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CHAPTER 10

Barrio Women

Community and Coalition in the Heartland

JANET WEAVER

Between 1945 and 1975, Mexican American women in the United States pressed for the rights of economic citizenship. They challenged gender and racial inequity through coalition building, community organizing, and union and political activism. In the eastern Iowa towns of Davenport and Muscatine, their activism traversed a broad spectrum of progressive reform from fundraising for educational scholarships to picketing local factories and supermarkets. Collectively and individually—often in partnership with men—they chipped away at the structures that contributed to gender and racial discrimination.¹ Yet these Mexicana mothers, daughters, breadwinners, and nuns rarely identified themselves as feminists.²

In this they were by no means unique. Concurrently on the west coast, Dolores Huerta engaged in community organizing, co-founded the United Farm Workers union, led its national grape boycott campaign and by 1975, had become its chief lobbyist for the landmark California Agricultural Labor Relations Act. Her work on behalf of agricultural laborers improved the lives of countless women and children. Still, when asked in a recent interview to what extent she had identified with the women's movement during those years, Huerta responded, "I have to confess that I didn't."³

Because the community activism of these Mexican American women mirrors the work of many who did identify themselves as feminists, their experience invites us to examine, expand, and enrich our understanding of

the history of feminist activism, questioning the narrowly defined parameters of its persistent “waves” metaphor.⁴

Since the 1980s, scholarship on feminist activism in the Southwest has challenged us to contemplate the intersection of race and gender as we move away from a predominantly white, Euro-centric interpretation of feminism.⁵ But the agency of Mexicanas in the Midwest remains obscure—a significant omission given that, by 1970, over 500,000 individuals of Mexican descent lived in the ten-state area between Kansas and Ohio, half of them women.⁶ Despite substantial efforts to collect and interpret this history, much remains to be done.⁷ Like their sisters in the Southwest, Mexicanas in the heartland were part of a complex cast of historical actors who shaped change. Our ability to understand and interpret their agency affects how we describe and define feminist history.

In the Iowa Mississippi River town of Davenport, *barrio* women established early patterns of activism in response to immediate needs of family, community, and employment. Mexicanas formed the backbone of tight-knit communities like the Cook’s Point *barrio* in southwestern Davenport. From the 1920s to 1952, this two-acre site with its frame houses, boxcars, and boathouses was home to approximately 270 residents, the majority of whom were Mexican nationals and their U.S.-born children. Subject to regular flooding, the settlement’s streets went unpaved and its homes never had running water, electricity, or sanitary facilities. A city dump was located close by.⁸

Children raised in Cook’s Point benefited from strong female role models provided by women like Mary Ramirez Terronez. Born in 1918 in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí, Terronez had lived at Cook’s Point since she was five years old. She married in 1936, raising five of her six children in the *barrio*. Like many women at “the Point,” Mary supplemented the family income with seasonal work in the onion fields of nearby Pleasant Valley. Yet, in other respects she was unusual among the women of her generation. She drove a truck, worked in a poultry processing factory, and developed the practice of engaging individual onion growers in informal wage negotiations on behalf of *barrio* field workers. By the 1940s, her fearless and outspoken nature had established the young, bilingual Terronez as a community leader and activist.⁹

During World War II, over half a million Mexican Americans entered the armed forces, where they were disproportionately represented in comparison to all other ethnic and minority groups.¹⁰ On the homefront, comparatively high numbers of Mexicanas filled nontraditional jobs in war production industries. After the war, as was true for all women, their newly acquired skills did not translate to ongoing economic opportunities and the majority of Cook’s Point families remained in the *barrio*.¹¹ What kept

them there was a combination of poverty, prejudice, and a sense of place so strong that it would reunite its former residents every year, even fifty years after the Point was closed.¹²

During the twenty-nine years that Mary Terronez lived at Cook's Point, from 1923 to 1952, the settlement remained largely invisible to most Davenport residents. In January 1952, it drew local attention when its owner issued evacuation notices to residents, to make way for a factory to be built on the site. He gave barrio residents just six months to find alternative housing. Despite her status as a Mexican national, Terronez stepped forward to help her community deal with the impending housing crisis, working with a cross-section of community activists and local government officials.¹³ Along with other Cook's Point residents, she attended a gathering of around 150 community members and made what was, by all accounts, a remarkable speech, in which she refuted accusations that Mexicans liked the poor living conditions of Cook's Point. She concluded, "We want our children to grow up in as good an environment as your children."¹⁴ While Terronez's appeal was consistent with traditional women's issues of family and community, her willingness to speak out defines her as an activist and early feminist in the tradition of "community feminism" described by Ula Taylor.¹⁵

The closing of Cook's Point marked a turning point for a cadre of Mexican and Mexican American men and women. Through their community work, Terronez and others became acquainted with members of the League for Social Justice, a Davenport organization that promoted racial equality through grassroots organizing, propelled by an enthusiastic cross-class, multicultural, and interfaith membership. The League was inspired by former students of activist priests on the faculty of St. Ambrose College in Davenport.¹⁶ One such student was Charles Toney, an African American Roman Catholic activist and welder at John Deere Plow. His wife, Ann Toney, was a beautician. Aside from being members of the League for Social Justice, the Toney family were also leaders of the Davenport NAACP and veterans of the local civil rights movement. In 1945, they had won a landmark suit in Iowa district court against a Davenport resident who refused to serve them at a local ice cream parlor. Looking back, Ann Toney remarked, "After the ice cream parlor, I knew that we were headed to try to make life a lot better for everybody. No one said it, but we knew that something had to be done."¹⁷

Seven years later, in 1952, Ann Toney and other League members turned their attention to the residents of Cook's Point. Toney went door-to-door conducting a survey of the barrio while other members of the League for Social Justice assisted in locating affordable housing for the soon-to-be displaced residents of Cook's Point. Some League members

quite literally moved Cook's Point houses to a new area on Highway 22, where the Ramirez family had purchased land. Shortly after the barrio was closed, the Toney's became godparents to Mary Terronez's nephew.¹⁸ This early experience of community organizing based on coalition building and multi-cultural friendship and cooperation provided a strong foundation for future activism.

In the years after the closing of Cook's Point, the children of barrio women carried their tradition of activism into new neighborhoods and organizations. In the late 1950s, former barrio residents founded local chapters of two Mexican American organizations—the American GI Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Founded in Texas in 1948 to uphold the rights of Mexican American World War II veterans, the Forum supported a wide range of civil rights issues. Nationally, women were active partners and sometimes leaders in the affairs of the Forum. At its first annual conference in 1956, women successfully lobbied for recognition of a women's auxiliary; the next year they sponsored a women's leadership conference. Mary Vasquez Olvera—a former Cook's Point resident whose two brothers were killed during World War II—worked closely with her husband to form an Iowa chapter of the Forum in 1958. She took a lead role in managing its affairs as well as its women's auxiliary, whose members were active in politics, education, and civil rights. By creating and demanding opportunities in leadership and political activism, Forum women nurtured and passed on to their children an activist consciousness firmly rooted in their cultural heritage and identity.¹⁹

As Cynthia Orozco has pointed out, prior to the 1970s, Mexican American women did not belong to any national organizations specifically for women, and their participation in voluntary organizations composed of both men and women is “a history largely untold.” Orozco notes that when LULAC, the oldest Mexican American civil rights organization in the United States, was founded in Texas in 1929, it was distinctly patriarchal. In 1933, it created women-only chapters known as “Ladies LULAC” councils, which were discontinued in 1960, after which all LULAC councils were composed of men and women.²⁰ Of Iowa's five LULAC councils, the only Ladies LULAC was Council No. 308 in Des Moines, which was chartered in 1958. The next year, LULAC Council No. 10 was formed in Davenport.²¹

From its inception in 1959, Council 10 included both men and women. Reflecting on an early effort to form a Ladies LULAC Council in Davenport, one “LULACKer” recalled, “The guys didn't want us to. They wanted us to stay with the men.”²² Perhaps the male members foresaw the pivotal role the women would play in Council 10, which immediately pushed forward a strong civil rights agenda, establishing a reputation as “Iowa's most

active council.”²³ In 1960, Estefanía Rodríguez—the daughter of Norberto Rodríguez, a Mexican railroad worker, and of “Muggie” Adams Rodríguez, an African American woman from Alabama—held the office of secretary of LULAC Council 10. In that capacity, she worked with her younger brother, Ernest, to publish a Spanish-language newspaper, *El Reportero*. While the council’s predominantly male leadership served on the Davenport Human Relations Commission and local civil rights organizations, its women proved indispensable to the day-to-day running of the council, supporting community projects, preserving cultural traditions, and fighting racial discrimination.²⁴ Operating under the radar, these midwestern Mexicanas maneuvered deftly between family and community to uphold their rights in a largely patriarchal world.

Working through LULAC and the GI Forum, women demanded rights of economic citizenship as they quietly and strategically integrated neighborhoods and school districts. After buying a home in an Anglo neighborhood in 1963, stay-at-home mom Lucy Vargas—whose husband was a laborer at John Deere Plow, president of LULAC Council 10, and a member of the Davenport Human Relations Commission—responded with wit and steely determination to neighbors’ concerns: “I had neighbors come over here and ask me, ‘Oh, we hear that you’re a family with fourteen kids.’... I says, ‘No, there’s seven but they make enough noise for fourteen.’” By upholding her right to live in an Anglo neighborhood, Vargas asserted the right for her children to be educated in the Anglo school. Nor did she allow the chilly reception she received at local PTA meetings to deter her from planning for the educational future of her children.²⁵

Rather than work through unresponsive PTAs, Mexican American women used the networks and resources of LULAC and the American GI Forum. They coordinated chili suppers and raffle ticket sales for annual fiestas and queen competitions to raise money to support educational scholarships for Mexican American students. A 1961 Council 10 newsletter reflects the traditional role of the women in those early fundraising drives: “ATTENTION ALL WOMEN DONATING CHILI: Here is the recipe to follow so all the Chili will be uniform.” LULAC Council 10’s extraordinary success in fundraising for its educational scholarship program, which each year brought in between five and twenty-five thousand dollars, illustrates how women used traditional roles to achieve far-reaching objectives.²⁶

The strong tradition of women’s activism, handed down through barrio families, became increasingly visible over time. During the 1960s, women battled for opportunities embedded in the civil rights legislation of the day, moving outside Mexican American organizations to participate in community coalitions and fill leadership positions in local, state, and regional organizations. As a result, we can begin to discern the agency of

midwestern Mexicanas in the type of labor feminism described by Dorothy Sue Cobble and Dennis Deslippe.²⁷

In the decade that followed the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, LULAC Council 10 worked with the Davenport Catholic Interracial Council (the successor to the League for Social Justice). The interracial cooperation fostered since the 1950s brought hard-earned victories in the form of a fair housing ordinance and a paid, full-time director for the Davenport Human Relations Commission funded by the City of Davenport. Building on their historical experience of community-based feminist activism, Mexicanas from Iowa and Illinois expanded their activism to employment rights in the 1960s and 1970s. An important catalyst to this development came when local concern for the rights of migrant workers in Iowa fused with the national issues raised by the Delano, California, grape strike that had been underway since 1965.²⁸

The farmworker movement for justice, led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, had a profound impact in Iowa, where a core group of activists simultaneously supported the rights of grape pickers in California and of migrant workers in Iowa's agricultural industry. National publicity on the Delano grape strike helped Iowa activists draw attention to conditions endured by the roughly three thousand migrant workers and their families who arrived each year to work in the fields of Iowa and southern Minnesota. Many Iowans, previously unaware that migrant workers were employed in their state, now identified farm labor in Iowa with the powerful 1960 CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame*, which had brought to light the deplorable condition of migrant workers employed in Florida's agricultural industry.²⁹

The children of barrio women led the grape boycott campaign in Iowa. Mary Terronez's son, John, born in Cook's Point in 1938, was the state director of Iowa LULAC when he formed the Quad City Grape Boycott Committee in 1968. His committee co-chair, Ernest Rodriguez, born in boxcar No. 8 in Holy City in 1928, was the son of Muggie Adams Rodriguez, and brother of LULAC secretary Estafanía Rodriguez. These and other former barrio residents, who had worked together on civil rights issues for many years, now turned their attention to the rights of grape pickers in California. LULAC Council 10 led the coalition to support the grape boycott campaign in Davenport. Through their involvement in that campaign, Davenport Mexicanas gained activist skills picketing local supermarkets, preparing mailings, attending meetings, and coordinating rallies. During the dedication of a World War II monument on Hero Street in nearby Silvis, Illinois, Mary Terronez's daughter climbed to the top of the monument to hold high a "Boycott Grapes" poster.³⁰

Between 1967 and 1970, "settled-out" migrant workers and Mexicana

activist nuns turned to the Iowa struggle, where high-profile battles in the Iowa legislature were waged for the rights of migrant workers.³¹ Mexican Americans and their Anglo allies supported bills to establish a minimum age for the employment of migrant children on Iowa farms and to establish health and safety standards for migrant worker housing. In 1967, Irene Guzman voiced her support for the migrant child labor bill at a joint hearing before the Iowa House and Senate committees on human and industrial relations. She refuted the claim of Iowa canning companies that migrant workers themselves pressured employers to allow children to work in the fields, arguing instead that she and her husband felt “very strongly that we have a right to give [our children] the education we didn’t have.”³²

The legislative struggle for the rights of Iowa migrant workers also engaged Mexican American women in Muscatine, a major center for migrant labor twenty-five miles downstream from Davenport on the Mississippi River. Each year approximately one thousand agricultural laborers, predominantly U.S. citizens of Mexican descent from Texas, came to work in the tomato fields around Muscatine where the H. J. Heinz Company operated a large canning facility. In 1969, leaders of the 150-member Muscatine Community Effort Organization (CEO) helped expose the shameful conditions endured by migrant workers and their children on some Iowa farms. Inspired by the national grape boycott campaign, CEO members proclaimed in their flyer: “RAZA, apoyenos para ganar nuestros DERECHOS en beneficio de todos nosotros y sobre todo nuestros hijos” (Raza, let’s lift ourselves up to gain our rights for the benefit of us all and especially of our children).³³ Members of the Muscatine CEO and Quad City Grape Boycott Committee joined forces to work with organized labor and Iowa House Representative John Tapscott to plan the official start of a boycott of H. J. Heinz Company products.³⁴

In southeastern Iowa, Mexican American activist nuns Irene, Molly, and Lucinda Muñoz led the fight in the fields. They earned a reputation as “trouble-shooters on the front lines.”³⁵ The biological sisters, who were bilingual, were the children of first- and second-generation Mexican immigrants. They grew up in a working-class, ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood in West Des Moines, Iowa. Irene Muñoz trained as a public health nurse and joined the order of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary (CHM) in Davenport. Responding to principles set forth by the Second Vatican Council, Sister Irene sought and received permission to go out into the community where she felt she could be of greater service to others.³⁶

In 1967, Sister Irene arrived in Muscatine, where she would spend the next fifteen years providing health services to migrant workers. Working for the Muscatine Migrant Committee in cooperation with doctors from

the University of Iowa, she helped organize the free medical clinic that served patients each Friday evening in the basement of a local church.³⁷ In 1973, with funding from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Sister Irene and her sister, Sister Molly Muñoz, opened the doors of the modest but welcoming Muscatine Migrant Clinic. Staffing the clinic with the assistance of two University of Iowa medical students, the sisters provided free medical care to migrant workers. Within four years of its opening, the clinic was serving over 2,500 migrant workers annually in 32 labor camps in six counties along the Iowa and Illinois border.³⁸

Over time, some Muscatine growers grew increasingly hostile toward the sisters. “Rabble rousers, they called us,” Sister Irene remembered. “I think about when we first arrived, my sister and I, they called us the good nuns and then when we left, they called us the damned nuns.”³⁹ Because of their status in the church, the nuns were initially given some latitude, but that waned as they became a potential threat to farmers’ profits. Growers did not always welcome the sisters’ regular visits to the homes of migrant workers living temporarily on their property, as it afforded an opportunity for the nuns to inspect the camps and report violations of Iowa’s migrant housing law. Sister Irene had “run-ins” with the farmers, and one farmer kept a shotgun to “throw her off.” On one occasion, Sister Molly was arrested for “criminal trespassing” on private property.⁴⁰

Looking back on her years in Muscatine, Sister Irene Muñoz noted, “We really pushed for a lot of changes in the state of Iowa.”⁴¹ In 1969, she testified at a public meeting in Davenport called by the Iowa State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Her testimony helped lay the groundwork for the creation of the Iowa Spanish Speaking Peoples Task Force, which led to the formation of the Iowa Spanish Speaking Peoples Commission in 1976, on which Sister Irene served.⁴² She was elected to represent Iowa on a steering committee charged with the formation of a Midwest Council of La Raza in 1970.⁴³ During this period, like Dolores Huerta, Sister Irene Muñoz identified with *el Movimiento Chicano* rather than the organizations of predominantly white, middle-class feminist movements. Yet by 1977, when the National Women’s Conference convened in Houston, Sister Irene was the only Mexican American delegate from Iowa to attend.⁴⁴

Between 1968 and 1975, the momentum generated by the grape boycott campaign and nurtured by the social justice ideology of a liberal clergy was captured in a wave of grassroots organizations in Davenport. One such organization was the Minority Coalition, known as MIN-CO. Formed in the spring of 1970, it drew representatives from the NAACP, LULAC, the local grape boycott campaign, and neighborhood committees. Although women did not hold leadership positions in MIN-CO, they supported its

demands to strengthen educational opportunities for minority students, which had long been an objective of LULAC and GI Forum women. Foremost among MIN-CO's demands was that the Davenport School District hire 150 African American teachers and 50 bilingual Mexican American teachers. (Two years earlier, just 10 of the district's 973 teachers were African American, and only 1 was Latino.) By the start of the 1970 school year, the number of minority teachers employed by the Davenport School District had risen to 30 as it bowed to pressure from local activist coalitions and the Iowa Civil Rights Commission.⁴⁵

In addition to improving educational opportunities for minority students in Davenport, activists sought to change local employment practices that prevented many Mexican Americans from attaining economic citizenship. Former Cook's Point resident Dolores Carrillo understood that, for Mexican Americans, even a high school diploma did not guarantee union jobs with living wages such as those available to employees at the Oscar Mayer packinghouse in Davenport.⁴⁶ A second-generation Mexican American, Carrillo had studied for the GED to encourage her daughters to stay in school. She became discouraged when, despite their educational accomplishment, her daughters were unsuccessful in gaining entry to better-paying blue-collar jobs. In 1970, the thirty-six-year-old Carrillo saw the issue in terms of race and gender-based discrimination.⁴⁷

That year Carrillo organized a boycott of the Oscar Mayer plant to draw attention to the company's discriminatory hiring practices. She understood the power of public protest from her experience in the local grape boycott campaign. "That's what I learned from that—fight for your rights," she explained. "You have the same right as anybody else. Fight for it. If you don't get it...you can picket until you do get it."⁴⁸ An experienced factory worker, Carrillo had expected to be hired by the Davenport Oscar Mayer company on each of the numerous occasions that she submitted her employment application. She suspected discrimination because, although the company stated that it was not hiring, Ernest Rodriguez—employed inside the plant at that time and also a member of the Davenport HRC—confirmed that Anglos were being hired.⁴⁹

Carrillo worked with Ernest Rodriguez and Mary Terronez to coordinate the protest, bringing together Mexican American women from Davenport and Muscatine to picket the plant. A welfare mother herself at that time, Carrillo gathered other Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) mothers as well as African American women and men to stand picket duty outside the plant. Their signs proclaimed, "Brown is Beautiful," "Boycott Oscar Mayer" and "1970—Year of the Chicano." Their action received little attention from the Davenport media. However, an Iowa City feminist press with national circulation, *Ain't I A Woman?*, covered the

story under the headline: "Not Everybody Loves an Oscar Mayer Wiener." This front-page coverage by a feminist publication commending the agency of Mexicana picketers supports the argument that, indeed, these women did the work of feminism.⁵⁰

The Oscar Mayer boycott illustrates the multi-faceted approaches adopted by working-class Mexicanas as they confronted the dual oppression of race and gender discrimination. The women collaborated with Ernest Rodriguez to back up their action by filing a complaint with the Davenport HRC. The commission found that the Oscar Mayer Company was using a culturally biased test, known as the Bendix Dexterity Test, in its hiring procedure. The test, administered to women who applied to work at Oscar Mayer, was designed to measure the quickness of the applicant's fingers and involved reading and carrying out a series of written English-language instructions. As a result of the women's protest, the company discontinued its use of the Bendix test.⁵¹

In 1970, the Diocese of Davenport established the Area Board for Migrants (ABFM) to provide a community-based organization to tackle racial discrimination. With additional funding and support from the Dioceses of Rockford and Peoria in Illinois, the ABFM served as liaison between the Spanish-speaking community, public officials, and institutions.⁵² In November 1970, Ernest Rodriguez left his packinghouse job for a full-time position as director of the ABFM. Working out of its Davenport store-front office, he filed civil rights complaints, edited the Spanish-language newsletter, *Columnus*, and initiated an immigration counseling service and a job placement program known as Trabajo.⁵³ He hired Mary Terronez as a job developer for the Davenport Trabajo program, where she worked with residents, employers, and welfare agencies, tracking hiring procedures and the retention of Spanish-speaking employees to see that their rights were upheld. Terronez often accompanied Latinos to job interviews, working directly with plant managers to ensure that they hired qualified minority applicants. Looking back, Rodriguez noted, "sometimes I wondered who was directing whom. She [Mary] kept me on track that the purpose of our program was to serve the needs of La Raza."⁵⁴

As members and leaders of neighborhood associations, women used traditional community-based approaches to achieve far-reaching goals. Working with MIN-CO and the ABFM, residents addressed housing, education, police-community relations, and welfare rights. On the east side of town, Estefanía Rodriguez organized the Community Active Mothers and was well known in her neighborhood for the often repeated words of encouragement that had been passed down to her in the Mexican barrio by her African American mother: "Look up my young American, stand firmly on the earth. Noble deeds and mental powers give title over birth."⁵⁵

In 1971, members of the Eastside Neighborhood Assembly organized a workshop for AFDC mothers led by Erma Gray, an African American leader of the Chicago-based welfare rights organization, Mothers' Power. Gray encouraged Davenport AFDC mothers to stand up for their rights and, if necessary, take their children and even sit in at the welfare office.⁵⁶

Maria Aguilera, the sister of Dolores Carrillo and a long-time acquaintance of Mary Terronez, was an elected officer of the West Neighborhood Committee in 1970. She had participated in the local grape boycott campaign and also supported her sister by picketing Oscar Mayer.⁵⁷ Aguilera's experience in community organizing and protest prepared her to stand her ground in the workplace. A factory worker with many years of experience in Chicago plants, she set her sights on a good-paying union job at International Harvester Farmall in Rock Island, Illinois, where her husband was employed. In 1973, after her application was rejected on the basis that Mexican women were too short to work on Farmall's assembly line, she questioned the company policy. She explained to the hiring officer, "Nobody's ever told me I was too short to work." Aguilera remained outside the personnel office all day, returning each day for five days until she received an interview with the personnel manager. She was finally hired to work on the assembly line, a job she held for many years.⁵⁸

Ongoing concern over discriminatory employment practices prompted fifty Mexican Americans to picket the Farmall plant in the fall of 1975. Production came to a halt when the union, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1309, honored the Latino picket line.⁵⁹ Aguilera's experience and that of other Mexican Americans, led LULAC Council 10 to file a complaint with the Department of Defense (DOD) against International Harvester Company Farmall Works. The DOD responded to their complaint in 1976 when it warned Farmall against continuing discriminatory practices in hiring, job retention, and termination. Its investigation found that "Latino women [sic] who applied for unskilled and semi-skilled jobs when compared to all other applicants, all female applicants and Black female applicants, were adversely affected." The report identified the use of height and weight requirements as a partial cause for the adverse screening out of Latino women prior to interviewing.⁶⁰

Like Aguilera and Carrillo, Eva Savala applied for a nontraditional, blue-collar job, less as an expression of her feminist sensibilities than because it paid significantly more than the traditional women's jobs available in the region. The job involved manufacturing truck parts for Mack semi trucks in East Moline, Illinois. In 1973, the McLaughlin Body Company hired Savala to fulfill its requirement to employ more women. She joined the union—UAW Local 1414—and entered a male-dominated workforce with only three women working in the plant. Her job involved cleaning and

hoisting truck parts after they came out of the press. The first few days were an unwelcome shock to Savala: "It was rough. I had never worked in a factory...and I almost walked out the first night—almost—because it was not very clean. The language!... I was not happy. I would come home and be dirty from head to toe. I couldn't eat."⁶¹

Apart from the physically demanding work she did, Savala was routinely subjected to degrading sexual remarks from co-workers. As she pursued avenues for addressing her sexual harassment grievance, she read the union contract to consider her options and decided to run against her union steward in the next election. With just three months seniority at the plant, Savala was elected to the position of union steward in UAW Local 1414, becoming the first woman and the first Mexican American to hold an office in that local.⁶²

Eva Savala won the respect of her co-workers, who re-elected her to represent them as their union steward for the next twelve years. She spearheaded local programs to uphold the voting rights of minority populations, gaining experience in community service and political action through the union. As she prepared to leave the plant and go on staff as the first Latina international representative for UAW Region 4, the personnel manager remarked to Savala, "If I was ever in a bargaining position, I would want you to represent me."⁶³

The road to economic citizenship taken by second-generation Mexican American women like Vargas, Carrillo, and Savala forged its way through the complex intersection of race, class, and gender. Iowa Mexican American women hailed from a rich tradition of women's activism exemplified by their mothers and other strong female role models in the barrios. Their activism was informed by their grassroots experience in civil rights organizing and their involvement in the farmworker movement for justice during the 1960s and 1970s. Mexicanas in the heartland identified with *La Raza* and *el Movimiento Chicano*, and their contributions to feminist advances took place in part through the labor movement. As a result of their community, labor, and civil rights activism from the 1940s through the 1960s, Mexicanas from Iowa and Illinois were able to demand, and in many cases secure, rights as workers and as U.S. citizens during the 1970s. Their identities as mothers, housewives, breadwinners, and nuns informed their approach to community organizing and workplace advocacy. By bridging the period between "waves," the activism of these mid-western Mexicanas challenges the notion that there was a lull in feminist activism. Their early and little-noted contributions to the women's movement demand a more expansive interpretation of feminist history, one that encompasses family and faith, idealism and bread and butter issues.

Notes

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12. Maria Aguilera Papers, IWA; Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 149; Weaver, "Barrio to ¡Boicoteo!": 235.
13. Mary Terronez became a US citizen in 1963, Mary Terronez Papers; "Racial Injustice in Iowa," *Labor*, Vol. 26, No. 15 (October 1963), Rev. William T. O'Connor Collection.
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19. Teresa Paloma Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 217–18; Mary Olvera interview; Richard Santillán, "Latino Politics in the Midwestern United States: 1915–1986," in *Latinos and the Political System*, ed. F. Chris Garcia (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 99–124.
20. Cynthia E. Orozco, "Alice Dickerson Montemayor: Feminism and Mexican American Politics in the 1930s" in *Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women's West*, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 435–56; idem, "Regionalism, Politics, and Gender in Southwest History: The League of United Latin American Citizens' Expansion into New Mexico from Texas, 1929–1945," *Western History Quarterly* 29 (1998): 459–83.
21. Jesse Mosqueda and Felix Sanchez, "Iowa LULAC History, 1957–1972," 3 June 1972, LULAC Council 10 records, IWA. Weaver, "Barrio to 'Boicoteo!':": 229–33, 237–38.
22. Estefanía Rodríguez interview.
23. "Iowa LULAC History, 1957–1972."
24. Estefanía Rodríguez interview; minutes, 26 April 1960, LULAC Council 10 Records; LULAC Council 10 newsletter, 21 October 1998, idem; *Quad-City Times*, 31 August 2004. Born in 1923, Rodríguez grew up in Holy City, a predominantly Mexican settlement on the Mississippi in Bettendorf, Iowa, just three miles from Cook's Point. During the 1910s, her mother, "Muggie" Adams Rodríguez, managed a boarding house in the coal mining town of Buxton in southcentral Iowa. There Adams met and married Norberto Rodríguez, who had been a lodger at her boarding house. (Family history, Ernest Rodríguez Papers, IWA; Department of Commerce and Labor, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 – Population, Buxton Town, Monroe County, Iowa.*) The 1910 census records Margarita Adams as Muggie (her nickname) Glenn (the name of her first husband Adolphus Glenn).
25. Lucy Vargas, interview with author, Davenport, 3 October 2006, IWA.
26. LULAC Council 10 newsletter, April 1961, LULAC Council 10 Records; "scholarship program" folders, Box 4, idem; Salvador Lopez, interview with author, Davenport, 21 May 2007, IWA.
27. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); For the role of rank-and-file women in legitimizing the demands of middle-class feminist organizations, see Dennis Deslippe, *Rights, Not Roses: Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945–1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
28. Weaver, "Barrio to 'Boicoteo!':": 235–53.
29. Ibid; *¿A donde vamos ahora? (Where are we going now?)* A Report of the Problems of the Spanish Surnamed and Migrant Population in Iowa prepared by the Iowa State Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights, September 1970, LULAC Council 10 Records.
30. Quad-City Grape Boycott Committee newsletter, 18 April 1969, LULAC Council 10 records; *Times-Democrat*, 26 February 1969; film of Hero Street ceremony, possession of Mary Terronez.
31. The term "settled-out" describes former migrant agricultural laborers who had settled out of the migrant stream to live permanently in an area where they had previously worked seasonally.
32. "Ask Schools, Not Fields for Migrants," *Des Moines Register*, 28 February 1967; Irene Guzman, interview with Teresa García, Des Moines, 12 July 2007, IWA.

33. CEO letter, 24 April 1969, Muscatine Migrant Committee (MMC) Records, IWA; Gloria Casas, interview with Iskra Nuñez, Muscatine, Iowa, 16 June 2005, IWA. On the use of the term "La Raza" by Mexican American civil rights organizations, see David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 35–36.
34. "Migrants Set Heinz Boycott," *Davenport Catholic Messenger*, 10 April 1969; Weaver, "Barrio to 'Boicoteo!': 195–201.
35. "Sister Irene and Sister Molly: Nightingales for Migrant Workers," *Des Moines Register*, 20 November 1977.
36. Sister Irene Muñoz, interview with Iskra Nuñez and author, Ottumwa, Iowa, 3 August 2005, IWA.
37. MMC annual report, 1969, 38, University of Iowa Libraries; board of directors minutes, 28 March 1967, 27 June 1967, 5 July 1967, MMC records, IWA.
38. *Des Moines Register*, 20 November 1977.
39. Irene Muñoz interview.
40. Juanita and Ernest Rodriguez, interview with Iskra Nuñez and author, 6 August 2005, IWA; court intake record, Milan, Iowa, for Sister Molly Muñoz, arrested in Buffalo Prairie, Iowa, 22 August 1978, Sister Molly Muñoz folder, IWA.
41. Irene Muñoz interview.
42. *LULAC Glances*, October 1969, LULAC Council 10 Records; *¿A donde vamos ahora?*
43. "Davenport LULACs to Mexican American Midwest Conference," *LULAC Glances*, 26 May 1970; Registration for Urban Studies Mexican American Conference, University of Notre Dame, 17–18 April 1970; *Columnas*, Davenport, 28 May 1970, Ernest Rodriguez Papers.
44. *LULAC Glances*, 26 May 1970; "\$624,000 asked by Midwest Council of La Raza," *Columnas*, 1970 (p. 8), Ernest Rodriguez Papers; *Los Desarraigados*, Notre Dame, IN, Vol. 1, No. 2, Junio 1973, Sister Irene Muñoz folder, IWA; *The Spirit of Houston, the First National Women's Conference* (National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, Washington D.C., March 1978), 280.
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46. "Not Everybody Loves An Oscar Mayer Weiner," *Ain't I a Woman? A Midwest Newspaper of Women's Liberation* Vol. 1, No. 4, 21 August 1970, IWA.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid; *Times-Democrat*, 12 August 1970; *Times-Democrat*, 13 August 1970; Dolores [Carrillo] Garcia, interview with author, Davenport, 22 September 2005, IWA.
49. Dolores [Carrillo] Garcia, interviews with author, Davenport, 22 September 2005 and 26 September 2006; Ernest Rodriguez to author, 2 March 2006, author's files.
50. Mary Terronez, interview with author, Davenport, 10 October 2006, IWA; Dolores Garcia interviews; Maria Mercedes Aguilera interviews with author, Davenport, 22 September 2005 and 19 September 2006, IWA; *Ain't I A Woman?* 21 August, 1970.
51. *Ain't I A Woman*; Rodriguez to author. The Bendix Dexterity Test, given to women applicants at Oscar Mayer, was designed for female-designated jobs on the sliced meat line.
52. *Times-Democrat*, 27 February 1971; *Catholic Messenger*, 15 October 1970; Untitled history of the Area Board for Migrants (ABFM), ca. 1974, ABFM folder, MMC Records.
53. Untitled history of the ABFM.
54. Ernest Rodriguez, eulogy for Mary Terronez, 9 September, 2009, Mary Terronez papers; Mary Terronez resumé, ibid; Mary Terronez interview, 10 October 2006; Dolores [Carrillo] Garcia interview, 26 September 2006; ABFM folder, LULAC Council 10 Records.
55. LULAC Council 10 newsletter, 21 October 1998; *Quad-City Times*, 31 August 2004; *Quad-City Times*, 23 May 1999; Estefanía Rodriguez interview. The words passed down from

- mother to daughter come from a poem by Caroline Howard Gilman published in *Stories and Poems by Mother and Daughter* (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1872).
56. *The Eastside Story*, Davenport, January 1971, LULAC Council 10 Records; *Times-Democrat*, 30 January 1971; *Chicago Daily Defender*, 14 August 1969; Anne M. Valk, "'Mother Power': The Movement for Welfare Rights in Washington D. C., 1966-1972," *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter 2000): 34-58.
 57. *Friendly News*, Davenport, July 1970, Box 9, LULAC Council 10 records.
 58. Maria Aguilera interviews.
 59. "Farmall Workers Honor Picket," *Hard Times, the Workers' Newspaper*, Davenport, 5 November 1975, LULAC Council 10 Records; *Quad-City Times*, 4 November 1975; Henry Vargas, interview with author, Davenport, 26 September 2006, IWA.
 60. From William D. Faughnan, Department of Defense, to Henry P. Vargas, president LULAC Council 10, 20 August 1976, LULAC Council 10 Records. The Department of Defense was the federal agency that oversaw contract compliance with federal employment regulations.
 61. Eva Savala, interview with author, East Moline, Illinois, 27 September 2005, IWA; Savala resumé, IWA. Richard Santillán references Eva Savala, spelled "Zavala," in "Midwestern Mexican-American Women and the Struggle for Gender Equality," 104, and fn. 59 and 67.
 62. Eva Savala interview.
 63. *Ibid.*