

# Farm Workers' Struggle

THE POLITICS OF INSURGENCY:  
THE FARM WORKER MOVEMENT  
IN THE 1960s

by J. Craig Jenkins

Columbia University Press. 261 pp. \$30.

by David J. Garrow

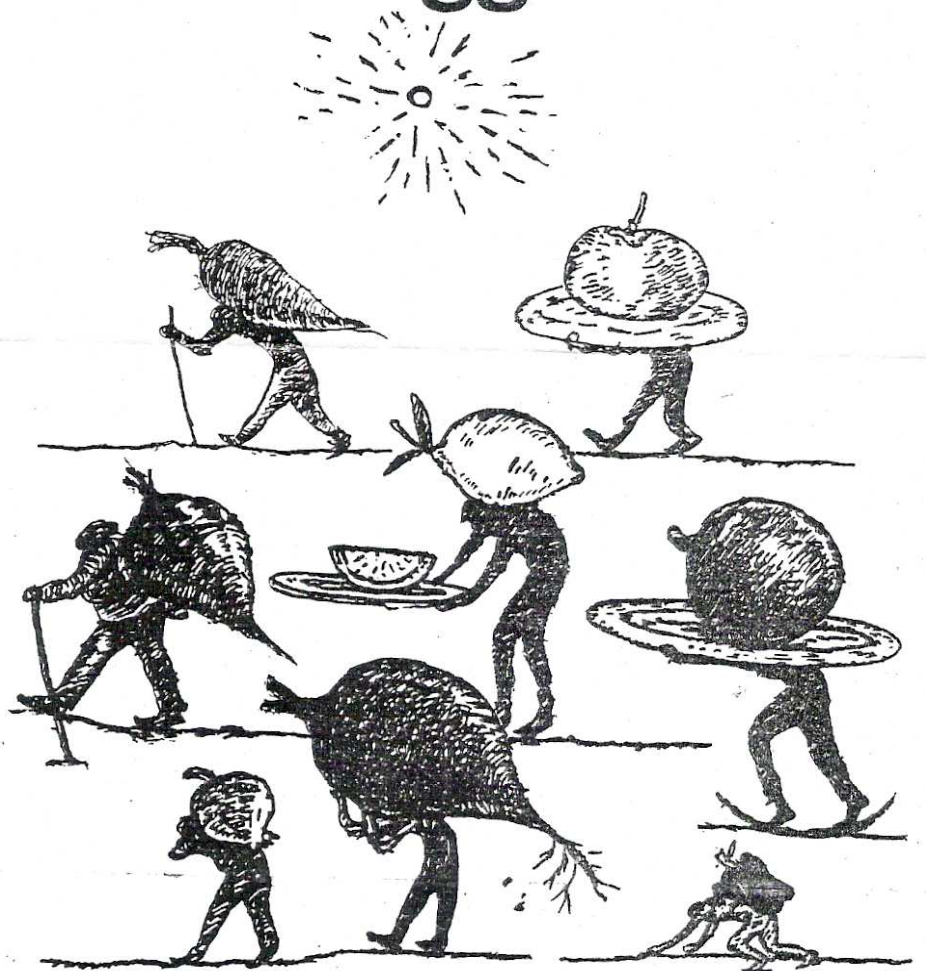
Social protest movements are receiving increased attention from academic analysts. Particularly in sociology, new concepts and theories have generated a better understanding of strategies for organizing the economically disadvantaged and sharper insights into the political dynamics of protest.

University of Missouri sociologist Craig Jenkins is one of the most acute younger scholars, and his new book on the United Farm Workers (UFW) is one of the most important contributions to social-protest theorizing in the past ten years. Focusing on farm-worker organizing efforts that culminated in the successes of Cesar Chavez's union in the mid-1960s, Jenkins outlines why the UFW was able to achieve tangible gains for farm workers and alter the distribution of political power in California agriculture.

Jenkins explains how the UFW employed a dual strategy of grass-roots, local-level farm worker organizing and nationally oriented appeals for outside political support. Chavez built durable, friendship-based groups of farm workers who were committed to withstanding the large growers' antiunion tactics. Chavez also created persuasive appeals for political assistance from office holders and progressive activists who had not taken any previous interest in the pervasive exploitation of California's agricultural workers.

While the strike was the most powerful weapon available to the farm workers themselves, previous California organizing efforts had demonstrated the growers' ability to break strikes by hiring other field hands, often through the Federally controlled Mexican bracero program, and by manipulating Federal regulatory efforts and state judicial processes to serve the landowners' ends. The growers' repeated demonstrations of their strikebreaking powers,

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and particularly their ability to play upon ethnic differences among the farm workers, made union organizing even more difficult.

Chavez, however, pursued an organizing strategy that emphasized community solidarity rather than the often transitory individual wage gains that had been stressed in previous organizing efforts. That strategy change allowed Chavez to succeed where others failed to create lasting organizations.

Durable union locals were only half the strategic battle. For the UFW to achieve any meaningful changes in grower dominance, potential external allies would have to be activated. Most important, grower control of state and Federal agricultural labor policies had to be broken, for only through legal coercion could the growers' wide array of strikebreaking devices be defeated. In particular, elimination of the braceros, the growers' favorite substitute

labor during strikes, was especially necessary. Similarly, substantial reforms in California state government policies also were needed.

The UFW reached out to pursue those changes through a media-oriented strategy quite similar to that the Southern civil rights movement had employed a few years earlier. Indeed, veterans or students of the Southern movement will recognize Jenkins's portrayal of the UFW's dual local and national strategy as combining the two often separate approaches that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) employed in the South. While SNCC's cadre stressed grass-roots organization building and cultivation of indigenous leaders, King and SCLC eschewed that approach and staged dramatic demonstrations designed to attract national media coverage and widespread public



support for Federal action against Southern racial discrimination. Chavez and the UFW employed both, and added yet another crucial approach: consumer boycotts of grower produce, particularly table grapes, that had been harvested by non-UFW labor.

The UFW's ability to achieve media coverage, and to use that coverage to win popular backing for its initial grape boycott, enabled the union to move the plight of California farm workers onto both the national and state political agendas. Jenkins correctly emphasizes that these changes on the national political scene, and the willingness of both Federal and state politicians to remove some of the underpinnings of growers' control of labor policy, proved even more crucial to the UFW's success than its local-level strike organizing.

Jenkins notes that it was the UFW's morally persuasive appeal for a modicum of economic justice for long-exploited farm workers that mobilized that crucial national support. In doing so, he explicitly distinguishes himself from other social-protest analysts who have attempted to argue that poor people's movements can bring about major distributional changes only through the coercive threat of physical disruption. Civil-rights scholars have shown how the movement's national support and statutory victories were generated by a similar strategic dynamic based upon appeal rather than threat. They, like Jenkins, clearly if not always explicitly conclude that the building of political coalitions is an unavoidable necessity for making any distributional changes in American society.

Although some analysis has correctly shown that the urban riots in the late 1960s did lead to significant increases in certain categories of Federal social welfare spending and corporate philanthropic activity, such incremental changes represented new strategies of social control, not an initial step toward redistributive ends. In the absence of significant political support for greater economic justice in America, social disruption alone will not help produce redistributive policies. However, in the absence of durable organizations of the economically disadvantaged, such political coalitions will be impossible to generate.

Those conclusions are not necessarily uplifting or encouraging, but they are accurate and realistic. Jenkins is similarly restrained, and sometimes overly ambiguous, about the troubles that have befallen the UFW in recent years. He notes but does not extensively discuss the criticisms of Chavez's leadership that former colleagues have voiced, though he does not doubt the long-term survival of the UFW despite its extensive setbacks. His valuable study is a book that all serious students of the 1960s and American social protest ought to read.

## The Foat Case

**NEVER GUILTY, NEVER FREE**  
by Ginny Foat with Laura Foreman  
Random House. 307 pp. \$17.95.

There are at least two significant ways to assess Ginny Foat's book about her erratic life and notorious murder trial. First, does it seem to be honest and complete in its essentials? Second, what is its effect on readers' perceptions of feminism and the women's movement? Neither question can be answered with complete accuracy or adequacy, since we have only Foat's word for the first, filtered


through her able coauthor Laura Foreman; as to the second, we can make only an educated guess, affected by our own individual reactions. Yet Ginny Foat's case is important enough to make the attempt on both counts.

Certainly the book is a "good read," passionate but rational in its rendering of the life of Virginia Galuzzo, the obedient little Catholic girl who went astray—torn by her family's, particularly her father's, traditional expectations and contradictory ambitions for her—to become a failed housewife, a mother who gave up her illegitimate infant in shame and secrecy, and finally the battered slave of sadistic, psychotic Jack Sidote. Breaking away at last

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