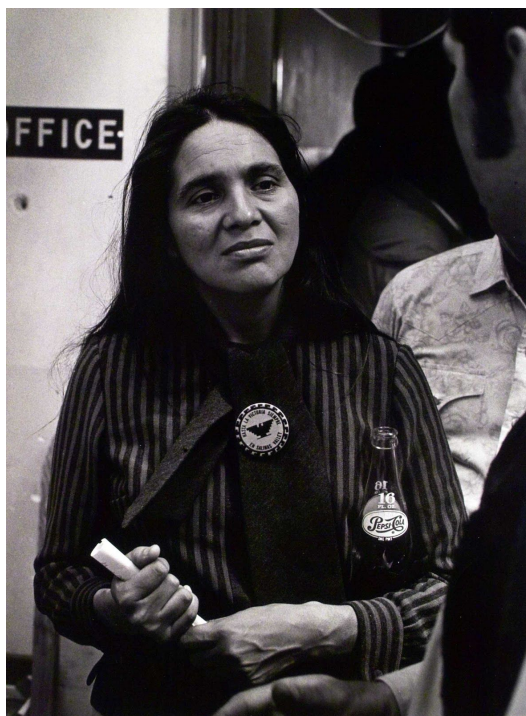


A CLOSER LOOK

The United Farm Workers Movement



Morrie Camhi (American, 1928-1999)

Dolores Huerta, Union Organizer, from the series, Farmworkers, 1971-72

Gelatin silver print

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation, 2005.57.20

Watch

In this two-minute video from 2012, listen to activist Dolores Huerta reflect on a lifetime of activism and community organizing:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDtKc4BDQFY&ab_channel=TheObamaWhiteHouse

Themes

- Civil Rights
- Liberation
- Social Movements
- US History

About the Artist

Morrie Camhi grew up in New York City and moved with his family to Los Angeles in 1942. Working as a magazine photographer, he traveled all over California during the 1960s and 1970s. His paths often crossed those of the state's many migrant laborers. Camhi witnessed the workers' efforts to unionize, and began following the strikes and demonstrations being waged throughout the state. He photographed both the laborers and those who helped to organize them. Through his photographs, Camhi documented the farm laborers' struggle for better pay and improved working conditions.

Introduction: Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta was born in Dawson, New Mexico in 1930, about seven months after the economically devastating stock market crash of 1929. For Huerta, it was the strength, independence, and ambition of her mother that encouraged her to create her own life and purpose—a passion for justice and equal opportunity that made her one of the 20th century's most powerful and respected labor leaders. After graduating from Stockton College in the 1950s, Huerta began teaching in the farm workers' community and was inspired to work to eliminate the poverty and brutal conditions she witnessed there.

In 1962, Huerta co-founded with activist César Chávez, what would become the United Farm Workers Union (UFW). Using tactics of non-violence, she organized an effective boycott of California table grapes and successfully lobbied for the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which grants farm workers the right to collectively organize and bargain for better wages and working conditions.

Research: The Fight of Farm Workers in the United States

The history of migrant workers in the western United States has a long and complicated history. By the mid-20th century, most migrant farm workers in the west were Mexican, due in large part to the exploitative Bracero program, which brought thousands of Mexicans to the United States between 1941–1964. Research the Bracero program. What were its aims and goals? Where did it fall short?

The United Farm Workers movement was initiated, in large part, as a response to this program and the conditions of farm workers. Research the origins of the UFW. Along with Huerta, who were its main leaders? What were the organization's primary goals? How did it organize to achieve those goals?

Activity: Creating a Logo

In two of the photographs, you will notice the logo for UFW. The logo incorporates the Aztec eagle to show the connection the union had to migrant workers of Mexican-American descent, encircled in white to signify hope and aspiration.

If you were to design a logo for a cause you believe in today, what would it look like? Would you include a symbol or letters? What colors would it be? Draw your logo.



Morrie Camhi (American, 1928-1999)

Farmworker's Press Conference, 1971-1972

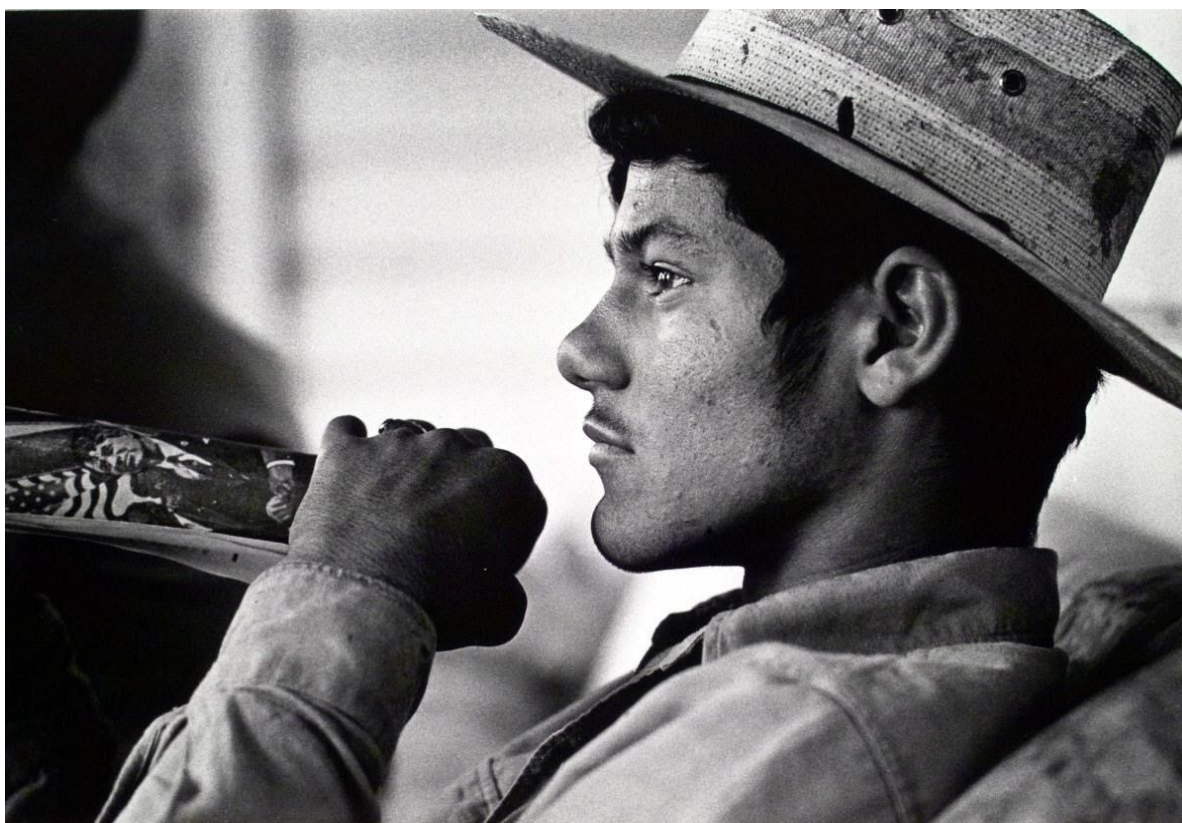
Gelatin silver print

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation, 2005.57.1

Read: Still Striving

In 2012, President Barack Obama bestowed on Huerta her most prestigious award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States. Upon receiving it, Huerta 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."*

Reflect on Huerta's words and the idea of organizing. If you had to organize for a cause you believe in, what would you say to bring people together?



*Young Man with Union Brochure, 1972**

Activity: Making Connections

In two of the photographs by Morrie Camhi—one of a famous leader of the Chicano/a movement, the other of an unknown young man—we see a rolled-up piece of paper in their hands. Look closely. Do these papers seem related? Do the photographs? What do you see that makes you say yes or no?

While the woman, Huerta, is a committed spokesperson for the cause, the young man appears to be considering joining it. Write an imaginary conversation between these two people. What might Huerta have wanted to say to this young man who is lost in thought? What question might he have asked of this impassioned leader? Write the conversation as you imagine it. Or write an internal monologue—what they are individually thinking—as if you were inside their minds.

Two Versions of the Story: Poetry and Newspapers

The two poems on the following page were written by poets who grew up in California. Both worked in the fields beside their parents as migrant laborers. For them, the idea of a living wage was sacred, as was the UFW. These poems turn a moment of history into something searingly personal.

Read the poems and then "translate" them as if you were writing a news story. Take the same inspiration—the strike at Delano, a bus full of workers stopped by immigration officials—and rewrite the events as they might have been reported in the newspaper that day. What difference does the language of poetry make to your feeling about these events? Which poem would be more likely to move you to action?

Huelga

Diana García

September 24th, 1965
 Delano California.
 You remember this day.
 How can you forget?
 Iconic this photo,
 outsize reproduction guiding us in.
 The great strikes in Delano,
 where it all began and you were there.
 Look at you atop a truck,
 sun in your eyes, you squint.
 Sensible clothes,
 sleeves pushed up passed your elbows,
 your get to work look.
 Comfy dark slacks,
 nothing you'd wear to church,
 nothing you'd wear turning trays.
 You turned from side to side,
 arms tired from holding the sign.
 It looks heavy,
 the word huelga feels heavy.
 Think of what this word means
 to all those who follow you out that day.
 Think of the lives changed by this one word,
 workers daring to claim their lives.
 Daring to think their arms, backs, legs
 should earn them
 more than subsistence wages.
 More than a quick meal midday,
 more than those furtive trips
 to the edge of the fields,
 hunkered down against crying eyes.
 More than dry eyes and dryer throats.
 The heat rises,
 pushes against your face,
 singles you out atop that truck.
 You must wonder
 if even now
 someone has you in their crosshairs.
 You must wonder
 what would happen to your children.
 But you can't think about them,

because this is about your children.
 This is about all the children,
 about all these young workers,
 ready to walk out,
 ready to follow you,
 ready not to grow old beneath another hot sun.

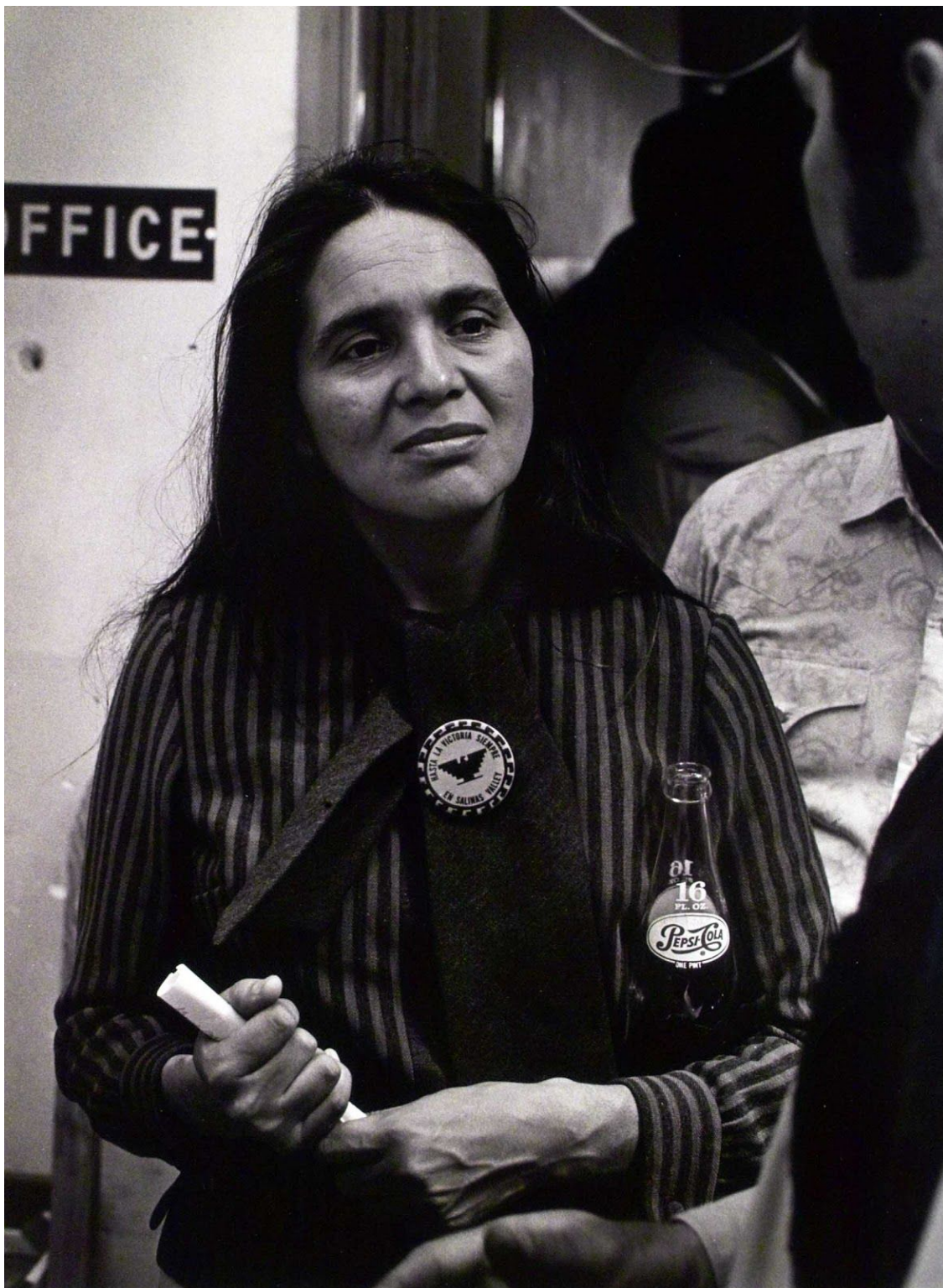
Bent to the Earth

Blas Manuel de Luna

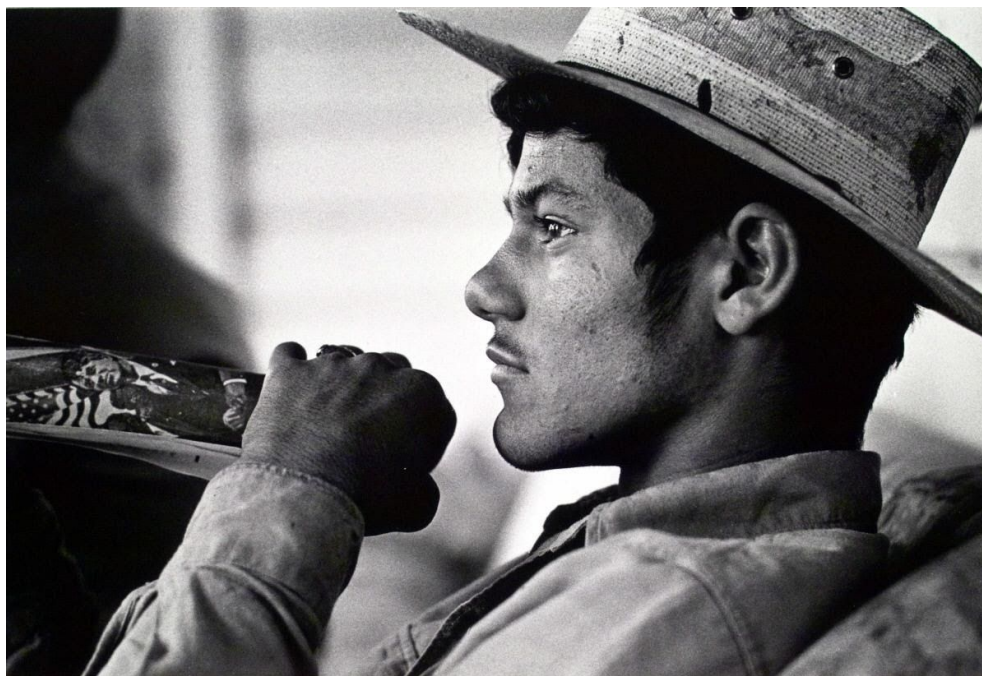
They had hit Ruben
 with the high beams, had blinded
 him so that the van
 he was driving, full of Mexicans
 going to pick tomatoes,
 would have to stop. Ruben spun
 the van into an irrigation ditch,
 spun the five-year-old me awake
 to immigration officers,
 their batons already out,
 already looking for the soft spots on the body,
 to my mother being handcuffed
 and dragged to a van, to my father
 trying to show them our green cards.

They let us go. But Alvaro
 was going back.
 So was his brother Fernando.
 So was their sister Sonia. Their mother
 did not escape,
 and so was going back. Their father
 was somewhere in the field,
 and was free. There were no great truths

revealed to me then. No wisdom
 given to me by anyone. I was a child
 who had seen what a piece of polished wood
 could do to a face, who had seen his father
 about to lose the one he loved, who had lost
 some friends who would never return,
 who, later that morning, bent
 to the earth and went to work.



Morrie Camhi, *Dolores Huerta, Union Organizer*, from the series, *Farmworkers*, 1971-72. Gelatin silver print. SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation, 2005.57.20.



*Morrie Camhi, *Young Man with Union Brochure*, from the series, *Farmworkers*, 1972. Gelatin silver print. SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation, 2005.57.2.



Morrie Camhi, *Farmworkers' Press Conference*, 1971-1972. Gelatin silver print. SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation, 2005.57.1.