

Cesar Chavez: Who He Was and What He Did



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cesar_Chavez

Who was Cesar Chavez and what were his endeavors in the 60s, 70s, and 80s?

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Rodriguez, Arturo S. "Why Cesar Chavez Led a Movement as Well as a Union." *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 23 (2011): 15.

This source provides insight into why Cesar Chavez led a farm worker movement and why he decided to lead the union behind it. This article is a secondary source because it relies on information that was gathered from other textbooks, journals, and scholarly resources. The article takes a look at both the past and present, but with an emphasis on the past. The author begins by explaining Cesar Chavez's living conditions, family life, and humble beginnings before he became the man we all know him to be. A main theme throughout the article is that Cesar Chavez and the movements he was involved were controversial for their time, and provides explanations as to why that was the case. This is done by explaining legislation that was backed by Chavez and the first collective bargaining agreement between farmworkers and growers in American history. A main focus of the article is not so much of what Cesar Chavez did, but more on why he did it. There is extensive information about his personal life and how it influenced the way he approached his leadership responsibilities. A major talking point was how Cesar Chavez embraced living a life of voluntary poverty and encouraged the lifestyle among many other movement leaders. Labor leaders would often enjoy large salaries and wealthy lifestyles, but such a life made Cesar Chavez uncomfortable considering the conditions the farmworkers he supported had to live through. Overall, this article is a reflection of Cesar Chavez's morals, thought process, and voluntary sacrifices which helped him become the prominent figure he is today.

Levy, Jacques E., and Cesar Chavez. *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa*. New York: Norton, 1975. Print.

This source was a book about Cesar Chavez and *la causa*. This book highlights all aspects of *la causa* and the significance of organizing migrant farm workers in California. The book is a primary source because the author is writing about firsthand encounters and conversations he had with Cesar Chavez, and other notable labor leaders. The author provides many stories and accounts which lets the reader see Cesar Chavez from a different point of view, through the eyes of a follower. The entire basis of the book is to retell the story of *la causa* (the cause) in its entirety, from its very beginnings, to the very end, and everything in-between. This is a very useful source compared to my other choices because of the unique point of view it provides, rather than other sources which analyze Cesar Chavez through his actions, speeches, or relatability. The autobiographical nature of the source makes it as though you are truly reading a story, and not studying the historical effects that a man had on society. The reader not only finds out about Cesar through the eyes of a follower, but also contains recollections of other notable labor leaders and what they thought of him as well: one notable example being Dolores Huerta. This book also gives great insight into key moments during the movement Cesar Chavez was a part of, and what it took to make change. In a final testament to his character, it is acknowledged that Cesar Chavez helped push for this source's publication, and refused to censor or influence the final manuscript.

Chavez, Cesar, Richard J. Jensen, and John C. Hammerback. *The Words of César Chávez*.

College Station: Texas A & M UP, 2002. Print.

The words of Cesar Chavez is a book detailing his speeches, history, goals, and challenges. This book is a primary source because a majority of its information comes from Cesar Chavez himself, or those who were able to witness his speaking style firsthand. While the book is a

wealth of knowledge into the history of Cesar Chavez, it is most valuable for its insight into Cesar Chavez as an extraordinary communicator. He spoke Spanish mostly, but always spoke English to his staff, non-Mexican audiences, and on college campuses. He rarely raised his voice to get a point across, and he was a migrant farmworker with a family as well, which made it easy for others to relate with him. He was not an imposing figure, yet he spoke with a conviction that others respected. Other topics that are covered in the books are presentation style and adaptiveness to particular situations. On certain occasions he would assume too much knowledge from the audience and had to adapt and present in a more simplified way so that everyone could understand. The author also examines study habits and inspirations that helped Cesar improve and refine his already tremendous speaking ability. He would look at other great leaders in history and see what they did well when addressing the public, which resulted in him reading a variety of books which involved other notable labor leaders of the past. Cesar Chavez excelled at public speaking at every conceivable level and helped capture his audiences and further his cause for organizing migrant farm workers in California.

Ferriss, Susan, Ricardo Sandoval, and Diana Hembree. The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997. Print.

This book, like most others about Cesar Chavez, covers his life and endeavors in the farmworker movement. However, this book puts much more of an emphasis on the movement, which came to be known as “La Causa” by its supporters. This movement became instrumental for Mexican American and Filipino farmworkers seeking better working conditions. This movement involved many boycotts throughout the years, including successful nationwide grape and lettuce boycotts. Along with increased public support when working conditions faced by immigrants become better known, led to the first collective bargaining agreement between farmworkers and growers

in California. This book was extremely insightful because of the focus on the agricultural movement in relation to Cesar Chavez, as where other sources tend to put Cesar Chavez on center stage. The book contains numerous images, real documents, and articles written by people who were active in la causa. This book also puts increased emphasis on the people involved in Chavez's life and their significance during the movement in addition to Chavez himself. The book also contains valuable interviews and narratives by people who were close with Chaves. The interviews cover a variety of topics, but they all lend insight into what drove Chavez into action. Something not covered in detail in my other sources, this book also touches on the extreme racism and discrimination faced by migrant workers on a daily basis by white Americans. This book is a secondary source because most the information in the book is gathered by other historians about the topic.

"The Official Web Page of the United Farm Workers of America." *United Farm Workers*:. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 May 2016. <<http://www.ufw.org/>>.

This website is the official website of the United Farm Workers. This organization was created in 1962, cofounded by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. The website pays a lot of homage to Cesar Chavez for helping to create the United Farm Workers, as well as his accomplishments after its establishment. This is a primary source because the organization itself is giving information about its history, members, and other historical facts it was directly related in. A key point in the website is the history of the organization, which is similar to other sources. However, there is a more detailed analysis of the successful lettuce and grape boycotts that led to the first ever collective bargaining agreement for farm workers. These strikes are commonly called the Salad Bowl Strike, in reference to the agricultural nature of the protest. When the Salad Bowl strike ended, tension and disagreements remained. The United Farm Workers were put under

extreme stress from legal battles, mass arrests of their members, and financial insufficiency. Support for the UFW was hindered severely, and although further protests were planned, they were ultimately canceled due to the perceived drop in support. However, both the growers and UFW were severely hurt by the outcome of events, and talks resumed in an attempt to come to a better agreement that pleased both sides. The website is a very good source for specific information about events that it was tied to as well as stances that were held by the group in the past.

Willhoite, David. "The Story of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act: How Cesar Chavez Won the Best Labor Law in the Country and Lost the Union. (UC Hastings College of the Law Student Symposium: California Aspects of the Rise and Fall of Legal Liberalism)." *California Legal History*, (2012): 409.

This journal article is all about the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, which is the law that allowed for collective bargaining for farm workers in California. This is a secondary source because all the information is gathered from other sources. A main focus of the article is the balance of needs and priorities that was necessary to sustain the United Farm Workers organization, and how the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act, the most important piece of legislation achieved by the organization, led to the ultimate collapse of the organization. Attaining the post protective labor law in history was a huge victory, but only proved to further divide the ranks within the organization. Organizers were sent to far off places to boycott, or were purged from the United Farm Workers completely. Things reached a boiling point when the lawyers for the group demanded a higher salary. In some cases, some lawyers were earning less than the farm workers they fought for. Cesar Chavez insisted they earn the same amount as their farmworker counterparts. When the lawyers refused, Chavez dismissed the entire legal team.

Those who actively voiced their disagreements were fired, and those who weren't eventually quit. By 1980, all people who disagreed with the direction Cesar Chavez was taking the union had been removed. During this tumultuous time, many contracts were allowed to expire and other important matters required to keep the organization upright were neglected. This was a fantastic article because it highlights the dysfunction that plagued the UFW in its later years, and is a good source to show that not everything went perfectly, even during times of great triumph for the group.