

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

DOLORES HUERTA & ELLEN GAVIN: CREATIVE COURAGE IN THE FACE OF FASCISM

[Watch](#) | [Download Podcast](#) – [Uncut Interview](#) | [Download Podcast](#) – [Episode](#)

LAURA FLANDERS: If you haven't seen it yet, you may soon. The theater artist behind a series of election year shorts imagining life under Project 2025 is out with a new short video, this time imagining community resistance to an ICE raid. It's being released this month by [People for the American Way](#), and will be all over [social media](#). A few weeks ago I had a chance to talk with the writer and director behind the film, [Ellen Gavin](#), as well as one of the women who appears in it, the now 95-year-old activist extraordinaire, Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the [United Farm Workers](#) and founder and president of the [Dolores Huerta Foundation](#). That conversation just ahead, but first, here's the first national broadcast of "The People, United."

- Que me dijo, hijo
- A proper ID, abuela. That's your Vons card.
- Okay, I am going to need you two to step back.
- And yours?
- I did three tours of Afghanistan, Marine Special Ops. You feel me?
- It says here, you're born in Jalisco.
- I was naturalized after my stint. And what's up with you all? Weekend warriors for the National Guard?
- I ask the questions.
- Pendejos.
- Oh, so you do know Spanish. How can I live in Mexico? You know, you can be denaturalized. Show me your tats.
- California grizzly. Gang tattoo. Ayudame Ricardo!

- Hey, calm down, ma'am.
- She's lived here 40 years. This is insane! Ayudame Ricardo!
- Help me.
- Watch your hands, senora!
- Ayudame Ricardo!
- Joaquin Sanchez, you're coming with us. Would you like to be detained with Norteños or Sureños? Red or blue?
- Pops, don't answer that. That's a trick.
- We're only red, white, and blue here. Got our LAFC tickets.
- Don't say another word, friends. You got a warrant signed by a judge? Let's see it.
- National emergency, no warrant required.
- That's exactly what they said to me when they interned me in the desert hellhole in 1942. It's un-American!
- I survived Palau. Rule 916 of the military code, you are not obliged to follow an illegal order. UNMASK ICE!
- Come in.
- Hands off, ICE out.
- [Neighbor] All right then, you're all done here.
- Let's go.
- Hands off, ICE out. Hands off, ICE out. Hands off, ICE out. Hands off, ICE out. Tell me what democracy looks like. This is what democracy looks like. Tell me what democracy looks like. This is what democracy looks like.

- Who got the power?
- We got the power!
- What kind of power?
- People power!
- The people united!
- Will never be divided! The people united will never be divided! Si se puede. Si se puede. Si se puede. Si se puede.
- Everybody needs to protect their neighbor. ♪ This land is your land ♪ ♪ This land is my land ♪ ♪ From California ♪ ♪ To New York Island ♪ ♪ From Redwood Forest to Gulf Stream Waters ♪ ♪ We shall not be moved ♪

LAURA FLANDERS: That was "The People, United," a new short video being released by People for the American Way. I had a chance to sit down with the writer and director behind the film, producer Ellen Gavin, as well as one of the participants, Dolores Huerta, a few weeks ago in Ellen's New York home. Huerta is co-founder of the United Farm Workers and founder and president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. This is not their first collaboration, but it may be the most urgent. I started by asking why narrative? With so much agitprop out there, why did they take this particular imaginative, creative approach?

ELLEN GAVIN: Well, you know, I've been doing theater for 25, 30 years, and I'm a writer. And I also was having events in my life that were formulating what I wanted to do. A friend of mine was, had a construction project in her house and the foreman actually, they were moving a glass shower curtain, a shower door, and they were arrested by ICE. And that shattered, and that glass shattered to the ground. And they heard that on the phone. That was their warning, that this is what was going on. I recently, you know, have been thinking a lot about Japanese internment and how that, how that was happening now is reflective of that. And my own father was a World War II veteran. And so I kind of put him in the story as well because we're asking these young women and men from across the country to do something that we've never had done before, which is to turn on the American people. And so the whole notion that we could actually come up with some resistance that is in the form of civil disobedience and protecting each other just moved me to think about, okay, can we put something together that will touch people? And you know, I called Dolores, and she is so amazing and committed. "I'm coming!" So it's a group effort.

LAURA FLANDERS: And you Dolores?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, we're in a very critical moment in our country, in the United States of America, where we see that fascism has moved in to our country and that it's taking place and that is being carried out in Bakersfield, California, which was the first place where I live that these ICE raids happened. They arrested 90 people. Only one person had any kind of a criminal record. And we don't know what that is. It could have been that they crossed the border without documents, a petty theft, a highway, a traffic ticket, who knows? But this whole criminalization of the Latino community is horrific. It's horrific. And the brutality with which they are treating the immigrants right now, creating such chaos and fear and the devastation of the economy in the Latino community, people are terrified. They're afraid to go out. And you know, these are decent people. They talk about criminals, but the people they're arresting are farm workers. They're nannies, people that take care of our children. You know, people that work in construction and hotels, you know, doing the service work that keeps our country safe and clean, you know, and fed. So this whole lie that people that we're attacking people because they're criminals, it's just a lie. And it's just straight outright racism, straight outright fascism.

LAURA FLANDERS: Dolores, you just used the word fascism. Why now? Why does that word apply to this situation now in your view? You've been through decades of hard times.

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, because this is what is happening right now when people have no, their rights are being taken away from them completely. That people are being put into detention centers way back in the fifties when they had Operation Wetback as they called it. You know, people were being repatriated to the countries that they came from. They were not being put in prisons. And you have all of these prisons that are being opened up now where they have, what, \$41 billion or more, 47 billion that has been actually appropriated just to arrest people and to detain them and to open up more prisons. This is absolutely crazy. So we have all of this attack on the working people and the poor people in our country, and just so we can have more money for the billionaires. That is totally wrong. And if that isn't fascism, I don't know what that looks like.

LAURA FLANDERS: So many of us, of our generation, I'm in my sixties, remember the grape boycott. We remember the campaigns of our youth because they had a certain kind of resonance that was different from just an argument. How would you put your finger on that difference? If you, you remember the grape boycott, Ellen?

ELLEN GAVIN: Of course I do. I remember looking, going and looking at grapes in a store was like looking at illicit drugs or something. I don't think I had a grape for.

LAURA FLANDERS: Decades.

DOLORES HUERTA: Some decades. But here's the thing, and I'm hoping this is what we can do and contribute a little bit, is we want people to be on our team. We want people to be touched in a way that says, I want to be that neighbor. I want to be that helper. I want to be that person who sees something and does something, instead of reacts with fear. When they say that fear is contagious and then they say, courage is contagious. I want to be on that team. And I think that's what we had with Dolores and the grape boycott, which was, I want to be on that team. I don't want to be on the team that is supporting this inequity and this ugliness and this hatred. So this is what we're trying to do in our small way. So again, we're asking people, what kind of an American are you? I want to be that kind of American.

DOLORES HUERTA: A lot of people are still saying, what can I do? What can I do? Of course, one of the things that we say to people, oh, the one thing, major thing we have to do is we have to get out there and register to vote and vote in California. But the other thing too is not to be afraid to go out there and protest and march and stand by, you know, stand by and do pretty much what the video tells us to do. Don't be afraid. Get out there and protect people that are being arrested and detained.

ELLEN GAVIN: We're all connected. And the thing that really, I mean, bothers me so much is that I felt like we came out of the pandemic. We were having a, we were having an economic surge. We were having an economic surge, and we were finally maybe able to address some of these crucial problems. We have some really innovative stuff happening with unhoused people. We have, you know, expanding healthcare, all those things were on the move and then this retrenchment. And we just have to say absolutely no. And we're going to get in the streets until we overcome this.

LAURA FLANDERS: Speak to people who really do feel afraid. And I think we've all been in this, none of us, as long as you Dolores. If you can join with others, there is a strength that comes. But getting into that connection is the challenge. And I think that's what "The People, United" video is getting at. But in your experience as a longtime organizer, how do you get someone from being scared in their room, to being outside, smiling behind you in a demonstration or at a lobbying day on Capitol Hill?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, I think the pandemic taught us one thing, that we have to protect each other. That we have to cooperate, we have to take actions to protect each other. And so that is the lesson that we have to, that is in front of us right now. And I like to say, imagine had we been in Nazi Germany in the thirties or the forties, okay? What would we have done to protect Anne Frank? We would've gone out of our way to do anything that we could. Well this is the situation that we're in right now, and we are seeing the beginnings of it, and we know it's going to get worse. And so we have to step up and not be afraid. And it does take a little bit of courage, you know, but when we see what we're facing and when we see that our constitutional rights are

being wiped away, it's, you know, I like to say people, you know, we had the war of independence where in our country people fought and died so that we could have our own country, that we could elect our own representatives. And then we had the Civil War, which by the way, I have a great grandfather that was in the Civil War on the Union side, right? We were fighting to get away from slavery, you know, and so we had these two great wars. We had World War II when millions of people died during that war, again, so that we would not have fascism. So we would have democracy. Hey, it's our turn now. It's our turn now. And you know, we don't have to carry a gun. None of us are, supposedly will not have to go out there and die for this, but we have to take action.

LAURA FLANDERS: You say that, and you have this big beaming smile on your face. And I think also of your slogan, "Sí se puede," that positive vision of what it is like to be in movement is another thing you're conveying in the video.

ELLEN GAVIN: In the video, there are four women, and I didn't even realize until after it was made, over 90.

LAURA FLANDERS: Wow.

ELLEN GAVIN: The Holocaust survivor, the Japanese internment survivor, the woman who's being victimized, a Mexicana, and Dolores, four women who turned the whole situation around, who provide information, know your rights, people have lived this, and know and can see what's coming and can say we're doing something about it.

LAURA FLANDERS: Coming back to you, Dolores, it wasn't as if, and you've mentioned this, it wasn't as if the early days of your organizing were not violent days. The violence against you was real.

DOLORES HUERTA: Yeah, we had the five people killed in the farmer movement. You know, the first one was a young Jewish girl, Nan Freeman from Boston. The second one was a Muslim, Naji Daifallah. And then we had three other farm workers that were Catholics that were killed. We all fasted for three days after one of our martyrs were killed. And as you know, Caesar fasted for 25 days and then 36 days. But we always wanted to respond with nonviolence. And that's what we have to do now, because the other side, they want us to respond with violence. If we can respond with non-violence, because they would like to have martial law for the whole country, for the whole United States of America. So we've really got to have a lot of discipline now. And in spite of the anger or the fear that we feel, we've got to respond with non-violence. Let's follow the lessons of Gandhi, who liberated India with non-violence. Okay, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez, okay? Dorothy Day, another one. Let's respond with non-violence. This is a way that we can win.

LAURA FLANDERS: Another tactic that you used in the fields, in those early days that I think of in the context of our discussion today about empathy and narrative, was theater. The "El Teatro Campesino" with Luis Valdez. What was the role that that played and what was that for people that don't know?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, culture is so important. The songs, the theater, the comedy to keep our spirits alive so that we do not, we were not drawn into despair. We don't want to do that or people feel helpless if there's nothing that we can do. One thing about theater, it not only teaches us, it keeps us alive, it energizes us. It gives us that inspiration that we need to keep on going.

LAURA FLANDERS: You brought people with flatbed trucks into the fields to perform, yep?

DOLORES HUERTA: Yeah, yes. In fact, that's even happening now in Los Angeles. Some of the, some of the groups that are like Ozomatli, they're actually going into the fields with the music where the farm workers have a a lot of fear right now. They're actually just going into the fields on flatbed trucks and playing for the workers.

ELLEN GAVIN: You know, you want to touch people's hearts. And I think touching people's hearts in a community setting, you know, I mean, I love live theater because you're in a room, and you're having a virtually religious experience with people.

DOLORES HUERTA: Absolutely.

ELLEN GAVIN: But I think also there's this short format. I mean, there's not a person I have shown this to that doesn't have a tear in their eye when Dolores is leading everyone and singing and chanting. And that's the spirit that we need to nurture. So there is a way that if you are putting your fears and your aspirations out ahead of time, you know, that you can ring a bell of warning or ask people to mobilize. And I mean, I forget what, there's a number, which is when with fascism where you get to, I think it is.

LAURA FLANDERS:] They say 3%. When 3% of the population has participated in some kind of direct action.

ELLEN GAVIN: In the street. And we need 3% of the people in the street now. And so that's, that's I think the direction to go in. And I am losing patience for people that can't figure out what to do. Get on the Google machine and find the demonstration in your neighborhood or find the group in your neighborhood, or I have friends in LA who are driving and buying groceries for people who are afraid to leave their home. Or taking children to school because their parents are

afraid to take them to school. I mean, this is terrible. And we can all find a way to push back against it.

LAURA FLANDERS: Your advice, Dolores, to people that don't have your long organizing experience and may have in their own families or in their workplaces, people who are participating in something that maybe doesn't feel right to them. Maybe they signed up to be part of ICE in this new effort to recruit people with offering them great bonuses, and they don't have a lot of other options in their lives. Or maybe they've just always voted Republican, and they're always going to vote Republican. Or maybe they've been told that Trump really will eventually bring their economy back. How do you break people out of that way of thinking? How do we get people out of their silos?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, I think we have to have a lot of patience. And the one thing we do not want to start hating people that are not on our side, so to speak. You know, and having that patience with them, and let's talk to them. And we may think, well, they're not paying attention or they're not listening. But the thing is, you're planting that seed of justice into their minds. Okay, and it may take a little while for that seed to germinate and to actually bloom, you know, so that they will see what's actually going on. And the other thing is the people that are not yet active, we've got to get them to participate in some way form or the other. And so each one of us should see ourselves as a recruiter and recruit two or three people that you know, ask them to recruit two or three people that they know.

LAURA FLANDERS: And this is some of the work that the Dolores Huerta Foundation is doing.

DOLORES HUERTA: Yes, exactly. And we do it, you know, house by house, going knocking on doors, doing house meetings, and doing human billboard. We're going to be up there holding signs out there in the street, passing, you know, thousands of leaflets out there in the street at grocery stores, at churches, any place where people gather. You know, just do all of that outreach mobilization that needs to be done.

LAURA FLANDERS: Well, I'm going to ask the two of you the question that I ask all of our guests before we close, which is, what do you think is the story the future will tell of this moment? I don't know, looking forward 25, 50, a hundred years. Ellen, what do you think people will say about us now?

ELLEN GAVIN: I think what has happened here is that the kind of ugly underbelly of the country has been completely exposed and in concentrate, concentrated form. It's terrible because if they win, we're over. But it's also an opportunity. And I really see it as once it's been exposed, we can just shine the sunlight on it. We can get our act together, we can own up to it. We have to

look at the history of racism in this country, which is the foundational aspect of fascism is racism. We have to deal with it, we have to own it, we have to understand it, we have to teach it. But I really believe we're going to come out the other end a much better country. I think I feel like I can see it, and I think it could happen pretty quickly. Yet we could dip our toes into fascism and say, we don't like it. We're out of here. We're not doing this again. I mean, there's hard work to do to make it hold, but if we just go back to democratic principles and fairness and equality, we can get there. And I just truly believe, believe this, and we just might look back on it and say, wow, that was a close call, but we get out of it because we mobilized.

LAURA FLANDERS: What do you think, Dolores?

DOLORES HUERTA: Well, I agree with Ellen and I think we look back into history during the Depression and people that didn't have work, it was a really bad time in the United States of America. But after the Depression, what did we get? We got welfare programs, we got labor, labor unions had the right to organize, we got social security, and then we had what happened during World War II. And again, coming out of that, you know, we had really good things that came out after World War II. And so we see the good things come out of bad things that happen. So the civil rights movement in the seventies and where we got the women's movement, the LGBTQ movement, you know, the Chicano movement, the environmental movement, all came out of this. And now we know what we need in our country. We are the richest country in the world. And I like to say again, I'm going to repeat it, as I said at the very beginning, we know that we will never have peace in the world until feminists take power. And when I say feminists, that's not just the women. That includes men who are feminists.

LAURA FLANDERS: And what does feminism mean to you?

DOLORES HUERTA: It means people that believe in justice. People believe, people that believe that we are all equal, so to speak. You know, and what I mean by that, I mean no racism, no sexism, no homophobia. Take all the hatred out of society. And again, when I talk about feminists, what do we believe in? We believe in justice number one. We believe in cooperation, not competition. We believe in sharing. You know, if we could think of a world where we actually are able to use our resources to help each other out, you know, and instead of competition, that we share what we have, then I think it takes away a lot of the antagonism that we have, a lot of the hatred. Let's share what we have. Let's not just compete.

LAURA FLANDERS: Thank you two. Really what a pleasure to talk with you. *Sí se puede!* "The People, United."

DOLORES HUERTA: Thank you.

ELLEN GAVIN: Thank you.

LAURA FLANDERS: It's one of the most rousing calls to conscience to come out of the 20th century. I'm thinking of Martin Niemöller's "First they came for the communists." You know how it goes. It begins, "First they came for the communists, but I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist." And it ends, "And then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out." It's a powerful statement, and you'll see it on T-shirts and posters and placards at demonstrations. But when you actually look at our history, it's not just that good people didn't speak out. It's that many of us actually threw others of us under the bus. When the press and the pundits and the politicians and the courts came for the communists and the queers and the feminists and the abortion providers and the teachers of critical race theory, many didn't just stay silent. They actively participated in creating suspicion around all those folks. And that's how we got to where we've come. In a moment in which Donald Trump is trying to vilify Antifa, an entity that he thinks exists, but really doesn't, and puts us in the position of having to say, "Are we or are we not anti-fascists?" Is he going to succeed in making anti-fascists suspect? Or when someone comes for the anti-fascists, are we going to see people say, "You looking for anti-fascists? You're looking for Antifa? Antifa is us." That's my question for today, and we'll be looking for the answers. You can get my full uncut conversation with Dolores Huerta and Ellen Gavin, and there is a lot in it, through subscribing to our free podcast. All the information's at the website. Thanks for joining us. Till the next time. From "Laura Flanders & Friends," I'm Laura. Stay kind, stay curious, and thanks for joining us. For more on this episode and other forward thinking content, subscribe to our free newsletter for updates, my commentaries, and our full uncut conversations. We also have a podcast. It's all @lauraflanders.org.