

Guide to
the Microfilm Edition
of the

**FBI File on
Cesar Chavez
and the United
Farm Workers**

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Introduction

Cesar Estrada Chavez was born to Mexican immigrant parents on their family farm near Yuma, Arizona, on March 31, 1927. During the Great Depression the family lost the farm and joined the thousands of other landless Americans as migrant farm workers wandering the southwestern United States. Despite a transient home life, the necessity of working in the fields to help support the family, and thirty different schools, Chavez did manage to finish the seventh grade. In 1938 his father found permanent work at a dried-fruit packing plant in San Jose, California, where Chavez was introduced to unions when his father organized the plant's workers. During World War II, Chavez served in the U.S. Navy for two years. After the war he married and settled in California, becoming a volunteer organizer for the Community Service Organizations (CSO) in 1950.

The CSO was organized by Saul Alinsky, a self-proclaimed "professional radical," to create a Mexican-American voting bloc. Chavez registered Mexican-Americans and helped them deal with government agencies. During this period he did much to fill out his limited formal education and to learn organizational and leadership skills. He idealized Alinsky's social activism and absorbed Ghandi's teachings on nonviolence. Singled out for his leadership ability, he rose quickly in the organization, becoming the California-Arizona regional director in 1958.

As a regional director, Chavez's attention was drawn to the plight of the migrant farm workers in the agriculturally rich area of California where he lived. Organizing these workers into a union seemed to offer the solution to many of their problems. When in 1962 the CSO board repeatedly refused to support Chavez's idea for a farm worker's union, he resigned. He moved to the Central Valley, and with a few others slowly built the National Farm Workers' Association, today known as the United Farm Workers of America.

Chavez successfully merged the struggle for better working conditions for the migrants with improving their lives and standing in society, dubbing the hybrid "La Cause." Using traditional strikes and boycotts combined with nonviolent techniques, such as long marches and fasts, to generate publicity, Chavez successfully established a measure of stability and security for some of the migrants' lives. The union's struggles increased farm workers' wages throughout the country and made many workers eligible for medical insurance, pensions, and unemployment insurance. Above all, the union gave the workers a mechanism to challenge their employers.

The work of Chavez on behalf of the migrants resulted in him being closely examined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. His desire to form a union was not necessarily a problem; however, a number of factors brought him and his followers to the attention of the authorities in Washington, DC. First and most obvious was the race and class of Chavez and the migrants. Organizing and empowering poor minorities inevitably led to radicalism and subversion in the view of the FBI dominated by Director Herbert Hoover, who saw Chavez's actions as an epidemic of empowerment movements in the United States during the 1960s. Second, was Chavez's close association with Alinsky, already a known radical. Third, the structure and appearance of the union made it suspect: Chavez *was* the union. It is clear today that its success depended on his great personal charisma, thereby reminding those on guard against Communist infiltration of the personality cults of the Soviet bloc. The union's rallies, with their great number of poor people singing and hundreds of red and black banners fluttering in the air, completed an image of subversion in the minds of the Bureau. Finally, the potential threat that a farm workers' union posed to the enormously powerful and Anglo-controlled agribusiness of California's Central Valley ensured that Chavez would receive national attention.

In 1968, Chavez led a strike of grape pickers in the Central Valley. Marked by a nearly month-long fast by

Chavez, and culminating in a nationwide boycott of table grapes that spread to Europe, the strike became an international cause célèbre. One poll found that 17 million Americans had joined the boycott. The strike ended late in 1970 when the growers, under this tremendous economic pressure, agreed to a three-year contract with the union, thus marking the high point of the union. Its membership peaked early in the 1970s, with approximately 20 percent of California's 200,000 farm workers under its banner.

Chavez died in 1993 in Arizona; he was sixty-six. The union that he founded has struggled to continue without him. He lived to see many of his accomplishments slip away as his union faced numerous problems, not the least of which were the constant arrival of new workers willing to work for any amount, and a nation that has turned its back on union action.

The grape pickers walkout was not merely a labor dispute. Chavez viewed it, and the union, as part of the larger national drive for social justice that marked the 1960s. It was exactly this drive for social justice, or to overturn the status quo that frightened Hoover and led the FBI to begin a file on Chavez and his organization.

These microfilm rolls deal primarily with the 1960s, the period of the United Farm Workers greatest growth. They will be of interest to scholars and students in a number of areas, including twentieth-century U.S. history, labor history, the 1960s, social history, Mexican immigrants, and Chicano history. These rolls also provide one glimpse of the FBI's interest in supposedly subversive groups during the era, and whom the establishment found threatening.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents or portions of documents have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, and every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

The file is in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.

Paul R. Beezley

Roll Notes

FBI File: 161-4719

1966

Roll 1, 0001-0249

Chavez considered for staff position at White House
Background information on Cesario Estrada Chavez
Chavez nomination protested

News articles from:

The Denver Post (Jun. 16, 1966)

“Spanish-American Problems Outlined”

“Spanish-American Solidarity Urged”

Suspected Communist infiltration of the National Farm
Workers Assn. (NFWA)

Transcript of Chavez testimony before U.S. Senate

Subcommittee on Amending Migratory Labor Laws

Editorial published in the *Delano Record* (Sep. 27, 1966)

“A Cruel Hoax”

FBI File: 100-444762

SECTION 2

Roll 1, 0250-0336

Jan.–Apr. 1966

Communist infiltration of the National Farm Workers
Assn. (AFWA)

Proposed march sponsored by Congress of Racial
Equality, from Delano to Sacramento, California

March sponsored by Chicago Citizens Committee to aid
Delano Farm Workers

FBI File: 105-157123

1966–Aug. 1975

Roll 1, 0338-0478

Alleged threat against Cesar Chavez and President
Lyndon Johnson

Attempt to organize the farm laborers of Coachella
Valley, California (Jul. 1969)

Robert F. Kennedy proposed commemoration program
(Sep. 1969)

News articles from:

The NY Times (Dec. 1970)

“Chavez Ordered Freed by Court”

Cincinnati Post & Times Star (Dec. 1970)
"Chavez at Work," by Whitney Young, Jr.
Chavez jailed for contempt of court (Dec. 1970)
News articles from:
Cincinnati Post & Times Star (Jan. 27, 1971)
"Pentagon Lettuce Protest to Continue"
The Sunday Star (Jan. 17, 1971)
"Chavez Files Suit to Curb Army's Lettuce Buying"
Surveillance of Chavez at various rallies supporting the
boycott of lettuce
News article from:
The Washington Post-Times Herald (Jan. 1971)
"Ex-Agent Sees Plot to Kill Cesar Chavez"
Chavez undergoes a fast to protest Arizona's new farm
labor law (Jun. 1972)
Chavez activities organizing boycott of Safeway Stores
for selling non-union lettuce
Pope John Paul VI receives Cesar Chavez (Oct. 1974)

FBI File: 100-444762

SECTION 6

Roll 1, 0480-0716

Jan. 1971-May 1976

Activities of the United Farm Workers including:
Protests of the U.S. Army procurement of boycotted
lettuce
Leaflet: "Force Lettuce Out of Mess Halls"
Demonstration at Pogue's Department Store,
Cincinnati, OH (Feb. 1972)
Picketing Vice President Spiro T. Agnew (Mar. 1972)
Protest of Farm Bill before Arizona State Legislature
(Mar. 1972)
Demonstration during Republican Women's
Conference, Phoenix, AZ (Apr. 1972)
Demonstration at Federal Court Building, St. Louis,
MO (Oct. 1972)
Demonstrations and violence in connection with
Farm Workers organizational activities, El Paso,
TX (Aug. 1975)

FBI File: 100-444762

SECTION 5

Roll 1, 0719-0920

Nov. 1968—Jan. 1971

News article from:

Globe Mail, Toronto, Ontario

“Agitators fail to gain support for grape boycott in
Canada”

Mexican-American Youth Organization (MAYO) student
members boycott classes in protest over “blatant
discrimination” by faculty members (Nov. 1968)

News articles from:

The Monitor, McAllen, TX

“Action Must be Taken Against E-E Students”

Valley Morning Star, Harlingen, TX

“Here are the ‘Demands’ of the Striking Students”

Corpus Christi Caller

“Loitering Charges Filed on 5 Pupils”

Activities of the United Farm Workers including:

Demonstration to gain union recognition for grape
pickers (Pittsburgh, Nov. 1968)

Grape boycott sought at Ohio State University
(Jan. 1969)

Farm Workers strike in Rio Grande City, TX (Jan.
1969)

Grape boycott at five Pittsburgh supermarkets
(Jun. 1969)

News article from:

The L. A. Times (Sep. 1969)

“Cesar Chavez Begins 7-Week Tour of U.S.”

FBI File: 100-444762

SECTION 4

Roll 1, 0921-1058

Jun. 1967—Nov. 1968

Activities of the National Farm Workers Assn. including:

Farm Workers strike in Rio Grande City, TX

Communist infiltration of the United Farm Workers

Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO in Delano,
California

Possible picketing of U.S. Attorney General Ramsay
Clark by United Farm Workers

FBI File: 157-15963

Dec. 1970

Roll 1, 1059-1070

Activities of the National Farm Workers Assn. includes:
Picketing Dow Chemical, Chicago, IL
Pamphlet: "Off DOW"

FBI File: 9-48291

Jul. 1968

Roll 1, 1071-1130

Investigation into threats against Cesar Chavez
Obscene mail received by Cesar Chavez
Investigation of phone call threatening the life of Cesar
Chavez

FBI File: 44-51593

Jan.-Mar. 1972

Roll 1, 1131-1187

Investigation of murder plot against Cesar Chavez

FBI File: 100-444762

SECTION 1

Roll 1, 1188-1230

Oct.-Nov. 1965

Communist infiltration of the National Farm Workers
Assn., Delano, CA

FBI File: 157-33076

Sep. 1974-Jan. 1975

Roll 1, 1231-1277

Activities of the United Farm Workers include:
Civil unrest following demonstration at Yuma, AZ
Incidents of violence and beating of illegal aliens at
Yuma, AZ

FBI File: 176-69

Aug. 1968

Roll 1, 1278-1287

Union workers protest lack of police protection

FBI File: 173-9333

Jul.-Sep. 1973

Roll 1, 1288-1367

Investigation of organized violence and denial of constitutional rights by teamsters against the Farm Workers Union in Coachella Valley, CA

FBI File: 44-66143

Sep. 1975

Roll 1, 1368-1374

Investigation into alleged violation of Farm Workers civil rights following a peaceful demonstration in Reeves County, TX

FBI File: 44-63337

Jan.-Mar. 1975

Roll 1, 1375-1393

Investigation of alleged violation of Civil Rights Statutes in connection with alleged violence and brutality against striking Farm Workers in Phoenix, AZ

FBI File: 44-61404

Aug. 1974

Roll 1, 1394-END

Investigation into the civil rights of Sheriff's office and personnel violated by United Farm Workers Union and tomato picker pickets in Sacramento, CA

FBI File: 44-60006

Mar. 1974-May 1976

Roll 2, 0001-0087

Investigation into break-ins at United Farm Worker Union offices in California allegedly tied to grape growers

News article from:

San Francisco Chronicle (Dec. 1975)

"Big Cover-Up in Burglary Chavez Says"

FBI File: 92-9831

Mar.-Jul. 1967

Roll 2, 0088-0109

Investigation into alleged violence in connection with efforts to organize farm workers in Rio Grande City, TX

FBI File: 58-10898

(no file)

Roll 2, 0110-0112

FBI File: 139-2387

Nov. 1965–Jun. 1966

Miscellaneous documents

Roll 2, 0113-0119

FBI File: 44-57102

Jul.–Nov. 1973

Investigation into alleged assault on members of the
United Farm Workers by Teamsters (Sacramento,
CA)

Includes: "The Coachella Experience" published by
the Task Force on Farm Workers, Wayne State
University

Roll 2, 0120-0197

FBI File: 100-444762

SECTION 3

May 1966–Jun. 1967

Activities of the National Farm Workers Assn. (NFWA)
include:

Sympathy demonstration at S & W Food Co.,
Chicago, in support of striking California grape
pickers

Communist infiltration of the NFWA, Delano, CA

Proposed march from Rio Grande City to Austin, TX

Striking farm workers Rio Grande City, TX

Roll 2, 0198-0399

FBI File: 100-478197

Sep.–Dec. 1973

Activities of the United Farm Workers include:

Demonstration in observance of Attica Day, JFK
Federal Building, Boston

Roll 2, 0400-0415

FBI File: 157-27530

Dec. 1972

Potential violence between United Farm Workers
Union (UFWU) and Homestead Farm Owners,
Homestead, FL

Roll 2, 0416-0418

FBI File: 157-30054

Aug.-Oct. 1973

Roll 2, 0419-0478

Labor dispute between the United Farm Workers Union (UFWU) and Teamsters Union, Fresno County, CA

FBI File: 159-3729

Jan.-Feb. 1973

Roll 2, 0479-0482

Investigation into destruction of United Farm Workers Union offices in California

FBI File: Cross References

Roll 2, 0484-0593

1966-1978; not in chronological order

Activities of the United Farm Workers including:

Dispute between United Farm Workers and Teamsters-Growers in California

Teamster violence against Farm Workers ("wetbacks") (Aug. 1973)

UFW charges that field workers had civil rights violated (Aug. 1973)

UFW cited for disorderly conduct after picketing at food market in Dayton, OH (Nov. 1974)

Investigation into alleged illegal arrest of United Farm Workers and children in Reeves County, TX (Jul. 1975)

Student agitation, Univ. of S. Florida, campus meetings to gather support for the grape boycott (Jul. 1970)

Disturbance following United Farm Workers Organizing Committee meeting at Coachella, CA (Apr. 1970)

UFW Solidarity Committee (May 1975)

Tension between UFW and Sugar Cane Growers, Clewiston, FL (Oct. 1972)

UFW protests at Federal Building in Phoenix over use of illegal aliens (Aug. 1974)

Cesar Chavez and UFW demonstrate against produce company, Yuma, AZ (Jun. 1978)

UFW occupation and demonstration at U.S. Federal Building, Sacramento (Aug. 1974)

Cesar Chavez and UFWA protest and rally against
Gallo Winery (Modesto, Feb. 1975)
Bombing at UFW Organizing Committee office
building (San Francisco, Apr. 1970)
Bombing at UFW Co-Op Gas Station (Calif., Jun.
1973)

Newspaper articles include:

El Paso Herald-Post (Jun. 1975): "Farm Workers'
Rights Statement is Planned"

El Paso Times (Jul. 1975): "Pecos Report Alleges
Law Violations"

El Paso Times (Jul. 1975): "Sympathizers Arrested in
Pecos County"

Odessa-Republic (May 1969): "The Grape Fraud"

FBI File: 44-43004

Jul.-Aug. 1969

Roll 2, 0594-0618

United Farm Workers Civil Rights complaint against the
Maricopa County Sheriff's Department (AZ)

News articles from:

The Arizona Republic (May 1969)

"The Grape Fraud"

"Valley Stores Selling Grapes to be Picketed"

The Phoenix Gazette (Apr. 1969)

"Grape Industry Pickets Cast Eyes on Arizona"

FBI File: 44-58258

Aug.-Oct. 1973

Roll 2, 0619-0628

Investigation of incident involving a sergeant of Kern
County Sheriff's Office, Bakersfield, CA, and mem-
bers of the United Farm Workers Union

FBI File: 44-59048

Aug.-Nov. 1973

Roll 2, 0629-END

Congressman Don Edwards (D-CA) handling of Civil
Rights cases in Kern County, CA, involving the
United Farm Workers and Teamsters