Honoring a Hero

Cesar Chavez spent his life fighting for workers' rights. Today, people celebrate his legacy.

By Sarah Rehman

Andres Chavez (holding a flag) leads a march to honor his grandfather.

On a warm, spring morning, a group of two hundred people linked arms and marched peacefully through Pomona, California. They marched to honor the legacy of Cesar Chavez, a civil rights leader who had fought for farmers' rights.

It was a proud moment for everyone involved—especially Andres Chavez, the grandson of the late civil rights leader. “My grandfather believed in community and people coming together for a just cause,” said Andres. “He would have been humbled by this.”

Unfair Conditions

Cesar Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona, in 1927. When Cesar was a boy, his family members lost their business. So, they moved to California, seeking work as migrant farm workers. For the next several years, they traveled from farm to farm, harvesting crops. The experience was horrifying.

During the early 1900s, Mexican farm workers, like the Chavez family, were treated poorly by their employers. They worked long hours and for little pay. In addition, they were forced to live in metal shacks with no plumbing or electricity.

Many of these workers wanted to band together to demand better working conditions, but the government prohibited them from doing so.

Fighting for Change

Cesar Chavez was determined to change this. In 1965, he formed a group, which eventually became known as United Farm Workers (UFW), to advocate for the rights of workers. The group went on strike against grape growers who were not paying their pickers enough money. This became known as "the Great Grape Strike."

Eventually, the group took action against growers of other crops, too. In addition, they encouraged the public to boycott, or not buy, products that were sold by people who treated their workers unfairly.

Chavez's tactics were a success. Farming companies suffered major financial losses and were forced to sign agreements that gave farm workers better pay and better working conditions.

Cesar Chavez holds a sign that discourages people from buying grapes.

"My grandfather changed the world simply by standing up and saying, 'Enough is enough,'" said Andres proudly.

Chavez's Legacy

Chavez died in 1993, but his legacy lives on. In 2012, President Barack Obama even proclaimed March 31 as "Cesar Chavez Day." On that day, many Latinos join hands and march peacefully, as Chavez often did. Some partake in parades and festivals where traditional dances are performed.

For Andres, it is a great way to honor his grandfather. "He also always felt it was important to make sure the history and traditions of Latino people continue to be told in the United States."

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