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Prospectus

March 2013

*La Pasionaria: Ethos formation, Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers*

Dolores Huerta is one of the great women of twentieth-century American history...La Pasionaria (the passionate one), as she is also referred to, has personified leadership, courage, commitment to the cause of the downtrodden and powerless, and yes, passion for social justice.

Mario T. Garcia, *A Dolores Huerta Reader*

\*Excerpted

Purpose and Rationale:

Both my parents were farm laborers. Most of my extended family members were too. This fact is not all together surprising considering that I am Mexican-American and from the Central Valley of California. My parents and family can tell you stories that echo what is known about farm laborer conditions. They worked for hours in the blistering heat; sweating out the little nutrients their bodies were fighting to hold onto. They labored. They had sore hands and bodies to show for their meager contributions to each of their family's household incomes.

Neither of my parents kept the money they made from working in the fields. They wouldn't have thought to. When I asked my mother if she remembered how much she got paid for working in the fields, she simply answered, "I don't know. My dad got the money." As we spoke a bit longer she offered the phone to my dad, she thought he might remember what he got paid. He did. He described the way he'd work to fill as many trays as possible in a day. He struggled to remember the exact

amount he got paid, but knew it was approximately 5 cents a tray, of which he got 1 cent, his mother kept the rest. If he worked without any “messaging around” he could get 100 trays a day, or \$5. His share, \$1. His parents routinely kept him out of school during the grape harvest, so he could contribute to the household income. He’d usually begin school in the middle of October and was responsible for buying his own clothes. My mother suffers from nosebleeds almost daily and terrible allergies. Many of her doctors attribute her propensity for nosebleeds as a side affect from dusting corn in the fields when she was a child. For many, like my mother, dealing with the carcinogenic pesticides was just part of the job description and many times families felt lucky to have the work.

The brutal conditions and low wages for farm laborers like my parents was what fueled Chavez and Huerta to dedicate their lives to improving their work environment. Keeping me out of those conditions is what fueled my parents to work to ensure that I would not experience the pain and labor of working in the fields. My parents were hard workers in every sense. They had to be. My work keeps my hands soft and not calloused, so while we can call the work of scholars rigorous, it has always escaped my definition of hard work. *Working with your hands is hard work.* Laboring. Crafting. Toiling. Farm laborers are hard workers and though my parents recount their days as field workers as grueling and the main reason they worked tirelessly to put my father through college and my mother through beauty school, they don’t complain about it. They didn’t want us to have to work as hard and to struggle in the ways they did. Their plan worked.

It's important to understand my close connection to the cause Huerta and Chavez fought for because it's what fuels me to make sure Huerta's contributions are not lost or ignored by our field. It's imperative that examples of rhetorical strategies deployed by people from outside the often White and/or traditional institutions (political and academic arenas) are looked at in order to further our understanding of the way rhetoric works. In other words, the kind of inclusion and valuing that this work aims to do is as much for my parents, and those they represent, as it is for the Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy (RCL) field.

Although much of this work is driven by my personal connection to the people most affected by the work of Huerta, it is also driven by my observation of a huge and critical gap in our scholarship. For example, in a general survey of the field of Composition and Rhetoric it is evident that there is little research that focuses on Latino, and even more so, Latina figures. To be certain in the last decade or two there has been an increase of scholarship out there regarding Latino/a cultural rhetoric, but there are still very few figures being studied beyond Gloria Anzaldua and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. Further while there are important works from well-known Latino scholars such as Damian Baca, Victor Villanueva, Jaime Meijia, and Ralph Cintron, the Latina voice is still often silent despite evidence of their/*our* participation in the field. With veteran scholars such as Christina Kirklighter (comp oriented) and Gloria Anzaldua (lit oriented) and emerging scholars such as Aja Martinez and Cristina Ramirez there is promise for more and louder representation of the so called "sleeping giant" Latino/a community. I place myself within this community as an emerging Latina scholar committed to not only inserting

important Latina figures from the past into the present, but in also analyzing how rhetoric is deployed from diverse bodies. While my work begins to fill in a very small part of the scholarly gap left by the general absence of Latina figures, there are 3 primary goals I aim to accomplish in this project.

First I aim, to bring the Latina voice of Dolores Huerta into the field of Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy. As co-founder of UFW Huerta worked tirelessly alongside Cesar Chavez during the 1960s and 70s to secure better wages and working conditions for farm laborers. And although she was often a speaker at rallies and protests she remains a largely understudied contributor. Her voice is an important contribution to the field of Rhetoric and Composition for several reasons. First, as a field we have very little representation of Latina rhetors. Second, Latina/os make up an already large and still growing population in the US and including major figures from this community is important to demonstrate that our histories matter while also providing a more complete representation of history; a rhetorical history that ignores such a significant population is not very thorough. Lastly, a representation of the agricultural industry's workers is also lacking in our field despite our cultures dependence on them.

Second, this work will analyze and focus on specific artifacts that demonstrate how Huerta addresses and constructs her ethos. These documents provide us with a rich understanding of the rhetorical nimbleness required and exhibited by Huerta, which ultimately expands how ethos can be conceptualized in the field. Ultimately I imagine my focus on ethos construction through the analysis

of delivery and style as a way to expose the kind of rhetorical strategy necessary to move people from divergent groups to action.

After uncovering the moves Huerta makes in her delivery and style, I aim to build on the work of feminist scholars such as, Dingo, Enoch, and Royster and Kirsch by looking to the networks Huerta develops and how her work lives on beyond her role as UFW vice-president. Ultimately, through this research I will trace the opportunities made possible for others by Dolores Huerta because of her actions, speeches, and participation in UFW. Further, with the culminating work I aim to deepen our understanding of ethos construction.