

A Statement from The Department of Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies

The department of Chicano/a Latino/a Studies at LMU stands in solidarity with Ana Munguia, Debra Rojas, Dolores Huerta, and all other survivors of sexual abuse at the hands of farmworker organizer César Chávez. We support their courage coming forward and breaking the silence. We condemn acts of sexual violence and gender-based violence in our Chicane and Latine communities and activist spaces. The Chicana/o Latina/o Studies department further acknowledges that, for many of our students, this issue is personal and we are dedicated to prioritizing care and accountability when these concerns are brought to our attention.

The investigative [New York Times](#) article on Chávez's abuse states that the women stayed silent for decades "out of shame and for fear of tarnishing the image of a man who ha[d] become the face of the Latino civil rights movement." In a public statement by Dolores Huerta and an interview of Huerta by journalist Maria Hinojosa for [Latino USA](#), Dolores Huerta said she remained silent to protect the farmworker movement. We are heartbroken that the safety and wellbeing of women and girls were sacrificed for the preservation of the movement against racial labor exploitation. It should have never been one or the other. The racism and exploitation to which our communities are subjected fuel heteropatriarchal violence *within* our communities. That very violence creates the conditions for survivors to not be believed, be accused of dividing the liberation movements they helped create, and be shamed into silence to protect male leaders.

Demystifying charismatic leaders is part of moving forward in our work for liberation. This news comes at a time of extreme state-sponsored violence in the country, so we think it is important to recognize that César Chávez was public about his anti-immigrant politics. He also took credit for the work of Dolores Huerta and their Filipino comrade, [Larry Itliong](#), another labor organizer in the farmworker movement.

We take this moment of grief, rage, and heartbreak to remind one another that:

- Breaking the silence about abuse does not and must not divide our movements. Breaking cycles of abuse should make our liberation work stronger. We need space for accountability within our activist spaces when harm happens as well as safe channels for survivors to come forward.
- Liberation movements never have only *one* leader. Organizers "behind the scenes" are leaders, too; women, queer and trans folx, youth members are leaders.
- The farmworker movement in California in the 1960s and 1970s was not Cesar Chávez; the movement was everyone who organized for years to demand better working conditions for farmworkers.
- Chávez's abuse does not diminish the accomplishments of the farmworker movement. The farmworker movement was much bigger than Chávez. It culminated with the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, which established the right of collective bargaining for farmworkers. This led to the creation of United Farm Workers (UFW).

As we process this news, we recommend the following two books, [*The Origins of Macho: Men and Masculinity in Colonial Mexico*](#) and [*The Revolution Starts at Home*](#) to reflect further on gender-based violence within our Chicane and Latine communities and activist spaces.

To our students: we stand with you as a standard of integrity and critical accountability. We believe and see you and we will not stay silent when these difficult conversations are brought up. Please feel free to reach out to us if you want or need to process.

In solidarity,

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March 2026