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MIGRANTS AND CITIZENS

MEXICAN AMERICAN MIGRANT WORKERS AND THE WAR ON POVERTY IN AN AMERICAN CITY

MARC S. RODRIGUEZ

On 25 November 1968, a large group of “concerned south-side citizens” packed the Milwaukee offices of United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc. (UMOS), a social service agency operating under the auspices of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), to protest what they considered the mismanagement of this poverty program. The protesters had called for a meeting with the management staff of UMOS to demand that this Milwaukee-based War on Poverty agency do a better job serving the needs of migrants and hire more former migrant farmworkers, the majority of whom were Tejanos, and promote them to management positions.¹

This “meeting” was no sudden uprising, but resulted after several conferences of employees and community activists resolved to press the all-white UMOS management officers to consider “problems relevant to the UMOS program.” At the meeting Dolores Aguirre, a UMOS board member and former basic education student, read the group’s demands which mainly outlined the ways “those upstairs” were failing to properly manage the program and the difficulty this caused for the staff who worked “with the people.” Although not directly requesting the ouster of the white administrators, these serious charges implied that it was time for them to go.²

UMOS’s management reacted to the complaints of the Tejano migrants with dismay. Surprised by the demands of employees, board members, and activists, William Kruse, UMOS executive director, countered that he “was confused” by the requests, citing the fact that there had been “no great outcry” over employment issues in early 1968. Kruse had missed the point, seemingly unaware of the growing tide of activism spreading through Milwaukee’s Latino, and in particular Mexican American community. The petitioners that day would in weeks to come ask that Kruse’s job and other top management positions go to migrants.

This exchange exposed two competing frameworks for understanding the War on Poverty that I would like to explore in this paper. First the poor, in this case Tejano migrants, had understandings of their place as workers and citizens (though not always expressing it quite clearly), and of their place within the institutions of the local War on Poverty. Tejanos, in rejecting all-white management of an organization they claimed for migrants, were defining themselves into the meaning of the War on Poverty, actions that could lead to large-scale protests, and perhaps nearly as often to negotiations like those that began in Milwaukee after the event described above. Second, well-meaning progressive reformers in Wisconsin brought an opposing set of definitions to the table with them when they established an organization for migrants that would allow them to assist those they considered visitors. From its beginning, UMOS and some, but not all, white board members and managers saw the Tejano migrants as guests whom they sought to have settle in Milwaukee. Although migrants were encouraged to join the community, they were outside what many whites considered the local community when it came to management. These opposing viewpoints would have important consequences for both parties, as both would seek to define the local community in ways that shaped this War on Poverty agency to their own advantage. Within the resident white community, several key people, including academics and clergy members, would assist the Tejanos in their effort to win control of UMOS. As they struggled with the notion of community, the poverty program at UMOS would pass through two periods separated by a period of struggle and transformation as both groups worked out the meaning of community participation.

The ways in which Tejanos defined themselves into the “community” in this case provide a needed corrective to overgeneralizations that dominate the history of both the War on Poverty and the various rights movements that flowered in the late 1960s. Moreover, the UMOS case also sheds light on the translocal development of Mexican American civil rights activism—the Chicano Movement, as it is commonly known—outside the American Southwest.³

Few historians of the various social movements of the 1960s consider the Community Action Program (CAP) and the OEO as more than well-intentioned failures. William Chafe, among others, demonstrates how, despite the inspired efforts of the CAP, the program helped bring about the end of the New Deal consensus rather than an end to poverty.⁴ Attentive to the failure of particular CAPs, other scholars have detailed the most controversial cases of contention in some of the nation’s most polarized cities without
exploring CAP successes nationwide. Several recent examinations have painted a different portrait of the CAP in the many localities where poor people struggled to participate in programs that aimed to end poverty.5

The problem of defining the role of migrants at UMOS was one that grew from the law that had created the War on Poverty. In 1963, the Kennedy administration, reacting to growing concern for the plight of America’s poor, began planning for a new poverty program. Research submitted to the administration that summer found that “33 to 35 million Americans were living at or below the boundaries of poverty in 1962.”6 Despite the prosperity enjoyed by many Americans, the administration had proof that poverty continued to burden the lives of some Americans.7

In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson pushed a domestic antipoverty bill as a component of his legislative agenda that included several revolutionary rights programs. He further extended coverage to migrants and the underserved ethnic Mexican population of the Southwest. Johnson was a Texan, after all.8

On 20 August 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) which included the concept of “community action” as an essential component of the law. Included in the act was language that gave the impression that the responsibility and management of poverty programs like UMOS would fall to poor people themselves. The purpose of the act was to “provide stimulation and incentive for urban and rural communities to mobilize their resources to combat poverty through community action programs.”9 The CAP was to rely on individual Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which were to be “developed, conducted, and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served.”10 This language resonated with poor communities nationwide, yet few planners knew quite what to expect.

For the activists who protested the management of UMOS in 1968, the experience of interstate labor migration was central to the farmworker community they sought to institutionalize at UMOS. By the late 1960s, this mobile social world had expanded to embrace an activism with particular emphasis on the specific needs of migrant workers. Add to this an emerging national and transnational Chicano worldview, and migrants were able to construct a vision of community control that required that UMOS become wholly a migrant social and political space.

Tejano migrants did not build this community out of whole cloth. In fact, migrants were expanding a social world that they had established on the foundation of an agricultural labor network that for much of the twentieth century had moved Tejanos and others across the continent each year in search of work. These were often quite localized labor flows that relied for the most part on networks tied to workers’ particular sending regions, villages, small towns, or cities. Often very distinct local communities joined together as people moved across these networks. Within this translocal labor world, migrants also incorporated a variety of social service agencies and organizations founded for the benefit of migrants by resident nonmigrants. At midcentury, these had primarily been missionary aid societies, religious organizations, labor placement stations, or various ad hoc groups established at the local level to assist migrants, yet the migrants were not often active in the management of these programs. The War on Poverty and various reform programs it brought into the migrant world were tied to the rhetoric of participation included in the EOA, a fact that would change migrant orientation significantly so that by 1968 activists felt that migrants should control migrant-serving agencies.11

In the UMOS case, the organization served as an outpost on this northern frontier of migrant life in both periods of management. From its founding UMOS sought to and did improve education, training, and working conditions for migrants, as it encouraged Tejanos to consider settlement in Wisconsin.12 For example, migrant workers such as Alberto Avila, who already knew several dozen successful earlier migrants from his hometown of Crystal City, Texas, to Milwaukee, relied on UMOS to enable his settlement:

I told my wife, “let’s see if we can settle down in a place so we don’t have to go back and forth to Texas . . . every year.” [W]e decided to stay here and see if we could make it over here [in Milwaukee]. The first thing that we did was go to UMOS and they found us an apartment, and they gave us Welfare . . . they helped us out, and I went as a student in UMOS.13

After several weeks in 1969 as an adult student making sixty-four dollars a week, Avila found a job with Rexnord Corporation in its foundry. Over the next three decades, Avila would hold various jobs and despite layoffs become a homeowner on Milwaukee’s South Side, able to send some of his children to college. Avila was only one of many Tejanos from Crystal City and other migrant labor centers who had long lived and worked across this northern frontier of Mexican American life, and was now able to join the ranks of the urban working class with the help of government intervention—an intervention directed and managed by other Tejanos after 1968.
Resident religious and social service advocates for migrant workers in Wisconsin greeted the passage of the EOA with much optimism. As early as 1963, Wisconsin religious leaders, most prominently Reverend Ralph Maschmeier, a Lutheran minister from Waukesha, and Father John R. Maurice, a Catholic priest from Milwaukee, along with the Wisconsin Council of Churches, initiated discussions to identify funding sources to establish a statewide program to provide aid and training to migrants.\textsuperscript{14} Incorporated as a not-for-profit agency in 1965 to seek monies from the newly created Economic Opportunity Act programs, UMOS received its first grant of $31,000 in OEO funds to operate day-care centers in small southern and south-central Wisconsin agricultural areas where many migrants worked.\textsuperscript{15} These programs provided transitional learning experiences which enabled migrant children to prepare for elementary school, attain English-language proficiency, improve their health, and according to planners, “extend the child’s horizons and interests, stimulating interest in learning.”\textsuperscript{16} Most importantly, perhaps, the UMOS schools allowed the children to leave the fields to learn and play.\textsuperscript{17} UMOS also hoped that these day care programs would bring parents to the school and that they would take advantage of job training programs.

Day-to-day contact with migrant children provided UMOS staff with firsthand knowledge of the astonishingly poor health and material conditions of migrants. Many migrant children suffered from tuberculosis, malnutrition, dental disease, and other serious conditions that if treated earlier would have been minor afflictions. After receiving its initial OEO funding, UMOS realized that the migrant family’s needs were extensive and sought to broaden its program in 1966.\textsuperscript{18} One early strategy was to use Tejano farmworkers and former farmworkers to introduce potential participants to the program. This became formalized when UMOS began hiring former migrants as “roving counselors” to recruit participants for various programs. These counselors entered migrant camps and communities during the harvest season to inform, educate, and recruit participants for UMOS programs—serving as its main point of contact with the community.\textsuperscript{19}

The religious, academic, and agricultural leaders who had founded UMOS, however, did not envision the organization as an activist agency. UMOS was to “avoid problems with employers,” and stay neutral in the area of civil rights and labor relations, so that it could focus on migrant welfare and settlement.\textsuperscript{20} This neutrality paid off as UMOS experienced significant success and in the process became a clearinghouse for OEO-funded migrant programs in Wisconsin. As a progressive social service agency UMOS sought only to “make it possible for the migrant to break out of the cycle of poverty and enter a new and better life now enjoyed by the vast majority of Americans.”\textsuperscript{21}

Despite this policy of seeking out the middle ground, the world around UMOS was changing rapidly. Mexican American political activism, having already emerged in the southwestern United States, spread to Wisconsin in 1966. As UMOS sought to establish a presence among migrant farmworkers, a small group of former migrants and a team of graduate researchers were busy collecting data on migrant workers for the University of Wisconsin after 1964, an experience that would transform them into activists.\textsuperscript{22} The research when completed revealed that migratory cucumber harvesters earned less than four dollars per day in Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{23} Upset by these findings, in August of 1966, three young Tejano migrant workers, Jesus Salas, Manuel Salas, and Salvador Sanchez, together with several graduate students assigned to the research project, organized and led a march to Madison to shed light on the suffering of migrants in Wisconsin.
The marchers, borrowing the images and symbolism of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the developing farmworkers union movement in California, marched the nearly ninety miles from Waucoma to Madison to dramatize the plight of migrant workers in Wisconsin. They marched with a plan and made several demands of the state, which included the extension of the $1.25 minimum wage to migrant workers and public sanitary facilities for migrants. Moreover, the marchers demanded the placement of migrant workers on the Governor’s Committee on Migratory Labor, an advisory body that gathered data for the state and suggested reforms to the governor, growers, labor groups, and various state agencies. When the marchers entered Madison, students from the University of Wisconsin joined the march, swelling its numbers as it made its way to the capitol. On the capitol steps, the march leader, Jesus Salas of Waucoma, Wisconsin (formerly of Crystal City, Texas), was greeted by state agency heads. Despite this reception, the march did not bring immediate policy changes. Migrant workers who had marched to Madison asked the march’s organizers to help establish a union. In late August, with the support of the AFL-CIO, Salas founded Obreros Unidos (United Workers) as an independent labor union.

Although 1966 marked the start of migrant labor activism in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin-based management team at UMOS worked to keep UMOS neutral, while expressing some support publicly. In many ways, the fact that UMOS failed to strongly support the union at the same time many of its “roving counselors” were unofficially doing so showed just how rapidly the bond between resident reformers and Tejanos was beginning to come apart.

In some ways UMOS as organized was meant to guarantee the minimum participation of migrants and maintain the maximum control for the Wisconsin-based white managers, a practice they apparently saw as being in line with the federal mandate for “maximum feasible participation.” UMOS’s founders did not intend management to pass rapidly to migrant workers, but rather created several layers between the local white religious and resident managers and Tejano migrant employees. This organizational structure was flawed in that in order to achieve program success UMOS reserved the grassroots positions for Tejanos, a fact that empowered the roving counselors, making them the public face of the organization as they worked the same camps as those seeking to establish the union. In the 1966 and 1967 seasons, these counselors entered migrant camps and communities speaking to migrants about the opportunities available at UMOS. Roving counselors were not only key to the success of UMOS’s programs but they were carving out authority as community leaders in the free space created by the need for bilingual outreach workers. The roving counselors were mainly male Tejano former farmworkers, and some may have in fact participated in the founding of the union as many were from the same towns or regions in South Texas as the workers being organized. In fact, the managing roving counselor was Carlos Salas, union founder Jesus Salas’s older brother. Thus, Tejanos may not have had much input in UMOS management, but they were on the front lines of the OEO-funded effort. This provided critical support to migrant workers as the union took shape.

Board management also limited the participation and management role of migrants by a set of restrictive internal administrative rules. This organizational law included rules that allowed migrant representatives only three board positions with two of the three chosen by existing board members, and the third chosen by a vaguely defined “migrant advisory committee.” This institutional structure restricted migrant access to the board by limiting input to an outside “advisory” committee with little power. In various documents submitted to the OEO, “migrants” were listed last on the UMOS list of “communities” served by or participating in the agency, after groups which included “interested citizens,” “public agencies,” and “growers and canners.” The bylaws cited the “maximum feasible participation” requirement, but it appears that UMOS read this language as divisible into two parts. The first included “residents of the areas,” which meant the mostly white Wisconsin nonmigrants, including canners, growers, religious leaders, and bureaucrats, and a second that included Tejano and other migrants. What is apparent is that UMOS management saw itself as working for migrants rather than with them.

In August 1967, the OEO made a point of informing UMOS of the important role migrants should play in its programs. OEO reminded UMOS administrators of the “close link” between Adult Basic Education instruction and day care and the overall program goal to “help people help themselves out of poverty. . . . [S]teps should be taken to ensure the participation of the people being served in the planning and operation of the local program.” Further, the OEO suggested that migrants be involved in advising UMOS on issues related to day care, and that “[a]ides hired by the program must be from the group to be served.” In fact, the OEO created the day care aide position so that the migrants “have an opportunity to have job experience, education, and a chance at advancement through increased skill.” Though “participation” was key to compliance with OEO guidelines, the difference between “management” and “participation” provided UMOS with wide latitude in achieving the goal of migrant involvement.
from the medium-sized town of Waukesha to the heart of Wisconsin's largest barrio on Milwaukee's South Side at 809 Greenfield Avenue. In early 1968, the independent union movement had won the support of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department, the head of the state AFL-CIO, and many Wisconsinites, and played an increasingly vital role in Milwaukee's Mexican American and broader Latino community. The broad support for the union on the part of Wisconsin's labor leadership enabled Jesus Salas to resign from the union and leave it under the control of his brother Manuel. Salas then joined Chavez's United Farm Workers (UFW) union movement, and directed that union's grape boycott effort from Milwaukee. The UMOS agency had moved right into the center of a Mexican American and Latino community experiencing a wave of labor and political activism. In fact, the United Farm Workers office was only blocks away from the new UMOS headquarters. In early 1968, the boycott effort on behalf of the UFW won wide support in Milwaukee, and sparked greater activism on the part of Latino residents of Milwaukee's barrio. In May a contingent of UMOS employees joined African American and other Milwaukee groups as they participated in the Poor People's March on Washington. Other UMOS employees worked with the North Side African American community to increase cooperation between Milwaukee's North and South Sides.

Riding this wave of community activism, in the winter of 1968 a group of Latinos and Tejanos sought to implement "maximum feasible participation" under the EOA. Jesus Salas would lead the migrants' effort for control of UMOS. In 1967, while still with Obreros Unidos (United Workers), Jesus Salas criticized UMOS for serving as merely "an educational program" and for failing to take public action for enforcement of state laws related to "workmen's compensation and housing code violations." He would remember this when he decided to support Tejano employee efforts to take over the organization. According to Salas:

UMOS's offices were in Milwaukee and I had problems. Between '67 and '68, six hundred workers and their families lost their jobs. Many of them didn't know that until they were already here. In '68, when these [union] workers start coming in [to settle in Milwaukee] I go and talk to the UMOS staff and I tell them, "we gotta do something, these people have just lost their jobs because of the strike action"... and I said "you gotta provide some services." To make a long story short, they denied us. They said "they didn't want to get involved with strikers because they were afraid of how the growers and the processors would react to that involvement." So then, I started going to the UMOS meetings and getting involved.
After these events, Salas and others began to openly challenge UMOS’s authority in the migrant community. They argued that the white managers did not allow for effective representation of and participation by migrants. According to Salas, the EOA’s maximum feasible participation provision “meant [that] advocacy [should be] directed by participants, both migrants and ex-migrants.”

Jesus Salas was uniquely situated to assume control of the movement for migrant management. Because of his already established leadership position among migrants, and the fact that he was from South Texas, Salas was able to successfully lead the push for Tejano control of UMOS. In November of 1968, after private discussions with influential Tejano employees, including labor union co-founder Salvador Sanchez, now a UMOS field operations coordinator, and Ernesto Chacon, UMOS counselor and the founder of the Latin American Union for Civil Rights (LAUCR), an informal group was established to pressure UMOS to hire more Tejanos as managers and administrators. After submitting the complaint on behalf of “concerned south-side citizens” mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Salas and others pushed for control of the agency and for the ouster of the white management team.

The protesters felt that their demand for migrant management was in line with government policy and that the time had come for migrants and former migrants to manage the agency on their own behalf. UMOS management, on the other hand, apparently thought that it would be able to phase in migrant control over a number of years and was not ready in late 1968 to respond to these demands. UMOS management knew change was coming as OEO had released a series of instructions to assist agencies in including greater levels of participation in CAA operations on the part of poor people. According to the OEO, “CAP grantees have a responsibility to broaden the scope of opportunities within their own agencies . . . for participation of the poor, and to help the poor equip themselves to take advantage of these opportunities.”

Responding to these pressures from the federal government, the Tejano community, and its own board, UMOS felt confident that it was increasing the involvement of former migrants in its programs and administration. Commenting in 1968, UMOS founder Father Maurice remarked:

Probably the greatest headway was the increasing involvement on the part of migrants and ex-migrants . . . [which] gave better direction and meaning to the whole project. This increased involvement and concern on the part of migrants and ex-migrants will hopefully continue to deepen in the year ahead.

Despite Father Maurice’s good intentions, the scope of participation that migrants hoped for did not result. For the period between 1966 and 1968, UMOS reported that between its two primary employee groups, “Administrative and Field” and “Teaching” employees, a process that it termed “Latinization” had taken place, which presumably means that Tejanos and other Latinos were taking these jobs. Tejanos and a small number of Latinos comprised 73.3 percent of workers in the former category, and 35.8 percent in the latter. “Administration,” when viewed alone, however, remained nearly lily-white in 1968. Tejanos, despite “Latinization,” remained the lowest-paid employees.

Following the protest, the activist group won the support of powerful members of the UMOS board who supported the transition to migrant and Tejano management. These members, led by chairperson Bill Koch, a professor at the University of Wisconsin Extension, supported the appointment of
several ex-migrants and migrants to the UMOS board, in an effort to give them a majority vote. After the board was expanded to include migrant representatives, it voted to meet the demands of the protestors. This takeover of the board led to the resignation of UMOS’s white managerial staff en masse after it became apparent that the board supported the demands of the protest leaders. The effect was the opposite to that intended. Following the resignation of the managers, Koch supported the appointment of Jesus Salas as UMOS program manager in April of 1969, and requested that the OEO provide a leadership transition consultant to assist UMOS in making the change. A high level of cooperation between supportive board members and the protest leaders brought community control to UMOS in just a few months.

The placement of labor union founder and activist Salas at the head of UMOS led to a backlash in 1969 as Wisconsin’s agricultural industry sought to have UMOS funds cut off. Many of the state’s agricultural interests came out against the appointment of this labor leader. Most of the opposition to Salas came from the same Waushara County vegetable growers and processors who had fought the local union tooth and nail, led by future Wisconsin Supreme Court judge Jon Wilcox, then the county’s Republican state assembly member, and a cucumber grower. The agricultural interests, in their effort to discredit Salas, made the contradictory argument that the two years Salas had spent leading and organizing a migrant farm workers union in fact disqualified him from holding a leadership and organizational position assisting migrants. Despite this effort, UMOS benefited from the coordinated support of Wisconsin’s Senate delegation, several Milwaukee and Madison area Congress members, and a number of nonprofit agency heads. Despite the clamor and complaints of Wilcox, the OEO, now managed by the Republican Nixon administration, approved the 1969 UMOS operating grant.

By 1969, Tejano migrant control was a reality at UMOS, beginning a trend to expand the role played by Latinos in a number of other service organizations on Milwaukee’s near South Side. Early on, however, Salas drew fire from Central Wisconsin again, this time over his concern that funds for migrant children’s school programs were benefiting nonmigrant children. Further complicating matters in the late summer of 1969, Jesus Salas engaged in direct action protests on behalf of welfare mothers’ rights in Madison. Salas participated in a march dubbed the “Welfare Mothers’ March on Madison” led by Catholic priest and activist Father James Groppi of Milwaukee. The marchers engaged in a sit-in at the state capitol, taking over the assembly chamber. In a photograph, Salas is standing arm-in-arm with Father Groppi. Police arrested both Salas and Groppi under an antiprotest statute banning “misconduct on public grounds and in public buildings.” Salas phoned the OEO after his arrest to inform them that he had not been “employed” at the time of his arrest, but had been “on leave” to participate in the march, a definitional turn that would keep him out of trouble with the state and the OEO.

After Salas’s arrest, the issue of violations of OEO instructions regarding employee participation in direct action activities arose. One iate Wisconsinite complained that Salas was using the “taxpayer’s money . . . against us.” In response to this letter, Wisconsin OEO director Robert Neal Smith wrote that “[a]s an advocate of the poor, an Office of Economic Opportunity Employee or agency may take part in direct action as long as lawful means are employed,” and pointed out that Salas was on leave, and that if he was found to have engaged in criminal activity, the state of Wisconsin “does not have any direct control over OEO Title III-B grants.” The OEO and UMOS, because of the fact that Salas was “on leave” and did not engage in violent activities, refused to oust Salas. Despite the turbulence of the first year of Salas’s management, UMOS programs continued and were the cause of little controversy. No longer seeking the middle ground, UMOS employees like Salas were increasingly active in politics and social concerns across the state and within the Milwaukee Latino community.

In late October, Salas submitted his 1969 report to the UMOS board of directors. He lambasted the administration that preceded him for having “been too selfish and fearful,” and for failing to allow “the indigenous . . . population” a place in the decision-making process. Salas called on local whites still on the board to “put the cards on the table.” He proposed having board meetings in “Spanish and translated into English” to make them more accessible for community members. Not wholly attacking the remaining white board members and employees, Salas thanked Bill Koch and UMOS employee Beverly Seekamp, two supporters, for their assistance in the administration of the organization. Salas also made it clear that he wanted to establish a clear policy of providing a “ladder within the program for the staff to climb, either economically or in responsibility” so as to keep good employees at UMOS and provide opportunities for migrants and Tejanos.

Soon after the report, Salas resigned, paving the way for longtime migrant activist and UMOS employee Salvador Sanchez to take over UMOS management. In so doing he remarked that it was “time for a change and for the development of more Mexican American indigenous leadership.” More broadly, Salas commented that
Additionally, I leave because the political and economic situation in this country is日益 worse for the poor and much has to be done in the fields and streets in organizing for change. I feel I can more effectively attempt to create this change with the guidelines set by the self-determination of the people instead of those presently involved in misdirecting our country: VIVA LA CAUSA.65

As the director of UMOS, Salas succeeded in continuing UMOS programs without disruption despite nearly constant attacks on the organization. Upon his departure from UMOS, Salas left an organization that from its large building on Greenfield Avenue on Milwaukee’s South Side offered courses for adults and a day care center, and maintained several branch offices around the state. Under Salas’s direction, UMOS provided services to all migrants regardless of nationality. Salas also helped to establish local migrant councils at the branch offices to allow for a greater degree of migrant participation in UMOS’s affairs at the various county and city centers across the state, a step that made migrant councils important consultative bodies. In addition to encouraging a higher level of migrant participation at all levels, Salas made sure that young Tejanos gained experience in program management. In the process, UMOS went about creating a cadre of activists, some of whom later broke with Salas and left the organization, yet continued to serve Milwaukee’s migrant community.

Salvador Sánchez’s leadership of UMOS began in 1970, and included a heightened commitment to direct action. As UMOS director, Sánchez led and organized numerous marches on Madison between 1971 and 1974 to demonstrate the failure of the state of Wisconsin to enforce its own laws related to migrants. State-level bureaucrats, despite UMOS attacks, continued to assist UMOS.60 Before joining UMOS as a roving counselor in 1967 Sánchez had been a labor activist, and he saw UMOS as an activist agency:

We came to realize that our responsibilities as staff were much more complex, that in fact we were not just our to “recruit” families and bring them to the cities. There were problems to deal with in the fields: housing code violations, minimum wage violations, unemployment problems, workmen’s compensation and innumerable others. It was our responsibility to do all that we possibly could to find solutions to these problems, including making legal complaints... In fact because of the emphasis staff placed on serving the total need of the farm worker, both rural and urban, services improved.61

As an activist organization, UMOS continued to operate programs with much success and relatively little scandal. Maintaining its commitment to

the settlement of migratory farmworkers, the program settled 108 families in Milwaukee in program year 1970–71, and extended its educational programs into rural areas where it offered training courses at satellite campuses near migrant work areas.62

Continuing the activist impulse, on 24 August 1971 Salvador Sánchez and UMOS supporters completed a nine-day march to Madison where they filled the capitol building with protesters in a massive sit-in. Sánchez’s 1971 march made many of the same demands as in 1966:

Enforcement of equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation, ... Amendment of State Civil Service regulations to ensure equal opportunity for Latinos; an affirmative action program to remedy problems between police and
commitments they have outside the agency; on the contrary, participation is encouraged and vital to the growth of the community as a whole. 67

Under Tejano control, UMOS firmly supported its employees' right to participate in the Tejano and related social movements. At last, UMOS was an activist agency controlled by the Tejano migrant community.

Between 1965 and 1973, UMOS received steady funding from a number of sources in addition to the OEO, and maintained a budget that fluctuated between $1 million and $1.3 million dollars per year. Following nearly a decade of expansion, UMOS offered an increasingly rich body of programs serving the health, nutrition, housing, vocational, educational, day care, and job placement needs of Wisconsin's migrant workers. By 1973, UMOS had expanded its service area to include thirty-two Wisconsin counties, and as the provisions of the OEO evolved, adapted to revision of federal funding sources as its employees continued to engage in sustained direct action on behalf of migrant farmworkers. In 1974, Salvador Sanchez resigned leaving a funded organization now known for its commitment to migrant advocacy and for producing dynamic Tejano leaders. Salvador Sanchez's dynamic leadership marked the end of OEO funding for UMOS, and the end of charismatic Tejano activism on the part of UMOS directors, yet paved the way for continued migrant control and the continued existence of UMOS.

In 1974, Lupe Martinez assumed the director's position, a position he has held for over thirty years. With the activist period of the late 1960s at an end, and the OEO in decline, replaced for the most part by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act and other programs after 1973, UMOS has continued to play a significant role in Milwaukee's migrant and Latino community. Under Martinez's tenure, UMOS expanded its service mission, and began to promote a number of important community events including a Cinco de Mayo festival, a Hispanic Awards banquet, and other annual community celebrations. For over thirty years since the resignation of Sanchez, UMOS has played a leading role in Wisconsin's Latino community, and has increased its mission to cover activities in Texas and other Midwestern states. After activism and a period of protest, UMOS and the migrants who now ran the organization entered the mainstream.

Despite the failure thesis posited by several scholars, the UMOS case demonstrates the broader successes of a single migrant-serving CAA in moving Tejanos from migrants to settlers as they expanded their own definition of community. Moreover, by allowing for the participation of the poor, in this case migrants, in the management of OEO programs, the EOA did enfranchise

Figure 5. UMOS marchers arrive at Madison, Wisconsin, after a nine-day march from Milwaukee on 24 August 1971. Courtesy of United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc., Milwaukee.

the Latin communities; enforcement of Wisconsin's protective laws; action to correct problems within Wisconsin's Spanish speaking communities; creation of an inspection and enforcement division on the Housing Code. 63

Much like the marchers of 1966, UMOS protested what it considered the failure of the administrative state to execute the laws of Wisconsin related to migrants and minority groups. For this reason, Sanchez asked many of the state's department heads to meet the marchers before the march began. 64 Though there were problems with the state's law related to migrants, Sanchez wanted enforcement of present law. 65

In early 1972, UMOS underwent an independent review by an outside agency. The review criticized the strong commitment of staff to "ethnic movements," a charge rebuffed by UMOS. 66

UMOS employees came to work for the program in support of their belief for change and betterment of conditions for migrant farm workers and all poor people. We do not expect our employees to disengage themselves from
a group of workers long denied the rights, benefits, and protections of U.S. citizenship within the interstate migrant world in which they lived. In this sense, the OEO and UMOS allowed for the “maximum feasible participation” of a group of formerly disenfranchised poor people. For UMOS, the period from 1968 to 1974 was a time of social movement activism followed by a long period of stability for this migrant-serving agency. Although this is a single case study, perhaps a consideration of the many local War on Poverty agencies like UMOS may reveal that many CAAs experienced a cycle of protest followed by community control and stability rather than the collapse forecast in early sociological writing and documented in some historical examinations of the Economic Opportunity Act and the Community Action Program.

NOTES

1. Throughout this paper, I will use the term “Tejano” to refer to the Texas-based migratory workers who made up the majority of activists and workers at UMOS between 1964 and 1974. I use the term “ethnic Mexicans” to refer to the combined population of people of Mexican descent or origin in the United States, regardless of their nativity or nationality, and “Latino” when referring to the broader Spanish-surnamed population regardless of nativity. Many of these Texas-based ethnic Mexicans, as Jose Limon has pointed out, refer to themselves as mexicanos in Texas, but in Wisconsin, in the interviews I conducted many—when speaking of a particular ethnic Mexican individual—indicated whether he or she was from Texas, often referring to specific cities. For a discussion of usages and references, see Manuel G. Gonzales, Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States (Bloomington, Ind., 1999), pp. 1–8; Clara E. Rodriguez, Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States (New York, 2000); and Jose Limon, Dancing With The Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican American South Texas (Madison, Wis., 1994), 6.


3. The Chicano Movement lacked the viable national institutions found in the African American civil rights movement of the period, such as the Congress of Racial Equality or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. As others have pointed out, the Chicano Movement can be best seen as several related like-minded local civil rights efforts that originated within the ethnic Mexican community, often led by U.S. citizens. The broader Texas-Wisconsin civil rights activism that developed across this migrant network is discussed in Marc S. Rodriguez, “Cristalejo Consciousness: Mexican American Activism between Crystal City, Texas, and Wisconsin, 1963–1980,” in Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (Chicago, 2001), pp. 146–69.

4. See, for example, such nationally focused works as Allen J. Matsuw, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York, 1984), p. 255; James Patterson, America’s Struggle Against Poverty, 1900–1994 (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); William H. Chafe, The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II (New York, 2003), pp. 230–37; and the work of social scientists of the period, including among others Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty (New York, 1969); Sar Levitan, The Great Society’s Poor Law: A New Approach to Poverty (Balimore, 1969). Of course, some of these works do not intend to study the CAP at the grassroots level, but most tend to see CAP as a failure, or detail the way various administrations dealt with its many political problems and case-specific scandals.


14. Minutes, Southwestern Wisconsin Migrant Health Committee, 18 December 1965, Bureau of Community Health and Prevention, Migrant Health Program in Wisconsin (hereafter BCHP-MHPW), 1953–1978, Wisconsin State Historical Society (WSHS), Box 6, Folder 7. This meeting considered applying for federal funds to operate a "pilot program" and the creation of a "non-profit organization."

15. "1965 Operation," BCHP-MHPW, WHSH, Box 6, Folder 7. For information on UMOS's broad-based effort to assist migrants see "Propose Migrant Aid Plan," Hartford Times-Press, 13 May 1965; Secretary's phone call notes, Mrs. Margaret Salick, State Economic Opportunity Office, to Dr. James L. Wardlaw, Jr. 5 May 1965, BCHP-MHPW, WSHS, Box 6, Folder 7.

16. "Draft of Statement to be included with the UMOS proposal to OEO and to be given the summer staff. The purpose of UMOS operated pre school day care centers," BCHP-MHPW, WSHS, Box 7, Folder 9.

17. Interview, Jesus Salas, 20 April 2000. According to Salas, children did not play in the fields as many growers told the public, but rather were important workers in their own right, bringing sacks and b knowledge for picking. and if old enough, working as laborers themselves regardless of mandatory school attendance or maximum hours laws which applied to them.

18. Robert Holzhauer, Chairman Advisory Committee, to Carl N. Neupert, MD, September 17, 1966, BCHP-MHPW, WSHS, Box 6, Folder 7; John R. Maurice to Joseph C. Fagan, Commissioner, November 3, 1966, Department of Industry Labor and Human Relations, Commissioner's Subject Files (hereafter DILHR-CSF), WSHS, Box 121, Folder "Governor's Committee on Migrant Labor."


22. Interview, Bill Smith, 23 August 2000. Smith, a graduate student in history, became the Madison-based coordinator for the march on Madison.


26. For the history of the development of this union see Marc S. Rodriguez, "Obreros Unidos: Migration, Migrant Farm Worker Activism, and the Chicano Movement in Wisconsin and Texas, 1950–1980" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2000).


29. Interview, Jesus Salas, 20 April 2000.


31. United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc., "Bylaws of United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc. (1966), 502(a)-1, 509, BCHP-MHPW, WSHS, Box 7, Folder 10. It appears as if this "migrant advisory committee" did not operate in 1966 or 1967. No minutes of meetings are available, and there is no mention made of it outside the OEO grant and UMOS bylaws.

32. "Relationship of Local Communities to UMOS," BCHP-MHPW, WSHS, Box 7, Folder 9.


34. "Five Policy and Personnel Resolutions Recommended by the Executive Committee, 1967," emphasis added. DILHR-CSF, WSHS, Box 151, Folder "United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc."


36. Interview, Jesus Salas, 20 April 2000; interview, Bill Smith, 23 April 2000.


38. Interview, Jesus Salas, 20 April 2000.

39. Interview, Jesus Salas, 20 April 2000.

40. Interview, Jesus Salas, 20 April 2000.


43. United Migrant Opportunity Services, Annual Report (Milwaukee, Wis., 1968), pp. 1-9; William R. Bechel, Staff Director, Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty to Mrs. Helen Bruner, Center for Community Leadership Development, University of Wisconsin Extension, 28 May 1969, and Margaret Salick to Salvador Sanchez, 21 May 1969, in Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance, Economic Opportunity Section, Administrative Subject Files (hereafter WDEA-EOS), WSHS, Box 24, Folder "S24 UMOS General, 69/69."


45. Ibid., pp. 3-4; Alicia P. Parra, "United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc.," p. 56.

46. Memo, Margaret Salick to Robert Neil Smith, "Telephone Conversation with Bill Koch about Migrant Grievances," 5 December 1968, WDEA-EOS, WSHS, Box 24, Folder "S24 UMOS General 1968/1969." Koch was new to the job, having worked for the University of Wisconsin, and so perhaps the UMOS managers were surprised by his

47. This move drew criticism from some UMOS Advisory Committee members who felt that the "en masse resignations" had the effect of "dealing a serious blow to the UMOS organization." Memo, Helen Bruner, Secretary, Madison UMOS Advisory Committee, to C. L. Greiber, Arthur Kurzt, Bronson LaFollette, Stephan Reilly, Frank Walsh, Melvin Velhulst, 17 January 1969, DILHR-CSF, WSHS, Box 151, Folder "United Migrant Opportunity Service, UMOS; "Five Administrators Quit Migrant Services Program," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 January 1969.


49. In "Salas Poorly Qualified," *Wausau Argus*, 3 April 1969, a rural newspaper reprinted a letter which attacked Salas written by Waucoma resident Donald M. Wrenn and addressed to Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire. Wilcox went on the offensive as a legislator, pushing for an amendment to the state's antitrespass statute to bar entry to migrant camps and keep groups like UMOS from "stirring up trouble." "Wilcox 'Anti-Trespass' Bill Can Slam Gates to Migrant Worker Aid," *Madison Capitol Times*, 29 July 1969.


52. Jesus Salas to Grace Lensmire, 27 May 1969; Beverly Seekamp to Grace Lensmire, Central Wisconsin Economic Opportunity Committee, Inc., 10 July 1969; Grace Lensmire to Jesus Salas, 17 July 1969; all in WDEA-EOS, WSHS, Box 24, Folder "S24 UMOS General, 69/69."


55. "Migrants Could Suffer From Salas' Part in Capitol Protest," *Appleton Post-Crescent*, 15 February 1970. The article cites a federal spokesperson for the OEO stating that "the right of legal protest is the right of every citizen, and we do not deny our employees that." The article then, without citing a source, reported that UMOS's funds could be in jeopardy.