

¡HUELGA! Study Guide

La Historia de Dolores Huerta – by Maya Malan-Gonzalez



The Feminist Seed is Planted

Dolores Clara Fernandez was born on April 10, 1930 in Dawson, a small mining town in the mountains of northern New Mexico. Her father Juan Fernández, a farm worker and miner by trade, was a union activist who ran for political office and won a seat in the New Mexico legislature in 1938. Dolores spent most of her childhood and early adult life in Stockton, California where she and her two brothers moved with their mother, following her parents' divorce.

According to Dolores, her mother's independence and entrepreneurial spirit was one of the primary reasons she became a feminist. Dolores' mother Alicia was known for her kindness and compassion towards others. She was an active participant in community affairs, involved in numerous civic organizations and the church. Alicia encouraged the cultural diversity that was a natural part of Dolores' upbringing in

Stockton. The agricultural community where they lived was made up of Mexican, Filipino, African-American, Japanese and Chinese working families.

Dolores followed her mother's civic mindedness, by becoming a teacher, but she could not tolerate seeing her students come to school with empty stomachs and bare feet, and thus began her lifelong journey of working to correct economic injustice.

An Organizer is Born

Dolores found her calling as an organizer while serving in the leadership of the Stockton Community Service Organization (CSO). During this time, she founded the Agricultural Workers Association, set up voter registration drives and pressed local governments for barrio improvements. It was in 1955 through CSO founder Fred Ross, Sr. that she would meet a likeminded colleague, CSO Executive Director César E. Chávez.

The two soon discovered that they shared a common vision of organizing farm workers, an idea that was not in line with the CSO's mission. As a result, in the spring of 1962 César and Dolores resigned from the CSO, and launched the National Farm Workers Association. Dolores' organizing skills were essential to the growth of this budding organization. The challenges she faced as a woman did not go unnoted and in one of her letters to Cesar she joked... "Being a now (ahem) experienced lobbyist, I am able to speak on a man-to-man basis with other lobbyists."

The first testament to her lobbying and negotiating talents was demonstrated in securing Aid For Dependent Families ("AFDC") and disability insurance for farm workers in the State of California in 1963, an unparalleled feat of the times. She was also instrumental in the enactment of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975. This was the first law of its kind in the United States, and granted farm

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workers in California the right to collectively organize and bargain for better wages and working conditions.

Dolores became one of the UFW's most visible spokespersons. Robert F. Kennedy acknowledged her help in winning the 1968 California Democratic Presidential Primary moments before he was shot in Los Angeles. Throughout the years she has worked for various political campaigns, including President Clinton, Governor Jerry Brown, Congresswoman Hilda Solis and Hillary Clinton.

Women's Liberation



As much as she was Cesar's right hand, Dolores could also be the greatest thorn in his side. The two were infamous for their blow out arguments, an element that they claimed was a natural part of their working relationship. Dolores viewed this as a healthy and necessary part of the growth process of any worthwhile collaboration. She was a true collaborator, an equal of Chavez, which was quite a public position of power for a woman during this time. While Dolores was busy breaking down one gender barrier after another, she was seemingly

unaware of the tremendous impact she was having on, not only farm worker women, but also young women everywhere.

While she was in New York directing the first National Boycott of California Table Grapes, she came into contact with Gloria Steinem and the burgeoning feminist movement who rallied behind the cause. Quickly she realized they shared much in common. Having found a supportive voice with other feminists, Dolores consciously began to challenge gender discrimination within the farm workers' movement.

Non-Violence Is Our Strength

Early on, Dolores advocated for the entire family's participation in the movement. After all it was men, women and children together out in the fields picking, thinning and hoeing. Thus, the practice of non-violence was not only a philosophy but a very necessary approach in providing for the safety of all. Despite the approach of peaceful protest, her life and the safety of those around her were in jeopardy on countless occasions. When she was 58 years old, Dolores suffered a life-threatening assault while protesting against the policies of then presidential candidate George Bush in San Francisco. A baton-wielding officer broke four of Dolores' ribs and shattered her spleen. Public outrage resulted in the San Francisco Police Department changing its policies regarding crowd control and police discipline and Dolores was awarded an out of court settlement.

Following a lengthy recovery, she took a leave of absence from the union to focus on women's rights. She traversed the country for two years on behalf of the 'Feminist Majority's Feminization of Power: 50/50 by the year 2000' Campaign encouraging Latinas to run for office. The campaign resulted in a significant increase in the number of women representatives at the local, state and federal levels. She also served as National Chair of the 21st Century Party, founded in 1992 on the principles that women make up 52% of the party's candidates and that officers must reflect the ethnic diversity of the nation.

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Her Second Wind

At 89, Dolores Huerta continues to work tirelessly developing leaders and advocating for the working poor, women, and children. As founder and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, she travels across the country engaging in campaigns and influencing legislation that supports equality and defends civil rights.

Recognitions and Awards

There are four elementary schools in California, one in Fort Worth, Texas, and a high school in Pueblo, Colorado named after Dolores Huerta.

She was inducted into the California Hall of Fame in March of 2013.

She has received numerous awards: among them The Eleanor Roosevelt Humans Rights Award from President Clinton in 1998, Ms. Magazine's One of the Three Most Important Women of 1997, Ladies Home Journal's 100 Most Important Woman of the 20th Century, The Puffin Foundation's Award for Creative Citizenship: Labor Leader Award 1984, The Kern County Woman of The Year Award from the California State Legislature, The Ohtli Award from the Mexican Government, The Smithsonian Institution – James Smithson Award, and Nine Honorary Doctorates from Universities throughout the United States, just to name a few.



In 2012 President Obama bestowed Dolores with her most prestigious award, The Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the United States.

Upon receiving this award Dolores said, "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."