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## A Great Impact of Cesar Chavez

There are many immigrants in the United States, from various countries. This paper will concentrate on the Mexican " American heritage and their outstanding spoke person Cesar Chavez. The people of this culture are some times called Latinos, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and Chicanos. Mexican is specifically for the nationality of the inhabitants of Mexico and the term is used appropriately for Mexican citizens who visit or work in the United States. The term Mexican is insufficient to designate those people who are citizens of the United States, or born in the US and of Mexican ancestry. It is important to explain why these people feel it is important to make such a distinction. US citizens who are troubled by this often point out that most immigrants do not distinguish themselves by point of origin first, but simply as Americans. In the next paragraphs I will explain why many US citizens of Mexican extraction feel that it is important to make the distinction.

About 150 years ago, approximately 50% of what was then Mexico was appropriated by the US as spoils of war, and in a series of land sales that were coerced capitalizing on the US victory in that war and Mexico's weak political and economic status. A sizable number of Mexican citizens became citizens of the United States from one day to the next as a result, and the treaty declaring the peace between the two countries recognized the rights of such people to their private properties, their own religion, and the right to speak and receive education in their own tongue. The descendants of this population continue to press for such rights, and many hold that theirs is a colonized land and people in view of the fact that their territory and population was taken over by military force.

Numerous classes of US citizens of Mexican extraction are descendants of, or are themselves, people who conceive themselves as temporarily displaced from Mexico by economic circumstances. As opposed to the waves of European migrants who willingly left their countries due to class and religious discrimination, and sought to make their lives anew in the new world and never to return to the old land, these displaced Mexicans typically maintain strong family ties in Mexico by visiting periodically, and by investing their incomes in homes or kin in Mexico, and usually intend to return to Mexico provided they can become economically secure. Religion, language and customs help the Mexican people maintain and nurture their children.

There is great tension within this population between those of Mexican birth who conceive of themselves as temporary guests in the US, and their descendants who are born in the US, are acculturated with the norms of broader US society in public schools, and are not motivated by the same ties that bind a migrant generation of Mexicans. This creates a classic niche of descendants of immigrants who are full-fledged US citizens, but who typically do not have

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access to all the rights and privileges of citizenship because of the strong cultural identity instilled in them by their upbringing and the discriminatory reaction of the majority population against a non-assimilated and easily identified subclass.

Chicanos are not the same as Mexicanos. Mexicanos, and instead spoke of themselves as Mesheecanos, in accordance with the pronunciation rules of their language. An equivocal factor is that in vulgar Spanish it is common for Mexicans to use the "CH" conjunction in place of certain consonants in order to create a term of endearment. Whatever its origin, it was at first insulting to be identified by this name. The term was appropriated by Mexican-American activists who took part in the Brown Power movement of the 60s and 70s in the US southwest, and has now come into widespread usage. Among more assimilated Mexican-Americans, the term still retains an unsavory connotation, particularly because it is preferred by political activists and by those who seek to create a new and fresh identity for their culture rather than to subsume it blandly under the guise of any mainstream culture.

Under the great Mexican American Leadership of Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers made historic achievements by appealing to the best in people from all walks of life to help farm workers. Cesar Chavez used the motto, ¡Si se puede! (Yes we can!) as he developed and lived by a unique blend of values, philosophy and styles.

Cesar Estrada Chavez, was a great Mexican American labor union organizer, leader and an Agricultural migrant worker. He used nonviolent action to gain recognition and respect from the Migrant farm laborers. Cesar Chavez knew he needed recognition in order to negotiate in collective bargaining for the labor rights of the migrant worker. Agricultural growers and agricultural business corporations were rich and powerful and had never allowed any recognition of any union. Farm workers had been excluded from the right to collective bargaining that had been guaranteed to other workers by the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (Zannos). It would not happen for forty years; later in 1975 through the efforts of Cesar Chavez, United Farm Workers Union (UFW) and the migrant workers that they secured for themselves the protection of the National Labor Relations Act and an Agricultural Relations Board.

Cesar Chavez was born in 1927, in a farm near Yuma, Arizona. In 1939, his parents lost their farm in a bank-foreclosure. During Cesar's childhood his family migrated to California where he became a migrant worker. Chavez had worked in the fields as a child and had encountered the reality of being poor, as well as a member of a discriminated class of people (Altman). The land shaped the thinking and emotional being of Cesar Chavez. The reality of hard work in the hot fields at low wages, the planting, hoeing and harvesting of the agricultural produce that was the foundation of a multi-billion food chain industry impressed Cesar. He discovered his place in the whole enterprise and that the workers were merely expendables obtained at the lowest price with the least personal protection and job benefits. Cesar Chavez had realized the workers were

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too weak to fight the agricultural business that controlled public, political enforcing and policing agencies.

The powerful growers and corporations lacked the consciousness of putting into practice the fair integration of workers as partners in the agricultural enterprise. The situation of the migrant workers guided Chavez's actions and provided him with the emotional motivation to organize farm workers. There is no doubt that the land, the people, his family and cultural environment of his home shaped his character and motivated him in his efforts on behalf of migrant field workers.

Cesar Chavez organized grape pickers in California in 1962, into the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). Chavez originally from Arizona knew first hand about being poor and directed his union organizing activities with few resources. He started out with the solidarity of his wife-Helen, his brother-Richard and a few friends. Cesar borrowed \$3,000 from his brother Richard to begin the union. The National Farm Workers Association had developed a non-violent strategy to survive and selected the Aztec eagle for its emblem. They also carried the image of the Lady of Guadalupe on banners during their Huelgas (strikes) and other marches.

Cesar Chavez never wavered from his task of helping the migrant workers and he was able to relate to the experiences of the field workers. In 1966, the powerful agricultural enterprises were now challenged by the smallest, weakest and poorest agricultural labor union. The NFWA merged with the Filipino labor union changing their name to the Farm Workers Association Committee (UFWOC). Chavez and NFWA encouraged all Americans in a nation-wide boycott to boycott all table grapes as a show of support. Cesar began to fast as a spiritual plea for union members to adhere to non-violent action, although confronted by so much violence against them. (Richard, p.19)

The use of the nation-wide boycott was a strategy that took the struggle away from a small area in Delano, California where the powerful growers controlled the power. Across the nation, other rich and powerful groups, college students and general public consumers saw the injustice of the treatment of field workers and supported their grape boycott. Public officials such as Robert Kennedy, religious leaders and ordinary citizens from all over the United States flocked to California to march in support of the farm workers. In 1973, the union changed its name to the United Farm Workers of America, (UFWA).

With each change of name came new alliances, new strategies, new vision and hope. Unfortunately, the rich and powerful growers never had intentions of changing its non-integral philosophy and failed to renew their contracts in 1973. In 1973, the UFWA organized a strike for higher wages from lettuce and grape growers. Always, Chavez remained committed to non-violence although, this was difficult when the opposition employed the use of police, county

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sheriff deputies and paid rednecks to harass the strikers in the fields. The out breaks of violence against the union resulted in beatings and some deaths of union strikers. Chavez and UFWA used their strategies from previous strikes and where able to negotiated with the growers in 1978.

Cesar Chavez a very religious Catholic wrote a prayer about the struggles the union members faced. 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 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 that we will never tire of the struggle. Let us remember who have died for justice; For they have given us life. Help us love even those who hat us; So we can change the world.

Amen Written By Cesar E. Chavez, UFWA Founder (1927-1993 During the 1980's, Chavez led a boycott to protest the use of toxic pesticides on grapes. Again Chavez fasted to draw public attention; these strikes and boycotts generally ended with the signing of bargaining agreements. Chavez continued to lead marches, often accompanied by one or more of his grandchildren. He was always concerned about dignity, justice and fairness. He was ready to sacrifice for what he believed was right, "Fighting for social justice, it seems to me, is one of the profoundest ways in which man can say yes to man's dignity and that really means sacrifice", Cesar has said, " There is no way on this earth in which you can say yes to man's dignity and know that you're going to be spared some sacrifice."

Chavez was so compassionate about the rights of the Farm workers, and because of his compassion they were able to earn better wages, respect and better treatment. They had secured collective bargaining and political protection from the National and California Labor Relations Boards. The workers had secured wages that were closer to being livable wages, they had won human rights that were reflected in safe working conditions in the fields, clean water, toilets, improved housing, and worker's compensation. These were working conditions and rights that with out a Cesar Chavez's visions of hope and integrity would have never came about. Cesar E. Chavez died in his sleep on April 22,1993, at a friend's home in the town of San Luis, Arizona.

The funeral was held in Delano, California and was attended by some 35,000 mourners, represented by Catholic and other church representatives, union members, public figures, representatives of the entertainment industry, people from all walks of life and economic classes. Cesar E Chavez was a remarkable person; he dedicated his life for farm workers rights with non-violence and is one of our countries greatest civil rights leaders. Chavez helped

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change history to improve the future for my generation and our children.

In conclusion, the Spanish culture is so vital in our communities today and without them where would the farmers, factories, and businesses be. The missions in California are so beautiful and add such a wonderful heritage to the history of America. Many of the Spanish-Mexican immigrants worked in the fields and this is still an area they are employed. They pick the fruit and vegetables we eat, and many are household workers, daycare workers, and gardeners.

Overall they do a vital job in today's society. This is where Caesar Chavez had such a great impact. He fought for equal rights and fairness for all farm workers. Although, his main achievements were for farm workers, many immigrants benefited from his crusade. The great impact of the Mexican culture is still going strong in the United States.

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