

Study Guide



WATSONVILLE:

SOME PLACE NOT HERE

By Cherríe Moraga





Photo by Russell J. Young

Cast members Rosalie Siler, Patricia Alvitez, and Amalia Alarcón Morris

Watsonville: Some Place Not Here by Cherríe Moraga depicts a fictionalized version of the cannery strike in the California town, the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and the Loma Prieta earthquake, and is a sequel to her play *Heroes and Saints*. While not strictly a historical play, *Watsonville* is inspired by real-life events based on extensive research Ms. Moraga did with the people of Watsonville. The play features a combination of English and Spanish, a reflection of the language used in the area.

This study guide explores the history of the real-life events that inspired the play and takes a look at notable women in the labor movement in the United States.

We hope this information informs your enjoyment of the production.

WATSONVILLE:

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SOME PLACE NOT HERE

By **Cherríe Moraga**
Directed by **Elizabeth Huffman**

Study guide research and writing
by **John Epperson** and **Shira Goldeen**



Uncredited photograph from the *The People's Slate* promotional materials. Marchers gather in this photograph that appeared in promotional materials related to the Teamster strike committee election. Source: [Remembering the Struggle](#) Archive

Inspired by real life events

In *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, Cherríe Moraga was inspired by real life events to write the fictional story about a group of chicana women who work in a cannery during a labor strike in Watsonville, CA.

THE CANNERY STRIKE

The strike at Watsonville Canning and Richard A. Shaw Frozen Foods began on September 9, 1985.

When worker pay was cut from \$6.66 an hour to \$4.75 an hour, the primarily Latina workers refused to accept this without a fight. Watsonville, a small farm town in Central California outside of Santa Cruz, was crippled by the Cannery strike for nearly two years. Despite increases in sales of the frozen foods mass produced at the Cannery, the company claimed that worker pay had to be cut due to financial struggles. Throughout the 19-month strike, strikers received \$55 a week in strike pay and food box deliveries two times a month.



Unity Staff Photo, Unity Machistas are playing a leading role in supporting the strikers. Photo provided by SFSU Labor Archive & Research Center Source: [Remembering the Struggle](#) Archive

Many of the strikers were Latinas who had been working at the Cannery for years. Social service agencies reported that one in seven people in Watsonville was a striker or a dependent of one. The entire community's economy was devastated by the strike. *Esquirols* or scabs were brought in from neighboring areas to work at the Cannery during the strike.

At the time of the Watsonville strike, this was the longest strike in United States history. Throughout the strike, other companies in the region began lowering pay because they thought that workers would be too afraid to go on strike.

THE EARTHQUAKE

At 5:04 PM on October 17, 1989, a 6.9 magnitude earthquake struck the Bay Area. The Loma Prieta Earthquake killed 63 people and injured an additional 4,000. Watsonville, a small town with a 1990 population of 31,099 residents, was only 4 miles from the epicenter of this massive quake.

Following the devastating Loma Prieta Earthquake, much of the region was demolished. In Watsonville alone, there were over 300 homes destroyed and upwards of 1500 more were damaged. In the months following the earthquake, thousands of Watsonville residents, a majority of which are people of color, were forced to live in tents.

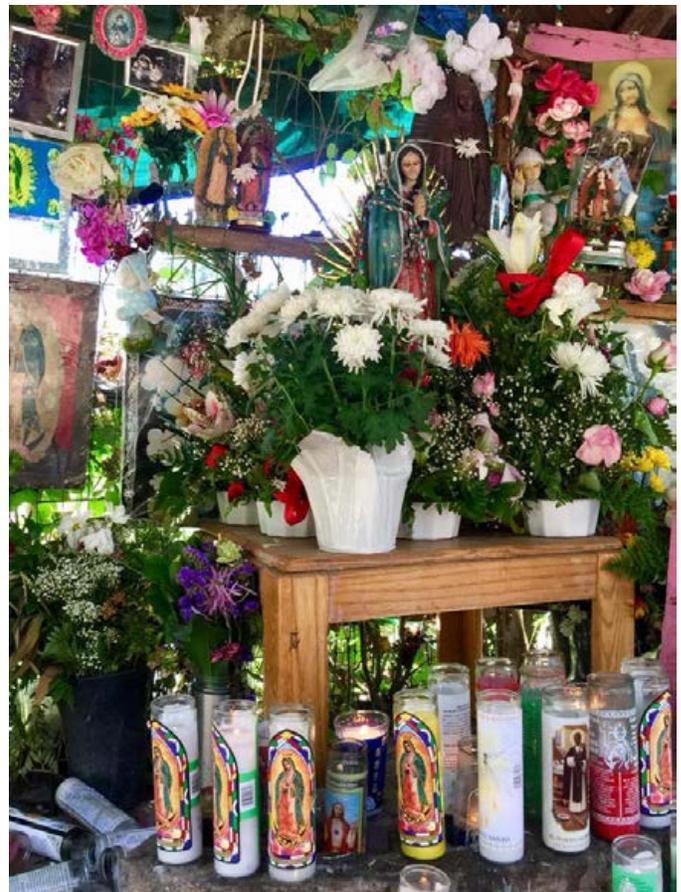
In the weeks following the Loma Prieta Earthquake, most of the major news coverage of the destruction and displacement focused on San Francisco and other large cities. Though Watsonville was the town closest to the epicenter, national news did not talk about the sheer devastation they experienced. The cost of damages from the earthquake in Watsonville totaled over \$325 million: approximately \$645 million in value of 2018 dollars. In downtown Watsonville, 16 of the major buildings were completely demolished — including Ford's department store, a staple for local employment and a gathering place for the townspeople.

THE APPARITION

In the Catholic tradition, the Virgen de Guadalupe (English: Virgin of Guadalupe) is the title associated with the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary enshrined within the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

In December of 1531, a young indigenous Mexican man named Juan Diego claimed that the Virgen de Guadalupe appeared before him and, in his native Nahuatl language (the language of the Aztec empire), she asked for a church to be built at that site in her honor. She appeared a number of times in the following days, leading to a commitment from the Bishop to build what became the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in what is now Mexico City. Mexican Catholics have celebrated the Virgen de Guadalupe on December 12th ever since.

On June 17, 1992 Anita Contreras saw an image of the Virgin in the bark of an oak tree at Pinto Lake in Watsonville, CA. Since the apparition of the Virgin, Anita Contreras has been referred to as Our Lady of Watsonville. Every year around the anniversary of the sighting of the Virgen de Guadalupe Mexicans celebrate, especially those in Watsonville.



Shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe at Pinto Lake
Photo: Patricia Alvitez

TIMELINE OF SHIFTING IMMIGRATION LAWS

Immigration laws like the one depicted in *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* have not been uncommon in the history of the United States.

Many immigration laws are directed at assisting the transition of refugees from war torn regions to The United States of America for resettlement, such as laws that expedite immigration of World War II's persecuted European Jewish population. Often times, policies are meant to undermine communist regimes, such as laws intended to assist Cuban nationals fleeing Communism. More recently, laws are directed at Central and South American immigrants in the guise of a war on drugs.

- 1942** Prompted by labor shortages in the United States as a result of World War II, the United States and Mexico enter into the Bracero Agreement , allowing Mexican nationals to enter the United States to serve as temporary agricultural workers. US employers will pay the transportation and living expenses of Mexican laborers, as well as wages equal to those of American workers.
- 1988** The Anti-Drug Abuse Act (ADAA) (102 Stat. 4181) adds "aggravated felony" as a new but limited ground for deportation. Initially, this category is limited to serious crimes (e.g., murder and drug and weapons trafficking).
- 1994** The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (VCCLEA) (108 Stat. 1791) gives the US Attorney General the option to bypass deportation proceedings for certain alien aggravated felons, enhances penalties for alien smuggling and reentry after deportation, and increases appropriations for the Border Patrol.
- 1996** The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) (110 Stat. 3009) adds new grounds of inadmissibility and deportability, expands the list of crimes constituting an aggravated felony, creates expedited removal procedures, and reduces the scope of judicial review of immigration decisions.
- 2002** The entire immigration system is overhauled with The Homeland Security Act (116 Stat. 2135), which creates the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which assumes nearly all of the functions of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and is restructured to become three new agencies: US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- 2005** Ostensibly directed to combat terrorism, The REAL ID Act (119 Stat. 302) is a sweeping change to immigration and establishes statutory guidelines for removal cases as well as increasing the burden of proof for individuals applying for asylum. Among other things, the Act bars the use of habeas corpus as a means for challenging deportation orders and strictly limits the rights of those being deported.
- 2006** Congress enacts the Secure Fence Act . The law mandates the construction of more than 700 miles of double-reinforced fence to be built along the border with Mexico, through parts of the US states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas in areas that experience illegal drug trafficking and illegal immigration.

Notable Labor Leader: Dolores Huerta

Born in New Mexico, Dolores Huerta's father was a champion of workers and union organizer and later served in the state legislature. When her parents divorced, her family relocated to California where her activism was powerfully shaped by her mother and grandmother. Recalling an experience when a school teacher unfairly accused her of plagiarism and gave her poor marks, she came to understand racial bias and she concluded that the world needed to be educated and changed. Huerta started her career as an elementary school teacher, but when faced with poorly clothed youngsters of migrant workers who came to class starving, she said that "I could do more by organizing farm workers than by trying to teach their hungry children."

With numerous accomplishments to her credit, she is most known for co-founding the National Farm Workers Association with famed migrant worker and activist César Chávez. She also coined the slogan popularized by Chávez "Sí, se puede" (Spanish for "Yes, one can" or, roughly, "Yes, it can be done"). She was with Robert F. Kennedy the night he was assassinated, having stood at his side as he gave a victory speech for having just won the California Democratic presidential primary election.

Huerta also lobbied for laws that improve the lives of farm workers. Some of the laws she supported are:

- 1960 bill to permit Spanish-speaking people to take the California driver's examination in Spanish
- 1962 legislation repealing the Bracero Program
- 1963 legislation to extend the federal program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), to California farmworkers
- The 1975 California Agricultural Labor Relations Act

She has also been a champion for women's rights and ethnic diversity. She was an honorary co-chair of the Womens March on Washington on January 21, 2017.



Dolores Huerta speaking at an event in Phoenix, AZ.
Photo: Gage Skidmore

Other Notable Female Labor Leaders

The impact women have made in labor history is often missing from textbooks and the media. Despite the numerous roles women have played to organize, unionize, rally, document, and inspire workers—men and women, children and adults, citizens and immigrants—their fight for justice is often ignored. From championing better workplace conditions to cutting back the 12-hour day to demanding equal pay across racial lines, women have been an active part of labor history. Below are a few notable female labor leaders.



Anna LoPizzo

Anna LoPizzo was a striker killed on Jan. 29, 1912 during the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike, considered one of the most significant struggles in U.S. labor history. Three strike leaders—Joe Ettor, Joe Caruso and Arturo Giovannitti—were charged as accessories before the fact in LoPizzo’s death.



Luisa Moreno

Luisa Moreno, a Guatemalan immigrant, first experience with labor activism was in 1930 at in Zelgreen’s Cafeteria in New York City with her co-worker to protest exploiting its workers with long hours, constant sexual harassment, and the threat, should anyone object, of dismissal. Moreno spent the next 20 years organizing workers across the country before taking a “voluntary departure under warrant of deportation” on the grounds that she had once been a member of the Communist party. [Description adapted from San Diego Reader and SanDiegoHistory.org.]



Jessie de la Cruz

A field worker since the age of five, Jessie knew poverty, harsh working conditions, and the exploitation of Mexicans and all poor people. Her response was to take a stand. She joined the United Farm Workers union in 1965 and, at Cesar Chavez’s request, became its first woman recruiter. She also participated in strikes, helped ban the crippling short-handle hoe, became a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, testified before the Senate, and met with the Pope. She continued to be a political activist until her death in 2013.



Ai-Jen Poo

When Poo started organizing domestic workers in 2000, many thought she was taking on an impossible task. Poo’s first big breakthrough with the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) happened on July 1, 2010, when the New York state legislature passed the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. The bill legitimated domestic workers and gave them the same lawful rights as any other employee, such as vacation time and overtime pay. Though the bill was considered a major victory, the NDWA did not stop there, expanding operations to include 17 cities and 11 states.

Source: *Women in Labor History*. Zinn Education Project.
Read about more notable women in the labor movement at
<https://zinnedproject.org/materials/women-in-labor-history/>

Women in Labor History Timeline (abridged)

- 1844** Women from the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts formed themselves into the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA). The women of Lowell, led by the intrepid Sarah Bagley, testified fearlessly before the Massachusetts legislature that new requirements forcing them to tend more machines at accelerated rates were endangering their physical well being.
- 1866** Newly freed black women, working as laundresses in Jackson, Mississippi, form a union and strike for higher wages.
- 1869** Women shoe stitchers from six states form the first national women's labor organization, the Daughters of St. Crispin.
- 1900** International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) is formed by the amalgamation of seven local unions. At the turn of the century most of the workers in the garment industry were Jewish women immigrants.
- 1903** Mary Harris Jones, nicknamed "Mother Jones," led a 125-mile march of child workers to bring the evils of child labor to the attention of the President and the national press.



Photo source: [UAW](#)

- 1905** Wobblies, the International Workers of the World was founded with the help of San Antonio labor organizer Lucy Gonzales Parsons.

- 1920** The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, giving women the right to vote.
- Congress established the U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, the only federal agency mandated to represent the needs of wage-earning women in the public policy process. The Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor promotes the passage of legislation to protect working women.
- 1922** The Nineteenth Amendment is declared constitutional by a unanimous decision of the Supreme Court.
- 1930** Rosina Tucker helped to organize the first Black labor union — the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In September 1938, the wives of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters established the International Ladies Auxiliary. Tucker became its first secretary-treasurer.
- 1933** Frances Perkins is appointed secretary of labor by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, making her the first woman member of a presidential cabinet.
- 1935** The National Council of Negro Women is formed to lobby against racism, sexism, and job discrimination.
- 1938** The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), also Federal Wage and Hour Law establishes a national minimum wage for men and women alike. The law is also enacted to eliminate labor conditions injurious to the health and efficiency of workers, and unfair methods of competition based on these conditions, and set maximum working hours.
- 1938** Luisa Moreno, a Guatemalan immigrant, became the first Hispanic vice president of a major labor union: the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of American (UCAPAWA).
- 1945** Maida Springer-Kemp, Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader, became the first African-American woman to represent labor abroad, when she was chosen for a labor exchange trip to England.
- Immediately following World War II, the Women’s Pay Act of 1945 — the first ever legislation to require equal pay — was introduced in the U.S. Congress. It would take another 18 years before an equal pay bill would make it to the President’s desk to be signed into law.
- 1950** The Salt of the Earth Strike was the first major strike conducted by women and children. From October 1950 until January 1952 the predominantly Mexican Mine-Mill Workers Union struck the mines in southern New Mexico.
- 1961** On the suggestion of Esther Peterson, director of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, President John F. Kennedy establishes the first national Commission on the Status of Women.
- 1963** The Commission on the Status of Women report led directly to the passage of the Equal Pay Act. The Equal Pay Act made it illegal to pay different wages to men and women who performed the same work. However, the new law had little effect on narrowing the wage gap between the sexes.
- 1965** Dolores Huerta became the first female leader of the farm worker’s union. She co-founded the United Farm Workers with Cesar Chavez and became its contract negotiator.

- 1972** The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) measure won congressional approval in 1972 as the 27th Amendment, 49 years after it was introduced.
- 1974** The Coalition of Labor Union Women is founded as America's only national organization for union women.
- 1982** The ERA was defeated when only 35 states had passed the measure, three short of the 38 required for ratification.
- 1983** AFSCME's Women's Rights Department is established.
- 1985** Wilma Mankiller becomes the first woman chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.
- 1986** AFSCME wins a \$106.5 million settlement in its sex-based wage discrimination suit against Washington State. As a result, nearly 35,000 state workers in undervalued job classifications get pay increases.
- 1987** The US Congress declares March to be National Women's History Month.
- 1988** AFSCME Iowa Council 61 scores a \$1.3 million win for AFSCME state employees victimized by sex-based pay discrimination.
- 1992** In "The Year of the Woman" a record number of women run for public office, and win. 24 are newly elected to the House of Representatives and 6 to the Senate.
- 1993** The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is signed by President Clinton, enacted to provide job-protected leave to employees who need time off to care for themselves or their families.
- 1995** Linda Chavez-Thompson, an AFSCME International Vice President, is elected as the AFL-CIO's Executive vice President, becoming the first Latina elected to an executive office in the AFL-CIO.

Source: *Women in Labor History Timeline*. AFSCME.

Read the complete timeline at

https://www.afscme.org/for-members/womens-leadership-training/leadership-tools/body/Women_in_Labor_History_Timeline.pdf



ABOUT CHERRÍE LAWRENCE MORAGA

Cherríe Lawrence Moraga (born September 25, 1952) is an award winning writer, poet, essayist, and playwright. Raised in California's San Gabriel Valley, Moraga felt the effects of her mixed ethnicity — Mexican and Anglo — from an early age. Her early writing acknowledges the complex relationship of being able to “pass” for white, while emotionally deeply identifying with the non-white part of her identity and her extended Chicano (Mexican American) family.

Currently part of the faculty at the University of California, Santa Barbara, her works explore the ways in which gender, sexuality and race intersect in the lives of women of color. Moraga is also a founding member of the social justice activist group La Red Xicana Indígena which is an organization of Xicanas fighting for education and culture rights, as well as, Indigenous Rights.

Her play *New Fire: To Put Things Right Again*, which she also directed, opened at Brava Theater Center in San Francisco in 2012. A collaboration with visual artist, Celia Herrera Rodríguez, over three thousand people witnessed the work. In 2017, Moraga premiered a new work, the award winning *The Mathematics of Love*, a theatrical conversation with her forthcoming literary memoir, *The Native Country of a Heart — A Geography of Desire*.

She has mentored a full generation of published writers and playwrights who credit Moraga as one of their most influential teachers. Cherríe Moraga is an activist writer, who sustains an engaged schedule of appearances on college campuses, conferences and community settings both nationally and internationally.

HER WORKS:

- *Coatlicue's Call/ El llamado de Coatlicue*
- *Shadow of a Man, Heroes & Saints, Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* — part of the Watsonville series
- *A Circle in the Dirt*
- *The Mathematics of Love*
- *New Fire. - To Put Things Right Again*
- *Digging Up the Dirt*
- *La Semilla Caminante*
- *The Hungry Women: A Mexican Medea/ Heart of the Earth: A Popol Vuh Story*
- *Giving Up the Ghost*

Additional Reading

Watsonville Canning Strike, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/watsonville-canning-strike>

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CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor and Statistics,

<https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=325&year1=198910&year2=201803>

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Dolores Huerta, National Women's History Museum,

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/dolores-huerta>

Celebrate the Virgin Where She Appeared at Pinto Lake by Jennifer Squires for the Watsonville Patch, 12/10/2011,

<https://patch.com/california/watsonville/celebration-of-the-virgin-where-she-appeared-at-pinto-lake>

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<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/timeline-1790>

The History of Women in the Labor Movement. SEIU-UHW.

<http://www.seiu-uhw.org/archives/20663>



WATSONVILLE:

SOME PLACE NOT HERE

By **Cherríe Moraga**
 Directed by **Elizabeth Huffman**

May 3 - 26, 2018

Thursday-Saturday, 7:30 PM | Sunday, 2:00 PM

Milagro Theatre | 525 SE Stark Street, Portland

Tickets start at \$27

Student, senior, and veteran discounts available

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at shira@milagro.org or 503-236-7253 x 111

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 following the performance

Cast

Amalia Alarcón Morris Amparo
 Patricia Alvitez Lucha
 Bunnie Rivera Dolores
 Rosalie Siler. Susana
 Matthew Sepeda Jojo
 Osvaldo González Juan
 Feliciano Tencos-García Chente
 Enrique Andrade Don Arturo/Monsignor
 Julio César Velasquez Musician/Variou

For full cast and crew list and biographies, please refer to the program or the website.



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