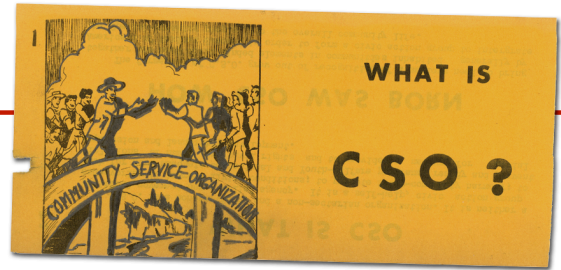


Community Service Organization Project

CSO Project
University of California
Extended Studies and Public Programs
UC Professional Development Institute

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02/27/2013

Dear President Obama,

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William Deverell

Herman Gallegos

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Chris Hartmire

Gretchen Laue

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Cruz Reynoso

Fred Ross Jr.

Alex Saragoza

Ruth Shy

Mary Walshok

Louis Zarate

Alex Zermeno

My name is Gilbert Padilla. For the almost 60 years I have fought for the community and against exploitation. My life changed and my work for justice truly began because of Fred Ross and the Community Service Organization (CSO). I am writing to you President Obama, to urge you to award Fred Ross Sr. the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He changed my life and the lives of many others. Through his work he built a foundation of leadership that has helped change our nation and makes it better.

In 1955 I met Cesar Chavez, who was working for the CSO, in Hanford, California. In 1957 I met Fred. Fred was traveling with Cesar visiting CSO chapters. In the beginning Fred didn't impress me. But he kept coming around and I began to understand him more and more. What really started to make an impression on me was that Fred didn't just come in to tell us what to do, like so many so called *do gooders* do. He came to listen. He came to ask us in the community what we were doing, what were our concerns. He wanted to know how he could help. It wasn't about him, it was about us. About that time I also began to realize that most of the things Fred said were right. I began to really like him.

In 1960 I got hired by CSO to work in Stockton. Fred came to Stockton to meet with the local groups and to introduce me and Cesar. I liked the way he met with the groups, listened to them, and introduced us to them. I began to talk with him and I started to learn what he had done. He was the manager of the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp near Bakersfield, the camp John Steinbeck wrote about in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Then he worked for the War Relocation Authority helping Japanese American internees leave the camps and obtain jobs and housing. In 1946 Fred went to work for the American Council on Race Relations to promote "Councils for Civic Unity" in California in response to the racial tensions that had surfaced during the war. He fought segregation in schools and elsewhere. While working for the American Council on Race Relations, Ross helped Hector Tarango and other Mexican Americans sue the Orange County city of Westminster so that their children could receive an equal education and not be segregated. They won the landmark desegregation case, *Westminster v. Mendez*, which predates the far more famous *Brown v. Board of Education*. Justice Thurgood Marshall used the Westminster case to support the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

After that Fred went to Los Angeles. He wanted to work with the Hispanic community. The first chapter of the Community Service Organization was established in Los Angeles in 1947. In 1963 Fred hired me to work with him in the San Joaquin Valley and the Coastal areas. I worked with him in Oxnard, Santa Maria, Hanford, Visalia and Madera.

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WHAT IS CSO

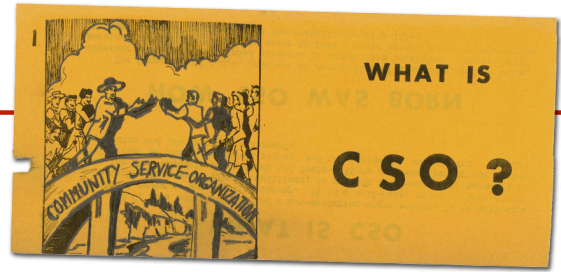
C.S.O. is a non-partisan, and a non-sectarian organization. It is neither a political movement nor a relief agency. It is a self-help, civic action group endeavoring to improve living conditions; to promote inter-community harmony; to work for more adequate educational and Youth-Welfare programs, remedy and prevent violations of human and civil rights and to provide a medium for social expression and leadership development.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.csoproject.org>

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I see Fred as an angel who came in and worked with minorities. It didn't matter which minority it was. He worked with all groups. Filipinos, Japanese Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Mexicans. He helped all of us. I believe he deserves to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his work and for the example he set for all of us. Our country is a better place because of Fred. By your awarding him the Medal of Freedom posthumously, you will honor and celebrate the meaning of citizenship and honor all people who promote the general welfare of everyone in any community in the United States. You will honor those who work together to fight discrimination, prejudice and oppression.

Sincerely,

Gilbert Padilla

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