

AMERICAN HERO

Cesar Estrada Chavez, Senator Robert F. Kennedy noted, was "one of the heroic figures of our time.."

A true American hero, Cesar was a civil rights, Latino, farm worker, and labor leader; a religious and spiritual figure; a community servant and social entrepreneur; a crusader for nonviolent social change; and an environmentalist and consumer advocate.

A second-generation American, Cesar was born on March 31, 1927, near his family's farm in Yuma, Arizona. At age 10, his family became migrant farm workers after losing their farm in the Great Depression. Throughout his youth and into his adulthood, Cesar migrated across the southwest laboring in the fields and vineyards, where he was exposed to the hardships and injustices of farm worker life.

After achieving only an eighth-grade education, Cesar left school to work in the fields full-time to support his family. He attended more than 30 elementary and middle schools. Although his formal education ended then, he possessed an insatiable intellectual curiosity, and was self-taught in many fields and well read throughout his life.

Cesar joined the US Navy in 1946, and served in the Western Pacific in the aftermath of World War II. He returned from service to marry Helen Fabela, whom he had met working in the vineyards of central California. The Chavez family settled in the East San Jose barrio of Sal Si Puedes (get out if you can), and would eventually have eight children and thirty-one grandchildren.

Cesar's life as a community organizer began in 1952 when he joined the Community Service Organization (CSO), a prominent Latino civil rights group. While with the CSO, Cesar coordinated voter registration drives and conducted campaigns against racial and economic discrimination primarily in urban areas. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Cesar served as CSO's national director.

Cesar's dream, however, was to create an organization to protect and serve farm workers, whose poverty and disenfranchisement he had shared. In 1962, Cesar resigned from the CSO, leaving the security of a regular paycheck to found the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers of America.

For more than three decades Cesar led the first successful farm workers union in American history, achieving dignity, respect, fair wages, medical coverage, pension benefits, and humane living conditions, as well as countless other rights and protections for hundreds of thousands of farm workers. Against previously insurmountable odds, he led successful strikes and boycotts that resulted in the first industry-wide labor contracts in the history of American agriculture. His union's efforts brought about the passage of the groundbreaking 1975 California Agricultural Labor Relations Act to protect farm workers. Today, it remains the only law in the nation that protects the farm workers' right to unionize.

The significance and impact of Cesar's life transcends any one cause or struggle. He was a unique and humble leader, in addition to being a great humanitarian and communicator who influenced and inspired millions of Americans to seek social justice and civil rights for the poor and disenfranchised in our society. Cesar forged a diverse and extraordinary national coalition of students, middle class consumers, trade unionists, religious groups, and minorities.

A strong believer in the principles of nonviolence practiced by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar effectively employed peaceful tactics such as fasts, boycotts, strikes, and pilgrimages.

Cesar E. Chavez Foundation – His Legacy

In 1968 he fasted for 25 days to affirm his personal commitment and that of the farm labor movement to non-violence. He fasted again for 25 days in 1972, and in 1988, at the age of 61, he endured a 36-day "Fast for Life" to highlight the harmful impact of pesticides on farm workers and their children.

Cesar passed away in his sleep on April 23, 1993, in San Luis, Arizona, only miles from his birthplace of 66 years earlier. More than 50,000 people attended his funeral services in the small town of Delano, California, the same community in which he had planted his seed for social justice only decades before.

Cesar's life cannot be measured in material terms. He never earned more than \$6,000 a year. He never owned a house. When Cesar passed, he had no savings to leave to his family.

His motto in life-"si se puede" (it can be done)-embodies the uncommon and invaluable legacy he left for the world's benefit. Since his death, dozens of communities across the nation have renamed schools, parks, streets, libraries, other public facilities, awards and scholarships in his honor, as well as enacting holidays on his birthday, March 31. In 1994 he was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in America.

Cesar Chavez-a common man with an uncommon vision for humankind-stood for equality, justice, and dignity for all Americans. His ecumenical principles remain relevant and inspiring today for all people.

In 1993, his family and friends established the Cesar E. Chavez Foundation to educate people about the life and work of this great American civil rights leader, and to engage all, particularly youth, to carry on his values and timeless vision for a better world.

www.ChavezFoundation.org

FOUNDATION PROGRAMS

The Foundation has been engaged in effective, high quality programming based on the belief that by applying Cesar's vital legacy and universal values, we can uplift and empower our most disadvantaged communities to address their own needs and concerns.

The organization's programming in the areas of Education, Arts and Culture; Civic Engagement; Sustainable Communities; and Nonviolence provide individuals and communities with the skills, tools, and knowledge necessary to maximize their inherent human potential for improving their lives, communities, and the world.

With the core values of stewardship, relevancy, and excellence, the Chavez Foundation will continue to provide individuals and communities with cutting edge programs that touch at the heart of our nation's concerns: education, health, immigration, and youth development, today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Together, Si Se Puede!

Prayer of the Farm Workers' Struggle

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know my people's plight.

Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.

Help me to take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.

Grant me courage to serve others;
For in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience;
So that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration;
So that the spirit will be alive among us.

Let the spirit flourish and grow;
So we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world.

Written by Cesar E. Chavez, UFW Founder (1927-1993)

Oracion del Campesino en la Lucha

Ensename el sufrimiento de los mas desafortunados;
Asi conocere el dolor de mi pueblo.

Librame a orar por los demas;
Porque estas presente en cada persona.

Ayudame a tomar responsabilidad de mi propia vida;
Solo asi sere libre al fin.

Concedeme valentia para servir al projimo;
Porque en la entrega hay vida verdadera.

Concedeme honradez y paciencia;
Para que yo pueda trabajar junto con otros trabajadores.

Cesar E. Chavez Foundation – His Legacy

Alumbranos con el canto y la celebracion;
Para que levanten el Espiritu entre nosotros.

Que el Espiritu florezca y crezca;
Para que no nos cansemos entre la lucha.

Nos acordamos de los que han caido por la justicia;
Porque a nosotros han entregado la vida.

Ayudanos a amar aun a los que nos odian;
Asi podremos cambiar el mundo.

Escrito por Cesar E. Chavez, Fundador de la UFW (1927-1993)

To Print a Copy: Prayer of the Farm Workers' Struggle