

**CESAR CHAVEZ:
The Rhetoric of Nonviolence**

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

INTRODUCTION

Our cause, our strike against table grapes and our international boycott are all founded upon our deep conviction that the form of collective self-help which is unionization holds far more hope for the farm worker than any other single approach, whether public or private. This conviction is what brings spirit, high hope and optimism to everything we do.

—CESAR CHAVEZ

"Viva la Causa!" is shouted by someone from a crowd of shirt-sleeved farm workers. Antiphonally, the crowd roars back in unison, *"Viva!"* *"Viva!"* is followed by a spirited, *"Viva la Raza!"* The crescendo completes a trilogy with *"Viva Cesar!"* A short, five feet seven inches, ordinary-appearing dark Mexican-American in his forties rises from his chair with obvious physical pain. The crowd is on its feet instantly and he receives the accolades with genuine gratitude, but with a hand gesture that suggests personal embarrassment.

The people, however, are not finished. They begin to clap in unison (a farm worker tradition at meetings) slowly at first, then more rapidly. As the clapping gathers momentum, reaching toward a climax, their feet stomp out a rhythm. The gathering cacophony sounds like the clacking of train wheels.

Finally, it is done. One lone burst of *"Viva Cesar!"* is shouted in the battered Filipino Hall in Delano, California. (Filipino Hall was the early gathering place for most farm workers meetings, celebrations and meals.) As the crowd began to settle down Cesar Chavez quietly begins to speak. There is no more sound but his voice.

One way to understand the mood, vibrancy, and direction of the farm worker movement is to experience such drama, for it is the stuff out of which the nation's second largest minority successfully created a farm workers' union in Delano, California.

This human drama, however, did not evolve spontaneously or rapidly. It is a drama with behind-the-scenes characters. The lead character of the movement is Cesar Estrada Chavez. It is his leadership, coupled with dozens of grassroots leaders, that has energized and directed the farm workers' organizational efforts.

METHODOLOGY

A detailed biographical chapter will follow this introductory chapter. First, I would like to introduce a methodology for studying and understanding the rhetoric of Chavez. Anthony Hillbruner, in a chapter entitled “biographical Description and Analysis,” suggests a three-pronged process for the critic of public addresses:

First, he must amass a great deal of pertinent material about his subject. Then he must sift this for significant and salient details. Finally, he will need to analyze and even interpret the descriptive factual information to discover its relevance to the subject’s speechmaking.¹

With Hillbruner in mind, the biographical chapter is divided into three sections: biographical history of Cesar Chavez (general comments from some critics); biography—1927 to the present; and major influences on the life of Cesar Chavez.

Before moving into the chapter following the biography, the reader is urged to turn to Appendix A. This is a detailed chronology, which includes important dates in the early farm worker movement and in the life of Cesar Chavez. The chronologies of the movement and the man are combined, for the two are inseparable, as this study will demonstrate.

The major section of the study will be a rhetorical analysis of the speech written by Cesar Chavez on the occasion of the end of his twenty-five-day fast, March 10, 1969. That speech contains primary examples of Chavez’s chief rhetorical skill, identification. I am using that speech, therefore, as a paradigm and synthesis of his speaking. In addition, I will cite examples from other early speeches and writings that support and clarify this thesis. That March 10 speech represents a climax in the life of the farm workers’ union and in the life and leadership of Chavez.

IDENTIFICATION

The underlying thesis of this study is that the essence of Cesar Chavez and the dominant characteristic of his speaking power is identification. Kenneth Burke’s discussion of identification suggests some of the direction of this study.

In Burke’s terms, when one “identifies” himself with someone else (i.e., audience, person, etc.), he becomes “consubstantial” with him.

A doctrine of consubstantiality, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in action together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial.²

For Burke, identification is the simplest case of persuasion. He suggests that you persuade a man insofar as you can “talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.”³

In that context, this study will demonstrate that Cesar Chavez achieves a full identification with his audience in his speaking; not simply identifying with their “ways” (Burke’s term), but achieving an intimate identification with the lives and future of his audience (farm workers).

Those specific elements of identification which will be illustrated in this study include:

1. *Delivery*. Nearly all rhetorical analysis contains some mention of delivery. A. Craig Baird’s statement on an excellent speaker defines delivery as “free from vocal bombast, declaration, and, like Wendell Phillips’ [sic], his platform speaking is basically conversational.”⁴ For the purposes of this study I shall use the less familiar synonym for “conversational delivery,” “non-oratorical”; i.e., Chavez speaks in a familiar, conversational, non-oratorical manner.

2. *Appeals to humanity*. The enhancement and appreciation of human values constitute the most characteristic element in the rhetoric of Cesar Chavez; he makes continual references to community, unity and family. Central to the thesis of this study is Chavez’s appeal for “militant nonviolence.” (Eubanks and Baker suggest several ways appeals to humanity or values operate in an essay entitled, “Toward an Axiology of Rhetoric.”⁵)

3. *Motivational appeals*. Gary Cronkhite gives some helpful background for this element in a chapter “The Paradigm of Persuasion,”⁶ in which he discusses some of the types of motivational concepts. Personalized goals, struggle, and the use of invectives are some of the elements to be discussed in this study. I shall make reference to an unfamiliar term in rhetorical studies that will consider Chavez’s use of invectives; that is, “generalized epithets.” (This term refers to the non-personalized invectives Chavez employs in his speaking.)

4. *Style*. Every speaker has a personal style. It is often that characteristic—the lack of it or the prominence of it—which distinguishes or sets apart one speaker from another. This study supports the theory that speaking style is most heavily influenced or molded by the life of the speaker: his early years, education, dramatic or traumatic experiences, vocational pursuits and theology or philosophy of life.

Cesar Chavez employs several stylistic devices in his rhetoric that can be labeled a “mode of ingratiating.”⁷ Some of these devices include use of personal pronouns, plain language, use of the verb to be, and the use of the present and future tense. Marie Hockmuth Nichols has some helpful background on appeals, style and “ingratiating” in a chapter on Kenneth Burke.⁸

5. *Motivational proofs*. This study will also illustrate Chavez’s use of ethical appeals, appeals to authority, use of evidence and denotative and connotative words. Bettinghaus has written a most useful chapter dealing with these specific elements.⁹ I will also include some discussion on a term more related to literary criticism than public address, the “pedestrian illustration” (i.e., using familiar, local or highly personal illustrations).

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Some books have been written specifically on the early farm worker movement in California and about Cesar Chavez. They include: *Huelga*, by Eugene Nelson; *Delano*, by John Gregory Dunne; *Forty Acres*, by Mark Day; *Sal Si Puedes*, by Peter Mathiessen; *La Raza*, by Stan Steiner (which contains a valuable, full bibliography of important source materials); and *The Plum Plum Pickers* by Raymond Barrio (a novel). In addition, dozens of articles have appeared in journals and periodicals such as *El Grito*, *Time*, *Christian Century*, *Tempo*, *Look*, *Life*, *New Yorker*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Newsweek*.

All of the books just mentioned and most of the articles (listed in the bibliography) give excellent historical data and background. But none of them offer any comprehensive rhetorical study of Cesar Chavez. It is the assumed thesis of this study that the speaking of Cesar Chavez, coupled with his community organization sophistication, has both activated and directed the farm worker movement.

A related purpose is the need to record some of the texts of Chavez's speaking and writing. This task is partially fulfilled in this study and in the appendix, and particularly in the extensive bibliography.

The only bibliography of substance and detail on Chavez and the farm worker movement presently available is one prepared by the staff at the Labor History Archives at Wayne State University.¹⁰ The Speech-Arts Department at Fresno State University has established a modest repository of farm worker documents which are housed in the Special Collections Department of the college library; finding lists are available from both institutions. The final section of this study will include an additional exhaustive source list with primary emphasis on Cesar Chavez and the early farm worker movement in California's San Joaquin Valley.

CONCLUSIONS

History has already started judging the motives, successes, and effectiveness of Cesar Chavez. In the future, after his death, it will look on the total man. It will be detached, impersonal, and objective; and it will be, one hopes, complete. But it is infinitely more satisfying, relevant and useful to carefully scrutinize men like Chavez in progress; for he, like movements and their movers before him, is affecting history now as well as in the future. The rhetorical critic, therefore, has an exciting and important mission as these contemporary, living leaders speak and write. It is to be hoped that history-makers of the future will gain insight and vision from such efforts.

During the last five years (1970-1975) those early contracts with California grape growers ran out. On many farms the growers did not honor or seek renegotiations. Some did, in fact, seek "sweetheart" contracts with the Teamsters union—already organizers for truckers and cannery workers.

Therefore the familiar words are being raised once more in the painful, encyclical struggle of farm workers: *Huelga*, Coachello, Salinas, Arvin, boycott, Delano. Chavez works desperately to internationalize the United Farm Workers boycott against California grapes and lettuce in order to affect firm and new contracts. On September 25, 1974, he even

asked for and received an audience with Pope Paul VI, as well as other leaders in the international community.

One thesis of this book is that there is important historical value in being in touch with the early farm workers organizing years, 1965 to 1970. Those were the formative years—years of policy making, testing, and future goal setting. While the battle for justice continues today unabated in the rich valleys of California, Chavez and his movement live. This headline has been underscored by California assemblyman Richard Alatorre. On September 25, 1974, he wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* criticizing their feature article on Chavez, “Is Chavez Beaten?” (*New York Times*, September 10, 1974).

If the Teamsters really believe their claim to the loyalties of the workers, let them test that claim at the ballot box in the democratic tradition. Anyone who thinks the farm workers union is defeated is deluding himself. If history, hard work and determination still count, Cesar Chavez and his union will have the last word.¹¹

NOTES

1. Anthony Hillbruner, *Critical Dimension: The Art of Public Address Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 45.
2. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives and a Rhetoric of Motives* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962), p. 5645.
3. *Ibid*, p. 579.
4. William A. Linsley, *Speech Criticism: Methods and Materials* (Dubuque, Iowa: William Brown Company, 1968), p. 51.
5. Joseph Schwartz and John A. Rycenga, *The Province of Rhetoric* (New York; The Ronald Press, 1965), pp. 329-45.
6. Gary Cronkhite, *Persuasion* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Incorporated, 1969), Chapter IV.
7. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (New York: The New Republic, 1935), p. 71.
8. Marie Hockmuth Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), Chapter IV.
9. Erwin P. Bettinghaus, *Message Preparation: The Nature of Proof* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Corporation, 1966), Chapter VI.
10. *Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers: A Selected Bibliography* (Wayne State University: Labor History Archives, 1970).
11. Sam Kushner, “Cesar Chavez: Far From Defeated,” *Christian Century* (November 13, 1974), p. 1070.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

BIOGRAPHICAL GENERALIZATIONS

Some say that Cesar Chavez is destined to become a legend. If that should be true, then the reason I would offer is because Cesar Chavez seems to have those qualities which another person once had in mind when he spoke to his disciples, saying, "Behold, I send you out as sheep, in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and gentle as doves."

—GEORGE HUNSINGER

Characterizations about Cesar Chavez vary from excessive hero worship to "red-baiting." Some detractors label him "Communist," "Alinsky-dupe," "opportunist" (plotting for union dues), "gangster," "phony civil rights worker," "outsider" and "colossal fraud." (At a public debate dealing with the problems of agriculture, which I was moderating, a local citizen posed this typical, loaded rhetorical question: "Isn't it true that during the 'so-called' fast, Chavez snuck off evenings to a Delano restaurant to stuff himself?"¹)

Peter Matthiessen's description of Chavez is one of the most accurate and fascinating:

Chavez has an Indian's bow nose and lank black hair, with sad eyes and an open smile that is both shy and friendly. He is five feet seven inches tall, and since his 25-day fast in the winter of 1968 has weighed no more than a hundred and fifty pounds. Yet, the word "slight" does not properly describe him. There is an effect of being centered in himself so that no energy is wasted, and at the same time he walks lightly.²

While he was journeying on a ten-thousand-mile personal pilgrimage to boycott centers in the fall of 1969, the *New York Times* pointed to Chavez's "simplicity of manner." (This *Times* piece is a representative summary of contemporary biographical sketches on Chavez.)

Much of the popular attention has inevitably focused on Mr. Chavez himself, a quiet, almost shy man who has retained a simplicity that is rare in such a public figure.

He still lives on the \$5. a week all union workers receive and he invariably dresses in the same gray work pants and plaid wool shirt. His rough appearance caused several Secret Service men to question him closely when he attended the funeral of Robert F. Kennedy, who was probably his strongest public supporter.

One sometimes has to strain to hear his soft voice, with its slight Spanish accent, and some of his followers look upon him as at least a minor saint. But his mellow demeanor belies a streak of inner toughness. His hero is Gandhi, but as one aide said, "He's capable of being quite Machiavellian."

Mr. Chavez has been called a "Mexican Martin Luther King" and "the most charismatic union leader in the country."³

I met Cesar Chavez on October 18, 1965, one month after the Delano grape strike began. Physical surroundings not only influence us but tell others a great deal about us. The physical surroundings of Cesar Chavez were—and remain to this day—quite modest and commonplace. The dilapidated, pink stucco house, serving as the first National Farm Workers Association headquarters in Delano, reminds one of those sad borderline dwellings that the Highway Department condemns in order to build a freeway.

The cheap, vanilla-yellow wallboard walls were being used for bulletin boards, plastered with newspaper clippings with such headlines as: “Rise in Wet-Backs’ Arrests;” “Six-Year-Olds Being Used by Growers;” “National Board of Rabbis Support Strikers;” and “What the Workers Want.”

Chavez’s office was a cluttered back room thoroughfare without a door. Pictures of Gandhi and Zapata (Mexican fold hero) were thumb-tacked to the wall, along with one or two banners and more newspaper clippings. Half a dozen farm workers stood in the middle of the office gesturing and talking rapidly in Spanish. I did not recognize Cesar Chavez. That is an important circumstance to underscore. He is not a celebrity you can easily spot in a crowd. He is an archetype; he is a farm worker.

His manner of conversation was quiet, accepting and self-assured. A phrase he often repeated in his conversation was “the justice of our cause.” His stubby, brown fingers did not clench into a fist as he talked; rather, they seemed to implore and punctuate his conversation.

One of my questions was: “Just what are you seeking to accomplish or win in this strike?” His immediate response was: “We want recognition for our local association [NFWA]. In addition we want \$1.40 an hour.”⁴

Chavez described the NFWA as a credit union, food co-op, farm worker insurance center, newspaper, service station, family and a place to unravel some bureaucratic red tape that binds farm workers’ lives.⁵

I inquired about NFWA communications with the growers. His explanation was:

We get no response from any of our letters or telegrams. The one-third which have been answered have referred us to their “representatives,” who is a strikebreaker. We have no communication.⁶

I have been in similar situations and heard Chavez speak three or four dozen times since that October in 1965. Is he different today, ten years later? Only in that he is more glib. He has spoken so often and to so many that the words veritably spill and tumble out like a torrent. His manner is consistent, however: he is reticent, shy. He still blends into crowds and often goes unnoticed by many.

His second office, located on the “forty acres” east of Delano, was Spartan like its earlier counterpart. In fact, it appeared to be smaller, the plain white walls, bare and the high ceiling with exposed pipes, open. The furnishings included busts of John Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln, brick and board bookshelves, a print of Gandhi, two religious statues, a picture of the Virgin Mary and his plain, black rocking chair (which he has used continually since his twenty-five-day fast weakened his back).

A small secretarial office was sandwiched in between Chavez's office and that of his administrative assistant, Reverend James Drake. Underneath the light switch outside Chavez's office door a small white card carried this cryptic inscription: "The boss isn't always right, but he's always the boss."

BIOGRAPHY: 1927 TO THE PRESENT

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on March 31, 1927, the fifth child of a Mexican immigrant family in Yuma, Arizona. The small family farm belonged to his grandfather. All biographical sketches written about Chavez offer only sparse detail about those growing-up years (a kind of parable of the life of the migrant farm worker—stark, obscure). Martin Duberman summarized Chavez's memories of his childhood and youth as a time of pain, ridicule and rejection.

He remembers walking barefoot to school through the mud, fishing in the canals for wild mustard greens to ward off starvation, collecting tinfoil from empty cigarette packages to sell to a junk dealer for a sweatshirt or a pair of shoes.

He remembers his parents getting up at 5:30 in the morning during the depression to go pick peas all day in the fields and then not earn the seventy cents to pay the cost of their transportation.

He remembers living under bridges for protection against the cold and rain, being forcibly ejected by the police from the "Anglo" section of a movie theater, working seven days a week picking wine grapes only to have the contractor disappear with his pay.⁷

The depression smashed a lot of dreams. For those trying to scratch out an existence on poor farms the smashing process was often violent and absolute. The Chavez family farm was foreclosed during the depression, for nonpayment of taxes, and the family was packed up and melted into the endless caravan routes of the migrant farm workers.

The family packed a few possessions in its old Studebaker and joined the pathetic cortege of Okies and other desperate migrants following the harvest from crop to crop across Arizona and California.

Chavez grew up in a series of labor camps where home was invariably a tar-paper shack, and he attended more than thirty elementary schools scattered along the family's itinerary. When he dropped out of school, he was, theoretically, a seventh grader; but in practice, he could barely read and write. Only later did he master the three R's through self-study.⁸

In the late thirties and early forties, as in previous decades, there were several abortive attempts to organize farm workers: the Wobblies, Agricultural Workers Organization,

Cannery and Agricultural Workers Union, Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association, The Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, National Farm Labor Union, AFL.⁹ Chavez's father and uncle joined several of these early farm workers unions, none of which survived. An important phase of Chavez's early education, therefore, was overhearing late evening strategy talks and watching firsthand all the other confrontation tactics used by organized labor. At nineteen, Chavez himself joined one of those short-lived groups, the National Agricultural Workers Union.

The early forties were the days of America at war. They were the days when the cost of basic foodstuffs rose 61 percent over prewar prices; the forty-hour week began; the Taft-Hartley Act was passed; and nationwide strikes were being waged by all major industries. During those fomenting years Chavez was far removed from the action. He was being fully baptized into the severe existence of the migrant farm worker. He knew firsthand the taste, feel, smell and touch of its agony and injustices. (In the fifties the Chavez family lived in a slum area of San Jose called "Sal Si Puedes," which means "Get out if you can.")

Chavez remembers going to segregated schools. "There was a school and there was an annex. The Mexican-American kids went to the annex—it was just another name for a segregated school"¹⁰ He remembers particular labor camps and living out of cars.

Everyone left the camp we were living in, but we had no money for transportation. When everyone else left they shut off the lights, so we sat in the dark.

We finally got a few dollars from some relatives in Arizona and bought enough gas for our old Studebaker to get us to Los Angeles. Our car broke down in L.A. and my mother sold crocheting on the street to raise the money for enough gas to get to Brawley. We lived three days in our car in Brawley before we could find a house we could afford to rent.

Next winter we were stranded in Oxnard and had to spend the winter in a tent.¹¹

During the closing years of World War II, 1944 and 1945, Chavez served in the United States Navy, going to sea for the first time.

Following the war he returned to the stream of harvest followers, this time on his own. He labored in the lush green vineyards, fruit orchards and fields of cotton in Arizona, and the rich central valleys of California. While working in Delano, California, he met and later married Helen Fabela, whose family lived there. (Helen had been working in the Delano fields since she was fourteen years old.) Today, the Chavez family—Cesar, Helen, and most of their eight children—live in La Paz, near Tehachapi, California (La Paz is a former tuberculosis Sanatorium).

During the 1950s the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) of Chicago, Illinois, began organizing low income families in urban centers across the nation. The Director of IAF, Saul Alinsky, focused his efforts on the Mexican-Americans of the Southwest. In 1952 he sent organizer Fred Ross into Southern California to set in motion the Community Service Organization (CSO).

CSO was designed to be a grass roots, self-help program and it specifically sought out indigenous leadership. In San Jose, California, Ross heard about such a leader: Cesar Chavez. Chavez was working in the apricot orchards around San Jose, and after several failures in meeting the two men finally confronted each other. Ross recalls: “He looked to me like potentially the best grass roots leader I’d ever run into.”¹² Chavez soon became a CSO volunteer worker.

As an organizer his style was one of personal and persistent confrontation with individuals. Referring to such organizing tactics Chavez said: “The only way I know is to spend an awful lot of time with each individual—hours and hours—until he understands and you’ve got him going.”¹³ His first organizing effort was to register Mexican-American voters. In two months’ time he registered over four thousand persons (the first time there had been a voter registration among Mexican-Americans).

After the elections Chavez was laid off from his farm worker. He managed to scrounge a temporary office and began assisting Mexican-Americans in getting their citizenship. Incredibly, no one else had organized such a program before. During the next eight years the organization formed by Chavez helped thirty thousand Mexicans get their papers.¹⁴

Fred Ross finally was able to place Chavez on the CSO staff. As a staff person Chavez traveled the length and breadth of the San Joaquin Valley. After he left most towns, a CSO chapter came to life. He was even assigned the difficult task of organizing a CSO chapter in urban Oakland—he accomplished that task.

During those middle fifties he often worked late into the night improving, sharpening and focusing his reading and writing talents. He became a voracious reader, borrowing whatever he could from local public libraries. He gave particular time and study to St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Paul, Gandhi, autobiographies and books on Mexican-American history. Concerning the philosophy of St. Paul he once commented: “St. Paul must have been a terrific organizer, as he would go and talk with the people right in their homes, sit with them and be one of them.”¹⁵ That face-to-face methodology has been consistently used by Chavez.

He labored for the CSO for ten years. So effective and impressive were his organizing techniques that in 1958 he was appointed General Director of the national organization, with headquarters in Los Angeles.

The CSO was a major influence on his life. But being part of the “establishment” began to box in the real passion of Chavez: a union for all farm workers. The CSO was preoccupied with many of the complex urban problems, such as legislation, housing, and elections. Summarizing his frustration with the CSO, Chavez declared in an interview: “It developed a verbal commitment to farm workers, but no action.”¹⁶

Chavez leaned on the CSO, trying to move it to its original purpose of mobilizing the poor.

Chavez began to appear at meetings in worker’s dress, without coat or tie, and finally refused to shave or have his hair cut. In 1962, when the CSO convention voted down his proposal that the organization create a farm workers’ union, he resigned.¹⁷

Returning to Delano he began traveling the San Joaquin and Imperial valleys again with his personal message concerning farm worker organization. The Chavez family lived from a \$1200 savings account and from the wages his wife, Helen, earned working in the fields. In eleven months Chavez visited eighty-seven communities and labor camps, and in each place a few more people became committed to his cause.

In 1962 a farm workers organizing convention was held in Fresno, California. Two hundred and fifty farm workers showed up from sixty-five farming communities. The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) was born during that convention. It selected the Aztec thunderbird for its emblem, wrote a constitution, and elected Cesar Estrada Chavez as its first NFWA President.

At the end of six months the NFWA had two hundred members who paid \$3.25 a month dues. Chavez worked at odd jobs on weekends while his wife continued working in the fields. In time the NFWA membership voted him a weekly salary of \$40.

As the membership roster swelled, workers began trooping into Chavez's tiny office with their grievances. They now had an advocate. Chavez used whatever power he could lay hold of, which was largely personal persuasion, to assist workers. Sometimes it was a direct personal confrontation with the growers or public official; occasionally, the problem might be mediated through a priest or lawyer friend.

When you establish an institution you have to keep some kind of records or books. Chavez learned to keep a set of books by mastering a government manual on the subject. Under his leadership the NFWA offered several services to its members: a credit union, a newspaper, life and burial insurance, a service station, counseling and a growing sense of community.

Chavez's style of organizing, as in the CSO years, continued to be the personal confrontation and persuasion approach. During those early years of the NFWA, Chavez held hundreds of house meetings (reminiscent of St. Paul's technique). It was tedious, time-consuming work. "Sometimes two or three would come," Chavez recalls. "Sometimes none. Sometimes even the family that called the house meeting would not be there."¹⁸

Three years after the birth of the NFWA (1965), membership approached the two-thousand-member mark (largely families). They possessed sufficient strength to win a few small wage disputes, but these were brief skirmishes—war had not been declared. Chavez did not believe that the NFWA was ready for an out-and-out confrontation with the powerful grape industry. History, however, can dramatically change agendas. It changed the NFWA's plans. On September 8, 1965, eight hundred Filipino farm workers, members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), went out on strike for higher wages in Delano. Evidently they anticipated an early victory—they had had earlier successes in the Coachella Valley, where their striking raised wages from \$1.25 to \$1.40 an hour. They miscalculated. A week passed and the Delano farmers were silent.

AWOC needed more convincing power, so it called on the NFWA, urging it to join in the struggle. NFWA members called a special meeting and voted on the issue, and on September 16, 1965, they joined AWOC's strike (despite Chavez's initial reluctance). That date marks the beginning of the longest and bitterest strike of farm workers in America's history.

What of Cesar Chavez's role in the swirling gales of the past ten years? AWOC and NFWA worked side by side like shirttail relatives until the summer of 1966. On August 22, 1966, they merged to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (UFWOC). Chavez was elected Director. Under his pervasive and steady influence UFWOC's cause has catapulted from the one-hundred-degree heat of the Delano vineyards to the entire San Joaquin Valley; to the courts and the governor's mansion; to the United States Congress; to the White House; to the international community. And Cesar Chavez has been the spokesman and architect.

For Chavez, the lowly grape, once a standard of luxury and after-dinner enjoyment, has become a symbol for justice. He underscored that assertion when he declared:

Grapes must remain un-enjoyed for all as long as the barest human needs and basic rights are still luxuries for farm workers. The grapes grow sweet and heavy on the vines, but they will have to wait while we reach out first for our freedom. The time is ripe for our liberation.¹⁹

The progressively dramatic and singular events of the years 1965-1970 (see Appendix A) have been an exercise in personal diplomacy by Chavez. Traditional union goals—increased wages, insurance programs, grievance procedures, hiring practices and better working conditions—represent only a portion of “La Causa.” Humane commitment and people's pride have been infused into the arena by Chavez so that La Causa is also a movement, an insistence on a people's worth, a molding of a transient, unskilled work force into a skilled and participative citizenry. It is black and brown and yellow and white and red. Few significant unified racial counterparts can be found today. It is, likewise, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist and none of these. Few, if any, significant ecumenical counterparts exist in America.

Chavez drew together the several strands of the movement when he declared in 1968:

One of the most beautiful and satisfying results of our work in establishing a union in the fields is in witnessing the worker's bloom—the natural dignity coming out of a man when his dignity is recognized. Even some of the employers are seeing this point. Workers whom they previously had treated as dumb members of a forgotten minority suddenly are blooming as capable, intelligent persons using initiative and showing leadership.²⁰

MAJOR INFLUENCES ON THE LIFE OF CESAR CHAVEZ

There have been three major forces of influence that appear to have worked significantly on the life of Cesar Chavez. These three need to be underlined in order to gain some insight into his ideas and writings, which follow this section. The first is his early life as a migrant farm worker and member of the Mexican-American community.

During the first year of the Delano strike, Chavez reflected on his motivation for being an organizer among the farm workers.

There are vivid memories from my childhood—what we had to go through because of low wages and the conditions, basically because there was no union. I suppose if I wanted to be fair, I could say that I'm trying to settle a personal score. I could dramatize it by saying that I want to bring social justice to farm workers. But the truth is I want through a lot of hell and a lot of people did.²¹

After quoting the preceding in his *Notes on Delano*, George Hunsinger editorialized:

The amazing thing about these words is that they are spoken without bitterness. Cesar Chavez burns with a patient fire, not with a revolutionary wrath. He explains that he has gone through a lot of hell. But curiously, these are always his parting words, not his opening ones. They are quiet words spoken simply and with deep determination, not words of harangue screamed to a crowd at a fevered pitch. Indeed, they are the words of a man who has avoided arrogance and who has turned his suffering into humility.²²

Repeating an earlier historical note: Cesar Chavez is totally familiar with the migrant farm workers' day-to-day existence. He is a farm worker and has traveled their paths. He knows intimately the suffering moments and wrenching injustices (like being called "dumb" "Mex" and refused services where signs read "Whites only!"). He has experienced the community isolation of the migrant and the accompanying hopelessness that originates from isolation and powerlessness.

But he has not internalized these harsh forces; not in a negative, sinister sense. That body of experience has not forged him into an instrument of hate and revenge; it has become, instead, a tempering agent that has forged a determined will—a will determined to free himself and all farm workers from injustice and poorness of life.

Why didn't those early, forceful experiences forge him into a bitter weapon of destruction? Certainly his immediate family—father, mother, five brothers and sisters—were important sustaining and healing influences. They lived and experienced the uncertain migrant life as a family unit. They depended on each other and on their own resourcefulness. In this context Chavez says of his mother:

She's a very illiterate pacifist. She never learned how to read or write, never learned English, never went to school for a day. She has this natural childishness about how to live, and how to let people live.

My Dad never fought. We never saw my Dad fight or drink or smoke—all the things that have a bad meaning. My parents weren't too young when they married. They were in their early 30's, so once they married they gave us all the time.²³

A major ingredient of Chavez's life style is, therefore, directly related to strong family loyalty and the clearly defined male-female role in the Mexican-American culture. One community organizer, who has worked extensively among Mexican-Americans in the San

Joaquin Valley, suggests that there are several “spin-offs” which can be speculated on because Cesar has run the union very tightly; he has emphasized the family because of the extended family unit as part of the Mexican culture—probably more than we, with our individualistic Anglo value orientation.²⁴

A second major impact on Chavez’s life was his ten-year relationship with the CSO (Community Service Organization) movement. During that apprentice decade he mastered valuable, practical, and personal principles of organization. He was not the planner plopped behind a desk gazing idealistically at some organizational blueprint. His organizing style was—and remains—that of the quiet, grass roots activist-reformer out there, face-to-face with people. A migrant farm worker among farm workers. In all of his organizing efforts he has been preoccupied with community organization (as opposed to the traditional union membership efforts).

As was noted earlier, the CSO began under the umbrella of the Industrial Areas Foundation of Chicago. The IAF and the CSO invested a major portion of their time and resources in community organization of the poor in the early fifties. The organizing style included: coalition of existing groups, confrontation to publicize issues, corporation structuring, strong emphasis on grass roots membership, and the local or neighborhood membership carrying the financial load (as opposed to outside monies being used).²⁵

When Chavez broke with the CSO in 1962 the issue was the establishment of a farm workers union. One additional cause appears to have been differences in community organization philosophy. Chavez has placed heavy dependence on the quiet, methodical trust-building relationships (i.e., small groups, house meetings, etc.). “In organizing people,” he said, “you have to get across to them their human worth and the power they have in numbers.”²⁶

Further, while IAF and CSO may take on a group of issues, Chavez’s principle of organization is to take on one major issue at a time. His style incorporates more elements of local vested interest, self-help, and community organizing than does that of the CSO.

When Chavez broke with the CSO he was convinced that it was out of touch with farm workers. He underscored his commitment to the rural man when he wrote in a letter to boycott supporters in late September, 1968: “Our movement is a militant beginning of a new hope for American farm workers.”²⁷

The break with the CSO did not occur in hostile anger. Chavez recalls: “It was a major decision for me to leave L.A. and CSO. CSO was the only organization I had ever known, it was my whole world. So it was difficult to quit and get out on my own.”²⁸

The third major force in Cesar Chavez’s life is one that is more intangible and more difficult to trace and isolate: his faith or personal theology.

Cesar Chavez and his are Roman Catholics. There is a quiet, unpretentious piety about the man and his faith. He often slips unnoticed into churches to pray or to receive Communion, alone. Religious pictures, symbols and statuary are all familiar accouterments of his office. In addition, the history of the farm workers movement since 1962 is punctuated with such traditional religious practices as pilgrimages, fasting, retreats, public prayers, worship services and special observances. The Virgin of Guadalupe’s shadow

continues to touch the everyday routine of Chavez and the farm workers. (That symbol is present at nearly every farm worker meeting and is carried in every procession or march.)²⁹

More than these outward manifestations, however, is the coterie of religious advisers who continually surrounded Cesar Chavez. These included the Reverend James Drake, Migrant minister and Chavez's Administrative Assistant; the Reverend Chris Hartmire, Director of the California Migrant Ministry; Father Mark Day and Father David Durrand, priests assigned to the Delano farm workers from the Franciscans; and LeRoy Chatfield, former teaching priest who became UFWOC's financial adviser, among other duties. These five did not serve as chaplains-in-waiting, but as speech advisers, office managers, financial consultants, strategy planners, public relations men, itinerary arrangers, guest greeters, custodians and so on (Father Day acted as editor of *El Malcriado*).

In the concluding paragraph of an essay on the role of the Church, written for *El Grito*, Chavez asserted:

Finally, in a nutshell, what do we want the church to do? We don't ask for more cathedrals. We don't ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.³⁰

The pilgrimage and the fast, traditional religious acts for penance, renewal or discipline, have been dramatic symbolic focal events in the history of the farm worker movement and the theology of Cesar Chavez. The historic three-hundred-mile Sacramento pilgrimage began on March 17, 1966—six months after the strike began—and ended nearly four weeks later on April 10, 1966 (Easter Sunday), in Sacramento, Chavez described the meaning of the march in a letter dated March, 1966:

Throughout the Spanish-speaking world there is another tradition that touches the present march, that of the Lenten penitential processions, where the *penitents* would march through the streets, often in sack cloth and ashes, some even carrying crosses, as a sign of penance for their sins, and as a plea for the mercy of God. The penitential procession is also in the blood of the Mexican-American, and the Delano March will therefore be one of penance—public penance for the sins of the strikers, their own personal sins as well as their yielding perhaps to feelings of hatred and revenge in the strike itself. They hope by the march to set themselves at peace with the Lord, so that the justice of their cause will be purified of all lesser motivation.³¹

These periodic pilgrimages or marches (e.g., Sacramento, Washington, D.C., to the Mexican border, in Texas, International Boycott Day) not only dramatized the cause of farm workers, but also amalgamated the rank and file farm workers.

No other event or practice so clearly illustrates Chavez's religious fervor as his practice of fasting. His longest fast, and the most costly physically, was the twenty-five-day fast from February 14, 1968, to March 10, 1968. The full background of that fast and Chavez's speech presented at its conclusion will be discussed fully in the next chapter. That fast and

the speech following it represent a dramatic turning point for Chavez and UFWOC; therefore, they merit detailed study and commentary.

CONCLUSIONS

Cesar Chavez is a combination of the thinking of Gandhi, Alinsky and his rich Mexican culture—plus, of course, his own unique personhood. His life style has been created out of his difficult years of migrant wanderings, self-education, practical organizational experimentation, full identification with the farm worker cause, and his commitment to a tangible, grass roots union of farm workers.

Chavez's premise for action is clearly that justice is won, and continually won again, by men and women who are free to win it for themselves. Dolores Huerta, Vice-President of UFWOC, addressed herself to that premise in a major address on the capitol steps following the Sacramento March:

Cesar Chavez began as the Corrido del Capesino states, going through the San Joaquin Valley as a pilgrim inspiring the workers to organize; giving the confidence they needed through inspiration and hard work and educating them through the months to realize that no one was going to win their battle for them, that their condition could only be changed by one group—themselves.³²

NOTES

1. Church of the Brethren, Fresno, California, Fall, 1968.
2. Peter Matthiessen, "Profile: Cesar Chavez," *New Yorker* (June 21, 1969), p. 42.
3. Steven Roberts, "Grape Boycott: Struggle Poses a Moral Issue," *New York Times* (November 12, 1969), p. 43.
4. From notes taken by the writer during an interview, October 18, 1965, in Delano, California.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *The New Republic* (January 29, 1966), p. 29.
8. *Current Biography* (February, 1969), p. 8.
9. For a concise and fascinating account of these organizing efforts see *Farm Labor Organizing 1905-1967: A Brief History* (New York: National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, July, 1967).
10. Eugene Nelson, *Huelga!* (Delano, California: Farm Worker Press, 1966), p. 48.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Current Biography*, p. 8.
13. "Cesar Chavez Talks About Organizing and the History of the NFWA," *Movement*, December, 1965, p. 8. (The *Movement* was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's newspaper in California.)
14. John Gregory Dunne, *Delano, the Story of the California Grape Strike* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), p. 68.

15. A. V. Krebs, "Cesar Chavez, Final Hope for Farm Workers," *St. Anthony* (August, 1968), p. 17.
16. *Movement*, p. 2.
17. *Current Biographies*, p. 8.
18. *Movement*, p. 3.
19. From a speech delivered at the First Unitarian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 6, 1969. Taken from notes recorded by the Reverend Chris Hartmire, California Migrant Ministry, Los Angeles.
20. "National Council Policy Statement," *Tempo* (Summer-Fall, 1968), p. 9.
21. Cesar Chavez, "Tale of the Organizer," *Ramparts* (July, 1966), p. 23.
22. George Hunsinger, *The Hunsinger Report: Notes on Delano* (Fresno, California: Valley Ministers Association, 1967), p. 25.
23. Robert Fitch, "Tilting with the System," *Christian Century* (February 18, 1970), p. 206.
24. Information in a letter to the writer from Professor Edward P. Dutton of University of Kansas, School of Social Work, June 23, 1970. For further detail see: *La Raza: Forgotten American* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966).
25. For details on the organizational philosophy of IAF and Saul Alinsky, "From Citizen Apathy to Participation," (Chicago: Industrial Areas Foundation, 1957).
26. "Cesar Chavez—The Shy Mobilizer of American Farm Workers," *Life* (April 29, 1966), p. 49.
27. Information in a letter to supporters from Cesar Chavez, September 23, 1968. From the San Joaquin Valley Farm Workers Collection, Fresno State University Library. All subsequent sources cited and found in this collection at the FSC Library, Special Collections Department, will be noted as SJV-FWC.
28. *Movement*, p. 6.
29. Those interested in symbolism will be fascinated to discover and examine the vestments used by the farm worker priests. They are not fashioned in the traditional gaudy gold and appliqué. The cloth is plain, rough-red cloth and the emblems adorning the vestment cloths are not fancy budded crosses but the black thunderbird of UFWOC (an example of twentieth-century syncretism).
30. Cesar Chavez, "The Mexican-American and the Church," *El Grito* (Summer, 1968), p. 12.
31. SJV-FWC.
32. "Text of Mrs. Huerta's Speech at Capitol Rally," *Delano Record* (April 28, 1966), p. 9.

Chapter III

BACKGROUND TO THE MARCH 10, 1968, SPEECH

DIGIORGIO AND GIUMARRA

The fast is an act of penance, recalling farm workers to the nonviolent roots of their movement. These farm workers who are united in the Delano strike care about the well being of all fellow beings, even those who have placed themselves in the position of adversaries.

—UFWOC STATEMENT

On February 14, 1968, Cesar Chavez began a fast: the most rigorous testing of his nonviolent principles. Twenty-five days later, on March 10, 1968, he ended that fast. Eight thousand farm workers, supporters and others gathered with Chavez in Memorial Park, Delano, California, at noon to break bread together. Everyone there was anxious to see and hear the farm worker chief, but the twenty-five days of fasting had so profoundly weakened his body that he could neither stand nor speak above a whisper. Therefore, he spoke by proxy: a union official and a minister read his speech in Spanish and English.

The words of Cesar Chavez read by the two spokesmen were brief and uncluttered (only 487 words). Yet they represent a crystallization and refinement of his political, economic and theological ethic; a kind of “credo” of the farm worker movement. And even though the speech is a kind of synthesis of the farm worker movement, it is, nevertheless, addressed to the union’s adversaries—agribusiness.

More germane to this study, however, is the fact that this brief piece of rhetoric contains primary examples of Chavez’s chief rhetorical skill: identification.

Every time Chavez addresses a group of people—formal or informal—he employs several identification elements. I shall cite examples from these other sources to further illustrate his use of identification, for I believe that through identification he gains rhetorical effectiveness and persuasive power.

The events that led up to the twenty-five-day fast and to this speech began in the spring of 1966. This date marked the beginning of formal meetings between DiGiorgio Corporation and UFWOC, meetings that were marked by frustration and failure to reach agreement.

On April 7, 1966, DiGiorgio announced readiness to hold an election among its workers on its Sierra Vista Ranch in Delano—clearly a breakthrough for the farm workers. NFWA and DiGiorgio met on several occasions to discuss arrangements. No agreement could be reached. (See the chronology in Appendix A, April 7, 1966, to August 30, 1966, for details.)

During this first year of the strike there were, in addition to DiGiorgio problems, several historic moments: Schenley Industries, Christian Brother and Los Gatos Novitiate Wineries recognized NFWA and negotiated contracts; the farm marched a 300-mile pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento; Teamsters organizers were discovered in the Delano fields and after two months of negotiations agreed to leave field worker organizing to NFWA; and NFWA and AWOC merged to form one Union of farm workers, United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (UFWOC).

UFWOC declared a national boycott of DiGiorgio products in an attempt to bring DiGiorgio to the bargaining table. One election was finally held on June 24, 1966, UFWOC had its name removed from the ballot by court order, accusing DiGiorgio of election irregularities. Governor Edmund P. Brown commissioned the American

Arbitration Association to investigate the charges. New elections were ordered as a result of that investigation.

On August 30, 1966, DiGiorgio workers stepped behind polling booth curtains and overwhelmingly selected UFWOC to represent fields workers at the Delano and Borrego Springs ranches.

On August 3, 1967, UFWOC took on the Goliath of the grape industry, Giumarra Corporation. It was a bold, calculated leap, for Giumarra owned 12, 500 acres in Tulare and Kern counties (California)—representing a significant portion of the table grape harvest.

Throughout the summer of 1967 the Giumarra Corporation rejected all attempts on the part of both the Union and outside mediators to discuss the issues, or to arrange for an impartially supervised representation election. Therefore, on September 14, 1967, UFWOC announced a nationwide boycott of Giumarra grapes. And thus began the bitterest and longest of the boycott attempts.

In the months following, Giumarra was able to use labels from other friendly growers, thus making a boycott of specific labels nearly impossible. Feelings between the two sides grew more intense and bitter. Members of UFWOC picketed Giumarra Vineyards every day shouting to workers in the field to quit: “*No trabaje aqui!*” (“Don’t work here!”). Father Mark Day, one of the two priests assigned to the farm workers in Delano, reported that the beating of a UFWOC representative and continued threats of violence magnified the hostilities to the point of physical confrontation.¹

In the middle of this tense battling with the Union taut and in stalemate, Cesar Chavez quietly began fasting. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that it was the first time that a nationally prominent union leader had resorted to fasting as a method of calling on followers to refrain from violence of any kind.²

MEANING OF THE FAST

In a letter to National Council of Churches officers Chavez specifically expressed his concern for violence as a reason for his fast:

I have just begun the seventh day of a personal fast of penance and hope. After so many months of struggle and slow progress, I have become fearful that our common commitment to nonviolence is weakening and that we may take dangerous shortcuts to victory. I accept full responsibility for this temptation and for all of its possible negative results. Our hope is the same as it has always been: that farm workers here can work together to change unjust conditions and thus to serve their brothers throughout the land.³

The increased frustrations and tensions in the fields made violence all the more possible, and the farm worker chief apparently looked with alarm at the ominous storm clouds gathering and acted.

Ron Taylor, staff writer for the McClatchy newspaper chain, who has been chief reporter on the farm worker movement since its beginning in 1965, called the fast

“Chavez” way of addressing the growing unrest among his own followers and the nation’s minorities.”⁴

The Reverend Chris Hartmire, frequently referred to in this study, called the fast both a private and social event:

As a social event it was directed toward the members and leaders of the farm worker’s union. Many people outside the farm workers’ struggle were influenced by the fast; but it was a disciplined and organizationally responsible deed aimed at an existent farm workers union that has concrete goals and a day-to-day need to get the job done. The fast called the leaders and members of the union to nonviolence and sacrifice.⁵

THE SCENE AT THE FORTY ACRES

As soon as the fast became public knowledge, striking farm workers and their families closed ranks in Delano. Special masses were said each day outside the bare, small back room of the Union service station where Cesar Chavez lay at the forty acres. By the end of February more than one thousand persons were attending the daily masses offered by Father Mark Day and others.⁶

I visited the forty acres on several occasions during the fast. It was both a fascinating and awesome spectacle to view. By the second week of the fast a sprawling tent city had sprung up around the little service station at the forty acres. Farm workers from all over California came to live in the tents and to share in the event.

People talked quietly as they gathered in little groupings around several smoky campfires warming their hands or sharing coffee from fire-blackened pots. The flapping canvas of the tent neatly tied down to rows, the deliberate pace, the quiet voices, the huddled figures, the sharing of food and drink—all these gave me the impression of a serious religious vigil. Cesar Chavez’s yearning for unity and new commitment was unmistakably coming to pass.

Occasionally, there would be a flurry among the small knots of people who wore levis, plaid shirts and muddy boots. Then one of the many visitors would stride by with a small following chattering after him. Among them were the late Walter Reuther, Cardinal Timothy Manning (Archdiocese of Los Angeles) and National Council of Churches officials. Most days Chavez’s nurse permitted him to receive small groups or individuals for a few moments.

Gifts of money, clothing and food once more began to flood into the Union headquarters. Telegrams and letters piled in from all over the country. Many of the messages urged Chavez to end his fast, fearing for his health. On the twenty-first day of the fast, seven members of the House of Representatives sent the following telegram expressing such concern:

Our thoughts, hopes, prayers and understanding are with you as you make your personal penance in the cause of all mankind. Your act of devotion and rededication has been an inspiration and a source of strength to all who look to you for leadership.

We urge you to break the fast now, doing so in the knowledge that yours has been the true sacrifice of a troubled spirit. We urge you to continue on the course you have chosen in the farm worker's movement, supported by the assurance that we are steadfastly with you in your effort to hasten the day when "justice shall flow down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream."⁷

THE SCENE ON MARCH 10, 1968, DELANO

On March 10, 1968, Cesar Chavez ended his fast. He had lost forty pounds, seriously weakened his kidneys and caused severe damage to the bone and muscle structure of his back (which would confine him for months). But new spirit and resolve had blossomed in the struggling Union. It was as if an open plateau had been reached after a very long difficult climb.

UFWOC was able to launch a united strike in the Coachella Valley, whose ranchers were the first table grape growers to sign contracts with the Union in May, 1970; a nationwide boycott of all California table grapes was activated; and the Union began to expand its service into such widening areas as credit unions, group insurance, medical insurance, legislative lobbying and education.

On March 10, Senator Robert F. Kennedy flew to Delano to join with the thousands of other supporters and farm workers in a day of religious services, speeches and a fiesta.

When I arrived on the scene that day from Fresno, Delano's Memorial Park was overflowing with men, women and running children. Estimates of the gathered crowd vary from eight to ten thousand persons. Most of the thousands who tramped through the park were farm workers. The entire scene was a kaleidoscope—a festival, religious procession, political gathering, church social and family reunion.

At noon, a procession stretching for nearly a mile began to make through the main entrance of the park. The people marched slowly, two by two. Priests, ministers, nuns, farm workers, union officials, and Senator Robert Kennedy marched behind the thunderbird flag and the Our Lady of Guadalupe banner. Most of the marchers near the front ranks of the line carried cardboard boxes heaped with shiny gold-colored loaves of semita (Mexican peasant bread).

The procession ended in front of a flatbed truck that had been converted into an altar and speaker's platform. Standing on the truck were priests, a rabbi, ministers, and several union officials. The improvised altar was surrounded by Valley flowers of red and yellow and blue. Two overstuffed chairs were placed in front of the altar side of the truck; Cesar Chavez sat huddled in one and Robert Kennedy in the other.

Chavez was so weak that he could not hold up his head. His mother, who sat beside him, occasionally offered him sips of water. The processors who carried the semita formed a protective semicircle around Chavez and his family. Newsmen climbed nearby trees and aimed their telescopic lenses. Two farm workers hoisted a large Union flag over Chavez, forming a canopy-like shade from the warming Valley sun. The celebrating began.

The agenda called for a Mass of Celebration, speeches, entertainment, a fiesta and an afternoon of fellowship.

Following the Mass, UFWOC Vice President, Julio Hernandez, read Chavez's words in Spanish. The Reverend James Drake read the identical words in English. The audience responded to the speech with long, sustained applause and cheering, interspersed with shouts of "*Viva la Causa! Viva Chavez!*"

Then Senator Kennedy spoke first in fractured Spanish, which he joked about—"How I'm doing, Cesar?"—and then in English.

Paul Schrade, West Coast head of the United Auto Workers, rose to the platform to deliver a \$50,000 check for construction of new offices on the forty acres.

The crowd then dispersed to participate in a huge "*comida cooperativa*," a sort of potluck of massive contributions from strike committees and families all over California.

March 10, 1968, was an important date for UFWOC and for farm workers. Cesar Chavez's speech that day has been widely quoted in Valley and national newspapers and periodicals. The complete text was printed and sent to supporters all over the country. References to that speech are made repeatedly, such as the lengthy essay on nonviolence published in *El Malcriado*.⁸

That speech represents a climax—a climax of rhetoric and ideas, a compilation or model of the strategy and mind of Cesar Chavez. And most importantly, it is a vivid, concise example of Chavez's use of identification in his speaking. Therefore, it merits isolation and close study.

NOTES

1. "Farm Labor Leader's Fasting Gets Spot Light," *National Catholic Reporter* (March 10, 1968), p. 1.

2. Harry Bernstein, "Judge Fears for Chavez' Health, Delays Hearing," *Los Angeles Times* (February 28, 1968), p. 21.

3. Information in a letter to the National Council of Churches, February 20, 1968, SJV-FWC.

4. *Fresno Bee*, March 10, 1968, p. 6.

5. Chris Hartmire, "Chavez' Fast for Nonviolence," *California Migrant Ministry Newsletter* (June, 1968), p. 3.

6. "Chavez' Fast in Cause of Non-Violent Action," *Central California Register*, March 7, 1968, p. 2.

7. Information in a telegram sent to Cesar Chavez on March 6, 1968, and signed by: Phillip Burton (Dem, Calif.); Edward R. Roybal (Dem., Calif.); George E. Brown, Jr. (Dem., Calif.); Frank Thompson, Jr. (Dem., N.J.); John Conyers, Jr. (Dem., Mich.); Robert W. Kastenmeier (Dem., Wisc.); and Donald M. Fraser (Dem., Minn.), SJV-FWC.

8. "The Discipline of Nonviolence: Three Life Styles," *El Malcriado*, April 15, 1970, pp. 8-11.

CHAPTER IV

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MARCH 10 SPEECH

INTRODUCTION

In y opinion non-violence is not passivity in any shape or form. Non-violence, as I understand it, is the most active force in the world.

—MAHATMA GANDHI

I don't subscribe to the belief that non-violence is cowardice, as some militant groups are saying. In some instances non-violence requires more militancy than violence.

—CESAR CHAVEZ

Cesar Chavez's speech delivered at the conclusion of his twenty-five-day fast, will, because of its brevity, be studied line by line. To repeat the thesis of chapter 1: it is my intention to note Chavez's use of some specific elements of identification in his speaking, specifically delivery, everyday illustration, appeals to humanity (especially nonviolence), use of personal pronouns, motivational appeals and simple style.

In addition, I shall point not other related rhetorical characteristics of Chavez's speaking throughout this study: his use of allusions to history, assumptions, theological assertions and the like. By so doing I hope to present a comprehensive profile of the farm worker chief.

I have divided the speech into eight paragraphs for the purpose of this study. This full text comes from a UFWOC release of the speech dated March 10, 1968.

FULL TEXT OF THE SPEECH

1. I have asked the Rev. James Drake to read this statement to you because my heart is so full and my body too weak to be able to say what I feel.

2. My warm thanks to all of you for coming today. Many of you have been here before, during the Fast. Some have sent beautiful cards and telegrams and made offerings at the Mass. All of these expressions of your love have strengthened me and I am grateful.

3. We should all express our thanks to Senator Kennedy for his constant work on behalf of the poor, for his personal encouragement to me, and for taking the time to break bread with us today.

4. I do not want any of you to be deceived about the Fast. The strict Fast of water only which I undertook on February 16 ended after the 21st day because of the advice of our doctor, James McKnight, and other physicians. Since that time I have been taking liquids in order to prevent serious damage to my kidneys.

5. We are gathered here today not so much to observe the end of the Fast but because we are a family bound together in a common struggle for justice. We are a Union family celebrating our unity and the nonviolent nature of our movement. Perhaps in the future we will come together at other times and places to break bread and to renew our courage and to celebrate important victories.

6. The Fast has had different meanings for different people. Some of you may still wonder about its meaning and importance. It was not intended as a pressure against any growers. For that reason we have suspended negotiations and arbitration proceedings and relaxed the militant picketing and boycotting of the strike during this period. I undertook this Fast because my heart was filled with grief and pain for the sufferings of farm workers. The Fast was first for me and then for all of us in this Union. It was a Fast for nonviolence and a call to sacrifice.

7. Our struggle is not easy. Those who oppose our cause are rich and powerful and they have many allies in high places. We are poor. Our allies are few. But we have something the rich do not own. We have our own bodies and spirits and the justice of our cause as our weapons.

8. When we are really honest with ourselves we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So, it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life. 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!

PARAGRAPH-BY-PARAGRAPH STUDY

Before we lift our those obvious instances of identification, some generalized observations should be made about this speech and the speaking of Cesar Chavez.

Note the opening paragraph. Chavez seldom uses a formal opening in his speaking, such as “Honored guests,” “Your Honor,” or whatever. The exception to this characteristic is when he offers testimony before a government body. Otherwise, he moves steadily into the stream of his presentation.

Such a style does not imply abruptness, carelessness or hurry; it suggests simplicity, directness and purposeful candor. It is a primary example of his use of identification; that is, he is acutely aware of his major audience, the individual farm worker. He uses no flowery openers, no clever imagery or flashing flamboyant rhetoric. He speaks on an ordinary, fundamental “bread and butter” level. He is, therefore, the ordinary farm worker’s spokesman. He does not try to impress or overwhelm; he does appeal—appeal to his farm worker listeners, and, indirectly, to their adversary, agribusiness.

Thus, Cesar Chavez stands in stark contrast to other contemporary Mexican-American spokesmen who do employ flamboyance and fiery oratory, the two principal examples in the Southwest being Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Rejes Tijerina.²

This speech is likewise a clear example of Chavez’s informal approach to the speaking situation. He is almost never bound to a narrow, labored, argumentative outline. He does not title his speeches, make bold thesis statements, or drive home by repetition ringing assertions. A strategy is evident, however, but is veiled strategy. Finally, economy of words, structure and style are common in all his speaking.

Such a simple style is further illustrated by the absence of notes. He seldom speaks from a prepared text. Again, formal testimony or a major public address is the exception. (Even with the latter, however, most of his speaking is extemporaneous.) Thus, he adds to

the casual spontaneity of his style. It is true that he confers with officials and intimate advisers before giving a major address, but these sessions seem to be designed to stimulate relevant ideas rather than polish a style or produce a written manuscript (which you would get from speech writers).

Furthermore, his speaking is usually translated immediately into Spanish and often, Filipino. This speech under study is such an example. Chavez thereby related personally with his listeners. It is *their* speech, in their tongue. He knows that many farm workers do not yet speak English fluently or have difficulty with it. He likewise seems to realize that by translating his ideas into a native language he makes meanings not only more personal but more precise and clear (some things get lost in translation).³

One final generalization concerns his delivery. While Chavez did speak these words under study by proxy, one important aspect of his identification noted from other speaking situations is his conversational tone of delivery. He does not punctuate his ideas with shouts; indeed, he seldom raises his voice at all. I have found it extremely difficult even to hear him on several occasions.

He does give some words accentuated inflection for emphasis—as you would italicize a word in written rhetoric. Therefore, by speaking in a quiet, conversational tone, he makes the speaking situation more intimate, personal.

Paragraph 1 illustrates some of the generalizations just noted: lack of formal opening, personalized tone and a third chief identification characteristic: use of personal pronouns.

After introducing the Reverend James Drake, mentioned in an earlier chapter, he addresses his audience with intimate emotion: “My heart is so full and my body too weak to be able to say what I feel.” He begins by confessing that he is overcome by the moment and the support of his audience (to whom he directly refers in paragraph 2). Note the personal pronouns “I,” “you,” and “my.” You will find such examples of identification scattered generously throughout this speech and in all of his other speaking situations. He is, therefore, including his audience in all that he says. To be more specific: he identifies, i.e., he draws his audience into his confidence while at the same time extending himself to them.

Paragraph 2 is an amplification and continuation of paragraph 1. Regarding his personal identification with his supporters he says: “My warm thanks to you for coming today. Many of you have been here before, during the Fast. Some have sent beautiful cards and telegrams and made offerings at the Mass.”

Chavez is making reference to the daily masses said at the forty acres during the fast. As we noted earlier, the little back room in the service station where he lay on a cot during the fast was surrounded by a tent city of supporting farm workers.

Chavez does not neglect recalling those gestures of affection shown him during the fast. His word choice suggests gratitude as to a family. This is one consistent appeal to humanity that he employs—appealing or relating directly to his audience in such familiar terms as to relating directly to his audience in such familiar terms as to suggest close family ties. This characteristic will be fully explored in the analysis of paragraph 5, in which Chavez refers to the workers as a “union family.”

It is particularly revealing to note that in expressing gratitude he does not present a long list of the noteworthy people who visited him during the fast. Instead, he lifts up the

audience—the farm workers—explicitly. He fails to mention bishops or congressmen or labor leaders like Walter Reuther. His preoccupation is with his audience.

Evidently the cards, telegrams and gifts that he received were particularly meaningful. Among his telegrams was one received from Martin Luther King, Jr. It is useful to note the text of that telegram, for it articulates the very nonviolent principles to which Cesar Chavez subscribes:

I am deeply moved by your courage in fasting as your personal sacrifice for justice through non-violence. Your past and present commitment is eloquent testimony to the constructive power of non-violent action and the destructive impotence of violent reprisal. You stand today as a living example of the Gandhian tradition with its great force for social progress and its healing spiritual powers. My colleagues and I commend you for your bravery, salute you for your indefatigable work against poverty and injustice, and pray for your health and continuing service as one of the outstanding men of America. The plight of your people and ours is as grave that we all desperately need the inspiring example and effective leadership you have given.⁴

Still in the context of a familiar or family relationship, Chavez ends paragraph 2 on a note of gratitude: “All of these expressions of your love have strengthened me and I am grateful.”

Paragraph 3 is a trilogy that centers around the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy. The three statements in this one paragraph express personal and corporate gratitude to the Senator:

1. for Kennedy’s work “on behalf of the poor.”
2. for his personal encouragement to Cesar Chavez.
3. for his presence among the farm workers that day (March 10, 1968).

This paragraph raises several fascinating questions: Why did Chavez single out Robert Kennedy, a politician? Why not Walter Reuther, a labor leader? Or Martin Luther King, a civil rights-religious leader? And why Robert Kennedy? Why not Senator Harrison Williams (Democrat, New Jersey) or Vice-President Hubert Humphrey?

There are, of course, the obvious answers, Robert Kennedy and Cesar Chavez were warm, personal friends. Chavez publicly thanks Kennedy for his “personal encouragement to me” in this paragraph. Later, in his speech, Kennedy returned the confidence:

I’m here because of my great admiration for Cesar Chavez. With all the problems that we have in this country and all the problems that we have around the world, this man has sacrificed against violence and against lawlessness. And he has made an effort on behalf of people who suffer so tremendously in this country, namely, so many of our farm workers, particularly the Mexican-Americans and others of minority groups who have not had the protection of the laws as exists in so many other elements of society.⁵

Furthermore, from a strategy standpoint, Kennedy, whose political power could open some closed doors, may have been the Union's most important ally. He was an acknowledged champion and advocate for the poor—American Indians, people of Appalachia, farm workers.

More to the point of this study is the premise that Chavez was making an appeal to humanity, i.e., to the community or family life style of the Union members. Here was a politician farm workers “should” (the verb form Chavez used) support and thank, one they “should” identify with, as he, Chavez, had done. A month after this speech Chavez wrote a strong, explicit endorsement of Robert Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy came to Delano when no one else came. Whenever we needed him, whenever we asked him to come, we knew he would be there. He approached us with love; as people, and as subjects for study—as Anglos usually had done—as equals, not as objects of curiosity. He helped the oppressed. His were HECHOS DE AMOR. Deeds of love.⁶

There is substantial evidence that the farm workers responded to the veiled imperative of Cesar Chavez found in this paragraph and in later appeals. The Union openly endorsed and supported Kennedy's candidacy by stumping for him, registering voters and sending Chavez to the State Democratic Convention as a delegate. Farm workers were present the night Robert Kennedy was shot down by an assassin. On August 1, 1969, The Robert F. Kennedy Farm Workers Medical Plan was announced, which is a group insurance plan worked out between the Union and employers.⁷

There is also the plain fact that Kennedy was the best known among a half dozen political figures who continually lobbied for farm workers. Chavez was, therefore, lifting up the major political friend of the workers. It was like appealing: “We farm workers have no political power, no political identity; but we have Robert Kennedy. He can give us both.”⁸

The preceding discussion brings to the surface a major motivational appeal employed by Chavez: the use of the generalized epithet. By singling out Kennedy specifically, Chavez seems to intimate that politicians are not the advocates for the poor. (Note the particular characteristics of Kennedy that he praises: “his constant work on behalf of the poor”; “taking time”; and, “personal encouragement.”) But Chavez does not harangue by condemning politicians' non-advocacy—single or as a corporate body. He rarely, if ever, publicly castigates individuals. He avoids the invective or personal name-calling tactic. He does, however, use generalized epithets; i.e., he takes on corporations, institutions or the government as general adversaries of farm workers.

In a New York City speech he alleged that agribusiness controls even the “actions of the Congress of the United States.”⁹ He pointed to such evidence as land acquisition, federally subsidized irrigation projects and unjust immigration laws (braceros).¹⁰

Chavez frequently singles out specific departments of the government for criticism: the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Department of Justice¹¹ and the Border Patrol.¹² He has been most critical of the Federal Food and Drug Administration, the U.S.

Public Health Service (over the pesticide issue), and the government's largest institution, the Defense Department (for accelerated grape purchases during the boycott).¹³

Cesar Chavez's assertion is, therefore, that he and his farm worker audience could identify with Robert Kennedy, but not easily with any other major political figure at that time.

A final note on paragraph 3. Consistent with his plain language style, Chavez publicly thanked Kennedy for "breaking bread with us [personal pronoun] today." What could be more everyday? Here is an act each member of his audience could understand and respond to: the simple act of breaking bread or eating a common meal together.

There is, however, a theological overtone contained in the phrase "breaking bread." "Breaking bread" is one of the Christian titles for the giving and receiving of Communion or the Lord's Supper.¹⁴ Both acts were performed that day: Communion at the Mass and eating supper around picnic tables later that afternoon. Chavez joins both traditions into his life style and speaking; his audience could identify with both.

Paragraph 4 is both personal and curious. It continues with the familiarity of the three previous paragraphs in a personal, conversational tone. It offers another vivid and concrete illustration of the informed, humane speaking style of Chavez.

I do not want any of you to be deceived about the Fast. The strict Fast of water only which I undertook on February 16 ended after the 21st day because of the advice of our doctor, James McKnight, and other physicians. Since that time I have been taking liquids in order to prevent serious damage to my kidneys.

While Chavez does refer to his fast, the curious element in this paragraph is his special reference to his kidneys. Very few public speakers discuss their kidneys in public. (Some do exhibit operations scars, however.) Kidneys are a delicate subject even among close friends and relatives. That is precisely the point. Chavez shares his human condition openly with his farm worker audience. Such a practice simply reinforces the observation that he relates or identifies with his audience as a relation. It suggests familial intimacy.

These references to health problems sound a familiar alarm. Chavez has been continually preoccupied with the severe health problems of farm workers. One of the first services offered by the Union was a mobile health clinic—which is fully staffed today on the forty acres (Roger Terronez Memorial Clinic). The Robert F. Kennedy Medical Health Plan is further evidence of this concern; health and safety measures written into Union contracts are another. Chavez has particularly and loudly voiced UFWOC's concern for the use of pesticides in the fields. Since January, 1969, that has been a top UFWOC priority pushed by Chavez involving court battles, marches in Washington, D.C., and testimony before Senate and house committees.¹⁵

Health is one issue that most certainly concerns the farm worker audience of Cesar Chavez; for poor health, inadequate medical facilities and hazardous working conditions are day-to-day realities for them. Senator Harrison Williams (Democrat, New Jersey) has given substance to these realities in a report from his Senate subcommittee, which investigated farm worker conditions.

Infant mortality: 125 percent higher among farm workers than the national rate.

Maternal mortality: 125 percent higher than the national rate.

Influenza and pneumonia: 200 percent higher than the national rate.

Tuberculosis and other infectious diseases: 260 percent higher than the national rate.

Accidents: 300 percent higher than the national rate.

Life expectancy for migrants is 49 years, as opposed to 70 for all others.¹⁶

As a postscript for paragraph 4 it should be noted that the fast did deal Chavez severe physical blows. Weakness, deterioration and pain in his back system—due partly to the absence of calcium—confined him to his bed for months. In early March, 1969, he was visited by Dr. Janet Travell, the Kennedy family physician. She was able to introduce physical therapy treatment and corrective procedures that significantly alleviated the chronic back problems.¹⁷

Paragraph 5 is the touchstone of this speech. The preceding four paragraphs are intimate, social—a kind of generalized prelude. These remaining four paragraphs expose the substance of the speech and Cesar Chavez. They contain the continuing polemic of Chavez, the unique premise upon which he has fashioned the farm workers union. The assertions of this paragraphs separate UFWOC's unionizing style from that of other traditional trade union movements of this country.

Likewise, a rhetorical purpose or strategy begins to unfold and spread out with definite form and color—a strategy that builds to a theological crescendo-climax in the final paragraph of this speech.

There are six word terms that's lift this paragraph like support beams. The six are interdependent, interrelated, and highly evocative. This paragraph is clearly the mind, the plan, the heart of Cesar Chavez exposed. I shall isolate these six terms and discuss them individually: *family, Union family, nonviolent, movement, future, celebration.*

The opening sentence is a distilled illustration of Chavez's use of identification: "We are gathered here today not so much to observe the end of the Fast but because we are a family bound together in a common struggle for justice." Aside from the use of collective personal pronouns and a personal deprecation, there remains the richly evocative noun "family"—a family "bound together," locked in a "common struggle."

The family unit is cardinal to the farm worker movement. During all the months of the strike, strike meetings were "house meetings," i.e., meetings in homes with husbands and wives and often children. Strike meetings held every Friday night in Delano were family gatherings. In addition to strategy talks, progress reports and other Union business, the Teastro Campesino (farm workers' theater) performed; groups sang songs and films were shown. Those farm workers who organized boycott activities in eastern and southern cities for nearly three years are together as families, not just as heads of households. A new concern of Cesar Chavez and the leadership of UFWOC was the education center for farm workers' children.¹⁸

Much of the Union's activity in Delano was performed around the table with families. This was particularly true at Delano's Filipino Hall, where meals were served from a common kitchen to strike families and others every day.

The services offered by the Union to its members (insurance programs, service stations, counseling, health care and education) are to families. The conservation of the health and integrity of the family unit is, I believe, one of the farm worker movement's most unique contributions.

Whenever a Union member or supporter is addressed he is "brother" or "sister." Chavez makes continued use of written rhetoric for support and propaganda. His frequent "open letters" to students, churchmen, workers, boycotters, green-carders, etc., usually begin with "Dear Sisters and Brothers." One letter to supporters contains a paragraph that illustrates this family identification.

The time-worn struggle of the poorest of the poor, the farm workers; the men and women who work from sunrise til sunset in the cold winter, and under the searing heat of the sun in summer; they, who in order to survive have brought food on your table from day to day; these men and women, often with their children, so that they, too, will enjoy the kind of life that most Americans already enjoy; their struggle has brought us so very close to each other.¹⁹

Further evidence of this familial, supportive phenomenon that Chavez evokes was seen during the twelfth and thirteenth days of his fat (February 27-28, 1968). Chavez was ordered to appear in a Bakersfield, California, court to answer multiple charges concerning antistrike injunctions filed by Giumarra Corporation. When Chavez arrived at the Bakersfield courthouse by makeshift ambulance on February 27 and 28, nearly 2,000 farm workers and supporters from all over California lined the corridors in a silent prayer vigil. Entire families came, some traveling all night long to get there. As I stood among the farm workers in those corridors I was impressed with the family spirit that prevailed. It was a gentle gesture of supportive concern, a rallying around a family member in trouble. (The charges against Chavez and UFWOC were dropped.)

The second word is simply a phrase expansion of family: "We are a union family. . . ." "Union" is a modifier to "family." "Family" is clearly the heart of the message. Chavez's view of unionism carries his philosophy of identification and family even further.

The nature of the union being built is of great importance. If the union which is offered to the workers is simply that of a neat business operation with no heart, the workers will scoff, they will turn it down cold. The union must hold out concrete programs which guarantee a new life. Cooperatives, credit unions, educational programs of a practical nature, money saving devices . . . these are necessary elements of any union planning on capturing the imagination of the farm worker. It must be a grass roots with a vengeance.²⁰

All of these premises are bound together by the word "unity." "We are a Union family celebrating our unity. . . ." That declarative sentence is not so much an affirmation of present reality as it is a challenge or appeal to the audience for specific response. There was no full, satisfactory unity in the Union on March 10, 1968. As I pointed out in the historical introduction to this speech, there was factionalism and frustration. The "unity" Chavez

seems to point to is the “family” concept of the nonviolent Union. If subsequent history is any evidence, this challenge was met by his audience and Union.

“Movement” is a word frequently employed by Chavez in his rhetoric. It has powerful, motivational appeal. While it is clearly related to the preceding ideas of this paragraph, it is also one of the farm worker’s distinctions from traditional trade union organizing tactics and goals, i.e., preoccupation only with wages, hours, and fringe benefits (economic issues). Chavez’s references to “movement” not only reveal his goals but suggest good audience awareness. The editor of *Saturday Evening Post* alluded to Chavez’s distinction when he wrote of the farm worker organizing efforts in Delano: “In the vineyards where the grapes of wrath are stored, the poorest of the poor began an epic struggle against the masters of the land.”²¹

In early examples of his written and spoken rhetoric Chavez personalized his meaning of “movement.” In the opening weeks of the strike he spoke of the “cause” or movement in the context of citizen responsibility.

The farm workers, especially those speaking only Spanish, are not a part of or participating in the society around them. We want to develop in them and awareness of citizenship, of civil rights and civil responsibilities. The strike is only a small aprt of this.²²

In October, 1965, Chavez declared that the farm workers had to find some cross between being a “movement and being a union.”²³ Further, in an important policy speech delivered in Fresno in December, 1965, he spoke of the farm worker organizing efforts as efforts for “community organization.”

Labor organizing, as I know it, has a lot of community organizing in it. When you read of labor organizing in this country you can say there is a point where labor is “organized.” But in community organizing there never is a point where you can say “it is organized.”²⁴

Chavez released a letter just before the beginning of the 1966, 300-mile Sacramento march. The final sentences suggest this idea of a movement.

Pilgrimage, penance and revolution. The pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento has strong religio-cultural overtones. But it is also the pilgrimage of a cultural minority who have suffered from a hostile environment, and a minority who mean business.²⁵

“A minority who mean business” is an important phrase to remember, for it expresses the fact that the farm worker movement today is predominantly a Mexican-American struggle—a minority with frequently heard slogans of UFWOC illustrate this cultural linkage: “*Viva la Cause!*” and “*Viva La Raça!*”

Returning to an earlier assertion: this family orientation and movement emphasis places the farm worker efforts clearly outside the mold of the traditional labor groups. Indeed,

Chavez has been fearful from the beginning of the strike that “La Causa” would pattern itself too closely along customary unionizing efforts.

The danger is that we will become like the building trades. Our situation is similar—being the bargaining agent with many separate companies and contractors. We don’t want to model ourselves on industrial unions; that would be bad. We want to get involved in politics, in voter registration, not just contract negotiation. . . . The membership must maintain control; the power must not be centered in a few.²⁶

Finally, in a speech before a House of Representatives sub-committee Chavez spoke of the farm workers’ movement in this general context of a “civil liberties struggle.”

If we do nothing else today, we would like to make it very clear that in rural America today, when farm workers declare a strike, it is not only a strike that happens, but it is a whole revolution in that community. It becomes a civil liberties issue, it becomes a race issue, and it becomes a desperate struggle just to keep the movement going against such tremendous odds.²⁷

As a historical note it should be mentioned that this “movement” and “issues” emphasis of Chavez both confuses and angers his critics. He does not fit into the mold of a Walter Reuther or John L. Lewis (although both of these mentors of Chavez were concerned with such issues as justice, housing for workers, and humane treatment). The reaction of these critics can be typified by the president of the Washington (State) Young Republican Federation when he declared: “Chavez is basically conducting a road show and smearing a lot of good people. Chavez is interested in power. He is not a labor leader, he is a phony civil-rights worker.”²⁸

The most characteristic, precise word that is at the heart of Cesar Chavez’s personal polemic is “nonviolence” (a word term he uses not only in this paragraph but in 6 and 8 as well). Examples of it may be found in all the rhetoric of Chavez and in most of his life style.

Chavez is a student and admirer of Gandhi. It was Gandhi who defined and refined “soul-force” as an active nonviolent political methodology. Nonviolence was Gandhi’s “moral equivalent of war.”²⁹ He believed that one must appeal to people’s concern for justice and one another’s welfare rather than use physical force. His methodology included demonstrations, marches (pilgrimages), vigils, boycotts, civil disobedience, lobbying and such personal disciplines as fasting, meditation, retreats, worship. His life style was, clearly, moral appeal.

There are many parallels between Gandhi’s methodology and Cesar Chavez’s that can be discovered both in his life style and rhetoric. The occasion of this speech under study is one piece of evidence: the end of a long fast. Other parallels include: the marches (Delano, 1965; Sacramento, 1966; Coachella Valley, 1967; to the Mexican Border, 1968; in Washington, D.C. 1970), the boycott, petitioning and the continuing preoccupation with justice, workers’ lives and their full citizenship.

A uniqueness needs to be isolated here, and that is Chavez's insistence that nonviolence must be manifested as "*militant* nonviolence." Evidence clearly substantiates that the particular nonviolent thrust he has in mind cannot be considered passive resistance. It is action. It is a direct, motivational appeal to his audience. Three years after the strike began he wrote in a letter: "Our movement is a militant beginning of a new hope for American farm workers."³⁰ In a letter to students he put it still another way. After making reference to the violence done to farm workers he declared: "Despite all this, the pickets have stood their ground and have fought back with aggressive non-violence."³¹ In an essay on nonviolence he affirmed: "In some instances non-violence requires more militancy than violence. Non-violence forces you to abandon the shortcut in trying to make a change in the social order."³² Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Chavez sent a telegram to King's widow. It expressed with poignant candor his view of nonviolence. Referring to Dr. King he said:

His nonviolence was that of action—not that of one contemplating action. Because of that, he will always be to us more than a philosopher of nonviolence. Rather, he will be remembered by us as a man of peace.³³

On some occasions his rhetoric on nonviolence amounts to a plea to his audience. Surrounding these pleas is the assumption that human life—all human life—should be treated with respect and dignity and compassion.

We must respect all human life, in the cities and in the fields and in Vietnam. Nonviolence is the only weapon that is compassionate and recognizes each man's value. We want to preserve that value in our enemies—or in our adversaries, as President Kennedy said more gently, more rightly. We want to protect the victim from being the victim. We want to protect the executioner from being the executioner.³⁴

As a summary statement that hopes to encompass the several radiating strands on nonviolence preceding, consider these words of Cesar Chavez directed to leaders of agribusiness:

If to build our union required the deliberate taking of life, either the life of a grower or his child, or the life of a farm worker or his child, then I choose not to see the union built. . . . We advocate militant nonviolence as our means for social revolution and to achieve justice for our people.²⁵

"Celebrate" is still another vivid, appeal verb used by Chavez. While he makes use of it twice in this paragraph, he implies the spirit and meaning of "celebration" throughout the second half of the speech.

The spirit of the word certainly is in the context of family, unity and common struggle, which is the theme of the paragraph and much of the speech. Note the support verb forms. They intensify and augment the meaning of "celebrate," "family" and "unity"; they

make identification all the more imperative: “gathered,” “bound together,” “common struggle,” “come together,” “break bread.” (The verb *to be* is the verb most frequently used by Chavez. That is likewise true in Spanish. This use of the most common, familiar verb form is further evidence of identification.)

Celebration, as a corporate act, is a familiar part of UFWOC’s agenda. These celebrations occur when historic anniversaries are observed (Sacramento March, etc.); when some sort of victory or contract agreement is announced; when someone like Robert Kennedy or Walter Reuther visits the Union in Delano; when food and clothing caravans arrive in Delano from supporters. Occasionally, member families meet for just a potluck get-together. The fiesta following this speech occasion is typical of such celebration.

The final weighted word found in this very packed paragraph is “future.” That is a reference to time—distant time. But it illustrates another tense of the verb to be which Chavez frequently utilizes—future tense. He makes use of the past, present and future tenses in his rhetoric. He therefore appeals to the entire life cycle of the farm worker; i.e., what it was in the past (a time of injustice and suffering); what it is in the present (a challenge to the agribusiness industry for meaningful change); what it is becoming or will be in the future (unity, justice and an equal voice in the farming system).

This final concluding sentence sounds both like a pledge and a prophecy; but it is also presented to the farm worker audience as a possible reality; i.e., the workers can have victory using the methods and life style lifted up by Chavez in this speech and his life—militant nonviolence.

Perhaps in the future we will come together at other times and places to break bread and to renew our courage and to celebrate important victories.

This assumption ought to evoke strong emotional response; i.e., what we *can* and *will* win for ourselves and our families. It implies long-range planning, patience, discipline. These are the ideals of Chavez found repeatedly in his rhetoric.

This Christmas, when the world seems to be torn by foolish racial hatreds and senseless war, the strikers of Delano, along with the staff and elected leadership, want more than ever to be instruments for peace and justice. The Delano strikers want to win better lives for themselves, and their children, of course. But we are concerned that our victories be of the kind that can be the foundation for future victories for others who are oppressed in other parts of our nation.³⁶

On another occasion Chavez declared emphatically: “We will win, we are winning, because ours is a revolution of mind and heart, not only of economics.”³⁷

Speaking in the context of a pledge and future time he told farm workers:

We make a solemn promise: to enjoy our rightful part of the riches of this land, to throw off the yoke of being considered as agricultural implements or slaves. We are free men and we demand justice.³⁸

After a 10,000-mile, two-month trip to boycott centers around the United States and Canada, Chavez wrote in *El Malcriado*:

Men who seek peaceful but meaningful change are not perplexed by long struggles. Over and again I was told: “We will be with you until you win—even if it takes a lifetime.”³⁹

In an essay addressed to the proposition that farm workers are seeking to share this nation’s wealth, Chavez wrote that full unionization is not the future end of farm worker organizing. “It must be understood that once we have substantial economic power—and the political power that follows in its wake—our work will not be done.”⁴⁰

When he was asked about his hopes for the 1970 decade, Chavez replied:

There is nothing else for us to do in the 1970’s but to continue the struggle for recognition and power. This is what we started in the 60’s and, for our children’s sake, that is where we must go in the 70’s.

But maybe the 70’s will be different. I think these years will see the poor coming into the light. We are going to have some power.⁴¹

This paragraph 5 illustrates several of Cesar Chavez’s identification elements: pedestrian or familiar illustration—“family,” “break bread,” etc.; appeals to humanity—“community,” “unity,” “family,” “nonviolence”; use of personal collective pronouns—“we” (and adjective, “our”); motivational appeals for altruistic, personal goals in the future; and a rhetorical style that is plain, uncluttered—illustrated by the use of the verb to be.

The last noun of the last sentence suggests one final motivational appeal of this paragraph. The word is “victories.” The motivational appeal is for hope, the unrelenting goal voiced by Chavez—hope forged out of confidence in the Union and in La Causa.

Paragraph 6 is the explanation for the occasion of this speech; but more than this, the ideas herein represent Chavez’s personal purposes for the fast (note the use of “I,” “my,” “me”). It is significant that he devotes such a generous section to explication. The explanation is not an exhaustive one, however, for some details are missing. The audience has to draw its own conclusions or make its own assumptions.

The opening sentence anticipates and answers the question of the audience or critics: “Why did you have a Fast?” “The Fast has had different meanings for different people,” Chavez answers. Such an answer allows every person present the option of judging the fast personally.

The second sentence is addressed to those still perplexed about the fast’s meaning and to those who might view the fast as impulsive, vindictive, faddish or publicity seeking. “Some of you may still wonder about its meaning and importance.”

Chavez’s strategy is apparently twofold: first, he offers answers without posing the questions (as you would with a rhetorical question); secondly, he sets up his audience to accept his definition of fasting or nonviolence or sacrifice. This definition comes in full in paragraph 8.

Chavez answers the question—Why the fast?—with a negative assertion followed by three affirmative ones.

1. The fast was not for pressure on the growers.
2. The fast was a personal act for the pain, suffering of farm workers.
3. The fast was a witness for nonviolence.
4. The fast was a call to sacrifice.

There were those who scoffed the fast as an unholy theatric. Some critics called it a “cheap publicity stunt” and charged that Chavez had a “messiah complex.”⁴² The editors of *Time* alleged that the fast took on a “certain circus aura and raised suspicions that its motivation was more theatrical than theological.”⁴³ Finally, using the sarcastic approach, two agribusiness officials later publicly wrote of the fast:

How are mere mortals to attempt to reply to the charismatic leader of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, who writes in flawless prose of his devotion to nonviolence, calls attention to his miraculous and marvelously publicized 25-day fast, and draws comparison to him self to Gandhi? How does one cope with an adversary so determinedly bucking for sainthood?⁴⁴

Following his negative assertion—“It was not intended as a pressure against growers”—Chavez offers his evidence. “We have suspended negotiations and arbitration proceedings and relaxed the militant picketing and boycotting of the strike during this period.” (Notice it is “we” who have suspended negotiations, etc.) In his letter to the National Council of Churches officials he made that same assertion:

My fast is informed by my religious faith and by my deep roots in the Church. It is not intended as a pressure on anyone but only as an expression of my own deep feelings and my own need to do penance and to be in prayer.⁴⁵

The three affirmative assertions about the fast that follow are more to the theme of the speech—nonviolence and family unity. First, Chavez identifies with farm worker “pain” and “suffering” by volunteer self-inflicted suffering. His farm worker audience could identify with that motivation and act. But then he declares the fast to be for “nonviolence” and a “call to sacrifice.” Here is, then, a summons, an appeal to his audience. We have already demonstrated that Chavez was alarmed with the growing tensions and frustrations among Union members. By understanding a fast he was, in his theological viewpoint, doing penance for those acts or violent feelings. That assumption is reinforced by the Union’s own statement about the meaning of the fast, which Chavez must have had some hand in composing.

The fast is an act of penance, recalling farm workers to the nonviolent roots of their movement. These farm workers who are united in the Delano strike care about the well being of all fellow beings, even those who have placed themselves in the position

of adversaries. They believe that these brothers can only be approached through determined creative and nonviolent means. If the commitment of nonviolence has been violated, in thought or deed, by himself, by the strikers, or by those who have rallied to the Cause, Cesar does Penance.⁴⁶

Chavez makes parallel assertions in his letter to the National Council of Churches on the seventh day of the fast (note 45).

This theological view of penance comes, in part, from the Roman Catholic Mexican culture. Chavez makes lengthy reference to that heritage in his letter of explanation about the meaning of the 300-mile Sacramento pilgrimage (in the spring of 1966).

The penitential procession is also in the blood of the Mexican-American, and the Delano March will therefore be one of penance—public penance for the sins of the strikers, their own personal sins as well as their yielding perhaps to feelings of hatred and revenge in the strike itself. They hope by the march to set themselves at peace with the Lord, so that the justice of their cause will be purified of all lesser motivation.⁴⁷

“The fast was first for me . . .” is a declaration with strong ethical appeal. The fast was very personal and quiet in its intent and opening (in spite of what some critics suggest). Chavez did not announce the fast. It was not until after the third day that his family discovered he was fasting.⁴⁸

The fast was an individual act, he asserts; really, a personal pilgrimage or period of self-testing. In retrospect he expanded this affirmation:

I am not completely nonviolent yet, and I know it. That is why I fasted; I felt it was a very personal form of self-testing and of prayer. Anyone could be nonviolent in a monastery, after all, but that is easy, and that was not the way of Christ). What’s difficult is to be nonviolent in the cause, in the battle for social justice.⁴⁹

“The Fast was . . . for all of us in this union.” As the paragraph sweeps to a conclusion the farm worker audience is drawn into the private act of Cesar Chavez. It becomes a corporate, Union act. The paragraph ends with summons, an appeal: “It was a Fast for nonviolence and a call to sacrifice.”

This paragraph gives exposition to Chavez’s personal journey or pilgrimage on behalf of the Union: “I undertook this Fast because my heart was filled with grief and pain. . . .” This personal testimony ends with a corporate, motivational appeal. His cause is the farm workers’ cause; it is their Union.

Paragraph 7 clarifies these implications. It opens by answering most of the questions raised by the preceding paragraphs: Why should the farm workers sacrifice or practice nonviolence or be a movement or family or united effort? Indeed, why the fast? :”Our struggle is not easy,” he begins. As the paragraph gathers momentum it becomes obvious that it is the summit of the speech. It is directed to the farm worker audience exclusively. It is rhetoric of pure appeal and full identification. The illustrations are pedestrian; the syntax,

simple. In fact, all of the rhetorical elements employed by Chavez outlined in chapter 1 are contained in these six sentences.

“Those who oppose our cause are rich and powerful and they have many allies in high places.” Here is concrete illustrations of Chavez’s use of the generalized epithet. You find nowhere in his public rhetoric a resort to personal invectives or personality defamation. You do not, however, find timidity in attacking an adversary, in identifying a foe. His speeches are far from pep talks or fireside chats for boosting morale. Indeed, when his words resound with emotional charge he is generally pointing his finger at the farm worker adversary, agribusiness. There are many examples available to illustrate this assertion. In a New York City speech he declared: “We are fighting not against the family farm, but against agribusiness.”⁵⁰ In his Good Friday Letter he leveled his attack on the “system.” “We hate the agribusiness system that seeks to keep us enslaved and we shall overcome and change it not by retaliation or bloodshed but by a determined nonviolent struggle.”⁵¹

Chavez’s definition of agribusiness is not limited strictly to fields, vineyards and barns. It encompasses bank board rooms, the stock exchange office, and the “smoke-filled room” of the political arena. Specifically, he includes “banks and railroad companies and big corporations that run agribusiness, a \$4 billion industry in California.”⁵² In a Fresno, California, speech he was a bit more graphic: “The length and width of this valley is controlled by one octopus—the growers and politicians or, if you want to call it that, the Establishment.”⁵³

Finally, in a letter to students, referred to earlier, he asserted that the farm workers were locked in a once-and-for-all struggle with “the most powerful men of Western America—the fantastically wealthy growers of California.”⁵⁴

Chavez’s theological commitments and religious support appear to be the major causes for his restraint. In contrast, some of his critics resort to personal attacks and invectives. Most frequently the “red-baiting” tactic is applied (reminiscent of the thirties and the similar problem of organized labor). In a speech before the Rotary Club of Hanford, California, one critic employed this methodology.

While we have no record of Mr. Chavez advocating the overthrow of the government, the record is eminently clear that he has advocated the overthrow of innumerable government agencies and that he has openly challenged the government of California and the governor of his state.⁵⁵

The Taylor Farm Management organization was more explicit in an April 4, 1966, report:

We do not need to go to Vietnam to fight Communism. It is all around us. The “Delano Story” should be read carefully. . . . Cesar Chavez, trained under Saul Alinsky, has now become a professional agitator in his own right. . . . Chavez and his cohorts had to import long haired kooks, professional loafers, winos, and the dregs of our great society to carry his “Huelga” placards.⁵⁶

The John Birch Society printed an article in its June, 1966, issue of *American Opinion* entitled “The Grapes: Communist Wrath in Delano.” This article was put into booklet form and widely disseminated in the San Joaquin Valley and about the country for three years. In it, the author, Gary Allen, called the Delano strike a “phony strike, a Communist revolution, farce-tragedy.”⁵⁷ Allen’s summary of Chavez’s organizing efforts is:

He runs a prep school in grassroots organizing for revolution based upon picket lines, boycotts, mass meetings, rent strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins.⁵⁸

It is Chavez’s relation to the CSO and Saul Alinsky that is the constant preoccupation of many of his critics. The *California Farmer*, in consort with several other Chavez critics, called Alinsky the “guiding spirit behind Delano.”⁵⁹ The South Central Farmers Committee (the Delano grape growers) declared in a 1968 report:

Chavez makes no secret of the fact that he received most of his organizational training under Saul Alinsky, the master activist who has fanned the flames of discontent into raging fires of civil disturbance throughout the nation.⁶⁰

Finally, the Citizens for Facts From Delano group called Chavez the “puppet” of Alinsky. In the first issue of their newsletter they posed several questions to Chavez:

WHY do you need all the outside organizations when you have so many members supporting you? WHEN you publicly stated you were trained by Saul Alinsky at the Industrial Areas Foundation—WHEN it is a known fact that Alinsky trains people to be Organizers of Social Revolutions—WHY the need for outside help? With your 1100 you should have all the support you need here in Delano. How about it, Cesar, are you the PUPPET or the LEADER??????⁶¹

In a wider context, critics attack the “allies” of the farm worker chief (as he does in this speech, without actually naming them). The editor of the *Delano Record* spoke editorially in the opening months of the strike:

It is frightening to discover that our quiet, peaceful, friendly and well integrated city is suddenly the focal point of so much hate, distortion, untruth and nationwide effort on the part of the New Breed. For there is a New Breed. They are the Vietnicks, the Civil Righters, the Berkeley sit-inners, the do-gooders who are determined to whittle everyone down to a certain level. They want fanatically to have a Cause, whatever it may be, and to bend everyone in their direction. . . . We are in the midst of a social revolution brought about by this New Breed.⁶²

Finally, there are numerous attacks on Chavez himself. The mayor of Porterville, California, a Valley grape-growing community, said of Chavez:

What a mess of garbage this fellow dishes out in promoting a politico-union con game! Preserve free speech! The issue is not even involved in Delano, rather, the issue is forceful attempts to inflict unionism. The word “freedom” is used to stir up the bleeding hearts, the eggheads and the just plain uninformed.⁶³

In an open letter to farm workers, DiGiorgio Corporation offered this view of Chavez:

Cesar Chavez and his ill-tempered followers have commenced a wicked boycott of DiGiorgio products. We are confident that this boycott will not be successful, for it is being conducted by individuals that no self-respecting person would associate with. . . . Cesar is on his way out. He cannot live without newspaper publicity. He will probably try to start more fights, and try to keep things in a turmoil. Do not worry about him. As we have said before, DiGiorgio has been here for nearly half a century, and DiGiorgio will be here long after Cesar Chavez and his NFWA “No Fair Working Association,” are nothing but an unpleasant memory.⁶⁴

More recently, the Farm Bureau President, Charles Shuman, said in a Valley speech:

Cesar Chavez has failed as a union organizer. He attracted only a handful of workers in Delano. Nearly all of the grape pickers have remained on the job through four harvest seasons, despite harassment by the Chavez pickets. However, Chavez has proved himself a master propagandist.⁶⁵

California State Senator John L. Harmer alleged in a speech that all the “misrepresentation” surrounding the grape dispute originated with one man, Cesar Chavez.

The misrepresentation originated with one man—Cesar Chavez who has NEVER been a grape worker and only briefly, a farm worker. He is a carefully trained and disciplined revolutionist, schooled by the master himself, Saul Alinsky, self-proclaimed “doctrinaire socialist,” head of the Industrial Areas Foundation of Chicago.⁶⁶

A common attack follows this line: “I heard from a person I trust that Chavez is making a pocket full of money off the strike.”⁶⁷

Four groups have consistently assailed Chavez and UFWOC: California Farm Bureau, California Grape and Tree Fruit League, South Central Farmers Committee and Whitaker and Baxter (San Francisco public relations firm).⁶⁸ Other short-lived groups include: Mothers Against Chavez, Men Against Chavez, Citizens for Facts, Agricultural Workers Freedom to Work Association (AWFWA).⁶⁹

The revelation that arises from all the preceding is the restraint of Cesar Chavez in the face of such well-organized, well-financed criticism or character assassination. It is simply further evidence that his primary preoccupation is with the Union and farm workers. That agenda takes precedence over everything else (including personal matters). His identification with La Causa appears to be absolute.

Chavez uses a familiar strategy in presenting his case and developing his argument: the rich against the poor. He notes that their adversaries are not only “rich and powerful,” but have “many allies in high places.” I have alluded to those allies in previous sections; i.e., federal agencies and departments, public relations firms, gas companies, banks, the courts and railroads. In the October 1, 1969, speech before a House of Representatives committee he expressed it in near conspiracy terms.

We have experienced things that we never dreamed we would be confronted with when we began the strike. These small communities are so well knit and the grower influence is so predominant that when we struck in Delano, we not only had the growers against us, but we had the other public bodies like the city council, the board of supervisors, the high school and elementary school districts, passing resolutions and propaganda against the strike and against the union.⁷⁰

In a spirit of camaraderie with his audience Chavez contrasts the rich and the poor. “We are poor. Our allies are few.” Even the sentence structure is modest, direct. “We are poor.” Could any other sentence be one of such total identification with his audience? Furthermore, this statement is not an idle generalization of premise without evidence; farm workers are still poor. According to a study done for the University of California, the average grape worker in Kern County in 1964 (where Delano is located) was employed 119 days out of the year.⁷¹ Moreover, the farm workers’ annual income was comparable to the average for all seasonal farm workers in California, \$2,024.⁷²

With a motivational appeal calculated to stir the pride of the farm worker, Chavez asserts: “We have our own bodies and spirits and the justice of our cause as our weapons.” These are altruistic, personal and corporate appeals. His “bathe metaphor” declares that farm workers do have weapons. They are not powerless. The weapons of their arsenal include: their bodies, their spirits, and the justice of their cause.

“Our own bodies. . . .” The farm workers have numbers. Contrasting agribusiness and workers in this context, Chavez said in a speech: “They have the power and they have the money, but they are the few and we are the many.”⁷³ Likewise, “In organizing people,” Chavez said, “you have to get across to them their human worth and the power they have in numbers.”⁷⁴ It is a mass appeal to a mass audience.

Referring to the “cause” of the farm workers, Chavez wrote: “With their hands, sweat and sacrifice, the farm workers are building a monument—their union.”⁷⁵

In a speech to an audience of farm workers and supporters present at the West Coast Boycott Conference, Delano, January 25, 1969, he put it still another way:

We raise two things here in Delano: grapes and slaves. But we will win with two weapons: dedication and disciplined sacrifice. And both of these are encased in the most perfect case: the human being.⁷⁶

In a later speech this viewpoint was more complete:

I think we have got one idea over to the employers—that we are here to stay. We are now as much a part of the grapes and the agricultural scene as growing and planting. We are here to stay for good!⁷⁷

These preceding illustrations support a major premise that grips Cesar Chavez: the farm worker, individually, has ultimate worth. He is not a pawn, slave or agricultural tool. He is a person. It is this insistence on the personhood of the individual farm worker that makes Chavez's organizing goals unique in farm labor history (and his identification unswerving).

As in previous paragraphs Chavez begins this final one, number 8, by amplifying preceding assertions. He repeats the assertion that "all we have is our bodies." But now he leaves no presumption. His summary statements are candid and closely adhere to his religious and political viewpoints. While these sentences are declarative in tone—suggesting exhortation—they are a powerful appeal for commitment to the Union cause and the cause of humanity, i.e., nonviolence.

This concluding paragraph possesses a uniqueness when compared to the previous seven: it is epigrammatic. It is a concise grouping of thoughts that form a unity, a distinct and unique thought; a paragraph that can stand alone and still issue a total idea; in this case: personal, sacrificial nonviolence is the meaning of manhood.

An appropriate thesis for this paragraph, fo that is the chief underlying assumption Chavez makes in this speech and others within the same framework, is that farm workers are to be free, liberated. Thus, he speaks of the "movement," "our cause," "justice," "courage," "celebration," "common struggle," "love."

This paragraph is highly polemical. In the biographical section I demonstrated that religious or theological conviction is a major power of influence generating the life style of Chavez. This paragraph is a summary, a personal theological affirmation, an existential assertion.

There is much that is emphatic about this paragraph: "we *must* admit—my *deepest* belief—I am *convinced*—God *help* us." Note the forceful adjectives: "really," "truest," "strongest." This paragraph is a call for action, a summons for introspection, as well as a strong motivational appeal for nonviolent commitment and unity.

In this paragraph, as in paragraph 7, Chavez places high value on the personhood of the individual. "It is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are." Part of Chavez's thesis is that farm workers have not been regarded nor treated as men. They have been devalued.

We are men and women who have suffered and endured much and not only because of our abject poverty but because we have been kept poor. The colors of our skins, the languages of our cultural and native origins, the lack of formal education, the exclusion from the democratic process, the numbers of our slain in recent wars—all these burdens generation after generation have sought to demoralize us, to break our human spirit. But God knows that we are not beasts of burden, we are not agricultural implements or rented slaves, we are men.⁷⁸

And in this final paragraph Chavez affirms that all farm workers have value and that they can illustrate it concretely, invest their lives in the cause. A theological parallel to his methodology at this point would be the minister who is asking his congregation for a decision—a decision concerning the conduct and investment of their lives.

The theological rootage of this paragraph is found in the sentence “It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life.” This assertion originates in the New Testament (for Christians). Early in His ministry Jesus laid down some of the conditions for discipleship. One was “He who loses his life for my sake will find it.”⁷⁹ The theological premise is that sacrifice and selfless service to others lead to the authentic life. Chavez calls this, significantly, “my deepest belief.” He alluded to this same premise when he said a year later:

We are men locked in a death struggle against man’s inhumanity to man . . . and this struggle itself gives meaning to our life and ennobles our dying.⁸⁰

There are two nouns buried in these sentences that give the paragraph substance and direction: “act” and “manliness.” Chavez speaks of the “act of courage” and the “act of manliness” as the nonviolent way. “Act” suggests intention, a strategy, a blueprinted deed. In an interview Chavez denied this kind of mechanical implication.

If you have no basis for nonviolence other than a strategy, a tactic, then when it fails your only alternative is completely the reverse and that’s violence. So you have to balance the strategy with a clear understanding of what you are doing. However important the struggle is and however much misery and poverty and degradation exist, we know that it cannot be more important than one human life.⁸¹

“Manliness” is a most curious word; it juts right out with its strangeness in this paragraph. It means masculine courage and the like. What a strange word to use. Surely there is an implication or assumption hidden behind the word. In the context of this entire speech it would appear tht the word is another weapon for Chavez in his attack on violence. Some view violence, confrontation, the big fist or whatever as not only a way to get desired results but as being manly. The results may be immediate, but they are temporary and illusory (particularly if you are weak or a minority member). Chavez is asserting: “The ends cannot justify the means.” He calls violence the temporary shortcut, as I noted earlier. The really hard path, he testifies, is nonviolence..

Nonviolence is more powerful than violence. We are convinced that nonviolence supports you if you have a just and moral cause. Nonviolence gives the opportunity to stay on the offensive, which is of vital importance to win any contest.⁸²

Gandhi carried a parallel conviction:

Nonviolence and cowardice go ill together. I can imagine a fully armed man to be at heart a coward. Possession of arms implies an element of fear, if not cowardice. But

true nonviolence is an impossibility without the possession of unadulterated fearlessness.⁸³

In another speech Gandhi put it more succinctly: “Nonviolence is the summit of bravery.”⁸⁴ Since Chavez is a student of Gandhi’s words and admirer of his deeds, his assertion must have been influenced by the Indian leader.

Chavez is exercising his authority as Director of UFWOC by making a direct appeal for nonviolence. But it is a moral appeal, rather than an authoritative demand or coercion.

He sums up the goal, purpose, agenda of the farm workers with one noun, “justice.” That word carries the weight of equity, fairness, a decent standard of living—all the goals of traditional trade unionism. But it is a carefully chosen word and perhaps the most common in Chavez’s vocabulary. It therefore suggests: recognition of the farm worker as a human person, and a ratification of his right to chart his own life with dignity and safety.

There is little doubt that the concluding words of this speech voice the clearest affirmation concerning the life style of Cesar Chavez: “To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men!”

These words are a direct appeal to the listeners, but also a kind of invocation to God. These sentences likewise appear to be a paraphrasing of the imperative of Christ: “Greatest love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”⁸⁵ There is a parallel in one of Gandhi’s speeches: “Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself.”⁸⁶ And as a final note, the May 15, 1970, issue of *El Malcriado* was largely a memorial to the late Walter Reuther, powerful labor friend of the farm worker movement. The cover of that special edition carried a picture of Reuther speaking to farm workers. His words were: “There is no greater calling than to serve your brothers.”⁸⁷

This concluding paragraph is both a crescendo and a summary of the entire speech. It is a logical focusing of several ideas into one single, climactic thrust. It is arrangement of theme—nonviolence—into spirit and body. The audience had to respond, for the burden was left on their lives. What began as a gentle reminiscence concluded with a powerful summons.

NOTES

1. SJV-FWC.
2. For further study on these two colorful spokesmen, two publications are most specific: *La Raza*, by Stan Steiner (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), and *Tijerina and the Courthouse Raid*, by Peter Nabokov (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969). Steiner’s book contains a section on Cesar Chavez: Chapter XXIII, “The Cross of Cesar Chavez.”
3. Mexican-American (Spanish-speaking) form the largest ethnic group in the California farm labor work force, making up 67 percent of the farm labor force. Anglo workers form some 12 percent, with the remaining 21 percent being composed by

Filipinos, blacks, and other ethnic groups. *The California Farm Workers Health Services Annual Report 1967-1970* (Sacramento: California State Department of Public Health, 1968), p. 4.

4. *El Malcriado*, April 15, 1968, p. 4.

5. "Kennedy Speaks to the Farm Workers," *El Malcriado*, October 1-15, 1969, p. 2.

6. "Nonviolence Still Works," *Look* (April 1, 1969), p. 53.

7. For complete details and photographs on the Union's support of Kennedy see the special edition of *El Malcriado* devoted to Kennedy: June 15, 1968.

8. Michael Harrington alluded to this under-representation when he wrote: "The poor are politically invisible. It is one of the cruelest ironies of social life in advanced countries that the dispossessed at the bottom of society are unable to speak for themselves. The people of the other America do not, by far and large, belong to unions, to fraternal organizations or to political parties. They are without lobbies of their own; they put forward no legislative program. As a group, they are atomized. They have no face; they have no voice." Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Incorporated, 1962), p. 14.

9. "Cesar Chavez Talks in New York," *Catholic Worker*, June, 1968, p. 4.

10. *Ibid.* In addition, part of Chavez's quarrel with the Immigration Service is over the number of illegal aliens who stream into harvest fields, and the use of "green carders."

11. *Look*, p. 54.

12. "La Migra Shapes Up . . . We Hope," *El Malcriado*, May 15, 1968, p. 5.

13. Information taken from the transcript of a public hearing with Chavez and members of his staff held by the members of the U.S. House of Representatives in the Hearing Room of the Education and Labor Committee, October 1, 1969, Washington, D. C. (Transcript prepared and published by the National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy, Room 201, 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C.), SJV-FWC. This transcript is an excellent and fascinating source that illustrates the extemporaneous question and answer kind of rhetoric where Chavez is most persuasive and glib.

14. For use of these terms see Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:11 (Revised Standard Version).

15. For full details on this preoccupation by Chavez and UFWOC see the following sources: "The Threat of Chemical Poisons," *El Malcriado*, January 1, 1969, pp. 5, 14; "What Are They Hiding?" *El Malcriado*, February 1, 1969, pp. 4, 112; *Congressional Record*, 91st Congress, Second Session, Volume 115, Number 161 (October 3, 1969); Ron Taylor, "Poisoning Threatens Hundreds, Field Hands Most Vulnerable," *Fresno Bee*, December 31, 1969, pp. 1B, 8B (one of a series of five articles by Mr. Taylor on pesticides and a very useful and complete resource).

16. *Congressional Record*, 90th Congress, Second Session, Volume 114, Number 169 (October 11, 1968).

17. Peter Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 345.

18. "Educating Our Children: 'Huelga' School Tries New Techniques," *El Malcriado*, February 1-28, 1970, pp. 7-8.

19. Information in a letter to supporters from Cesar Chavez, February, 1970, SJV-FWC.

20. *Farm Labor Organizing, 1906-1967* (Washington, D.C.: National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, 1967), p. 49.
21. John Gregory Dunne, "Strike!: *Saturday Evening Post* (May 6, 1967), p. 32.
22. Ron Taylor, "NFWA Claims Ethnic Ties, Clergy Support," *Fresno Bee*, November 21, 1965, p. 1.
23. "The Delano Strike," *The Movement*, October 1965, p. 5.
24. "Cesar Chavez," *The Movement*, December, 1965, p. 6.
25. Information in a letter to supporters from Cesar Chavez and NFWA, February, 1966, SJV-FWC.
26. *Current Biography*, p. 4.
27. Transcript, National Campaign for Agricultural Democracy.
28. Lyle Burt, "Chavez Called 'Phony Rights Worker,'" *The Seattle Times*, December 19, 1969, p. 4.
29. H. J. N. Horsburgh, *Nonviolence and Aggression; A Study of Gandbi's Moral Equivalent of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 31.
30. Information in a letter to supporters from Cesar Chavez, September 23, 1968, SJV-FWC.
31. "The Student Summer Project of the NFWA," The National Farm Workers Association (Delano, California, Summer, 1966), SJV-FWC. (A letter from Chavez to students may be found in this pamphlet.)
32. Cesar Chavez, "Creative Non-Violence," *Center Magazine* (March, 1969), p. 27.
33. *El Malcriado*, April 15, 1968, p. 5.
34. *Look*, p. 54.
35. Cesar Chavez, "Good Friday Letter," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 23, 1969, p. 4, SJV-FWC.
36. Information in a letter to supporters from Cesar Chavez, December, 1966, SJV-FWC.
37. *Look*, p. 55.
38. "The Little Strike That Grew To La Causa," *Time* (July 4, 1969), p. 17.
39. "Greetings from Cesar Chavez," *El Malcriado*, December 1-31, 1969, p. 2.
40. Cesar Chavez, "Sharing the Wealth," *Playboy* (January, 1968), p. 253.
41. Cesar Chavez, "What's Ahead?" UFWOC (Delano, California, 1970), SJV-FWC.
42. Peter Matthiessen, "Cesar Chavez: Profile," *The New Yorker* (June 28, 1969), p. 89.
43. *Time*, p. 19.
44. R. K. Sanderson, E. L. Barr, Jr., "Why Grape Growers Do Not 'Render Unto Cesar,'" *Christian Century* (June 11, 1969), p. 810. This letter penned by Sanderson and Barr, officials of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, was, in part, a response to Chavez's Good Friday Letter, which appeared in the April 23, 1969, issue of the *Century*.
45. Information in a letter to the National Council of Churches from Cesar, Chavez, February 20, 1968, SJV-FWC.
46. "Statement of the Fast for Nonviolence," UFWOC (Delano, California, February 25, 1968), SJV-FWC.
47. Information in a letter to Union members and supporters from Cesar Chavez, March, 1966, SJV-FWC.

48. *Sal Si Puedes*, p. 326.
49. *Look*, p. 53.
50. "Cesar Chavez Talks in New York," *Catholic Worker*, June, 1968, p. 4.
51. "Good Friday Letter." See note 35.
52. *Look*, p. 53.
53. "UAW Western Region Pledges New Support," *El Malcriado*, March 29, 1967, p. 15.
54. Letter to Students. See note 31.
55. "Speaker Reviews Problems of Farm Labor in Central Valley," *Delano Record*, May 19, 1966, third section. The speaker was Mr. Walter Aufderheide, managing director of the Valley Employees Association.
56. Leslie O. Taylor, "The Delano Story," Taylor Farm Management (Terra Bella, California, April 4, 1966).
57. Gary Allen, "The Grapes: Communist Wrath in Delano," *American Opinion* (June, 1966), pp. 2-3.
58. *Ibid.*
59. "Saul Alinsky, The Guiding Spirit Behind Delano," *California Farmer* (March 19, 1966), p. 31.
60. "South Central Farmers Committee Report on Delano" (mimeographed report, Delano, 1968), p. 11.
61. "Puppet or Leader?" *The Truth—La Verdad*, July 1, 1966, p. 2. (The Citizens for Facts group has since dissolved.)
62. (Editorial) "the New Breed Breeds Revolt," *Delano Record*, March 22, 1966.
63. Bill Rodgers, "We Only Heard," *Farm Tribune*, October 28, 1965.
64. "DiGiorgio Blasts NFWA Boycott in Lettr to Ranch Employees," *Delano Record*, May 10, 1966, p. 1.
65. "Farm Bureau Leader Opens Anti-Chavez Truth Campaign," *Fresno Guide*, April 28, 1969, p. 1.
66. "The Grape Boycott, A First Hand Report," Committee to Elect John Harmer Attorney General (San Francisco, 1969). This pamphlet contains only brief excerpts of a speech made by Harmer dealing with Chavez and UFWOC. The full text is recorded in the *Congressional Record*, July 11, 1969.
67. *Hunsinger Report*, p. 22. (Footnote 22, Chapter II.)
68. A public relations firm cannot be considered a serious critic since theirs is a commercial arrangement. For details see: Ron Taylor, "Public Relations: Key Weapon in Grape Battle," *Fresno Bee*, November 9, 1969, p. 1-C.
69. In March, 1969, it was discovered that the AFWFA was a grower's front. See Dick Meister, "Federal Report—Big Growers' Secret Anti-Union Organization," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 4, 1969, p. 4.
70. Transcript of Home committee speech, see note 13 for full source.
71. William H. Metzler, "Technological Change and Farm Labor Use, Kern County California" (Giannini Foundation: Berkeley, 1964), Part II, p. 27.
72. California Department of Employment, Disability Insurance Report 835, parts 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d, 1967.

73. "Nonviolence and Your Vote," *El Malcriado*, April 1, 1968, p. 8.

74. *Life*, footnote 25, Chapter III.

75. Jon Lewis, *From This Earth . . . Of The Delano Grape Strike*. Limited edition published by the author for a master's thesis, San Francisco State College, 1969, SJV-FWC. (This is largely a photographic essay, but it is both very creative and of particular historical significance.)

76. From notes taken by the writer. (The remarks quoted were from offhand comments given by Chavez as he introduced several families who were about to leave Delano for boycott assignments in cities around the country.)

77. "California Labor Backs Boycott 100%," *El Malcriado*, April 1970, p. 5.

78. Good Friday letter.

79. Matthew 10:39.

80. Good Friday letter.

81. Gerald Barr, "Cesar Chavez: Apostle of Non-Violence," *Observer* (May, 1970).

82. *Ibid.*

83. *All Men Are Brothers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 101.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

85. John 15:13.

86. *All Men Are Brothers*, p. 86.

87. *El Malcriado*, May 15, 1970, cover.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Nonviolence exacts a very high price from one who practices it. But once you are able to meet that demand then you can do most things, provided you have the time, Gandhi showed how a whole nation could be liberated without an army. This is the first time in the history of the world when a huge nation, occupied for over a century, achieved independence by nonviolence. It was a long struggle and it takes time.

—CESAR CHAVEZ

This speech delivered at the conclusion of the twenty-five-day fast of Cesar Chavez was an affirming speech. It was not so much a speech to convince as it was one to reaffirm fundamental Union goals. It was a speech calling farm workers to a unity of direction and to purposeful action. Its positive appeal is for a life style that is nonviolent, the underlying premise being that violence is weak and immoral and will shatter a cause or movement.

The language and style are simple, even modest. The tone is conversational. There are numerous highly evocative nouns with strong adjectival and adverbial modifiers. The verb forms tend to be plain, as opposed to severe or melodramatic. They most often center around the verb *to be*.

It is a highly personal polemic whose burden of proof rests primarily on identification—the speaker with his audience and the audience with the speaker and their

common cause. Those identification elements used in the speech include: pedestrian or everyday illustrations (even discussing kidney ailments); appeals to humanity (i.e., “family,” “unity,” “nonviolence”); and use of personal pronouns (i.e., “we,” “us”).

The motivational appeals in the speech push for such personal goals as “sacrifice,” “justice”; most often they are couched in futuristic terms of reference. Chavez does not make use of the character assassination device of rhetoric. Neither does he neglect to fix blame and to isolate and expose the adversaries of farm workers; but he points his accusing finger by using generalized epithets rather than verbal abuses or invectives.

His use of style, outlined in the opening section, reaches into the everyday experience and language of the farm worker. His short phrases, uncomplicated syntax and one or two-syllable vocabulary clearly unite him with his audience, the farm workers. His speaking seeks to involve, to relate, rather than to impress.

The occasion for the speech was a critical time in the Union’s history. In his Good Friday Letter Chavez alluded to this fact.

Knowing of Gandhi’s admonition that fasting is the last resort in place of the sword, during a most critical time in our movement last February, 1968, I undertook a 25-day fast.¹

The Union cause was grinding away so slowly that the spirit of the movement was being charged with tension and frustration. The possibility of violent eruption was very high. That being true, the occasion for this speech was also a time of personal crisis for Cesar Chavez, for his life is inexorably wedded to the farm worker movement.

One critical question remains unanswered: Was the fast a pure moral act or an internal organizational device? It is clear that the fast was undertaken at a time when the internal dissension problems were critical and the general morale of the Union was extremely low (due largely to the draining effects of the boycott efforts, threats and acts of violence, and because there had not been a decisive victory for a relatively long period of time). It is also clear that Chavez is a sincerely religious man and fasting is no stranger to him. Furthermore, Chavez’s two chief nonviolent mentors, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, also practiced fasting. The question of motive, however, still remains.

The surface evidence supports an inclusive response to the question; that is, the fast was *both* a personal, moral act and a human model in organization commitment. Part of the purpose of the fast was to bring together divergent, frustrated commitments in UFWOC’s membership. The Union also needed a persuasive, catalytic example of sacrifice for the cause, as well as a symbolic victory. Chavez’s fast apparently gave the farm workers both.

If seven years of subsequent history are any evidence, that fast was a seminal event for Chavez and UFWOC. That makes this speech all the more important for serious study and analysis, for UFWOC drew together significantly under the leadership of Chavez. The boycott became international. Farm worker families have been living in dozens of major American (and Canadian) cities for the past years working on the boycott. Support grew in Washington, D.C., for protective legislation for farm workers in health, wages, housing, education, etc. But most importantly, contracts have finally been negotiated and signed with table grape growers in Arizona and California. In 1970, nearly 90 percent of the

California table grape industry was under contract with UFWOC. (In 1969, California sold a total of \$799 million worth of fruits and nuts. The largest money crop was grapes. They earned \$2221 million of the \$799 million.)² The boycott, which demands close, disciplined unity, has worked.³

And what of the future? Cesar Chavez is a man with one foot in the present and the other stretching out toward the future. At a news conference, following the announcement of a new table grape contract, he spoke of that future.

We now have a staff in the 65 largest cities of this country. We are in a very large, intensive recruiting drive to recruit summer volunteers for the program. We now have staff in the major cities in Canada. We are putting more effort and moer money on the boycott beginning this season than we have put in the combined seasons in the last three years.

We have a union label and those grapes are marked: we know where they've being sold and who is selling them. And we're going to make every effort that we can to make sure that people buy the union grape. And we're going to work our darnedest to make sure that people do not buy the scab or non-union grape.⁴

My study of this speech, this man and his movement convinced me of several things. First, critical studies of Cesar Chavez, his rhetoric and the farm worker movement are lacking and needed (particularly, Mexican-American and Filipino history in the San Joaquin Valley). Most of UFWOC's critics that I have studied or heard or reviewed are in the act of reacting, rather than responding (criticizing responsibly). Too often they are going after the man (of his myth) or his allies with little attention devoted to substantive, relevant issues. The study of a contemporary figure or movement calls for a broad, balanced, human, historical panorama.

It is evident that my study is slanted toward the cause of the farm worker. Therefore, there needs to be continuing appraisal and analysis of Cesar Chavez, his words and deeds by additional critics. I commend others to study this immensely colorful leader. It is a task rich in reward and revelation. I commend others to study the history and documents of UFWOC, a most unique, vital human movement that has already influenced the history of the San Joaquin Valley and the nation.

We who live in a day of violent confrontation and with a balance of terror need the leavening effect of a humane study. Not simply for our own sanity or relief, but because there are relevant, nonviolent models to follow in La Causa. The farm worker movement does not simply leave a legacy to study, it offers a sense of direction.

Secondly, the speech was, in my judgment, both highly persuasive and humanly effective. There was significant response. But so was the act—the fast—persuasive and effective. The rhetoric and the man are a rare combination—inseparable.

In conclusion, the “success” of this man or his rhetoric will not be fully known for decades. But he has already achieved what he set out to do back in the early 1950s in San Jose: a level of justice and unity among farm workers, and a strong farm workers Union. A goal accomplished with militant, active nonviolence.

On July 29, 1970, Cesar Chavez signed contracts with all of the remaining Delano grape growers. It was another historic event for Chavez and UFWOC. Speaking to the three hundred jubilant farm workers present for the occasion, Chavez echoed the thesis of his speech given after the fast. The words summarize the rhetoric and life style of Cesar Estrada Chavez.

Today when we see so much violence in the country and in our midst, this event here truly justifies the beliefs of millions of people that through nonviolent action, in this nation, across the world, that social justice can be gotten.

The struggle has been a difficult struggle. It would have been five years in September. The strikers, and the people involved in the struggle, sacrificed a lot. Sacrificed all of their worldly possessions. Ninety-five percent of the strikers lost their homes and cars.

But I think that in losing those worldly possessions they found themselves, and they found that only through dedication to serving mankind—and in this case to serving the poor and those who are struggling for justice—only in that way could they find themselves.⁵

NOTES

1. Good Friday letter, SJV-FWC.
2. "Money Crop," *Parade*, August 2, 1970, p. 12.
3. The San Joaquin Valley newspapers have carried front page reports of these negotiations and contracts. For details see the following sampling: Ron Taylor, "Chavez Union Signs Contract With Steinberg," *Fresno Bee*, April 1, 1970, pp. 1A, 4A; Ron Taylor, "Contracts Bring End to Vineyard Strike," *Fresno Bee*, July 29, 1970, pp. 1A, 4A; "Chavez: Union Will End Boycott, Help Sell Grapes," *Fresno Bee*, July 30, 1970, pp. 1A, 6A; "Chavez, Farm Workers Union Win Five Year Labor Battle," *California Advocate*, July 31, 1970, p.1; Ron Taylor, "Triumph of a Boycott," *Fresno Bee*, August 2, 1970, pp. 1A, 18A (excellent, concise chronology of the farm worker movement, 1965-1970); "Fresno, Tulare Grape Growers Sign Pacts," *Fresno Bee*, August 7, 1970, p. 1.
4. "Channel 47 News," ABC News (Fresno), May 21, 1970, Gary Bentley, reporting, SJV-FWC (tape recording).
5. "Channel 47 News," ABC News (Fresno), July 29, 1970, Jim Vargus, reporting, SJV-FWC (tape recording).

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY

Once we have substantial economic power—and the political power that follows in its wake—our work will not be done. We will then move on to affect even more fundamental changes in this society.

—CESAR CHAVEZ

March 31, 1927: Cesar Estrada Chavez was born on a small family farm in Yuma, Arizona.

1937: The failure of the Chavez farm—and subsequent foreclosure—pushed the family into the endless migrant routes following the harvests from crop to crop across Arizona and California.

1939: The Chavez family lived in San Jose, California; they worked in the San Joaquin Valley fields and orchards.

1944-1945: Chavez served in the Navy on a destroyer escort on weather patrol (out of Saipan). Following the war he labored in the vineyards, cotton fields and fruit orchards of Arizona and California. While working in Delano, California, he met and later (1948) married Helen Fabrela (whose father was a colonel under Pancho Villa in the Mexican Revolution).

1950: Chavez and his brother Richard worked in a lumber camp on the Smith River (south of the Oregon border). Cesar and Helen Chavez moved to San Jose. They lived in a barrio named, “Sal Si Puedes” (“escape if you can”). During the early months of this decade Chavez met the man who was to influence his life as an organizer and union leader, Fred Ross.

1952: Chavez was added to the staff of the Community Service Organization (CSO). Earning a salary of \$35 a week, he organized CSO chapters in many sections of California.

1958: Chavez was appointed General Director of the CSO: his headquarters were in Los Angeles. Organized CSO chapters in urban Oakland and scores of towns.

August, 1958, to November, 1959: He worked organizing the farm workers at Oxnard, California, against the injustices of the Government’s *bracero* program.

March, 1962: Chavez resigned from the CSO when the organization voted down his proposal to organize farm workers. Shortly thereafter, the Chavez family moved to Delano, California. While members of his family worked in the fields, and operating from a \$1,200 savings account, Chavez began to organize farm workers. For six months he and his old car bounced over scattered, rutted roads in the San Joaquin and Imperial Valley.

September, 1962: The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) held its first organizing convention in the San Joaquin Valley’s chief agricultural center, Fresno. Two hundred and eighty farm workers from sixty-five farming communities came as voting delegates; a constitution was ratified, the Aztec thunderbird adopted as emblem, and Cesar Estrada Chavez was elected the first president.

September, 1962: The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) held its first organizing convention in the San Joaquin Valley’s chief agricultural center, Fresno. Two hundred and eighty farm workers from sixty-five farming communities came as voting delegates; a constitution was ratified, the Aztec thunderbird adopted as emblem, and Cesar Estrada Chavez was elected the first president.

1962-1965: The NFWA developed a credit union for its members, a newspaper, life insurance program, service station, and offered counseling for welfare assistance, grievance problems with employers, etc.

September 8, 1965: Eight hundred farm workers, members of Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), struck several growers in the Delano area for higher wages (\$1.40 an hour).

September 16 (Mexican Independence Day): NFWA voted to support the AWOC strike. Twelve hundred workers walked out from the Delano fields.

September 19 AWOC and NFWA set up a joint strike committee. Chavez issued the first of many pointed letters to Delano area growers.

September 22-23: Observation team of the California Church Council visited Delano. (The Council is the parent organization of the California Migrant Ministry.)

September 26: Farm worker rally at Delano's Ellington Park.

October 7, 1965: State Department of Employment certified the DiGiorgio strike.

October 19: First mass arrest of farm worker pickets, Forty-five persons were arrested by Kern County Sheriff's officers from the picket lines in Delano (W. B. Camp, Jr., Vineyards). The charge was "unlawful public assembly."

November 7, 1965: Chavez was arrested for operating a loudspeaker system from an airplane without a permit. Chavez, and two priest friends, flew over some of the struck fields in a light plane; Chavez urged workers, from a bull horn, to leave the fields and join "La Huelga."

December 16, 1965: Walter Reuther visited Delano (first of several trips), and presented Chavez with a \$5,000 check for the struggle.

Late December: NFWA announced the beginning of a nationwide boycott against Schenley products and Delano grapes.

March, 1966: United States Subcommittee on Migratory Labor hearings in Delano.

March 17, 1966: Beginning of the historic 300-mile Sacramento "Peregrinacion" ("pilgrimage," "march").

April 6, 1966: Chavez announced that Schenley Industries would begin negotiations with NFWA for a contract.

April 7: DiGiorgio Corporation announced readiness to hold an election among its workers on the Sierra Vista Ranch in Delano.

April 10: (Easter Sunday) Between 8,000 and 10,000 farm workers and supporters joined together in a rally in Sacramento, at the conclusion of the 300-mile march. (For a detailed accounting of the pilgrimage see *El Malcriado*, issues 31, 32, 33, and 34, the latter contains excellent photographs of the journey.)

April 29, 1966: Life story on Cesar Chavez and NFWA.

May 13 1966: NFWA discovered Teamster organizers in the Delano fields.

May 17: NFWA broke off negotiations with DiGiorgio.

May 20: DiGiorgio obtained a temporary restraining order against NFWA pickets which limited picket activity. (This order was dissolved on June 17, 1966.)

June 7, 1966: The Teamsters announced suspension of farm worker organizing efforts among field hands.

June 19: NFWA members voted in favor of free elections at DiGiorgio.

- June 21:* Agreement with the Schenley Company signed in Los Angeles. First contract for farm workers.
- June 22-23:* A breach in NFWA and DiGiorgio negotiations occurred over alleged voting discrepancies. The NFWA had their names removed from the DiGiorgio ballot by court order.
- June 24:* DiGiorgio elections at Sierra Vista Ranch in Delano and Borrego Springs Ranch. Most farm workers refused to vote.
- June 27, 1966:* Ronald W. Haughton of the American Arbitration Association was appointed by Governor Brown to investigate DiGiorgio election irregularities. New elections were ordered as a result of that investigation.
- June 28:* Chavez Rev. Chris Hartmire, Father Victor Salandini, and eight workers were arrested at Borrego Springs Ranch by DiGiorgio Corporation guards for “trespassing.” The charges were later dropped except those against Chavez and Rev Hartmire. Each paid a \$250 fine and received a year’s probation.
- Late June:* Chavez met in Denver with Chicano leader, Corky Gonzales.
- July 19-21, 1966:* A hearing on farm labor practices, conducted by the State Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Agriculture, was held in Delano.
- August 22, 1966:* NFWA and AWOC merged; formally recognized by the AFL-CIO Executive Committee in Chicago; called the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (UFWOC).
- August 30:* DiGiorgio workers (1,343) went to the polls to elect UFWOC to represent field workers at the Delano and Borrego Springs ranches.
- September 5, 1966:* Chavez flew to Texas and joined with farm workers who were completing a 400-mile march from the banks of the Rio Grande to the State Capitol in Austin.
- October 15, 1966:* Chavez prevented physical violence from erupting when a farm worker—Manuel Rivera—was run down by a grower representative and strikers reacted.
- November 4, 1966:* DiGiorgio elections at the Arvin, California ranch. Fifty-nine percent of the workers voted for a union to represent them.
- November 15:* Elections were held at the Goldberg ranch in Delano. Two hundred and eighty-five voters (out of 377 ballots cast) said “yes” to the question “Do you want to be represented by the United Farm Workers Association?”
- January 17, 1967:* Dolores Huerta (a UFWOC vice president) and Chavez sat down with the representatives of DiGiorgio to decide the basic issues of the new contract, such as: wages, hiring, grievances, etc. (Interestingly, they met in an old funeral parlor on 12th Avenue in Delano.)
- February 11, 1967:* Chavez spoke to 15,000 students gathered on the steps of the state capitol.
- March, 1967:* After speaking to the UAW’s Western Region Convention in Fresno, Chavez was promised increased UAW support (and received it with larger monthly financial support).
- March, 1967:* Farm worker co-op gas station was opened for business in Delano. *El Malcriado* commented: “Nobody can accuse the strike of running out of gas.” (March 29, 1967, p. 15.)

- May 29, 1967:* UFWOC recognized, for purposes of collective bargaining, at the Altar Vista Ranch in Reedley, California.
- June 26, 1967:* The first of many registered letters, signed by Cesar Chavez, which were sent to the Giumarra Corporation. (Giumarra represents the longest, bitterest, and most stubborn boycott effort. It was the prelude to the national, then international, grape boycott.)
- July 7, 1967:* Elections were held at the DiGiorgio Ranch in Marysville, California.
- August 3, 1967:* UFWOC issued strike orders against Giumarra Vineyards.
- September 14, 1967:* Chavez announced the official beginning of the Giumarra boycott.
- February 14, 1968:* Chavez began a 25-day fast. The Union leader declared that he regarded his fast as a “call for faithful leadership so that present hopes of farm workers will not turn to frustration, frustration to despair, despair to violence.” (*Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1968, p. 12.)
- February 27-28:* Arriving by makeshift ambulance, Chavez appeared in a Bakersfield court on multiple charges, i.e., twelve alleged violations of an antistrike injunction brought to court by Giumarra. Twelve hundred farm workers, on both days, held a silent vigil in the Bakersfield Court House, lining the corridors and walls like sentinels. The charges were later dropped.
- Late February:* As the fast lengthened the vigil of concerned farm workers grew in numbers silently, steadily, powerfully, drawing the various strands of the Union tightly. A tent city sprang up like new weeds out on the forty acres. The farm workers, seemingly, wanted to be near the “event.”
- March 10, 1968:* Chavez ended his fast by breaking bread with Robert Kennedy and thousands of workers in Delano’s Memorial Park. Ron Taylor, staff writer for the *Fresno Bee*, assigned to cover the Union since 1966, wrote: “The 41 year old Chavez, 35 pounds lighter and so weak from his 25 days of fasting that he could not walk without help, ended his long ordeal yesterday, sitting through three hours of religious services, speeches and a symbolic breaking of bread with Kennedy and members of UFWOC. “When it was all over, at about 3:15pm, Chavez was helped to a car amid cheers of ‘Viva Chavez, Viva la Causa’ and then taken to a retreat somewhere on the coast where he will recoup his strength.” (Ron Taylor, “Chavez Ends Fast: RFK Issues Call for Justice,” *Fresno Bee*, March 11, 1968.)
- March 19, 1968:* Chavez chosen to be Democratic National Convention Delegate (for Robert Kennedy).
- Spring-Fall, 1968:* Coachella Valley Strike; Robert Kennedy visited Delano again; intensive voter registration efforts carried on among farm workers.
- July, 1968:* A nationwide boycott of all California table grapes was announced from Delano.
- August 15, 1968:* Chavez testified before the Congressional Labor and Education Subcommittee hearings in Delano.
- October, 1968:* Serious back complications and pain, aggravated by the twenty-five-day fast, confined Chavez to bed for months. His staff permitted only the briefest and most urgent interviews. During this long, painful convalescent period, Chavez stayed for

a time at Saint Anthony's (a Franciscan Seminary in Santa Barbara). The Kennedy family doctor flew out for consultation.

January 14, 1969: Chavez issued the first letter on Economic Poisons (pesticides).

January 25, 1969: Chavez addressed the Western Regional Boycott leaders conference in Delano. Several families were introduced who were soon to leave for eastern and southwestern cities, as part of the boycott task force. Chavez said in a speech there: "There is an awful loneliness of going from Fremont Street, downtown Delano, to the main street, downtown New York City. But bit by bit we are emancipating ourselves." (From notes taken by the writer.)

January 26, 1969: Annual meeting of the farm worker credit union in Delano.

February 21, 1969: British dock workers refused to unload more than 70,000 pounds of California grapes (illustrating the international thrust of the Union's efforts).

March 27, 1969: Judge George A. Brown (Bakersfield) ruled that UFWOC representatives he denied access to all public records on pesticides and herbicide poison applications filed with the county Agricultural Commission. (This case had been dragging on through the courts for eight months. It was a significant defeat for UFWOC, but served to intensify its efforts to make such records public and to insure the safety of its workers.)

March 28, 1969: Both houses of the Hawaiian State Legislature endorsed the boycott. (A Fresno church launched a public boycott of pineapples the following day.)

April 1, 1969: *Look* carried a feature story on Chavez. Also on this date, Chavez filed a \$1 million libel suit against members of the Dessert Grape Growers League and league president, Mike Bozick.

April 4, 1969: "Letter from Delano" (also called "Good Friday Letter") released simultaneously in the *Christian Century* and the *National Catholic Reporter*. (This germane piece of rhetoric written by Chavez has strong parallels to Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." It is an open letter to leaders in agribusiness.)

April, 1969: Chavez gave testimony before the Subcommittee on Labor of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare.

April 23, 1969: Fernando Chavez, eldest son of Cesar and Helen Chavez, refused induction at a service in front of the Fresno induction center. (He had sought conscientious objector status on the basis of his convictions about nonviolence, but was turned down by his draft board.)

In support of his son's action Cesar Chavez said: "The decision that Polly has made and his reasons for it are his own. But it is a decision that I very much agree with. A year ago, during my fast for nonviolence, I said that if to build our union would require the deliberate taking of life, either the life of a grower or his child, then I would choose not to see our union built. Today Polly has chosen to respect life and not kill in war. Such a decision is not easy to make and my heart goes out to all parents and children who are faced with a similar challenge of nonviolence." ("News Briefs," *California Migrant Ministry Newsletter*, Spring, 1969, p. 4.)

May 30 1969: International Boycott Day proclaimed. Marches, vigils, parades, and

- picketing were carried on in dozens of cities in California and across the nation. (See *El Malcriado*, April 15-30, 1969, for “Delano Proclamation.”)
- June 21, 28, 1969:* A two-part article on Chavez appeared in *The New Yorker*. (There is excellent biographical material in these two articles by Peter Matthiessen.)
- June 13, 1969:* Ten Coachella Valley grape growers publicly called for the convening of negotiations with UFWOC. (These talks broke down over the pesticide issue.)
- July 3, 1969:* \$75 million dollar law suit filed by eighty-one growers against UFWOC, in Fresno. Part of the suit claimed \$35 million dollars loss because of the boycott.
- July 4, 1969:* Cesar Chavez appeared on the cover of *Time* (feature story inside).
- July 13, 1969:* An intensified strike effort began in Lamont, California. Chavez addressed hundreds of workers in the Lamont Community Center. (For the text of that speech see *El Malcriado*, July 15-31, 1969, pp. 12-13.)
- August 1, 1969:* The beginning of the Robert F. Kennedy farm workers medical plan. (See the special issue of *El Malcriado* devoted to the plan, October 1-15, 1969.)
- August, 1969:* UFWOC took steps toward the establishment of a Filipino Retirement Village on the forty acres. World Council of Churches meeting in England urged support for the farm workers.
- September 7, 1969:* UFWOC and the National Liturgical Conference held a special memorial march rally in Washington, D.C., to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the strike (September 8, 1965).
- September 14, 1969:* Walter Reuther met with Chavez in dedicating the new office building for UFWOC headquarters at the forty acres. It was named the Roy L. Reuther Memorial Building, after Walter Reuther’s late brother.
- September 18:* A. Perelli-Minetti and Sons Vineyards of McFarland, California, and UFWOC, completed negotiations on a new labor contract that included, for the first time in any farm contract, pesticide safety clauses. (See *El Malcriado*, September 15-October 1, 1969, pp. 3, 8-9.)
- September 25:* Chavez, together with several UFWOC leaders, began a six-week tour of the United States and Canada to bolster UFWOC’s international boycott. Some of the stops were: Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Atlantic City, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Montreal, Toronto, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago—all important boycott centers where Delano families were at work.
- October 11, 1969:* Chavez spoke to a picketing rally before the Food and Drug Administration headquarters in Washington, D.C., on the dangers of pesticides. (Later he gave testimony before a Senate subcommittee.)
- October 8:* Appearing on the *Today* show (NBC), Chavez affirmed, “Nonviolence is a most powerful way to organize.” (From notes taken by the writer.)
- November 15, 1969:* UFWOC made a public appeal to California and Arizona grapes growers to open negotiations to end the four-year grape strike.
- November 22, 1969:* Annual Thanksgiving caravan to Delano. All manner of transportation—bus, truck, car, train—brought food, clothing, and supplies from all over the state.
- January, 1970:* Larry Itliong, UFWOC Vice-President (and former head of AWOC), was appointed international coordinator of the UFWOC boycott.

- January 14, 1970:* UFWOC filed a counterclaim against the Central California Farmers Association for \$115 million in damages. The Union claimed that grape workers had lost \$37 million in wages during the strike because of the growers blocking negotiation contracts.
- January 19:* UFWOC asked the Federal District Court in Los Angeles to outlaw the use of DDT and ten other pesticides.
- January 25, 1970:* Fourth annual farm workers credit union meeting in Delano. In the five years that the credit union had been serving farm workers, it had loaned out a total of \$281,308.10 to 1264 individual farm workers and families.
- February 6, 1970:* California State Department of Public Works reported that pesticide poisoning of California farm workers might be as high as 150 cases per 1,000 employees per year. (For complete details and researching on the issue see the series written by *Fresno Bee* staff writer, Ron Taylor: December 31, 1969, pp. 1, 13; January 1, 1970, p. 6c; January 2, 1970, p. 1C.)
- March 8, 1970:* Proceedings against UFWOC, because of the boycott, were authorized by the National Labor Relations Board.
- March 27, 1969:* National and state AFL-CIO leaders met in Delano at UFWOC headquarters. (See *El Malcriado*, April, 1970, for text of speeches by Chavez and other union spokesmen.)
- April 1, 1970:* First table grape contract signed in Los Angeles with UFWOC and David Freedman Company of Thermol and Indio, and the Wonder Palms Ranch of Indio (Coachella Valley ranches).
- April 12:* Two additional table grape contracts signed with UFWOC. K. E. Larson ranches in Coachella Valley. Elections held the day before with the vote 152-2 in favor of Union representation. (For details see, "Two Ranchers Agree to UFWOC Terms," *Fresno Bee*, April 12, 1970, pp. 1, 4A.)
- April 29:* First contract with a San Joaquin Valley table grape grower: William Smeds and Sons, Reedley, California (Fresno County).
- May 1-3, 1970:* Farm worker march in Washington, D.C.
- May 21:* UFWOC contract with Bruno and Bianco Fruit Corporation of Delano. (First contract in Delano since DiGiorgio in 1966.)
- June 4, 1970:* UFWOC members working in melons at Abbatti Brothers in Imperial Valley go out on strike.
- June 6:* Abbatti recognizes UFWOC on behalf of all workers and all crops.
- June 10:* Roberts Farms, Incorporated, announced the signing of contracts with UFWOC (one of the world's largest almond and walnut producers).
- June 26:* S. A. Camp and Tenneco Farms (huge conglomerate in the San Joaquin Valley) sign contracts.
- July 5, 1970:* 600 UFWOC members go on strike in the citrus groves of Fillmore, California.
- July 7, 1970:* Mike Bozick ranches of Coachella Valley sign contracts.
- July 27:* Several lettuce workers leave the fields on strike and in protest of grower-Teamster negotiations (Santa Maria Valley, Salinas Valley).
- July 29:* Giumarra Corporation and twenty-five other Delano area growers sign UFWOC

agreements. (All major Delano growers were now under contract with UFWOC; 80% of the grape industry.)

August 3, 1970: Chavez announced that organizing headquarters will move to Salinas.

Purpose: to stop Teamsters organizing. (Teamsters have packing shed employees organized.)

August 7: Fresno, Tulare County grape growers signed contracts with UFWOC. (Only the Lodi, California, are remained to be organized and the grape industry would be unionized.)

August 12, 1970: The jurisdictional dispute between UFWOC and Teamsters ended; the two unions sealed a pact by which the Teamsters would halt all their organizing of field workers in the Salinas Valley and elsewhere. (The Catholic Bishops Committee on Farm Labor mediated.)

August 13-15: UFWOC and melon growers reach a tentative pact in Mendota (Coit Ranch, Fresno County).

The mission of the leaders—which is the mission of any authority—is to sustain the movement, to keep the farm workers association on its destined path, to do what always has to be done so that the goals of the association can be reached.

If we want the movement to develop and the association to perfect itself, it is necessary to maintain a unity of doctrine, a unity of methods, and a unity of structure which will assure the goals of the movement.

This unity means that we must make sacrifices, but these are necessary to sustain the life of the whole organization; they are essential. When we decide on the goal of a particular work, it is necessary to hold on to it, not only with our lips, but always actively; it is necessary for this goal to become a rule of life. He who knows principles is not equal to he who loves them.

Viva La Causa!

—CESAR CHAVEZ
December 15, 1964

APPENDIX B

SPANISH GLOSSARY

Huelga, Strike.

Viva la Causa! Long live the cause!

Viva la Raza! Long live the race, the people (Mexican).

El Jefe. The Leader.

Campesino. Farm worker.

Teatro Campesino. Farm worker theater. An actual troupe originating with Luis Valdez in the

early days of the strike; performed at strike meetings and ultimately on our around the country (and in Paris).

El Malcriado. Name of the farm worker newspaper; meaning is obscure: “ill-bred, servant, impish, rascal,” etc.

Alambristas. Fence jumpers; wetbacks or illegal aliens.

Huelguista. A striker.

Peregrinacion. A pilgrimage or march.

Huelga General. A general strike.

Esquirol. Strikebreaker, scab.

Peregrinos. Pilgrims.

Our Lady of Guadalupe. Patron Saint of the Mexican people; banner that headed the Sacramento march and most other UFWOC activities.

WORDS USED IN THE PICKET LINES

Salganse! Come out!

Ayudenos! Help us!

Afuera! Get out!

Venganse! Come here!

No trabaje aqui! Don't work here!

Deberia tener verguenza? Have you no shame?

Que viva nuestras Union! Long live our Union!

Hay huelga aqui! There is a strike here!

Si, se puede! Yes, you can! (a new shout that began to be heard in 1974)

APPENDIX C

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE RANCHERS

Mr. Rancher:

We wish to meet with you as soon as possible about a collective agreement with respect to the wages, hours and all the other conditions of work for your employees.

Our demands are the following:

- 1) A minimum of \$1.40 an hour, plus \$.25 a box.
- 2) Per gondola, \$12 for the first gondola; \$16 for the second gondola; \$22 for the third gondola.

It is true, as you know, that our Association has given its complete cooperation to AWOC. By means of the Special Committee for the strike of the two organizations, we have mobilized a supreme effort to help the farm workers of the vineyards in order to

improve working conditions. The FWA is resolved in its fight for contracts which guarantee the rights of the farm workers.

We do not wish to endanger the harvests of any farmer, because the workers are not going to gain anything if the harvest is aborted and the grapes remain on the vines. Besides, the representatives and members of the FWA do not condone any action which engenders the security of any man.

For these reasons it is critical that we meet together immediately to sign a contract satisfactory to all interested persons.

Sincerely,

CESAR E. CHAVEZ
General Director
Association of Farm Workers

September, 1965

APPENDIX D

SACRAMENTO MARCH LETTER

In the “March from Delano to Sacramento” there is a meetings of cultures and traditions; the centuries-old religious tradition of Spanish culture conjoins with the very contemporary cultural syndromes of “demonstration” springing from the spontaneity of the poor, the downtrodden, the rejected, the discriminated-against baring visibly their need and demand for equality and freedom.

In every religious orientated culture “the pilgrimage” has had a place, a trip made with sacrifice and hardship as an expression of penance and of commitment—and often involving a petition to the patron of the pilgrimage for some sincerely sought benefit of body or soul. Pilgrimage has not passed from Mexican culture. Daily at any of the major shrines of the country, and in particular from all points—some of whom may have long since walked-out the pieces of rubber tire that once served them as soles, and many of whom will walk on their knees the last mile or so of the pilgrimage. Many of the “pilgrims” of Delano will have walked such pilgrimages themselves in their lives—perhaps as very small children even; and cling to the memory of the daylong marches, the camps at night, streams forded, hills climbed, the sacral aura of the sanctuary, and the “fiesta” that followed.

But throughout the Spanish speaking world there is another tradition that touches the present march, that of the Lenten penitential processions, where the *penitents* would march through the streets, often in sack cloth and ashes, some even carrying crosses, as a sign of penance for their sins, and as a plea for the mercy of God. The penitential procession is also in the blood of the Mexican-American, and the Delano march will therefore be one of penance—public penance for the sins of the strikers, their own personal sins as well as their yielding perhaps to feelings of hatred and revenge in the strike itself. They hope by

the march to set themselves at peace with the Lord, so that the justice of their cause will be purified of all lesser motivation.

These two great traditions of a great people meet in the Mexican-American with the belief that Delano is his "cause," his great demand for justice, freedom, and respect from a predominantly foreign cultural community in a land where he was first. The revolutions of Mexico were primarily uprisings of the poor, fighting for bread and for dignity. The Mexican-American is also a child of the revolution.

Pilgrimage, penance and revolution. The pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento has strong religio-cultural overtones. But it is also the pilgrimage of a cultural minority who have suffered from a hostile environment, and a minority who means business.

CESAR CHAVEZ
General Director, NFWA
March, 1966

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

To My Friends in the National Council of Churches:

I have just begun the seventh day of a personal fast of penance and hope. After so many months of struggle and slow progress, I have become fearful that our common commitment to non-violence is weakening and that we may take dangerous shortcuts to victory. I accept full responsibility for this temptation and for all of its possible negative results. Our hope is the same as it has always been: that farm workers here can work together to change unjust conditions and thus to serve their brothers throughout the land.

My fast is informed by my religious faith and by my deep roots in the Church. It is not intended as a pressure on anyone but only as an expression of my own deep feelings and my own need to do penance and to be in prayer. I know you will understand and I ask that you pray for me.

I regret that I cannot be with you in San Diego. My own weakness and the crucial importance of non-violence for our struggle are the only things that could have kept me from your meeting. Please forgive me.

I would like to express the thanks of all Delano strikers for the early and faithful support of the churches. You have been with us from the beginning and at cost and we shall not forget it.

Our struggle in Delano is not over. In some ways it becomes more difficult each day. Our success (or failure) here and the quality of the organization we build will help us to shape the future for farm workers everywhere in our country. We do not take this

responsibility lightly. But we cannot be faithful to this responsibility without the participation of the Christian community. You can help us survive and win new victories, but because of who you represent you can also help us stay true to our intention, to serve our fellow farm workers.

We need and want your continued presence and support.

Sincerely

CESAR CHAVEZ

February 20, 1968

APPENDIX F

STATEMENT OF THE FAST FOR NONVIOLENCE

Cesar Chavez is engaged in a prolonged religious fast which is first and foremost a deeply personal act of penance and hope. But the personal nature of the fast does not limit it; rather, as all acts of love, Cesar's fast is for all men. Cesar's pain reminds us of the suffering of farm workers and of men of all races and kinds who are the victims of poverty and injustice. The hurt which he now accepts willingly points especially to the suffering that the Delano strikers bear as they struggle to achieve a better life for their fellow farm workers.

The fast is an act of penance, recalling farm workers to the nonviolent roots of their movement. These farm workers who are united in the Delano strike care about the well being of all fellow beings, even those who have placed themselves in the position of adversaries. They believe that these brothers can only be approached through determined creative and nonviolent means. If the commitment of nonviolence has been violated, in thought or deed, by himself, by the strikers, or by those who have rallied to the Cause, Cesar does penance.

The efforts to achieve justice through nonviolent sacrifice have achieved many important victories for the Delano strikers. Hopes of farm workers in all parts of the land have been raised by this sacrifice. Cesar's sacrifice recalls members of these hopes and aspirations. It is a powerful call for faithful and effective leadership so that present hopes will not turn to frustration, frustration to despair, despair to violence. It is a personal demand on each person to accept responsibility and to give the best of himself for a movement that is intent on setting other men free.

The fast points beyond the suffering of farm workers to the needs of the world. It is an act of the spirit which reaches to every man's need to escape living death and to begin giving of himself for the sake of other men. It is a personal act which beckons to each of us to participate in the nonviolent, worldwide struggle against man's inhumanity to man.

United Farm Workers Organizing Committee

AFL-CIO

February 25, 1968

APPENDIX G

GOOD FRIDAY LETTER

The following letter appeared in the National Catholic Reporter and the Christian Century on April 23, 1969. It was addressed to: E. L. Barr, Jr., President, California Grape and Tree Fruit League, San Francisco, California.

Dear Mr. Barr:

I am sad to hear about your accusations in the press that our union movement and table grape boycott have been successful because we have used violence and terror tactics. If what you say is true, I have been a failure and should withdraw from the struggle. But you are left with the awesome moral responsibility, before God and man, to come forward with whatever information you have so that corrective action can begin at once.

If for any reason you fail to come forth to substantiate your charges then you must be held responsible for committing violence against us, albeit violence of the tongue. I am convinced that you as a human being did not mean what you said but rather acted hastily under pressure from the public relations firm that has been hired to try to counteract the tremendous moral force of our movement. How many times we ourselves have felt the need to lash out in anger and bitterness.

Today on Good Friday 1969 we remember the life and the sacrifice of Martin Luther King, Jr., who gave himself totally to the non-violent struggle for peace and justice. In his letter from Birmingham Jail Dr. King describes better than I could our hopes for the strike and boycott: "Injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured." For our part I admit that we have seized upon every tactic and strategy consistent with the morality of our cause to expose that injustice and thus to heighten the sensitivity of the American conscience so that farm workers will have without bloodshed their own union and the dignity of bargaining with their agribusiness employers.

By lying about the nature of our movement, Mr. Barr, you are working against non-violent social change. Unwittingly perhaps, you may unleash that other force that our union by discipline and deed, censure and education has fought to avoid; that panacean short cut: that senseless violence that honors no color, class, or neighborhood.

You must understand—I must make you understand—that our membership and the hopes and aspirations of the hundreds of thousands of the poor and dispossessed that have been raised on our account, are above all, human beings, no better no worse than any other cross section of human society; we are not saints because we are poor but by the same measure neither are we immoral. We are men and women who have suffered and endured much and not only because of our abject poverty but because we have been kept poor. The color of our skins, the languages of our cultural and native origins, the lack of formal education, the exclusion from the democratic process, the numbers of our slain in recent wars—all these burdens generation after generation have sought to demoralize us, to break our human spirit. But God knows that we are not beasts of burden, we are not agricultural implements or rented slaves, we are men. And mark this well, Mr. Barr, we are men locked

in a death struggle against man's inhumanity to man in the industry that you represent. And this struggle itself gives meaning to our life and ennobles our dying.

As your industry has experienced, our strikers here in Delano and those who represent us throughout the world are well trained for this struggle. They have been under the gun, they have been kicked and beaten and herded and herded by dogs, they have been cursed and ridiculed, they have stripped and chained and jailed, they have been sprayed with the poisons used in the vineyards. They have been taught not to lie down and die or to flee in shame, but to resist with every ounce of human endurance and spirit. To resist not with retaliation in kind but to overcome with love and compassion, with ingenuity and creativity, with hard work and longer hours, with stamina and patient tenacity, with truth and public appeal, with friends and allies, with mobility and discipline, with politics and law, and with prayer and fasting. They were not trained in a month or even a year; after all, this new harvest season will mark our fourth full year of strike and even now we continue to plan and prepare for the years to come. Time accomplishes for the poor what money does for the rich.

This is not to pretend that we have everywhere been successful enough or that we have not made mistakes. And while we do not belittle or underestimate our adversaries, for they are the rich and the powerful and possess the land, we are not afraid nor do we cringe from the confrontation. We welcome it! We have planned for it. We know that our cause is just, that history is a story of social revolutions, and that the poor shall inherit the land.

Once again, I appeal to you as the representative of your industry and as a man. I ask you to recognize and bargain with our union before the economic pressure of the boycott and strike takes an irrevocable toll; but if not, I ask you to at least sit down with us to discuss the safeguards necessary to keep our historical struggle free of violence. I make this appeal because as one of the leaders of our nonviolent movement, I now and accept my responsibility for preventing, if possible, the destruction of human life and property.

For these reasons and knowing of Gandhi's admonition that fasting is the last resort in place of the sword, during a most critical time in our movement last February 1968 I undertook a 25-day fast. I repeat to you the principle enunciated to the membership at the start of the fast; if to build our union required the deliberate taking of life, either the life of a grower or his child, or the life of a farm worker or his child, then I choose not to see the union built.

Mr. Barr, let me be painfully honest with you. You must understand these things. We advocated militant nonviolence as our means for social revolution and to achieve justice for our people, but we are not blind or deaf to the desperate and moody winds of human frustration, impatience and rage that blow among us. Gandhi himself admitted that if his only choices were cowardice or violence, he would choose violence. Men are not angels and the time and tides wait for no man. Precisely because of these powerful human emotions, we have tried to involve masses of people in their own struggle. Participation and self-determination remain the beset experience of freedom; and free men instinctively prefer democratic change and even protect the rights guaranteed to seek it. Only the enslaved in despair have need of violent overthrow.

This letter does not express all that is in my heart, Mr. Barr. But if it says nothing else it says that we do not hate you or rejoice to see your industry destroyed; we hate the

agribusiness system that seeks to keep us enslaved and we shall overcome and change it not by retaliation or bloodshed but by a determined non-violent struggle carried on by those masses of farm workers who intend to be free and human.

Sincerely Yours,
CESAR E. CHAVEZ

APPENDIX H

STATEMENT ON BELL SILENCING

The Whitechapel Foundry of London—makers of America's Liberty Bell—cast a copy of the bell which hangs in the Washington Cathedral for UFWOC. The British Transport And Workers Union arranged for its transportation to New York and the UAW arranged for it to be delivered to Delano by July 4, 1970. After the "freedom bell" arrived in New York it was chained. On the occasion of the silencing of the bell, April 17, 1970, Rev. James Drake read the following statement prepared by Cesar Chavez:

It is a tragedy that in 1970 we farm workers should take such a step as we take today, silencing a bell which intended to ring out freedom and hope. However, we have taken such a drastic measure because we believe such ringing would be out of place. Farm workers, America's lowest paid workers, continue to live in misery. They are deprived of safe and wholesome living and working conditions; they are threatened by early death and hellish existence.

For this reason, after long and serious consideration, the Farm Workers Union has made up its mind that we shall chain this bell and refuse to ring it until at the very least the grape growers of California and Arizona recognize our rights as human beings to have a union.

As long as farm workers are not free, this bell shall not be free. But on the day that our strike and grape boycott brings justice, we shall ring this bell with all the joy our hearts can contain. And it is our firm belief that on that day, not only the workers will be free, but also the men who enslave them will experience a new freedom as well.

We in Delano look forward with anticipation to the arrival of the bell in this troubled valley on July 4th, 1970.

City Hall, New York City
April 17, 1970

CESAR CHAVEZ

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A study of the farm worker movement is very much like an iceberg; there is a visible portion of it sticking up above in plain view, but the bulk of it is to be discovered lying underneath many layers. What may start out to be a modest rhetorical or historical survey can draw you into a maze of politics, sociology, nationalism, law, feudal powers, corporate

powers, political science and religion. Such a statement suggests the obvious: there is a plethora of sources to be discovered and digested.

For immediate historical information and reaction newspapers are helpful, though not exhaustive or always accurate. Several newspapers across the nation have been consistent in their coverage of the farm worker movement. Principally these are: *Catholic Worker*, *The New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *National Catholic Reporter* and SNCC's *Movement* (especially early in the strike, 1965-1967).

Five newspapers are the most valuable news source for this study: *Fresno Bee*, *Delano Record*, *Central California Register* (Fresno Roman Catholic Diocese), *Valley Labor Citizen* and *El Malcriado*.

For original, primary sources *El Malcriado* (farm workers' newspaper) is, of course, the most valuable. Clearly, it is a fascinating and extremely important record of events, goals, ideas, literature, biography and graphic arts (drawings, photography) of the farm worker movement.

A unique source is the little-known journal *Farm Labor*. It originated in Berkeley in 1963 with a group called Citizens for Farm Labor. Under the editorship of Henry Anderson *Farm Labor* published a forty- to fifty-page mimeographed journal each month carrying essays, reprints, newspaper accounts, letters, reports, testimony and photographs having to do with farm labor and agricultural problems.

Members of Citizens for Farm Labor included: Anne Draper, Wendy Goepel, George Ballis, Honorable Willie Brown, Honorable Phillip Burton, Cesar Chavez, Edward P. Dutton, Michael Harrington, Rev. Wayne C. Hartmire, Jr., Paul Jacobs, Professor Jack London, Fred Ross, Norman Thomas and others. *Farm Labor* ceased publication in 1966. (The major articles from this journal have been reprinted and bound and may be found in the SJV-FWC.)

Other sources for farm labor history include newsletters (*California Migrant Ministry*, *Tempo*, *California Grower*), government documents (testimony and Congressional Record), periodicals, journals, books, independent publications (books, pamphlets, leaflets, mimeographed materials, letters) and unpublished dissertations. Many of these will be noted in the bibliography.

The annotated bibliography that follows is very broad. It is meant to encompass the history of the farm worker movement in California from 1965 to 1970 (and some pre-1965 history), as well as the life and rhetoric of Cesar Chavez.

It is divided into six major headings:

1. Farm Worker History and Background.
2. Mexican-American History and Culture
3. Agribusiness History and Background
4. History of NFWA and UFWOC
5. The Religious Community in Delano
6. Cesar E. Chavez: Biography and Writings

In order to maintain a historical context the sources in each division, as far as possible, are arranged chronologically.

Every compiler gathers documents that illustrate or strengthen his thesis. These sources, therefore, are selective and not necessarily exhaustive. They do cover the California farm worker movement and Cesar Chavez specifically, and problems of agriculture in general. Many of the documents are in the Special Collection Department of Fresno State University's library under "San Joaquin Valley-Farm Worker History." Another primary source is my personal library gathered over eight years of living in the San Joaquin Valley. Two other primary sources are Labor history Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan; and the National Farm Worker Ministry, 1411 West Olympic Boulevard, Los Angeles.

Finally, hundreds of farm workers were unknowingly one of the "sources" of this study: persons I stood next to in Delano strike meetings, on the picket lines, at the forty acres, or sat with at meal times at Delano's Filipino Hall; or those whom I have seen living in the labor camps and stooping in the fields and vineyards of this Valley. Most of the sources that follow are abstract, pedantic, factual, matter-of-fact, sometimes emotional and even casual. But the people of La Causa are the real "sources." They are the living history.

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Shon Meckfessel . . . brings a fresh perspective to the stubborn debates around violence and nonviolence and suggests a way to move beyond the left's tactical impasse. Nonviolence Ain't What It Used to Be won't settle the old argument. Enter your mobile number or email address below and we'll send you a link to download the free Kindle App.