

# Cesar chavez essay



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One of the greatest civil rights activists of our time; one who believed the ways of Gandhi and Martin Luther King that “ violence can only hurt us and our cause” (Cesar Chavez); a quiet, devoted, small catholic man who had nothing just like those he help fight for; “ one of America’s most influential labor leaders of the late twentieth century” (Griswold del Castillo); and one “ who became the most important Mexican-American leader in the history of the United States” (Ender). Cesar Chavez; an American farm worker, who would soon become the labor leader that led to numerous improvements for union workers; it is recorded that Chavez was born near Yuma, Arizona on March 31, 1927 and died on April 23, 1993 in San Luis, Arizona.

(Wikipedia) His life affected many others as his unselfish deeds changed the labor union force forever. This essay will discuss the reasons Cesar Chavez became involved in Union rights, the immediate impact he had, and also the legacy he left behind with his actions that influenced American society.

There are many reasons why Chavez became part of the movement, but the major reason was his childhood. It is noted that Cesar Chavez was one of five children born to Librado Chavez and Juana Estrada who were farmers. As a child in Arizona, he grew up nourished by the values of his family and his rural Mexican-American community. His mother taught him the importance of non-violence and self-sacrifice and his grandmother impressed upon him the values of the Catholic faith.

And as a child, he experienced racial discrimination in school. (Griswold del Castillo) Chavez quit school after the eighth grade to work full-time in the fields. His grandfather had homesteaded some 112 acres that the family soon lost because of the Great Depression. (Jusko) It is reported that Chavez

and his family fell behind in mortgage payments and lost what they had. They then moved to California looking for work in the fields as temporary farm laborers; just like thousands of other rural families in the southwest.

The family led a nomadic life; moving very often in search of migrant work. Chavez joined his parents to help harvest carrots, cotton, and grapes under the blazing California sun. During this period Cesar Chavez experienced the corrupt labor contractors, extremely low wages, and poor living and working conditions that the migrant workers had to endure. Around this time as well, he got his first glimpse of union organizing when his father became active in several union activities.

(Ramakrishnan; Russell) It is believed that Chavez's father and uncle actively supported unions. Therefore he learned at a young age firsthand about strikes, organizing operations, and also picket lines. Gale Encyclopedia) During his lifetime, Cesar Chavez and his followers made many changes and contributions to society. While he was alive, he had the privilege to see what his non-violence actions produced; what they transpired.

It is recorded that Chavez began actively organizing workers in the fields in 1952. The California-based Community Service Organization (CSO) recruited and trained for his work. Chavez built new chapters of CSO, led voter registration drives, and helped Mexican-Americans confront issues of police and immigration abuse during the next ten years. In 1958 he became general director of CSO. With \$1, 200 of his own savings, Chavez resigned four years later, to found the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in

1962. (Gale Encyclopedia) He was a very determined man; strived in everything he put his mind to.

Russell declares that by 1965, the NFWA had convinced two major California growers to raise the wages of migrant workers; 1, 700 families had joined the organization. And in 1966, the UFWOC, which was the United Farm Workers Organization Committee when the NFWA merged with an organization of Filipino workers, launched a campaign picketing grape growers in Delano who paid low wages. La Huelga (The Strike), which the campaign nationally became known as, proved to be the defining moment in Chavez's work as a labor activist. America's consciousness about the conditions of migrant workers was raised when the five-year strike against grape growers in the San Joaquin, Imperial, and Coachella valleys went public throughout the country and world.

Chavez was then transformed into a national symbol of civil disobedience. Chavez's boycott cost California grape growers millions of dollars. He did this by holding hunger strikes, marches, and sit-ins; he also had himself arrested in order to gain attention to his cause. In 1970, the growers agreed to grant rights to migrant workers and raised their minimum wage.

(Russell) He ended the fast by "breaking bread" with, then at the time, the candidate for the United States presidency, Senator Robert Kennedy.

(DISCovering World) "Chavez became the first man ever to organize a viable farm workers' union in California that obtained signed contracts from the agricultural industry". (Jusko) Russell argues that Cesar Chavez also fought for the civil rights of African Americans, women, gays, and lesbians, but

LaHuelga was the first of many successful boycotts that Chavez organized on behalf of grape and lettuce pickers. He also states that Chavez remained a beloved figure in the Mexican American community and nationally represented the quest for fairness and equality for all people, even though membership in the UFWOC eventually waned.

(Russell) Despite that, Cesar Chavez had many accomplishments with his non-violence, charismatic qualities; he brought dignity and strength to the farm workers and greatly influenced the consciousness of Americans. Chavez Forms) He would go down in history as one of the greatest Mexican-Americans to ever live. After Cesar Chavez's death, he left behind a legacy; a legacy in which nobody else can every recreate; till this day many Americans and also those outside the country, still honor him. He was responsible for La Causa, the birth of the Hispanic American civil rights movement, which is the greatest part of his legacy; not only of the increases in pay, eligibility for medical insurance, employer-paid pensions, and unemployment benefits that UFW members received.

Gale Encyclopedia) Chavez will never be forgotten. “ Even today, Chavez remains a source of inspiration for Latino activists, union organizers, community leaders, and civil rights activists”. (Ramakrishnan) It is stated that When Chavez died on April 23, 1993, at the age of sixty-six, and a front-page obituary was published in the New York Times. Many expressions of sorrow were received from a host of national and international leaders.

(Russell) In 1994, President Clinton awarded Chavez the nation's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom.

Ramakrishnan) In 1999, he was inducted into the U. S. Labor Department's Hall of Fame for his work toward improving the treatment of farm workers. (Jusko) Chavez was awarded Mexico's highest award presented to people of Mexican heritage who have made major contributions outside of Mexico, the Aguila Azteca (" Aztec Eagle"). The state of California declared his birthday an official holiday, recognizing his greatest achievements of moral leadership and a commitment to social justice in August 2000.

Griswold del Castillo) All over the country, somehow or someway, Cesar Chavez left a presence. It is noted that a Cesar Chavez commemorative meeting was held in San Antonio, in 2005, honoring his work on behalf of farm workers. In his honor, there are elementary schools named after him in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Madison, Wisconsin. Also in his honor, there is a community center named The Cesar Chavez Community Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The business loop of I-196 Highway is named " Cesar E Chavez Blvd", in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Cesar Chavez was inducted into the California Hall of Fame located at The California Museum for History, Women, and the Arts on December 6, 2006 by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and First Lady Maria Shriver.

And the University of Texas at Austin unveiled their Cesar Chavez Statue on campus on October 9, 2007. (Wikipedia) There is proof that Cesar Chavez left a legacy behind; whether it be a form of mentality to Americans or a physical asset that honors him, he is always with us. Castillo claims that Cesar Chavez was the antithesis of the stereotypical labor leader. He never owned a house or a car, lacked fancy clothes and a formal education, and never made more than \$6, 000 per year, nut despite all of that, he was one

of the most successful organizers in American history. He provided the moral compass for the Mexican-American civil rights movement that is in force to this day.

Chavez had always envisioned the UFW a social movement that could change the lives of Mexican-Americans in general not as a traditional labor union. 'Ninety-five percent of the strikers lost their homes and their cars,' Chavez said after the 1970 grape strike. ' But I think in losing those worldly possessions they found themselves. "' (Enders) Chavez changed the way Americans thought about farm workers with his inspiring leadership of El Movimiento. The UFW brought the social and economic problems of Mexican Americans into the nation's consciousness under his direction. (Griswold del Castillo) He would forever change the lives of future farm workers, whether he knew it or not.