in the UFW was precedential. Margaret Rose explains:

The lack of a trained professional staff and limited resources contributed to the decentralized approach to the boycott which by default allowed more opportunities for women to rise to these positions and more freedom for both women and men to experiment with community-based organizing strategies. For Mexican-American women, in particular, these circumstances provided a new space to express a gendered resistance to the status quo based on their own views and experiences. Oftentimes female administrators were unmarried, widowed, or divorced, and they were usually young adults. (7)

Notable Chicanas within the UFW were making more feminist moves than Huerta, though, and were quite successful in these. Hope López, lead organizer in Philadelphia during the grape boycott, used tropes such as motherhood, childbearing, and child rearing, to speak to women in the area about the importance of boycotting grapes (Rose 17). López would often also use the rhetoric of women’s power in her chants and

slogans, once declaring “WOMAN POWER WILL STOP THOSE GRAPES!—with masculine moral support” in a boycott communiqué (ibid).

As the labor rights years ended and Huerta’s obligation to spread the message of abstinence and self-control<sup>ii</sup> as union tenets was no more, she became more vocal about her connection to feminism, speaking directly to her views on women’s rights and becoming involved with feminist organizations. But, unlike López and other more focal feminists in the UFW, hers was a burgeoning awareness of just how important her work was to Chicana feminism and feminism in general. In a dialogue on mass movements in 1985 Huerta remarked, “I am invited to speak here and there as a symbol for the women’s movement, as an Hispanic women. And it has been difficult. But I am also sort of a born-again feminist” (M. García 276). This new rhetorical attention was due to her shifting responsibilities with the UFW as well as her own critical consciousness on women’s issues, and her commitments during the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated this. Huerta recalls:

“I was fortunate to be in New York when the Women’s Movement started and Gloria Steinem was a great supporter of the Farmworker’s Union. Although, I have to say that for the first years I was so focused on the Union, and at some point in the 1980s I said, “Wait a minute, something is wrong here.” (M García 297)

The connection between women as change agents for the environment, and thus the connection between labor union work and the women’s movement’s goals, solidified and has become a cornerstone of her labor rights work and overall rhetorical legacy in the most recent decades. Most notably, Huerta has committed time to the Feminist

Majority, serving as a board member and travelling around the United States speaking on issues such as the legalization of the morning after pill and late term abortions.

In 1999, after working for and leading the United Farm Workers Union for 37 years, Huerta stepped down from her position as Vice President to pursue activism work on her own terms, including work with the Feminist Majority. In 2002 Dolores Huerta received a \$100,000 Puffin/Nation Creative Citizenship Prize, awarded annually to “an American citizen who has challenged the status quo “through distinctive, courageous, imaginative, and socially responsible work of significance” (off our backs 8). With this money she founded the Dolores Huerta Foundation (DHF). After years of tireless travelling, speaking, boycotting, rallying, and testifying, Huerta was able to solidify these activities into one cohesive space, the DHF, which she describes as “a continuation of the non-violent civil rights movement of the 1970’s” (doloreshuerta.org). Through her role as executive director of the foundation, Huerta has been able to shift from tireless traveller to frequent and focused traveller, committing herself to feminist and worker issues and education of worker rights. Huerta explains, ‘It’s about meeting with people, showing them what they can achieve by giving them successful examples. These are lessons I learned from the farm workers’ movement’ (M. García 323).

The Dolores Huerta Foundation has become a force in California since it’s 2002 inception. In pursuit of educating workers in their rights “The DHF has implemented its organizing model in six rural communities (Lamont, Arvin, Weedpatch, Woodlake, Cutler-Orosi, Tulare) in California’s Central Valley” (doloreshuerta.org). In these communities, full-time trained organizers form neighborhood organizations called *Vecinos Unidos* (United Neighbors) are trained to train neighborhood citizens to

collectively engage public officials and navigate the system for the benefit of their communities (ibid).

Complementing her continued work for labor and worker rights, the DHF also focuses on civic engagement by helping rural and low-income communities throughout California engage in community organizing. This allows for community members to make crucial changes, such as advocating for more parks, for green alternatives, and for sustainable, local food sources, to their neighborhoods and communities on their own terms. These programs all follow the grassroots style of cultivating voice and ability in community residents that Huerta first learned from Fred Ross in the Community Service Organization (CSO) and practiced throughout her time with the United Farm Workers (UFW). This, in turn, creates community-specific forums, community-specific changes, and people within the community capable of advocating for themselves.

In recognition of her more than fifty years dedication to activism, organizing, and social issues, Huerta has garnered many awards and recognitions. In 1984, Huerta was honored with the Outstanding Labor Leader Award and throughout the 1990s she was bestowed the American Civil Liberties Union Roger Baldwin Medal of Liberty Award (1993) and the Eugene V. Debs Foundation Outstanding American Award (1993), inducted into the National Woman's Hall of Fame (1993) the Ellis Island Medal of Freedom Award (1993). She has been awarded numerous accolades focusing on her work with women's rights including the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award (1988) and, ten years later, Ms. Magazine's "Woman of the Year" in 1998 (<http://www.nwhm.org/>). Recently, in May 2006 Huerta was awarded an honorary degree from Princeton

University<sup>iii</sup>. This honor was complemented by the naming of various schools after Huerta in states such as California, Texas, and Colorado.

The UCLA Medal, established in 1979, was added to this list of accolades at the 2009 University of California Los Angeles graduation ceremony. According to the award's protocol:

The UCLA Medal should be bestowed upon individuals of exceptionally distinguished academic and professional achievement, whose body of work or contributions to society illustrate the highest ideals of UCLA, and whose career has manifestly benefited the public well beyond the demands of tradition, rank or direct service to the university. Philanthropy may not be a consideration for The UCLA Medal. ([eventsprotocol.ucla.edu](http://eventsprotocol.ucla.edu))

With the awarding of the UCLA Medal, Huerta was invited to give recipient remarks during convocation. Her speech began with common epideictic tropes, but soon took a decidedly political turn.

In working with Chicana texts, Tey Diana Rebolledo advises that “scholarship must be sound and rigorous; when working with living authors, scholarship must not be timid” (Rebolledo 208). Though Huerta does abide by the genre conventions expected for remarks, which are expected to be short, semi-extemporaneous, and laudatory in content, she does not provide her audience with an impactful, cohesive text focused on the occasion. As a tenured rhetor, it is expected that Huerta understand and abide by the rhetorical rules of the occasion. But, as a Chicana rhetor, Huerta continues to counter these rules. I will explore the efficaciousness of this countering through the tripartite renderings after the analysis.

*Analysis of Dolores Huerta's 2009 UCLA Medal Recipient Remarks*

After being introduced, Dolores Huerta takes the stage to a vociferous round of applause and a standing ovation from the graduates, faculty, and attendees. Once quiet, Huerta begins her recipient remarks by thanking the Chancellor and the graduates. She then mentions that her son, Dr. Fidel Huerta, is a family practice doctor and a UCLA Medical School graduate, and her grandson, David Ibarra, is a UC Berkeley graduate. When she mentions UC Berkeley, the crowd returns to being a bit vociferous, letting out some yelps and “boos” directed towards the rival school, to which Huerta responds with a return “boo” and a laugh. The tone of this epideictic event is celebratory and lighthearted, with the honoring of Huerta being a welcomed addition to the graduation ceremony. The cohesion created between rhetor and audience is a coming together of Huerta's *ethos* based on her historic labor and civil rights work in California and throughout the United States and the student's own connections to this work as residents and students in the state. The jubilation of the occasion is thus enmeshed with the excitement of having a profound icon of California speaking at the event.

After establishing her immediate connection with the audience and the occasion, Huerta moves into the first part of her remarks, the dedication of the UCLA Medal “to two young men, one of them is graduating here today.” She continues:

His name is Martin Terrones. He is graduating from the film school. Another young man, he is also a UCLA graduate named Sean Ley. They are fasting. They are today on the 17<sup>th</sup> day, water only fast, to try to keep the budget cuts, to try to keep the local school board [...] of the L.A. school district from firing 2,500 teachers and increasing the class size. So, this is dedicated to them.

The rhetorical turn of dedicating during a dedication is another cohesive device of semiotics: Huerta's exercising of humility by sharing her honor with other activists aligns the audience with her in terms of graciousness. This is a savvy set-up for the rest of the remarks, as Huerta moves from ceremony to politics and requires her audience to be aligned with her so that they will hear her message.

After applause from the audience, Huerta invites those in attendance to support the fasters either in person or in their hearts and prayers. She continues:

We know that education is such a critical issue in our society. And, now we have so much of our education system that is being dismantled, for California, where we were once in the top five in the nation, we are now number 48, number 48, in the United States of America.

Common in Huerta's rhetoric is an element of education, either through the statement of facts, through a recounting of history, or through an educatory tone, regardless of the genre. Here, she calls on statistics regarding education by using *palilogia*<sup>iv</sup>, a common rhetorical device found in her rhetoric, to emphasis the great disparity from before and after the crisis.

Huerta continues:

In the San Joaquin Valley, where Cesar Chávez and I organized, since 1965 there has been only one university built, the University of California Merced. But there has been 17 prisons, 17 prisons that have been built. So, we have a crisis and this is something that we really have to worry about.

These opening moments, full of *palilogia* and education, the Latin term for education which she invokes later in her remarks, are quite dense in content. Thus far, two minutes

into her remarks, Huerta has spoken on student's fasting in protest of teacher cuts, the crisis of education in California, and the state's investment in prisons instead of universities. Huerta is honoring the genre of the epideictic through her dedication and jubilant tone, yet not deviating from her typical tropes and the opportunity to make an argument towards causes she is aligned with. She builds on the theme of education, but doesn't allow the congratulatory nature of the occasion or the honor of being the recipient of the UCLA Medal deter her from espousing important sociopolitical topics. In fact, education was her original motivation to enter organizing and activism.

This turn in "organic" rhetoric demonstrates a common trope of Huerta's and, by extension, of Chicana rhetoric. Her speech act is characterized by the spontaneous emerging of content and everyday linguistic practices that reflects and represents the needs of a specific social group, here being college graduates, i.e. future laborers and labor leaders. Huerta acknowledges this particular audience as a universal audience for these issues that may not currently, but will eventually affect their well-being as citizens of the state.

In order to get her point across, Huerta aligns herself with these audiences by extending the education trope to account for potential, in the image of the schoolchildren and disappointment, with the image of the prisons. As a grade school teacher in California in the 1950s, Huerta was moved by the lack of basic necessity of her students. She understood that without clothes and food and a suitable place to live, her children could not focus on their schoolwork, and thus the vicious cycle of being poor and uneducated was set in motion for these children. Witnessing this, she began being involved, eventually meeting Fred Ross of the Community Service Organization (CSO)



and his associate Cesar Chávez. This lends to Huerta's *ethos*. She is not just remarking on the occasion of college graduation, she has a deep understanding of how fundamentally important education is to these California residents.

Huerta continues to build on the central topic of education with the move of *apomnemonysis*, or the quoting of an authority from memory. She says:

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when he was president during World War II and they wanted to take money out of education, out of our libraries, he said, "No, we cannot take one cent out of our education and out of our libraries because our education is the soul of the nation." And, as a professor, a philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, wrote in his book *The Revolution of the Masses* (sic) "If you do not have an educated [...] If you do not have an educated citizenry, what you have is mob rule." We cannot let that happen, or continue to happen, in our country."

Here Huerta invokes a different sort of *ethos* by quoting two very different men.

Roosevelt was a well-known, vocal advocate of education. When he came into the presidency and began instituting New Deal policies, the education system in the United States was in dire straits. Schools were closing across the country, school districts were crippled by layoffs, and the students were malnourished ([www.rooseveltinstitute.org](http://www.rooseveltinstitute.org)).

Roosevelt acted aggressively, allotting funds for the most at risk, but, in an innovative move for the time, directing these funds more towards the individual and not the schools and school districts. His approach to education paralleled Huerta's own: the empowerment of the individual, not the ruling entity, was the solution to social and individual welfare issues.

Complementing the sociopolitics of Roosevelt was a Spanish contemporary of his, José Ortega y Gasset, whom Huerta closes this instance of *apomnemonysis* with. Ortega y Gasset was a philosopher and an educator, and education was a central theme in his many essays and lectures. As Spain struggled to overcome the destruction of fascism of the decades prior, Ortega y Gasset struggled with the concept of individual freedom and the needs by which the individual is bound to. Education was at the root of this struggle. “Ortega saw education as part of the process of attaining [...] cultural transformation. He pointed out that the Latin word *educatio* or *educatio* meant drawing one thing out of another, or converting one thing into something better” (Juan Escámez Sánchez 4). It was this ‘something better’ that Huerta invokes through Ortega y Gasset. That education, the education of farm workers to advocate for themselves as well as the education of those graduates present for Huerta’s remarks, could cause a change for the better, was the shared and ultimate goal.

With her *ethos* established and the move of *apomnemonysis* implicitly invoking progressive democratic ideals, Huerta moves on to the more political content of her remarks. She prefaces this movement with empathy. She states:

I know that in your education that you have received an education, as Cesar Chávez would say, an education of the heart. As you have been extolled many times to come back and give to your community. And, we must do this, all of us must be engaged.

Calling on *apomnemonysis* again, Huerta this time invokes Cesar Chávez, an icon of civil rights and labor justice that more readily invokes inspiration in these graduates. Chávez is a more contemporary icon than Roosevelt or Ortega y Gasset, and the audience will more

readily be able to recall his face, his voice, and his message of labor and civil justice for laborers and for all Californians. Huerta couches Chávez's *apomnemonysic* invocation with the empathetic "I know that in your education you have received an education" then goes on "of the heart." The rhetorical turn here is complicated; at once Huerta again aligns herself with the audience while also reminding them of her ties to a cultural icon while concurrently instilling in them the idea that they have been imbued with an education built on a profound moral and ethical foundation.

This positioning of the audience as aligned with Huerta and with the causes she, and by extension Chávez, represent is important as her remarks progress. Her next rhetorical move is the exhortation portion of the remarks, and Huerta does not equivocate on her urges to action. If this exhortation is going to be effective, her particular audience needs to be aligned with her as rhetor as well as with the causes she represents. Huerta continues:

If we want to have economic justice, let's support worker's right to organize, please support the Employee Free Choice Act by sending an email to Diane Feinstein telling her that she has got to support this, Ok? (audience applause) Let's support gender justice for women by supporting equal right's for women. (significant audience applause) Let's support equality in marriage and overturn Proposition 8. (significant audience applause). So, we know we can do this, these are issues of justice, and I know as UCLA graduates that you will have that justice in your hearts.

Though the content of her remarks remains education based, with Huerta continuing to tie the politics of the remarks back to the ceremonious occasion of graduation, there is a

certain shift in tone and focus here. After mentioning past UFW president and close personal friend Cesar Chávez, Huerta moves into the connection of education and community, a connection that is at the forefront of the Dolores Huerta Foundation's goals. She urges the graduates to not disconnect from their home bases, but rather to take their education and apply it to their communities. And then, she provides directives in doing this, directives that include her most important social justice issues including worker's rights, gender rights, and women's rights.

These, she remarks, are "issues of justice" that the graduates may have a direct impact on and since the particular audience, including the graduates but also those there in support of them, has justice in their hearts, they are moved to listen and respond positively to Huerta's urges to action. Though the movement here from epideictic to deliberative would seem inappropriate to some genre purists, these two branches of rhetoric have often been collapsed. Because, as Richard Lanham argues, they are both motive based, the nuanced delivery of the congratulatory with the exhortive makes sense. And, this is Dolores Huerta, a consistent political rhetor in all occasions.

Huerta ends her UCLA Medal Recipient Remarks with a few of her signature rhetorical moves, including code switching and the use of *palilogia*, fashioned here into the call back. She states:

So, you're at graduation and I congratulate you...come back, come back, come back and give to your community. As we like to say, "Can we do it?" "Yes we can." But, in Spanish, we say "Si Se Puede!" Let's all do it together, let's put our hands up. Everybody. "Yes We Can" in Spanish. Everybody let's go, "Si Se

Puede! Si Se Puede! Si Se Puede!” Muchas Gracias. Thank you very much. I am very honored.

Here, again, Huerta conflates the two branches of epideictic and deliberative with the use of *palilogia*, or recapitulation for effect, used in its original intention and during the call back in concluding her remarks. Before going into her signature exhortation (Si Se Puede!) Huerta uses the *diacopic*<sup>v</sup> “come back, come back, come back” and “give to your community.” This is her most forthright use of *palilogia* in her remarks, and by far the most persuasive. And, her overall message is contained in this line. She urges the students to do as Terrones and Ley, as her and Chávez have done and use their abilities to improve their communities.

Ending the remarks is the callback, a signature rhetorical move of Huerta’s that was often used to rally her audience at the ends of political rallies, on the picket line, and in the fields. For these remarks, the call back functions as an act of persuasion. Huerta urges the graduates to use their newly minted knowledge in the betterment of their communities. She does not wish them financial stability, instead she wishes them use their degrees to add to the financial stability of their communities. This theme of empathy is thus reiterated with the call back. With the act of speaking together, the audience’s connection to others is moved from abstract to concrete.

As a rhetor, Huerta is tasked with positioning her audience so that they align with her, and this alignment is what makes her so effective in getting her message listened to and subsequently in persuading those listening to take action. Here she demonstrates her tropes of positioning, including the *palilogia*, which allows her audience to recognize the most important aspects of her speech, and *apomnemonysis*, which calls upon the cultural

imaginary of other, similar rhetors to enhance and lend ethos to her messages. As a Chicana, a speaker whose place in the North American polis is still new and tenuous based on only a short precedence, Huerta must balance culture and gender with politics; making her audience feel welcomed into her rhetoric while at the same time keeping them actively engaged in her message.

*Scholarly Renderings*

Huerta's 2009 UCLA Medal Remarks were made during a unique era of *Chicanisma*. By this time, Chicana Literature, Chicana Studies certificates and departments, and Chicana scholars were present and efficacious in the North American university system, where once a large and conspicuous absence of Chicanas reigned in academia. Maylei Blackwell explains that Chicana's were reclaiming:

Earlier feminists and feminist political leaders was a way to constitute a historical tradition, gain political legitimacy within Chicano Nationalism, and, most important, create a new historical imaginary, which authorized an autonomous female political agency. (103)

Huerta's remarks came at this time of sustained reclamation, happening since at least the early-1990s and led by activists such as Huerta and Hope López, journalists such as Maria Hinojosa, a cadre of brilliant writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, and scholars such as Norma Alarcon and Emma Pérez. These Chicanas were not only prominent writers and reporters of politics and knowledge, they were foundational in rehistoricizing Chicana identity as complex and dynamic, in direct opposition to the subjugated, either/or, Guadalupe/Malinche binary that had plagued Chicanas since the Civil Rights Movement and for decades prior.

These multiplicity identities led to multiplicit rhetorics, all representing Chicana thought and identity, yet finding cohesion in common tropes and rhetorical moves. This countering of the either/or dynamic was an important manifestation of modern Chicanisma, as the need to continue to deconstruct the conception of Chicanas as disempowered and incapable was still a necessity. But, this was not without tension from outsider rhetorics and, possibly more destructive than outsiders, from other Chicanas who continued to embrace essentializing narratives. Scholar Lori A. Flores, in her critique of the Chicana Rights Project (CRP), cites a profile of Chicanas written by the CRP:

The Chicana can be found in every corner of our country, but mainly she resides in large numbers in the southwestern states. The Mexican American woman exhibits consistent patterns of high unemployment, low income, and little education which, in addition to her sex and national origin, lead to a crucial lack of experience in maneuvering through the channels of the American social, political, and economic system. Her traditionally unequal position results in a lack of political participation and perpetuates her low social status. When her racial and sexual counterparts are enjoying productive years and comfortable lives, the Chicana woman is often broken in health and spirit and is faced with insurmountable obstacles in her attempt to enter the labor force. Confronting both sexism and racism on the job and in other areas, the Mexican American woman must begin testing her emerging identity in order to achieve equality in our society. (94)

Though assertive in language on poverty and racism, topics which continued to be relevant to Chicanas, the CRP is also assertive on their rendition of the “typical” Chicana:

low income, poor education, poor health, lack of political power, and overall broken by the systemic ills of North American society. While scholars and activists such as Alarcon, Anna NietoGomez, and Anzaldúa were working against this type of reductive, essentializing rhetoric, Chicanas such as those working with the CRP were perpetuating it.

Scholars, during this latter period of Huerta's rhetorical career, were not only writing towards a rehistoricization of Chicana presence and accomplishments in North American history, they were also writing against continued essentialized renderings of Chicanas, as evidenced by the CRP, by exploring the manifest ways that Chicana rhetoric was being employed outside of *La Causa* and *El Movimiento*. Huerta was doing the same, moving beyond *La Causa* and into the realm of women's and gender rights and politics. Third space feminism era Chicanas were, like Huerta, successful in their respective careers, and often not active in one cause or medium. Rather, as Huerta's UCLA Medal Remarks demonstrate, rhetorically active Chicanas were voices in their own field while concurrently active in the realms of feminism and civil and labor rights.

### *Media Renderings*

Media accounts of Huerta have always been a mixed bag, depending on the context, the author of the account, the publication site, and bias associated with the preceding. Positive accounts surrounding Huerta's diverse approach to rhetorical activity in her latter days exist, such as articles by Julie Felner and James Rainey. Felner recounts in a *Ms. Magazine* article that for Huerta, affairs are often political and "every moment is an organizing opportunity" (M. García 134). Felner explains that Huerta:



Leads the crowd in a rousing round of vivas (long live...) and abajos (down with...). “Viva la Latina/Chicana foundation! Viva the UFW! Abajo Sexism! Racism! Homophobia! [...] And then with hands clapping, voices chanting, energy racing, the crowd breaks into a chorus of Si se puede, the UFW’s enduring motto: Yes it can be done. Si-se-pue-de.” (M. García 134)

In regards to Huerta’s dedication to multiple causes, Felner continues:

Made up for lost time. She has made sexual harassment a centerpiece of the strawberry worker’s campaign. She has fought vigorously against state and federal legislation that takes away women’s rights—from the Welfare Reform Act to California’s anti-affirmative action Proposition 209. And she has pushed to get women into leadership positions inside and outside the union. From 1991 until Chávez’s death in 1993, Huerta took a leave from the UFW to work on the Feminist Majority’s Feminization of Power campaign, traveling around the U.S. encouraging Latinas to run for office. (139)

James Rainey adds to this sentiment of Huerta turning every rhetorical opportunity into an opportunity for activism when he writes, ‘Like some presidential contender, Huerta whips across the landscape today, as if her next speech might be the one that finally enlightens a slumbering nation’ (M. García 144). These writers render Huerta as almost mythical; the tenured Chicana rhetor rallying the crowd with efficacious passion.

In another article published in *The Tidings* (2002), María Luisa Torres recounts hearing Huerta speak at an event at California State University Northridge, where Huerta was being honored with an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters. Torres quotes Huerta

in saying, ‘My message to [you] as college graduates, as future professionals, is that [your] main responsibility is to working people, to poor people, to those who don’t get the chance to go to college, to those who don’t have a voice in society’ (M. García 155). Torres goes on to write, Huerta’s life-long devotion to standing in solidarity with the voiceless has its roots in both her faith and family. Her work as a labor leader and civil rights activist has ‘been a continuation of the types of beliefs we had in our family’ she explained” (M. García 156).

Other contemporary media renditions of Huerta’s rhetoric, though, are not so kind. Huerta is a consummate activist, and this dedication to social issues was at the root of receiving the UCLA Medal. Yet, there was some backlash. The sole comment left on the YouTube rendition of her remarks reads, “like someone fasting is going to stop the firing of workers.... this women has gone off the deep end. Political statements during a graduation speech truly shameful” (homeloansmd).

After giving a very similar speech a few days later at the Cal State Bakersfield commencement, blog posts and comments sprang up on the internet continuing to attack Huerta. One particularly scathing blog post, written by Richard Beene and found on the Blogger page *Bakersfield Observed*, summarizes the fallout witnessed in the “Opinion” section of *The Californian*. It states that citizens were offended over Huerta turning the graduation into “nothing more than a rally for the United Farm Workers.” The blog post continues:

It was just awful. Horrible topic, bad delivery, uninspired, full of class warfare rhetoric. And that's too bad, because the day your son or daughter graduates from college is one of the great special days for families--a brief shining moment that

should be recognized by a well prepared speaker. The best commencement speeches (and there are many) are aimed at the students themselves. Some are funny, some dry, but they all talk about the future and the accomplishments these kids have made to reach this point. Dolores simply dusted off her standard stump speech full of UFW platitudes and predictable drivel that had absolutely nothing to do with the graduates. At least that's the way I see it. (Beene)

Disregarded in this opine on Huerta's speech is her continued reminder to the students that their education should be used to give back to their communities, a message clearly in line with the Dolores Huerta Foundation and clearly in line with Huerta's activist work. What this media commentator is truly saying is that Huerta is not enough of a sanctioned speaker to be able to deviate from the strict genre conventions of commencement remarks. This genre demands remarks must be possibly "funny, some dry" yet all should "talk about the future and the accomplishments these kids have made to reach this point." When Huerta dares to include her politics, a rhetorical move she was sure to make when invited to speak, dissonance happens between the rhetor (Huerta) and the universal audience (those not present at the commencement, but interested and effected nonetheless). Implied here is that the Chicana's place in the North American polis is still tenuous, so strict adherence, honorific in execution, must be abided by in order for her to be "heard" by the audience beyond the particular.

Commentator Beene continues:

Here's a hint to Dolores: next time someone asks you to do a commencement, spend more than three minutes preparing and think about the kids, not you. Let me repeat that: it's not about you! And to CSUB: the fact that someone is in the

news should not be the sole criteria for having them give a commencement. Look for someone to be uplifting and forward looking and please, focus on the kids.

(Beene)

Before positioning Huerta as someone simply “in the news,” Beene offers up the advice to Huerta, “it’s not about you!” Though Beene may know who Huerta is, being a resident of California and a self-elected voice of Bakersfield, he demonstrates a lack of historical knowledge of her work. But, Beene’s critique is clear: Huerta was an ineffective rhetor who failed her audience by not adhering to the occasion of expectations. Implicitly, what is being said is that although Huerta is being honored for her life’s work of social justice, there is an expectation that she not speak on this life’s work in these honorary rhetorical situations. Huerta defies this expectation, as she has continuously defied stifling normative expectations throughout her life in regards to her labor activism, her motherhood choices, and her corpus of rhetorical work.

### *Personal Rendering*

Dolores Huerta’s history with UCLA and the University of California system was not always on good terms, as her activism work had previously led to confrontations dating as far back as the 1970s. In a [speech given at UCLA in 1978, Huerta boldly critiques UCLA curriculum, noting their lack of a labor history class and their support of the Bracero Program. Huerta remarks:

“You should insist on having a very good labor history class about California, and you would be surprised about how many organizers were lynched in the state and were killed by Associated Farmers, the group that the Farm Bureau organized. In 1943, the University of California organized the Bracero Program. This was to

bring in people from Mexico that were kept like slaves behind barbed wire to work in the California fields and were exploited so terribly.” (M. García 251)

And, Huerta’s critiques of UCLA and the UC system were not limited to their involvement in the Bracero Program. Huerta was a notable presence alongside Jesse Jackson during the mid-1990s when the UC system decided to end affirmative action. Her appointment in 2003 as a Regent for the UC system brought her anti-UC activism during these earlier times to light, casting doubt on her allegiance to the university system and her ability to work with other Regents whom she had publically spoke against, most notably Ward Connerly, who had supported ending affirmative action. Speaking on these concerns, Huerta remarked boldly that her and Connerly had “had confrontations, not meetings’ and that “there are other regents on the board who feel like I do” (Cockrell).

Musing on her assumption of the vocal leadership role that had become the bulk of her work with the UFW and, by the new millennium, with social justice and women’s rights, Huerta said:

“I guess because I’m articulate, I came to the forefront. A lot of people who do a lot of hard work in the union are not mentioned anywhere. *Son los soldadados razos del movimiento*. And that’s what I consider myself—just a person working at what I am supposed to be doing.” (M. García 166)

She understands that her rhetorical prominence is a respected place. She is a *soldadera* of *el movimiento*, not the only *soldadera*, and her position in the movement is to be a voice of the concerns of the people fighting against North American racial and economic injustices. And this position will often come with backlash, adversity, alienation, and undermining, as with the UCLA remarks. Huerta is prepared.

Edwina Barvosa shed some insight into Huerta's positioning as a *soldadera* for social justice and women's rights when she writes,

The diversity of subjectivity involves the internalization of a multiplicity of constructed identities gained through one's own immersion in an array of social groups, cultures, and lifeworlds, including but not limited to multiple classes, races, ethnicities, sexualities, and language communities. Many Chicana feminist thinkers follow Gloria Anzaldúa in referring to inner diversity marked by multiple identities as "mestiza consciousness." (123)

For Huerta, *mestiza* consciousness arose in various manifestations, including more than five decades of activism work, defying cultural norms in her approach to motherhood, and, in these latter years of her rhetorical career, taking time during speaking engagements to vocalize the plight of those she fought for. Huerta is quoted as saying 'That's the history of the world. His story is told, hers isn't' (M. García 130). She continues, "At some point in my career in the union I realized that women were not being valued for what they were doing. Women have the ideas and men take the credit for them. It happens all the time (ibid). She acknowledges the silencing of women, the third space of speaking with no real forum or audience listening, and she refuses to embrace this liminality as reality. Her work stands in defiance of silence, and audiences have listened to her for more than fifty years. Huerta adds:

"I hope my legacy will be that I was an organizer; that I have passed on the miracles that can be accomplished when people come together, the things they can change. And I look at...when we passed the pension bill, the voting in Spanish, the getting driver's licenses in Spanish—all these bills we've passed.

The fact that you can build and you can make nonviolent change through organization; that's what I want my legacy to be. And hopefully we'll see the day when we don't have discrimination against women, against minorities, against workers. And working for a just world. Showing people how to accomplish this, what they can do to make a difference." (Bencomo Lobaco 311)

Summing up her later years of rhetorical work, Huerta spoke with *Teaching to Change LA* in 2003 on her legacy of activism and community work in California. When asked what role she played in the community, Huerta responded, 'My role in the community is to get involved with issues, especially issues that pertain to immigrants, women, labor, and the environment' (M. García 291).

### *Conclusion*

While normative genre conventions exist, and the audience(s) accept and expect these normative conventions to be rendered, particularly in highly formalized situations such as the epideictic occasion of acceptance remarks at a convocation, it is left to the rhetor to decide if these normative, often signifying of the prestige, align with their sociocultural positionality and their intentions for their speech act. For Huerta, a juxtaposition of delivering the rhetoric of the prestige and concurrently undermining it via untraditional tropes, genre-bending, and decidedly political.

On hearing Huerta give a talk at Santa Clara University in 1990, author Richard A. Garcia remarked:

After being formally introduced, Huerta began by speaking about her experiences with the union, about the poor and the farmworkers, and about the obligations of

employers to their employees. As she spoke she began to sway the crowd with her message and her quiet, personal, but forceful rhetorical tone. (57)

Garcia continued, “When she finished her short talk, the audience felt touched by her personality, her self-confidence, and her simple, powerful oratory” (57). Garcia’s recollection of Huerta as a rhetorical figure, gentle and unassuming, yet powerful and effective, nicely captures the latter years of Huerta’s rhetorical career. He continues, “As she left the podium, it was clear that we had been exposed to a woman of great complexity: a woman leader, an organizer, a powerful personality with rhetorical skill and a powerful and radical message” (58).

Huerta is a consummate activist of labor and social justice, and she is also a consummate rhetor for these causes. Her work is not simple organizing, or simple boycotting, or simple lobbying, but also setting new standards and precedence for vocal Chicanas looking to also do these things. She understands exigence, the motivation to speak based on the coming together of people and situation and purpose. And she understands that her rhetoric can bring about significant change to the thoughts or actions of those who hear her speak, both the particular audience and the universal one. Her rhetorical career did not end early or in misery as Tenayuca and Luisa Moreno’s nor was it reliant on her connection with any one man like Fierro de Bright’s. Huerta’s career was not limited to time nor place nor cause. Rather, it reflects a corpus of rhetorical work spanning decades and covering the spectrum of social justice issues. She is political, she counters gender and cultural norms, and she speaks widely and effectively on a range of issues to a range of audiences.



By 2009, the year of these remarks, Huerta was an honored and revered rhetor in the North American *polis*. There has never been another Chicana rhetor/activist to accomplish what Dolores Huerta has. And, she is still active. She is still attending speaking engagements, giving interviews, and cultivating a corpus of work that provides Rhet/Comp studies with access to the milieu and zeitgeist of every decade since the 1950s.

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<sup>i</sup> Quote taken from an unpublished interview from an unknown writer, subsequently republished in Mario T. García's book *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, page 279.

<sup>ii</sup> For more on the Cesar Chávez and, by extension, the UFW's, position on abstinence, birth control, and abortion see Ana Raquel Minian's "Indiscriminate and Shameless Sex: The Strategic Use of Sex by the United Farm Workers."

<sup>iii</sup> To date, Huerta has received 11 honorary doctorates from colleges and universities around the United States (feminist.org).

<sup>iv</sup> Palilogia, from the Greek "*palin*" meaning over again and "*logia*" for speaking, is the repetition of the same word or phrase for vehement emphasis (*Silva Rhetoricae*).

<sup>v</sup> The *diacope* is a type of *palilogia* that consists of an uninterrupted repetition of a word.

## Conclusion: Dolores Huerta as Rhetor and the Implications of Chicana

### Rhetoric to Rhetorical and Composition Studies

Over the last few decades, many scholars have called for a rhetor such as Dolores Huerta, a rhetor whose corpus of work represents gender, race, class, labor, and religious issues, to be acknowledged and studied. This dissertation project heeds this call for a subject-based, ideological rectification of the *lacuna* of diverse voices in our Rhetoric and Composition canons and recognizes Dolores Huerta as the modern day subject-paradigm for these intersections of important North American rhetoric. Huerta represents what is relevant to our students and their communities and their studies, and our canons will only benefit and progress in thought, methodology, and theory by acknowledging her place in our histories.

Chicana rhetoric has emerged as a cohesive and efficacious part of civil, labor, and social justice movements over the last four decades. It is an everyday rhetoric and a civic rhetoric. A rhetoric that is “subjectively constructed and individuated and at the same time it is collectively circulated” (Kells 5). It achieves voice “through the symbolic performance of authorship and production of polyvocal discourse” (ibid). It is this performance and production of polyvocality with purpose that is the foundation for Chicana rhetoric, for Dolores Huerta, and for Chicana rhetoricians.

Chicana rhetoric is a *mezcla* rhetoric representative of the voice of labor, of gender, of economic and social justice. And, while all of these are polyvocal in their own right, Chicana rhetoric remains a consistent site where we can locate that certain passion, the urge, the movement towards progress that is happening within each. It is about who is speaking, who is not, and how that speech is manifesting. In what language? To whom?

For many years, Chicanas have been this voice, yet our scholarship has silenced them. What could have been productive research was neglected due to systemic and systematic prejudices against Mexican American women.

This dissertation recognizes two time periods of Chicana rhetoric: the Mexican American Generation era marked by the diasporas of the Mexican Revolution and Great Depression and the subsequent U.S. labor rights movement and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement to the present day. While the Mexican American Generation movement influenced Dolores Huerta, she was the influence of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. In the following sections I will delineate how each of these eras can add to and positively progress the canons of Rhetoric and Composition.

*The Importance of the Mexican American Generation to Rhet/Comp Studies*

Emma Pérez places the beginning of Chicanisma at the time of the Mexican Revolution, when *Mexicanas* rose vocally and textually against the Porfirio Diaz presidency (56). While Diaz was responsible for bringing in foreign investors, effectively stabilizing and growing the Mexican economy, this investment was at the expense of workers and peasants, whose land was taken away and who were forced into a modern day peonage system with the new *patrons* being North American corporations and wealthy Mexicans. In support of the *antiporfirista* agenda, which included agrarian reform, education reform, and gender equality, women such as Dolores Jiménez y Muro and Juana Gutiérrez de Mendoza wrote and published political tracts, organized other women against Diaz, and were active *soldaderas*, soldiers fighting in the revolution (ibid).

This revolutionary time in turn of the century Mexico was important for Mexican and North American Southwest politics, but, more important to this project, it marks the rhetorical precedence from which later Mexican American women and Chicanas would build upon. Much of the same issues such as agrarian reform, labor rights, and gender rights would become the issues that Mexican American women would take up, though on *el otro lado*, the other side of the border. These similar pathways from *oikos* to *polis* that women from both sides of the U.S./ Mexico border took are important. First, they demonstrate a legacy of rhetorical work that, up until recently, has not been documented or taught. Second, they demonstrate a pattern of rhetorical work that lends itself to a current understanding of what Chicana rhetoric is and what it accomplishes.

Current scholars of border rhetorics are beginning the revisionary history of this early era, between the Mexican Revolution and the Mexican American Generation, by uncovering the actors and actions concerning immigration, diasporas, language practices, and activism/organizing. Maylei Blackwell writes that what:

Distinguished them as a political generation is that they collectively named, theorized and built a political practice to confront oppression in student, community, and labor organizing, in the cultural arts, in educational and scholarly associations, and in their homes. (50)

Scholars such as Michelle Hall Kells and Carl Allsup have done recovery work on the rhetorics of the American G.I. Forum, founded in South Texas, focusing on Hector P. García and Vicente Jimenez. Kent Ono and John Sloop are doing progressive work on Border Rhetorics and Cynthia E. Orozco has explored the rhetorics of LULAC, looking at how women entered and navigated middle-class Mexican American organizations.

These works range from theoretical to historical and not only answer some questions but raise some intriguing ones as well. Most important from these works is the continued need to recover more Mexican American women's voices from this era. We know of Jovita Gonzales and of Luisa Moreno, but who else might we add to this repository of scholars and activists?

Recovery work is also being done in *Mestiza*<sup>i</sup> rhetorics, both contributing greatly to the progress of documenting Mexican American women's rhetoric. Cristina Devereaux Ramirez has done considerable recovery work with Mexican American journalists, most recently in her book *Occupying Our Space: The Mestiza Rhetorics of Mexican Women Journalists and Activists, 1875-1942*. Her work focuses on Mestiza rhetorics, including not only Mexican American women but also Mexican women and other Latinas who contribute to the milieu of Latina rhetorics. This conceptualization of Chicana rhetoric allows for inclusivity and is built upon the Anzaldúan concept of the *mestiza* consciousness, or the concept of inner *mestizaje* which is "physically and culturally rooted in living diverse social positions, yet simultaneously being or feeling displaced from each of those positions" (Anzaldúa 125).

Another example of the work currently being done is a collection of biographical essays documenting the early rhetors of the Post-Mexican Revolution, pre-Civil Rights era. In the preface to an anthology exploring Chicano/a rhetors from the 1930s-1960s, and era termed the "Mexican American Generation," editor Anthony Quiroz writes:

Mexican Americans were generally ignored, marginalized, and disrespected in the traditional canon of American history until the late twentieth century. [...]

Mexican Americans have now become more firmly entrenched in the scholarly

discussions about race and ethnicity, gender relationships, class, politics, education, economics, culture, and in an ongoing negotiation of the meaning of American. (*Leaders of the Mexican American Generation*)

For early Mexican American rhetors, becoming a ratified speaker entailed a complicated battle of positioning of self and audience as well as access to the North American *polis*. With early forums such as LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, these sites for Chicana/o rhetoric were created (Quiroz). With these sites of rhetoric created, Chicana/o rhetors were then able to employ the tropes and *topoi* relevant and efficacious to them, their arguments, their audiences, and their intents. This was a new rhetoric, a rhetoric that has grown from civil, labor, and economic rights issues and continued to evolve to include gender and racial concerns.

Continuing to uncover these early Mexican American rhetors and exploring the contexts and accomplishments of their rhetoric is crucial to a continued re-defining of what Chicana rhetoric is. The more we know about the precedence, the better able we are to understand the current and future of this important intersectional rhetoric. But more substantial work in libraries and cities along the border and throughout the Southwest is needed. Who are the lost voices that were crucial political and social presences in the small Texas towns during the Great Depression and labor rights years? Who were the women founding and running the always influential *mutualistas* throughout the Southwest, forming the sociocultural fabric of welfare in communities along the border? Who are the lost Mexican American women scholars, those teachers and students who educated generations of youth and formed educational policy that still resonates today. The possibilities for research and publication in these areas are broad, with manifest

positive implications to not only scholars of the Southwest, but to North American history at large.

*The Importance of La Causa to Rhet/Comp Studies*

Thomas Rosteck contends that ‘rhetorical studies is concerned with how the struggle for power happens through legitimate social institutions such as local and national elected officials’ (Kells 5). Gaining access to “legitimate social institutions” i.e. the academy, the corporation, or political office was the first struggle for power. Huerta’s invitation to join the CSO and subsequent invitations to lead the National Farm Workers Association and the United Farm Workers demonstrate the modern day movement of the Chicana out of the *oikos* and into the U.S. *polis*, the legitimate sociopolitical institution of rhetoric. The second struggle would then be rising to vocality within these institutions. The third, and possibly most difficult struggle towards inclusion in the canon, would be for Chicanas to recognize and name themselves as rhetors. This struggle continues daily, in all institutions and personally.

*La Causa*, the labor rights movement beginning in the late 1950s with Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chávez at the helm and extending into the Chicano/a Civil Rights years of the 1960s and 1970s, was this moment of both struggle for power and also legitimation. *La Causa*, or “the cause,” focused on basic human rights, with the migrant laborer/farm worker as the actors and the civil rights violations of large growers as the action. The stage ranged from the fields to the picket lines to boycotted stores, and, for Huerta, the halls of the Senate and Congress.

While I have focused solely on Dolores Huerta throughout this project, I have mentioned other important Chicana rhetors that were crucial to the success of *La Causa*

and, by extension, union formation and efficacy in North America, labor rights legislation, and the overall culling of Chicana rhetoric. Important in the United Farm Workers Union was quite a few notable Chicanas. Jessie Lopez de la Cruz was an early member of the NFWA and the UFW and served as the first female recruiter for the UFW. Her activism and organizing work paralleled Huerta's in timeframe and involvement, and her rhetorical work was crucial in the outlawing of the *cortito*, the short hoe. Her life and work are well-documented, yet not in the realm of Rhetoric.

There are contemporary Chicanas still pursuing the work of *La Causa*, yet in more current forums such as foundations and as union representatives. Dolores Huerta's youngest daughter Camila Chavez, serves as Executive Director of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. As figurehead and decision maker for this very important foundation, Chavez is very influential in California labor rights work. Another interesting current rendering of "union" happening within Chicanism is the *La Unión Chicana Por Aztlán*, a coalition of Chicanas at Massachusetts Institute of Technology who declare in their charter:

We represent 500 years of conquest, oppression, triumph, and honor. Being born of this tumultuous past, We know the importance of family, the source of our strength. As a surrogate to the families We left behind, LUCHA is a family of artists, athletes, engineers, actors, scientists, architects, poets, and musicians (La Unión Chicana Por Aztlán). This "union" practices inclusivity, noting that anyone who identifies with Latino culture is able to join. This move of forming a coalition of like-minds for socialization and support in arenas where Chicana/os and Latina/os are not many harkens back to the grassroots organizing of Huerta



and the CSO. Contemporary rhetorical scholarship could delve into these connections, as well as into this new turn into inclusivity under the frame of Chicanisma. How does the intersections of Chicana—gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, socioeconomics—speak to these scholars at this top tier university? Does the language of Chicana feminism, of *La Causa*, and of *El Movimiento* impact the language, both official and social, of this newly envisioned union? (“*La Unión Chicana Por Aztlán Constitution*”)

*The Importance of El Movimiento to Rhet/Comp Studies*

The Chicano Civil Rights movement is deeply important to both Dolores Huerta’s rhetoric as well as Chicana rhetoric. While Dolores Huerta was at the apex of her rhetorical work in labor rights organizing and activism, Chicanas within the movement were struggling against macho politics, which kept them silenced and relegated to the back lines during this fight for civil rights. While Huerta was prominently speaking and lobbying as the Vice President of the UFW, Anna NietoGomez was being systematically harassed and undermined as the first female president of MEChA at California State Long Beach. Though these tensions, at times, seemed to undermine Chicanas in *El Movimiento*, we now have the perspective of time, which indicates that from these struggles Chicana feminism rose, a force that today stands as more powerful and longstanding than *El Movimiento*.

Chicana rhetoric, thus, came into fruition during a time of resistance. If, as scholar Robert Connors contends, exclusion of women from rhetoric can be traced to its agnostic roots, the tradition of rhetoric as a discipline of “fighting” words, (26) then one can see how women, traditional keepers of the *oikos*, not the *polis*, could be absent from

rhetorical history. This was much the case for Chicano Civil Rights era Chicanas, who struggled to support the nationalist cause while fighting against the men on the movement who wanted to keep them silenced.

But, how is it that a 2,000 year old discipline has but a handful of women practitioners? How can the art and science of words continue for millennia with only women enough to count on two hands? How are these handfuls of women mostly white and mostly ancient? Connors iterates, “I cannot stress too strongly how successful this exclusion of women from rhetoric was or how deeply it affected the discipline” (36). With women rhetors few and far between-- Aspasia and Sor Juana, the two most anthologized women rhetors, were separated by continents and millennia—no cohesive precedent exists. Women rhetors have had to continuously rebuild their presence, their approaches, their ideologies and theories, over and over, situation after situation. Each time a women rhetor came into prominence, she was tokenized, exoticized. The need for constant resubstantiation could never be overcome. Women such as Dolores Huerta had to begin anew, begin at the lowest echelon, and work, work, work to gain access to voice in the *polis*.

With the movement out of *El Movimiento*, this Chicana voice rose. And, by the third wave/third space feminist decades of the 1980s and 1990s, a working definition of Chicana rhetoric became clear. Chicana rhetoric became a resistance discourse that countered the hegemonic rhetorics of male-centered/heteronormative *cultura* and identity formation of *El Movimiento*. With this as its base, Chicana rhetoric continued to evolve over the ensuing post-Civil Rights years to incorporate linguistic norms of how North

Americans speak about labor, of gender, of economic social justice and from those speech acts how change arises.

The Chicano Civil Rights Movement not only gave rise to the beginnings of Chicana rhetoric, it also created the space for Chicanas to employ, practice, and revise what was effective in terms of rhetorical moves, tropes, and topoi. And, this was across a spectrum of causes, in various organizations, and in different mediums. On the student movement front, the rhetoric of Dolores Huerta was apparent as Chicana students organized, rallied, and advocated. Mexican American student movement legacies reached back to the Mexican Revolution, and it was Mexican Americans, not African Americans, who brought the first case of desegregation before the courts in the case of *Mendez V. Westminster*, 1947. The courts ruled that separating Mexican and Mexican American students attending public schools in Orange County California into “Mexican schools” was unconstitutional, therefore leading the way for further challenges against segregation in the Jim Crow South.

The Chicano Civil Rights Movement saw a resurgence of student activism in both the establishment of organization such as the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA). The problems experienced by Chicanas attempting to join this organization, ran by “heavies” and macho politics, gave way to outlets such as *Encuentro Femenil*, considered the first Chicana scholarly journal and founded by Anna NietoGomez. Though many Chicana/o Studies and History scholars tend to focus on these figures and tropes of the Civil Rights era student movement, here were other vocal and prominent Chicanas who shaped the organizations and rhetoric. This area of scholarship can be

explored locally, institutionally, and regionally and each rendering will give way to rhetorics that represent each of these spaces.

Concurrent with the scholarly and civic ambitions of the student movement and *EL Movimiento*, on the political front the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) was founded, with the Chicana Rights Project coming together shortly thereafter to specifically help lower-income Chicanas with issues directly affecting them within their communities. The Chicana rhetoric employed within the CFP differed from that of the student movement rhetoric, though, in very telling ways. CFP communications were rife with stereotypes and other such subjugative language positioning lower-socioeconomic Chicanas as without power and without the means to gain that power. Essentially, the CFP rendered other Chicanas without voice and then assumed themselves as the mouthpiece for these this population. In her critique of this rhetorical power move, Lori A. Flores<sup>ii</sup> cites the need for the CFP to garner funding, thus relying on these essentialized biographies of women whom they claimed to be empowering.

The Chicana rhetoric employed by the Chicana Rights Project is reminiscent of the earlier rhetorics of LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens. LULAC was established and remains to be a very middle class Latino organization, with early membership being by invitation only. For selected women in early LULAC auxiliaries and chapters, invitation was based on education, family ties, and moral upstanding in the community. Those Chicanas whose family name did not resonate with the higher ups within the community, who had to drop out of school early to assist their families economically, or whose reputation was not on par with cultural/community expectations were not allowed into the fold. This exclusion created inter-cultural class-based

differences and, concurrently, allowed for the types of rhetoric later employed by the CRP.

*El Movimiento* is such a rich era of the Chicana rhetoric of civil rights, labor rights, and gender rights. Similar to the Mexican American Generation rhetorical scholarship in extant, *El Movimiento* scholarship has just begun uncovering the important actors of this era and documenting their context and legacy. This documentation can now be tied to what contemporary Chicana rhetors concerned with similar work are doing linguistically, as Cristina Ramirez, Kendall Leon, and Jessica Enoch's work demonstrates. And, there is much opportunity for continued recovery of Chicana rhetors based on these scholars' methods and analyses. Students of Rhet/Comp, Chicana Studies, History, and Linguistics can add to their field's scholarship through the recovery and documentation of other efficacious rhetorical practices and impacts. These studies will continue to lend to the revisionary history of Mexican American women in the North American *polis* and continue to rectify the enduring absence of Latina voices in Rhetorical Studies.

*The Impact and Implications of Chicana Rhetoric*

As of the year 2000, it was reported that “[o]f all the racial and ethnic minorities, Latinos are the least likely to complete a college degree” (Rendón xvi). There are various factors for this trend, including lack of financial resources and financial assistance and the need for Latina/o college students to work while taking college classes. More impactful, Rendón argues, is the lack of integration into the college environment, an environment already shaped by the dominant (i.e. white) culture (ibid). And the major factor leading to the retention of Latina/o students is faculty's validation of the student's

“desire to succeed and encouraging their optimistic outlook” (ibid). The employment and presence of Latina/o faculty and administrators demonstrates to their students the ability of this demographic to enter college and succeed, and to move into professorial and administrative roles thereafter. The reality is, though, that this demographic remains severely underrepresented, with only 2 percent of tenured faculty in the United States being Hispanic, with the other “80.3 percent white, 13.6 percent Asian and 3.9 percent black” (Zhu)<sup>iii</sup>. The ramifications of this absence of Latina/os is clear: with a lack of role models, advocates, and confidants that Latina/o students feel comfortable interacting with, they remain at risk for dropping out of college and the gap remains.

The impact of this dissertation project directly speaks to this gap. With more scholarship that focuses on Latina/o voice, on Latina/o precedence, and that theorizes and cultivates methodologies for scholarship in Latina/o issues, a space is created for a filling of this lacuna. Looking forward to the future of Rhetoric and Composition studies, scholar Jaime Mejía spoke urgently, yet hopefully, about the inclusion of Chicana and Chicano voices in our canons of study. In the article “Bridging Rhetoric and Composition Studies with Chicano and Chicana Studies: A Turn Toward Critical Pedagogy” (2004) he wrote, “Scholars and practitioners of Rhetoric and Composition can today make up for this long standing absence by developing organically based pedagogies and curricula to fill and address this much needed gap” (51). And, he warned, “Rhetoric and composition pedagogies that fail to incorporate our students’ ethnic identities and cultures can and will have adverse effects on our students’ academic success, as will literacy based textbook readers that fail to advance the critical literacy skills of our Mexican American students” (ibid).

This sentiment has been echoed by other Latino Rhet/Comp scholars such as Victor Villanueva (1999) and Edward Bonilla-Silva (2003), who focused on the need to honestly explore the language of racism as well as the racist practices embedded in our fields of study. Scholar Marco Portales extends these calls, asking:

What is it going to take to wake up scholars, educators, and teachers to the fact that the United States yearly miseducates and loses many students because we have not yet figured out how to educate Mexican- and Spanish-speaking students better? Yes, there are some English as a Second Language courses in the colleges of education, and there are some bilingual education classes that succeed in helping some students here and there, but the great majority of Latino students are still being yearly subjected to teaching techniques that very clearly are not working for them. As Mejía suggests, “we need always to be on guard against systems that seem convenient to teachers but that ignore the way writing is actually done. (136)

The addition of the Chicana/o voice to our Rhetorical and Composition Studies canons is about representative inclusion and the manifest benefits of representative inclusion to students of Mexican American descent and to students of all ethnicities.

The Chicana/o voice is an integral part of the North American zeitgeist, of North American ideology. Terry Eagleton explored the importance of ideology as recently as 1991 (*Ideology: An Introduction*), outlining what ideology *is* and what it *does*. Eagleton argues that ideology currently in circulation is:

- (a) the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life; (b) a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class; (c) ideas which

help to legitimate a dominant political power; (d) false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power, (e) systematically distorted communication; f) that which offers a position for a subject; (g) forms of thought motivated by social interests. (1-2)

If these definitions more or less identify what ideology *is*, Eagleton furthers that ideology creates “identity thinking,” “the conjuncture of discourse and power,” “semiotic closure,” “the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relationship to a social structure,” and “the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality” (ibid).

Raúl Sánchez cites Gayatri Spivak when he comments that a theory of ideology is necessary to Rhetoric and Composition studies because ideology allows “for an understanding of constituted interests within systems of representation<sup>iv</sup>” (743). Sánchez argues that a theory of ideology:

Can help compositionists ask more fruitful questions about the production of culture than we have to date asked, and these questions might help us theorize writing subjects as functions of textual activity rather than as essential precursors to it. (742)

The power in Sánchez’s approach to Rhet/Comp studies lies in the agency he envisions for those involved, rhetors and students and scholars alike. I anticipate this agency arising in rhetoric and composition courses that value the cultivation critical thinking, informed world views, an awareness of the diversity of rhetoric and writing that occurs in academic as well as everyday situations, and, most important, that values students as citizens.

Providing students with honest renditions of civic discourse representative of their communities is an act of empowerment.



While ancient rhetorics and rhetoricians are important, they no longer suffice as models for how and why rhetoric currently arises in the modern North American polis. And, our *doxa*, the representative citizenry active in the polis, is massively different than the ancients. Dolores Huerta and women like her are now prominent voices and their topoi, their multilingualism, their syncopation and delivery, their engagement of audiences, is all categorically different than what landed white male citizens of decades, centuries, millennia past used.

Our students in the modern rhetoric and composition classroom at universities across North America as well as the communities they reside in represent the diversity embodied by Huerta. Through analysis of Huerta's texts students gain insight into their own spheres of belonging, into their own language practices, into the linguistic ecology of their communities. There is also history, and politics, and civil/social/gender rights embedded throughout Huerta's corpus of work. Students may read and analyze Huerta's statements or debates and be tasked with historically contextualizing it and then exploring how she integrates important issues or happenings of that time in her rhetoric. Or, they may research her audience for her speech, for instance the audience for her testimony in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, and explore how she cultivates topoi based on the universal and particular audiences.

Students may then use these texts as models for their own statements or testimonies, they may read these texts and understand their language practices align with Huerta's and feel empowered by their potential to draft efficacious rhetoric. Rhet/Comp scholars may read Huerta and begin to explore their own myopicism, and begin taking the steps to integrate more diverse voices into their rhetoric readings, more diverse

language practices into their composition classrooms. Ultimately, what will come from the critical inclusion of Dolores Huerta into Rhetoric and Composition Studies is the progressive forward movement of a field of study plagued by stasis rooted in the honoring of practices decades, centuries, and millennia outdated and irrelevant. The inclusion of Dolores Huerta's rhetoric and, by extension, Chicana rhetoric, in our classrooms, in our textbooks, and in our scholarly publications is not forced or tokenism; rather, it is organic and obvious. Huerta's rhetoric is the practical application of the urgent theorizing of the last few decades. It is timely and necessary.

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<sup>i</sup> Latina Rhetorics encompasses all women rhetors from Latin American heritage active in the North American polis, whether U.S. citizen, immigrant, or undocumented. *Mestiza* rhetorics account for Latina women who emphasize their indigenous heritage along with Hispano, African, Asian and other such Southwest legacy ethnicities. *Mestiza* rhetoric is much like Chicana rhetoric and these two approaches to documenting Mexican American women's rhetoric are still new and in flux, with many similarities and not much disparities.

<sup>ii</sup> See Lori A. Flores' article "A Community of Limits and the Limited of Community: MALDEF's Chicana Rights Project, Empowering the "Typical Chicana" cited in the bibliography.

<sup>iii</sup> Yiyun Zhu cites data from the Faculty Diversity Initiative Biannual Report in the article "Latino Faculty numbers remain low, 10 years after Faculty Diversity Initiative" in *The Chronicle* (Duke).

<sup>iv</sup> Sánchez cites Spivak's work *A Postcolonial Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (page 252). For more information on this work and Sánchez's use of it, see his footnote in the cited article.

## Appendix

### *Key Terms*

The interdisciplinary approach of this project, a project bringing together the fields of Rhetoric, Composition, History, Literary Studies, and Critical Theory, results in a multitude of terms and concepts that may be intelligible within their own realms but when interwoven into another lose their power. Following is a listing of terms key to the understanding of this dissertation. All rhetorical terms, which often retain their Latin spelling and pronunciations, used throughout the analysis chapters will not be included herein but rather footnoted with their English translations.

Aztlán: Some frame Aztlán as the ancestral birthplace of the Aztec peoples and others frame Aztlán as the mythical, conceptual homeland of modern day Mexican Americans.

Bridging these two perceptions, John R Chávez, in the introduction to *The Lost Land*:

*The Chicano Image of the Southwest*, states,

To the Anglo-American majority of the United States, the Southwest is vaguely defined as that group of states at the corner of the country toward Mexico.

Whether laymen or scholars, few Anglo-Americans agree on exactly which states the region comprises or what its characteristics are. Chicanos, however, the region's Spanish-surnamed population, have a clear image of the Southwest: to them, the Southwest is home, a land including California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado, the states where 85 percent of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent reside. But to Chicanos the Southwest is more than just their place of residence; it is their homeland, their lost homeland to be more precise, the conquered northern half of the Mexican nation. (1)

Chicana: Rebolledo and Rivero explain that

Many terms are used to define the Mexican/Chicano experience. [...] when talking about the colonial Southwestern experience, the women are referred to as Spanish/Mexicanas or as Hispanas. After the Mexican National Period they are known as Mexicanas, and after 1848 as Mexicanas, Mexican American, or are identified by the region in which they lived: Californias, Tejanas, Nuevo Mexicanas. After 1960 we refer to the women as Chicanas. This nomenclature, albeit complex, is an attempt to be historically accurate, as well as define identity as the women would have defined it themselves. (Infinite Divisions 1)

This process of identification via historical and self-referential means is mirrored in this project. Yet, as Yolanda Flores Nieman writes, “it is critically important for readers to keep in mind that a label does not define a woman or her ideology and that labels are fluid and, for many women, interchangeable (*Chicana Leadership*, xii). I honor this fluidity.

Kairos: *Kairos* is an ancient Greek word (καῖρός) meaning the supreme moment.

Reflecting on a discussion of the term with rhetoric scholar James Kinneavy, Roger Thompson explains that *kairos* is “transcendent, in that it work[s] across culture lines and offer[s] a subtle way in which rhetoric is born” (73). Further, *kairos* is capable of expressing how cultural movements and conditions united with special moments create the right time for rhetoric to happen (Thompson 73). *Kairos* is not just the moment where a rhetorical act happens, but the context, the interlocutors, and the zeitgeist all coming together in the perfect moment to make the speech act persuasive, to make it functional, to make it rhetorical.

Polis: Essentially, the *polis* was the Greek city-state, yet more nuanced than modern conceptions of similar sites. Ancient Greek rhetoricians saw their city-states as more than just living spaces; rather, the *polis* was a civic obligation and a civic forum for the development of thought and politics that potentially outweighed one's obligation to family. In Plato's *Crito*, Socrates proclaims, "our country is more to be valued and higher and holier far than mother or father or any ancestor" (<http://classics.mit.edu/>).

Additionally, according to Aristotle (*The Republic*) the *polis* is the ultimate form of social and political organization of a city-state. Based on virtue and ability, members of the *polis*, the *demos*, could come together in discussion on topics relevant to their city-states, in discussion of moral issues, and in pursuit of truths.

Semiotics: is the study of the "life of signs in our society (Saussure) and is compelled by the belief that no sign exists in isolation (Hodge and Kress 1). Further, "[s]emiotics offers the promise of a systematic, comprehensive, and coherent study of communications phenomena as a whole, not just instances of it (ibid). Semiotics can be equated with the rhetorical concepts the Dramatist Pentad (Kenneth Burke) and the Rhetorical Situation (Lloyd Bitzer) which each allow for a speaker/writer/listener to map the speech act in it's context. Semiotics, and more specifically social semiotics was chosen over these rhetorical constructs because social semiotics accounts for the social relations and processes integral to understanding the importance of Chicana Rhetoric as arising from a specific sociocultural, resistance movement.

Transcultural Repositioning is the rhetorical practice of moving "back and forth with ease and comfort between and among different languages and dialects, different social classes, different cultural and artistic forms" (Guerra 8). Different than codeswitching, which is

the movement between languages within a speech act, transcultural repositioning accounts for sociocultural movements via rhetorical markers in speech acts.

Transcript from Dolores Huerta's 2009 UCLA Medal Remarks<sup>1</sup>

Thank you very much Chancellor, and thank all of you graduates, because I feel this is very much a part of you. And I am so happy that I can join as a UCLA personage here, my son, Dr. Fidel Huerta, who is a family practice doctor who graduated from UCLA medical school and my grandson, Danny Ibarra, who graduated from UC Berkeley (audience boos and Huerta laughs). Boooo, Ok.

But, I do want to dedicate this beautiful medal to two young men, one of them graduating here, today. His name is Martin Terrones, he is graduating from the film school. Another young man, he is also a UCLA graduate named Sean Ley. They are fasting. They are today on the 17<sup>th</sup> day, water only fast, to try to keep the budget cuts, to try to keep the local school board of the university, excuse me not the university of the L.A. school district from firing 2500 teachers and increasing the class size. So, this is dedicated to them. They are fasting in front of the Board of Education down there on 3rd and Beaudry right off of the 10 Freeway, so if any of you have a chance to visit them, do that. If not I know you are supporting them in your thoughts and your prayers.

We know that education is such a critical issue in our society. And, now we have so much of our education system that is being dismantled, for California, where we were once in the top five in the nation, we are now number 48, number 48, in the United States of America. In the San Joaquin Valley, where Cesar Chavez and I organized, since 1965 there has been only one university built, the University of California Merced. But there has been 17 prisons, 17 prisons that have been built. So, we have a crisis and this is something that we really have to worry about.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when he was president during World War II and they wanted to take money out of education, out of our libraries, he said, “No, we cannot take one cent out of our education and out of our libraries because our education is the soul of the nation. (audience applause) And, as a professor, a philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, wrote in his book *The Revolution of the Masses* (sic) “ If you do not have an educated [...] If you do not have an educated citizenry, what you have is mob rule.” We cannot let that happen, or continue to happen, in our country. I know that in your education that you have received an education, as Cesar Chavez would say, an education of the heart. As you have been extolled many times to come back and give to your community. And, we must do this, all of us must be engaged. If we want to have economic justice, let’s support worker’s right to organize, please support the Employee Free Choice Act by sending an email to Diane Feinstein telling her that she has got to support this, Ok? (audience applause) Let’s support gender justice for women by supporting equal right’s for women (significant audience applause) Let’s support equality in marriage and overturn Proposition 8. (significant audience applause). So, we know we can do this, these are issues of justice, and I know as UCLA graduates that you will have that justice in your hearts. And, also, not only compassion. Our new nominee to the Supreme Court Sonia Montamayor (sic) says, also, empathy! Let’s be empathic. Let’s get out there, come back into our communities, you know, and help. A lot of these millionaires that are making so much money while many people are losing their homes. I don’t care how much money you have, you can only eat three meals a day. You an only wear one suit of clothes a day.

So, you’re at graduation and I congratulate you...come back, come back, come back and give to your community. As we like to say, “Can we do it?” “Yes we can” But,



in Spanish, we say “Si Se Puede!” Let’s all do it together, let’s put our hands up.

Everybody. “Yes We Can” in Spanish. Everybody let’s go, “Si Se Puede! Si Se Puede! Si

Se Puede!” Muchas Gracias. Thank you very much. I am very honored.

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<sup>i</sup> Transcribed by me. Citation follows: Huerta, Dolores. "Dolores Huerta Speaks at UCLA Graduation" *YouTube*, June 2009. Accessed June 2014. Web.

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