

Record: 1

Title: CESAR ESTRADA CHAVEZ.

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Abstract: This article profiles agricultural labor leader Cesar Estrada Chavez. Cesar Chavez was born to a family of farm workers near Yuma, Arizona in 1927. At age 16, Chavez displayed a penchant for peaceful rebellion upon which he would later build a movement. Growing up in Delano, California, the Mexican-American Chavez was subjected to segregation and "whites only" areas. Chavez was the first man to organize a workable farm workers union, obtaining signed contracts from the agricultural industry for the workers. When he died in 1993, over fifty thousand people attended his funeral. (Copyright applies to all Abstracts)

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CESAR ESTRADA CHAVEZ**1927-1993 AGRICULTURAL LABOR LEADER**

Cesar Chavez was born to a family of farm workers near Yuma, Arizona. At the time of his birth, the family lived on land originally homesteaded by Chavez's grandfather in 1904. By 1939 the family lost the ranch when they could not pay taxes on the property. They joined the migrant laborers uprooted by the Great Depression who were pouring into the California farm fields--the new land of opportunity. Chavez quit school after the eighth grade to join his family working in the fields; he worked in Imperial Valley tying carrots for one to two dollars a day.

At age 16, Chavez displayed a penchant for peaceful rebellion upon which he would later build a movement. Growing up in Delano, California, the Mexican-American Chavez was subjected to segregation and "whites only" areas. Once, while attending a movie, Chavez sat in the "whites only" section. Police had to pry his hands off the seat in order to drag him to the police station.

In 1951 Mexican Americans living in the barrios of California began organizing to mobilize for equality and formed the Community Service Organization (CSO). In 1952 Chavez met CSO leader Fred Ross and began learning the art of political organization. Chavez was so successful in a voter registration drive in Sal Si Puedes that Ross hired him as an organizer for the CSO. By 1958 Chavez became director of CSO.

In 1962 Chavez decided to utilize his skills to help organize the predominantly Hispanic farm workers in California. At the time he had \$1,200 in savings, a wife and eight children. Through Chavez's hard work, the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) was formed. When the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee of the AFL-CIO struck the vineyards of Delano in 1965, they asked for support from the NFWA, which Chavez granted. The resulting California table grape strike lasted five years. The two unions merged to form the United Farm Workers Organization Committee (UFWOC) of the AFL-CIO, headed by Chavez, which grew to a union of over one hundred thousand members. The grape boycott ended in 1970 when the grape growers signed with the newly formed union. Chavez was the first man to organize a workable farm workers union, obtaining signed contracts from the agricultural industry for the workers.

A student of Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr., Chavez advocated change by nonviolent means, bringing the plight of the farm worker to the attention of the American public. He broke through the wall of invisibility that had surrounded the farm workers, making the public aware of their plight and winning significant gains on their behalf. Chavez was the leading spokesperson for "La Causa," a term that came to signify the larger struggle of migrant workers everywhere. When he died in 1993, over fifty thousand people attended his funeral. He was, as one writer noted, "a great activist for human rights in a movement of poor people of color."

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By Robert C. Baron; Samuel Scinta and Pat Staten

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Source: Millennium 2000 -- 20th Century America: 100 Influential People