

DURAZO, MARÍA ELENA (1953–)

“The thing that clicked for me from the very beginning, my parents being immigrants, was the class analysis. All they did was cross the border, they were still workers, and they were really getting screwed. [Although] they’re Mexican and I’m Mexican, there was the bottom line of class.” María Elena Durazo. *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*.

President of Local 11 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union in Los Angeles, Durazo represents predominantly low-wage Latina and Latino immigrant workers, the cutting edge of the new social movement unionism, and a key player in this revived labor movement. Involved in college with Chicano Studies and el Centro de Acción Social Autonomo (CASA), an organization that focused on immigrant and workers’ rights, she joined the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union as an organizer shortly after graduation. In 1981 she left to attend the People’s College of Law while working part time at Levy and Goldman, a labor-law firm. At that time, Levy and Goldman represented Local 11, and she began to do legal work for the union. Eventually she was asked to assist with a strike, and this subsequently led to a permanent position as an organizer with Local 11. In 1989, Durazo ran for president and won. Durazo’s victory and subsequent efforts to transform the local have proven significant for both the union and the larger labor movement. Local 11’s emphasis on Latina/o organizing and promoting worker leadership and community alliances reflects a radical departure from traditional union culture.