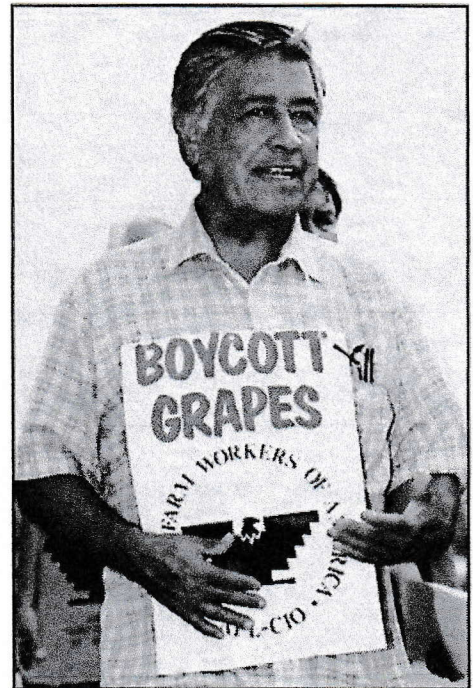
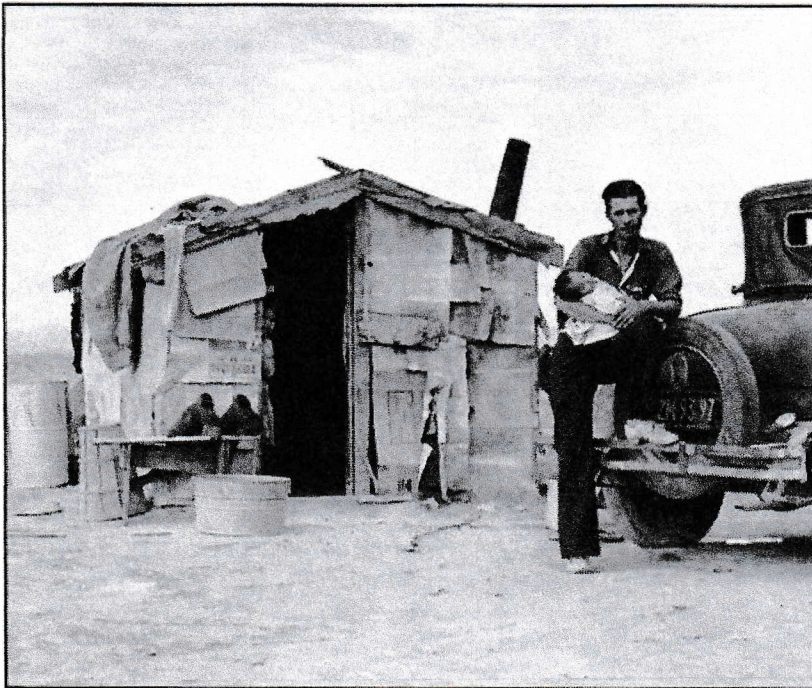


What Made Cesar Chavez an Effective Leader?



Overview: For decades, the farm workers of California had worked without unions and without a living wage. Chicanos, Dust Bowlers, Filipinos, and a growing number of immigrants from Mexico thinned the lettuce, tended the grapes, and picked the peaches that kept the rest of America well fed. Many attempts were made to organize these farm workers into a union but all had failed. When Cesar Chavez arrived in the early 1960s he was told it couldn't be done. Chavez was to prove them wrong. This Mini-Q asks, what made Cesar Chavez such an effective leader.

The Documents:

- Document A: Recruit from the People
- Document B: Equal Status Within Movement
- Document C: Fasting and Non-Violence (with photo)
- Document D: Grape Boycott

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

Hook Exercise: Cesar Chavez

Directions: Below is a list of eight traits or characteristics of an effective leader.
You have two tasks.

Task One: Next to each trait, name a person you regard as a strong leader who has that trait.

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1. clear goal _____
2. courage _____
3. integrity _____
4. willing to sacrifice _____
5. money to get things done _____
6. persistence _____
7. of the people, with the people _____
8. tough when necessary _____

Task Two: List three traits from this list that you believe a person must have to be an effective leader. Be ready to discuss your choices.

What Made Cesar Chavez an Effective Leader?

Cesar Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona, in 1927 on his grandfather's farm. One of five children, Cesar's childhood was happy, but drought and the Great Depression forced the family to leave. They crammed into their old Studebaker and headed for California. The year was 1938. The family had 40 dollars to its name.

The Chavezes were not alone. Tens of thousands of other **migrants** sought work – any kind of work – in the fruit and vegetable fields of California's great valleys. Many of these migrants were refugees from the Dust Bowl back East. A large number were **Chicanos** – Americans like the Chavez family with strong Mexican roots.

During their first ten years in California, the family tended and picked whatever the valleys had to offer. Living in tents or shacks, they moved with the seasons. Cesar shuttled between the fields and the classroom. By the time he dropped out at the end of eighth grade, he had attended 36 different schools.

After a stint in the Navy and more than ten years in community service work, Cesar Chavez returned to the fruit and vegetable fields. He had decided to do what no one had been able to do before, to organize the farm workers of California. It would not be easy. As one California governor said, "The farm workers do not have the power, the growers do. The growers have the lawyers, ... they belong to golf clubs, they talk to editors of newspapers, ... this is power." History was also not on Chavez's side. Many attempts had been made over the decades to organize farm workers, and all had failed. Cesar was determined to change this.

From 1962 until his death in 1993, Cesar Chavez worked tirelessly to create and then

maintain a union for farm workers. The union was called the United Farm Workers of America (UFW). Many of Cesar's tactics were classic – organizing worker strikes so that a grower couldn't harvest his strawberries, picketing outside the gates of a lettuce farm to keep strike-breakers from taking over jobs in the fields, conducting long marches to build union support,

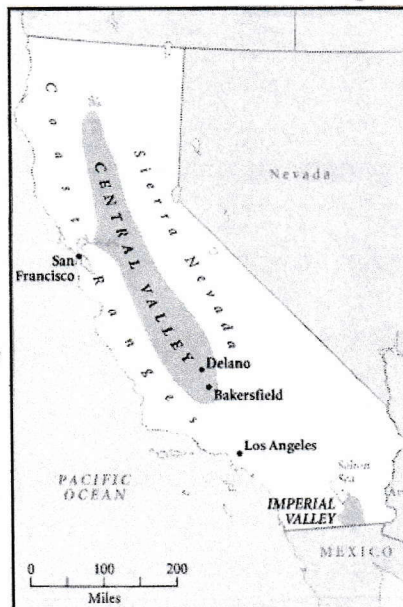
organizing boycotts so that consumers wouldn't buy table grapes.

In this effort Chavez and the farm workers attracted world-wide press. He was even on the cover of *Time* magazine. While winning the praise of many, Cesar drew the criticism of others. Neither Presidents Richard Nixon nor Ronald Reagan were fond of Chavez. And there were members of his own board who left because of very low pay. In his entire life,

Cesar never owned his own home, and seldom earned more than \$6,000 a year. Cesar asked a lot from himself and the people around him.

Perhaps Cesar Chavez' greatest success came in 1975. The California state legislature passed a law which gave the United Farm Workers the right to form a union and the right to **collective bargaining**. It was a huge achievement.

This Mini-Q asks why Cesar succeeded where others before him had failed. Beyond the strikes and the picket lines, beyond the marches and the boycotts, why did 40,000 mourners attend Cesar's funeral in 1993? Examine the documents that follow and answer the question: *What made Cesar Chavez an effective leader?*



Background Essay Questions

1. When and where was Cesar Chavez born?
2. How many schools did Cesar attend in California? Why?
3. Who were the growers?
4. What were some of the classic tactics used by Cesar Chavez to win bargaining rights for the farm workers?
5. Define each of the following:
 - migrants
 - Chicanos
 - UFW
 - collective bargaining
6. What important labor legislation was passed by California in 1975?

Timeline

- 1961** – President Kennedy establishes the Peace Corps.
- 1962** – Cuban Missile Crisis
- 1962** – United Farm Workers Union is founded in California.
- 1965** – Martin Luther King, Jr. marches in Selma.
- 1968** – Cesar Chavez ends 25-day hunger strike.
- 1972** – Break-in at Democratic Headquarters in Watergate Hotel

Document A

Source: Dick Meister in Ann McGregor's *Remembering Cesar: The Legacy of Cesar Chavez*. Quill Driver Books: California, 2000.

It was a hot summer night in the little San Joaquin Valley town of Delano, California. Cesar Chavez ... sat behind a makeshift desk ... in the cluttered shack that served as headquarters for him and the others who were trying to create an effective farm workers union.

“Si se puede,” he said repeatedly to me, a highly skeptical reporter from San Francisco....

“Si se puede – it can be done!”

But I would not be swayed. Too many others, over too many years, had tried and failed to win for farm workers the union rights they had to have.... The Industrial Workers of the World, ... the Communists who followed, the socialists, the AFL and CIO organizers – all their efforts had collapsed under relentless pressure of growers and their powerful political allies.

I was certain this effort would be no different. I was wrong... Chavez grasped the essential fact that farm workers had to organize themselves [creating what is called a “grassroots” organization]. Outside organizers, however well intentioned, could not do it.

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Document Analysis

1. What is the English translation of “si se puede”?
2. To what was Cesar Chavez referring when he said “si se puede”?
3. Why was the reporter skeptical?
4. According to Dick Meister, why was Cesar Chavez a successful leader?

Document B

Source: Bob Maxwell in Ann McGregor, *Remembering Cesar: The Legacy of Cesar Chavez*. Quill Driver Books: California, 2000.

Note: Maxwell worked as a social worker in various social justice movements.

My wife Liz and I had been interested in the union for years and had discussed the possibility of joining the movement full-time.... We laugh now at the reception we got when we arrived in California. The union's offices were located near the tiny town of Keene in what used to be a tuberculosis hospital.... We found (a room) at the end of a corridor. It was piled with broken furniture and empty beer cans, had ancient obscenities scribbled on the walls, but it did have windows and a sink that worked.... The bathroom and shower were down the corridor.... Living conditions like that resulted from Chavez's determination to keep the union a genuine organ of the poor. For him, it was unthinkable that representatives of the poor be better off than those for whom they labor.

Housing was provided, but most staff people, Cesar included, got \$7.50 a week for food and \$5.00 for other expenses. As a result, the union was staffed only by those with a strong and sincere interest in social justice.... The scheduled workweek was fifty-three hours but it was always necessary to work overtime. We were almost constantly exhausted. Besides the scheduled job, there was picket duty for staffers. Cesar was concerned that the administrative people not withdraw into an ivory tower.... Every person was pressured to take his place on the picket line when the union was on strike. This entailed rising at 4:00 am, driving some forty miles and walking a picket line outside an orchard or vineyard.

EV

Document Analysis

1. What were Bob Maxwell and his wife Liz doing in Keene, California?
2. Describe the room the Maxwell's were given to live in.
3. What does it mean when an administrator withdraws "into an ivory tower"?
4. The minimum wage in 1970 for American workers was \$1.60 an hour. Was Cesar paying his staffers more or less than the minimum wage?
5. What is the main idea of the document?
6. How does the document help explain why Cesar Chavez was a successful leader?

Document C

Source: Time-Life Pictures / Getty Images, March 11, 1968.

Note: In February 1968, during a long strike against grape growers, Cesar Chavez went on a 25-day hunger strike. Senator Robert F. Kennedy, soon to announce his run for President, came to support Cesar on March 11, the day Cesar ended his fast.



“I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness, is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men.”

Cesar Chavez, 1970

Document Analysis

1. Why do you think Chavez chose a hunger strike as a form of protest?
2. Why was it important for Chavez that Robert Kennedy had his photograph taken with him?
3. How does this photo and the quote help explain Cesar Chavez’s effectiveness as a leader?

Document D

Source: *U.S. News and World Report*, April 6, 1970.

Exact figures on the boycott's effect are hard to come by. But it is estimated that shipments of table grapes were off by 10 per cent or more in 1968 and by about 3 per cent last year....

One indication of how this is hurting growers: Last July more than 80 growers filed a triple-damage suit against the union for 75 million dollars, charging that they had lost 25 million....

The drop in grape sales has been dramatic in some parts of the country. In New York City, sales are down an estimated 50 per cent, in Atlanta about 46 per cent.

EV

Source: *Newsweek Magazine*, August 10, 1970.

Last week, surrounded by 300 cheering supporters in the dusty little valley town of Delano, the 43-year-old Chavez celebrated his greatest victory. He signed a contract with 26 major grape growers in the area, an act that meant some 75 per cent of the state's growers have now been organized by UFW.... Summed up Chavez proudly: "This is the beginning of a new day."

The new contracts provide that grape pickers will now be paid \$1.80 an hour, plus 20 cents a box during harvest time this year.... Five years ago, the pickers – most of them itinerant Mexican-Americans and Filipinos – earned only \$1.10 an hour....

Document Analysis

1. What is a boycott? In this case, who was boycotting what?
2. In the April 1970 document, what evidence supports the idea that the boycott was successful?
3. In the August 1970 document, what evidence supports the idea that the boycott was successful?
4. How does this document help explain why Cesar Chavez was an effective leader?