

“Cesar Chavez” Film

Film length: 101 minutes

Film rating: PG13 - Language and some violence

Genre: Biography

Release Date: March 28, 2014

Director: Diego Luna

Synopsis

The film, “Cesar Chavez” recounts key events in the life of one of America’s most relentless and inspiring activists. Chávez was a leader of farmworkers, a strong believer in nonviolent activism, and a man who devoted his life to helping others and promoting civil rights. He became deeply rooted in the migrant farmworker lifestyle when his family lost its farm during the Great Depression. The family moved to California and joined other migrant workers in picking fruits and vegetables for very low wages. César witnessed the injustices that farmworkers suffered. He escaped this life temporarily when, at age 17, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

Returning to California, Chávez married Helen Fabela and settled in San Jose. He worked for the Community Service Organization and became an organizer in the Mexican-American community, spearheading voter registration drives and fighting racial and economic discrimination. He realized if he were ever to be successful in organizing farmworkers, he would need to return to the fields himself. César and his family relocated to Delano, a small town in California’s Central Valley. He resumed his life as a farmworker, picking grapes and beginning his efforts at organizing.

The film highlights one of Chávez’ great insights. He said that for a farmworkers’ union to be successful, it had to be created by the workers, from the bottom up. Together with Dolores Huerta, he co-founded the United Farm Workers Association, an organization that continues to defend the rights of those previously living in the shadows.



Catholic Social Teaching themes to engage through the film:

- The dignity of the person
- The common good
- The human person in community
- Rights and responsibilities
- Human care of and connectedness to creation
- Solidarity
- Subsidiarity

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Uniting Latino and Filipino farmworkers, the organization began to grow. The film focuses on important steps on the road to developing a strong union. Key among these was the farmworkers' 340-mile *Peregrinación* (pilgrimage) to bring the union's demands to the state capitol in Sacramento. The publicity this generated drew more support for UFW efforts. The supporters became essential to the union's successful grape boycott.

The film also portrays the increasingly bitter struggle between growers and farmworkers, culminating in violence involving both parties. This was a seminal moment in Chávez' work.

Committed to nonviolence, he believed he had

failed the movement and its members. For this he apologized and, in atonement, began a 25-day fast intended to inspire pledges of nonviolent resistance from his followers.

Many people had been convinced that farmworkers could not be organized into a union. Many attempted to destroy this effort, including growers and powerful politicians. This film about Chávez' early organizing efforts is relevant today given increasing income inequality, the lack of a humane immigration policy, and continuing discrimination against large segments of the Latino population.

Reflection questions

1. What did you know of César Chávez and the farmworkers' movement before seeing the film?
2. In the late 1940s, Chávez, a devout Catholic, began to study the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Reflect on the principles that he used to mobilize the farmworkers movement. Why would he choose the social teachings of the church to be the basis of his organizing efforts?
3. Catholic Social Tradition advocates that humans are the clearest reflection of God among us. How did the union's efforts raise farmworkers' sense of their own dignity?
4. What principles determine the dignity accorded to human beings in today's society? Reflect on how the poor and vulnerable of our global community are treated? There are those who clean up after us – custodians, garbage collectors, dishwashers, etc. Do they receive the same respect as a university professor or a broker on Wall Street? Why or why not? Do you respect them? If so, how?

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**“It is right to struggle against an unjust economic system
that does not uphold the priority
of the human being over capital and land.**

~ Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year), No. 35, Pope John Paul II

5. In the film, Chávez says that farmworker wages are unjust. What do you believe is a just wage in today's society? Do all people receive just wages? If someone were to propose that no one in the United States should make more than three times as much as anyone else, how would you respond? Now take the minimum wage and multiply it by three. Do you believe this would be a fair wage for those at the top of the income scale? Why or why not?
6. What would you do if you were denied the right to live where you wished, or entry into a school or job, because of your race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, religion or disability?
7. Describe the qualities that made Chávez an effective leader. What makes someone a good leader? What role do leaders play in shaping our communities and our society? Why do youth make some of the most powerful leaders in our society?
8. What were some of the obstacles that Chávez and the movement encountered during his early years? How did these experiences shape who he became and his work for justice? What challenges did the farmworkers face? Think of a challenge that you have faced. How did it affect your life? How did you handle this challenge?
9. When Chávez began to organize farmworkers in the grape boycott, he was depicted as a troublemaker. Why are those who challenge unjust systems or governments depicted as troublemakers? Reflect on a gospel passage where Jesus was depicted as a rabble-rouser? Did this label prevent him from promoting justice and defending the rights of the oppressed? What does it mean to you to be a troublemaker for justice?
10. Share some examples of other leaders who have taken risks because they believed it was the right thing to do? What does it mean to be a risk taker in today's world? Are you a risk taker? Why or why not? Is something holding you back from standing up for what is right and against what is wrong? Why?
11. What do you hope to be remembered for? What four words do you hope people will use to describe you after you have died?
12. It is said that today's youth know little of yesterday's heroes. For example, students were asked what they knew of César Chávez. One student responded, “Is that the name of a salad?” Another responded that it was a name given to a street but was unsure why. Why weren't they taught about César and what he did? Which other heroes do you feel have been forgotten?

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13. For young people, the film is a moving introduction to a pioneering social justice movement and the individuals and communities who creatively confronted inequalities. How can those who have been engaged in activism for years ensure that the messages of these heroes remain fresh in the minds of generations to come.
14. Catholic Social Tradition reminds us of our moral responsibility to contribute to the good of society. How did Chávez' actions contribute to the common good? What are ways in which you contribute to the common good?
15. Leaders may pay a price when engaged in creating a more just society. Identify one price that Chávez paid that he knew was great. Was that cost worth it in light of what he accomplished? Why or why not? How did Chávez' commitment to justice interfere with his family life? Reflect on the challenges of raising a family and working for justice.
16. What are your thoughts on fasting as a means to redress injustice and a form of nonviolent resistance?



Take Action: Sign the Petitions

- Urge President Obama to declare a César Chávez National Day of Service so that Americans can honor Chávez' work and legacy.
<http://www.takepart.com/chavez/petition>
- Stand up for food that is responsibly grown in safe and decent working conditions.
<http://www.takepart.com/chavez>

Online Resources

- Film Web Page: <http://www.cesarchavezmovie.com/#landing>
- Official Trailer: <http://trailers.apple.com/trailers/independent/cesarchavez/>