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The War in the Valley: Farm Labor Organizing in a Hostile Anti-Union Environment

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The War in the Valley: Farm Labor Organizing in a Hostile Anti-Union Environment

by

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Modern Mexican labor migration is a result of overlapping neocolonial and internal-colonial relationships. Mexican and undocumented individuals overwhelmingly make up the farm worker labor force in the United States. Agricultural labor has historically been exploitative. Although organizing efforts by the United Farm Workers in the 1960's and 1970's brought about legal reforms in California, by the 1980's the United Farm Workers had almost completely stopped organizing farm workers. This study takes a historical approach to demonstrate how cycles of protest deposit organizing templates that were later used by both documented and undocumented farm workers from a town in California's Central Valley to organize and gain union representation in a climate of rural labor unionization decline. The findings indicate workers/organizers' motivations in wanting fair wages, worksite safety, and to be treated with respect and dignity, along with access to salient knowledge of workers maltreatment, and heuristic use of this knowledge combined for a successful union organizing campaign at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company. Nonetheless, a local struggle is not enough to overcome the system of interactive colonialism, as new forms of domination become established.

“My foot was so swollen that I needed to cut a hole in the heel of my boot in order to let the blood out and be able to continue working. I could not afford missing one day of work.”

- Emiliano¹

INTRODUCTION

Farm labor is an exploitative occupation entailing high danger and low wages. Agricultural work ranks among one of the most dangerous industries in the nation (USDA 2015). Similar to other occupations with work-place risks, such as being a police officer or longshoreman, one would think workers wages/salaries would offset the risk; unfortunately this is not the case. The United States Department of Agriculture (2015) states more than 50% of hired farm workers are undocumented and continue to be one of the most economically disadvantaged groups in the nation. Low wages for farm workers is a longstanding trend (Garcia 2012; Ganz 2009; Ngai 2004; Rothenberg 2000; Sifuentez 2016) in the United States and throughout the world. However, resistance has always existed, even if not overt (Scott 1985); farm workers have organized to combat low wages, resist discrimination, and gain worker rights. The establishment of the United Farm Workers (UFW) union by Filipino and Mexican-origin farm workers in the 1960's allowed for the development of innovative and new tactics for successful farm worker organizing.

The United Farm Workers successful organizing campaigns in the 1960's and 1970's was part of a larger protest cycle happening throughout the United States (McAdam 1995). During this time the UFW developed an organizing template that could be used to help ensure success in organizing farm workers. Although farm worker organizing accomplished major victories, by the late 1970's the UFW significantly reduced organizing farm workers. By 1977, any organizing of farm workers came from the initiative of workers themselves and with little to no help from the UFW (Ganz 2009). By the 1980s, United Farm Workers membership was steadily declining.

Considering the most active farm worker organizing efforts occurred before the 1980's, the literature available does not directly address how and why farm labor organizing continued into the 1980's; as with the case of the La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company. Hence, the research question guiding this project centers on how was successful labor union organizing possible in a climate of rural labor unionization decline? In this paper, I employ interactive colonialism theory with the cycles of protest perspective from social movements. I demonstrate that collective resistance to interactive colonialism is possible when subaltern groups take advantage of their strategic capacity and past organizational templates deposited from previous protest waves. Nevertheless, the interactive colonial system is pervasive and resorts to new forms of dominance such as prisons and the closure of businesses to not meet the demands of the workers. This framework will be used to better explain the immigration, living and working conditions,

¹ Description of a injury 53 year old Emiliano Ramirez, Mexican immigrant, obtained after working more than a month with out a day off at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company. His job required Joaquin to move water pipes across agricultural fields to water crops. This interview took place the 26th of July 2016.

and relationships of farm workers who resided in barracks at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company and additional LCV farming locations.

THEORY

Interactive Colonialism: I use Barajas' (2009) Interactive Colonization framework to situate the lived experiences and mobilization potential of Mexican farm workers who worked and lived in the barracks at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company as well as the larger region of Coalinga, Lost Hills, and Huron in rural western Fresno County. Interactive colonization uses colonial, structural, and transnational frameworks in concert. It also highlights colonialism and social interactions between groups (Barajas 2012). Interactive colonization is used to explain how colonialism and overlapping forms of colonization (e.g., neocolonization) of Mexican-origin people, intersectional inequalities (e.g., race, class, and gender), and social interactions affect the migration patterns and incorporation of the Mexican diaspora in North America as an exploited labor force (Barajas 2009, 2012). Neo-colonialism is defined as "the domination of a nation by controlling its political-economy without having to invade it in a comprehensive way (i.e., militarily) as in classical colonialism" (Barajas 2009 pg. 240). In addition, neo-colonialism is marked by economic dominance more than outright political control (Go 2011). This interactive colonization is a system that sustains a cheap, accessible, and reliable labor supply to make agricultural profitable (Cheng and Bonacich 1984; Menchaca 2016; Sassen 1988). In contrast to the push-pull or structural perspectives (Massey et al., 1990; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Yang 2010), interactive colonization theory centrally focuses on the historical and continued marginalization of Mexican-origin people (Barajas 2009, 2012).

This interactive colonization process is continuous. Although there may be instances in which internally colonized people, such as farm workers of Mexican origin, are able to obtain legal rights and generational mobility, the overarching system of rural class relationships never stops functioning. In turn, whatever gains these oppressed and marginalized people have obtained can be minimized or removed all together. Neoliberal policies further enhance the slashing of workers and people rights (Almeida 2008; Golash-Boza 2015).

Interactive colonization contextualizes the lived experiences and resistance of Mexican-origin farm workers in the United States. This framework resonates with scholarship highlighting the internally colonized position of Mexican-origin people and people of color in the United States, even after acknowledging growing diversity within the middle-class (Acuña 1988; Blauner 1972; Gutierrez 2004). I combine the interactive colonialization framework with theories of social movement resistance.

Cycles of Protest: Social movement-type mobilization is a powerful tool that can be used to demand social change (Snow and Soule 2010). Social movement scholars call a period in which many sectors of the society across a wide geographical space become highly organized and participate in heightened levels of demonstrations and collective action as a *cycle of protest* or a *wave of protest* (Tarrow 1998; Almeida 2014). The large scale of protest and diversity of groups participating in a protest wave can reach more marginalized groups (including rural populations) as opposed to smaller and shorter-term

outbreaks of collective action. Once a cycle of protest has developed it can help serve as a vehicle to push forward demands and deposit lasting organizational templates of resistance (Tarrow 1989; Almeida 2003). Cycles of protest are prevalent in the history of the United States as well as other world regions (Almeida 2007; 2014; Cortés Chirino 2016).

From the 1960s to the early 1970s the United States was experiencing protests, demonstration, and strikes by different sectors of the population – it clearly exhibited a classical wave of protest (McAdam 1995). The 1960's ushered in an era in which people of color, organizations, and religious leaders around the country demanded political rights and an end to the longstanding racist Jim Crow segregation laws (Piven and Cloward 1979). By the late 1960s, the war with Vietnam was protested nation-wide by the anti-war/anti-imperialist movements – largely involving youth and students (Gitlin 1993). The second wave of feminism was also taking place during this time period (Van Dyke 2017). Others, such as the growing Chicano/Latino population joined in this cycle of protest and began to organize in large numbers, differing in protests and demands depending on the state (Acuna 1988).

In the Southwest for example, support was rising for Reies Lopez Tijerina and the *Alianza's* demands for the U.S. to uphold the stipulations made with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In Denver, Colorado, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez and the Crusades for Justice was also gaining support among the Chicano community demanding an end to police brutality and supporting high school strikes (Acuna 1988). In California, a “key event that ushered in the *movimiento* in Los Angeles,” was the student lead Walkouts, where over 15,000 students walked out of their classes and into the streets demanding a change to the racist educational system (Rosales 1996 pg. 184). These social movements overlapped, learned from one another, and often worked together to advance individual movement demands or demands which benefited multiple groups (Araiza 2009). For example, the Chicano Moratorium, organized by the Chicano Moratorium Committee and the Brown Berets in the early 1970's was part of the anti-war movement demanding an end to the war in Vietnam (Acuna 1988; Rosales 1996). On another occasion, the collaboration of Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American students in protesting and striking at California State University San Francisco led to the implementation of the nation's first School of Ethnic Studies and Department of Black Studies (Okihiro 2016; Rojas 2010). Moreover, the mass mobilization by Black, Asian, Latino, white and other activist groups, who often organized collaboratively and transnationally (Lubin 2014; Omi and Winant 1994; Young 2006), frequently amplified their demands, spread protests across borders, and maintained the cycle of protest through the early 1970s.

The success of the Delano Grape Strike between 1965 and 1970 and the establishment of the United Farm Workers (UFW) union signaled the first sustained rural labor union after several short-term campaigns earlier in the century (Garcia 2012; Ganz 2009). Farm worker organizing looked to be a powerful force. The success of the Delano Grape Strike was made possible with the collaboration of the UFW and other civil rights organization, students, and religious leaders (Araiza 2009, Pawell 2014). Along with the UFW's alliance with other struggles, their success in organizing farm workers was due to their unique organizing strategy, which Ganz (2000; 2009) calls *strategic capacity*. This strategic capacity consists of three aspects: motivation, access to salient knowledge, and

heuristic use of the knowledge attained (Ganz 2000; 2009). The UFW's diverse group of workers and volunteers allowed organizers to develop many different strategies and tactics instead of relying on the traditional organizing repertoires being implemented by their rivals (e.g., the Teamsters).

In the following years, the United Farm Workers membership would rise to over fifty thousand and play a major role in the passage of the nation's first pro-farm worker legislation which gave farm workers the right to join a union (Ganz 2009). The United Farm Workers participation in the cycle of protests in the 1960's and 1970's allowed for the deposit of organizational knowledge in Californian rural communities even after the union stopped organizing in the late 1970's (Ganz 2009). The ability of farm workers to legally gain union representation is one form of resistance strategy. The UFW's unionization election campaign survived as a central tactic from the protest wave. This unionization election campaign tactic provided farm workers and organizers an important and influential tactic to pressure growers into negotiation with its employees.

Survival of the Organizing Template: The repertoires of contention (Tilly 1978, 2010) implemented by social movements (i.e., strikes, demonstrations, boycotts, walkouts, etc.) to collectively obtain their demands do not always achieve desired outcomes. Often times organizing strategies fail to gain any results. Regardless if organizing strategies may have failed or succeeded, remnants of these strategies remain in the political environment. Future social movement campaigns can choose to employ strategies from past protest cycles. They may also discard failed strategies and incorporate new ones (Almeida 2008; Ganz 2004). For this study, I examine how successful organizing repertoires from past protest waves function as an organizing template, which can be a useful tool for social movements to utilize. Survival of organizing templates and strategies over time is an important factor to consider when analyzing any social movement.

Omi and Winant (1994) highlight how the Civil Rights struggles and other mobilizing efforts by the African American, Latino, Asian Americans, and American Indians in the 1960s and early 1970s "permitted the entry of millions of racial minority groups members into the political process" (pg. 138) and created a lasting legacy of organizational models and collective resistance strategies for people of color in the United States. Some of the gains of the 1960's and early 1970's came under attack by the Reagan Republican presidential administration and other conservative popular movements (Omi and Winant 1994; McAdam and Kloos 2014) but organizational forms of resistance could not be completely suppressed. An example of how organizing templates can be utilized by social movements is evident in Edward's (1995) study of environmental justice advocates in the 1980s. Edwards (1995) highlights how grassroots environmental groups used the organizational strategies created during the African American led civil rights movement, to implement confrontational tactics. These tactics involved blocking roads, such as in Warren County, North Carolina and civil disobedient acts such as when Lauri Maddy handcuffed herself to the Kansas state governor's chair as a sign of protest in order to gain media coverage for the polluting of their communities. The tactics used by these African American community groups were taken directly from protest wave of the 1960's, and in particular the black church in North Carolina. In addition, Teiken and Warren (2015) highlight how leaders in Mississippi from the nonprofit Southern Echo used their lived and activist experience in the Civil Rights

movement to create local and state level policies and reforms. The leaders of Southern Echo understood the inequalities and structural barriers against their community and used this understanding to build solidarity with community members and grow in numbers (Teiken and Warren 2015). Flores and Cosseyleon (2016) highlights how civic groups use religion and civil rights hymns to empower formally incarcerated individuals to remain committed to the group and advocate for progressive policies targeting the formally incarcerated. These are clear examples of how the remnants left by these cycles of protests can be utilized in the future.

The participation of individuals in activism varies depending on groups and the goals they wish to accomplish. The large scale of protest and diversity of groups participating in a wave of protests can influence an individual's decision to get involved in activism. The participation of individuals in activism can serve as a learning experience to better understand social issues, increase empathy for those affected, and raise motivation to continue their participation in activism well into the future (Van Dyke and Dixon 2013). According to Van Dyke and Dixon (2013), individuals continued participation in activism is due in part to "the acquisition of activist-relevant skills and knowledge, what can be thought of as *activist human capital*..." (pg. 192). The skills and knowledge an individual obtains can be helpful in future activist related activities to launch group level mobilizations. In addition, this activist human capital can allow individual(s) to utilize past organizing templates to serve their current organizing campaigns. Activist human capital was a key component in the strategic capacity framework the United Farm Workers used to successfully organize workers in the 60's and 70's and remained in the organizing template used afterwards (Ganz 2000, 2009). An example of how this organizing template can be successfully used is seen in the UFW 1981 victory over the Cal Coastal Farms Inc., in which they won the right to represent the agricultural workers (Cal. Coastal Farms Inc. vs. UFW 1981).

In summary, I will use the interactive colonization framework to situate the lives of farm workers and their mobilization potential that resided in La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company and the surrounding region of Coalinga. The interactive colonial model is one of ongoing structural subordination. Nonetheless, cracks in the system allow for attempts at collective resistance. The cycle of protest in the 1960s and early 1970s served as a moment in which organizing templates were developed, refined, diffused and remained long after the height of social movement activity diminished. Activist human capital along with Ganz's strategic capacity theory will be utilized to explain the successful union organizing campaign that occurred as well as the harsh return to interactive colonialism with the growth of the prison-industrial complex.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data

In this research project I used primary, archival, and secondary data. The primary data comes in the form of 12 life history interviews of key informants around the farm labor movement in Coalinga in the early to mid 1980s. The interviews were conducted with 1 United Farm Worker union organizer, 1 union lawyer hired to represent the LCV farm workers, 1 individual who held a managerial position, 2 rank and file farm worker organizers, and 7 farm workers. The interviews were conducted in either English or

Spanish, depending on which language the interviewee felt most comfortable communicating with. I am fluent in both English and Spanish, grew up in a farm working family, and personally know some of the participants. My positionality allows for an insightful understanding of farm worker working conditions and possibility of participants conveying knowledge with me because of my insider position as a member of the community and farm worker family.

The participant's demographics were eight men and four females. All of the participants who had worked at LCV as farmworkers had proper documentation to be in the country at the time of the interview. However, at the time of their involvement at LCV all but two participants had proper documentation to work legally in the U.S. In addition, all LCV farm worker participants identified as being Mexican and ranged from 47 years of age to 78. Considering this organizing campaign at LCV has not been mentioned in any literature about the UFW, in-depth interviews yielded the best and most amount of information about the organizing campaign. This research project used a purposive sampling method as well as a snowball sampling technique. I recruited participants by word of mouth and individuals I personally knew worked at LCV from 1985-1987.

Archival Data

I systematically reviewed archival documents and secondary sources. The archival documents included official union documents collected from the lead farm worker organizer from La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company, LexisNexis Database, and the 1984-1987 microfilm/microfiche newspapers from the Fresno Bee, Coalinga Record, and the Hanford Sentinel. The official union documents consisted of letters to and from the UFW and LCV lawyers, a UFW collective bargaining contract, workers complaints of the LCV management, and UFW organizing material, and the Malcriado UFW newsletter. The organizing material was made up of authorization for union representation cards, stickers with the words "Queremos un contrato" (We want a contract), and a variety of different pamphlets outlining regulations on pesticide use, wages, hours worked, working conditions, and finally a pamphlet outlining the rules and regulations of the United Farm Workers union. The microfilm/microfiche newspaper archives were accessed at the University of California, Merced library and the Coalinga District Library. The Coalinga Newspaper and the Fresno Bee were used because of the likelihood the organizing effort at La Cuesta Verde maybe mentioned. Newspapers were used for historical context, protest events and other information participants could otherwise leave out in the in-depth interviews.

The secondary sources resulted in a few newspaper clippings verifying what participants mentioned during the interviews. The archive of official union documents was obtained from the lead rank and file farm worker union organizer Joaquin Villa. These documents assisted in helping to verify the timeline of farm worker organizing and contract negotiation at LCV. In addition, the official union documents consisted of original hand written farm worker rights complaints, farm worker notes of meetings, drafts of the union contract, recruiting material used by the union, and lists of employees.

EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY

This research project focuses on a large California farm called La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company (LCV). This farm is located on the outskirts of Coalinga, a small rural town on the Westside of Fresno County in California's Central Valley. In 1978 La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company was the 12th largest farm operator in the State of California (Villarejo 1999). In 1983, the company consisted of approximately 18,000 acres (Wilson 1983). La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company grew a variety of crops, but specialized in cotton. The farm had fallen to the 26th largest in the state by 1986 (Eckhouse 1989).

La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company resides on the outskirts of the town of Coalinga. Coalinga is one of the few California mining towns that transformed from a mere camp to a permanent city (Novell and Davis 2015). Thirty years after the discovery of oil in 1862 by sheepherders, the Southern Pacific company named the site of Coalinga as a way to signify its function: "Coaling Station A" (Novell and Davis 2015; Van Dor 1919). In 1910, the oil rich Coalinga became incorporated and provided residents with a variety of different amenities not typically found in small rural communities, such as two daily newspapers, electric light, a water system and a public school (Novell and Davis 2015; Mitchell 2005). By 1912, it was estimated that Coalinga was one of the two largest producers of oil in the world (Levick 1912). In 1910, at the time of its incorporation, the town of Coalinga was estimated to have 5,500 residents and 5,000 workers living in the surrounding oil worker camps (Novell and Davis 2015). The following sixty years brought about strikes by oil workers in the 1920s, the construction of a community college in the 1930s, intensified oil production during WWII, all the while the population size of Coalinga remained fairly constant (Novell and Davis 2015, Mitchell 2005, Howell). The oil production in the surrounding region of Coalinga made this small rural town on the Westside of Fresno County a prosperous place to live. In addition to the large oil deposits surrounding Coalinga, other industries specializing on producing and extracting resources existed. One particular industry was agriculture.

Farm labor, which is a key component to the agricultural industry, has a long history of low wages and dangerous working conditions. The unprecedented wave of farm labor organizing that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s in California's rural communities as part of the larger cycle of protest helped to highlight these worksite abuses and create change. Although the history of farm worker organizing in the United States has been well-documented (Butousky and Smith 2007; Devra 1994; Garlaza 1964; McWilliams 1971), it was not until the establishment of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1965 that organizing Mexican-origin farm workers on a large scale began. The creation of the UFW stems from the collaboration of the Filipino led, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association (Ganz 2009). The combined efforts by these groups allowed the United Farm Worker's a victory in the historic Delano Grape Strike (1965-1970) (Pawel 2010). Moreover, these actions helped build the momentum needed for the state of California to implement the nations first legislation allowing farm workers the right to collectively organize and negotiate contracts with growers in 1975.

Below, I will examine four chronological time periods: 1970-1981, 1982-1984, 1985-1987, and post-1987. These phases represent time periods in which cycles of protest from the 1960s and 1970s and the United Farm Workers union participation in these cycles helped create templates of organizing that farm workers used to successfully

organize to gain union representation at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company. In addition, my analysis shows how the interactive colonial system remains even when contention exists proving to be pervasive and resorts to new forms of dominance such as prisons and the closure of farms to stop farm worker mobilizing.

1970-1981: Early Farm Labor Organizing

The population in the town of Coalinga in 1970 was 6,161. This was only a two hundred-person increase from the previous decade (US Census 1980). The discovery of a large asbestos deposit (Mumpton and Thomas 1973), oil, and agriculture in the region helped maintain steady work for the local community. The surrounding area consisted of farming a variety of different crops including but not limited to melons, barley, tomatoes, onions, grapes, garlic, cucumbers, and cotton. Cotton, which was first introduced by colonial missionary settlers to California in the 19th century and by the 20th century it had skyrocketed in production (Walker 2004). Similar to the mechanization of tomatoes, by the 1950's the state of California had mechanized cotton harvesting and reached its peak in production by the late 1970's when over 1.6 million acres of cotton was harvested (Walker 2004; Geisseler and Horwath 2013; Smith 2004). According to Joel Cabrera, a young farm worker who arrived at LCV in 1977 after following his father to the United States who had participated in the *Bracero* program (1942-1964) a decade prior, cotton was the largest crop being produced at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company.

The United Farm Workers participation in the waves of protest from the 1960s allowed for their messages and demands for better working conditions and wages to reach a large audience including rural communities in California's Central Valley. Although the historic Delano Grape Strike from 1965-1970 began in a specific geographical location in the southern Central Valley, the strike eventually spread throughout California's Central Valley affecting 32 growers (Ganz 2009). After negotiations with growers failed an additional tactic of a consumer boycott of grapes helped expand the farm worker struggle beyond the fields of California to cities and town across the U.S, and even internationally. The United Farm Workers victory in this grape strike signified a moment in time in which farm workers, one of the most marginalized groups in the nation, stood up against a goliath and won (Ganz 2009). The potential benefits and rights gained for farm workers in other regions for joining the UFW was evident. In the Salinas Valley for example, *lechugeros* (lettuce workers) were earning close to 10 dollars an hour after joining the UFW, making them one of the highest paid workers in the country in the 1970's (Bardacke 2012).

Another example of the United Farm Workers reach in organizing is evident in the surrounding community of the rural town of Coalinga. This small rural community, located 82 miles away from Delano began to experience farm labor organizing by the 1970's. On June 20th, 1974 melon pickers from Pappas and Co. marched out of the fields on the outskirts of Coalinga to protest the theft of their labor (El Malcraido 1974). This sort of action was part of the organizing repertoire the United Farm Workers had normalized during their involvement in organizing the wave of the 1960s and early 1970s to denounce employer abuses (Ganz 2009; Galarza 1964). Although these nonviolent tactics were widely used by workers so was repression on behalf of employers. In the case of the melon pickers from Pappas and Co., these workers were violently sprayed with high-pressure hoses from a watering truck (El Malcraido 1974). Although the

protesting farm workers were victims of a violent attack, the workers succeeded in maintaining their nonviolent resistance by temporarily stopping production in the packaging plant causing the company to lose revenue.

In 1975, Democrat Jerry Brown was running for Governor for the state of California. The UFW was an early supporter of Brown and soon after being elected Brown placed farm labor relations as one of his top priorities (Martin 2003). Along with the support of the Governor of California, the United Farm Workers and their allies' successfully lobbied politicians to implement the first ever labor law to protect farm workers (the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act - ALRA²) and instituted a board to oversee farm worker violations (Ganz 2009; Garcia 2012). The passage of the ALRA, at least on paper, gave the UFW hope, for it was the first time in the history of the US that legislation explicitly recognized farm workers rights to organize and join labor unions (Bardacke 2012; Martin 2003). Within five months after the passage of the ALRA, over four hundred union elections occurred, with the majority of the elections issued by the UFW becoming certified a short time afterwards (Martin 2003). The passage of the ALRA was a tremendous victory for farm workers who had historically been denied right to collectively bargain.

The passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975 would not have been possible without the United Farm Workers organizing farm workers, mobilization of allies, and successfully employing organizing tactics in the early 1960's and early 70's to show politicians and society the UFW was a major player in California. The accomplishments of the UFW should not be undervalued or overlooked. Farm worker organizing campaigns by the UFW provided a vehicle for marginalized community to stand up against abusive employers and demand change. Moreover, the passage of the ALRA is a significant feat, considering farm workers were one of the only workers in the country excluded from the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, which granted employees rights and the opportunity to collectively bargain (Ganz 2009).

The passage of the ALRA could not have come at a better time. Unlike the fairly homogenous racial demographic of Coalinga which consisted of primarily white individuals³, the agricultural labor force-surrounding Coalinga consisted of largely Mexican immigrants. The farm workers at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company were primarily Mexican or Mexican American. A large portion of these workers was undocumented⁴. A individual who arrived in at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company in

² Unfortunately, after less than a year of the passage of ALRA, the California Agricultural Labor Relation Board (ALRB), which was the agency that oversaw the ALRA, was temporarily closed due to funding and pressure from agricultural elites (Bardacke 2012; Garcia 2012). Although the implementation of ALRA to protect farm workers was not functioning correctly the UFW remained a major player in state politics and the agricultural fields. The ALRB eventually re-initiated operations when growers refocused their efforts to successfully defeating the pro-rural union Proposition 14 in 1976 (Bardacke 2012; Martin 2003).

³ Ten participants claim the majority of Coalinga's population was white. The US Census does not include racial/ethnic demographics until 1980.

⁴ Interview with Joaquin Villain Coalinga, California on July 2nd, 2016.

1977 stated, “I came for a better life.... it was difficult living here, we were always hiding from *la migra* (immigration enforcement)...it was hard⁵.” The company provided housing for many of its workers on its premises in the form of housing barracks. Barracks were provided for individual families and single rooms where *solteros* (single men) slept in bunk beds or on the floor. One participant recalled the barracks as being “dirty and small.... Imagine, it was 20 people living in one room and many of us were young living alone away from our families for the first time.¹” Jose de Molina stated, “If we wanted to do any repairs to the home it would have to come out of our pockets¹.” Neuburger (2013) describes the housing situation for agricultural workers in 1975 in the town of Huron, which is fifteen minutes away from Coalinga as:

“In one corner of the room, old mattresses were stacked in a pile next to a stack of rough, thin blankets and coarse materials to use as sheets... The barracks sat in a dirt yard that turned marshy with the downpour, so that we had to slosh through mud to go from barracks to bathroom to mess hall. It was impossible to keep the floors in any of these places clean, and so we got used to shuffling in the mud, inside and out” (pg. 240-241).

The deplorable living situation in combination with horrible working conditions and low wages in the surrounding agricultural fields led to a lettuce pickers strike in 1975 (Pawel 2014). The organizing of lettuce pickers in Huron was part of a larger campaign organized by the UFW (Neuburger 2013). The union was striking against the powerful Cal Coastal Farms Inc. agricultural company and found it necessary to keep workers well informed and organized (Pawel 2014). The long and drawn out campaign would prove to be a success when in 1981 the company recognized the UFW as the sole labor organization representing all of the company’s agricultural workers (Cal. Coastal Farms Inc. vs. UFW 1981).

The United Farm Workers participation in the wave of protest in the 1960’s and 1970’s helped spread farm union organizing throughout the Central Valley of California, and eventually even to the Pacific Northwest (Sifuentez 2016). This was made possible by the development of an organizing template that remained long after the UFW drastically reduced organizing farm workers in the late 1970’s (Ganz 2009). For example the Huron lechugeros mentioned above were able to gain union representation with the UFW as late as 1981. Nonetheless, the UFW would decline in union membership numbers in the 1980s as it shifted its focus to the political arena and the vetting of long time union organizers by Cesar Chavez (Bardacke 2012; Pawel 2014).

1982-1984: The Transition to a Hostile political environment

The 1980’s proved to be a hostile political environment for organizing labor unions in general, and farm workers in particular. The election of Republican Ronald Reagan as the President of the United States at the beginning of the 1980’s proved to be harmful to

⁵ Interview with Jose Rivera in Coalinga, California, July, 2nd 2016

union organizing. On August 5th, 1981 Ronald Reagan fired 11,345 striking air traffic controllers signaling an attack on workers bargaining power (Spade 2015). The successor to Democratic Governor of California Jerry Brown was Republican George Deukmejian (1983-1991). The election of George Deukmejian, forced the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, the agency that oversaw the implementation of the nations first labor law (ALRA) protecting farm workers to be accused of becoming “an arm of the growers” (Martin 2003). This came as no surprise considering California farm growers had funded much of Deukmejian’s governor campaign (Martin 2003). Previous farm worker sympathizers who held positions on the ALRB were quickly removed and replaced by anti-union individuals. The 1980’s also signified a shift in which unions defensively battled employers as they began to permanently lay-off workers as opposed to temporarily lay-offs in the past (Jung 2015).

Unfortunately, rather than continuing to ride the wave of protest from the 1970’s and the implementation of the ALRA, the United Farm Workers drastically reduced organizing farm workers by the late 1970s. This change in organizational strategy dramatically hurt the UFW membership. By the early 80’s, the UFW’s due paying members reportedly had shrunk to approximately 4,000-5,000 members from 50,000-70,000 in the late 1970s (Bardacke 2012). By the 1980’s the area and towns around Coalinga, like many other agro-industrial regions of California, had witnessed a drastic decrease in farm worker union organizing.

The town of Coalinga was forever changed after a critical event in 1983. A registered 6.5 earthquake struck the town of Coalinga on May 2nd, 1983 (Agnus 2008; Stover 1983). The aftermath left 1 person dead and 47 people requiring hospital treatment (Stover 1983). In addition, 309 single-family homes, 33 apartments were destroyed, and 1,594 other housing units had major and minor damages (Stover 1983). Gloria Castillo, who had only lived in the U.S for two years prior to the earthquake describes the event as, “Everything was moving. My sisters and I where inside our barrack not knowing what to do! My older brother Fidel got us all out. We were really scared as we stood outside watching the house and car moving⁶!” Overall, the estimated cost of property damage exceeded \$31 million dollars (Stover 1983).

In the aftermath of the 1983 Coalinga earthquake, the surrounding agricultural community of Coalinga also faced a financial burden. Coalinga is located on the east portion of the 39,000-acre Pleasant Valley Water District. The lands in this water district were overwhelmingly used for agriculture, specifically cotton, grain, hay crops, and tomatoes (Summers 1983). The main source for irrigation in this water district came in the form of irrigation wells. Shortly before the earthquake, farmers from had begun the irrigating their cotton and tomatoes crops. Following the earthquake many irrigation wells became damaged, placing farmers with a financial burden.

According to Summers (1983), the agricultural damages caused by the earthquake were in the millions of dollars. Bob Lee, president of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company, the largest agricultural company in the Pleasant Valley Water District making up 18,000 acres, is quoted in the Santa Cruz Sentinel saying, “...every farmer in the basin has had well problem. What we’re concerned about is that we’re repairing wells for what damage we can see today. There may be some more shifting going on” (Wilson 1983). In

⁶ Interview with Gloria Castillo in Coalinga, California, July 2nd, 2016

this newspaper article, Lee estimated repairs for one of irrigation well to cost \$75,000 (Wilson 1983). The timing of the earthquake could not have come at a worst time. A few years later, in 1985, the Coalinga Record newspaper reported that cotton plantings in the San Joaquin Valley would see a 200,000-acre decrease.

1985-1987: La Cuesta Verde Unionization Campaign

Description of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company

La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company was once among the top 15 largest farm operators (Villarejo 1999) in the state of California but had fallen to number 26 by 1986 (San Francisco Chronicle 1989). The decline in cotton in the State of California was caused by the rise in production costs (Glade et al., 1996); and in the case of Coalinga, the 1983 earthquake also had a damaging effect on cotton production (Wilson 1983). The company provided housing for many of its workers on its premises in the form of housing barracks. Barracks were provided for individual families and single rooms where *solteros* (single men) slept in bunk beds or on the floor.

Joaquin Villa arrived in Coalinga in 1981. The rural environment and calm setting of Coalinga helped Joaquin decide this would be town he would raise his family. With the help of his brother-in-law Joaquin acquired employment at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company in 1981. Prior to arriving in Coalinga, Joaquin had worked as a police officer in Mexicali, Mexico and labored in a furniture-manufacturing warehouse in Los Angeles, California. During both occupations, Joaquin was part of a union. He was part of the part of the Regional Mexican Workers Confederation (CROM) union in Mexicali and later the Teamsters labor union in Los Angeles. While organizing with the CROM and Teamsters labor union Joaquin gained invaluable activist human capital. Joaquin claims that his participation in “block walking” and speaking with fellow workers about the importance of joining the Teamsters union made him a stronger believer in the power of the union.

After acquiring his tractor operator position at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company in 1981 Joaquin began witnessing the inhumane way workers were treated by supervisors and the company. Joaquin describes the poor working conditions, harassment, discrimination, low wages, and horrible living conditions workers endured daily. On several occasions throughout the interview Joaquin described the shaming of farm workers endured by a supervisor they called *terror*: “I remember this man would come into the homes of the workers there at the ranch.... he would yell at the men, with no shame, there in front of his wife and kids! Oh, how we despised that supervisor⁷.” Joaquin had spent four years building camaraderie with fellow farm workers in order to gain trust and have discussion of the benefit of being represented by a union. The discussion with fellow workers regarding the union allowed Joaquin to establish a group of workers whom he could trust in. Finally in 1985, a work place injury was Joaquin’s final reason to call the union:

I walked into the office of the farms main supervisor. I told the secretary I needed to speak with the boss. I could not work, by this time I had a softball sized swollen knee from getting hurt on the job... it was full of puss and hurt every single time I walked!
Anyway, I told the secretary I needed the boss to give me some

⁷ Interview with Joaquin Villa in Coalinga, California, July 3rd, 2016

days off to rest in order to go to the doctor. I also asked for money to pay the hospital visit. The secretary asked the boss, who had the door open and he laughingly refused! Just then, my softball sized injury burst open and blood was running down my leg making my pants red from the blood... the secretary screamed and told the boss... he then agreed to loan me the money but with a 25% interest rate that would come out of my next paycheck. Can you believe this man!

Following this incident, Joaquin and his fellow farm workers decided to call the United Farm Workers union. Joaquin came into contact with Ricardo Torres, a UFW organizer in early 1985. In order to figure out whether or not workers at LCV wanted the union, organizer Ricardo Torres asked Joaquin to get his fellow workers to sign union pledge cards (see figure 1). To Ricardo’s surprise, after two days Joaquin returned with all of the union pledge cards filled out. Shortly after, Ricardo along with other UFW organizers

Figure 1. United Farm Worker union pledge card

traveled to LCV ranches and began organizing workers. Ricardo and his fellow UFW organizers brought along the organizing template the UFW had successfully implemented in the 1970’s in terms of the use of the union pledge cards to mobilize workers and gauge potential union support.

AUTHORIZATION FOR UNION REPRESENTATION

UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO

DATE _____

NAME _____ S.S.# _____

ADDRESS _____

EMPLOYED BY _____ LOCATION _____

JOB _____

I HEREBY OF MY OWN FREE WILL, AUTHORIZE THE UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO, ITS AGENTS OR REPRESENTATIVES, TO ACT FOR ME AS THE SOLE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGENT IN ALL MATTERS PERTAINING TO RATES OF PAY, WAGES, HOURS OF EMPLOYMENT, AND OTHER CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT, ADJUSTMENT AND SETTLEMENT OF ALL GRIEVANCES, COMPLAINTS OR DISPUTES OF ANY KIND ARISING OUT OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING.

SIGNATURE _____ WITNESS _____

IDENTIFICATION

UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT _____

NAME _____

S.S.# _____ LOCATION _____

HAS SIGNED AN AUTHORIZATION CARD TO HAVE THE UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO, REPRESENT HIM/HER AS HIS/HER UNION.

Cesar E. Chavez
CESAR E. CHAVEZ, PRESIDENT

DATE _____

United Farm Worker organizer Ricardo Torres was a veteran in union organizing. In 1965, Ricardo had begun as farm worker working along side his brother and father at the age of fifteen. This same year, Ricardo would travel from his worksite in the fields outside of Fresno to Delano after hearing the about Cesar Chavez and the farm worker uprising. Ricardo and a friend decided to start an alliance group in Fresno in order to support the now striking farm working grape workers in 1965. Realizing the potential with this young individual, United Farm Workers union hired Ricardo. During this time Ricardo gained invaluable organizing skills working along side Cesar Chavez, Gilbert Padilla, and Dolores Huerta. Ricardo makes the claim that his “university was the fields

and the workers were the teachers⁸.” During his time with the union, Ricardo worked on various campaigns in and around California’s Central Valley taking on a variety of positions from Reedley to Salinas. The activist human capital that Ricardo and other UFW organizers possessed along with the United Farm Workers organizing template allowed for farm workers from LCV, who had no previous knowledge of union organizing or activist experience to become empowered and stand up against the abusive LCV (Van Dyke and Dixon 2013).

With the exception of Joaquin Villa, the group of farm workers from La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company had little knowledge of a union. Joaquin was the only worker with prior knowledge and experience being in a union and an active member within the union. The other workers became knowledgeable of what a union was and could accomplish with the assistance of Joaquin and the UFW organizers sharing their activist human capital. According to participants, they understood they were being mistreated by management, constantly being robbed of wages, and verbally abused by supervisors. The types of abuses documented by Scott (1985) in Southeast Asian plantations. However, it wasn’t until Joaquin told them they had rights as workers that they began to question their living and working conditions at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company⁹. The workers access to this new knowledge helped them develop a new consciousness open to the idea of being represented by a union. The arrival of UFW organizers and the UFW organizing template increased the workers’ activist human capital that led to the organizing of actions and protests to demand change at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company.

United Farm Worker organizer Ricardo Torres claims this was the fastest union organizing campaign he was a part of stating, “the union campaign at La Cuesta Verde was one of the best organized and remember, I have been apart of thousands of organizing campaigns in my life.” Within a few months, the UFW garnered enough support from the more than 400 farm workers at LCV to have elections on July 24th, 1985 on deciding whether or not they wished to be represented by the union¹⁰. The results of the election showed that well over 75% of the workers favored the union¹¹. Interviewee Jennifer Magon responded, “of course I wanted the union, it was the only way the company was going to respect us¹².” Another participant, a mother of two claimed the reasoning behind her vote for the union was her children well being stating, “I love my children and it was hard to survive with the money we were getting paid. They were becoming wealthy meanwhile the workers were living in poverty!¹³” Certification of the union would come in early 1986 followed by beginning of contract negotiations.

The negotiation of the contract took place a few months after the certification of the union in 1986 (El Malcraido Aug. 1986). During this time grievances were filed against the company for discriminating against union members (El Malcraido 1986). Joel Cabrera, recalls his companions being mistreated and fired for their participation in union

⁸ Interview with Ricardo Torres in Fresno, California, July 2nd, 2016.

⁹ All of the farm workers participants mentioned this in their interview.

¹⁰ Interview with Joaquin Villa in Coalinga, California, July 3rd, 2016

¹¹ Interview with Ricardo Torres in Fresno, California, October 15th, 2016

¹² Interview with Jennifer Magon in Woodland, California, November 5th, 2016

¹³ Interview with Frida Castro in Coalinga, California, July 2nd, 2016

activity¹⁴. Joaquin Villa described the harassment and maltreatment of workers as unjust, stating "...they were discriminating against us," and in turn filed grievances to "...make sure the company knew we were not scared and not going to let them push us around." In addition, the election to be represented by the union and solidarity among the workers at LCV proved to be an influence in the surrounding farms. One participant recalls being approached by a supervisor at LCV and told that on another farm the employer had taken away farm workers benefits and cut their wages, but after the union organizing campaign at LCV the employer gave the worker everything back plus a 25 cent raise¹⁵.

Although contracts were developed and shared with the farm worker-negotiating group called "Los Malcraidos" (the ill-mannered) headed by president Joaquin Villa, negotiation talks stalled. In the year that followed, negotiations between the UFW and the LCV stalled. During this time period participants describe protests by workers, acts of individual resistance in the workplace (Kelley 1994; Scott 1985), and union busting attempts by the company. Ultimately, the UFW failed. Contract negotiations stalled and after nine months the company filed for bankruptcy. The bankruptcy is said to have occurred due to LCV not being able to acquire a crop loan from the Bank of America (Coalinga Record 1987). While participants claim the real reason was LCV management was reluctant to pay the fair wages the workers demanded. As a result of the closing of LCV, now ex-workers who lived in the barracks supplied by the company were given two months to vacate and the promises.

Many former employees of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company did not let the closing of the company stop them from staying vigilant. These former employees continued to use the skills and knowledge they had obtained in the organizing campaign to place pressure on their former employers for a severance package to help them and their families, many of whom had worked for the company for decades, and find housing outside of the barracks. The displacement of the workers not only affected the adults but the children as well. UFW's lawyer Malcolm Reisner stated, "Many of the children were still in school at this time... for the very least the workers wanted to be able to stay until the end of the school year¹⁶." The tactics the workers and UFW organizers used was protest the Bank of America for failing to give LCV a loan. This tactic, which was part of the UFW organizing template, was used to apply pressure to the Bank of America in Coalinga and Fresno and also to give them bad publicity¹⁷. These protests continued for over a month. Eventually in 1987, the bank gave into the workers demands and issued a payout of \$1,250 per family and \$250 per worker¹⁸.

Post-1987

The election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States not only resulted in an attack on organized labor, but also an expansion of the War on Drugs. This expansion led

¹⁴ Interview with Joel Cabrera in Coalinga, California, July 2nd, 2016

¹⁵ Interview with Joaquin Villa in Coalinga, California, July 3rd, 2016

¹⁶ Interview with Malcolm Reisner in Fresno, California, August 24th, 2016

¹⁷ The Coalinga Record documents these protests in their newspaper in March of 1987. In addition the documents provided by Joaquin shows photos of former LCV employees participating in the protests outside of the Fresno Bank of America.

¹⁸ Coalinga Record May 12th, 1987

to the criminalization of black and brown bodies and sharp increases in the construction of prisons. A total of forty-three major prison, smaller prisons and camps have been built since 1984 (Gilmore 2007). The cluster of prisons located in the heart of California’s Central Valley is known as “prison alley.” According to Gilmore (2007) the typical characteristics of a prison town is “dominated by a few firms in a single industrial sector, majority Latino, unemployment and poverty are two to five times the statewide averages, and the land converted to prison use was formerly irrigated cropland” (129). Although this description is not identical to the conditions where the Coalinga prison was constructed, the neoliberal underpinnings for its construction are certainly present.

The closing of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company in May of 1987 forced workers to vacate company housing. During the same period that these farmworkers were in the process of being displaced from their homes, the City of Coalinga had begun inquiring the possibility of constructing a prison. On February 10th, 1987, three months before the closure of LCV the Coalinga Courier states that Coalinga’s City Council had begun requesting Assemblyman Jim Costa advocate for a construction of a prison in the town. The City Council was trying to cash in after seeing the immense revenue its neighboring town Avenal had experienced with the opening of its own state prison. Within five months Assemblyman Costa introduced Assembly Bill 833, which was then signed by the pro-Agro-industrial Republican governor Deukmejian to begin studying possible sites for the construction of a medium security prison (Klimek 1987). Shortly afterwards, the location of the prison was determined (i.e., LCV) construction commenced. Pleasant Valley State Prison opened in 1994 in the formerly irrigated croplands of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company on the outskirts of Coalinga – providing a direct and palpable transition from agrarian forms of domination to a penal state model of an adapting and evolving interactive colonial system.

The interactive colonization system that helped displace Mexican-origin individuals and supply California agricultural growers, like La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company with a cheap, accessible, and reliable labor remained after the closing of LCV. The former LCV farm worker employees were marked as “bad workers” after the companies closing, making it difficult to find work even as staff employees in the new prisons¹⁹. Eventually, many former employees were able to obtain work laboring in agriculture but claim wages and working conditions worsened with the lack of union protections.

It is important to note that along with the opening of the Pleasant Valley State Prison, the city of Coalinga is also home to the Claremont Custody Center (opened 1991), a custody center formally leased to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations to house the overcrowded prison population. In addition, the Coalinga State Hospital opened in 2005, which houses approximately 1,283 forensically committed patients, mostly of which are sexually violent predators (California Department of State Hospitals 2016). Hence, the trend of a new form of domination continues into the 2010s.

Table 1- *Political Environment*

Event	Implication
Larger Political Environment	

¹⁹ Five of the participants interviewed made this claim.

Establishment of UFW (1965)	Union organizing farm workers, organizing boycotts, pickets, strikes, and advocating for better worker protections on a state & national level.
Agricultural Labor Relations Act (1975)	Recognized farm workers' rights, allowed for unionization and bargaining with employers, & establish the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) to oversee violations.
United States Presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989)	Anti-union stance. Fired 13,000 union air traffic control workers.
California Governor George Deukmejian (1983-1991)	Appointed pro-grower representatives to the ALRB.
Immigration Reform and Control Act (1985)	Legislation aimed to control & deter illegal immigration to the United States
Local Political Environment	
UFW organizing (1974-1975)	Union organizes protest and actions in the fields surrounding Coalinga
Pleasant Valley Water District (1985)	Coalinga farmers are in need of water. Pleasant valley expected to revert to desert in next 10 years.
Assemblyman Jim Costa (Jan. 1987)	Meets with Coalinga residents & city council about the construction of a state prison
Opening of Avenal State Prison (Feb. 1987)	State prison brings hundreds of jobs to Avenal.

Table 2- *UFW Activity in and around Coalinga*

Event	Action	Outcome
Union Activity		
1974-1981:		
Farm Labor organizing around Coalinga: Medium Coalinga Melon pickers (1974)	Action: Yes Protest	Positive: Temporary stoppage of melon packaging plant
Huron Lettuce pickers (1975)	Action: Yes Strike Marches	Positive: Increase in wages
UFW arrives at LCV (1975)	Action: No	Negative: Union leaves after getting no support
Union Activity		
1982-1986		
UFW involvement at LCV: High Hiring of Joaquin Villa (1981) UFW	Action: Yes Organized farm worker committee	Positive: Contacting
Arrival of UFW (1985)	Action: Yes Organizing LCV workers	Positive: Election-gain union representation
Unionization of LCV workers (1985)	Action: Yes Protests	Positive: Negotiation of union contract
Union Activity		
Jan-July 1987		
UFW Involvement at LCV: Low Negotiation of contract by UFW (1986)	Action: Yes Protests	Negative: LCV rejects union demands
LCV files for bankruptcy (1987)	Action: Yes Picket of Bank of America	Positive: Obtained severance

DISCUSSION

The cycle of protest from the 1960's and 1970's proved to be an important factor for farm labor organizing in California's Central Valley. The United Farm Workers involvement in this cycle of protest helped reach rural communities throughout the state of California. In addition, the UFW's participation in the wave of protest helped in creating an organizing template that was used even after the political environment became hostile. In our case this template involved the strategies of mobilizing a farm worker labor union election campaign. Table 1 highlights the changes in the political environment in both the larger and local level. This political environment, which is a factor in cycles of protest, seemed favourable in the late 1960's and 1970's. The 1980's ushered in a hostile political environment with the election of anti-labor Republican politicians on the national and state level. Table 2 summarizes the activity at La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company from the 1970's until its closure in 1987. This time period is separated into four sections: 1970-1981, 1982-1984, 1985-1987, and post-1987. Each section has significant events, actions, and outcomes.

Between the years 1970-1981 there was a moderate amount of union activities around the town of Coalinga. On a state level, the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relation Act of 1975 finally gave farm workers the right to unionize and the creation of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board to oversee this process and the UFW the opportunity to develop a union election-organizing template. Table 2 highlights how in 1974 and 1975 on two separate occasions, the United Farm Workers union helped support farm workers protesting horrible working conditions and demanding a raise in wages around the town of Coalinga and a neighbouring town. Table 1 highlights how the UFW would obtain a major victory 1975 with then Governor Jerry Brown, an advocate for farm workers, passing the Agricultural Labor Relations Act. The UFW attempted to organize farm workers one final time in the area surrounding Coalinga in the 1970's they were unsuccessful in gaining support. The UFW would eventually dramatically reduce its organizing efforts of farm workers by 1977 (Ganz 2009).

Between 1982-1984 a change in the political environment occurred. The election of Republican President of the United States Ronald Reagan in 1981 and Republican Governor of California George Deukmejian proved to be an anti-labor era resulting in a hostile environment for union organizing. The town of Coalinga experienced a registered 6.3 earthquake resulting in a collapse of homes and businesses and local growers having to repair wells used for watering crops.

Between 1985-1987, the United Farm Workers union once again became active in the surrounding region of Coalinga. Joaquin Villa and his fellow farm workers from La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company contacted the United Farm Workers union after workers decided they were fed up with the horrible working conditions, verbal abuse, and the stealing of their wages. The United Farm Workers organizers arrived in LCV in 1985 and organized collaboratively with the farm workers to have elections to decide whether or not the workers wanted to be represented by the union. Prior to contacting the UFW, farm workers at LCV had organized amongst themselves, lobbying fellow workers to see the benefits of being part of a union. Along with the guidance of UFW organizing and the

leadership of Joaquin Villa farm workers at LCV gained union representation in 1985. The vast majority of the workers voted in favour of the union and within the following year became certified. Unfortunately, contract negotiations stalled and LCV filed for bankruptcy in 1987. This resulted in the loss of work and eviction of LCV workers from the company supplied housing.

After the closure of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company in 1987 the state of California decided to choose the location where LCV used to reside for the construction of a new state prison. The discussion of building a prison in Coalinga had been happening for over a year. Yet, coincidentally it was not until the bankruptcy of LCV that the location for the construction of the prison was decided.

CONCLUSION

Literature on the farm worker movement tends to focus on the period before the 1980's (Bardacke 2012; Ganz 2009; Garcia 2012). This study shows how farm worker union organizing campaigns continued to occur, but on a much smaller scale in the 1980s and even 1990s (see also Sifuentez 2016). The United Farm Workers participation in the cycles of protests from the 1960's and 1970's allowed for their message for justice to reach farm working rural communities throughout the state of California and nationwide. During this cycle of protest the United Farm Workers developed an organizing template that resulted in successful mobilization and winning rural union elections. The ability of organizers and workers to stay motivated, have access to salient knowledge, and put this knowledge to good use allowed the UFW to develop many different strategies and tactics instead of relying on the traditional organizing repertoires being implemented by their rivals (e.g., the Teamsters) (Ganz 2000, 2009). Unfortunately, in the late 1970's the United Farm Workers decreased organizing farm worker resulting in a dramatically reduced union membership (Bardacke 2012).

The 1980's ushered in a hostile political environment with the election of Ronald Reagan and California Governor George Deukmejian. The case of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company demonstrates that farm worker union organizing in an unfavorable climate was made possible using the already established organizing template the United Farm Workers union had developed and refined during the cycle of protest from the previous decades. Similar to the literature regarding the usage of a strategic organizing framework to assist farm workers in organizing campaigns, farm workers at LCV used similar tactics. The usage of activist human capital resulted in workers remaining loyal to their union campaign and vigilant when LCV failed to negotiate the contract.

My findings indicate that although farm labor union organizing was possible in a hostile political environment by a group of marginalized and oppressed people the interactive colonization system is pervasive and resorts to new forms of dominance such as prisons. The closing of La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company insured the empowered farm workers from LCV would remain in a marginalized position and show farm workers from the surrounding area that collective action was pointless because the growers seem to always gain the upper hand.

Finally, the La Cuesta Verde Ginning Company case can be used to help explain farm worker union organizing campaigns post 1977. Considering the larger political environment remains the same in the state of California, farm worker union organizing

campaigns in post-1977 would have had to rely on the same union organizing template developed by the United Farm Workers during their participation in the previous cycle of protest. Moreover, this case informs us that farm worker motivation, access to salient knowledge, and what they choose to do with this information is important regardless of the political environment they encounter.

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