

Art in Agriculture  
Labor Movements:  
a zine/syllabus  
by Jessica  
Springer



Positionality Statement: I am white and queer, studying Cognitive Science at Yale University, and I created this as part of the Yale Sustainable Food Program summer farm internship.

I am not an agricultural worker. My grandparents, aunt and uncle, and the majority of my mother's side of the family work(ed) on land that they own(ed). Their ownership of the land they work on is tied to their [whitness](#).

While making this I was living and learning on land stolen from Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Niantic, and Quinnipiac indigenous peoples and nations. Here are two resources on [land reparations](#).

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What does it matter to analyze how they're doing it?

How can (we) listen?

- ! At no point do I want a take away to be supporting consumer based change or creating "alternative pathways"

Why now??

Essential workers immigration crisis

[How do worker led agricultural movements use graphics to communicate?]

Who is titled 'worker/laborer' v.s. farmer?

What about small scale-farms?

What do worker-led movements look like?

Focus on agency of workers as **movement leaders**

Who's voices are centered here?

Why graphics as an entry point??

Because it is one!

+ educational accessibility in content and forum  
Arts based research

Disclaimer: not comprehensive rather an accumulation of exploration and a jumping off point

## More Questions?

What does understanding political organizing as inherently aesthetic or as a performance add to, or challenge, social mobilization and performance theories?

How do we understand art activism in this new context [waves of conservatism]?

What kinds of progressive or activist cultural practices will be most effective in challenging conservative power?

What is the relationship between the form taken by an activist cultural practice and its goals?

What relationships should artists establish with their audience, constituencies, or communities?

What can we learn from past examples of art and cultural activism?

How does the formulation of an activist art practice relate to the questions of difference and identity politics that are at the center of contemporary media and visual arts theory?

## Art in Activism//Aesthetics for Revolutions

### [Re/Imagining Activism](#) by Rodney Diverlus

Artivism is a bold vision for alternatives, whatever they may be; it provides a roadmap for finding ways of moving closer toward a “utopian” reality, but an essential one—call it peace, equity, justice, or however else one might conceive of this utopia. Artivism involves introducing audiences to radical and transformative concepts and visions—that are digestible and accessible—of and for many world contexts. Artivism works to resuscitate tired social justice movements in the continued uphill battle for a socially just world. Artivism is as fluid as it is fixed, as systemic as it is individualized, as apparently “simple” as it is complex. I see artivism as a future: a future full of different possible tactics. To me, artivism is one of the only methods of organizing resiliency for survival. Indeed, and dauntingly, I see artivism as our only fighting chance.

“Art is about framing and reframing things”  
-Elizabeth Sisco

### [Art Activism and Oppositionality](#) by Grant H. Kester

Transgressive Force of Aesthetic Knowledge:

- ↳ Kant’s third Critique, “The aesthetic is that mode of knowledge that can overcome the boundaries of conventional thought (the opposition between reason and sense, or between subjective and objective judgement)” (12)
- ↳ Moral/teleological dimension of aesthetic knowledge, “Which allows it to envision a more just and humane form of human society (even if it can only be evoked in the discrete encounter between the viewer and the work of art)” (12)

“These two dynamics combine to provide the aesthetic with the power to grasp the totality of social relations in a more systematic or comprehensive manner.”(12)

# Murals

"Neighborhood murals in which historical figures like these were portrayed as quite literally larger than life became important "textbooks" that spurred an interest in history."  
(109)

"Many muralists spend days and weeks seeking the right site in a given community, and weeksmore learning about the community's particular needs and values, before attempting a mural. Both the space and the mural content are thus often complexly negotiated texts, texts that raise issues in the community to new levels of debate. At the same time community murals, placed on the outside of buildings rather than inside museums, challenge dominant notions of the art object as fetishized individual production with no real connection to any audience."  
(117)

Founded in 1965 on the Delano Grape Strike picket lines of Cesar Chavez's United Farmworkers Union, the company created and performed "actos" or short skits on flatbed trucks and in union halls. Taking the "actos" on tour to dramatize the plight and cause of the farmworkers

## Greater Context: Chicano movement

"The intertwined nature of the Chicano movement and the mural movement is apparent already in one of the first Chicano murals executed in California. Painted by Antonio Bernal on the wall of the offices of United Farm Workers/ El Teatro Campesino cultural center in Del Rey in 1968, this mural can be read as a kind of origin story of the Chicano movement."  
(108)

This sense of united effort was given historical depth not only by the historical figures in the scene but also in the style of the mural, which draws from the Mexican muralists who had drawn from the style of ancient Indian friezes (which, like Bernal's mural, typically depict people in three-quarter profile)"  
(111)



## Dolores Huerta & Honoring Women Organizers



La Ofrenda

“The piece La Ofrenda (“The Offering”) by Yreina Cervantes, for example, helps to retell the history of the Chicana/o movement. It places Dolores Huerta, UFW cofounder along with Chávez, in her rightful place at the center of the movement. This is important not just for doing greater justice to Huerta as an individual but for symbolizing all the work done in the 1960s, 1970s, and earlier by Chicana activists and cultural workers.” (121)

The [Dolores Huerta Foundation](#) trains community organizers in direct action and creating change through structural transformation.

“Giving Huerta her rightful place in the movement is paralleled by a feminist rearticulation of the continuing struggle of farmworkers in the United States in such murals as Las Lechugueras (“The Lettuce Pickers”) by [Juana Alicia](#). This piece offers an “x-ray vision” of a child in the womb of a lettuce picker in the field to dramatically depict how the environmental and personal dangers of pesticides present a still greater potential for harm to pregnant farmworkers and their unborn children. The mural powerfully supports efforts by the farmworkers’ union to limit the use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals that harm farmworkers.” (122)

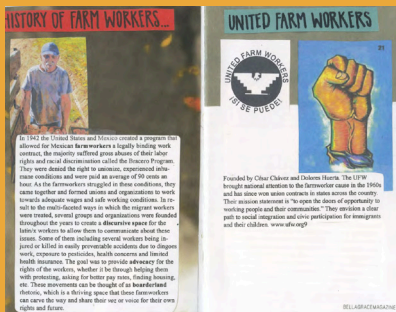


Las Lechugueras

# Zines on UFW History



These [Zines](#) give brief overviews of the founding of the UFW and other farm labor movements.

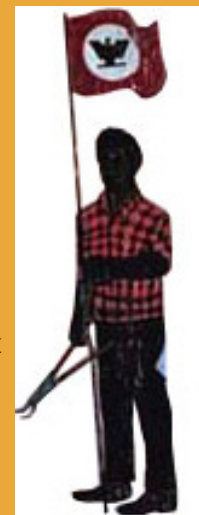


[Primary source accounts](#): photographs, oral histories, videos, essays and historical documents from the United Farm Worker Delano Grape Strikers and the UFW Volunteers who worked with Cesar Chavez.

"The UFW flag (which Chávez holds in the mural) proudly bore a black Aztec eagle against a red background, a symbol soon to become identified with the Chicano/a movement generally. The union began its first huelga (strike) on 16 September 1965, the day commemorated as the beginning of the Mexican Revolution." (109)

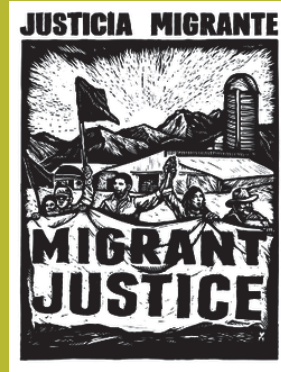
"A symbol is an important thing and that is why we chose an Aztec eagle. It gives pride...When people see it they know it means dignity." -Cesar Chavez

[The](#) black eagle signifies the dark situation of the farm worker. The Aztec eagle is a historic symbol for the people of Mexico. The UFW incorporated the Aztec eagle into its design in order to show the connection the union had to migrant workers of Mexican-American descent, though not all UFW workers were/are Mexican-American. The white circle signifies hope and aspirations. The red background stands for the hard work and sacrifice that the union members would have to give.



# Iconography

*What messages are they sending?*



Art housed an exiled divine spark-the image of human liberation and the sublimation of human rebellion-which, breaking its bounds, could inspire the most radical transformations of live ever achieved. -Judith Adler



*How do they imagine a better world? or a different world?*



*Are they inter or intra community focused?*



*How do these serve as visions or mission statements?*

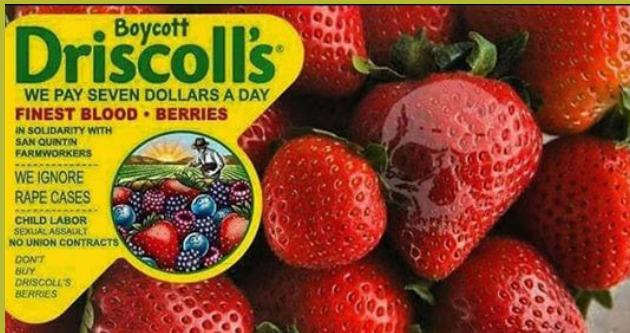


## Blood Berries:

### Boycotting Sakuma Bros Farm Berries



Notice similarities between the crest of [C2C](#) and Driscoll's?



*does the beauty of the movements iconography make it more easily co-opted?*

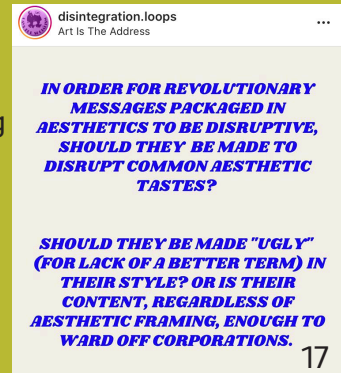
**Agrarian Imaginary:** an idealized image of the smallscale farmer (Getz et al. 2008, Gray 2014, Guthman 2004). Such portrayals appeal to the historical notion of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer who developed the U.S. agricultural economy and landscape by working the land with his own hands. This farmer is usually rendered as white and male, and as an individual who labors alone to produce wholesome food for the nation's population. This agrarian imaginary continues to disguise the messiness of real agriculture practice and its inherent injustices. (160)

How does Driscoll's crest pull on this Imaginary?

What does it mean that food justice imagery overlaps with corporate industrial images of where food comes from?

Notice the cognitive dissonance of Boycott Driscoll's recreation of the strawberry box logo?

The art practice that sells capitalist ideology is considered art and anything that deviates from that is considered political propagandist, polemic, or didactic, strange, weird, subversive, or ugly - Tony Cade Bambara



# Protest Signs and Puppets

Publix spends hundreds of millions of dollars billing itself as your friendly neighborhood grocery store

↑ This is what food justice movements are up against

Like with Blood Berries, The Coalition for Immokalee Workers twists corporate imagery to communicate their message



NEWM

# The Coalition for Immokalee Workers (CIW)

[CIW](#) is a worker-based human rights organization internationally recognized for its achievements in fighting human trafficking and gender-based violence at work. The CIW is also recognized for pioneering the design and development of the Worker-driven Social Responsibility paradigm, a worker-led, market-enforced approach to the protection of human rights in corporate supply chains.

Labor rights education, worker-led monitoring and market based enforcement with real teeth.

- Gerardo Reyes Chavez, prominent CIW member

Companies that sign on to the campaign have agreed to use their market power to force producers to increase farmworker wages (a penny more per pound of tomatoes bought goes directly to workers' paychecks), enforce a human-rights-based code of conduct for agricultural suppliers (in which ethics standards are regulated by worker groups, including zero tolerance for sexual harassment and forced labor), ongoing third-party farm audits to ensure that growers are complying with standards, and providing transparency for tomato purchases in Florida ([167](#))

The fair food program is proof of concept for a new approach to protecting workers rights and dignity in corporate supply chains everywhere. We call that approach worker-driven social responsibility.

- Gerardo Reyes Chavez

for more on this topic see [Food Chains](#) documentary and [Ted Med](#)

# Creating Art Messaging with Farm Workers

CIW collectively formulated a messaging framework which was to be expressed in the street theater as 4 types of abuse, along with 4 corresponding demands to put an end to them. One of my tasks was to illustrate these pictorially within portable mural-puppets: poverty, slavery, physical abuse, and sexual harassment; to be contrasted with fair wages, freedom, dignity, and respect.

The theater began with a wave of workers from Immokalee parting the crowd on their way to their place at the foot of the stage, which became an impromptu field where dozens of workers simulated the task of picking and hauling tomatoes by the bucket while on the stage itself, four workers testified to the central abuses of farm labor. As the play progressed, and farmworkers and their allies prevailed over the resistance of Publix to change, [the puppets] were turned, one by one, to reveal their opposite in a world where fundamental human rights are respected in the fields.



Mona Larson



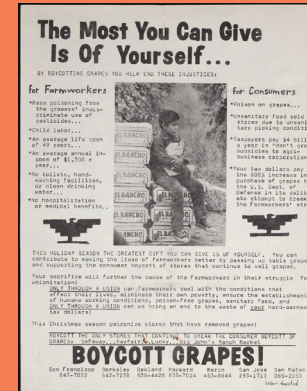
Mona Larson

# Boycotts

In contrast to fair trade labels and certification schemes, the CIW's campaigns do not merely encourage consumers to make better choices through their buying practices or create pressure for social change through the market. Rather, they ask consumers to use their political power as citizens to write letters and get involved with farmworker-led movements and, most importantly, to boycott products and retailers that do not adhere to the CIW's standards (166)

*Worker-led Agricultural Movements in the U.S. have a long history of using boycotts as a way to pressure the system*

For Farmworkers ->



<- For Consumers

Jacques E. Levy research collection on Cesar Chavez, 1959-1997

## Fair Food // New Food

*In the aforementioned Teb Med talk, Reyes Chavez describes the need to create a new kind of food, Fair Food*



*In many instances protest signs pair images of produce with words that match the ideals of the movement, this is contrasted by negative associations paired with corporate brands that they are trying to convince to join them.*



## \*\*Clarification on consumer-based initiatives\*\*

Contemporary consumer-based initiatives that address fair labor standards in the United States include domestic labor certification schemes such as the Agricultural Justice Project and the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group. They allow consumers to purchase their way into a supposedly more ethical food system. But as Brown and Getz argue (2008), in these initiatives laborers become yet another standard to be consumed, rather than being regarded as participants in the process of achieving justice. Broader farmworker movements and unionization efforts are not incorporated into these schemes, and therefore labor certification, no matter how well-meaning, can thwart efforts to create structural changes to the social relations of production.

(157)

V.S!

Consumer-farmworker solidarity where consumers not only [utilize] their purchasing power directly, but also [apply] their influence in boycotts, protests, and media campaigns. By refusing to purchase certain products and taking part in protests and actions, consumer-farmworker collaborations have successfully pressured producers and large-scale purchasers to improve labor conditions. (158)

## Final Questions?

In order to create a just food system, agrarian narratives and imagery that promote small, family-owned, and local farms must be pushed further: people need to ask not only “Where does my food come from?” but also “Who performs the labor to grow this food? ([172](#))

*How can we build coalitions and act in solidarity with farmers?*

*How can we listen best to farm workers and identify when we might be listening to corporations?*

## Thank yous

### Yale Librarians

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