

**USING COUNTER-MEMORY TO BUILD AN HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE
OF STRUGGLE**

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this project was to transcribe a 2010 interview with Raul Ceja, a resident of Santa Maria, California who had been a member of the Local 1222 of the Laborers International Union of North America. The interviewee Raul Ceja was born in Guadalupe, California, raised in Nipomo, and was a current resident of Santa Maria, California at the time of the interview. Raul Ceja is known locally and respected for facilitating the United Farm Workers Union's establishment throughout the Central Coast. The significance of Raul Ceja's interview is that he has personal reflections and perspectives on controversies specific to the Central Coast, thus providing an example of counter-memory that gives us an alternative and previously suppressed account to the established knowledge that has been propagated by those individuals and institutions with greater power.

Keywords: Counter-memory, subjugated knowledge, farm worker, Cesar Chávez

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CHAPTER I

Literature Review

“The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.”

Jorges Luis Borges, as cited by Michel Foucault
(*Language, Counter-Memory* 5).

I. Purpose of the Study

Raul Ceja is a respected leader with longtime ties to the Central Coast. Ceja represented the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local 1222 (Santa Maria) for approximately thirty years. During his career Ceja worked diligently to represent both the membership of LIUNA and the members of Santa Maria’s Hispanic population. His innovative efforts in both these areas resulted in important achievements that unified and magnified the voice of Hispanic workers in the Central Coast and beyond. He continues to be active in his community; in 2009, he and his wife, Minga, were honored with the Santa Barbara County Action Network’s Social Justice Award “[f]or promoting fairness, tolerance, equality, respect and compassion for all people in our community” (“North County Awards Dinner”). My transcription project sought to shed light on how an important Hispanic unionist understood the major civil rights and labor controversies of his place and time. It also tries to acknowledge the heretofore unrepresented, behind-the-scenes struggles in which he participated in his effort to give voice to Mexican and Mexican-American farm workers and their struggles for justice.

II. Theories of silencing (Counter-memory-Subjugated Knowledge).

In Cultural Studies, the question of the meaning of absence in representation is a fundamental concern. My project approaches this question from the perspective of three leading scholars who have shaped the theorization of counter-memory and its related ideas: Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, and George Lipsitz.

All three agree that theories of absence, silence, and representation are interconnected. In order to analyze absence and silence, Hall argues that we first need to identify the elements that construct representation. Representation occurs when we apply meaning to language. Language may be identified as a single letter or combination of letters, an abstract or physical image and even a voice. In short, language is anything that has the ability and potential to reflect an argument or series of arguments within our thought process. Once we process language and use it to apply meaning to a situation or sign, representation occurs; knowledge is produced when that representation is circulated in society. However, it must be noted that within “certain historical moments, some people had more power to speak about some subjects than others” (Hall 42). The presence of some voices, especially of those who hold power, can work to choose the vocabulary, define the arguments, and galvanize institutions around certain solutions that maintain the status quo. All the while, the voices of others who lack the means of representation are suppressed, and their definitions of and solutions to a problem or situation are silenced.

In chapter one of *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall discusses Foucault to explain how “power” in representation works.

Hall argues that Foucault's contribution consists in identifying "the relationship between knowledge and power, and how power operated within what he [Foucault] called an institutional apparatus and its technologies (techniques)" (Hall 47).

Institutions of power define what is true and correct by representing and documenting these ideas in books, scholarly journals, and media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, television and radio news, and more. The repetition of these representations not only constructs the knowledge regimes the audience accepts true, it tries to remove, ignore or discredit representations that contradict it. Representation, therefore, "works as much through what is *not* shown, as through what is" (Hall 59).

In this sense, as I will illustrate later, the agricultural industry in Santa Maria has historically operated as an economic institution of power because it has defined the truths about immigrant farm laborers, via its recurring representations in local media outlets, such as *The Santa Maria Times*, but also in their power to create the economic and social conditions in which these representations were embedded. After all, there is no better proof of immigrant backwardness than the material and social conditions in which most of them appear to live, and accept. It is in this way that discourse analysis can defamiliarize the gaze of agribusiness and make it visible when newspapers like *The Santa Maria Times* represent local "farm workers." Institutions of power thus continually attempt to silence other forms of knowledge that would challenge their hold on the mechanisms of truth making by omitting or discrediting those thoughts and opinions that contradict them. According to Foucault, the repeated silencing of oppressed social or ethnic minorities serves to convince a society that the

minority's subjugated condition is normal and natural, a pattern of representation that acquires that much more force and verisimilitude because the thoughts and opinions of the farm worker have been discounted in advance as irrelevant or inaccurate.

Foucault theorizes that when institutions of power systematically censor the expressions and ideas of other groups with lesser power, these ideas also become subjugated knowledge. However, intellectuals who conform to the dominant historical narratives inevitably conceal these “blocs of historical knowledge” (*Power/Knowledge* 82). It is through the critique of such forms of subjugated knowledge that we can begin to unearth previously disqualified historical contents and move forward in building a more complete understanding of “historical knowledge of struggles” (*Power/Knowledge* 83). Knowledge ceases to be subjugated when it breaks through and opens up a space for its own expression. That expression often begins with the recovery and representation of disquieting memories of those first moments when a group understood that it had been conquered or subjugated. When these memories are used to modify our interpretation of history it “constructs a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time” (*Language, Counter-Memory* 160).

George Lipsitz, in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Culture*, defines counter-memory as:

Counter-memory is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward toward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden

histories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myths that seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past...Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience (213).

According to Foucault, “If you wish to understand and perceive events in the present, you can only do so through the past, through an understanding—carefully derived from the past—which was specifically developed to clarify the present” (*Language, Counter-Memory* 220). Lipsitz adds, “Thus counter-memory is not a rejection of history, but a reconstitution of it” (227).

Lisa Flores in her 2003 article, “Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration,” recounts how the changing historic representation of Mexican immigrants has influenced anti-immigrant legislation and initiated U.S. government sponsored deportation drives. In the early 1920’s, Mexican immigrants were seen as the ideal immigrant workforce, “docile people, unlikely to strike or to bring with them radical and un-American ideas” (370). Later, during periods of economic crisis, such as the Depression, the Mexican immigration was represented as a problem; at various times, the news media have represented immigrants as being visible because it was “unexpected,” (e.g., “The growth of the Mexican population in Los Angeles has been phenomenal” 373) or diseased (e.g., “Tuberculosis is common among them” 374), and inherently prone to criminality (e.g., “Alien sent to prison” 374). Her research shows how the institutions in power control the language of immigration and the “solutions” surrounding it (e.g.,

anti-immigrant legislation, including expulsion). Although the present study did not go into this level of detail when selecting search terms, her study demonstrates how power structures dictate discourse or knowledge of immigrants.

In 2006, the Pew Hispanic Center published its 2006 National Survey of Latinos with the special topic, “The Immigration Debate.” The research involved 2,000 Hispanic adults who were surveyed over the telephone. It notes that, with regard to perceptions of discrimination,

As in 2002 and 2004, a significant majority of Latinos (82%) say that discrimination is a problem that prevents Latinos in general from succeeding in America. The intensity of that attitude, however, has increased: 58% of Hispanics now say discrimination is a “major” problem, compared with 44% in the 2002 National Survey of Latinos. Both the native and foreign born see greater problems with discrimination (4).

Although discrimination was viewed as a significant problem, Latinos did not feel that the major political parties were doing anything significant to solve the problem. In particular, the respondents blamed the Republican Party for fostering negative perceptions resulting from immigration debate. “At the same time, the survey provides little solace for the Democratic Party, which showed no significant gains among Hispanic registered voters and which by some measures has lost some support” (ii). By actually surveying Latinos, we notice an important shift that occurs when an institution begins to acknowledge that community’s insights and responses to the pro-immigration marches and policy debate of early 2006 (i).

In relation to the project presented here, the full transcription of Raul Ceja’s interview continues that discursive shift by adding it to the collection of interviews,

documents, and photographs in Kennedy Library's Central Coast Farm Labor Organizing Collection, MS 098. When taken together, these archival contributions begin to serve as a source of counter-memory of the workers' experience during the farm labor organization movement, including their personal interpretations of those events. At the time that these events occurred, these voices were actively suppressed by the institutions of power (e.g., law enforcement, media, government, agricultural industry, schools, etc.). It logically follows, therefore, that the only way to free a subjugated knowledge is through beginning the long process of uncovering and documenting counter-memory of Central Coast farm labor activist such as Raul Ceja.

III. Research Question.

Proving the existence of an absence, of a voice that has not been heard, sounds like an impossible task. One way to tackle this seeming impossibility is to make an inventory of the farm worker experience represented from the perspectives of agribusiness, farm labor contractors, local political authorities, farm labor organizers, and farm workers' voices themselves, to show how the voices of the latter are silenced. In order to do this, I reviewed a large number of newspaper articles and academic literature about farm workers on the Central Coast, looking for any cases in which opinions of or about farm workers were represented, or should have been represented.

To do so, I first did a variety of digital media searches to examine how the different media (newspapers, scholarly journals, and technical reports) constructed the topic of farm workers residing and working in the Central Coast. My methodology consisted of designing a series of text/keyword searches (described

below) using online article databases provided by Robert E. Kennedy Library Services. I selected seven article databases: Academic Search Elite, Chicano Database, CQ Researcher, Ethnic NewsWatch, JSTOR, Project MUSE, and Wiley Online Library. These databases were selected because they would likely cover a wide range of relevant issues either generally (e. g., Academic Search Elite indexes thousands of publications in various disciplines including coverage of the agricultural industry) or more specifically to Latino issues (e.g., Chicano Database (OCLC)). Including both types of databases increased the probability of identifying stories and articles about issues affecting farm workers in or around the Santa Maria Valley. My database search, which occurred between July 14, 2011 and July 20, 2011, retrieved articles that were available in the databases through my initial search date of July 14, 2011.

Table 1 (see Appendix) shows the breadth of the journals and periodicals that were searched. Because these search topics appeared in a wide variety of periodical types (e.g., Medicine or Medical Sciences, Social Sciences, Agricultural Science and Economics) it demonstrates my effort to search the breadth of possible representations of these search topics from an academic and scientific perspective. My searches show that the same breadth is not present for, and does not include, alternative perspectives, especially those of farm workers. The overall pattern of silences, or lost opportunities for representation, when combined with the occasional photograph of farm workers toiling in the field, sustains the idea of that worker as a mute physical presence.

My first search used the search terms “farm worker*” “pesticide*” and “methyl bromide”. It returned 59 results, one of which was a repeat, for a total of 58 results. I briefly summarize eight examples from this search to demonstrate the ways that the farm workers and their struggles are depicted in photographs and textual representations. It should be noted that, although these examples focused on farm workers as objects of representation, the farm worker’s voice was still silenced through the use of pseudonyms, general references (e.g., pictures of farm workers with captions that do not identify individuals), summary attributions as “a farm worker said,” or the presentation of quoted material in English without any reference to the fact that the message may have been originally uttered in Spanish. In David Bacon’s “The U.F.W. Picks Strawberries,” I found instances where two *Mixteco* farm workers from Watsonville, California were quoted in English, but only identified by their first names. In another instance, a Watsonville farm worker was quoted, but she was neither identified by first or last name (Rodriguez, “Organizing Strawberry Fields Forever”). Another article also quotes two Watsonville farm workers by first and last name in English (Sarat, “Horrid Working Conditions Fuse Farm Union Uprising”). In David Hosansky’s article, “Regulating Pesticides,” a farm worker is pictured dispensing a pesticide, yet the farm worker is never identified; a similar situation occurs in “The Barons of Bromide” by Joshua Karliner and Alba Morales. In Keith Douglass Warner’s article, “The Farm Workers and the Franciscans: Reverse Evangelization as Social Prompt for Conversion,” farm workers appear in photographs harvesting atop ladders, in the streets picketing pesticides, and even

being transported upon cattle cart via rail. None of these results represented Santa Maria area farm workers as sources for these newspaper and journal articles.

One article, “Compost Suppresses Disease in the Lab and on the Fields,” by Jerome Goldstein, quotes an organic farmer who does not use methyl bromide. “Our workers make more money on the organic berries, and we get better quality and sweeter berries in the organic growing program” (62). Despite this claim, there is no additional evidence to support it. In its depiction of the farm workers, who presumably reap both health and monetary benefits, they remain unnamed and unquoted. Doing so may have provided a more favorable image of alternatives to the use of methyl bromide in strawberry farming and may have helped persuade other farmers to switch to organic farming techniques.

One of my results included an article that quoted and summarized parts of Dolores Huerta’s presentation at Long Beach State University, (Lopez, "Sí Se Puede."). In the presentation, she traced the struggles farm workers had faced over the decades and discussed some of the continuing issues against which farm workers must struggle. “Make the commitment to get involved,” she asserts (44). Although Dolores Huerta is occasionally quoted in a rare article, ordinary farm workers, particularly Santa Maria’s, are rarely given the opportunity to speak in their own words. Instead, they must be spoken for by journalists, who withhold the worker’s identity to shield them from employer reprisals or apprehension by immigration authorities. The journalist’s patronizing relationship to their subjects also reinforces the naturalness of the farm worker’s muteness.

A second search using “farm worker*” “Central Coast” and “pesticide*” returned 20 results, five of which were repeats, and one was not retrievable, for a net total of 14 results. As with the examples presented above, these articles maintained the farm worker’s silence. One of my results included Diane Solomon’s notable article, “The Devil’s Fruit,” where newly immigrated farm workers in Watsonville were quoted in English and assigned pseudonyms “to protect them” (23). Michael McGrath’s article, "Fifty Years of Civic Accomplishment: The History of the All-America City Award," acknowledges Santa Maria’s lack of affordable housing, the continued success of a rapidly expanding strawberry industry, and the “cultural conflicts” resulting from a 1991 statement made by the mayor of Santa Maria, who claimed “Santa Maria has a Mexican problem” (31). Although McGrath’s article acknowledged the existence of Santa Maria’s farm worker population, he did not think it important to quote any of them so that they might begin to appear as fully human subjects.

My third search included the search terms “farm worker*” “Central Coast” and “methyl bromide”. It returned four results, three of which were repeats, for a total of one article. The farm workers’ voice remained absent in these articles despite the fact that these workers are the most likely to suffer any negative impacts from the use of that chemical.

Finally, I used the terms “farm worker*” and “Santa Maria”. It returned 74 results, nine of which were repeats, and seven of which were not retrievable, for a total of 58 results. A search result of 58 may appear significant, but only five of the

sources provided specific references to Santa Maria, California. Of these, three were scholarly investigations with actual references to Santa Maria, California.

In his academic articles “Weighing the Costs and Benefits of Mexican Immigration: The Mexican-American Perspective” and “Mexican Immigrant Replenishment and the Continuing Significance of Ethnicity and Race,” Tomás Jiménez attempts to interpret how Mexican-Americans in Santa Maria, California and Garden City, Kansas measure the “costs and benefits” resulting from Mexican immigration. Although Jiménez identifies Santa Maria’s Mexican immigrant population as “the only source of agricultural labor in the fields around the city” (“Weighing the Costs and Benefits of Mexican Immigration” 604), his participants represent later generation Mexican-Americans from a variety of non-farm worker occupations (e.g., a liquor store owner, a graphic designer, a law enforcement officer). I found no evidence in his articles establishing Mexican-American farm workers in Santa Maria as agents of their own representation.

In research, “Critical Ethnography and a Vygotskian Pedagogy of Hope: The Empowerment of Mexican Immigrant Children,” Trueba presents a case study of “El Rocío,” a fictitious Central Coast community “situated in the northwestern corner of Santa Barbara County, 75 miles north of the city of Santa Barbara” (597). Other descriptions of the area suggest that El Rocío is actually Guadalupe, California, a small farming community five miles northwest of Santa Maria. The author also gives fictional names to his two interviewees, people identified as Carmen and Mr. Garcia, no last names given, in a presumed attempt to protect his sources.

Carmen is the daughter of a Mexican family that immigrated to the U.S. in 1961, and initiated her farm worker career at the age of eight. According to Trueba, Carmen is a resident of El Rocío and is described as being 37 years of age (1999), a mother of four children, (one of which has special needs) and “suffering [from] many allergic reactions to the chemicals used in the fields and packing companies” (602). Carmen recounts the discrimination she and other children of Mexican-American farm worker families faced in the schools and in the community. Other farm working families also experienced that discrimination in the schools and in the fields.

Mr. Garcia, a Mexican-American elementary school teacher at the time of interview, is represented as attempting to empower his students and their families. “He opens his class with loud *ranchero* or *hip hop* music, inviting all the children to sing loudly for a few minutes” (603). He notably combines elements of both the American and the Mexican cultures in his curriculum to better meet the needs of his Mexican-American students of El Rocío.

Trueba’s research can be applauded on several levels. He sought the input of Mexican-Americans, including those of the farm workers whose experience is represented through Carmen. He interviewed Carmen in Spanish and then presented her words in their original language, and transcribed them into English. His research represents an effort to examine issues of relevance to Mexican-Americans, especially those on the Central Coast of California, from the perspective of his informants.

Despite these positives, Trueba contributes to the continued silencing of the farm worker’s voice by not explaining why he applied fictitious names to the

interviewees and to the community, an important opportunity to call attention to the grossly unequal power relations that construct that silence. Although he may have done this to avoid reprisals to them or himself, not addressing his choice to continue the silencing as a tactical decision prevents the reader from fully understanding the predicament of these workers. He also demonstrates a subtle, perhaps unintended classism by not providing a surname to the farm worker—she is referred to as Carmen—yet the educated teacher is referred to as Mr. Garcia, giving the illusion of full personhood. Although Trueba is able to be viewed by his colleagues as making a contribution to the literature, this same level of recognition is absent for the fictionalized Mr. Garcia and Carmen, who are also active in their professions. He adds to their subjugation by not treating them as co-contributors to the research, or at least discussing the conditions that force him, as a researcher, to maintain that silence.¹ Such an acknowledgment would have given the reader an opportunity to ask if there are other works of journalistic reportage or ethnographic description that have found ways to represent the personhood of these workers. A cursory review of such works would have turned up Rubén Martínez' excellent saga, *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*, Luís Alberto Urrea's works such as, *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border*, or Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy*, to name just a few.

¹ Trueba's research shares some similarities to dissertation research conducted by Theodore Parsons. He, too, applied pseudonyms to a place he called "Guadalupe." Although the community came to be identified as Castroville, he reported a number of abuses of children in the local elementary school. The abuses he documented were strikingly similar to some cases that occurred in the real Guadalupe, which led to an investigation by the California State Advisory Committee (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights). Their report "The Schools of Guadalupe...A Legacy of Educational Oppression".

Also, in this search I found an article in Spanish published in *La Prensa San Diego*, "El Retorno del Sindicato de Campesinos," by Eduardo Stanley, who quotes a *Mixteco* farm worker rights activist and an organizer for an indigenous farm labor group in Fresno, California in Spanish. In David Bacon's article, "Communities Without Borders," farm labor activists were quoted in both English and Spanish. These were the only examples that I found in my searches that acknowledged farm workers in their own voices, but none of these were about farm workers from Santa Maria, California.

Two of my searches focused on methyl bromide, a chemical commonly used in strawberry production and mentioned briefly by Raul Ceja in his interview. Although I found articles on this subject, including some that discussed the negative effects of the chemical on farm workers generally (e.g., higher cancer rates and neurological side effects), none included the personal representations of farm workers reflecting on the chemical's effects, the kind of silence Hall would have predicted for such exploited workers.

In contrast, Raul Ceja recounts some of Cesar Chávez's objections to the chemical, an issue of continued relevance, when he observed: "You know, he fought so hard to keep that bromide out of the fields and its [banning became] law, but they [the growers] keep postponing [the law's implementation], because these Republican idiots get in there. They want the . . . the money that comes from the farmer to go to them' [for delaying the ban]. . . Let's wait another year; let's wait another two years, three years, and they find ways around it."

The first set of databases I searched consisted of journals and periodicals designed for national audiences. The next phase of my research project required topic searches of the Santa Maria valley's most important local newspaper, the *Santa Maria Times* (<http://santamariatimes.com/search/advanced/>), by means of an advanced online search powered by Yahoo! In order to get the widest number of potentially relevant articles, I used the search terms "farm worker*" in "Local News" with results sorted in ascending order by "Start Time"—these search parameters retrieved 143 items, 104 of which were unique articles published between April 18, 2001 and May 16, 2011. (The bibliographic information on the articles identified in my various searches, including those from my search of the *Santa Maria Times*, appears in the Appendix.) Next, I coded these articles by analyzing the ways in which farm workers were represented, or could have been represented. Specifically looking for instances where Santa Maria farm workers may have appeared in images working in the field, quoted, identified by the farm worker's given name, I looked for instances where individuals critical of Santa Maria's agri-business industry may have been silenced.

Two articles of interest were published in the *Santa Maria Times* only one week apart. They illustrate the two contrasting views of Santa Maria's agricultural industry – one favorable to farm workers and the other favorable to the industry. "What the Editor Probably Should Have Done, But Didn't" by editor Michael Coates and published April 18, 2001 provided a response that was favorable to agricultural industry, was available in the paper's online archives, and came up as the first article

in my search. In contrast, the original editorial “What Ag Industry Should – but Won’t – Do,” by columnist Eric Firpo and published April 11, 2001, criticized the agricultural industry and called for better wages for farm workers. Eric Firpo’s article was not available in the *Santa Maria Times* online archives. I had to retrieve it via microfilm at the Santa Maria library. Although searches on other general items seem to confirm that April 17, 2001 is the start date for the archives (an online search in editorials only, also using “farm worker*” started with an editorial published August 15, 2003), this seems like an arbitrary (and convenient) start date, especially as these articles were published seven days apart and the later item references the first.

Firpo’s article characterizes “Santa Barbara County’s \$650 million agriculture industry” as an industry that “desperately needs” to regulate itself, because “it’s estimated by credible ag industry experts such as Richard Quandt of the valley’s Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association that as much as half of the ag labor workforce consists of field laborers who are not authorized to legally work in the U.S.” (A1). Although Santa Barbara’s agricultural industry is very aware of these labor law violations Firpo argues that these infractions will continue to be ignored, because “[t]he industry and the political parties that protect it are too powerful, too greedy, too gutless and too stuck in their ways to make a change that with a single step would dually bring about the most pain and the most gain for field laborers” (A1). That step, according to Firpo, would be to fine Santa Barbara’s agricultural industry “the maximum \$10,000 fine per unauthorized employee” (A1). However, as mentioned by Firpo, the agricultural industry will never enforce immigration laws that prohibit the

employment of unauthorized workers, because not doing so will ensure a continued influx of unauthorized immigration that will eventually saturate the farm labor workforce with undocumented workers, thereby keeping the price of farm labor to a very minimum. Despite Firpo's argument, nothing did change. Today, (ten years later) Santa Barbara's agricultural industry continues to report record gains. In support of Firpo, the 2010 Santa Barbara County Agricultural Production Reports the agricultural industry has just about doubled (\$1.2 billion), yet poverty among farm workers continues to be high, with 30% of all farm worker families reporting incomes below U.S. poverty guidelines (NCFH, 2009).

Although other articles such as "Local Farmworkers Reap Thanks and a Free Lunch" (by Jasmine Marshall, March 31, 2002), "Could Jobs Follow Housing?" (by Kristen Flagg, May 14, 2005), "Shrinking Labor Force Requires Innovation" (by Kent Miller, October 9, 2005), and "Immigration Issue Tops Survey" (by Julian J. Ramos, October 12, 2010) identified in the search did publish pictures of farm workers in the field, none of the farm workers are identified by name, nor are they quoted in the articles. Their invisibility makes it even more important to document voices such as Raul Ceja's; he provides a perspective, even though it is his own, that captures some of the struggles he and others encountered within the Santa Maria farm worker community.²

² There is some evidence in the literature that Spanish language publications present a more favorable view of farm workers and issues that are of relevance to Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. and elsewhere. See for example, Abrajano, Marisa and Simran Singh. "Examining the Link Between Issue Attitudes and News Source: The Case of Latinos and Immigration Reform;" Branton, Regina and Johanna Dunaway. "English- and Spanish-Language Media Coverage of Immigration: A Comparative Analysis;" Branton, Regina P., and Johanna Dunaway. "Spatial Proximity To The U.S.-Mexico Border

IV. Ceja's testimony as counter-memory

Ceja's testimony strongly suggests that some of the controversies experienced by the Santa Maria farm worker community stem from institutional efforts to silence the voice of the Hispanic farm worker and anyone critical of Santa Maria's agricultural industry. In this case, the voice of the Hispanic farm worker was challenged and oppressed equally by city government and local media reflected and expressed the interest of the town's biggest employer (agricultural business). Although suppressed, the voice of the Hispanic farm worker was not silenced. It continued to be vigorously expressed on the picket lines, in the union halls, and even in the courts when farm workers fought for their civil rights and a living wage, despite the alleged fear of deportation the news media traditionally cites to explain farm worker reluctance to become sources. The significance of Raul Ceja's interview is that he has personal reflections and perspectives of one who participated in some of the most important Central Coast struggles where farm workers fought for their humanity.

In the 1970s, Ceja served as a facilitator for the United Farm Workers (UFW) when it was working to establish itself in the Central Coast. Ceja made it possible for Cesar Chávez to have access to spaces for holding meetings. Ceja was also instrumental in getting more Hispanics into positions in the schools, local government, and the LIUNA. He served as an important advocate for social change in

And Newspaper Coverage Of Immigration Issues;" Dulcan, Emily. "A Content Analytic Comparison of News Frames in English- and Spanish-Language Newspapers;" and Vincenty Heres, María de Lourdes. "Hispanic Faces in the Media: A Study of Hispanic Related News Coverage in the Mainstream English and Spanish Media."

the Santa Maria and Central Coast areas. This interview explores his experiences and insights on the plight of California's Central Coast immigrant and non-immigrant farm workers, union organization, and environmental issues, as they impacted farm workers, but also the ways they were silenced by Santa Maria's institutions—the media, local politics, and the educational, civic, law enforcement, and corporate institutions.

V. Limitations and Assumptions

In using Raul Ceja's interview as a source of information on issues and controversies affecting farm workers in the Santa Maria area, there are several limitations. First, this creates a Central Coast focus. Second, it is one person's perspective. Third, his interview tends to cover the time period from the 1970's so he is not as well versed about events that are currently happening. All of these may limit how generalizable the results are. With regard to the searches conducted, the primary search term used was "farm worker*" this may have meant that other related terms that were used in stories did not surface in the searches. Again, this would limit how generalizable the results are, as well as the conclusions that could be drawn. For example, if for some reason the term "campesino" was widely used in certain stories, those would not have been identified, an omission that suggests the need for further study.

There are also some assumptions that are being made. A central assumption is that Raul Ceja's memories are accurate for the time and experiences about which he reports. However, my review of the literature, the *Santa Maria Times*, the California

State Advisory Committee Report, and Parson's dissertation triangulate with Ceja's testimony of anti-farm worker sentiments and abuse by Santa Maria's institutions of power. The California State Advisory Committee Report demonstrates that these sentiments were widely representative of the treatments of abuse experienced by Mexican and Mexican immigrant students in rural California's public schools in the 1960's and 70's. These documents along with my extensive review of literature strongly establish Ceja's credibility. Another assumption is that my searches were representative, even if my search terms and databases were limited. I was able to find several items that appeared multiple times in my searches, this also created a level of triangulation in my research, which involved looking at journal articles, book reviews, and newspaper articles.

Finally, all of this information is being funneled through my own knowledge, beliefs, and experience. The scientific method can only be applied in instances where you can actually test for something, but not everything can be tested, and even tests are based on observations. Two scientists may observe the same event or series of events side by side and apply the scientific method, yet synthesize two exclusively independent and original conclusions. In the same sense this project was experienced, researched, and synthesized by a budding social scientist who has worked as a farm worker in the viticulture industry, and whose family origins in this country stem from a grandfather who came to the United States as part of the Bracero Program.

CHAPTER II

Methodology

Interview Technicians

Raul Ceja was interviewed by Virgie Scozzari and filmed by John Murillo on February 2010, in Santa Maria, Ca. The interview, which is available as a series of six filmed records on DVDs for Special Collections at California Polytechnic State University's Kennedy Library, was transcribed by Gonzalo Chávez Villanueva (the author) for Professor Valle's Ethnic Studies 400 – Independent Study in Fall quarter 2010 and submitted here as a senior project for ES 461 – Senior Project, completed Fall Quarter 2011. This project and the transcript will become a permanent part of Kennedy Library's Central Coast Farm Labor Organizing Collection, MS 098. It will join interviews (not all are transcribed) by other Central Coast residents Carmen Magaña, Minga Ceja (Raul Ceja's wife), Sammy Gonzalez, Gabriel Valencia, and "children and descendents of Gabriel Valencia."

Transcription Process

Transcription was done using a MacBook and its DVD software and Microsoft Word. The transcript is available as a PDF document. The following guidelines were used in the development of this transcript:

1. Ceja's extraneous pauses at the beginning and end of sentences were edited out.
2. Ceja's extraneous self-interruptions were edited out when he spoke in complete sentences.

3. Ceja's extraneous self-interruptions were included when he spoke in sentence fragments in order to indicate where a non sequitur occurred.
4. In some instances, Ceja's grammar was corrected or missing parts of speech were interpreted so that the gist of his ideas would be more readily understood. In some instances, brackets [] were used to indicate where these edits occurred.

To guide the transcription process, I consulted the following sources.

"Cal Poly Transcribing Guidelines" available on request through Special Collections and University Archives, Robert E. Kennedy Library, Cal Poly.

Transcribing Guidelines for Oral History (Available:

<http://www.umsl.edu/~wolford/courses/stockwell/transcribing.html>) and the

Minnesota Historical Society's Transcribing, Editing, and Processing Guidelines

(Available: www.mnhs.org/collections/oralhistory/ohtranscribing.pdf).

These Web sites were consulted to review general policies regarding ethics, and document collection and preservation guidelines:

Cal Poly Special Collections: Services and Policies

<http://lib.calpoly.edu/specialcollections/services/>

Society of American Archivists

http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/app_ethics.asp

Northeast Document Conservation Center

<http://www.nedcc.org/home.php>

Drafts of the transcript were submitted to Professor Valle for his review. Corrections, which were made via the “Track Changes” function in Word, were reviewed and accepted or rejected as compared to the original DVD source. The final transcript was approved by Professor Valle.

CHAPTER III

Results

Interview with Raul Ceja - February 2010

Transcribed by Gonzalo Chávez Villanueva

Interviewed by John Murillo (film maker) and Virgie Scozzari in Santa Maria, Ca.

Transcription begins at 00:00:33

Raul Ceja: My name is Raul Ceja...uh, born in Guadalupe, California. Raised in Nipomo and then came to Santa Maria. In Santa Maria I...how do you say? Came from the service to live here [and] joined the union as a construction worker. From there I rose to the position of auditor, then president, then business manager.

Virgie Scozzari: What was the name of the union?

Raul Ceja: It's Laborers Local 1222 of the Laborers International Union of North America and I represented the Santa Maria area which included Lompoc, Guadalupe, over into the Santa Ynez area up to Cuyama and bordering San Luis County. So, anything in those areas was my territory. I also served as one of five [representatives] in the southern district of the Laborers Union, which [extended] from San Luis County and Bakersfield County [Kern County] all the way to [the] San Diego area down along the [U.S.-Mexico] border all the way around. In that capacity we negotiated contracts for the whole of that area, and I was one of the

five that negotiated till the end. Each local had a representative before that, but at that point we would break down into a smaller group to do the final, so that was my job.

Virgie Scozzari: How long did you do this?

Raul Ceja: For about 30 years, 30 some years and it was very interesting. You get to see how to negotiate contracts. How to, you know, do what the law says, what your requirements are. But right off the bat there was some difficulties in the way the operations were [managed]. A lot of the unions were still running the old way, [and] not looking at new ways to do things to actually represent their members. I could honestly say that we had some good battles in our own organization trying to get the new group moving in the right direction to actually serve our members.

Virgie Scozzari: This is the labor union?

Raul Ceja: Yes. From there um...when I first found-out about Cesar Chávez was through some of the people in the movement that had contacted the unions trying to get some backing for the [UFW] organization. When I found-out about it, I started asking questions. What it was about and all this kind of stuff? And I [eventually] got involved. And one of the things I was pushing a lot for was for them to participate in our union meetings, in the district council area, in the statewide, and then into the international arena, so they

can get more exposure to move forward, and we were very successful in that. [When organizing] I would contact the leaders of the different organizations [that were] doing the same thing I did, but throughout state and throughout the international [arena]. In that capacity I even fought to have the first Hispanic vice president put into the hierarchy of our organization, and I had to go to two conventions to actually get that done.

A lot of these things were done like I said through trying to organize people. So, when I heard about Cesar Chávez and I seen how he operated, he [Chávez] was working more into what I was doing, and I could say [that] my counterparts from San Luis [Obispo], Santa Barbara, Bakersfield, so on that ran those locals...they weren't. [It was] like a competition for them [my counterparts] to try [to] see what they can do with me. The leadership in Los Angeles tried to stifle some of that, because they had a power deal going. Well, it took me three years, but we knocked that out of place. I was always in the thought that the members were the union and not the business manager, not the union itself. The union is the men, and from my first election all the way to my last one, I always emphasized that in my meetings. I do what you want, and I had a way to do it and it was [by] talking to the members. So, when I heard about Cesar Chávez and how he

operated that's the kind of thing he was doing and that's the way he operated his meetings. I had him at meetings at our hall there, our union hall. I made other union halls available to him by talking to those people, and they opened their doors to him too when he was in that area. He would be able to use their halls and that was also accomplished.

Virgie Scozzari: What year did you...

John Murillo: Just one more comment. Okay we're all set. I had a question really quick, too, um. What's...why is the...what's important about having a union...like why is a union...

Raul Ceja: ...important?

John Murillo: ...necessary?

Raul Ceja: Okay. Basically, the union is necessary for only one reason, and that's because the employer doesn't take care of his people right. I had an occasion where one of our big farmers here well-liked, well-respected farmer Sammy Minami [H. Y. Minami & Sons] was on the Fair Board with me and when I went there he made a question to me and it was kind of like, "Are you going to come to my fields and try to unionize me?" And my answer to him was very simple. "If you don't need it, you don't need it, but if you don't take care of your people you're going to need it and that's basically the bottom line."

The members again make the union, and if the employer is not taking care of his people right by having the proper wages, the proper conditions, and take care of the people that work for him to help him make what he is...whether he's a big farmer or a small farmer that's what makes you. Without the worker's union [there is] nothing. It's just like the union. Without the member you ain't nothing. You can think you are, but that's not true. Proof of that is one of the years when we took a vacation and went to Mexico. I had left word with some of the *Mixteco* people in our community, because they were having trouble in the fields and they wanted to organize to become a union, but it wasn't the right time.

Everything has got its right time and at that time I said this is not the right time. We have to wait for a different crop type to be ready so we can move on it. So, anyway no sooner than when I got to Mexico I got the call that they had gotten out of the fields, and again it's because the employers were mistreating them. So, I told him to get a hold of the [Cesar] Chávez's union and tell them this and this is going down and Raul [Ceja] asked me to call and we need help.

Virgie Scozzari: Who asked you to call?

Raul Ceja: The workers, the guys that went out on strike. And, uh so right away they shot into it and were able to save the day even though

we couldn't get a long contract with it, because of the fact with the time uh was of essence. When you deal with this kind of negotiating you have to have like an ace. You know? Holding the right card and you know that when you negotiate your first contract. You have to have it where it's going to fall the same time year after year and it has to be at a time when you're most needed and the labor force isn't all there. So, it's kind of like a science that you have to know what you're looking for. You also have to know what the people that you represent want. That means when...like with Chávez. He would say, uh, you know. He would talk to the people first. He was always getting feedback from them, so he knew what they wanted. He knew what it was that they needed. What you do then is you bring it out to them. You talk to them about what's coming up, what's going to go down. You know what your possibilities are, so they actually made the choice. All he does is bring about to where they realize it's their move and he's going to back them. Okay. What I would do with our people [is the following]. We'd have a meeting. We would discuss what's going on and then we'd figure out what the priorities were, list them on the board, and you say this, this, this, and this is what you want, and then the next question is. What are you willing to walk out for? What are you willing to go out on that line for if you don't get?

Then you start going down that list, so you narrow it down to what your needs are going to be. Okay. Now, you take all those things with you from the bottom to the top and you go negotiate, but you know what your bottom line is going to be. Okay. What's that person willing to walk for? And that's what he would do, but he did it a different way. He had a charisma that when he went out there he had his thoughts together. He knew exactly what he was going to do and he put in reference to what he had done in other areas to kind of backup what he was going to do, so that the people, the members themselves...it's them speaking, but through him. We don't make those choices.

When I come back from negotiating in Los Angeles in the middle of the night or in the middle of the morning you know we're down to the last thing and we got it done. When I come back, if I'm going to go on strike, all I have to do is call them and they know that's what it's going to be, because that's what you wanted. If you don't got them [union members] on your side, you ain't going to win it. There is no way. So, basically you have to know what the member wants, and he was real good for that. He knew exactly how to do it. He had a lot of people that work with him, that talk with him and he would hear from all sides. Uh, when you're a good leader you have to do that. You have to find out even what

the opposition is looking at. Okay. What they're willing to go all the way with, because it's going to cost them money. I mean each day that you shut down, like those guys when they went out, cost[s] them a lot of money. Those berries are going to waste. That means a lot of money going down the tube there, so they have to move on it. In this case here when the *Mixtecos* went out, they got a good contract, but only for that season. Okay, because they did not have the power to do it again next year, because of the way it was done, when it was done. So, it was effective for that year. Okay. But, like everything else, everything has its season. Everything has its time. Cesar [Chávez] knew that. He knew how to do it, because he had done it. He had done it here. He had done it over there, this kind of thing. Here it was harder. Even for our unions it was harder. We had a large influx of people from Mexico during those times. The Bracero Program [A U.S. government managed program that permitted contracted foreign workers (mainly) from Mexico to fill the farm labor shortages created by WWII. This program was in existence from the early 1940's until the mid 1960's.] wasn't in, but there was a lot of people coming in. Okay, and what that did is that the farmer would cry to the federal government. We need more people; we need more people!

So, more people would be let in. Okay, they [ag industry] did this on purpose [to reduce the price of farm labor]. [For instance, when] so many people [are willing to work for lower wages] the farmer can say, “Hey, you don’t want to work for what I’m giving you then get out of here.” He [the farmer] had control of the thing. Okay. This affected Chávez’s union, because a lot of these people were in that category. So, what would happen with that is a lot of the farm workers that were here were mad, because all these guys were here, and a lot of the time those farm workers didn’t want these Mexican people from Mexico to come into this country. They were mad at them. They didn’t want them, and even Cesar himself and their inner group [were] really baffled by what was going on. You know? And, so it wasn’t like they had backing right away, and the uh people that came from Mexico they...you get paid nothing down there. You come up here and make a few dollars and hey that’s better than no money. So, these guys were getting burned up here...that were here. And, so I looked at the situation and I talked to our international people and I told him, “You know what this is; what’s happening to us, and this is what’s happening to them. We can’t fight each other. That doesn’t win anything.” Okay. So, what we did...we figured out a way to kind of get it a little bit closer together and to get Chávez, his people

from here and there both together to kind of start thinking better. And one of the things that uh we proposed and we drew-up some language with...I got a hold of the guy that ran the health organization out of Mexico, but he was out of Los Angeles and he worked for uh the P.R.I. [Institutional Revolutionary Party] party [and] worked out of an office out in Los Angeles to help people with their health needs and all of those stuff, and so him and I became good friends. So, I told him I says, “We need to do some contact.” And, so he came up here and we met, and we talked about health needs of the farm worker as a possibility, and I had already talked with some of Cesar Chávez’s people and him about the possibility, and Chávez came up with a good idea, and that was, when the farm worker gets done working here or he got some health [need] they can take him in here, but when he goes to Mexico he didn’t have nothing. So, we figured out a way to get money down there through the farm workers, so that when they went there, or even if their families were there, they would get their health need that uh their health care that they needed. It was like an insurance policy for them over there, so that helped out quite a bit in the organizing of that union.

Virgie Scozzari: How did you meet Chávez?

Raul Ceja: I met Chávez because I uh...let's see. It was uh Flores...Pat Flores that was in office, and um I would take some money down there to them to help them a little bit at first, and they were kind of like closed off, because they didn't know about the unions here. And I started talking to them and telling them who I was and start talking about other unions here, what was available...uh we could work together in [unclear] California, and so on and so forth, the connections that I had with them...and uh that we could help them with their movement even with the politics, because I was really heavy into the politics also. So we made connections through that for the bills to pass, see what they needed for the United Farm Worker movement, so that's how I got to know them there. Then when he came here one time they called me up ahead of time [and] says, "He's going to be here this afternoon. Why don't you come on by and meet him and all that?" And I did I went down to meet him. It's awesome! I mean it's...everyone that sees him and...and when he was around. It's kind of like in awe. You know? Not just because he was well known, because he wasn't that well known at the time, but it's because of his demeanor. The way he was. The way he talked. Just the way he handled himself. I mean here's a guy that was head of the union running around in an old raggedy car. Okay. I mean his thing was...you know? The people again, the

people is what he was. So he let that out in a meeting. You can feel it. You can sense it. It's kind of like...people like that...that are special like that. You can sense it. Okay, and you know that this is a real true thing; it comes from here [action not visible]. So, you see that, and you know what's going on. Coming also from family that did work out in the fields (my father worked in the sheds and in the fields) I was very much in tune to what was going on. When your family suffers that's the one thing that I think gets most of us. I always tell my wife we got up here [pointing to his head] not [unclear] for *pendejos*.

Virgie Scozzari: [Chuckle]

Raul Ceja: But it's not that; it's that you have a heart. You have a feeling. You have a sense of life and what's around you. You know people hurt, and you know you can make the difference.

Virgie Scozzari: You and your wife are...is Minga?

Raul Ceja: Yeah.

Virgie Scozzari: You're quite a force.

Raul Ceja: Yeah, yeah, and uh...but see, it takes that to...a lot of times we battle between ourselves how to do things you know, and it's a lot of head knocking sometimes, but we have to do it to...to come about. To learn more, to able to do more, to be able to move forward. You know we kind of like challenge each other, and it's

good, because that's what you got to have. Chávez was a peaceful man, a very peaceful man. We would talk in my office and he would be sitting there, and I'd say, "Why do you listen to your people as to what they want to get done?" You know? I knew, but I just [wanted] to see what he [said]. And he would say, "That's where I get all my ideas." He'd say, "[I] didn't know what their needs are. They know what they can do or what they can't do." He wasn't about you know this group fighting that group, or this guy I think. He was always like there [are] no groups. You know. He wanted everything together and that's exactly what would happen. When he first went to one of our conferences I mean everybody stood up. You know? It's just the awe of the thing and he was very well accepted, and the guy from I think it was the United Auto Workers um...when we went to the big one. They backed him up, I mean 100 percent anywhere he went financially and otherwise. You know? And a lot of our unions put a lot of money on it...[Phone rings]

Virgie Scozzari: Did you...

Raul Ceja: ...because...

Virgie Scozzari: ...have resistance from the higher-ups in backing him? [Phone rings]

Raul Ceja: No. [Phone rings] I think people...once, once they met [Phone rings] him and once they dealt with him, [Pause] uh it was like, [Pause] I mean this is what we're all about. That's what labor is all about. You know to do these kinds of things...[Phone rings]
[Tape interruption]

Virgie Scozzari: ...All right Mr. Ceja, as a union man...because you are a union man through and through...

Raul Ceja: ...Yup...

Virgie Scozzari: ...You were the head of a very large union...

Raul Ceja: ...Yup...

Virgie Scozzari: ...a very powerful union now.

Raul Ceja: Yeah...

Virgie Scozzari: ...so, I've heard...

Raul Ceja: ...um...

Virgie Scozzari: ...What was your first meeting with Cesar like, because you were both union men?

Raul Ceja: Well, like I said, I went into the office right here at the United Farm Workers when they were here in town [Santa Maria], and when I met him I just introduced myself, who I was and if I could help him in any way that I'd, you know, be more than happy to. He asked...

Virgie Scozzari: ...What was...

Raul Ceja: He asked about, you know? What union it was? He asked about what's the union situation around here in this area and all that? And I explained to him some of the unions. What they're doing, what we're doing? What's happening in the valley, the pros and the cons of what's going on? [Also], that we were more than [welcoming] him into our area, and let's see how we can work together to help each other. He was you know, thankful and that kind of thing. He said that he would be calling on me. So, I said, "fine" and I left him my card, because he had to go to a meeting with some people there. I said, "Okay, whenever you're ready, let me know." So, that was it for that particular meeting. They had a function at I think it was Preisker Park [Santa Maria] where they were going to have a fiesta. He asked me to go to that, and I did go with him. We marched from his office down to [Preisker Park] and all that kind of stuff. But, it was a while later before that happened. He...*como te digo, o veras?* He was kind of like from here, to there, to there kind of thing. So...

Virgie Scozzari: ...he was always on the go...

Raul Ceja: Yeah. He would have problems sometimes trying to set a marching route. They [City of Santa Maria] were always giving him a bunch of [restrictions]. You got to stay on the sidewalk. You got to do this. You can't do that, that kind of stuff. So the guys that were

running the halls at the times (all through the changing of the groups that were running it) were having a hard time with that part of it. So I guess he just decided how he was going to call me in to do that so he did. He asked me to find a path and they did the actual marching. What I did was go to the city and get the permits and get the thing run through the government here to make sure that they're going to be allowed to do their march.

Virgie Scozzari: So was this here in Santa Maria?

Raul Ceja: Yes.

Virgie Scozzari: And uh Cesar was planning to march and he needed you to coordinate it...

Raul Ceja: ...to...

Virgie Scozzari: ...[unclear]...

Raul Ceja: ...No. His crew, his people would do the coordinating. My job was to go over to the city [and] go through all the paperwork and take care of all that, so he wouldn't have no problem with it. Because the politics of the town exactly wasn't, you know, good toward the farm workers when they would go down there. So, I had the rapport to be able to do that, because I was into the politics of the area and that kind of stuff, so that worked-out good for him to be able to do that.

Virgie Scozzari: That's right, you ran for city councilman.

Raul Ceja: Yeah, and a few other things...

Virgie Scozzari: ...and on the Fair Board and you had connections political.

Raul Ceja: Yeah. Well, I had connections all the way through, because I would raise money for the politicians uh for their elections and uh so, that's how you know that politics works [pause] and it helped me in several things when they did their...they needed politicians in Sacramento uh we were able to...through our organizations push the issues that they wanted and, so that worked-out pretty good there.

Virgie Scozzari: Did Cesar call you, or did another person call you?

Raul Ceja: Cesar would call me on some of the stuff. Some of the stuff like the political part of it I would just take it upon myself. This is what they're doing. I'm going to push it from here, and I'm going to push it from there, and get it done. I didn't need to be told. I know how the labor movement works and I know what needs to be done. So, I did it. A lot of my counter-parts weren't all on board. I mean I'd really have to be pushing on them, because they have a different way of operating, but we got accomplished what we needed to get accomplished. The Teamsters Union, which was one of the adversaries...uh I worked with the Teamsters, but it was a different division. There would be the construction workers, that kind of thing. The division that took care of the fields was a

separate man that ran that group, and then there was another one that [ran] the truckers and that kind of stuff. So the one...

Virgie Scozzari: So it was actually the Teamsters that organized the farm workers? There was a farm worker'...

Raul Ceja: ...Well, yeah. What, what they did, they became sweethearts. They got together with the ranchers, and the farmers, and made a sweetheart deal to keep the workers away from his union, and put them with their union. It was just a sweetheart deal. They wrote it up, and you're going to get this, this, and this, and that's get my men and they're going to be in your union, but it was just paperwork.

Virgie Scozzari: I don't understand the term sweetheart deal?

Raul Ceja: Sweetheart means that the union didn't negotiate no contract, or something the employer gave them just to keep it away from Chávez's union. That's all it was.

Virgie Scozzari: So, the Teamsters had the sweetheart deal with the farmers?

Raul Ceja: Yeah. Well, the farmers actually orchestrated it. They told the Teamsters, "Come and meet with me. We want you to get our people." They didn't want Chávez in there.

Virgie Scozzari: So, it was like a false union?

Raul Ceja: Yeah. They called it the International, but it was the same thing, and the guy that ran here worked out of the Carpenters Building.

He owned the whole building where they have that Teamster group. They had the culinary workers. They had the Teamsters that work in the freezers, and that kind of thing; they decided with this one unit to raid the work of the farm worker. So I went and met with them and I said to the guy that was running [the International], “You know what? You’re encroaching on somebody else’s turf,” and as union leaders we always watch out for these [kinds] of things. If they try to steal my work, then I go take his work. So, I told him I says, “You know, you’re not going to do this.” And the guy says, “Well, you run your union, and I’ll run mine.” I said, “Well that’s fine. You want to play hardball? We know how to play hardball.” So, this went on for quite a while, and I started lining up my ducks. I got together with a guy that runs the Carpenters Union that owned the building and we talked about what needed to be done and the guy [representing the International] was on the street trying to find another building to rent. So, [I] made it hard for him to operate [Chuckles hard]. Some of the other Teamsters that were in the construction industry were my friends. They [construction industry Teamsters] have big gorilla guys, and somehow they orchestrated it where these guys were going over to the Bakersfield area and work over there for the other part of the union, which was these guys that were taking over

our work, and they [sent] them over there to be the goons. Okay. There's this one guy named Tiny, and he was everything, but tiny [pause] a big gorilla [pause] a real good friend of mine and they went over there. When they came home that weekend I called him up and I said, "What the hell are you doing?" He says, "Well I get paid for what I'm doing." I tell him, "Well, I'm going to tell you like this. You still want to be my friend? You better knock it off."

Virgie Scozzari: What was he doing?

Raul Ceja: Well they go out. They're the goons. They'd beat up the guys. They pull out weapons to scare the heck out of them, cuss at them, whatever.

Virgie Scozzari: The farm workers?

Raul Ceja: At the farm workers, yeah. They worked for the union, but they're representing actually the owners of the fields, the contractors and you know people that run the fields out there.

Virgie Scozzari: So, they were hassling Cesar's union?

Raul Ceja: Oh, yeah...

Virgie Scozzari: ...the...

Raul Ceja: Yeah...

Virgie Scozzari: ...the Farm...

Raul Ceja: ...Yeah...

Virgie Scozzari: ...Workers...

Raul Ceja: ...Yeah...

Virgie Scozzari: ...Union...

Raul Ceja: ...Yeah. Exactly...

Virgie Scozzari: at the picket lines or where?

Raul Ceja: Yeah, on the picket lines.

Virgie Scozzari: Where at? Do you know?

Raul Ceja: They were [in] Delano, Bakersfield all that area up in the Central Valley there.

Virgie Scozzari: And what happened?

Raul Ceja: This went on for quite a while again over there. So, then I took another action. I talked with Cesar first, and I talked to some other people and I arranged to have a meeting 'cause I told the guy [who represented the International] here in [Santa Maria]. I said, "You know, I am going to close you out of business I know where you're at now and I want to get that building, too. So, you want to play good ball, or you want to get taken care of again?" And he says, "I don't want no problems." I said, "Well then you need to back off." [He says], "I can't do that. You know. The International is pushing me, because they get money." I said, "Well there is a way to do it. Why don't you sit down and break bread with Cesar?" [Unclear] you know 'cause Cesar was famous okay. So, he says, "Yeah I'd like to do that."

Virgie Scozzari: What year was this?

Raul Ceja: I can't remember the years. I mean to me they're all [Pause] you know. So then I set up a meeting at the Santa Maria Club. We met over there and that thing got taken care of.

Virgie Scozzari: How did that go?

Raul Ceja: Good. They backed off. So, then when they backed-off, then we got some renegades coming in to try and take it over. They run actually by the farmers themselves. They call it another name and kept right on trucking. So they started using the fairgrounds to have meetings and to payout the checks of the vacations and all this kind of stuff, trying to make little sweetheart deals there. So I made it hard on them there too. Basically this [Santa Maria] valley has been very anti-union for all the unions, and it was no different for Cesar's group. There was a lot of people that wanted to be union and would go to Cesar's office, and try to you know, get the help they needed, but for every one of them that was out there trying to get the union in. There [were] a lot of people trying to get the jobs. So, they were kind of like pushed out the door and this is some of the things we had to deal with. Cesar you know tried all kinds of ways to do it. To make this come about, but he had an overall picture that he was looking at. He was trying to get a bigger area covered, which was California and some of the other states

that he went to all the way across the country even into Florida and so on. So, he couldn't just concentrate on one area. Uh, he left people here to service people to try to get the cards, to get the names, to get the people's authorization that they want to be represented by a union, but again a lot of areas to cover. You're a small union it's very difficult. I had suggested to him at one time [that] maybe he should become part of our union, 'cause we have the largest union there was throughout the United States, Canada, and Hawaii.

Virgie Scozzari: What's the name of your union again?

Raul Ceja: Laborers International Union of North America.

Virgie Scozzari: Okay...

Raul Ceja: ...and so...

Virgie Scozzari: What happened? What did he say?

Raul Ceja: He said that he couldn't do it at the time, because you know, he was just growing. He wanted to get his people to organize and become bigger. Organizing is [a] very touchy thing. You got to know what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. So, it's really hard to do and he was pretty well spread-out, because he didn't only work on the union side of the thing. He was working uh in general. You know like you say like *La Causa* [refers to the entire effort to improve living conditions for all Chicanos] and this kind

of thing. He would be working for the environment. He would be working to make sure women got protected. You know in the work jobs and so on. He was all the way across the board. In his funeral the people that came, came from all walks of life, and all of them had their story. How he affected their lives. You know. It's not just the farm worker. It was the fact that if you were Chicano in the schools getting your education. If you were going to be a doctor, you were going to be a lawyer, whatever you felt like he said, "*Sí, se puede.*" That was a key thing, very key. You can do it. A lot of people said, "We can do it." And we did it, even here with my wife and myself. We could do it. We're going to try; we tried the first *Cinco de Mayo*, and boy did we have opposition. I mean we had a battle. It went quick, but...

Virgie Scozzari: Didn't you...

Raul Ceja: ...we tried again, and the next year man it was bigger, much bigger, a lot of people got involved. You know, [*El Teatro Campesino*] even came into the area here. We had radios broadcasting out of our deal here...

Virgie Scozzari: ...Didn't you...

Raul Ceja: ...Lowriders, everything...

Virgie Scozzari: ...didn't you have to go to the Santa Maria Court to get the permit to march for...

Raul Ceja: ...No...

Virgie Scozzari: Cesar Chávez?

Raul Ceja: What we had to get [was] a parade permit from the city, and they messed us around, so what I did is through our politics, through state got a hold of Governor Jerry Brown, which was in office at the time, and he gave us the okay to use the main drag, and the city got pissed off, because they said, “How the hell did you do that; what was the politics?” But at that time it was too late, because I mean we had to be on the parade route I think within a few days. So, we didn’t have time to organize the people to have our actual parade. So, Minga (my wife), and a couple of horses, and a *mariachi* was what went through that parade, ’cause it had to be done, and I said, “You got to be kidding.” She says, “Nope, even if I walk by myself I’m going to get this done.” And that’s what she did, you know. It was kind of like, we had to show that it was going to get done whether they liked it or not, and after that, like I said, “It was excellent.” I mean we had a great big one. The city [Santa Maria] got involved, business people got involved, and we got a lot more involvement at that. But it [has] always been hard for the Hispanic [here in the Santa Maria valley].

Virgie Scozzari: I’m going to stop for a second.

John Murillo: Okay.

Virgie Scozzari: The squeaky coat, that's driving you [John Murillo] crazy? Is that driving [unclear] crazy? The squeaky coat is driving me crazy, but I thought that was going to ruin everything [laughter]...

Raul Ceja: ...this is part of the *Mafioso* outfit...

Virgie Scozzari: ...Okay. Okay. So, um...uh where should we go from here?

John Murillo: Well, um I was wondering uh what...what makes a union successful...do you think...in your opinion with all [unclear] experience?

Raul Ceja: I think what makes a union successful is that you represent the people that you have in your membership. That you do it properly, taking care of their needs and so on. I think the hardest part for me, and I was in office like I say about over thirty years, uh the thing that kept getting me re-elected was the fact that I listened to what I had there, and what I had to do to keep these people employed. When I did retire early, it was like taking a ton of weight off my back, and the reason for it is because you have a responsibility not only to that member, but [also] to his family. If he don't work, he don't got money to buy food, he don't got money to feed his kids, he don't got...So, these things eat on you. So, you have to be at least the kind of person I am. So, you have to be ready to do whatever it takes.

For the first ten years I didn't even take a vacation of any kind. Okay, and it was because [I was] new at this thing. I wanted to build it up, and I was able to do that. I was able to get the power that I needed to do it. I even went to our district council, which represents half of the state, and the guy that was on top, I finally folded him under, so we can do what we needed to do here. I worked a different way than they were used to. They would negotiate contracts just to get more money and you know more, more, more, without realizing whether it was available to you, whether or not your people were willing to go out and walk for it. You know, it was kind of like this [is] what you're going to do. This is what we're going to do and that's it. You know and I didn't. I looked at the whole situation. I not only looked at our side of it; I looked at the employer's. I got material from what they call the round table, and in this [unclear] where employers tell you their side of it. All the different facets of it, whether it's construction, or this, or that, or whatever, and they had all these little books. I mean about that thick [Action not visible] or that thick maybe, a whole bunch of them. There was a box about like this [Action not visible], and this... little books, and gives you all these points. I read all that stuff, and not only did I read it, I called them and said, "You know what? I need one box for each one of the locals." Then

I said, "I'm going to give it to each one of them, so they can get up to date when we negotiate." That's why I was one of the [unclear]. I got into negotiat[ing] contracts, 'cause I knew what the hell I was talking about. I said, "You people don't even talk to your people to find out what the hell we want." So, even though you think you're doing good by them. You're not, 'cause they're not going to be there when you need them and that's what happens.

So, a good union is a union that really represents its members, that takes care of their needs, their family needs, their community needs. We organized communities. We organized churches to work with unions. We organized people [of] different social groups together to work on the needs of the community whether it was what they call gangs, whether it was substandard housing.

Whatever it was. We worked people to work together. I would [ask] the church groups, the church leaders, "What are you all about? Aren't you all about taking care of the poor, and people that don't have? Let's get together. Let's talk about it." Their perception at the first meeting I had with the churches was, "Oh, unions you mean mafia, you mean Hoffa; you mean crooks?" I said, "No. We mean human beings."

And we went through all that to be able to get together so we could work together, and it was very successful. I started over in Lompoc

area. Then I came into Santa Maria with it and expanded it even more here. We had some hard times. We had hard times with some of the churches. Catholic church was one of the ones that didn't want to bite in. We hired a guy specially to help organize and so on. Minga got in on some of this stuff when we came to Santa Maria to try to get these things for the kids and for other things that were within our community. We worked with legal groups to try to get things that we need, whether we needed to [file] class action lawsuits or whatever to accomplish things. I mean we picketed the police department; we picketed city hall.

I remember one time just to hit off on the union part of it. Some guys had come from Iraq and they were Kurds; one of their cultures that are over there. These guys were people that fought in those wars where they were killing each other, and these two young men came into this valley and they joined our union. Well, first they came and talked to me. I said, "You know what? You got a home if you want." And I made it available to them, sent them for training and then put them to work, and one of the things came up one time was that we had to go picket, and I told them. I says, "You're going to go picket." Explained to them what it was all about and I took them out to the picket line and [they] were picketing. Well, just like Chávez some of those people started

calling them names and all this kind of stuff, and these two guys, young guys they get up and they say, “You know what? In my country I’d shoot that sucker.” [Both laugh] Then I said, “No, we can’t do that here. Here we got laws and we got to live by those laws, and this was what we have to do, and this is what they got to do, and we have to play the game that’s there, and that’s how it goes.” But these guys were, they’re Guerrilla fighters. I mean, you know they could do whatever, and I told them, “No, not here. We don’t do that.” So, it’s kind of comical, ’cause I look at them now. One of them has got a business cutting trees and trimming them and all that kind of work, and the other guy he went into something else. These guys their parents were rich. They had money, but they came here to live and to try a different life.

So, unions are good but they can also be bad. But the membership is the one that controls it. The sad part is that a lot of times the members don’t realize what power they have. These people that work, that don’t do their job you can get rid of them, but you got to learn how to do it. That’s what I had to do. We had some bad people, and we got rid of them. One of them was my ex-father-in-law. To me anybody that does that kind of thing is bad, and if it’s bad, it’s out. That’s the way we run our lives. What’s right is right, and what’s wrong is wrong, and that’s how we operate. But, it’s

kind of like ironic that we call ourselves unions and a lot of times unions don't realize who they are. [A] union is not the leader. It's not the job steward. It's not anybody. It's the members. The majority rules, and you got to say what you want.

You got to be able to do [pause] walk the line basically for what you want, and that's what Chávez would do with his people. He'd tell them, "This is where it's at," after talking to them, so he knew. They did big marches. I mean, they marched miles, miles, miles, and miles, and miles, and miles, and miles. And each issue they would go to Washington or Sacramento to fight their particular 'cause that they had at that time. To get the general public to understand, because that's a big part of it. The public has to understand.

I had occasions where the employers would try to lie, [pause] call the cops on me, that I did this wrong and that wrong. Okay, but the cops knew who I was. They knew how I operated. I have my background. I have my [style of working]. Just like Chávez did. He wouldn't do that. When people in this valley tell me, "He's a bad guy. He did this and that," I know they're lying, because I know him. See, that's the difference people don't understand. You build your reputation. You build your trust and that's something you have to do, and if you're not a good leader you don't have that.

Okay, and that's what Chávez had. Not only could [he] organize the people that were out there. He could organize the general public, educational system, [and] the systems of the environment. You know, he fought so hard to keep that bromide out of the fields and its [banning became] law, but they [the growers] keep postponing [the law's implementation], because these Republican idiots get in there. They want the politics of the money that comes from the farmer to go to them' [for delaying the ban]. So, then they [politicians] got to keep it off the books. Let's wait another year; let's wait another two years, three years, and they find ways around it.

Virgie Scozzari: Is this still in the fields?

Raul Ceja: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Virgie Scozzari: And what is it?

Raul Ceja: Bromide it's a poison! It's bad for you, and it stays in you!

Virgie Scozzari: Pesticide.

Raul Ceja: It's bad, real bad. It's just like he fought for the women. He fought for other [unclear]. You know women are still getting abused out in the fields? You know I get cards and letters? [Pause] They threaten them. They want to rape them. They slap them around [Pause] pull guns on them. Still today.

Virgie Scozzari: So, there still are a lot of injustices...

Raul Ceja: ...a lot of it...

Virgie Scozzari: ...to date...

Raul Ceja: ...a lot of it...

Virgie Scozzari: ...and [unclear] what year are you?

Raul Ceja: and it's...and it's got...

Virgie Scozzari: ...[unclear].

Raul Ceja: You know, people who work in the fields [Pause] women. They put up with a lot of harassment, sexual harassment. They get laid-off. They only work a few hours, because they don't give in [Pause] all kinds of little games. The workers that are here, you got two or three times more than you need. You know why? Because they only work them three or four hours each, so that way they keep them needy. You got to have money. You got to be able to work, so you [are] going to work for whatever they give you. These are all tactics. That's why you need unions.

Virgie Scozzari: That's a sneaky trick.

Raul Ceja: It's bad. It's bad, and people are suffering out there right now. Bad! They get into the wintertime over in that valley, colder than Hell. They don't even got for food, for anything. They live in cardboard houses, not only in Tijuana, here! People don't see that. They don't know it. They don't know in Santa Maria you can go down to the bridge right here and you find people living under the

bridge. You find them living under shrubs and stuff around town, and you got all these churches here. What do they do?

That's why you need unions. You need people to get paid the right wages, so they can support their own families. All they need is their part of the pie. The pie here is going to the farmer. He builds bigger sheds, freezers, whatever they need [for them]. The little guy, they pile them up. The houses are full of people in one house. All over, all around you can go anywhere you want in this town, and you'll see it, [but] everybody looks the other way.

Everybody complains about that poor guy, the one that goes into the store that smells like strawberries, but that's [just] bromide.

They don't want these Mexicans here because of that, or [because] their fingers are all stained.

Virgie Scozzari: What's the valley like here in Santa Maria, as far as agriculture [is concerned]? What percentage...

Raul Ceja: Agriculture is your biggest crop here that brings in the money. Marijuana is one of them, too, and that's getting worse. But agriculture is one of the biggest industries in our valley. Construction has quite a bit now, even though right now, it's slow...And the fact of the matter is, when your town or your area is so large in farm workers, and you don't have the money to take care of that problem, because they don't get paid right.

Uh, we've been trying to push what they call a living wage, which would be [that] they have to get at least that much paid to survive, [but] people fight it like crazy. Uh, they don't realize that if they don't get their money to be able to live, somebody has to support them. That's the rest of us. And why? Because the farmer or the business guy that uses these people is [putting] it in [his] pocket and getting richer. That's your injustice.

That's why you need unions, and Chávez knew that. Chávez knew what it took. That's why he went to colleges speaking, and went to different groups speaking, whether it was religious groups or whatever. You know, we've done the same thing. We talk to the religious people. A lot of that we learned from him. We learned from him how to be humble, how to listen to your people, how to uh see what's out there and what needs to be done and see that it gets done. Okay. No matter what the problem is. It's easy for us to go to our jobs and come back home and say, "Well, Hell I got my family, I'll just take care of my family and then I don't need to worry about the rest of them." But if that guy in the bottom isn't getting it taken care of, then you can't be comfortable because you're going to pay for it.

We have to be aware of our society. We have to be aware of our environment, all these things that come up in our lives. We got

water right now that's getting polluted. He talked about this stuff. All that stuff that's pesticides. It's going into your water. You know what's happening with that? You got, where the water is going to get all polluted somebody is going to clean it. Big business is going to come and clean it and they're buying the water rights right now. You know why? Because it's going to cost you more than gasoline. That's what's going to happen to you. They already got it figured out. Gasoline is coming up? Hell, we'll go buy all the water. So, we have to realize what Chávez said, "The thing about the bee. One little bee you can swat it away, but if we all got together," like my wife [Minga] said, "Then hey, you got a powerful force to deal with." Here we've got a situation where the farm worker isn't even respected. He's a nobody. [The farm worker has] to listen to the rancher 'cause he got a lot of money. See that's what Chávez was all about. That's where you could win. The only reason you can't win in this valley is because you got so many people unemployed and only so many jobs. So, they got control of the situation. Okay. But if the public got into it then you got something on your side. That's what your churches that's what your other groups should be saying. Let's work together, environmentalist, all these groups educators, you name it. That's what is needed. Chávez taught us all this. He taught all of us. He taught people in the arts. He taught

people in the environment realm. You know, he contacted people all the way across this country trying to get them to understand this is what we need for humanity. He was more of a humanistic person. Okay, and that's why when you meet the man or when you met the man all this vibes all this thing comes from that, because he is that. He reflects that.

He did a lot in this valley. People here don't think that he did a lot, but you got toilets out there. You got laws out there. Now, those laws are enforced by the state, so if you got the wrong governor, he don't enforce those laws. The people in this town, in this area need to realize who to put into those offices, so you get the right protection.

Virgie Scozzari: As a union man what law do you think is the most important that we had passed?

Raul Ceja: Well you got the right for them to organize and become a union.

Virgie Scozzari: The farm workers?

Raul Ceja: Yeah. They got their own law that protects them to organize and we're trying to strengthen that up right now. To make it work. Uh, we have a Republican governor, which makes it hard, but what we need is to be able to do that, so that they can then push it. Push it hard and get the kind of protection they need for themselves. What the public can do [is] make people aware. You know. That's why I

get mad sometimes or disgusted with our religious community, because they don't do that. They need to talk. When they talk to their congregations. This is what Christ was all about. You know. Why aren't we doing this? Why aren't we looking after the least of our people? That's who he was. That's him right there. That's Christ right there. The one you're abusing sexually and otherwise, mentally. They have them living out there in the middle of nowhere out in the gullies. Don't even have decent water for them to drink. I mean I get the mail all the time on this stuff, people's names, pictures. That's sad, [in] this day [and] age, in this country that people have to live like that.

Virgie Scozzari: [Unclear].

Raul Ceja: So, he taught us all this. All we do is pass it on hoping that our children, our friends, relatives will understand, in time even. If you don't understand today, maybe tomorrow or the next day, and politics are a big part of it. We got to push those politicians everyday, phone them, tell them. Hey, you know they represent you. It's just like a union.

Virgie Scozzari: How many years did you work with Cesar Chávez? What was your relationship like?

Raul Ceja: Oh, let's see from about [the] 70's. Well, about [the] mid 70's, late 70's somewhere around there and still going at it.

Virgie Scozzari: When is the last time you heard from him?

Raul Ceja: From the union?

Virgie Scozzari: From Cesar himself.

Raul Ceja: Everyday, in the things I do.

Virgie Scozzari: He speaks to your heart?

Raul Ceja: Yeah, every time I see a poor guy out there with no food, no jacket in the cold, mistreated in the fields. They're people. I don't give to churches. I give to people.

Virgie Scozzari: And you feel that's Cesar?

Raul Ceja: Yup.

Virgie Scozzari: So, you're saying his work is not done?

Raul Ceja: No, we got a long ways to go yet. This country has a lot to learn here, a lot of systems that need to be changed. He taught us all that stuff. He taught us to be aware in the different fields of our lives, not just farm worker. Farm worker is an important part, because that's the least of us in a sense of what they get paid, not for what they do. They're hard workers. It's hard work. I'd like to see how many people out there can get out in that field and work those berries. Stoop, all day long everyday, and not to say that you're going to go there today and play for a week and say, "Oh boy, see now I'm a strawberry picker." No, I'd like to see you do that for the rest of your life, and get the pay that they get paid, and live that life

that they live. That's the difference we're talking about. That's what he teaches us. He tells us everyday, "Don't be satisfied. *Sí, se puede. Sí, se puede cambiar.*"

Things have to change, and anytime you see an injustice you have to say it's an injustice. You don't just sit there and let the guy talk the baloney. You got to say, "No, you're wrong." Right now people don't want to say nothing because they want to get along. You can't do that. That's not what he taught us. Speak up! An injustice is an injustice, and maybe you're going to be alone. We were alone a lot of the times. I remember I got a plaque for that. One of the senators said in the plaque, "Against the tide." That's what we did. We fight against the tide, for justice. That's what it's all about.

Virgie Scozzari: Do you see a correlation between what Cesar taught and *La Causa*?
How were Cesar's teachings in *La Causa*?

Raul Ceja: I think what that did is reinforce *La Causa*, reinforced things that we need to do as a people, especially our Hispanic community because we're getting larger, and larger everyday. We have a low birth [rate] by the way. We could still grow. Kids are growing all over the place, *Mixtecos* and whatever. We're going to be a big force in this country like it or not. See, right now that's the key issue. We have to get these people legalized. They wanted them here. They need them here for their deal; pay them right and make

them legal. Okay. That's what it's all about. They're human beings like anybody else, and if you treat them right, you take care of them then society grows, the country grows, more products, more things get done. It's better for everybody. It's all it takes. Be a human. You don't have to make them citizens today. You could say, "All right, come in under a resident card," like they used to do and say, "Okay, now you work your way up." But, they're going to be here if you're going to use them as a farmer, or as a businessperson. That, and you have to make them legal.

I've said it many of times and I've put it in the paper. All you have to do [is] get that employer and put his butt in prison for hiring one of these people here illegal, and you watch that law change. But, see they don't do it because they can abuse, and when they abuse, then the workers they got out there abuse you even more. That's where your sexual harassment and all the other stuff kick in. They have people working out there free. Supposedly, they're training them. This is ridiculous in this day in age. We don't need it. Slavery went out a long time ago.

John Murillo: What do you think about Cesar's stance on, uh, nonviolence and uh, how effective that was?

Raul Ceja: I think it was very effective. Uh, the nonviolence thing is uh like Gandhi, like other people, uh, Martin Luther King. If you use

violence, then violence will be used against you and you don't need that. I don't even believe in hitting somebody let alone violence. I've never hit a child to make him do the right thing. I don't believe in it. I don't believe you have to beat somebody up to do that. I don't believe you have to go to a country and kill people in order for them to come along with your beliefs, whatever they might be. You can win more by being nice. Even my wife knows that the [unclear] told her to be nice. Be good [laughter]. So, it's kind of like you can win them. You know how hard...there's a saying something about you can get more bees with honey or something to that effect. You can get more people on your side if you're nice. That's what got Chávez. People tuned into him, because he was nice, because he was a good person. The people that went against him were people that were listening to lies. If you knew the man, and you walked with the man, and you see what he does, you couldn't say that. There's no way. They do that only for self-defense, because they want to make more money on the poor person, the one that doesn't have. It's all it is, and again you have to stand up. I could be in a restaurant and somebody in the next booth will be talking [about] those *Oaxaqueños* and [how] they take over the town and they do this and that and I tell them, "You know what? You're wrong. They want you to do that. They want you to

fight each other. They're doing what they're doing, because [of] where they come from and what they are. They're poor people. They're poor people that are here in a situation where they're trying to survive, because it's better than what they had down there. But, they're being abused. So, they got to do what they got to do. You want to make it better? It's easy. Fight for their rights. It's all it takes."

It's the old crab game where I talk about where there's two *compadres* getting crabs in the beach. They got a bucket, and they're putting the crabs in the bucket, and one *compadre* tell the other *compadre* "Let's go have a cup of hot chocolate. You know it's cold out here." The other *compadre* says, "No we can't go!" [The *compadre*] says, "Why not?" [The other *compadre* replies], "Because, those crabs will get out of that bucket." He [the *compadre*] says, "Oh, no. Those are Mexican crabs." [The other *compadre*], "What's got to do with it?" [The *compadre* explains], "Well, one guy tries to get up. The other guy pulls him down." That's an old plantation tactic. That's what they use. That's what the farmer knows is going to happen here. You get this group fighting that group, [and the farmers get] the cheap labor. Don't let people play that. Don't let them play head games with you.

Cesar teaches you all these things. Don't stand there letting people lie just to get what they want. A lot of the stuff is repetitious. The Mexicans, or the blacks [African Americans], or the gangs, or this they use every excuse so they get you fighting with the other one, and that one fighting with the other one. Split, conquer and divide. That's what it's called. You don't let them do that. You stick together like that beehive and you fight for what's right! Social justice, that's all it is.

Virgie Scozzari: You personally spent time with Cesar, didn't you?

Raul Ceja: Yes.

Virgie Scozzari: What would he talk about when you guys were together?

Raul Ceja: Well, usually what was bothering him at that time, like different issues that were there, and we'd talk a little bit about them. I didn't really want to talk too much with him, because I liked for him to rest, because he was usually tired when he came in. He was going from here to there, from here to there, and that kind of thing. But, we'd just recap on some of the things that were going down, and how I could help him. You know, with whatever project he's doing. Like if he was in L.A. or Sacramento. Whatever; I got connections all over. So, I would just say, "I got so and so up there you can contact him for this issue or that issue." Whatever it might be, that kind of stuff.

Virgie Scozzari: Would he speak to you in English or in Spanish mostly?

Raul Ceja: A little bit of both. You know, Spanglish.

Virgie Scozzari: Was he a happy guy or was he [unclear]?

Raul Ceja: Yeah, yeah he was kind of like, um not happy-go-lucky and not sad. He was kind of like a straight guy. He would tell jokes, but [with a] serious type [of tone], and that would get him a bigger laugh anyway. He was kind of like a walking *Teatro Campesino* of his own [smiles]. He was good.

Virgie Scozzari: When you found-out that Cesar passed away you were one of his pallbearers.

Raul Ceja: Yeah.

Virgie Scozzari: How did that come about?

Raul Ceja: Well, when I got home from work my wife told me about what had happened and Winnie which was running the office [unclear]. He asked if I would be [interested] to go over there and be delegate and Minga also my wife. So, I said, "I would be proud to." We went down. When we got there, he wanted me to be, uh like a. What do you call it? A guard of the casket and the body there and kind of keep control of the people. So, I said, "Sure." You know. So, that's what I did. When the procession was going to go from Delano into the Forty Acres side, which is about three miles maybe a little bit more we had a roped-off area around the casket where only the

people that were going to carry the casket would be in there, and that was my job to make sure that it went smoothly, and that people didn't try to crowd in and didn't let them move.

This thing was, like it was said before, it's uh from one fence to the other. You're talking a country road, one fence to another, one-way traffic this way and that way and it was full from wall-to-wall with people and as far as you can see all the way back. Uh, a lot of people and the Forty Acres side was full of cars. They had big tents. Huge white tents big, big tents and that's were they had the services and everything in there. So, I would go in and stand around the casket, and they'd do their things there, whatever programs they had going, and then in the evening we'd go, you know, sleep and then the next day we went to bring the body in the casket all the way from Delano into the Forty Acres. I mean it was a lot of people. I mean it was huge, huge, huge, and people from all walks of life, all walks of life. It was beautiful, and when you look back at it you really do think that you were dreaming. You don't want it to be over.

And it's not over! You realize that he left a legacy for all of us, a challenge for all of us to change for the better. To protect that farm worker whether it was Minga in the fields, my wife, or her dad or her brothers and sisters that worked out in the field or other people

that got abused and are getting abused. That's still going on. We still have that challenge. We had to challenge in employment, in our schools, in our city [Santa Maria]. We had to put lawsuits on them. We had to bring in Civil Rights Commission to straighten these people out. We had to put up bonds to fight them. We had to get in on class action lawsuits to stop them.

They would tell us at the schools we can't find [any] Hispanic teachers and then when we [found] them. [School officials would say], "Oh, they're too experienced. We can't hire them." We fixed that up real quick. We stopped their money, the same thing with the city. They couldn't find people [Hispanics] to work for them. We found them. Police department, we went down there and [police department] said, "We got people that are Hispanic." Oh, yeah? They says, "Come on over." We went down to the basement he had the three officers out of 78 officers that they had there, three guys and I got pissed. I said, "You know what? Get these people out of here; you and I need to talk. This is bullshit. We don't need this kind of crap. You're going to get Hispanics or we're going to stop your money." The same thing with the city we even picketed the city. Lowriders and everybody came out there and did their parade through it [smiles]. At first, we thought they weren't going to come. But, see Cesar thought them all these things, and we told them this

is what Cesar would do. You want change? You got to work for it. Injustice is injustice and you fight for it.

Now we got a lot of Hispanics in the schools. We got Hispanics in the police department. We got Hispanics in our businesses.

Businesses wouldn't even hire them [Hispanics]. But what made it happen? *Sí, se puede*. Okay, and people got that tune. They got the tune in their head. They help other people to get into the schools.

We had a guy David Sánchez in the school that he worked for. The father he was [an] educator up at Cal Poly [San Luis Obispo]. He helped a lot of people go through that school to make sure that they were able to fit in, a lot of them. He was a Chávez man all the way, and he got his son in on it. Which is the school [David J. Sánchez Sr. Elementary School] named after him [David J. Sánchez Sr.].

That's what I mean. The ball keeps carrying to the next generations.

We want our children and our grandchildren to follow that road, to protect and serve the people out here. Injustice, whether it's the environment, employment, housing, all that stuff. We have to fight for it. We had to fight for housing. It didn't just come. We stopped funds. We get them in the money where it hurts. That's how it's done. A lot of people work with us that's how it [gets] done. It wasn't one little bee or two little bees, a bunch of us. That's what made it work. *Sí, se puede*.

John Murillo: Is there anything you want to add at all that you [unclear]?

Raul Ceja: No. Like I said, “Just to be a challenge to everybody.” Like I just said, “If you see injustice, stand up, be counted! I don’t care where it’s at. Don’t just keep your mouth shut, and if they come after the little guy, then you better be there for him, because tomorrow it will be the next one up the ranks. Just like they did with the Jewish people, badges, different colors, the one at the bottom he was nobody; he was just a *peón*, so let them kill’em. Then the Jews [unclear] were educated. Then they went to the next group. Same thing. Till, it got to the last ones, nobody there to protect them. That’s what happens. You have to defend the people at the bottom or you’re next.” Right now there’s a big deal in our town with the Lowrider, with the gangs supposedly. You know? And they make it sound good. Oh, we’re going to get the gangs, the bad guys, the ones that really...It’s not true. So, what happens? You know, people are getting killed. Yeah, but why? We have to investigate all those kind of things. You don’t just go along and say, “Yeah, well, that’s what’s going to happen.” You have to understand why they are doing these things? Split, conquer and divide. It goes back to the same thing. Protect your rights! Protect your rights in this country! Don’t give them away.

We keep giving our rights away. That's what we did with these stupid wars. We gave our rights away. You see? They shouldn't be in those wars. And the thing is right now with these kinds of things is [if] you give your rights away today for the guy in the bottom, tomorrow it's going to be you. Because, when they say, "You can get a gang injunction to stop a group from moving." That means every Hispanic and every black [African American] is going to be pulled-over for no reason at all if they want to, and there is nothing you can do about that within the law. That's the problem. If the person has done something wrong, and you could prove that he did something wrong, fine arrest him and put him in jail. But you just don't go harassing a bunch of people because they're brown, because you're mad at them.

You know this happened over in the valley with Cesar Chávez. He taught us that, too. Okay. They had a big hearing [Robert] Kennedy was here. He [Kennedy] asked the Sheriff, "Why did you arrest these people and put them in jail?" He says [Sheriff], "Because I thought that they were going to go out there and break the law." He thought they were. Everybody started laughing. Kennedy says, "You thought they were?"

Virgie Scozzari: Which Kennedy?

Raul Ceja: Robert, I think it was. And see that's what I'm talking about. You don't let those kinds of things happen.

Virgie Scozzari: It chips away at the civil liberties.

Raul Ceja: That's right! The guy didn't do nothing wrong, and right away they already had him in jail, and this happens a lot. That happens to the kids everyday. They get arrested. They get put into situations, I mean for no reason at all. People end up in prison for no reason at all, and then the next generation same thing. Why? Because they follow the steps; because there's nobody there to help them. Nobody is there to say, "No, you're wrong! You haven't gone by the law. You're going around the law. You're changing the law on your own." And if enough people say it then people start saying, "Yeah, you're right you know." But if you don't it goes right on being abused. That has happened too much. It happened under the Bush administration right and left—Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, all that kind of stuff. People have to stand up and say, "You're wrong." And you have to be punished for being wrong. That's another thing, because otherwise the next guy comes along [and] it's going to get worse. If you want something, do it right. What's right is right and if it's wrong, it's wrong. *¡Y sí, se puede!* Don't think you can't. One little candle by its self in a room, it's just a little bit of light, but if everyone in the room gets a candle you

could light up the room. Same thing. Chávez thought all that stuff.
That's what his life was about. That's why he went all over. He
wasn't partying. He's teaching us. That's his legacy. Okay.

John Murillo: Thanks.

Raul Ceja: All right!

Transcription ends at 01:13:17

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

This project is centered on the transcript of an interview with Raul Ceja, which is presented as an example of counter-memory. In addition, I tied his account of his experiences as a farm labor organizer with various searches that illustrated how this knowledge and these voices have been silenced and subjugated. From the searches, I reviewed the journal and newspaper articles looking for information that would correlate with Ceja's account. At the same time, I did not find and was not expecting much overlap. This is because, as Michel Foucault has established, institutions of power exist and document events from a perspective that is favorable to these institutions of power. They decide what is correct by systematically omitting and thereby subjugating the voices of those with less power. Further, institutions of power frequently use "technologies" such as media outlets, local government, law enforcement, and schools to suppress the voices of those with less power.

This project is significant because it provides a direct, unobstructed, and unfiltered narrative of Santa Maria farm worker civil rights activist Raul Ceja. He provides the perspective of a farm worker on issues such as the institutionalized discrimination towards farm workers, the efforts Cesar Chávez took to establish the union on the Central Coast, and other issues. Also, this project provides another avenue for previously subjugated knowledge to be expressed via counter-memory. It is hoped that making this information available can lead to revisions of history to include farm workers' voices in their struggles for civil rights.

A major strength of this project is the combination of the failed search for examples of counter-memory in news sources such as the *Santa Maria Times* and academic resources such as journals and periodicals with the documentation of Raul Ceja's interview. I was able to demonstrate that the farm worker's voice and identity were silenced. In contrast, ag industry and other institutions of power have a significant presence in the literature I reviewed. The transcribed interview, which provides examples that counteract that narrative, is now preserved as an example of counter-memory that can be accessed by others through Kennedy Library's Central Coast Farm Labor Organizing Collection, MS 098.

If I were to do this project over, knowing what I know now, I would make several modifications. First, I would expand my review to include, or even focus on visual depictions. I would review as many magazines and documents specifically related to California's ag industry (e.g., produce, ornamental flowers, wine/viticulture, etc.) seeking instances where farm workers may be depicted cutting/sawing/grafting plant material, prepping the fields, planting crops, applying pesticides, harvesting, and packing. I would then code these instances looking to see if the farm worker(s) are identified by full name and given the opportunity to be quoted. Also, I would conduct my searches in all the databases provided by Kennedy Library, perhaps even extending my searches to the internet. Finally I would also use additional search/key word terms such as "campesino*", "field worker*", and "field labor*". This more comprehensive search would allow me to better analyze material that may have been absent in the searches in this project. I would expect to find more

instances where the opinions and experiences of farm workers should have been presented.

Future research in this area should include transcribing the remaining oral narratives within Kennedy Library's Central Coast Farm Labor Organizing Collection, MS 098. Access to documents such as these might provide insights about significant issues and controversies relevant to the Central Coast, such as the episode involving the Santa Maria 10, which was mentioned as a footnote in this project. It might be useful to get more oral histories from people involved in the unions, etc., especially those who may be older and have important historical insights.

Specific to the research done here, several recommendations can be made. First, there needs to be greater accountability within the ag industry for its officials to accept responsibility for their lack of regulation and enforcement of labor laws that have contributed to poverty, lack of adequate and affordable housing, discrimination in public education, discrimination by local law enforcement, and the ever increasing use of carcinogenic pesticides. Second, media representatives need to discontinue the practice of taking and publishing pictures of all farm workers without a documented form of consent, because it is unlawful, unethical, and it contributes to the further silencing of their voices and lack of political power. Finally, scholars should bring more attention to the issues that have been presented in this document by recording the names as given by farm workers, allowing them to speak in their own words when publishing documents where farm workers are the subject of research.

In closing, I end with some words from Raul Ceja, whose voice contributed much to this project.

We're going to be a big force in this country like it or not. See, right now that's the key issue. We have to get these people legalized. They wanted them here. They need them here for their deal; pay them right and make them legal. Okay. That's what it's all about. They're human beings like anybody else, and if you treat them right, you take care of them then society grows, the country grows, more products, more things get done. It's better for everybody. It's all it takes. Be a human. You don't have to make them citizens today (Raul Ceja, 2010).

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Appendix I

**TABLE 1. Journals and Periodicals Identified via Database Searches,
Categorized by Type**

I. Medicine or Medical Sciences	<i>Journal of Toxicology & Environmental Health</i>
<i>Allergy</i>	
<i>American Journal of Industrial Medicine</i>	<i>Occupational and Environmental Medicine</i>
<i>American Journal of Public Health</i>	II. Economics – Environmental Economics
<i>Annual Review of Public Health</i>	<i>The Ecologist</i>
<i>Archives of Environmental Health</i>	<i>Economic Geography</i>
<i>Birth</i>	<i>Sustainable Development</i>
<i>British Journal of Dermatology</i>	III. Environmental Sciences - Ecology
<i>Canadian Medical Association Journal</i>	<i>Conservation Biology</i>
<i>Cancer</i>	<i>Conservation Magazine</i>
<i>Cancer Causes and Control</i>	<i>Disasters</i>
<i>Clinical Microbiology and Infection</i>	<i>Environmental Health Perspectives</i>
<i>Environmental Health Perspectives Supplements</i>	<i>E: The Environmental Magazine</i>
<i>Environmental and Molecular Mutagenesis</i>	IV. Political and Social Sciences
<i>International Journal of Cancer</i>	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i>
<i>International Journal of Toxicology</i>	<i>Anthropology News</i>
<i>Journal of Applied Microbiology</i>	<i>Anthropology of Work Review</i>
<i>Journal of Nutritional & Environmental Medicine</i>	<i>California History</i>
<i>Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine</i>	<i>CQ Researcher</i>
<i>Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology</i>	<i>Earth Island Journal</i>
	<i>International Migration Review</i>
	<i>NAPA Bulletin</i>

*Journal of Latin American and
Caribbean Anthropology*

Rural Sociology/Sociologia Ruralis

Social Science Quarterly

Visual Anthropology Review

**V. Agricultural Science and
Economics**

Agribusiness

*American Journal of Agricultural
Economics*

*Canadian Journal of Agricultural
Economics/Revue Canadienne
d'Agroeconomie*

Journal of Agrarian Change

Journal of Farm Economics

*Journal of the Science of Food and
Agriculture*

Weed Technology

**VI. Historical and Scientific
Journals**

*Annals of the New York Academy of
Sciences*

*Annual Bulletin of Historical
Literature*

*Comparative Studies in Society and
History*

The Journal of Popular Culture

Appendix II

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