

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

HELGA GARZA

community organizer, executive director

"My life experiences have been intertwined with immigration policy and with the historical bias of the Rio Grande border region and its effects on the original people of the land."

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Background Information

Helga Garza was born to an Indigenous family in San Antonio, Texas. Garza's mother was an early political influence. Although only equipped with a 3rd-grade, she organized a community-centered campaign project.ⁱ These projects prompted community members of all backgrounds to form a neighborhood council known as Communities Organized for Public Service. The group advocated for sidewalks and paved roads.ⁱⁱ Garza continued her mother's legacy of advocacy throughout the

Southwest, specifically in Brownsville, Texas.ⁱⁱⁱ

Garza's Resistance

Using her experiences as a farmer, Garza organized campaigns focused on environmental justice through a community-led approach. Her campaigns included protesting against American-owned factories that were causing water pollution in Matamoros, Mexico.^{iv} The violent, state-sanctioned immigration policies and crises had detrimentally impacted Garza's community. Individuals in the area faced poverty and food insecurity.^v Influenced by her mother's community work, Garza organized community campaigns that educated people about water, land, and air contamination in the US/Mexico region.^{vi} Garza's community organizing aimed to end food insecurity through revolutionary farming action. Her efforts fought for the food sovereignty of low-income, Indigenous, and Latino communities.^{vii}

Achievements

Garza was awarded the Culture of Health Leaders Fellowship and the Castanea Fellowship.^{viii} Her work addressed the issue of inequitable food distribution through a grassroots approach to improving the livelihood and public health of marginalized community members. Garza's community vision to ensure everyone has access to fresh, healthy foods while being self-sufficient materialized through the usage of ancestral farming techniques and her being a skilled organizer.^{ix}

