



SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

HANDOUT 5 CESAR CHAVEZ 1927–1993



Printable Biography

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/printable.aspx?id=1E1:ChavezCes&topicid=6733>

Quotes

Our opponents in the agricultural industry are very powerful and farm workers are still weak in money and influence. But we have another kind of power that comes from the justice of our cause. So long as we are willing to sacrifice for that cause, so long as we persist in non-violence and work to spread the message of our struggle, then millions of people around the world will respond from their hearts, will support our efforts...and in the end we will overcome. It can be done. We know it can be done. God give us the strength and patience to do it without bitterness so that we can win both our friends and opponents to the cause of justice.

—Statement by Cesar Chavez at the end of his twenty-day “Fast for Justice,”
Phoenix, Arizona, June 4, 1972

This is the beginning of a social movement in fact and not in pronouncements. We seek our basic, God-given rights as human beings. Because we have suffered—and are not afraid to suffer—in order to survive, we are ready to give up everything, even our lives, in our fight for social justice. We shall do it without violence because that is our destiny. To the ranchers, and to all those who opposes, we say, in the words of Benito Juárez: “El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz” (respect for another’s right is the meaning of peace).

—Cesar Chavez, “The Plan of Delano,” *El Malcriado*, March 17, 1966, pp.11-14

Action

The following excerpt appeared in the July 4, 1969, issue of *Time* in an article titled, “The Little Strike That Grew to *La Causa*.”

For more than a year now, table grapes have been the object of a national boycott that has won the sympathy and support of many Americans—and the ire of many others. The strike is widely known as *la causa*, which has come to represent not only a protest against working conditions among California grape pickers but the wider aspirations of the nation’s Mexican-American

minority as well. La causa's magnetic champion and the country's most prominent Mexican-American leader is Cesar Estrada Chavez, 42, a onetime grape picker who combines a mystical mien with peasant earthiness. La causa is Chavez's whole life; for it, he has impoverished himself and endangered his health by fasting. In soft, slow speech, he urges his people—nearly 5,000,000 of them in the U.S.—to rescue themselves from society's cellar. As he sees it, the first step is to win the battle of the grapes.

To enter the public consciousness, a labor conflict must ordinarily threaten the supply of essential goods and services, like steel or transportation. Politicians and the public take notice only when there is great impact on the economy, when spectacular bloodshed occurs or when well-recognized issues are at stake. The grape strike seems to meet none of these criteria. Americans could easily live without the table grape if they had to, and even that minor sacrifice has been unnecessary. The dispute has been relatively free of violence. Neither great numbers of men nor billions of dollars are involved. The welfare of agricultural workers has rarely captured U.S. attention in the past, but the grape strike—la huelga—and the boycott accompanying it have clearly engaged a large part of the nation.

Read more of this article at

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,840167,00.html#ixzz0ciqIM8GR>.

By 1970, through 5 years of hard fought battles in the fields and organizing public pressure through a boycott where millions of Americans stopped eating grapes, the UFW did what most thought was impossible. They had forced the powerful grape growers to accept union contracts for the first time.

—Evelina Alarcon, excerpts from a statement issued in August 2000
after the Cesar Chavez holiday bill was signed into law

Additional Links

<http://www.chavezfoundation.org/>

<http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/ModelCurriculum/Public/Philosophy.aspx>

<http://www.ufw.org/page.php?menu=research&inc=history/07.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/index.html>