

Cesar chavez: the hardships and accomplishments in the fields essay sample

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Cesar Chavez: The hardships and accomplishments in the fields Throughout Cesar Chavezes life he witnessed the discrimination of his people in the area of farm work, which lead to Chavezes forming of labor unions, nonviolent protests, and in turn was looked upon as being a hero by the Mexican American people. Cesar Chavez struggled throughout his life to achieve equality amongst farm workers. With much respect held for this great hero, Santa Barbara named a street in honor of him. In addition, the assembly is trying to make Chavezes birthday a state holiday.

This paper will discuss the early life of Chavez, living conditions during 1930's depression, People that influenced Chavezes life, Chavezes educational background, C. S. O, NFWA, and his protests with the United Farm Workers.

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born March 31, 1927 in Yuma , Arizona. Chavez was born during the 1930's. During the 30's the U. S. economy collapsed and millions of people were out of work. This period during American history was called the great depression. It was especially hard during these times for Mexican American's because they were unable to find work and it was easy to discriminate against them, " When the Chavezes arrived in California, they discovered that 300, 000 poor and hungry people had already come to find work, too. Frequently , the contractors decided who would work and who would not. Some workers had to buy their job with a bribe. There were many dishonest contractors getting rich at the expense of the migrant laborers.

Sometimes they even charged the workers for water they drank While harvesting in the hot sun." (Cedeno P. 10) There were other factors that

contributed to the lack of work for migrant Mexican American people. Many Farmers lost their land during these times because they could not afford to pay taxes or to grow crops. Other farmers' lands were no longer fertile because of a severe drought in the southwest. As a young child Cesar Chavez witnessed inequalities for farm workers and the discrimination of his people. This greatly influenced him at a young age, and he knew someday that he would be able to help his people.

Cesar became influenced by many people, which helped him with his future practices. These future practices were protesting and working towards equality for farm workers. His mother, Juana , would recite words of wisdom to him at a young age. A typical one was, " It's best to turn the other cheek." Another was " It takes two to fight, and one can't do it alone" (Ferris & Sandoval P. 154). These " dichos" would later influence Chavez to protest and take actions nonviolently. Cesar grew up in Arizona and learned justice from his father at a young age. Cesar's father agreed to clear eighty acres of land and in exchange he would earn forty acres of extra land for his home. Then suddenly the agreement was broken. Then Mr. Chavez went to a lawyer who advised him to borrow money and buy the land back. Mr. Chavez bought the land back, but was forced to sell it after he couldn't pay the interest on a loan. In 1938, the Chavez family was forced to move to California.

Cesar grew up disliking school, because he was raised in a Spanish speaking environment. The majority of his teachers were anglo and only spoke English, which made it difficult for Cesar to communicate with them. During school Cesar was constantly being punished for speaking Spanish to his

fellow classmates. " He recalls being punished with a ruler to his knuckles for speaking Spanish" (DelCastillo & Garcia P. 232). This was a significant reason for Cesar's distaste in school, although he was a very bright child.

In the early 1940's , segregation was also a concern to Chavez and school seemed meaning less at the time. Cesar disliked school because , " It felt like he was a monkey in a cage" (Ferris & Sandoval P. 32). Chavez recalls having to listen to racist remarks and seeing signs that read " whites only." In addition, Cesar remembers being discriminated against when going to the movies. Chavez felt that because he had served in the U. S. Navy, he deserved to sit anywhere. The theater management did not agree, so Chavez and his friends were arrested for breaking the rules. Although he was later released, " Cesar Chavez would remember this act of discrimination" (Cedeno P. 28) Throughout his time in school, Cesar and his brother Richard attended thirty-seven different schools. " Cesar at the time didn't think education had anything to do with his farm work/migrant way of life" (Cedeno P. 25). Cesar graduated eighth grade in 1942. After eighth grade his father was hurt in a car accident. Cesar proceeded to leave school and work full time in the fields. Cesar planned to complete his education after a couple years of work, but it did not happen.

Later in Cesar's Life Education became one of his great passions. Chavez had a library of books such as philosophy, economics, cooperatives and unions. Cesar used education in his mid-life in order to help him become a successful United Farm Worker. Chavez believed that, " The end of all education should surely be service to others" (Delcastillo & Garcia P. 75). Chavez came to

realize education is very important and that people should take advantage of it.

During 1952 a thin tall man named , Fred Ross , visited Chavezes family in Sal Si Puedes , California. Ross was an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO). This organization was a program that helped Mexican Americans throughout California. After the visit was over, Chavez followed Ross out to his car because he was moved by the way in Ross spoke. Before Ross left he could tell that Cesar was interested in taking an active part in the CSO and invited Chavez to come along with him . Chavez was delighted, " His feelings about equality and justice for farm workers could now be channeled into something that actually had a name and a direction- community service" (Garcia P. 134). The CSO had two main programs, voter registration and citizenship classes.

Chavez immediately volunteered for the registration drive and worked for about two months. Chavez eventually became the leader of the local registration drive in Sal Si Puedes because Ross was transferred to a new town. Cesar began to be looked upon as a natural leader and hero as he took time to help the Mexican American people. Cesar helped them not with just their voter registration but also with government agencies, such as welfare board and immigration department. Though, he felt good about helping his people, Chavezes' dream was to create an organization to help farm workers. In 1962, after failing to convince the CSO to commit itself to farm worker organizing, he resigned from his CSO job. Chavez proceeded to move

his wife and eight young children to Delano , California where he founded the National Farm Workers Association(NFWA).

Slowly, the union, which was known as the National Farm Workers Association, grew. Chavezes brother Richard, Cousin Manuel and Dlores a former CSO organizer all gave up the jobs in order to join him. The NFWA offered a credit union which was essentially a savings program where Mexican Americans could make deposits, get loans, acquire life insurance and community service programs. Then in 1965 the NFWA had it first strike. The first strike was against a company called Mount Arbor Company. The company grew and harvested rosebushes. Just shortly after four days of striking Mount Arbor Company gave into the requests of the NFWA, which was to receive higher wages. The strike was a victory for Chavez and the NFWA, but it was nothing compared to the grape strike.

Early in 1966, Cesars NRWA, with 1, 200 family members, joined an AFL-CIO, which was another national union. It stood for American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrialized Organizations. The two unions merged together and became the UFW, which stood for United Farm Workers. After merging together Cesar's Brother Richard designed the flag that was a symbol of the UFW. The flag was an Aztec eagle that represented " A symbol of pride! When people saw it they know it meant dignity" (Sandoval & Ferriss P. 165). In 1966 the UFW went on strike against major grape growers such as Schenley, DiGiorgio and Tree Sweet Products. Yet these grape growers were tricky, " Some growers were loaning their brand names to other growers that the union was boycotting. Because the union was

boycotting only certain brands, a grower could switch the labels and then sell it's grapes under the new labels" (Cedeno P. 15).

This made the grape strikes drag on and Chavez decided to try to prevent the growers from switching labels. Chavezes solution was to declare a Boycott on all California grapes. Then College students and labor unions across the U. S. set up picket lines in front of grocery stores , telling consumers not to buy California grapes. People across the nation began to stop buying California grapes, but the process was not moving fast enough. A large majority of the people striking with Chavez began to want to use violence in order to speed up the process, " Sheds were burned down on several farms, fights broke out on picket lines and some pickets began to carry guns" (Cedeno P. 30). Then Chavez became discouraged and called for a meeting of the UFW.

He spoke out for nonviolent tactics such as boycotting , picketing, striking and fasting. Chavez believed if the UFW continued to use violence they would fail and lose respect from the general public. He decided to fast for twenty-five days and show his fellow union followers the practice of nonviolent protesting, " Farm workers everywhere are angry and worried that we cannot win without violence. We have proved it before through persistence, hard work, faith and willingness to sacrifice. We can win and keep our self respect and build a great union that will secure the spirit of all people if we do it through rededication and recommitment to the struggle for justice through non- violence" (Garcia & Delcastillo P. 102).

After Cesar's fast he lost nearly thirty-five pounds. The end of the fast marked the end of the grape boycott. During the time of his fast if the package of grapes consumers were buying did not have the symbol of the black eagle, they would not buy the grapes. Grape growers were losing so much money that after five long years, in 1970, the largest growers signed work contracts with the UFW. Nearly 4,000 people came to celebrate Chavez's mass and the end of the grape boycott. This provides a perfect example of how Chavez used nonviolent protests to fulfill his goals for the UFW.

Cesar Chavez dedicated his life to helping others and sharing the dream of a better life that his grandfather more than a hundred years had strived for. In addition, to better pay for farm work, the UFW brought new dignity and respect to Mexican Americans. Furthermore, Chavez and his CO-workers accomplished this goal without resorting to the use of violence. In spite of the unending hard work and the long way he had yet achieved treatment for all farm workers, Chavez never became discouraged. One of the sayings Chavez lived by was, "Hay mas tiempo que vida" (Cedeno P. 22). Which meant "There is more time than life" (Cedeno P. 22). Cesar Chavez devoted himself to others, to fighting injustice in a completely nonviolent manner. History will remember him as a great man who by example led the farm workers towards the path of equality.

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