

## Who is ... Dolores Huerta?

**Dolores Huerta, née Fernandez: labor activist and community organizer**

**Born: 1930, Dawson, NM**

Dolores Huerta was born into an immigrant family in the mining town of Dawson, NM. She moved to Stockton, CA with her mother at age 3 after her parents divorced. Her mother, Alicia Chávez, was a primary influence in her life. Ms. Chávez owned a restaurant and small hotel in which the low-wage workers and farm families in the area were welcomed, fed at reasonable prices and sometimes given free housing. As an adult, Ms. Huerta briefly taught elementary school but left that job to begin working for economic justice because:



“I couldn’t tolerate seeing kids come to class hungry and needing shoes. I thought I could do more by organizing farm workers than by trying to teach their hungry children.”

### Eight things to know about Dolores Huerta

1. An asteroid is named after her. [Asteroid 6849 Doloreshuerta](#) was discovered by American astronomers Eleanor Helin and Schelte Bus at the Palomar Observatory.
2. She campaigned for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. during the 1968 Democratic primaries and was with him at the podium on June 5 at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles as he gave a victory speech after winning the California primary. While leaving the podium, Mr. Kennedy was assassinated by Sirhan B. Sirhan.
3. She originated the phrase “Sí se puede” (roughly translated as “yes we can”) while working as the chief lobbyist and contract negotiator for the United Farm Workers (UFW) during the 1960s. The phrase is still the motto of the UFW and is used by Latinx activists working in other areas. It was also used by Barack Obama during his 2008 presidential campaign, acknowledged during [President Obama’s 2011 remarks](#) honoring Ms. Huerta with the Presidential Medal of Freedom (his remarks on Ms. Huerta begin at about the 9:00 mark).
4. She was severely beaten by San Francisco police during a 1988 peaceful and legal demonstration protesting the platform of then-candidate George H. W. Bush. The beating resulted in several broken ribs plus internal injuries that required emergency surgery to remove her spleen. In the days before cell phones, the beating was caught on videotape and shown on local television news. Ms. Huerta sued the city of San Francisco and the city’s police department and won a large judgement, which pressured the city

to change its crowd control policies and officer discipline procedures. True to her advocacy, Ms. Huerta used the proceeds of the suit to benefit farm workers.

5. She considered herself a [born again feminist](#), believing that women of color could play a lead role in civil rights, labor rights and women's rights movements (see [Intersectionality](#)). During the [National Boycott of California Table Grapes](#) (1965-1970), she traveled to New York City to enlist the support of women in the feminist movement. This was the starting point for a lasting relationship with Gloria Steinem. Ms. Steinem voiced her support for the boycott and Ms. Huerta began to explicitly incorporate feminism in her advocacy for worker's rights.
6. The [Dolores Huerta Foundation for Community Organizing](#) was established in 2003, headquartered in Bakersfield, CA based on the idea that "those most directly impacted by inequity have the knowledge to implement community driven solutions when empowered with the tools, training, and resources." The Foundation provides programs related to civic engagement, education equity, health and safety, and LGBTQIA+ equality. In 2019, the Foundation began a capital campaign to establish the Dolores Huerta Peace and Justice Cultural Center, also in Bakersfield, to further its goal of building "the power and practice of grassroots community organizing."
7. As of January, 2023, she was still going at age 90+ after more than 60 years as a grassroots activist and organizer. Examples from 2022 include:
  - In April, she talked with Bill Clinton for an episode of his [Why Am I Telling You This](#) podcast.
  - In October, she gave a special keynote address as part of the [2022 Spartan Speaker Series](#) at San Jose State University.
  - She shared the stage with former President Barack Obama during a [get-out-the-vote rally](#) in Las Vegas prior to the 2022 mid-term elections.
  - In December, she attended the New York celebration of the women named in 2022 to the Forbes [50 over 50 Impact List](#), recognizing successful women over 50.

### Honors and awards

The many awards Ms. Huerta has received recognizing her long career include:

- 1993: Received the Eugene V. Debs Foundation Outstanding American Award
- 1993: Inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame
- 1998: Received the inaugural Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights
- 1998: Named as one of the 100 Most Important Women of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by *The Ladies Home Journal*
- 2002: Received the Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Leadership
- 2007: Received the Community of Christ International Peace Award
- 2008: Received the Jane Addams Distinguished Leadership Award
- 2009: Received the UCLA Medal
- 2027: Received the Presidential Medallion, California State University at Los Angeles

- 2017: Received the Presidential Medal of Freedom
- She is the subject of [Dolores](#), a PBS documentary (video 1:35:39), available with PBS Passport.
- Received several honorary degrees, including:
  - 2002: Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters, California State University at Northridge
  - 2010: Honorary Doctorate, University of the Pacific
  - 2017: Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, Mount Holyoke College
  - Honorary Doctor of Laws, Yale University

### To learn more about Dolores Huerta

Each of these short print biographies provides some different details about Ms. Huerta's life and work.

- [Debra Michaels \(2015\) Dolores Huerta](#). National Women's History Museum.
- [Biography \(2018\) Dolores Huerta](#).
- [Dolores Huerta Foundation for Community Organizing Dolores Huerta](#).
- [National Park Service Dolores Huerta](#).

These are recent video interviews with Ms. Huerta.

- Ali Velshi. [Labor Leader Dolores Huerta praises "courageous" activism of Texas Dems](#). This is Who We Are. MSNBC. Video 5:37.
- Frank Buckley Interviews. [Activist Dolores Huerta Continues to Fight for Civil and Labor Rights](#). Video 21:56. This longer interview provides a retrospective look at the early days of Ms. Huerta's work as a community organizer. The interview can also be heard on a podcast at [Frank Buckley Interviews podcast](#).